

# Building Resilient Disaster Response: Strategic Preparedness for Food Banks and Hunger Relief Organizations



Comprehensive Assessment and  
Planning Guide

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# Introduction

This checklist has been developed from real-world disaster response experiences across hurricane-affected regions, including insights from food banks that have successfully navigated the devastation in the Carolinas caused by Hurricane Helene in 2024. Additionally, it includes logistical supply chain insights from Value-Added Food Sales, which played a significant role in supplying relief items for the largest disaster relief response in history at that time; Hurricane Katrina relief efforts in 2005.

We hope you find these lessons learned through helping hunger relief organizations respond to disasters over the past 20 years helpful.

While created with hurricane response in mind, these principles apply to all communities facing potential disasters, including earthquakes, wildfires, floods, and other severe weather events.

The questions are organized by critical preparedness categories. Use this assessment to identify gaps in your organization's disaster preparedness and develop action plans for each area.

The strongest disaster response plans address all these elements before crisis strikes, understanding that the first 72 hours are critical and even the strongest supply chain responses will take time to arrive.

These key insights and questions come from the comprehensive industry overview and lessons learned shared in the Value Added Food Sales blog.

Read the full article and detailed case studies here: on our blog.



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## **Key Takeaways** from: When Disaster Strikes: The Hidden Crisis That Unfolds in Hours.

### **PREPARATION PHASE:**

- Maintain 5-7 days of emergency inventory to bridge supply gaps when normal ordering becomes impossible
- Build relationships with emergency food suppliers who can fulfill orders rapidly (industry standard is 2-3 weeks; emergency-focused suppliers may offer 5-day fulfillment)
- Establish authentic mutual aid agreements with neighboring food banks and community partners before disaster strikes
- Ensure critical technology systems are cloud-based and accessible remotely to prevent total operational shutdown



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## Key Takeaways from: When Disaster Strikes: The Hidden Crisis That Unfolds in Hours.

### **RESPONSE PHASE:**

- Be prepared to act immediately without waiting for funding authorization—donations typically follow decisive action
- Understand that disaster food relief is regional, not just local—prepare for displaced populations from affected areas
- Plan for sustained operations over months, not just immediate response—the scale and duration will surprise you
- Prioritize suppliers with regional partnerships who can expedite during local disasters



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## **Key Takeaways** from: When Disaster Strikes: The Hidden Crisis That Unfolds in Hours

### **RECOVERY PHASE:**

- Provide extended flexibility for staff dealing with personal recovery, FEMA appointments, and contractor meetings.
- Plan for coordination with temporary relief organizations and their eventual departure from your service area.
- Set clear boundaries between emergency response mode and sustainable operations—staff cannot work crisis hours indefinitely.
- Maintain emergency supplier relationships for ongoing individual emergencies year-round.



# Assessment

## QUESTIONS FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION:

1. Do you have a designated disaster relief committee with pre-assigned roles from each department?
2. Have you established authentic mutual aid agreements with neighboring food banks and community partners?
3. Do you have relationships with emergency food suppliers who can fulfill orders rapidly? (Industry standard is 2-3 weeks; emergency-focused suppliers may offer 5-day fulfillment)
4. Have you cultivated relationships with suppliers who have regional distribution or mixing centers who demonstrate a willingness and ability to expedite during disasters?
5. Does your emergency food inventory reflect actual needs (ready-to-eat foods, including tools, long shelf life)?
6. Do you have 5 days of disaster relief supplies ready to distribute? If so, do you have a rotation system to prevent waste?
7. Are you prepared to act immediately without waiting for funding authorization, and do you have financial reserves to support the initial response?
8. Have you identified alternative facilities (like convention centers) and logistics partners for scaled operations?
9. Do you have corporate sponsors committed to supporting dedicated disaster relief inventory?
10. Are your critical technology systems (inventory management, communications) cloud-based and accessible remotely?
11. Have you participated in county and city disaster response planning, or do you only have your own internal plan?
12. Do you have designated staff financial security and flexibility policies for extended crisis operations?

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# Taking Action

Your answers to these questions reveal your organization's strengths and gaps in disaster preparedness.

Share this assessment with your leadership team and board of directors to ensure organizational alignment on disaster preparedness priorities.

Save this checklist with your disaster preparedness plan for easy reference during planning updates and actual emergency situations.

## STEP 01

### Emergency Supply Planning

**Emergency Supply Planning** The 5-day inventory recommendation isn't theoretical—it's based on actual emergency fulfillment timeframes from disaster response experience. Organizations that maintain emergency inventory report being able to begin immediate response while coordinating longer-term supply chain solutions.

## STEP 02

### Supplier Relationship Evaluation

Disaster response success depends heavily on supplier relationships built during calm periods. Organizations with established emergency supplier partnerships can access priority fulfillment when traditional supply chains fail.



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# Next Steps

For organizations beginning disaster planning, contact our team for an emergency supply assessment and a personalized quote for your disaster preparedness inventory, based on your current distribution volume and service area.

## **Existing Value-Added Food Sales Customers**

Your sales representative can review your purchasing history to develop a customized 5-day emergency plan tailored to your organization's specific needs and distribution patterns.

## **New Organizations interested in a custom plan**

Our partnership expert will work with you to assess your volume, agency partner network and make a recommendation customized to your needs.

## **Hunger-Relief Emergency Preparedness Consultation**

When disaster strikes, having pre-established supplier relationships with emergency contact protocols can mean the difference between immediate response and delayed relief.





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# About Value-Added Food Sales

For over 30 years, VAFS has served food banks, pantries, and disaster relief organizations across the United States, focusing solely on supporting non-profit hunger relief organizations.

With 98% of revenue coming from hunger relief nonprofits, VAFS brings a deep understanding of food bank operations, nonprofit budgets, and the unique logistical challenges that arise when disaster strikes.

VAFS maintains mixing centers, including some colocated with major food banks, such as Second Harvest Food Bank of Metrolina in Charlotte, providing operational insight into food bank crisis management for disaster response planning.

The company's disaster relief expertise was established during Hurricane Katrina, when VAFS contributed to the development of industry standards for emergency food distribution that remain in use today.

VAFS's network of mixing centers provides reliable fulfillment during disasters, regardless of regional impact, thanks to its nationwide footprint. Each mixing center offers STANDARD lead times of just 5 business days for order fulfillment, with expedited shipments possible for emergency and disaster response needs.

Established relationships with 110+ manufacturing partners allow VAFS to fulfill and expedite orders when traditional supply chains fail, helping you to maintain operations during critical response periods

**Contact Information:** For emergency supply consultation and hunger relief disaster preparedness planning, contact Value-Added Food Sales at [valueaddedfoodsals.com](http://valueaddedfoodsals.com)