



# A Smart Response to Disaster Relief

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## ☀ Call to Action

Learn more about the Disaster Accountability Project:  
[disasteraccountability.org](http://disasteraccountability.org) or  
202-556-3023 or email [info@disasteraccountability.org](mailto:info@disasteraccountability.org)

## ☀ Values

- Cooperation
- Generosity
- Efficiency
- Community Service
- Social Justice

## ☀ Lessons Learned

**Let your life be of service to others, and take your inspiration from giving back.**

**To create change, start by meeting and engaging with your neighbors.** Change begins with those closest to you.

**When fighting for social justice, let your words be clear, and let your voice be loud.**

**After volunteering to help in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Ben Smilowitz founded the Disaster Accountability Project (DAP), the very first organization of its kind, to provide independent oversight of the agencies and organizations receiving funds to assist with similar national emergency situations.**

Among its many notable efforts, DAP filed a successful complaint in New York against the American Red Cross for gross mismanagement of funds after Superstorm Sandy, winning a \$4 million release for those who had lost their homes, and much more. Ben then created SmartResponse.org, an interactive data repository where users can sign up, become a part of the disaster relief community, and work together to more efficiently administer local responses to emergency situations. Ben has been an Echoing Green Fellow, and is a graduate of UCONN Law. His work has been covered by the Washington Post, the Wall Street Journal, and CNN.

## ☀ Language Arts

**Hurricane Katrina was one of the most destructive storms to make landfall in the U.S.** Since then, we have seen many destructive storms touch land around the world. What is causing this increase in the intensity of storms? Write a research essay that analyzes the causes for the increased number and elevated intensity of these storms.

**One of the harshest realities after Hurricane Katrina was the mismanagement of the disaster.** Working in groups of 3-5 people, create a presentation in which you analyze what went wrong during the Katrina response; who was responsible; and what could have been done differently to bring relief better, and more quickly, to the people affected by the hurricane. Focus on which sustainable

technologies/solutions could have been implemented to ameliorate the effects of the storm.

**Write a 2,000-word blog post about the state of government emergency response services in your area.** What would happen in the case of a natural disaster? Would people know where to go to get help? What is the importance of having this information available? Have these services kept up with the increased demands caused by climate change? What can be done to improve them?

## STEM Activities

**In this [disaster simulation activity from the Center of Disease Control](#)<sup>1</sup>, students act as members of an Emergency Response Council for the City of Calamity.** They make decisions about how to proceed in the face of an emergency; how to prepare the community for a potential disaster; and how to keep the citizens of Calamity safe.

**In this [lesson plan from Health Smart Virginia](#)<sup>2</sup>, students create an action plan to prepare for a natural disaster.** They learn how to develop an emergency preparedness kit; a family communication plan; a family disaster plan; and a class preparedness plan.

**Design a technological solution to make information about your community's emergency response plan easily accessible to members of your community.** This can be your school, community organization, church, or town/city. For an added challenge, develop an action plan to implement your solution. Then share it with the leaders of your leaders.

- **Resources:** [AdobeExpress](#)<sup>3</sup>, [piktochart](#)<sup>4</sup>, [Prezi](#)<sup>5</sup>, [Canva](#)<sup>6</sup>, and [Thinglink](#)<sup>7</sup> are all free online tools that can be used to create infographics, posters, cards, pamphlets, or presentations. [WeVideo](#)<sup>8</sup> is a free online video editing tool.

**This [lesson plan from PBS Learning Media](#)<sup>9</sup> introduces students to a variety of natural hazards, emphasizing that when people understand such threats they are better able to avoid or reduce the potential impact of them if/when they occur.** Students work in groups to research and discuss specific hazards and learn how and why certain kinds of natural hazards impact specific areas, as well as what people are doing to minimize the threats these hazards pose.

## Sustainability Innovations

**What can you do when a disaster strikes your home?** Review the work of the [Disaster Accountability Project](#)<sup>10</sup>. How is DAP working to make organizations like FEMA (the Federal Emergency Management Agency) more effective?

**When preparing for a potential disaster, it is important to have both proactive safety strategies and response/relief protocols in place.** How does an organization like [All Hands and Hearts](#)<sup>11</sup> assist communities in the preparation process?

**Ben realized that he needed to find a way to create relief assistance once a disaster strikes.** Review this page, [www.smartresponse.org](#)<sup>12</sup>, and learn how to properly respond if a disaster were to strike your community.

## Sustainability Career Pathways

**Watchdog Organization.** Watchdog organizations—whether governmental, corporate, or nonprofit—are essential in order to sustain democratic practices. Watchdog careers can be in government oversight boards like the [GAO](#)<sup>13</sup>; nonprofit organizations like DAP or the [Bank Information Center](#)<sup>14</sup>; as well as in [journalism](#)<sup>15</sup>.

**Disaster Management Specialist.** The climate crisis has increased the prevalence of flooding, fires, droughts, and other natural disasters. Every community needs a disaster management plan that includes the just and effective allocation and management of limited resources. [Learn more here<sup>16</sup>](#).

**Data Analyst.** Understanding data and turning it into effective findings is essential in order to improve not just disaster relief, but development aid, the transition to clean energy, climate change, and all other fields as well. If you love working with data, finding patterns, and writing reports, check out this career path. [Learn more here<sup>17</sup>](#).

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- 1 [https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/zombie/00\\_docs/simulation\\_lesson.pdf](https://www.cdc.gov/cpr/zombie/00_docs/simulation_lesson.pdf)
  - 2 <https://healthsmartva.pwnet.org/uploads/rtditor/file/gr9-he-2-disaster-preparedness.pdf>
  - 3 <https://www.adobe.com/express/>
  - 4 <https://piktochart.com/>
  - 5 <https://prezi.com/>
  - 6 <https://www.canva.com/>
  - 7 <https://www.thinglink.com/en-us/>
  - 8 <https://www.wevideo.com/>
  - 9 [https://mass.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/ess05.sci.ess.earthsys.lp\\_nathazards/natural-hazards/](https://mass.pbslearningmedia.org/resource/ess05.sci.ess.earthsys.lp_nathazards/natural-hazards/)
  - 10 <https://disasteraccountability.org/about-us/our-mission/>
  - 11 <https://www.allhandsandhearts.org/>
  - 12 <https://www.smartresponse.org/>
  - 13 <https://www.gao.gov/>
  - 14 <https://bankinformationcenter.org/>
  - 15 [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watchdog\\_journalism](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Watchdog_journalism)
  - 16 <https://www.environmentalscience.org/career/disaster-management-specialist>
  - 17 <https://www.rasmussen.edu/degrees/technology/blog/what-does-a-data-analyst-do/>

