

Preparing for and Responding to Disaster: SLOVOAD

San Luis Obispo County Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster, or SLOVOAD for short, has been developed to bring together a variety of organizations to work on a common goal – helping our community when in need.

Prior to SLOVOAD, community organizations did not have a plan for how their organization would respond to disasters. They were not in regular communication with other organizations, nor were they aware of each other's services. Now, these organizations partner to provide joint services, preventing duplication of services as well as overlooking unmet needs. When a disaster strikes, all SLOVOAD will be a united force providing comprehensive services to the community.

Forty organizations in the county have come together to prepare and respond to disaster through the four principles of VOAD: cooperation, communication, coordination and collaboration. Since SLOVOAD began in February 2007, the membership has established plans for managing in-kind donations, managing monetary donations, coordinating food services and improving the county's animal evacuation plan. Standard operating procedures have been developed between the lead SLOVOAD agencies and the County Office of Emergency Services.

The challenges SLOVOAD has experienced include getting the message out to the community – both about what SLOVOAD is and does, and encouraging community members to prepare for disasters. The membership continues to work on these challenges.

What general insights would you like to share?

- Make sure you have staff time devoted to the collaboration! It takes a lot of checking in and following up with partner agencies to get everyone on board and on track.
- Set achievable goals and objectives with deadlines. It gives everyone involved a clear vision and focus. It also ensures that everyone is making progress and items are moving forward.
- Establish a structure. VOAD has an executive board that ensures accountability of the membership. There are clear policies and procedures for getting VOAD decisions made and objectives met.