

Volunteers in Disasters, A Case Study

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Speaker: Christa Lopez

Presentation Abstract:

The intention of this research was to understand the disaster survivors' experiences with disaster volunteers in order to inform how disaster volunteers can be of the greatest assistance. When disaster strikes a community, it is assumed that disaster volunteer organizations and spontaneous volunteers will arrive to assist the affected community. The community affected by the disaster can be overwhelmed by the impact of the disaster on their homes and possessions. This stress can be alleviated by the offerings of volunteers. However, volunteers may also pose a challenge as they may lack the appropriate training, may not understand the culture or community norms, and thus may not comprehend the magnitude of the community's needs. This qualitative case study using direct interviews with Hurricane Harvey disaster survivors in the Coastal Bend Region of Texas explored how disaster survivors describe their experiences with the disaster volunteers.

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Speaker Bio:

Dr. Christa López is the Deputy Director for Operations and Chief of Staff for Community Development and Revitalization with the Texas General Land Office. In this role she lead the first-ever, state-led and FEMA funded Direct Housing Mission and coordinates staffing and operational programs for the Community Development Block Grant-Disaster Recovery (CDBG-DR). Prior to joining the Texas General Land Office, Christa was the Section Administrator for Human Services at the Texas Division of Emergency Management. In that role Christa served as Human Services Branch Director in the State Operations Center and served as the Individual Assistance Branch Director for Federally declared disasters. Christa has professional experience a State and Federal Planner and working in the realm of crisis and emergency response. For 19 years Christa worked as a university administrator at the University of Texas at Austin, Colorado State University, and at Shippensburg University. Christa holds a PhD in Public Policy Administration, a Master of Arts in Emergency and Disaster Management, a Master of Science in Counseling, and a Bachelor of Science in Horticulture.