

DisasterLegalAid.org Disaster Response Toolkit (August 2014)

This toolkit consists of testimonials from attorneys engaged in the legal response to Superstorm Sandy in New York and New Jersey. It highlights best practices in disaster legal response and key issues that the legal community should be prepared to address in the aftermath of any disaster. For questions or comments regarding the toolkit, please contact Adam Friedl at AFriedl@probono.net.

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1. Introduction

This Disaster Response Toolkit consists of testimonials from attorneys engaged in the legal response to Superstorm Sandy in New York and New Jersey. It highlights best practices in disaster legal response around key issues that the legal community should be prepared to address in the aftermath of any disaster. The toolkit was developed and edited by Adam Friedl, Program and Special Initiatives Manager, Pro Bono Net and Jon Weinberg, AmeriCorps VISTA, Pro Bono Net in early-mid 2014, and contributions were edited and the toolkit published in August 2014.

The issues covered and contributors are as follows:

- Reaching Survivors and Establishing Operations (David Nguyen, American Bar Association Young Lawyer's Division)
- Attorney Communication and Training on Unfamiliar Legal Issues (Victor Tello, South Brooklyn Legal Services)
- Working with Non-Legal Providers (Liz Hampton and Jessica Limbacher, Volunteer Lawyers for Justice)
- Rebuilding and Assistance Programs (Courina Yulisa and Sara Martin, Center for NYC Neighborhoods)
- Insurance Claims and Litigation (Barry Bassis, Legal Services NYC)
- Language and Cultural Barriers (Chantal Hamlin, Brooklyn Jubilee)

The testimonials from the contributors follow brief introductions to each issue. Some contributors also included related resources, which follow their testimonials. While the toolkit in no way encompasses the full range of issues faced by disaster legal responses nor all the best practices manifested by the Sandy response, it is intended to raise awareness of the need for proper preparation on the part of the legal community.

For questions or comments regarding the toolkit, contact Adam Friedl at AFriedl@probono.net. For a full range of information, tools and resources for disaster legal responses, consult the National Disaster Legal Aid Resource Center at www.disasterlegalaid.org.

2. Establishing the Legal Response through Targeted Collaboration

Issue Background

The most immediate issue for many attorneys engaged in disaster response is to establish operations and reach out to populations in need of assistance. The safety and accessibility of offices has to be evaluated, and attorneys have to determine how, when and where they will get back to work. Post-disaster, attorneys have to learn which of their partners are operating and which are having trouble. Once attorneys are back to work and communicating with their co-workers and partners, they must reach out to populations in need and determine how they can be of service in the short and long term. Offices may have to be proactive and solicit new partnerships in the community.

Testimonial (David Nguyen, American Bar Association Young Lawyers Division)

The American Bar Association (ABA) Young Lawyers Division (YLD) Disaster Legal Services program is the partnership program between the ABA and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) that provides pro bono legal services to disaster survivors immediately after the disaster strikes. The program is funded by FEMA and collaborates with local bar associations and civil legal services.

Because the DLS program is the organization that directly partners with FEMA, it is important that the YLD District Representative (DR) builds partnerships with many organizations so that there is a holistic and collaborative effort to serve survivors. Without collaboration and partnering with the YLD DLS program, organizations will not have access to FEMA resources and survivors being served by FEMA.

Ultimately, the ideal DLS program will have created collaborations and partnerships with as many legal organizations interested and capable of assisting disaster survivors. Usually bar associations have the capability of hosting the hotline and the staff to do the intake. Civil legal services can assist with face-to-face assistance at the FEMA Disaster Recovery Centers (DRCs). Other organizations can help inform the public about the program, volunteer taking cases, and provide additional services, such as translation and interpretation.

It is important that all of these organizations that are participating with the response are partners with the DLS program and are listed on the press release. This is providing unfettered access to the DRCs and survivors. The pro bono legal assistance through the hotlines is only short term. The DLS program may end after several months to a year depending on the extent of the disaster. However, legal issues will still be lingering. As a result, it is important to have a strong relationship with the local LSC-grantee in order to refer survivors for long-term legal assistance.

One of the better-organized responses was to the Colorado floods. The DLS program in Colorado included a comprehensive collaborative effort from a wide-variety of organizations. In addition, the task force created a website that served many purposes. Not only was it used to recruit volunteer attorneys and conduct intake of cases, but it also served as an educational hub of information for the survivor and volunteer attorneys with informational posts and videos on different disaster-related legal topics. Moreover, all of the materials had both English and Spanish language descriptions because of the population in the disaster area.

Related Resource

[Colorado's Disaster Response](#)

3. Bringing the Legal Community to the Round(table)

Issue Background

One of the most prominent issues for individuals in need of legal assistance post-Sandy was flood insurance. Unlike other forms of insurance, flood insurance is offered by the federal government through the National Flood Insurance Program. Administered by FEMA, the NFIP offers subsidized policies but also brings with it unique bureaucratic and administrative requirements to process claims. Much of the terminology and scope of coverage for these policies was confusing not only for policyholders but also

for those assisting them. Attorneys had to familiarize themselves with NFIP policies, requirements and claims processes quickly and then represent and advise clients facing other evolving needs. In particular, lawyers needed to help their client(s) complete proof of loss forms and find affordable public adjusters to assess damages. In the process, they needed to become well-versed in depreciation and other concepts not readily understood by attorneys not specializing in insurance.

Testimonial (Victor Tello, South Brooklyn Legal Services [formerly City Bar Justice Center])

A) Organizing the Insurance Roundtables

While the legal services community was apt at responding to many issues it faced in the aftermath of Sandy, many attorneys felt they were falling behind on insurance-related cases and learning the necessary information to best represent their clients. My response was to organize a monthly insurance roundtable, which proved helpful and became a way through which legal services shared information and learned from each other.

In the winter and early spring of 2013, I was running the pro bono program at the City Bar Justice Center. Of course, many Sandy survivors had insurance disputes and attempts to place them with pro bono attorneys were difficult because lots of firms represented insurance companies and thus couldn't represent clients with claims against those same companies. Legal services providers, meanwhile, didn't have previous experience handling insurance issues and were at a loss of how to handle them.

Nevertheless, legal services providers would have to learn the process and become aware and so the City Bar Justice Center listened to the community and identified issues and problems they hadn't dealt with before. Since attorneys were confused and inefficiently replicating processes, we decided to host a roundtable uncertain of whether there would be interest or if it would be helpful.

Within the first week, the response to the idea was overwhelmingly positive and so we began planning. At first, we thought we'd try to model a medical approach of identifying case studies that were generic and got at the heart of insurance issues, but we realized that we would need more control in terms of how to put forth information. Instead, I communicated with a local insurance attorney who had experience with homeowner's insurance and the City Bar contracted him to provide general information and assistance at the insurance roundtables.

For that first roundtable, I compiled a general outline (enclosed) of topics based upon research and conversations with legal services attorneys. First, we went through an article written by insurance attorneys and identified good practices but also holes and flaws in the reasoning, recognizing that a) we knew more than we thought and b) when we got together we could ask questions and put information on the table that improved everyone's understanding. Then, we went through the main issues attorneys had been dealing with. It was helpful to see the topics on paper and discussing them together fostered a community through discussion that allowed us to put faces to names and work together at a different level.

Since the response to the roundtable was so positive and continued interest strong, we realized we'd need to continue the discussion. Originally we thought other organizations would want to rotate hosting and organizing, but given the location and role of the City Bar Justice Center we continued to serve as the hosts and organizers.

Ultimately, the roundtables became a monthly event through which we covered many different topics. While the first roundtable focused on both flood and homeowner's insurance, for example, the second was entirely dedicated to flood issues. For the flood insurance roundtable, we were able to build on a connection made at the first meeting in order to invite a FEMA employee to give their point of view. This process continued with different topics throughout 2013, and although the City Bar no longer holds the roundtables the partnerships, collaboration and information-sharing they fostered all continue.

B) Lessons Learned

Two key lessons I learned from my work on the insurance roundtables were the importance of networking and communicating with as many people as possible, and of anticipating certain issues.

Whereas I had a tendency to work independently, the most important parts of the roundtables came when I consulted with others, learned about addressing problems and interacted with experts at the roundtables. Much of this networking came about organically after we sat down and thought about issues and whom we could communicate with that would have worthwhile information. Representatives from the Attorney General's Office and the Department of Financial Services, for example, were able to provide invaluable assistance and share vital information about programs.

I also learned the importance of anticipating certain issues. Contractor fraud wasn't initially at the forefront of the response, but I spoke to FEMA employees in restoration centers who worked on previous disasters and they told me that in the past they had significant unexpected problems with contractor fraud. Attorneys wanted to become aware of what to expect, and so through the help of a contact, I reached out to someone from the Department of Consumer Affairs to speak at a roundtable about regulating contractors. The speaker gave us a sense of what they were able to and of administrative proceedings and how the DCA could bring about assistance. Had we not reached out, we wouldn't have known about a DCA program through which homeowners who filed claims and couldn't recover from contractors could receive close to \$20,000 from a trust.

Finally and importantly, we never felt like we knew all the answers. At the roundtables, it was important for attorneys to feel comfortable asking questions they wouldn't feel comfortable asking in other venues. We also ensured everyone's input was valued and that all contributions were helpful. As a result, we were able to collectively think outside of the box and address issues creatively.

Related Resource

[Outline of Topics from initial Sandy Insurance Roundtable hosted by the City Bar Justice Center](#)

4. Engaging Non-Legal Providers in the Legal Response

Issue Background

Attorneys representing or otherwise aiding Sandy victims were also faced with navigating a sometimes-complex relationship with others providing assistance. In particular, disaster case managers and representatives of community organizations were sometimes placed in a position to offer legal advice to victims. Lawyers were not always in all communities post-disaster, and disaster case managers and others were more likely to have relationships with survivors. As a result, there became a need to liaise with

disaster case managers and community organizations to ensure proper advice was being dispensed and that victims were aware of where to turn for legal help. Furthermore, attorneys faced difficulties in working with government agencies. In the aftermath of Sandy, different representatives of different agencies offered incomplete and contradictory information that was necessary for successful applications for assistance. Attorneys had to informally learn information through practice and by establishing connections with trusted partners.

Testimonial (Liz Hampton and Jessica Limbacher, Volunteer Lawyers for Justice)

In providing legal advice and services to victims of Hurricane Sandy, the staff and volunteer attorneys of the Disaster Legal Response Program (DLRP) of Volunteer Lawyers for Justice (VLJ) had a number of opportunities to interact and collaborate with non-legal providers. In particular, all of the long-term recovery groups in New Jersey, with which the DLRP worked closely, included disaster case managers, social workers, and mental health service providers as members.

Working with non-legal providers in a disaster context was often extremely helpful for VLJ's attorneys. For example, case managers would frequently refer clients to the DLRP who were in need of legal assistance. Many long-term recovery groups and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs) not only provided space for legal clinics and seminars but also helped to promote these events by passing out flyers to interested clients. Non-legal providers were also a wonderful resource for clients who contacted VLJ and did not have a true legal issue but were instead better served by applying for financial assistance or free mental health services, for example, with the help of a case manager. Finally, collaborating with these organizations served as an efficient means of sharing information and keeping track of the ever-changing issues – whether legal or non-legal – that clients were facing.

Despite these benefits, some challenges arose in working with non-legal providers. In some instances, case managers or social workers from other Sandy relief organizations did not initially identify certain issues as being legal in nature, especially in the immediate aftermath of the storm. These non-legal providers may simply not have been aware that a problem faced by a client might have a legal solution (i.e. an appeals process), and would neglect to advise clients to contact a lawyer. Clients may have benefited from earlier intervention in order to deal with these legal problems.

In order to address some of these issues, VLJ's staff attorneys attended long-term recovery group meetings to give presentations to case managers and to alert them to impending Sandy-related legal issues. By clarifying which issues were legal, attorneys encouraged case managers to give clients the DLRP phone number when they suspected they might need legal advice. VLJ also hosted a number of legal clinics and seminars on relevant Sandy legal issues in several different counties in New Jersey to make it easier for clients to get quick answers to legal questions from experienced volunteer attorneys.

5. Connecting People to Programs

Issue Background

In addition to FEMA assistance, survivors of Sandy were eligible for various federal, state and local rebuilding and assistance programs. Special DUA disaster unemployment assistance and DSNAP disaster food stamps were available but underutilized because they were offered too late and weren't adequately publicized. Long-term rebuilding assistance was offered through the Build it Back program in New York

City and NY Rising in the rest of New York State. Even now, these programs basically have paid out no money to survivors. Attorneys were tasked with assisting survivors successfully apply for programs, which proved difficult. Government programs seemingly changed daily, with shifting status and eligibility. A key problem was managing the expectations of survivors.

Testimonial (Courina Yulisa and Sara Martin, Center for NYC Neighborhoods)

About the Center for NYC Neighborhoods. As an organization that acts as a hub for 36 legal services and housing counseling Network Partners citywide, The Center for NYC Neighborhoods is uniquely positioned to assist with disaster recovery in a broad and systemic manner. The Center was able to take on the role of delivering coordination, technical assistance, funding, and connecting the various players within disaster recovery. As the recovery process progresses, we learned the importance of coordinating and working with groups such as disaster case managers, long-term recovery organizations, and entities providing federal and private assistance programs such as Build it Back and the NYNYC Home Repair Program.

Connect to Public or Centralized Sources. One prevalent need citywide is for more non-FEMA rebuilding and assistance programs. Notwithstanding the lack of disaster and repair funding overall, groups are not always aware of the programs available. For instance, many disaster case managers and attorneys were unaware of the availability of repair loans and grants being offered by some of our housing counseling partners. To address this, the Center instituted biweekly email updates to Sandy organizations that included information on these programs and held a training to make other organizations aware of these available resources. We also provide a forum for disaster recovery advocates to communicate via listservs and organize borough-based meetings regularly to further facilitate referrals, updates, and coordination.

The Center also regularly communicates with Catholic Charities's Disaster Case Management to spread the word about what our network has to offer and how we can better cross-refer. This way, Sandy-affected residents are able to get a more holistic range of services. Another approach we take is to communicate with city programs or CDBG-DR funded programs like Build it Back to provide our network with knowledge of these types of programs. Keeping contact with these organizations and signing up to receive regular email updates have helped with information-gathering and dissemination.

To find out about non-FEMA programs and localized assistance, attorneys can connect to centralized sources like the Center, probono.net, and long-term recovery groups within the neighborhoods they serve. Organizations consisting of various groups and partners often have faster means to obtain updates on programs internally and externally, and are generally good contacts to keep for resource assistance.

Reach Out Locally. From our experience with our network, it is generally helpful to reach out to community-based organizations (CBOs) and partners within your networks on top of your centralized sources. CBOs with long-standing offices within neighborhoods are familiar with the demographics they serve, and know what resources exist within these communities. Also, developing a referral system can make applying for non-FEMA programs more expedient, especially when you are referring clients directly to organizations that administer these programs to meet the different needs of your clients.

Coordinate and Participate. Once attorneys establish these relationships, they are then able to draw on these resources as well as the expertise of others in their field. Some of our partners have taken this a step further by taking on multiple roles. For instance, CAMBA and NHS of Jamaica not only provide housing counseling services but they are also disaster case managers. They are then able to directly draw on the resources that are limited to DCMs while continuing to draw on their housing counseling resources. Some organizations have also partnered with others providing a complementary service to be available in their offices. As the different issues arising from disasters become more interrelated as time goes by, it may make sense to take on the various disaster recovery roles to gain more oversight of your clients' recovery process.

Another example is how some organizations are participating, and even leading initiatives in the long-term recovery groups within the neighborhoods they serve. Not only can they obtain important updates on resources, but also help shape the recovery goals and advocacy issues of these neighborhoods as well as acting as a community organizer. This outlet is a good opportunity to connect with trusted public figures such as elected officials to help expand your reach to community residents and implement joint events with them and other CBOs. Long term recovery groups also organize resource-sharing events for advocates and community members.

Additionally, participating in working groups and task forces is a good way to build and coordinate resources as well as to proactively develop tools to better assist affected residents. City agencies and FEMA representatives often participate in these groups and make efforts to connect with advocates.

Keep Updated. Keeping track of program changes can also be a challenge for attorneys with heavy workloads. Being on listservs and mailing lists that provide summaries of program updates in disaster recovery will save time, as well as attending meetings with other advocates. Some programs may also have their own email newsletters and twitter feeds. It is helpful to have key contact people to reach out to for each program. As bigger programs have borough coordinators or outreach staff, obtaining their contact information is essential for submitting programmatic questions. Once you develop this relationship, they may act as a channel of information and case problem-solving, and may become receptive to suggestions for policy changes to address your clients' needs.

Be the Hub. As the Center is a hub of a network of housing counseling agencies and legal service providers, disaster recovery advocates become the hub of resources for their clients. Going through the various steps to build relationships with the many groups involved in the recovery process will give advocates better access to non-FEMA rebuilding and assistance programs, as well as giving advocates the opportunity to establish their role and legitimacy within the disaster recovery community.

Related Resource

Current Programs in Sandy Recovery (as of August 2014)

- Governmental
 - Build it Back (NYC)
 - NY Rising (NYS)
- Non-Governmental
 - NRNYC Home Repair Program (LISC)

- Disaster Case Management (Catholic Charities) with access to NYDIS's Unmet Needs Roundtable and Red Cross Repair Program
- Hurricane Sandy Relief Assistance (Dr. Theodore Atlas Foundation)
- The Center's Network Partners
 - Mortgage Assistance Fund (MAP): all of the Center's Network Partners
 - Emergency Home Repair Loans: AAFE
 - Emergency Loan and Grant Programs: NHS
 - Non-Emergency Repair and Rehabilitation Loans and Grants: NHS
 - SCHAP for senior homeowners: The Parodneck Foundation and Pratt Area Community Council

6. Navigating Insurance Policies and Claims with Homeowners

Issue Background

Survivors of Superstorm Sandy needed assistance with different types of insurance claims. Attorneys had to quickly learn about policies, coverage and intake. Initially attorneys had difficulty with intake – they took on the cases that resonated emotionally, rather than the cases that had the best chance of success. As legal services organizations became better-versed in insurance policies and coverage, they improved their intake to maximize the effectiveness of the assistance they provided. Attorneys also had to become familiar with documentation requirements for successful policy claims and with the complexities underlying policies. Finally, legal services organizations had difficulty placing many pro bono insurance cases because of firm conflicts.

Testimonial (Barry Bassis, Legal Services NYC)

What became apparent after Superstorm Sandy is that homeowners and community groups, even many attorneys, did not know what an insurance policy was. Often they had a declaration page and were under the misapprehension that that was the whole policy. Unlike flood policies, which all have the same provisions, homeowner policies vary considerably. A declaration page will list various endorsements but there is no way to determine what is covered or excluded unless you obtain the entire policy.

In some instances, homeowners did not even know that they had insurance. If the homeowner had a mortgage, then we contacted the mortgage company and on occasion discovered that there was a policy of force-placed insurance. While it seems counter-intuitive, mortgage companies make homeowners obtain insurance and then sometimes fail to file claims when the property is damaged by a covered event.

Another problem that we encountered was the participation of Public Adjusters (“PA’s”). Many were retained after Superstorm Sandy and some undeniably helped. Others, though, simply collected a portion of “low-hanging fruit,” sums that the homeowner would have received without their involvement. Then, the PA’s mostly disappeared, many returning to the South, where they lived. Some PA’s were remarkably ignorant of insurance requirements, especially with respect to flood policies. One who touted his 20 years of experience insisted that there was no deadline for Proofs of Loss. He also made the shocking statement that he had checked with his colleagues and they agreed with him. In some cases we were able to help the homeowner fire a PA. In others we intervened to supervise the process.

Homeowners affected by the storm were frequently victimized by contractors, some of whom were outright crooks. One did not reveal the cost until after doing some work on the premises and then filed a lien against the property. We eventually convinced the contractor to withdraw the lien when we pointed out to his attorney that his client was unlicensed and therefore had no right to file a lien and could be compelled to pay damages.

As we are approaching the two-year anniversary of the storm, there are deadlines on October 28, 2014: probably the final date for filing Proofs of Loss in flood cases and also the statute of limitations for homeowner insurance policies. Now, policyholders must bring lawsuits for those cases that could not be negotiated. This can range from small claims court to NYS Civil and Supreme Court (depending on the amount in dispute) or federal district court (for flood insurance claims or cases where there is diversity jurisdiction).

Knowing how to read a policy and determine how much an insured is entitled to are not the same as litigating a case, which is different in state and federal court. With respect to the former, the case will not move forward until one of the parties is pro-active. By contrast, a federal case in the Eastern District of New York will be treated as a Sandy case, with automatic discovery rules and the court pressuring the parties toward mediation (usually meeting resistance from the defense bar).

The challenges for the legal services community are to obtain funding to retain (or obtain in the first instance) insurance litigators and also to pay for the cost of litigation.

7. Disaster Relief for All

Issue Background

The legal response to Sandy was complicated by language and cultural barriers that precluded many of the neediest residents of the City from seeking assistance. Initial information about the storm, storm response and relief/recovery programs wasn't adequately translated into other languages and spread in many diverse communities. Since responders came from outside the area, they were often unfamiliar with communities and particular needs. Furthermore, undocumented members of some immigrant communities were unsure of what programs they qualified for and were deterred from asking responders for fear of detention or deportation. Attorneys well-versed in language and cultural barriers were tasked with reaching overlooked communities and survivors to ensure they received fair treatment and access to recovery programs.

Testimonial (Chantal Hamlin, Brooklyn Jubilee)

After Superstorm Sandy hit, Limited English Proficiency ("LEP") and non-English speaking New Yorkers alike were severely hindered in terms of their recovery. Many resources, including those from FEMA and other national programs were not immediately translated into many of the popular languages that exist in New York City neighborhoods, such as: Chinese, Russian, and Urdu. While there were many Spanish-language resources available, in communities on the Southern coast of Brooklyn that were predominantly Chinese and Russian speaking, information essential remained unattainable.

Ultimately, the needs of LEP and non-English speaking New Yorkers were met by donors and volunteers who saw the need for the translation services. This alleviated pressure on young children and teenagers in

many families where parents were LEP or non-English speaking and gave parents the chance to tell their stories first hand and really get the help they needed.

First, Brooklyn Jubilee immediately reached into its volunteer pool and tapped bilingual or trilingual volunteers who wanted to serve their fellow New Yorkers in a tangible way. In times of disaster, many clients were often comforted having someone who they could speak with in their own language. The burdens and pressures after a disaster are almost insurmountable and having a friendly face that understands your language and even culture played a role in many client's recovery. Brooklyn Jubilee also trained interpretation/translation volunteers on various recovery-related programs, rights, policies and procedures so they could interact directly with clients. Further, having volunteers available who also wrote other languages was vital in sending informative letters and posting and mailing notices to clients that explained various obligations and helpful resources.

Second, Brooklyn Jubilee and other legal services organizations secured telephone translations services through the grants of donors who were invested in disaster relief. These telephone translation services proved vital to client intake meetings and informing and educating clients about the various resources available to them. These telephone translation services also proved extremely helpful in following up with clients to ensure that they were indeed able to access necessary services and also to continue advocacy regarding issues with FEMA awards or flood/homeowners insurance.

Finally, volunteers and staff also researched various programs and organizations that were available to help clients either in their language or that were specifically available for undocumented persons. Volunteers and staff connected with various nonprofits that offered aid and services in languages that our client's spoke American Red Cross and the Council Of Peoples Organization (COPO).

In summary, needs of LEP residents and non-English speaking residents must be considered in every disaster. Many residents in these categories are eligible for disaster assistance/relief programs but are lost in a world of paper and resources that are mostly in English. Thus, much of the help available to them is not accessed simply because no one shared the resource in their language.

8. Appendix: Pro Bono Net and Superstorm Sandy

About Pro Bono Net

Pro Bono Net is a national nonprofit organization based in New York City and San Francisco. We work in close partnership with nonprofit legal organizations across the United States and Canada, to increase access to justice for the millions of indigent people who face legal problems every year without legal assistance. We do this by (i) supporting the innovative and effective use of technology by the nonprofit legal sector, (ii) increasing participation by volunteers, and (iii) facilitating collaborations among nonprofit legal organizations and advocates working on similar issues or in the same region.

Pro Bono Net and Superstorm Sandy

Pro Bono Net has worked with legal aid organizations, law firms, pro bono attorneys, advocate groups, government agencies, and others to coordinate legal assistance for the many low- and middle-income New Yorkers affected by Superstorm Sandy. We have served as an organizational leader to ensure long-term collaboration on efforts to address the myriad legal issues resulting from the storm. Our efforts

initially focused on providing emergency assistance to address immediate problems, and have evolved to meet the changing legal needs of long-term rebuilding and recovery efforts.

In the days right after the storm, Pro Bono Net anticipated an urgent need for aid focused on food stamps, evictions, unemployment assistance, and other emergency measures. Recognizing that legal aid organizations would immediately begin providing services, we leveraged our technical expertise, organizational capacity, and relationships in the New York legal community to lead efforts to coordinate information, ideas, and resources amongst responding organizations.

During the initial response to Sandy, Pro Bono Net created and maintained a clearinghouse in the NYC Pro Bono Center (<http://www.probono.net/ny/nyc/>) with daily updates on pro bono relief efforts, trainings, videos, manuals, and pro bono opportunities. We also immediately set up a weekly email to probono.net/ny members with information on pro bono activities related to Sandy relief efforts. Pro Bono Net attended the first relief meetings at the City Bar, facilitating the sharing of information and coordination of relief efforts. To further encourage coordination, we worked with the City Bar Justice Center and Legal Services-NYC to convene bi-weekly, cross-sector conference calls aimed at encouraging information sharing among stakeholders. These calls regularly drew 50-70 participants representing legal services organizations, pro bono providers, law schools, law firms, and national organizations. We also created and host an active listserv to facilitate communication between calls.

Pro Bono Net employed technology to train volunteers and responders in providing coordinated legal assistance. We partnered with the New York Legal Assistance Group to provide two webinars on disaster-related and FEMA legal issues that drew nearly 600 attorneys for the live taping, with hundreds more viewing the recording later online. We also live-webcast a City Bar training on FEMA appeals and private insurance issues so that attorneys unable to attend could view the training in real time could watch it later on their own schedule. In partnership with Legal Services-NYC, we led a webinar to train law students involved in a massive canvassing effort to gather storm relief data essential to effective legal advocacy. Through technology, we were able to expand access to valuable resources and train a significant number of volunteers in the initial aftermath of the disaster.

Our work on Sandy relief continued as the legal needs of victims evolved. Our efforts included a continuation of our bi-weekly stakeholder conference call in partnership with the City Bar Justice Center and Legal Services-NYC through the end of 2013. The calls sustained high levels of cross-sector participation and increasingly involve stakeholders both from the local community and from as far away as Washington D.C., New Orleans, and Texas. The accompanying listserv still enjoys robust usage and now includes over 175 members. Through the listserv, Pro Bono Net also communicates important news and updates related to the Sandy legal response via a digest. A similar call and listserv model has been employed by partners on Long Island and in New Jersey to better serve those communities.

In order to institutionalize best practices and collaboration around the delivery of legal services in New York, Pro Bono Net has undertaken an effort to develop a disaster legal response network. In October, we co-hosted a Disaster Lawyering Conference and published an interview series on our blog, www.connectingjusticecommunities.com. In the months following the conference, we conducted a community assessment and worked with partners to establish the beginnings of a network. 45 leaders of the disaster legal response effort attended a kick-off reception in May and following the reception attendees completed a comprehensive survey and participated in focus group meetings. Pro Bono Net has

developed a formal proposal and is in the process of implementing practices that will allow the network effort to succeed and grow. We have also worked with the Legal Services Corporation to convene a national advisory group of disaster legal response experts to aid attorneys in working on behalf of survivors.

Pro Bono Net also continues to use innovative technology to improve the disaster legal response. The National Disaster Legal Aid Resource Center, www.disasterlegalaid.org, was created by Lone Star Legal Aid, Pro Bono Net, the Legal Services Corporation, the American Bar Association, the National Legal Aid & Defender Association and the Texas Legal Services Center as a central online hub for disaster legal services for legal aid attorneys, pro bono volunteers and people in need of help. For people in need of legal help post-disaster, the site provides valuable resources to assist survivors with navigating issues ranging from securing housing to applying for assistance to filing insurance claims. Disaster-specific pages on the site allow survivors to find critical information on how and where to find legal assistance via hotlines, clinics and disaster recovery centers as well as guidance on eligibility and deadlines for assistance programs. The site also provides people in need of help with the latest news and agency alerts related to disaster legal assistance and has links to helpful tools, including a free, interactive tool to help appeal a FEMA denial.

As many legal issues persist and others continue to arise in the aftermath of Sandy and other disasters both in New York and nationally, Pro Bono Net will remain a leader of inter-organization collaboration and will work to develop innovative solutions to aid victims.