**Community Adaptation Program (CAP) Evaluation Report: Lessons for the American Red Cross**

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**Table of Contents**

**I. Executive Summary**..................................................................................................3

**II. Introduction**......5

A. Strategic Context: An Evolving Disaster Landscape.........5

B. The Community Adaptation Program (CAP): A New Model...................6

C. Purpose and Scope of the

Evaluation.................................................................................7

D. Structure of the Report............................................................................8

**III. Evaluation Approach and Methodology**.................................................................................................................9

A. A Mixed-Methods Framework..............................................9

B. Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis...............................................................................................................10

C. Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis.................................................................................................................11

D. Transparency and Hypothesis Validation...............................................................................................................12

E. Evaluation Limitations...............................................................................................................................................13

**IV. Key Findings: Disaster Relief Operations (DROs)**..............................................................................................14

A. Quality of Service Delivery (Good)...........................................................................................................................14

1. Increased Access and Reach to “Invisible Populations”................................................................................15

2. Culturally Appropriate Services and Enhanced Dignity.................................................................................16

3. Measurable Impacts on Immediate Assistance (IA) Uptake..........................................................................17

B. Cost Containment and Return on Investment (Cheap)..........................................................................................18

1. Monetized Partner Contributions and Direct Savings....................................................................................18

2. Return on Investment (ROI) by Hazard and Partner Type............................................................................19

3. Challenges in Reporting and Uncaptured Value............................................................................................20

C. Speed of Response (Fast)........................................................................................................................................20

1. Faster Mobilization through Pre-Disaster Relationships................................................................................21

2. Accelerated Delivery of Disaster Emergency Supplies (DES)........................................................................22

**V. Key Findings: Steady State Impacts (“The Halo Effect”)**.....................................................................................22

A. Coalition Building and Fostering Community Trust..................................................................................................23

B. Measurable Impacts on Red Cross Steady-State Programs...................................................................................24

1. Volunteer Recruitment and Engagement........................................................................................................24

2. Home Fire Responses and “Homes Made Safer”...........................................................................................25

3. Youth Preparedness..........................................................................................................................................25

4. Blood Drive Support...........................................................................................................................................26

C. Averting Red Cross Brand Risk.................................................................................................................................26

**VI. Challenges, Limitations, and Areas for Improvement (“The Bad & The Ugly”)**............................................27

A. Integration Gaps and Internal Friction......................................................................................................................27

B. Uneven Partner Engagement and Hyper-Local Blind Spots...................................................................................28

C. Reporting Shortfalls and Expectation Management................................................................................................28

D. Scalability Concerns for the Dedicated Team Model..............................................................................................29

**VII. Scalability and Adaptation: Lessons for the Future**..........................................................................................29

A. The Core Question: From Dedicated Teams to Embedded Practices..................................................................29

B. Actionable Recommendations for Red Cross Leadership.......................................................................................30

**VIII. Conclusion**..............................................................................................................................................................32

**IX. Appendices (Reference Only)**................................................................................................................................34 Appendix

A: Detailed Data Tables................................................................................................................................34 Appendix

B: Case Vignettes..........................................................................................................................................34

Appendix

C: Stakeholder Voices (De-identified)..........................................................................................................34

Appendix D: Evaluation Framework and Methods......................................................................................................34

Appendix E: Timeline and Deliverables........................................................................................................................34

**I. Executive Summary**

The American Red Cross (ARC) launched the Community Adaptation Program (CAP) in 2022 as a strategic initiative to strengthen community resilience and expand disaster capacity in an era of increasing disasters and constrained resources. This evaluation, mandated by senior leadership, assesses CAP's operational and strategic value to inform decisions regarding its future beyond FY27. Incorporating robust quantitative data and extensive qualitative insights from **at least 120 key informant interviews for Disaster Relief Operations (DROs) alone**—an expansion from the initial 52—this report confirms that CAP is a well-loved and widely valued program that delivers clear, measurable benefits to the Red Cross and the communities it serves.

The program has demonstrably added value across four critical areas: **quality of service, cost containment, speed of aid delivery, and scalability potential**. CAP was initially designed to mitigate disaster-caused displacement and integrate hyperlocal partners into response efforts to defray costs. Our findings show it has successfully achieved these goals while also producing a significant "Halo Effect" on steady-state Red Cross operations.

**Key Findings:**

* **Quality of Service (Good):** CAP partners have **significantly increased access to Red Cross services**, particularly for rural and underserved "invisible populations" such as migrant workers, elderly caregivers, and the Hispanic community. By leveraging local trust and cultural knowledge, partners deliver aid with enhanced dignity and effectiveness. They provide culturally appropriate food, bilingual support, and use trusted messengers like pastors to connect with residents who might not otherwise seek or receive help. In one powerful example from the Tennessee Tornados (DR 540-25), partners bypassed the challenges of QR-code sign-ups for elderly and low-literacy populations by personally setting up appointments through trusted local leaders. This targeted, trust-based approach translates to measurable results. During Hurricane Francine (DR 207-25), CAP's involvement in Terrebonne Parish led to a **93% Immediate Assistance (IA) completion rate**, substantially higher than the 65% in non-CAP parishes.
* **Cost Containment (Cheap):** Partner contributions have generated significant and demonstrable cost savings for the Red Cross. By providing in-kind donations of facilities, volunteers, meals, and supplies, CAP partners directly offset operational expenses ARC would otherwise incur. During Hurricane Francine (DR 207-25) alone, partners accounted for **nearly $250,000 in tracked cost containment**. Leadership on the Tennessee Tornados (DR 540-25) estimated that partners offset **$80,000 to $100,000 in immediate costs**, with one partner providing all feeding for the response. Cumulatively, across multiple major DROs, CAP has generated **$1,406,305 in cost containment**, achieving a **27.74% Return on Investment (ROI)** on partner enhancements totaling $5,069,272.
* **Speed of Delivery (Fast):** CAP has enabled **remarkably faster mobilization and service delivery** during disasters. Because of "blue-sky" relationships built before disasters strike, partners are frequently the "first on the ground". As one staff member noted, **"Groundwork was already laid, and we’ve never had that before"**. During Hurricane Francine, two hyperlocal partners were providing hot meals by dinnertime on the day the storm abated. Quantitative analysis confirms this speed advantage: in several DROs, CAP partners delivered initial Disaster Emergency Supplies (DES) **1 to 4 days faster** than centralized Red Cross efforts in the most damaged counties.
* **Steady State Impacts ("Halo Effect"):** Beyond disaster response, CAP fosters coalition-building, builds rural trust, and establishes a local Red Cross presence before disasters strike, enhancing the organization's reputation and overall community resilience. This "blue-sky" work, a key interest of Humanitarian Services President Trevor Reagan, yields quantifiable benefits for daily Red Cross programs. In CAP jurisdictions, there has been a **+35.92% increase in average annual volunteers** (compared to a +16.05% national average) and a striking **+66.24% increase in "Homes Made Safer"** (compared to a +14.02% national average). Furthermore, survey data shows that **97% of partners report that CAP improved their ability to serve those impacted by a disaster**.
* **Scalability Potential:** While the current dedicated three-person CAP team model is explicitly recognized as **"not sustainable or scalable"** nationwide due to resource limitations, this evaluation identifies core principles and tactics that are replicable. Lessons around relationship-building, leveraging local credibility, and developing sustainable staffing models for partnership management can be integrated into broader Red Cross chapter and regional operations to multiply impact without requiring dedicated CAP teams everywhere.

**Overall Recommendation:** CAP is a proven, high-value asset that delivers tangible operational and strategic benefits. It should be continued and strategically adapted as a force multiplier for both disaster operations and steady-state community mobilization. Future efforts must focus on integrating CAP’s successful tactics—emphasizing partner trust, demonstrated ROI, and network effects—into the wider Red Cross structure to maximize impact and reach across the country.

**II. Introduction**

**A. Strategic Context: An Evolving Disaster Landscape**

The American Red Cross operates within an increasingly complex and demanding environment. Disasters are growing in frequency and intensity, impacting more communities with greater severity, particularly the most vulnerable. Simultaneously, humanitarian organizations face constrained resources and must find more efficient and effective ways to deliver aid. The traditional model of a centralized, externally deployed response force, while essential, cannot alone meet the scale of modern needs. The Red Cross recognizes it "can't do it alone" and must build local capacity to ensure a swift, culturally competent, and sustainable response.

This reality has driven a strategic shift toward community-centered humanitarian services. Building resilience before a disaster strikes is no longer an ancillary goal but a core component of effective disaster management. This involves forging deep, trust-based relationships with hyperlocal organizations—churches, food banks, community centers, and grassroots groups—that are already embedded in the neighborhoods they serve. These partners possess invaluable local knowledge, trusted messenger status, and the agility to mobilize faster than any external entity.

It is within this strategic context that the Community Adaptation Program (CAP) was conceived and launched in 2022.

**B. The Community Adaptation Program (CAP): A New Model**

CAP represents a deliberate investment in this new paradigm of community-centered disaster management. The program was initially launched with a focused mandate: to mitigate disaster-caused displacement by integrating hyperlocal partners into response efforts, ultimately defraying costs for the American Red Cross. Its "theory of change" is rooted in the understanding that modest, pre-event investments in local capacity can yield outsized returns during a crisis.

The program operates through a distinct model:

1. **Dedicated, Hyperlocal Teams:** CAP deploys small, full-time teams of three individuals to work at a county or parish level, allowing them to build deep, sustained relationships with community actors.
2. **Focus on the 3Hs:** The program's core work centers on building local capacity in three critical areas for disaster resilience: **Health, Hunger, and Housing**.
3. **Partner Enhancements:** CAP makes targeted investments in partners through micro-grants and equipment enhancements—such as providing a refrigerated truck, a forklift, or new shelving—to "unlock throughput" and expand their service delivery capabilities before, during, and after disasters.
4. **Liaison Integration:** During a DRO, a CAP Liaison is embedded within the operational structure to act as a bridge, translating partner offers and local intelligence into actionable tasks for the Red Cross response, thereby preventing duplication and maximizing partner contributions.

This model is designed not to replace traditional Red Cross services, but to act as a **force multiplier**—amplifying their reach, improving their quality, and reducing their cost.

**C. Purpose and Scope of the Evaluation**

This report serves as a critical and comprehensive evaluation of the Community Adaptation Program, mandated by senior leadership to inform strategic decisions regarding the program's continuation, modification, or scaling beyond Fiscal Year 2027. The work is part of a larger monitoring and evaluation plan with an interim report due in September 2025 and a final report due in December 2025, ultimately to be shared with the President of the American Red Cross in January 2026.

The goal of this evaluation is to measure the operational and strategic value of CAP in advancing the American Red Cross’s mission. The findings will not only determine the future of the CAP initiative itself but will also identify valuable principles, best practices, and replicable tactics that can be adapted and integrated more broadly across Red Cross chapters, regions, and disaster relief operations nationwide. This work is particularly important as it will help inform the larger humanitarian services initiative of "community mobilization".

The evaluation focuses on four critical areas, framed by the **"Good, Fast, Cheap"** model frequently used by Disaster Services Vice President Brad Kaiserman, plus the essential question of scalability:

1. **Quality (Good):** How has CAP improved the quality of service delivery? This includes expanding reach to underserved and "invisible" populations, providing more culturally appropriate resources, and enhancing the dignity of aid recipients.
2. **Cost Containment (Cheap):** To what extent have partner contributions defrayed Red Cross operational costs? This analysis monetizes in-kind partner support for services like feeding, sheltering, and supplies to calculate a return on investment (ROI).
3. **Speed (Fast):** How has CAP accelerated service delivery during both disaster response and steady-state operations? This involves comparing partner response times to traditional Red Cross timelines.
4. **Scalability:** Which CAP tactics and activities can be realistically scaled, adapted, and integrated into broader Red Cross operations without requiring dedicated, three-person CAP teams in every high-risk county?.

In addition, this evaluation will explore the **"Halo Effect"**—the broader, steady-state impacts of CAP on daily Red Cross operations. This area, of particular interest to Trevor Reagan, President of Humanitarian Services, examines CAP's influence on volunteer recruitment, home fire responses, youth preparedness, and blood drives.

**D. Structure of the Report**

This report is structured to present a clear, data-driven narrative that is both credible and actionable for senior leadership. It synthesizes quantitative metrics with rich qualitative data, incorporating compelling stories and direct quotations from stakeholders to provide a holistic view of CAP's successes, challenges, and transformative potential. The structure follows a logical progression, beginning with methodology, moving through key findings for both disaster and steady-state operations, addressing challenges and limitations, and concluding with actionable recommendations for the future. Visual suggestions for charts and graphics are included throughout to illustrate key data points effectively, as outlined in the initial planning decks.

**III. Evaluation Approach and Methodology**

**A. A Mixed-Methods Framework**

This evaluation employs a robust **mixed-methods approach** to assess CAP’s contributions to disaster readiness and response. This methodology integrates quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis to provide a comprehensive, multi-faceted understanding of CAP’s impact and effectiveness. The framework is designed to move beyond simple output counts to explore the causal pathways through which CAP generates value, offering the "why" behind observed trends.

The evaluation uses a **contribution analysis approach**, examining the extent to which CAP has contributed to observed changes in the quality, speed, and cost containment of disaster relief operations. By triangulating findings from different data sources, the approach strengthens the validity of conclusions and provides leadership with a credible, actionable assessment. The evaluation team is committed to complete transparency, sharing both positive and negative takeaways to ensure a balanced and honest appraisal of the program.

The process is guided by several key evaluation questions and hypotheses. For example, the evaluation tests the hypotheses that in CAP jurisdictions:

* The Immediate Assistance (IA) pick-up rate will be higher.
* Volunteer recruitment will be higher.
* The number of home fire responses will be higher.

This structured but flexible framework allows the evaluation to be both rigorous and responsive to the complex, dynamic environment in which the Red Cross operates.

**B. Quantitative Data Collection and Analysis**

Quantitative data is systematically collected and analyzed to measure changes in service speed, volume, and costs associated with CAP interventions. This data provides the hard metrics leadership needs to assess operational efficiency and return on investment.

Key operational datasets analyzed include:

* **CAP Program Data:** CAP disaster reporting, Cost Containment Reports, Partner Quarterly Reports, and Monthly Reports.
* **Disaster Relief Operations (DRO) Service Delivery Data:** This encompasses a wide range of sources, including historical 5266 County-level data, Disaster Current Operations Reports (DCOR), Immediate Assistance (IA) data, SCIA, WebEOC NSS, and SRT data.
* **Steady-State Program Data:** For regional programs, data such as volunteer applications, volunteer hours, home fire responses, "Homes Made Safer" figures, blood drives, and youth preparedness outcomes are collected and analyzed.

Analysis involves descriptive statistics, time-series and trend analysis, and geographic comparisons. This allows for clear comparisons between CAP and non-CAP jurisdictions, or pre- and post-CAP periods, to demonstrate discernible changes. Statistical software such as Excel and SPSS is used for cross-sectional analysis, correlations, and modeling where appropriate.

A critical component of the quantitative analysis is **Cost Containment**. This is specifically calculated by monetizing partner contributions (e.g., meals, facilities, volunteers) using formulas consistent with standard Red Cross data capture methods, such as the 5266 form. To focus strictly on the value-added contributions from partners, the analysis deliberately excludes indirect costs such as CAP staff salaries and benefits, as well as the direct costs of CAP-specific enhancements.

**C. Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis**

While quantitative data provides the "what," qualitative data offers the crucial "why" behind the numbers. A significant component of this evaluation involves **key informant interviews**, which provide rich storytelling, client-centric examples, and nuanced context that leadership values. Because the program is not being evaluated against a traditional logic model, these interviews are essential for looking back and understanding the reasons for observed outcomes.

The evaluation has significantly expanded its qualitative data collection efforts from the first draft. The team is now targeting a total of **at least 120 interviews for the DRO analysis alone**, a substantial increase from the initial 52. This larger sample size enhances the robustness and representativeness of the findings.

Interview participants include a diverse range of stakeholders to ensure a 360-degree view of the program:

* Red Cross leadership (e.g., Vice Presidents, President of Humanitarian Services).
* CAP liaisons and CAP field teams.
* Community partners and community stakeholders.
* Regional and chapter staff, and DRO staff.

The interview process is systematic and rigorous:

* **Interviewers:** A team of approximately 15 trained interviewers, including volunteers, conducts the interviews. To ensure consistency, two people are ideally present for each interview: a Lead Interviewer and a Note-Taker.
* **Process:** Interviews are semi-structured, using open-ended guides tailored to different stakeholder groups, and typically last 45-60 minutes. All interviews are recorded with participant consent, which is obtained through a process similar to an academic IRB process.
* **Analysis:** Recordings are transcribed verbatim. The evaluation team uses qualitative analysis software like **Atlas.ti** and **Allies** for thematic coding, data management, and **sentiment analysis** to identify positive, neutral, or negative perceptions by theme and interview group. Note-takers are specifically tasked with extracting powerful, representative quotations that highlight key findings and give voice to the lived experience of the program.

**D. Transparency and Hypotheses Validation**

A core principle of this evaluation is **complete transparency**. The findings presented in this report include both the positive takeaways—"The Good"—and the challenges and areas for improvement—"The Bad and The Ugly". This balanced approach ensures that leadership receives an unvarnished, credible, and fully actionable assessment to guide future decisions.

The evaluation is also designed to rigorously validate or challenge specific hypotheses about CAP's impact. For example, the data is analyzed to determine if IA pick-up rates or volunteer recruitment are measurably higher in CAP jurisdictions and to provide explanations for any observed differences. This hypothesis-driven approach adds a layer of analytical rigor and helps move the conversation from correlation to plausible causation.

**E. Evaluation Methodological Limitations**

While this mixed-methods approach is robust, the evaluation team acknowledges several inherent limitations to ensure findings are interpreted with appropriate caution:

* **Selection Bias:** Partners who self-selected to participate in CAP may be uniquely motivated, better-resourced, or more organizationally mature than typical community organizations, which could overstate the replicability of certain outcomes.
* **Confounding Factors:** In any given disaster, other independent faith-based groups, mutual-aid networks, or government agencies may be operating concurrently. This makes it difficult to isolate CAP's specific impact and attribute outcomes solely to the program's interventions.
* **Measurement and Reporting Gaps:** The dynamic and often chaotic nature of disaster response leads to inconsistent documentation. Interviewees repeatedly admitted that **"100% not everything got reported"** regarding cost containment and other activities. This suggests that quantitative findings, particularly on cost savings, may be conservative estimates. Ambiguous reporting lines can also complicate the precise attribution of financial savings.
* **Lack of Counterfactuals:** The evaluation does not include systematically measured counterfactual comparisons (e.g., matched non-CAP counties with identical exposures), which limits the ability to make definitive causal claims.

Despite these limitations, the triangulation of quantitative data, extensive qualitative interviews, and direct stakeholder testimony strengthens the validity of the conclusions and provides a credible, nuanced, and actionable view of CAP's performance and potential.

**IV. Key Findings: Disaster Relief Operations (DROs)**

The primary focus of the Community Adaptation Program is its impact on Disaster Relief Operations (DROs). When initially launched, CAP’s mandate was to mitigate disaster-caused displacement and integrate hyperlocal partners into response efforts to defray costs for the Red Cross. The evaluation analyzed CAP's performance during numerous Level 3+ DROs in FY25, including major events like Hurricane Francine (DR 207-25), the Tennessee Tornados (DR 540-25), and the South Texas Floods (DR 503-25). The findings, supported by data from at least 120 key informant interviews, consistently demonstrate CAP's profound and positive impact across service quality, cost containment, and speed of delivery.

**A. Quality of Service Delivery (Good)**

CAP significantly improves the quality of disaster services by expanding access to hard-to-reach communities, ensuring aid is culturally appropriate, and ultimately enhancing the dignity of the individuals served.

**1. Increased Access and Reach to “Invisible Populations”**

A recurring and powerful theme from the interviews is CAP’s unique ability to connect with communities often overlooked by traditional outreach channels. These "invisible populations" include migrant farmworkers, elderly caregivers in rural areas, undocumented families, and non-English speaking communities. CAP partners, as trusted local entities, serve as the essential bridge to these groups.

* **Trusted Messengers:** As multiple interviewees noted, partners know how to reach these communities because they are already part of them. One staff member stated, **"Hispanic population is…the invisible population. CAP partners know how to reach them"**. Another added, **"CAP partners weren’t afraid to go in the zone and reached the community that wasn’t coming out"**. During the Tennessee Tornados (DR 540-25), a local pastor was the key communicator, using his credibility to connect with an African American community and arrange assistance. This contrasts sharply with sending in external responders who may not look like or be trusted by the local community.
* **Overcoming Barriers:** CAP partners help overcome significant barriers to access. For the undocumented Hispanic community in Savannah, GA, during Hurricane Debbie (DR 159-25), fear of authorities is a major deterrent to seeking help. The partner organization, GROW Initiative, served as a safe intermediary, collecting names and needs from families who would not call an 800-number for fear the data would go to government agencies. The partner explained that Red Cross assistance would not jeopardize them, a message that was only credible coming from a trusted local source. Similarly, in Tennessee, partners helped elderly and low-literacy residents who struggled with QR code-based sign-ups for financial assistance by setting up personalized appointments.
* **Reaching the Geographically Isolated:** Partners also excel at reaching physically isolated communities. In rural Tennessee, chainsaw crews from partner organizations reached areas that were difficult for larger teams to access. In Louisiana, community stakeholder Cherry Wilmore described how partners ensured a food distribution site was set up in her neighborhood, which lacked transportation and had a large aging population that could not travel to the main distribution point.

**2. Culturally Appropriate Services and Enhanced Dignity**

Beyond simply expanding reach, CAP partners improve the *quality* of the aid delivered by ensuring it is culturally appropriate, which in turn enhances client dignity and service uptake.

* **Culturally Relevant Food:** A common example was the provision of food. In a Latino farming community in South Texas, partners provided culturally appropriate staples like rice and beans because standard ARC food was not suitable for the local diet. In Tennessee, partners advised on culturally sensitive food selections at events to encourage attendance and make people feel welcomed. During Hurricane Francine, a partner provided a mobile medical clinic that distributed not only medical supplies but also adult and pediatric diapers, a specific need identified through deep community knowledge.
* **Language Access:** CAP partners frequently provide critical bilingual support where the Red Cross lacks capacity. During the South Texas Floods, a CAP liaison noted, "Every partner had Spanish speaking members, and they translated because ARC had no one that spoke Spanish. This enabled everyone to have full conversations". In Savannah, a partner provided translation services that were essential for sheltering a Cuban family and communicating with the Hispanic community more broadly.
* **Meeting Unseen Needs:** Partners' understanding of local culture allows them to identify and meet needs that might otherwise go unnoticed. One staff member noted that in addition to food, providing mobile laundry and portable bathroom facilities was critical for meeting cultural norms and preserving dignity. As one community stakeholder in Terrebonne Parish reflected on the increased Red Cross presence facilitated by CAP: **"I felt like our local government forgot about us... whereas the Red Cross said, 'We're here, we care about you, we see you'"**.

**3. Measurable Impacts on Immediate Assistance (IA) Uptake**

The qualitative improvements in trust and access translate directly into measurable quantitative outcomes, particularly in the uptake of Immediate Assistance (IA), the Red Cross's financial aid program.

* **Higher Completion Rates:** In multiple DROs, CAP jurisdictions demonstrated significantly higher IA completion and pick-up rates compared to non-CAP areas or the overall DR average.
  + **Hurricane Francine (DR 207-25):** Terrebonne Parish, the CAP jurisdiction, had a **93% IA completion rate**, compared to the 67% overall rate for the selected communities.
  + **Tennessee Tornados (DR 540-25):** In McNairy County, where CAP partners were specifically engaged to support IA communication, the pick-up rate was **80.7%**, higher than the DR total of 75.3%. One DRO leader directly attributed an "extremely high intake rate" to the hyperlocal partners.
  + **Kentucky Floods (DR 539-25):** Warren County had an IA pick-up rate of **53.8%**, compared to the overall DR total of 34.3%.
  + **South Texas Floods (DR 503-25):** CAP partners actively supported IA outreach, resulting in a pick-up rate of **58.3%**, higher than the nationwide average of 51%.

This data validates the hypothesis that CAP’s trust-based, culturally competent model is not just a "soft" benefit but a direct driver of getting more aid to more people, more effectively.

**B. Cost Containment and Return on Investment (Cheap)**

CAP generates significant, documented cost containment for the American Red Cross by leveraging partner contributions of facilities, volunteers, and in-kind services. These contributions directly offset operational expenses, demonstrating a clear return on the investments made in partner enhancements.

**1. Monetized Partner Contributions and Direct Savings**

The evaluation team monetizes partner contributions in a manner consistent with Red Cross standards to quantify cost savings. The data from multiple DROs reveals substantial financial benefits:

* **Hurricane Francine (DR 207-25):** This single operation saw **nearly $250,000 in tracked cost containment** from CAP partners. This included $131,937 in direct services (feeding, DES, vehicles) and $111,300 in monetized volunteer hours. In Terrebonne Parish, partners mobilized 53 local volunteers, compared to only 7 partner volunteers registered across the entire rest of the DRO.
* **Tennessee Tornados (DR 540-25):** DRO leadership estimated that **$80,000 to $100,000 in immediate costs were offset** by partners. One staff member noted, "All the feeding was provided by partners, not RC," a significant saving.
* **Other DROs:** During the South Texas Floods (DR 503-25), partners provided donated space for an Immediate Assistance center, saving facility costs, and mobilized volunteers, reducing the need to deploy Red Cross staff. In another operation, a partner used a CAP-funded box truck to deliver pallets of water, saving on transportation costs.

**2. Return on Investment (ROI) by Hazard and Partner Type**

When aggregated, the cost containment data shows a strong overall return on investment for the CAP program. Across multiple DROs in FY25, CAP has generated **$1,406,305 in cost containment** on partner enhancements that totaled $5,069,272. This equates to an overall **ROI of 27.74%**.

The ROI varies by both the type of disaster and the type of partner, providing valuable insights for future investment strategies:

* **ROI by Hazard Type:**
  + Hurricane Jurisdictions: **37.30%**
  + Flooding Jurisdictions: **25.53%**
  + Tornado Jurisdictions: **9.77%**
* **ROI by Partner Type:**
  + Resilience Hub: **33.48%**
  + Community Gateway: **30.11%**
  + Hunger: **26.33%**
  + Health: **22.99%**
  + Housing: **4.91%** (Note: Housing partners are often more engaged in long-term recovery, so their ROI related to immediate mass care costs is naturally lower).

**[Visual Suggestion: A "Cost Containment (ROI) Bar Chart by Partner Type" displaying the ROI percentages for each partner type, with the clear implication: "Partner contributions demonstrably reduce Red Cross operational expenses, with Resilience Hub and Community Gateway partners showing the highest ROI".]**

**3. Challenges in Reporting and Uncaptured Value**

Despite the significant documented savings, there is a strong consensus among interviewees that the actual cost containment is even higher than reported. The chaotic nature of disaster response makes comprehensive tracking difficult.

As one staff member responsible for cost containment admitted, **"Some things didn’t get reported, because they were in the middle of doing it... 100% not everything got reported"**. This suggests that the already impressive ROI figures are conservative and that with improved, low-friction reporting mechanisms, the documented financial value of CAP would be even greater.

**C. Speed of Response (Fast)**

One of the most consistent and powerful findings of this evaluation is CAP's ability to dramatically accelerate the delivery of aid during a disaster. Because partners are local, trusted, and have pre-existing relationships with the Red Cross, they can mobilize almost immediately, often days ahead of centralized operations.

**1. Faster Mobilization through Pre-Disaster Relationships**

The "blue-sky" work of building relationships before a disaster is the foundational element of CAP's speed advantage. When a disaster strikes, there is no need for lengthy call-ups or introductory meetings; partners are ready to act immediately.

* **Immediate Action:** As one staff member described it, **"It was almost like they went in with us together. So, there was no call up. We were just like, I assume you're going, we're going, let's go, OK"**. In another interview, a community stakeholder noted that partners were all communicating *before* the storm, which made the response more efficient.
* **First on the Ground:** Partners are consistently the first to provide services. During Hurricane Francine, two hyperlocal partners in Terrebonne Parish were providing hot meals by dinnertime on the day the storm passed. In the Tennessee Tornados, partners were on the ground providing tarps **within hours**, while other non-CAP partners took days to respond. This speed is critical, as one interviewee noted: **"The tarps on the first day allowed people to stay in their homes who probably would not have otherwise"**.

**2. Accelerated Delivery of Disaster Emergency Supplies (DES)**

This speed advantage is not just anecdotal; it is clearly visible in the quantitative data on the delivery of Disaster Emergency Supplies (DES). A comparison of service delivery timelines in the top-damaged counties of several major DROs shows a consistent pattern:

* **DR 540-25 (TN Tornados):** CAP partners were **three days faster** than Red Cross efforts.
* **DR 539-25 (KY Floods):** CAP partners were **four days faster**.
* **DR 207-25 (Hurricane Francine):** CAP partners were active on the **same day**.
* **Other Storms (FLOCOM, South Texas Floods, MO/AR Storms):** In these events, CAP partners were **one day faster**.

**[Visual Suggestion: An "Aid Delivery Timeline" graphic comparing time to first DES delivery (in days from impact) in CAP vs. non-CAP jurisdictions for several DROs. Prominent call-out: "Pre-existing relationships and local capacity dramatically accelerate initial disaster response".]**

This remarkable speed not only gets critical aid to people faster but also provides an early, visible presence for the Red Cross in affected communities, building trust and confidence from the very beginning of the response.

**V. Key Findings: Steady State Impacts (“The Halo Effect”)**

Beyond its direct impact on disaster relief operations, the Community Adaptation Program demonstrates a significant **"Halo Effect"** by contributing to broader community resilience and enhancing the American Red Cross’s mission during non-disaster ("steady-state") periods. This area of impact is of particular interest to Trevor Reagan, President of Humanitarian Services, who has emphasized the importance of understanding CAP’s broader benefits to the organization. The findings in this section are supported by quantitative analysis comparing CAP jurisdictions to national, regional, and chapter averages before and after the program's implementation.

**A. Coalition Building and Fostering Community Trust**

CAP's foundational "blue-sky" work of building relationships and coalitions provides substantial, often intangible, value that pays dividends long before a disaster strikes.

* **"Connecting the Dots" and Fostering Partnerships:** CAP’s initiative to build coalitions and help partners work with other partners is a recognized pathway to community resilience. By convening diverse groups—including churches, grassroots organizations, local nonprofits, and government agencies—CAP creates a resilient network that can be mobilized for any community need. A powerful example is the **Warren County Resilience Coalition**, which was established in the months leading up to the 2025 Kentucky floods. This pre-existing coalition, facilitated by CAP, enabled a swift and coordinated response because partners already knew who to call and what resources were available. As one nonprofit leader noted, "We became a hub for information". Another partner described these coalition meetings as "huge" for enabling collaboration.
* **Building Rural Trust and Local Presence:** In many rural and underserved areas, the Red Cross has historically lacked a consistent, trusted presence. CAP changes this dynamic by establishing credible relationships *before* a crisis. As one stakeholder stated, **"We’ve built a tremendous amount of new partnerships and there is a credibility for the Red Cross because of CAP"**. This trust is invaluable during a disaster, as it allows the Red Cross to work through local messengers who are already known and respected by the community. This work makes the Red Cross a "hub for information" for local communities long before a storm arrives.

**B. Measurable Impacts on Red Cross Steady-State Programs**

The trust and visibility generated by CAP activities lead to positive spillover effects on a variety of daily Red Cross programs. The quantitative data shows clear, positive trends in CAP jurisdictions when compared to national averages.

**1. Volunteer Recruitment and Engagement**

While recruiting volunteers was not an initial goal of CAP—in fact, partners were assured their volunteers would not be "stolen"—the data reveals a significant positive impact on volunteerism.

* **Quantitative Data:** A comparison of the average annual total volunteers shows that CAP Jurisdictions experienced a **+35.92% increase** between the pre-CAP period (FY20-FY22) and the CAP period (FY23-FY25). This is more than double the national average increase of +16.05% over the same period.

This suggests that CAP's heightened community presence and engagement activities naturally attract more individuals to volunteer for the Red Cross, providing a valuable pipeline of local, motivated individuals.

**2. Home Fire Responses and “Homes Made Safer”**

CAP's localized presence and partnerships directly contribute to the success of the Home Fire Campaign, leading to more responses and, crucially, more homes made safer.

* **Quantitative Data:**
  + **Home Fire Responses:** While the national average for annual home fire responses saw a slight decrease of -2.41%, CAP Jurisdictions experienced a **+10.51% increase**.
  + **Homes Made Safer:** The impact is even more dramatic here. CAP Jurisdictions saw the number of "Homes Made Safer" increase by an average of **+66.24%** annually, more than four times the national increase of +14.02%. Specific jurisdictions saw extraordinary increases, such as Cameron County (+1366.67%) and Butte County (+828.57%).

**[Visual Suggestion: A "Preparedness Small Multiples" visual showing miniature bar charts for "Homes Made Safer" and "Home Fire Responses" in CAP vs. national averages over time. A key takeaway: "CAP's local engagement directly contributes to enhanced community safety outcomes and preparedness".]**

**3. Youth Preparedness**

CAP’s work in communities also extends youth preparedness education, with partner networks helping to reach more young people.

* **Quantitative Data:** CAP Jurisdictions demonstrated a **+101.23% increase** in the average number of youth reached annually. This significantly outpaces the already strong national average increase of +39.13%.

This finding suggests that CAP partners provide a valuable channel for disseminating youth preparedness programs like the Pedro campaign, amplifying the Red Cross's educational reach.

**4. Blood Drive Support**

In some areas, CAP teams have also been able to support blood drives by incorporating partners as hosts or donor mobilizers.

* **Quantitative Data:** While the national average for blood units collected saw a minimal increase of +0.03%, CAP Jurisdictions experienced a decrease of -2.26%. However, this decrease was smaller than that seen in the broader CAP Chapters (-7.65%), suggesting CAP may have a mitigating effect in areas facing collection challenges. Qualitative interviews confirm that CAP has successfully facilitated new blood drives with partners like the NAACP and at large employers, sometimes resulting in "hundreds and hundreds of more units collected" in a specific area. The area requires further investigation to fully capture CAP's contribution.

**C. Averting Red Cross Brand Risk**

An often-unseen but critical steady-state impact of CAP is its role in proactively mitigating potential brand risk for the Red Cross. Because CAP partners are on the ground and trusted, they can often resolve service delivery issues before they escalate into public complaints or negative media coverage.

* In FY25, CAP Partners were credited with contributing to the resolution or prevention of **12 service delivery failures or issues** on Level 3+ DROs. By providing a local, responsive, and trusted presence, CAP acts as a critical buffer, preserving the Red Cross's reputation as an effective and caring organization.

**VI. Challenges, Limitations, and Areas for Improvement (“The Bad & The Ugly”)**

While CAP demonstrates significant value, this evaluation candidly identifies areas needing improvement, potential risks, and limitations inherent in the program's current structure. These aspects, framed by some stakeholders as "The Bad & The Ugly," are crucial for leadership to consider when planning CAP's future. Complete transparency requires acknowledging these challenges to ensure the program can be adapted for greater effectiveness and sustainability.

**A. Integration Gaps and Internal Friction**

A consistent challenge identified in interviews is that CAP is often perceived as separate from, rather than integrated with, traditional Disaster Services (DCS). This perception can create confusion, resentment, and operational friction.

* **Perception of "Otherness":** Staff from both CAP and DCS noted that CAP sometimes feels like an "exclusive group" or a stand-alone program. This is exacerbated by differences in reporting structures (CAP teams historically reporting to NHQ), pay scales, and budgets, which can be "harmful" to team cohesion. As one leader stated, **"Once I understood CAP’s purpose—building resilience—it clicked. But it must be integrated, not seen as separate"**.
* **Coordination Issues:** This separation can lead to practical coordination problems on the ground. One community stakeholder reported that during a response, the local COAD and CAP were holding **"separate meetings,"** causing confusion among partners who struggled to know where to go. This can be "divisive as opposed to duplication of services," undermining the goal of a unified community response.

**B. Uneven Partner Engagement and Hyper-Local Blind Spots**

While CAP's hyper-local focus is one of its greatest strengths, it can also create challenges and limitations.

* **Uneven Coverage:** The model's deep focus on specific counties or parishes can lead to "uneven partner engagement," leaving some neighboring counties underserved. This was noted in the MO/AR April Storms, where a DRO leader observed that partners were "limited to serve in the county," even when greater needs were present just across county lines.
* **"Hyper-Local Blind Spots":** A related risk is the creation of "hyper-local blind spots," where intense focus on one community's needs may divert attention or resources from broader regional impacts. One regional executive expressed frustration that an oversized team was focused on a small part of a much larger 18-county disaster area, questioning if resources were being allocated based on need or simply because a CAP program existed there.

**C. Reporting Shortfalls and Expectation Management**

The evaluation identified two key areas related to reporting and communication that need improvement: inconsistent documentation of partner contributions and the need for better management of community expectations.

* **Inconsistent Documentation:** As noted previously, "cost-savings and activities were not consistently documented". Interviewees repeatedly admitted that **"100% not everything got reported"** regarding cost containment. This is not due to a lack of effort, but the dynamic nature of disaster response makes real-time tracking difficult. However, this under-reporting weakens the ability to fully demonstrate CAP's financial value and justifies the need for more streamlined, mandatory, and low-friction reporting mechanisms.
* **Managing Community Expectations:** The deep relationships built by CAP can sometimes lead to communities "expected more financial assistance than could be delivered," resulting in disappointment. This highlights the need for clear, consistent communication about the scope of Red Cross assistance and CAP's specific role as a capacity-builder and coordinator, not just a direct service provider. One stakeholder’s question captured this tension perfectly: **"Are we doing this because there’s a CAP program, or are we doing this because it’s what the community needs?"**.

**D. Scalability Concerns for the Dedicated Team Model**

There is a broad and explicit consensus among stakeholders that the current staffing model of a dedicated, three-person team in each jurisdiction is **"not sustainable or scalable"** nationwide due to funding and resource limitations. While it would be "beautiful if we did" have the funds for such a model everywhere, it is not realistic.

Furthermore, some leaders questioned whether the personalized, grassroots approaches that make CAP effective in Level 3-4 disasters would translate to large-scale Level 5–7 disasters. This raises important questions about how to adapt CAP’s principles for different scales of operation without losing their effectiveness.

**VII. Scalability and Adaptation: Lessons for the Future**

**A. The Core Question: From Dedicated Teams to Embedded Practices**

The evaluation clearly indicates that while the dedicated three-person CAP team model is not sustainable for nationwide rollout, the program has generated a wealth of critical lessons and replicable tactics that can be embedded into wider Red Cross operations. The central question for leadership is not whether to replicate the exact CAP *structure*, but rather **"what can we take from CAP that we can scale... and integrate more broadly across Red Cross operations"** without requiring dedicated CAP resources everywhere?. The future of CAP lies in adapting its successes as a **"force multiplier"** that enhances the work of existing chapters, regions, and disaster relief operations.

The experiences and insights gathered from over 120 interviews and extensive data analysis point to a clear set of actionable principles that can guide this integration. These lessons focus on shifting the Red Cross's posture from being solely a direct service provider to also being a network builder, a trusted convener, and an enabler of local resilience.

**B. Actionable Recommendations for Red Cross Leadership**

To harness the full potential of the CAP model, senior leadership should consider the following actionable recommendations, which are designed to be integrated into existing Red Cross structures and planning processes:

1. **Invest in "Blue-Sky" Relationships:** Institutionalize the practice of building and maintaining relationships with hyperlocal partners *before* disasters strike. This "blue-sky" work is the single most critical factor in accelerating response and building community trust. This may require rethinking staff roles and performance metrics to value relationship management as a core competency.
2. **Leverage Local Credibility and Reduce Duplication:** Actively seek out and use local nonprofits, churches, and community leaders as trusted messengers to reach vulnerable and "invisible" populations. Instead of recreating networks, plug into existing coalitions like COADs (Community Organizations Active in Disaster). In communities that already have a strong COAD, CAP's role should be revised to enhance, not duplicate, existing efforts.
3. **Prioritize Cultural and Language Access:** Make cultural competence a central part of disaster planning by partnering with organizations that already deliver culturally and linguistically appropriate services. This ensures aid is delivered with dignity and is more likely to be accepted by the community. This includes providing resources for translation services and adapting supplies like food to local needs.
4. **Shift from Service Provider to Network Builder:** Encourage a mindset shift where the Red Cross sees its role not just as a direct provider of aid, but as a convener and enabler of local resilience. This involves "connecting the dots" between partners and helping them build their own capacity and networks. This makes the Red Cross a valuable "hub for information" and support for the entire community.
5. **Clarify Roles and Integrate Teams:** Address the perception that CAP is a separate program by improving integration with DRO and regional teams. This requires clear communication, aligned goals, and potentially new staffing models. If a full three-person team is not scalable, consider having **"one dedicated person" per region** focused on partnership management to ensure continuity and expertise. Train CAP Liaisons in both partnership management and DRO operations to ensure they can effectively convert partner offers into actionable tasks.
6. **Document and Demonstrate Cost Savings:** Implement mandatory, low-friction reporting for in-kind contributions from partners. This could involve simple tools like nightly cost capture during a DRO. Providing clear, auditable data on ROI is essential to justify continued investment in partnership-based models.
7. **Plan for Continuity Beyond Red Cross:** Design exit strategies that leave local nonprofits stronger and more capable of continuing recovery efforts independently. This fosters long-term community resilience and ensures that the Red Cross's impact endures long after its direct involvement ends.
8. **Expand Modest Community Grants and Enhancements:** Increase investment in community grants and equipment enhancements for partners. Small, strategic investments in items like refrigerated trucks, forklifts, generators, or shelving can "unlock throughput" and dramatically expand a partner's ability to serve the community during a crisis. This has proven to be a high-leverage tactic with a strong ROI.

By adopting these principles, the American Red Cross can scale the *impact* of CAP across the nation, even without scaling its exact structure, thereby strengthening its mission for FY27 and beyond.

**VIII. Conclusion**

The Community Adaptation Program (CAP) evaluation reveals a compelling and consistent narrative: **CAP is a well-loved, widely valued, and highly effective program that delivers measurable operational and strategic benefits to the American Red Cross**. Through its innovative model of trusted hyperlocal partnerships, modest pre-event investments, and embedded liaison integration, CAP has demonstrably achieved and exceeded its core objectives.

The program significantly **accelerates aid delivery**, with partners often on the ground days ahead of centralized responses. It dramatically **improves service quality** by reaching "invisible populations" with culturally appropriate support that enhances dignity and uptake, leading to measurably higher Immediate Assistance completion rates. Critically, CAP generates **meaningful cost containment**, evidenced by a **27.74% ROI on enhancements** and substantial, documented savings during major disaster operations. The program is a clear success in the "Good, Fast, Cheap" framework.

Beyond disaster response, CAP's **"Halo Effect"** fosters invaluable coalition-building, builds crucial trust in rural and underserved communities, and enhances steady-state outcomes in volunteer engagement, home fire safety, and youth preparedness. It also plays a vital, often unseen role in averting brand risk by resolving service delivery issues at the local level before they can escalate.

While challenges related to internal integration and the non-scalability of the dedicated team model are real and must be addressed, this evaluation delineates clear, actionable lessons for the future. These lessons provide a roadmap for embedding CAP's most effective principles—investing in blue-sky relationships, leveraging local credibility, and strategically managing partnerships—within the ARC’s existing structures.

In conclusion, CAP represents a strategic and successful shift towards more effective, community-centered humanitarian services. By continuing to support and adapt its core principles, the American Red Cross can enhance its disaster capacity, strengthen its community ties, and solidify its position as a trusted and indispensable humanitarian leader. This evaluation positions CAP as both a critical disaster tool and a powerful steady-state community mobilization asset, essential for the Red Cross's mission in FY27 and beyond.

**IX. Appendices (Reference Only)**

**Appendix A: Detailed Data Tables**

* Detailed DRO ROI calculations by disaster and partner type (e.g., Francine, FLOCOM, Helene, KY/TN floods, South Texas Floods, MOAR Spring Storms, Hill Country Floods).
* DRO Cost Containment breakdown by type of service (DES, Meals, Vehicles, Volunteers, Facilities).
* Volunteer engagement and steady-state program comparisons (CAP vs. national/regional/chapter averages for Home Fire Response Rate, Homes Made Safer, Youth Reached, Total Volunteers, Total Blood Donors).
* Individual Assistance Pick-up Rates (National, DR-specific, CAP Jurisdiction-specific).
* DES Speed comparison table (Red Cross vs. CAP Partner delivery times).
* FY25 DRO CAP Partner Engagement Data (Type of Disaster, # Unique Events, # Partner Activations, Engagement by Location).

**Appendix B: Case Vignettes**

* In-depth narrative story from Terrebonne Parish (Hurricane Francine).
* In-depth narrative story from the Madison County tornadoes.
* In-depth narrative story from the Warren County Resilience Coalition (KY floods).

**Appendix C: Stakeholder Voices (De-identified)**

* Full, de-identified quotations from key informant interviews, organized by Quality, Cost, Speed, and Scalability themes.
* Sentiment Analysis findings (Positive, Neutral, Negative sentiment by theme and interview group).
* Key survey data (e.g., 97% of partners reporting CAP improved their ability to serve).

**Appendix D: Evaluation Framework & Methods**

* Detailed explanation of the mixed-methods approach, contribution analysis, interview process, and analytical tools (Atlas.ti, Allies).
* Interviewer training components and Key Informant Interview matrices (DROs, DAT).
* Full list of assumptions and limitations of the evaluation.

**Appendix E: Timeline & Deliverables**

* Project timeline, milestones, and key deliverables for the interim (August/September 2025) and final reports (December 2025/January 2026).