KY April Storms (DR-539-25)

Summary

The following analysis is based on interviews from the KY April Storms (DR539-25). A total of nine interviews were conducted, which included participants in various operational roles from DRO Leadership, Regional and Chapter leadership, CAP staff, the CAP Liaison and CAP partners.

Community Adaptation Program (CAP) and its partners supported response efforts after multiple 2024 events—principally the April floods and May tornadoes—which affected Kentucky but impacted Warren County only modestly. Because Warren County's direct damage was limited, many CAP contributions were preventive, preparatory, or supportive rather than large-scale emergency relief.

Unlike the 2021 tornado event, DR539-25 unfolded over several days of rain that produced scattered sinkhole-type flooding—localized pockets of groundwater emergence rather than a single visible path of destruction. That pattern made damage harder to find and slower to recognize, which complicated timely activation, and meant impacts were less dramatic but still consequential for affected homeowners, many of whom lacked flood insurance (DRO Leadership).

During DR539-25, the Community Adaptation Program (CAP) pre-positioned local relationships, assets, and coordination capacity so community-based organizations could accelerate feeding, sheltering, damage assessment, and referrals while reducing duplication and relieving DRO burdens.

Across interviews, CAP partners were found to have demonstrably expanded hyperlocal service modalities (shelter hotel placements, food boxes), supplied logistics and cold-chain assets, staffed Community Resource Centers (CRCs), and brought culturally and linguistically tailored supports into response settings.

The program materially strengthened local nonprofit capacity and community infrastructure. Notable investments—refrigerated and box trucks, vans, a mobile food pantry, expanded food pantry hours, transportation shuttles, mobile charging stations, and enhancements to a greenhouse—improved nonprofit logistics, reach, and resilience.

The public library emerged as a critical resiliency hub: operating routing and transport to food resources, maintaining a detailed local resource database, running

cooling/warming centers, and convening quarterly coalition meetings and disaster exercises. The International Center and other partners improved culturally appropriate response capacity for diverse populations. CAP-supported creation of an international food pantry with the International Center ("we just got our first international food pantry), addresses dietary needs that standard food distributions may miss.

The balance of evidence supports the CAP model as a valuable, replicable local-led approach whose impact is real in practice but whose institutionalization and evaluative systems require strengthening.

Quality

CAP partners provided rapid, hyperlocal feeding, distribution, sheltering that broadened the menu of immediate assistance available to impacted populations. Multiple CAP staff and DRO leadership interviews described concrete examples: partners produced and delivered food boxes and supplemented shelter meals ("We partnered and collaborated with them to get food boxes delivered to several different counties" stated DRO Leadership).

Partners' prepositioned logistics—refrigerated box trucks, passenger vans, muck-out kits and generators—enabled delivery of perishable items and doorstep or shuttle deliveries that fixed feeding sites could not match, with CAP staff noting that a refrigerated truck "allowed them to go to our shelter locations and they actually provided fresh milk." These accounts show CAP materially expanded how and where services were delivered.

CAP partners meaningfully improved access for linguistically and culturally diverse and otherwise hidden populations by deploying translation tools, human interpreters, and trusted local venues. The interviews described device-based language tools and human translation backups ("we have 5 Pocket Talk translation devices," CAP partner interview; "they ended up helping us with translation … the appropriate translation," DRO leadership interview)

Trusted partners, particularly the library, served as effective outreach conduits ("the library is always a source for information," CAP partner interview; "I would recommend the library as a national CAP partner," region chapter staff interview).

CAP supported a Community Resource Centers ("we had the CRC stood up … a place that people throughout the DR could come by," CAP staff interview) that combined single-form intake, data-matching, and door-to-door follow-up to surface households

that had not self-identified, converting contactable records into immediate outreach lists ("we did some data sharing ... which really helped us to identify ... people that may ... haven't sought out services yet," CAP staff interview).

The library played a significant role in the Community Resource Center (CRC) during disaster response efforts in Kentucky. It served as a trusted local resource and a hub for information dissemination, collecting data, and coordinating services. The library implemented initiatives to enhance community preparedness, such as creating a comprehensive database of local resources and maintaining an online resource directory named "Start Here Warren County." This directory provided live updates on disaster-related information, including how to sign up for FEMA assistance and connect with local aid.

The interviews indicated clear operational gains in relevance, and local reach, however, DRO staff also expressed concern that CAP contributions were sometimes uneven and limited by volunteer capacity, organizational bandwidth, and governance constraints (for example, the need for board approvals).

Speed

Pre-existing relationships, local knowledge, and prepositioned assets accelerated identification, assessment, and service delivery—often producing faster and more contextually appropriate help than centralized stand-ups. Multiple accounts contrasted CAP partners' day-one responses with longer Red Cross stand-up times: partners "had folks in hotels within 24 hours" whereas Red Cross sheltering "did take ... 72 hours to stand up" (CAP staff interview).

Disaster Assessment Observe (DDAO) training allowed CAP volunteers to capture photographic damage evidence rapidly ("we probably had between 15 and 25 volunteers over 5 different days to do that disaster assessment," CAP Liaison).

These practices were said to have improved timeliness and targeting, thereby raising the overall speed and quality of service delivery. However, the lack of standardized timing measurement limits cross-site comparisons and conclusions about improvements to the speed of operations.

Cost offsets, capacity gains and measurement limits

CAP partners produced tangible capacity and substitution effects (meals, sheltering, volunteer staffing, logistics) that plausibly offset Red Cross costs, but inconsistent measurement and attribution practices prevented definitive, auditable savings estimates. DRO leadership and CAP staff cited direct substitution examples—partner feeding counted in cost containment ("the meals at $10 a meal and they were providing 67,000," DRO leadership interview), local partners staffing CRCs and supplying hotel placements that avoided flown-in personnel costs, and partner-owned refrigerated trucks and warehouses that reduced transport and storage needs. These are credible mechanisms for cost containment and faster service delivery. Yet several leaders cautioned that "there were a lot of numbers and cost savings being touted that I don't know that anyone could really prove" (DRO leadership interview). Cost containment sheets and local mission trackers began to capture offsetting activity, but systematic, standardized unit definitions and agreed attribution protocols are required to convert qualitative offsets into verified dollar savings.

Scalability

A resourced CAP liaison embedded in leadership forums served as the operational integrator that translated local partner capacity into incident planning and reduced duplication. Respondents consistently credited strong liaison presence with smoothing communications and surfacing partner capacity into daily objectives ("part of what made things move as smoothly … was having a really solid CAP liaison," CAP staff interview; "the CAP liaison was sitting there at the leadership table in every meeting and fully engaged and reported objectives," DRO leadership interview). Liaisons monitored mission trackers where available, plugged partners into listed missions, and preserved incident leaders' bandwidth to focus on broader operational decisions. Yet the interviews also highlighted gaps: liaisons often lacked pre-deployment training and routine system access (e.g., WebEOC). In practice, the liaison function worked well where trained and empowered, but inconsistent role definitions and tools limited the repeatability of that success across all activations.

CAP investments in durable local assets, MOUs and convening (Resilience Coalitions) established sustained readiness pathways that are replicable but require formalization and resource commitment to scale.

Several partners described institutionalized outcomes: libraries hiring a "Resilience Lead," formal MOAs across roughly twenty agencies, and local assets (vans, generators,

refrigerated trucks) staged for both blue-sky and gray-sky use ("work with CAP encouraged us to hire a new position called Resilience," CAP partner interview). The Resilience Coalition model was characterized as "really good and replicable" (CAP staff interview), and respondents reported that investments in convening and targeted equipment produce outsized local operational leverage. However, it should be noted that the coexistence of CAP, the Resilience Coalition, and the LTRG initially caused role confusion: partners debated whether readiness activities or recovery responses should lead, and terminology like "resilience hubs" and what it means to be "active" was unclear to some (CAP partner interview).

CAP partnerships showed a dominance of food-security organizations—largely because there are more food pantries locally—while housing and health partners exist but are fewer. CAP successfully engaged housing partners like Habitat and worked to integrate mental health supports when available, but health and housing services were less represented.

Some interviewees expressed uncertainty about CAP scalability if a larger, countywide impact had occurred. Further, since CAP coverage is geographically bounded, CAP assistance in responses is largely limited to the CAP county ("CAP is only in a few counties across the country," DRO leadership interview). Scaling would require standardized role scopes, measurement systems, pre-authorized activation triggers, and surge/backfill plans so local CAP teams and their assets are not overtaxed when an event affects partner organizations themselves.

Recommendations for future action

These actions respond directly to the operational gaps identified and are supported by practitioners' own suggestions. These measures will preserve CAP's local advantages while addressing the measurement, governance, and sustainability gaps that currently limit scaling and auditable cost-containment.

Readiness

- Clearly define terms and roles within coalitions to avoid confusion and duplication of efforts
- Adopt a governed shared partner hub within the Resilience Coalition and single intake form with release-of-information checkboxes to permit lawful cross-agency referrals

- Expand CAP's model through libraries. Focus meetings on partner roles and reciprocal referrals during non-disaster times, and foster routine collaboration under blue skies to smooth gray-skies responses.
- Run regular tabletop and hands-on drills to build muscle memory and systems familiarity
- Explicitly document CAP partner coverage areas, asset catalogs and activation triggers in searchable rosters to facilitate the planning of operations
- Codify partner activation triggers and commitments in MOUs (human and material resources)
- The material enhancements were highly impactful. Continue to fund local assets that can be used in blue and grey skies.
- Clearer role definition and more communication between CAP, Disaster Cycle Services, and regional leadership to avoid perceived role overlap and to scale partnerships effectively
- Regional coordination should begin before disasters: regular briefings or regional meetings would reduce the frequency of first-time introductions on-scene and the friction that occurs when CAP and regional relationships are unclear
- Train local partners as shelter workers
- Continue deployments of CAP staff to build broader operational experience
- Align Red Cross volunteer processes for CAP volunteers

Operations

- Institutionalize the CAP liaison role and ensure that the Liaison has an empowered seat at leadership tables with training and system access
- Standardize and require routine numeric reporting (nightly meal counts, household kits distributed, volunteer-hours) and cost-containment worksheets so offsets can be tracked and validated ("we need that count every single night," DRO leadership interview)

Evaluation limitations

Evaluation limitations include reliance on qualitative interviews and operational vignettes rather than consolidated quantitative outputs and site-specific evidence that may not generalize across all CAP jurisdictions. While directional conclusions about effectiveness are robust, precise estimates of net cost savings or system-wide impacts could not be derived from the materials reviewed.

Conclusion

Taken together, the reviewed materials indicate that the CAP model substantially improved the timeliness, contextual fit, and local reach of disaster relief in the jurisdictions where it was active. CAP partners provided day-one sheltering alternatives, expanded feeding modalities (including refrigerated perishables and doorstep deliveries), staffed CRCs to centralize intake and referrals, executed DDAO for faster assessment, and supplied in-kind logistics and local surge personnel that plausibly reduced DRO deployment and procurement burdens.

The program's primary strengths are embedded local trust, prepositioned assets, liaison-enabled coordination, and a convening model that may be replicable with modest investment. The chief weaknesses are inconsistent role formalization, limited pre-deployment system access and training for liaisons and partners, fragmented measurement practices that inhibit reliable cost attribution, legal/data-sharing constraints of community coalition members, and geographic limits to CAP coverage.

Appendix 1: Sentiment Analysis

Theme	Region Chapter Staff	Chapter Staff	DRO Leadership	CAP Staff	CAP Partners	CAP Liaison
Speed of Response	Very Positive	Very Positive	Positive	Very Positive	Very Positive	Positive
Cultural Appropriateness	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive
Operational Challenges	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Positive	Neutral	Neutral
Effectiveness of Partnerships	Very Positive	Very Positive	Positive	Positive	Very Positive	Very Positive
Capacity Building	Positive	Positive	Positive	Very Positive	Positive	Neutral
Community Engagement	Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Very Positive	Positive
Resource Availability	Very Positive	Very Positive	Positive	Very Positive	Positive	Positive
Pre-existing Relationships	Very Positive	Positive	Positive	Positive	Very Positive	Positive
Scalability	Neutral	Neutral	Negative	Neutral	Neutral	Neutral

Sentiment Analysis Explanation:

1. **Very Positive**: Strong praise was noted regarding the speed of response and effectiveness of partnerships (e.g., immediate availability, community trust).
2. **Positive**: General agreement on responsiveness and logistical capabilities, such as timely food delivery or cultural appropriateness of services provided.
3. **Neutral**: Varying levels of acknowledgment of operational challenges, such as data sharing issues, without strong negative or positive connotations.
4. **Negative**: Concerns were raised about scalability and challenges from verification and coordination issues.
5. **Very Negative**: Direct critiques of operational constraints (e.g., under-resourcing or team unfamiliarity) were rare but noted mostly by leadership when assessing broader implications for future responses.