

The Virgin Islands Consortium

Long-Term Recovery Groups Help Address Unmet Needs

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Four months after the disasters, survivors of hurricanes Irma and Maria continue to have unmet disaster-related needs. To help address those needs, members of local, faith- and community-based organizations and nongovernmental partners are coming together to establish Long-Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs) in St. Croix, St. John and St. Thomas, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) said on Wednesday.

Some survivors affected by the hurricanes do not meet the eligibility criteria for government disaster aid programs, or will continue to have unmet needs even after receiving the maximum amount of help from these programs. This is where recovery groups come into play. LTRGs are locally-based teams that are committed to seeing the

islands through to full recovery. The groups are helping Virgin Islanders remove debris, feed their families and make repairs to their homes.

“The most effective recovery strategies are built around local organizations with strong ties to the community,” said FEMA Federal Coordinating Officer William Vogel. “LTRGs are an integral part of the mission to provide support and guidance to communities recovering from disasters.”

The recovery process begins and ends with members of local communities. To support state and local officials, and help build back communities to be more resilient, FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons help establish the LTRGs after disasters. The groups on each island are now assessing the needs of survivors in their communities and are helping to get them the assistance they need.

“The mission of the St. Croix LTRG is to help our members independently provide community services on a daily basis, and provide effective relief and recovery services to people affected by disaster on the island of St. Croix,” said Pastor Gary Moore, chairperson of the St. Croix LTRG. “As we transition from the emergency response phase of the disasters to long-term recovery, it is important that we come together as community leaders to communicate, cooperate, coordinate and collaborate for a more sustainable and resilient future for our entire St. Croix community.”

The groups are supporting survivors in many ways. Four AmeriCorps disaster response teams arrived this month from the mainland to support LTRGs on all three islands. The LTRG in St. Croix worked with the Moravian Church to prepare a facility that will serve as the AmeriCorps Command Center. Other Command Centers in St. Thomas and St. John are planned as well. A total of 75 AmeriCorps team members will help clear out the muck in homes, clean up vegetative and other debris in yards and assist with making home repairs.

The LTRG on St. Croix worked with the FEMA Disaster Survivor Assistance team to provide a wheelchair to a member of a local church and another LTRG assisted a survivor by providing a backhoe to help remove debris so that power could be restored to the survivor’s home. The groups will also mobilize volunteers to help train local residents in new skills so they can work on recovery efforts well into the future. LTRGs will continue to bring people together to support grassroots recovery efforts and find solutions for some of the major challenges Virgin Islanders face after the disasters.