

# Information Note



## Emergency Response Rosters

### 1. Introduction: Emergency Response Rosters

Humanitarian agencies can mobilise emergency response personnel in several ways. Some of the larger agencies maintain full-time, dedicated rapid response teams -- such as Oxfam's Humanitarian Support Personnel (HSPs), or Save the Children UK's Emergency Response Personnel (ERPs). In addition to these permanent teams, many agencies also deploy on-call staff through either external or internal emergency response rosters.<sup>1</sup>

External rosters, sometimes called registers or standby arrangements, are comprised of emergency response professionals who are not permanent agency employees, but have agreed to join an agency's emergency response, usually within a 72 hour period. These rosters can be maintained either within the agency or by a specialist recruitment agency. Examples include registers run by RedR or Mango or standby arrangements between UNHCR and agencies such as the Danish and Norwegian Refugee Councils and Save the Children Alliance.<sup>2</sup>

Internal or in-house rosters are comprised of an organisation's permanent field staff who can be seconded from their current posting to respond to an emergency in another country.

<sup>1</sup> In a 1997 research survey of agencies involved in emergency response, Francesca Taylor noted that '...one of the most popular changes in [emergency recruitment in] recent years has been for agencies to introduce an emergency relief register.' Of those agencies participating in this survey, a significant majority of organisations (76%) reported operating a register or roster for emergency relief personnel. 'Preparatory Research for an Interagency Emergency Relief Personnel Seminar, Research Report, The Emergency Relief Personnel Seminar Working Party [c/o RedR], October 1997. [www.epn.peopleinaid.org](http://www.epn.peopleinaid.org) [visited 20 January 2004].

The following section focuses on this second type of roster -- *internal emergency response rosters* -- and offers some practical considerations for human resources staff that are either running an existing roster or considering establishing a roster for their agency.<sup>3</sup>

### 2. Advantages

An effectively managed internal roster system can contribute to an agency's emergency preparedness and response capacity by:

- saving significant **time and resources** through deployments of internal, prepared staff;
- adding immediate value in fielding **experienced, high quality** staff to an emergency; and
- **developing emergency response capacity** for host country programmes and professionals.

#### **Time and resources saved by deploying internal, prepared staff:**

An emergency roster system establishes an internal pool of experienced, skilled professionals who can be deployed quickly – around 6-8 times faster than externally recruited staff.<sup>4</sup> In an acute emergency, this speed of deployment offers an opportunity to provide expert, front-line response during the critical first weeks. Equally, this first, front-line deployment allows agency staff the time to recruit and prepare appropriate longer term staff for the follow-on response phase, typically

<sup>2</sup> See [www.redr.org](http://www.redr.org) and [www.mango.org.uk](http://www.mango.org.uk) for more information on these external registers.

<sup>3</sup> The points included here are drawn from an analysis of existing documents, including the findings of a recent review of the first year of Save the Children UK's regional emergency response roster and an interview with OXFAM GB.

<sup>4</sup> This is a rough estimate based on the premise that a properly prepared roster staff can be deployed within a week or less to an emergency, whereas it takes about 6-8 weeks to recruit and deploy external staff.

after the initial acute emergency phase of about three months.<sup>5</sup>

**Fielding experienced high quality staff members to an emergency:**

Emergency roster staff are already proven experienced agency staff members – they know operational systems, procedures and approaches. Critically, they understand and are committed to the deploying organisation's values, goals and mandates as well as to core humanitarian policies and standards such as Sphere, the Red Cross Code of Conduct and the IASC Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises: Plan of Action.

**Developing emergency response capacity:**

Emergency roster staff (both through their on-the-job experience and ongoing training) should strengthen their own country programme's emergency response capacity. They should have emergency response and training roles in their own country programmes, where they are transferring their skills to colleagues. In the case of an emergency in their country of posting, they can also act as experienced team leaders. In addition, agencies can use rosters as an important tool to develop field staff by providing positive feedback, recognition and a sense of belonging to a larger global response effort. Finally, on an individual professional level, a roster may offer one of the few career development paths open to host country programme staff.

### 3. Potential Pitfalls

The most frequently raised concerns around the use of internal rosters fall into three categories:

- *Impact on contributing country programme capacity*
- *Deployment difficulties*
- *Level of required management support*

**Potential negative impact on contributing country programme capacity:**

Senior field managers may worry that they will lose their staff seconded to emergencies, either temporarily or permanently. In some cases, staff may be extended beyond the originally agreed time-frame, often due to a failure to recruit longer term replacement staff. The damage caused by this type of delay can be exacerbated by ambiguity around the length of posting. In a worst-case scenario, another country programme or agency might poach staff while they are on secondment. This can be of particular concern for smaller agencies or country programmes with limited budgets.

**Deployment Difficulties:**

Emergency roster staff are not always available for emergency deployment, despite their original commitment to participating in the roster system. This is sometimes due to contributing country programme staff shortages. In other cases, the roster staff member may turn down a proposed posting because of security concerns or family responsibilities. On the other hand, roster staff members who are not deployed – often due to lack of experience – can become disillusioned with the roster system.

**Level of Required Management Support:**

Emergency rosters can require considerable effort to manage and maintain. These management requirements may not be anticipated in the original system design, particularly if a roster is initially envisioned as simply a list of interested staff.

<sup>5</sup> According to UNHCR, follow-up emergency staff recruitment and deployment can take approximately 4 months, although a recently launched fast track vacancy system in Afghanistan should allow deployment in about 6 weeks. Report of the Fifth Emergency Personnel Seminar (EPN 5), Evian, France, 18 – 20 June 2003.

[www.epn.peopleinaid.org](http://www.epn.peopleinaid.org) [visited 16 January 2004]

## 4. Best Practice Considerations

### Key Elements of a Successful Roster

Elements of a successful internal emergency roster system include:

- *Clearly defined goals and objectives*
- *Strong, professional capacity-building component*
- *Organisational buy-in and integration*
- *Evaluation and review process*
- *Resources for dedicated management, personnel and training systems*
- *Diverse roster composition*
- *Support for contributing country programmes*
- *Staff retention systems*
- *Pro-active deployment*

#### **Clearly defined goal and objectives:**

Agencies use emergency rosters in order to increase the quality of their *overall* emergency response. Depending on how the agency chooses to design the roster system, this can be achieved through two core methods. First, activation of an emergency roster should significantly contribute to the *immediate emergency response* by ensuring that highly skilled, experienced and appropriate emergency professionals are deployed quickly to an emergency. Secondly, the roster system should contribute to an agency's overall *emergency response and preparedness capacity*. This is achieved by developing a cadre of roster staff to respond to emergencies both in their own countries and globally, through a combination of specialised training, on-the-job experience and ongoing support and mentoring.

#### **Strong, professional capacity building component:**

An emergency roster should be supported with a capacity development and training package for staff members. This should include, at a minimum, a foundation course, specialist training and elective training. Training can be conducted in a variety of ways, through workshops; on-the-job training and mentoring; and 'virtually', through email, on-line courses and CD packages.

#### **Organisational buy-in and integration:**

A broad range of agency staff, from headquarters to the field, should buy into the roster concept as an integrated effective emergency response tool. This level of commitment can be achieved through good initial communications and engagement with relevant headquarters staff and field managers in developing the roster concept, ongoing communications around its implementation and support from field staff and advisors acting as roster 'champions'.

#### **Evaluation and review process:**

Agencies should systematically monitor use of the roster in order to measure actual impact as an emergency response tool. Some general indicators could include deployment speed, roster members' performance and 'value-add' to the emergency and the ratio of roster staff deployment to staff deployed from other sources [external recruitment, host country staff, emergency response teams]. This system should include a yearly review process, which can be internal. Monitoring and review process findings should be communicated regularly to organisational stakeholders and roster members.

#### **Resources for dedicated management, personnel and training systems:**

An agency should allocate sufficient human and financial resources to run the roster system, taking into consideration requirements for dedicated management support, relevant human resources policy and guidelines and an ongoing capacity building component.

#### **Diverse roster composition:**

Rosters should offer a range of skilled, diverse staff with a variety of technical expertise appropriate to emergencies. Roster composition and skills considerations should include:

- *Gender balance*
- *A mix of staff of different nationalities*
- *A range of language skills*
- *Some grant management and strategic planning skills*
- *Staff deployed for posts that require significant management activities should have several years management experience prior to deployment.*

**Medair's Mentoring Approach**

Medair's approach to emergency staff management could provide an example of how to mitigate concerns about potential staff loss from emergency roster deployment. It has specifically built in a field staff management process of active mentoring and shadowing to ensure that senior country programme staff are capable of deputising for each other's posts, particularly for the Country Director post. Medair's emphasis on the senior management level is particularly interesting, with country directors 'shadowed by three or four potential CDs during the course of a year... Each potential CD shadows a serving CD for three months, spending one month on each of three different disciplines or tasks. Importantly, the potential CDs are extra staff, supernumerary to the team – they do not fill an established post within the team.'

As a result, Medair can mobilise staff from existing teams to respond to new emergencies without damaging the capacity of the contributing country programme. Medair points out that there is an extra cost involved in the scheme, but consider it 'well worth paying' towards achieving their goal of a rapid response pool.

*[See Medair's presentation in the 'Report of the Fifth Emergency Personnel Seminar (EPN 5), Evian, France, 18 – 20 June 2003']*

**Support contributing country programmes:**

An emergency roster system should equally support contributing country programmes as well as emergencies. Agencies can alleviate contributing country concerns by:

- Ensuring clear communication about the secondment time-frame, and in particular returning staff on time as agreed
- Once a staff member is accepted on the emergency roster, the agency should work with the programme managers to identify internal candidates to shadow this staff member and if deployed, take on his or her responsibilities during the secondment period. For smaller country programmes, it is

important to keep in mind that the agency may need to defray the costs involved in this process through a separate emergency budget.

**Staff retention systems:**

In addition to capacity building and training, agencies should work with roster members to develop supporting initiatives to keep staff motivated and engaged, such as:

- Developing an email listserve for roster staff or a simple newsletter to keep members and others up-to-date on roster developments
- Encouraging membership or engagement with other fora, such as [www.aidworkers.net](http://www.aidworkers.net)

**Pro-active deployment:**

Through a combination of training visits and formal emergency deployments, agencies should try to deploy about one-third of roster members per year, allowing all roster staff at least one deployment in a three year cycle. Emergency rosters are often comprised of staff with varying levels of emergency experience. It is particularly important to ensure that less experienced roster staff receive appropriate support and training through structured 'exposure' secondments to longer term emergency programmes, regional support offices and emergency evaluations. This form of training should include specifically designated mentors who are responsible to ensure that the roster staff member receives structured supportive on-the-job training.

**Deployment Systems Checklist****Pre-Deployment****a) Standards and Policies Review**

During the initial nomination process, senior management staff should work with interested staff to assess their suitability to work in emergencies. This should include discussions of personal conduct as well as protection issues likely to arise – particularly around exploitation and abuse of women and children. Nomination to the roster and subsequent selection processes should prompt a review of existing background checks and a decision as to whether further vetting is required. Once nominated, roster

members should review standard documents such as:

- Relevant internal and interagency protection policies, including the *IASC Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises: Plan of Action and Setting the Standard: A Common Approach to Child Protection for International NGOs*<sup>6</sup>
- The Sphere Project: Humanitarian Charter and Minimum Standards in Disaster Response<sup>7</sup>
- The Code of Conduct for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement and NGOs in Disaster Relief<sup>8</sup>
- Operational Security Management in Violent Environments<sup>9</sup>

#### **b) Health Care**

As far as possible, staff should organise medicals and worldwide immunisations as soon as possible after they are accepted onto the roster, best arranged as a medical in their country of domicile. They should have a medical every two years and keep immunisations up to date.

#### **c) Passports and Visas**

Roster members should ensure that their passports are up to date, with sufficient pages available for visas and stamps, and where possible, staff should obtain a 2<sup>nd</sup> passport. Once a staff is invited to join the roster, the agency should establish a list of visa possibilities and restrictions for that member's nationality and keep this information updated on a roster database. When travelling to countries with security situations – it is advisable to apply for visas for any neighbouring countries at the same time. Often in an emergency – the only way out can be by land and not air.

#### **d) Airline tickets**

<sup>6</sup> See section 4 for full references.

<sup>7</sup> While the entire manual is relevant, roster members should take particular note of the minimum standards common to all sectors [Chapter 1], common standard 7: aid worker competencies and responsibilities and common standard 8: supervision, management and support of personnel.

[www.sphereproject.org/handbook/hdbkpdf/hdbk\\_full.pdf](http://www.sphereproject.org/handbook/hdbkpdf/hdbk_full.pdf)

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.ifrc.org/publicat/conduct/index.asp>

International staff should ensure they have valid return tickets to the agency's HQ.

### **Upon Deployment**

#### **a) Roles and Responsibilities**

All roster staff must have a clear appropriate terms of reference agreed between themselves, the sending country and the receiving country. This ToR should establish *clear line management responsibility* at all stages and for all aspects of the secondment, including reporting lines in-country as well as a point person for discussion in case of specific concerns about the posting. It must also be *appropriate to the level and expectations of the post and grade*. This is particularly important if staff or managers in country are being asked to step aside for a defined period and relinquish some or all of their responsibility in a particular area in favour of more specialist experience during a response. If the position in the field is significantly altered, and staff are expected to take on higher level responsibilities than originally agreed, then the ToR and contract terms should be adjusted accordingly. Finally, *terms of deployment and contract status issues must be clarified including:*

- Insurance, with particular clarity on war-risk insurance
- R&R allowance
- Maximum length of posting
- Payroll status
- Next of kin lists and clear points of contact for staff family members
- Evacuation plan as it may relate to visa compatibility<sup>10</sup>

#### **b) Induction and Briefing Minimum Requirements**

Roster staff should transition through their agency's headquarters for at least *one day* for a full induction and briefing. While an induction

<sup>9</sup> Koenraad Van Brabant, *Operational Security Management in Violent Environments*, ODI Humanitarian Practice Network Good Practice Review 8, August 2000.

<sup>10</sup> Not all nationalities are treated equally in evacuations. Experience has shown that when some government agencies organize evacuations, they will prioritise their nationals over staff from other countries.

should be adapted to the specific experience and responsibilities of the deployed staff, certain minimum induction requirements must be ensured, including a review of security conditions and policies, emergency programme status, humanitarian protection policies and a meeting with a health advisor.

### End of Posting

#### a) *In-country debrief*

Upon completion of their tour in-country, roster staff should receive an *in-country debrief* including a formal, written performance evaluation, provided by their line manager.

#### b) *Transition process*

All roster staff should transition through their agency's headquarters or regional management/coordination centre at the end of their deployment for a formal debrief and feedback session. This should include a meeting with a health advisor to discuss any questions or concerns, including a medical exam if necessary. Staff should also be encouraged to consider the option of counselling, which equally could be available during their posting or after they return home.

#### c) *Performance feedback and transparency*

In addition to ensuring that the returning roster staff member is provided copies of all written feedback for their own records, management staff from both the *recipient country* and *agency headquarters* should ensure that debrief reports, performance evaluation and feedback discussions are shared with the contributing country and regional office.

In the event that there are any performances or behavioural concerns these should be shared with the staff member. This is particularly important if a further deployment could be in doubt.

#### d) *Back home*

When roster members return home or to their country of posting, they should informally debrief with their programme director; organise meetings or workshops with colleagues to discuss their

experience and prepare a brief lessons-learned report for their country programme, HQ and the emergency country programme.

## 5. Useful Resources

Report of the Fifth Emergency Personnel Seminar (EPN 5), Evian, France, 18 – 20 June 2003.

<http://www.epn.peopleinaid.org/files/epn5/summary-final-report.pdf>

For an overview of UNHCR's emergency roster team training see the UN Disaster Management Training Programme: Training Inventory Database:  
[http://www.undmtp.org/inventory/pages/unhcr\\_V2.html](http://www.undmtp.org/inventory/pages/unhcr_V2.html)

The People in Aid Code [September 2003].

<http://www.peopleinaid.org/code/online.aspx>

Interagency Standing Committee Task Force on Protection from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse in Humanitarian Crises: Plan of Action, 13 June 2002.

'Setting the Standard': A Common Approach to Child Protection for International NGOs, 2003.

<http://tilz.tearfund.org/webdocs/Tilz/Topics/Child%20Protection%20Policy.pdf>

J. Barry, 'Save the Children UK Regional Emergency Response Roster Review', Save the Children UK, December 2003.

## Case Study - OXFAM GB Roster Synopsis<sup>11</sup>

In a typical emergency response, OXFAM GB will deploy emergency professionals from a pool of their Humanitarian Support Personnel [HSPs] and specialist OXFAM Humanitarian Department and regional staff, based in their eight regional management centres worldwide.<sup>12</sup> If additional staff are required for the response, human resources managers would next search for qualified candidates using a combination of

<sup>11</sup> The following summary is based on a 27 January 2004 phone interview with Linda Mason, Human Resources Team Leader in OXFAM GB's Humanitarian Department. It was updated in April 2007 with the help of Christine Newton, Humanitarian HR Manager

<sup>12</sup> OXFAM GB currently employs 90 professionals of various specialities who are on standby for deployment. An HSP, once

OXFAM's emergency register and open recruitment adverts.<sup>13</sup> Preferred candidates would have OXFAM experience and a good understanding of the agency's systems and processes.

This emergency register, established in 2000, is comprised of internal and external professionals whose applications were shortlisted by advisors, categorised by skills speciality, such as water engineers or nutritionists and kept on file for use as required.

However, OXFAM managers rarely activated this roster system, as they found it awkward and time-consuming to search through applications online, and in the past, they did not have dedicated human resources support for this form of recruitment.

Recently, OXFAM has begun updating and improving its emergency human resources systems, including its emergency register. First, it has a human resources team in the humanitarian department dedicated to building quality emergency staff across the regions and on the registers. It has also invested in developing a new register system through an adapted version of I-grasp software. This register is planned to be launched in February 2004, with a request for applications posted on the OXFAM and ReliefWeb sites.

Applicants for the new register will be screened and short-listed based on their applications, interviewed and reference checked. If the register candidate had been interviewed for a similar job within a few months of selection for an emergency post, then they would not require a second interview. They may, however, require a contextual interview to ensure best deployment matches are made. The roster would be kept updated through a monthly email bulletin, and

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deployed, will typically remain for the duration of the short-term emergency response.

<sup>13</sup> Although recruitment speed varies from each emergency, they estimate a two-week deployment for professionals found through their own lists, and about three to four weeks using external advertising.

roster members would be asked to update their availability on the OXFAM website. Oxfam is looking at ways to train and develop staff to maintain or increase the quality of its emergency response capability.

OXFAM hopes that this new web-based roster system will provide a lighter, more flexible recruitment tool, providing a wide pool of candidates they can call on quickly in an emergency. While this system would be administered in Oxford, it should also allow managers in regional and country offices to conduct recruitment searches themselves, thereby minimising the time and resources required to maintain the roster.

Based on this experience, OXFAM would recommend that agencies considering establishing an emergency roster ensure they develop and maintain internal buy-in for the system and systematic monitoring of the roster's use in order to measure its actual impact as an emergency response tool.<sup>14</sup> This requires committed resource to maintain.

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<sup>14</sup> For additional insight into another form of emergency roster, OXFAM GB recommended contacting their sister agency, Community Aid Abroad in Australia. They have a strong roster system that also involves staff training.