

Emergency management for refugee-serving agencies

Presented by Barry Growe, MAP BC, for the Canadian Council for Refugees

December 1, 2021

Goal of an emergency plan

An emergency is an abnormal, unmanageable situation. The goal of an emergency plan is to make the unmanageable manageable, to give arriving refugees and refugee claimants the services they must have, even in overwhelming circumstances.

Strategies: how to make an unmanageable situation manageable

1. Delegate or die

- In an emergency, normal supervision is impossible. Delegate as much of the work to capable people and trust them.
- Expand your workforce by training new volunteers and trust them, with supervision. Some of them will become your supervisors.

2. Cut services

- For the newly arrived refugee claimants, you might normally provide six services immediately. During an emergency, you may decide that only four of those services are absolutely necessary.
- For your regular clients, pare down services; e.g., their ESL training could wait a couple of months. Cutting services makes it possible to focus on key services like housing refugees in unconventional ways.

3. Promote a can-do attitude

- Hold regular meetings to coordinate services and keep up morale.
- Emphasize successes.

4. Take care of your workers

- You cannot afford to lose workers to burnout.
- Record everyone's hours. Set limits after which staff must rest at home.
- Have social workers and counsellors form a Worker Care unit.

5. Yell for help

- Refugee surges are big news.
- Expect businesses, organizations, news media, religious groups to be generous.

6. Coordinate

- Work closely with government. Ask for the information and funding you need.
- Work closely with fellow agencies. Consider establishing a coordination office to convene agency meetings, provide news media messaging, etc.