

# Establishing an AIA State Disaster Assistance Program

Since 1972, the AIA has recognized the important role that architects can play in preparing for and responding to disasters that affect the built environment. Architects can perform a vital service to society by conducting post-disaster safety assessments that help return people quickly and safely to their homes and businesses. The Disaster Assistance Committee, organized by AIA National, can help components and members prepare for disasters before they strike. This document is a first step to guide members and components as they establish a new disaster assistance program.

## Roles and Responsibilities:

**AIA national** maintains contact with all state coordinators and connects coordinators with any local volunteers that inquire about the program. The AIA National Disaster Assistance Committee provides support and guidance.

**Disaster assistance point person** is an AIA member that leads the creation of a State Disaster Assistance Program. This point-person is responsible for liaising between the state or local AIA components, and AIA National. This person is also responsible for engaging with the State Emergency Management Agency and with other professionals such as engineers and building code officials.

**State disaster coordinator(s)** are AIA members that will establish/maintain a relationship with state and/or local county Emergency Management Officials, their state or local AIA component, and AIA National. Coordinators work with their component to establish/maintain a roster of potential volunteers and assist in Disaster Assistance Trainings. Coordinators must take any state-required trainings or certification courses. In some cases, the disaster assistance point person will become the state disaster coordinator.

**Local volunteers** are responsible for completing state required trainings and must keep those qualifications up to date. Volunteers are not required to respond during an emergency.

**Community partners** are important collaborators. To avoid duplication of efforts, a coalition should be formed with aligned groups such as:

- Code enforcement officials
- Allied professionals
- General contractors
- Homebuilders
- Construction organizations
- Insurance industry
- Civic and religious organizations



1.

## Call for volunteers:

Put out a call for interested volunteers in chapter newsletters. You never know what kind of experience members in your state already have in emergency management. It is important to assemble interested and dedicated architects to help establish this program. Collect this information and use it to form a working group to shepherd this program as it develops.

2.

## Establish point-person:

Delegate one point person to lead the working group. This person should be the primary point of contact for the state Disaster Assistance Program. See roles and responsibilities description at left.

3.

## Coordinate:

Meet with the State Emergency Management Agency. AIA representatives should seek advice and guidance from appropriate state officials. Emphasize that you are working to help them and ask for their recommendations to move forward with their cooperation to enter into the chain of command in the event of a disaster. These individuals will be important allies in passing [Good Samaritan legislation](#) if your state doesn't already have such protections in place.

4.

## Connect and train:

Build your network of professional volunteers. Work with your point person and AIA National to organize an AIA Disaster Assistance training session. The AIA supports the Safety Assessment Program (SAP), however, many states have similar training programs that are already integrated into their disaster response planning. Work with the State Emergency Management Agency to identify required training(s). Maintain a roster of trained architects in your state.

5.

## Think long-term:

Establish a minimum of two long-term Disaster Assistance State Coordinators. Coordinators should have experience responding to at least one disaster and be qualified to conduct additional AIA training sessions for architects within the state. Coordinators should also be committed to serve in the role for three years and be responsible for identifying a potential replacement.