

Press Release

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Top Disaster-Response Agencies Sign Unprecedented Pact to Prepare Bay Area New Report Identifies Preparedness Gaps and Opportunities for Nonprofit Sector

SAN FRANCISCO, February 5, 2007 -- Seven of the Bay Area's top disaster-response agencies will sign an unprecedented charter today, pledging to increase the level of cooperation, planning and preparedness among agencies that will respond to disasters in the Bay Area. In conjunction with the charter signing, United Way of the Bay Area (UWBA) released findings from "Ready or Not: Ensuring Bay Area Nonprofits Can Serve During Disaster," a report which exposes several gaps that could hinder the ability of the Bay Area nonprofit sector as a whole to respond effectively in a crisis, as well as identifies opportunities for addressing those challenges.

The seven founding members of San Francisco's Coordinated Assistance Network (SF CAN) will sign the charter today during a working session at United Way. Media interested in photo opportunities are encouraged to attend the 1 p.m. meeting at 221 Main Street, Suite 300, San Francisco. Charter signers, which comprise the Governing Body of SF CAN, are:

- American Red Cross Bay Area Chapter
- Catholic Charities CYO
- The Salvation Army – Golden State Division
- San Francisco Community Agencies Responding to Disaster (SF CARD)
- San Francisco Department of Emergency Management
- United Way of the Bay Area and United Way's 2-1-1
- The Volunteer Center

While SF CAN signatories already have collaborative outreach programs in place, the charter establishes a first-of-its-kind comprehensive, cross-agency platform for ongoing planning and information sharing. SF CAN will focus on filling gaps in resources, recruiting and organizing other capable nonprofits to assist, and teaming with public sector first-responders to streamline response and recovery efforts. San Francisco is one of six pilot cities chosen to participate in the national CAN initiative, which is working to create a national database to track disaster survivors and services provided to them.

Report reveals challenges, opportunities

At the request and with the support of Northern California Grantmakers, PG&E, Levi Strauss Foundation, the Walter and Elise Haas Foundation, the Fritz Institute, and the San Francisco Foundation, UWBA researched whether the Bay Area nonprofit sector can respond effectively to a catastrophic disaster. Based on in-depth interviews with more than 50 disaster response leaders in nine Bay Area counties, the “Ready or Not” report identifies three major areas of concern that could significantly hamper the ability of local nonprofits to respond effectively in a crisis:

- **Existing plans fall short:** Too many organizations believe that once they have a plan in place, they are set – a mistake that has proven very costly in disasters elsewhere. Few Bay Area agencies have done enough to institutionalize learning and create a sustainable framework for preparedness.
- **The worst is yet to come:** Many nonprofits take comfort in their efficient responses to events like the East Bay Fire and Loma Prieta Earthquake. They believe that by simply ramping up personnel or emergency supplies they could perform well during a larger-scale disaster like the major earthquake that experts predict will occur here. Disaster response literature does not support this assumption.
- **Lack of standards and protocols:** Local nonprofits assume information sharing between nonprofits, the public and private sectors simply means utilizing technology, rather than employing interdependent and ongoing human and organizational processes.

The research also outlines several recommendations for improving preparedness of the nonprofit sector. The complete SF-CAN charter and a four-page executive summary of United Way’s “Ready or Not” report can be downloaded at www.uwba.org this afternoon. Over the next several month, United Way will expand the “Ready or Not” report to include detailed plans of action for the Bay Area’s nonprofit sector.

About United Way of the Bay Area

United Way of the Bay Area (UWBA) is a nonprofit organization dedicated to community impact. UWBA serves Alameda, Contra Costa, Marin, Napa, San Francisco, San Mateo and Solano Counties. Our mission is to be the catalyst that enables people to strengthen their communities by investing in one another. Through the Bay Area Community Fund, United Way supports more than 250 local programs that fight poverty and create opportunities for children, youth, families and neighborhoods to thrive. In San Francisco, United Way 2-1-1 is an easy-to-remember phone number that connects people in need—as well as individuals seeking to give—with community services. United Way’s introduction of 2-1-1 in San Francisco is the first step in plans to promote and establish 2-1-1 service throughout the Bay Area. For more information, visit www.uwba.org.

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SF CAN Members Available for Comment:

United Way of the Bay Area

Anne Wilson, Chief Executive Officer

"Despite some thoughtful and exemplary work by Bay Area nonprofits, the collaborative, ongoing processes that are essential for preparing for and responding to a catastrophic disaster are not yet in place in our region. By signing this historic charter, leading Bay Area agencies are committing to take decisive action now to ensure the nonprofit sector is prepared to serve our community effectively in any emergency or disaster."

To interview Anne Wilson, please call Maria Stokes at 415-808-4264.

American Red Cross Bay Area Chapter (ARCBA)

Harold Brooks, Chief Executive Officer

"CAN is a momentous stride to further improve upon the way the Bay Area responds to an emergency. The Red Cross applauds the efforts of all those who have come together to make this day a reality. Bottom line, we have a lot of work to do and ARCBA has been proactively strengthening the level of preparedness in the Bay Area by implementing an approach that ensures that every community has a base of knowledge to protect themselves and their loved ones both before and after an emergency."

To interview Harold Brooks, contact Paul Rose at 415-427-8060 or 415-694-9038 (cell)

Catholic Charities CYO

Brian Cahill, Executive Director

"We learned a lot from working with the City and the Red Cross in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. It opened my eyes about what we need to do internally to get prepared for the next disaster, and the collaborative work necessary for the Bay Area to get prepared."

To interview Brian Cahill, please contact Julie Harris at 415-972-1294.

The Salvation Army – Golden State Division

Major Joe Posillico, Divisional Commander

"Experience has taught us how important it is for all the agencies that provide disaster relief and support to be working well together to provide professional care to the survivors. Promoting the sharing of knowledge and resources with our partners facilitates responses and decreases duplication of services. We are encouraged by the signing of the Coordinated Assistance Network charter with our local community partners because it is a crucial part of our emergency disaster services strategy and, more importantly, will help us provide more adequate and thorough services to all those in need."

To interview Major Joe Posillico, please call Jennifer Byrd at 415.553.3524.

San Francisco Community Agencies Responding to Disaster (SF CARD)

Michael Braude, Chair of Executive Committee

“Collaboration and cooperation are the cornerstones of successful disaster response. CAN takes already existing efforts in this area to a new level. And while all of the organizations involved in CAN will benefit, the ultimate winners will be those in need of assistance following a disaster.”

To interview Michael Braude, please call Michael Braude at 415-282-1907, ext. 242.

San Francisco Department of Emergency Management

Laura Phillips, Executive Director

“The CAN charter serves to strengthen our long-standing partnership with local nonprofits who will play a vital role in the event of a major disaster. Together, we will continue to make great progress on disaster preparedness in the Bay Area.”

To interview Laura Phillips, please call Laura Adleman at 415-558-2703.

The Volunteer Center

John Power, Executive Director

“So many of us wondered during Hurricane Katrina response efforts how collectively we could be so resource-rich and respond so poorly. In the Bay Area, key agencies have spent years working on state-of-the-art, reality-based plans for emergency response that without integration and investment—no matter how well-informed and intentioned—risk having fragmented impact. CAN promises a greater level of integration and efficiency that coupled with sufficient investment might enable us to be properly prepared. And we must be.”

To interview John Power, please call John Power at 415-982-8999, ext 227.

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