Aidmatrix Helps Communities Recover from Disasters

Through a partnership with the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA), Aidmatrix has created the National Donations Management Network (NDMN), an online disaster relief coordination system that accelerates aid to those in need. This program connects FEMA with U.S. State, territory and city governments and with all members of National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) to create an online network for immediate response in the event of a disaster. These parties are able to share information and donations online in real-time, using the in-kind donations management, volunteer management, financial donations referral and warehouse management technologies.

The National Donations Management Network (NDMN), powered by the Aidmatrix Network®, was launched in 2007, and in 2008, the program grew to cover 43 US States and territories, including Puerto Rico, American Samoa, New York City, and the District of Columbia. On another important note, all of the Gulf Coast states most affected by hurricane season are actively using their portals for donations. Several other MOUs are in process, and the Department of Homeland Security is encouraging all states not using the NDMN to join soon, to further enhance nationwide disaster relief.

The goal of the NDMN program is to reduce the administration time involved in disaster relief and to increase the processing rate for quality, unsolicited donations for those in need. The extra time and effort put into managing excess and unorganized donations was eliminated with the NDMN program. Needs were posted onto the system by the Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) and other nonprofits, and donations were sent by private, public, and corporate donors to fulfill the disaster community’s needs.

After a large media publicized disaster, donations typically stream in from across the country, even internationally, creating a ‘secondary disaster’. For example, during the tsunami response of 2005, “one of the glaring examples of inappropriate aid was the mountain of clothing sent to southern India, including heavy sweaters which are useless in the tropical heat. The unwanted clothes ended up dumped on roadsides. Municipal workers had to be diverted from the relief effort to gather them up. As well as blocking roads, wasting workers' time and taking up storage space, they proved a hazard to local livestock who tried to eat it.” Alert Net, Oct 2005.

One of the benefits of the NDMN is that is enables donors, corporate and individual, to see the real-time needs and offer a donation without actually sending it to the disaster community. This simple step allows States and their nonprofit partners to review an offer before it is moved, saving transportation costs, staff, and potential warehousing costs. The NDMN also facilitates collaboration and communication between states, enabling offers of aid to be easily shared. Private sector and government partners leverage the framework. For example, the American Logistics Aid Network (ALAN), Business Executives for National Security (BENS), NORTHCOM, and RxResponse have portals on the National Donations Management Network that enable them to amass the needs and share them with their constituents. The NDMN enables them to efficiently share needs and provide aid to the communities in need.
Now there exists a framework that helps connect the private sector with government and nonprofit organizations. Aidmatrix is honored to work with those in the disaster response community to assist in their efforts of emergency response and rebuilding. Michael Chertoff, Secretary of Homeland Security, stated, “We have entered the 21st century here and we’ve got something called Aidmatrix”. At Aidmatrix, our goal is to amplify donor contributions, accelerate results to nonprofits, and partner with governments to help make a bigger impact on the world, together.

The first major use of the system was the California wildfires in the fall of 2007. The 2008 disaster season brought more thorough use of the system which covered all parts of the United States, through events such as the Midwest Floods last summer and hurricane season in the Gulf Coast states.

Similarly, during the hurricane season of 2008, the campaign websites of both Obama and McCain directed people interested in donating product or cash to the States’ portals on the Aidmatrix NDMN, so that they could know what the needs are and donate effectively.

During the Midwest floods in 2008, more than $800,000 worth of in kind product was offered on the Indiana, Iowa, and Missouri Portals. Donations were accepted by relief agencies, and unneeded donations were declined, preventing them from slowing down the relief efforts. Susan Jenson, the Voluntary Agency Liaison for FEMA, also pointed out the need for communication for recovery efforts: “Now, another way that they are using the Aidmatrix system in the Midwest is for rebuilding, and that is something again that requires an enormous amount of donated goods in order to accomplish. They can post those needs to the NDMN, and again private sector community groups, individual donors can go and see what is needed.”

The NDMN helped connect donors with nonprofit organizations in Iowa that were helping people rebuild their lives. For example, Habitat for Humanity in Iowa posted a need for carpeting during the floods, to repair all the severe water damage to many of the houses. Bentley Prince Street Carpets, a carpeting company in California, saw the need on the NDMN, and donated $200,000 worth of high-quality carpet to fulfill Habitat for Humanity’s need. Habitat for Humanity entered a need for transportation and UPS donated the transportation. The carpets arrived in Iowa and were used in houses damaged by the floods.

Hurricane Gustav caused more than $4.3 billion in the State of Louisiana alone, according to the National Weather Service. When a disaster strikes, humanitarians nationwide want to contribute to the relief effort. As part of the National Response Framework, States carry the responsibility to manage unsolicited donations and unaffiliated volunteers. The goal of the NDMN program is to assist the State Donations Managers to reduce the administration time involved in disaster relief and to help match donation offers with nonprofit organizations that are serving those in need. The program also can help our partners efficiently organize the hundreds of unaffiliated volunteers who offer their time and service to aid in the disaster relief effort.

In response to Hurricane Gustav, Gulf States from Texas to Florida were directing their citizens to their State’s donations management portal to help the recovery process. During the two-week period after the disaster, more than $21 million worth of in-kind donations were processed
through the NDMN system. The NDMN was the system facilitating communication and collaboration on these donated offers.

This program will continue to grow as people are connected and educated on effective giving. Although 43 states and territories are already signed on to the system, the groundwork is being laid for a long-term solution that will enhance disaster relief moving forward, in our increasing technologically-dependent society. As more VOAD members use the system to post needs, and more donors are able to offer product, time, and cash, the solution will become even more recognized as the standard for disaster relief, as well as long-term recovery. The process will continue to be streamlined so that information is shared in real-time, and needs are met quickly.

The entire Aidmatrix staff has done an outstanding job of rolling out the system, and providing training and support for those of us who use it. Most importantly, in disasters, members of the Aidmatrix team have been there to support us during the events. Issues that arose were quickly addressed and resolved, some literally in minutes.

After the system was introduced, Aidmatrix has kept an open ear to the users and have continuously improved the system, allowing us to fulfill our missions much more effectively than before, by holding monthly calls and requirement summits. Throughout the year, the team delivers enhancements to the system that constantly make it more effective and easier for all parties to use.

The National Donations Management Network (NDMN) covers more than 81% of the United States’ population. The program, powered by the Aidmatrix Network©, serves State governments and State Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOADs) and includes a winning combination of technology, partnership and community. The goal is to reduce the time-consuming manual processes involved in disaster relief and increase the flow-through rate of unsolicited, quality donations to those in need. The net result is more people getting helped more quickly. And that is how Aidmatrix approaches their humanitarian relief around the world: bringing the Right Aid to the Right People at the Right Time™.