U.S. Department of Justice Community Relations Service (CRS)

Working with Communities

Affected by Natural Disasters

CRS serves as "America's Peacemaker" for communities in conflict by mediating disputes and enhancing community capacity to independently prevent and resolve future conflicts.

Under Title X of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 and the Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crimes Prevention Act of 2009, CRS responds to community conflicts arising from differences of race, color, national origin, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or disability. CRS does not have law enforcement or prosecutorial authority. Rather, CRS works with communities in conflict to help rebuild relationships, facilitate mutual understanding, and encourage the development of local solutions.

CRS' conciliators work directly with state and local officials, community-based organizations, community and civil rights advocates, faith-based groups, and law enforcement on a voluntary and cost-free basis. CRS serves as a neutral-third party, and its services are free and confidential.

CRS provides four unique services to communities

Facilitated Dialogue. CRS facilitates dialogues between community stakeholders to open lines of communication between parties.

Mediation. CRS provides mediation services to help communities resolve conflicts and tensions through face-to-face negotiations between stakeholders.

Training. CRS training programs bring together representatives from state and local government agencies, faith-based organizations, law enforcement, advocacy groups, and other groups to develop common understanding and identify collaborative approaches for reducing community conflicts.

Consultation. CRS offers consultation services to help communities respond more effectively to conflicts.

Spotlight Case

Although not tasked with responding to natural disasters, CRS works with affected communities in various ways. After the 2017 catastrophic hurricanes that caused historic damage, CRS was selected to assist FEMA in an interagency disaster relief effort.

Natalia Casella, CRS Program Specialist, deployed with FEMA's Surge Capacity Force to help Hurricane Irma survivors in the Glades region of South Florida. Serving as a FEMA Intergovernmental Affairs Specialist, she coordinated local community relief efforts and recovery from Hurricane Irma. In this capacity, she worked with state and local governments to directly send services to devastated areas identified by local officials. Natalia was able to apply her expertise in community relations and facilitation to help the various stakeholders involved in the recovery effort work together to provide much needed relief to the community.

Photo by Department of Justice/Natalia Casella

For more information on CRS services

Please call us at 202-305-2935, email us at askcrs@usdoj.gov or visit us at: **www.justice.gov/crs**.

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