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

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.

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.

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.

Campaign field organizing technology has already proven effective in other realms. Several states and Enroll America have successfully used the VAN to coordinate healthcare exchange sign up efforts. This involves targeting and walking people through the healthcare qualification and application process, a huge overlap with recovery efforts to assist residents with hundreds of millions of dollars grants and aid in the wake of Katrina, Sandy, and other disasters.

**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