How disaster recovery in North America can benefit from VAN field organizing software

-Problem, opportunity, challenges, steps forward

**The Problem:** *Recovery efforts need optimization and coordination for on-the-ground relief.*

Major disasters trigger *billions* of dollars in recovery efforts, much of it going toward deploying thousands of personell to interact with affected residents and infrastructure. Federal agencies alone deployed over 17,000 field personell during Hurricane Sandy recovery[1], before counting other levels of government, private and non-profit relief, faith based organizations, contractors, and other responders.

Despite the need to optimize and coordinate this field effort, there is a dearth of proven technology to target affected residents, manage field staff, and facilitate coordination throughout the recovery ecosystem.

The Sandy recovery, like other major efforts, included a patchwork of technologies with various strengths and shortcomings. An effective and broadly available solution could save millions of dollars in duplicated effort, and lead to better experiences for the people receiving assistance.

**The Opportunity:** *Extend field organizing solutions from campaigns to disaster recovery.*

Political campaigns face a problem very similar to disaster recovery. Starting with a large voter universe, they use the VAN to target key individuals based on geography, demographics, and other criteria. Through multiple channels of communication, the campaigns build knowledge on individuals which then drives tailored future interaction. This interaction often includes educating voters and helping them to complete voter registration, attend community events, and share transportation on election day.

NGP VAN has created a best in class field organizing product to allow loosely affiliated political campaigns and other aligned social organizing programs to cooperatively target, contact, and build individual histories over a period of months in a large universe of potential voters.

In particular, the miniVAN mobile app and Turf Cutter system have brought huge gains in efficiency for door to door canvassing. The VAN’s multi-tenancy model has also allowed campaigns throughout the Democratic sphere to maintain key private data while working together to accumulate modelling data and knowledge about individual voters - a huge advantage up and down the ballot in 2012 elections.

Disaster Recoveryinvolves goals and challenges very similar to political and non-profit field organizing.

**Challenges**

Moving toward this solution is not without it’s challenges.

[1] “Hurricane Sandy FEMA After-Action Report” http://www.fema.gov/media-library-data/20130726-1923-25045-7442/sandy\_fema\_aar.pdf