
National Response Team Overview

NRT's role in disaster response

PDA's National Response Team (NRT) is made up of volunteers who have experience and training in disaster response and commit a minimum of four weeks per year to the ministry of disaster response in the Presbyterian Church (USA). Two weeks of that time is in the field responding to mid councils affected by disasters. Note: PDA's National Volunteer Team (NVT) members must meet the same guidelines except for the time commitment. Typically NVT members have special skills, training or talents that are useful from time-to-time for trainings or disaster response. For the purposes of this document, the NRT and NVT will be referred to as NRT.

The Associate for Disaster Response U.S. deploys members of the NRT in consultation with the Presbytery Executive(s) in the area impacted by disaster. Once the plan for deployment is in place members of the team will be in touch directly with the Presbytery leadership according to the prior agreement. PDA does not deploy members of the NRT at the request of churches or communities without first obtaining agreement from the affected Presbytery or Synod (mid councils). PDA may send volunteers to disaster affected areas in cooperation with ecumenical partners, such as Church World Service; but on those occasions the persons responding will communicate their presence and explain their mission prior to deploying to the area. Members of the NRT can be deployed several times over the course of the recovery depending upon the needs of the Presbytery and community and in collaboration with the leadership of the recovery.

The role of the NRT is to support the mid councils of the PCUSA (Presbyteries and Synods). The NRT has three functions when they deploy to the field:

- Present the visible witness of the Presbyterian Church (USA) and the Body of Christ to those who have been affected in a disaster. They come to stand alongside of those whose lives have been disrupted and who may be overwhelmed by the impact of the disaster.
- Assist the mid council in assessing the impact of the disaster on both the community and the church. In many cases the Presbytery will have already begun an assessment and will already have much of the data from state and local authorities. The NRT assessment is to provide PDA information about immediate needs, capacity of the local community to address those needs and gaps in support for recovery. The Presbytery and the NRT members work together to develop a sense of the next steps that may be necessary in the response. Each brings differing gifts to the table: the Presbytery brings the understanding of the capacity of the local congregations and the capacity of the Presbytery to respond to the disaster; the

members of the NRT bring their understanding of how responses typically are organized, what kinds of support may be available for response and an overall understanding of the roles of various partners in disaster response.

- Assist Mid Councils in connecting with the resources that will be of help in the response and introduce those selected by the Presbytery to their counterparts in National and State voluntary organizations and the Federal Emergency Management Agency. When Presbyteries are able to connect early on in the response to others who are also responding, including the Red Cross, Church World Service and National Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) they become part of the coordination of the delivery of services to survivors rather than observers.

PDA Responsibilities

The National Response Team will not be deployed into a Mid Council without the permission of the Executive, General Presbyter or Stated Clerk. During this early coordination PDA and the Presbytery will together determine the best time and place for the NRT to arrive. Team size and the number of teams, may vary depending upon the size and impact of the disaster and geography of the Presbytery.

PDA is responsible for covering the cost of the deployment of teams, including travel to and from the field, local travel, housing and meals. The Presbytery should incur no cost in receiving a team for disaster response other than nominal costs associated with Presbytery volunteers who may provide guidance and coordination with the team.

Just as every disaster is different, every deployment is different. Some deployments have lasted just a few days and others have gone on for weeks. When longer deployments are needed membership of the team may be rotated as needed.

Presbytery Responsibilities

Presbytery will be responsible for providing guidance and coordination to the team either directly from the Presbytery Executive or someone designated by the Executive to provide that support. The Presbytery should expect to provide information to the team as to the impact of the disaster, contact information for church leaders who may be helpful in assessment and contact information for the Presbytery's disaster committee or task force.

The NRT does not relieve the Presbytery of the responsibility for being involved in the response nor come in to lead the Presbytery effort. There is no one-way to set up a response. The NRT role is to provide insight and information as well as support for the Presbytery leadership as they develop their own response.

The NRT may also perform other functions as may be requested by the Presbytery Executive including visitation with congregations and pastors, accompanying Presbytery

leadership to community meetings and providing workshops or other training to Presbytery leadership. All of these functions are at the discretion of the Presbytery.

The Presbytery has the responsibility to communicate directly with PDA to request funds, equipment or other resources. The NRT supplements that communication with daily reports from the field that enhances the understanding of urgent needs and provides helpful ongoing information on other disaster agencies in affected communities.

The Presbytery may be asked to assist with expenses when special training or workshops are requested that are not in response to a disaster.

Team Composition

National Response Team members are volunteers. These dedicated people have training and experience in responding to disasters. Like all teams each has particular skills and knowledge that will be helpful at differing times during the recovery process.

Among other things, NRT members are trained in:

- Presbytery Disaster Response
- Connecting to Partner Organizations
- Early Response and Assessment
- Spiritual Care in Disaster
- Care for Caregivers
- Compassion Fatigue
- Response to Human-Caused and Violent Events
- Long-Term Recovery Organizing/Program Management
- Donations Management
- Volunteer Work Team Hosting

Not all NRT members are trained in all of these response skills; however, many have more than one skill set and can provide insight and technical assistance across several topics.

If there are any questions about what an NRT member might be able to do in a specific situation, you can reach PDA's Associate for Disaster Response in the US at pda.help@pcusa.org, 502/569-8800 or the PDA office at 502-569-5839, pda@pcusa.org.