



# Cross-Sector Language Guide

*Enhancing communication between government and nongovernmental disaster response groups*

This language guide is a working document that provides a starting point to foster enhanced communication between prominent disaster response actors. By presenting terms that are commonly used but often have diverse meaning between and amongst members of the ecosystem of disaster relief, we begin the dialogue which provides a foundation for a more exhaustive common language guide. Additionally, this guide will provide a fundamental understanding of the disparate interpretations of terms and improve cross-sector communications.

**World Cares Center**  
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## Asset

**Non military Responding Agency (NMRA) Definition:** Economic Resources that are owned and controlled by an organization such as stocks, bonds, and real estate.<sup>1</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** In disaster relief, an asset is a term that may denote an economic resource or it may also be used to describe a resource or actor that is vital to the success of operations. These can include supplies, equipment or resources, personnel, and general capacity that are a benefit to disaster relief or humanitarian operations.

**Military Definition:** Any resource — person, group, relationship, instrument, installation, or supply at the disposition of an intelligence organization for use in an operational or support role. Often used with a qualifying term such as agent asset or propaganda asset.<sup>2</sup>

## Collaboration

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** A mutually beneficial and well-defined relationship entered into by two or more organizations or individuals to achieve common goals. The relationship includes a commitment to mutual relationships and goals, a jointly developed structure and shared responsibility, mutual authority and accountability for success, and sharing of resources and rewards.<sup>1</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** Depending on the disaster environment where humanitarian actors operate and the actors involved, collaboration may or may not be an advantageous strategy for NGOs to utilize. Independence and autonomy of NGOs remains central to their primary mandate. The term “collaboration” is part of a group of terms that may be frequently used between and amongst NGOs and PSOs in reference to their relationships with each other. However, the application of this term by government agencies in reference their interactions with to NGOs or PSOs may not be appropriate or welcome. During World War II, this term held a negative connotation in that populations of newly occupied territories were urged to “*collaborate*” and accept foreign occupation without conflict. Prominent members of the NMRA community including InterAction suggest that this historical definition still impacts the use of collaboration between NMRAs and the military.

**Military Definition:** *No direct definition.*

*Related military term- alliance:* The relationship that results from a formal agreement (e.g., treaty) between two or more nations for broad, long-term objectives that further the common interests of the members. See also coalition; multinational.<sup>2</sup>

*Related military term- coalition:* An ad hoc arrangement between two or more nations for common action. See also alliance; multinational.<sup>2</sup>

## Community Engagement

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** Definitions vary by sector and organization. *No common direct definition.*

**Contextual Significance:** In the context of disaster relief, community engagement relates to any and all actions taken by responding organizations (domestic or international) that directly affect the direct population. These actions may include but are not limited to direct relief services such as aid distribution, disaster preparedness trainings, and medical services provisions.

**Military Definition:** Those public affairs activities that support the relationship between military and civilian communities.<sup>2</sup>

## Cooperative Approach

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** A situation in which the goals of the participants are so linked that any participant can attain his goal if, and only if, the others with whom he is linked can attain their goals. It is contrasted with a competitive approach in which it is assumed that it is impossible to win, unless the other side loses.<sup>1</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** During humanitarian assistance and/or disaster relief operations, a cooperative approach may or may not be employed by responding actors. Cooperative approaches between military and non-military actors may be more difficult to achieve in a disaster environment and cooperating parties could be better served by engaging in cooperative approaches on an individual project basis.

**Military Definition:** *No direct definition.*

*Related military term- Cooperative Agency:* An agency that provides technical and resource support (including planning, training, and exercising), at the request of the coordinating agency, to conduct operations using their own authorities, subject-matter experts, capabilities or resources (i.e., personnel, equipment, or other resource support). The Department of Defense is considered a cooperating agency for the majority of the National Response Plan support annexes.<sup>2</sup>

## Coordination

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** Coordination is a process through which actors involved in humanitarian assistance response, as a result of emergencies, work together in a logical and concerned effort towards an agreed common end (namely to protect the victims, save lives and help resume normal activities), and in order to ensure maximum efficiency with the resources available.<sup>10</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** The term “coordination” is part of a group terms that may be frequently used between and amongst NGOs and PSOs in reference to other NGOs or PSOs. However, the application of this term by government agencies in reference to their interaction with NGOs or PSOs may not be appropriate. In some cases select NGOs have referenced specific projects in which coordination has occurred. However, references to

“coordination” should be limited to the actions within an individual project rather than the overarching relationship between that NGO and the military authorities.

**Military Definition:** *No direct definition.*

*Related military term- Coordinating Agency:* An agency that supports the incident management mission by providing the leadership, expertise, and authorities to implement critical and specific aspects of the response. Responsible for orchestrating a coordinated response, provides staff for operations functions, notifies and tasks cooperating agencies, manages tasks with cooperating agencies, works with private-sector organizations, communicates ongoing activities to organizational elements, plans for short- and long-term incident management and maintains trained personnel to execute their appropriate support responsibilities.<sup>2</sup>

## Culture

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** A learned pattern of customs, beliefs, and behaviors which are socially acquired and socially transmitted through symbols and widely-shared meanings.<sup>1</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** NGO responding entities respect the culture, structures, and customs of the communities and countries they are working in. Their working knowledge of this culture is often considered an asset.

**Military Definition:** A feature of the terrain that has been constructed by man. Included are such items as roads, buildings, and canals; boundary lines; and, in a broad sense, all names and legends on a map.<sup>2</sup>

*Related military term- Human Factors:* The psychological, cultural, behavioral, and other human attributes that influence decision-making, the flow of information, and the interpretation of information by individuals or groups.<sup>2</sup>

## Disaster

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** The occurrence of a sudden, major misfortune disrupting the basic fabric and normal functioning of a society or community. An event or series of events which gives rise to casualties and/or damage or loss of property, infrastructure, essential services or means of livelihood on a scale beyond the normal capacity of affected communities to cope without assistance.<sup>5</sup> Disasters are typically grouped into two distinct categories: 1. Natural Disasters and 2. Man-made Disasters

**Contextual Significance:** Contextual significance varies greatly depending on the scenario, environment, and actor using the term. Disasters can range in size, scope, and affected area. Government agencies may use the term “incident of national significance” (U.S. DoD) or “catastrophic incident” (U.S. FEMA) when discussing what NGOs or PSOs may simply consider a “disaster.”

**Military Definition:** *No direct definition.*

*Related military term- Incident of National Significance:* An actual or potential high-impact event that requires a coordinated and effective response by and appropriate combination of Federal, state, local, tribal, nongovernmental, and/or private-sector entities in order to save lives and minimize damage, and provide the basis for long-term community recovery and mitigation activities.<sup>2</sup>

## Exploit

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** 1. To make productive use of. 2. To make use of meanly or unfairly for one's own advantage.<sup>9</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** Exploitation can hold a negative connotation when describing roles that actors, specifically NGOs can play. Exploit implies a zero-sum gain where mutual benefit for interacting groups is not given priority. The application of this term by government agencies in reference to NGOs or PSOs may be inappropriate or offensive (i.e. exploiting NGO resources).

**Military Definition:** *No direct definition.*

*Related military term- exploitation:* 1. Taking full advantage of success in military operations, following up initial gains, and making permanent the temporary effects already achieved. 2. Taking full advantage of any information that has come to hand for tactical, operational, or strategic purposes. 3. An offensive operation that usually follows a successful attack and is designed to disorganize the enemy in depth. See also attack; pursuit.<sup>2</sup>

## Foreign Disaster Relief

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** *No common direct definition. Related term- Disaster Management:* The body of policy and administrative decisions and operational activities that pertain to the various stages of a disaster at all levels.<sup>8</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** Foreign disaster relief is a term used in a multitude of contexts and acts as an umbrella term to describe the efforts of all actors (governmental and nongovernmental) in response to a disaster. This term applies to nations and areas outside of the United States.

**Military Definition:** Prompt aid that can be used to alleviate the suffering of foreign disaster victims. Normally it includes humanitarian services and transportation; the provision of food, clothing, medicine, beds, and bedding; temporary shelter and housing; the furnishing of medical materiel and medical and technical personnel; and making repairs to essential services.<sup>2</sup>

## Humanitarian Assistance

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** The generic term used to describe aid and action designed to save lives, alleviate suffering and maintain and protect human dignity during and in the aftermath of emergencies. Humanitarian

assistance includes both responses by local communities and governments of affected countries and the international response to crises.<sup>3</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** Humanitarian assistance is a term used in a multitude of contexts and acts as an umbrella term to describe the efforts of all actors (governmental and nongovernmental) engaging in development initiatives outside of the United States. Some actors divide humanitarian assistance endeavors into foreign and domestic categories. NMRA's feel that the military's role in HA/DR should be limited, temporary, and non-duplicative of NMRA efforts.

**Military Definition:** Programs conducted to relieve or reduce the results of natural or manmade disasters or other endemic conditions such as human pain, disease, hunger, or privation that might present a serious threat to life or that can result in great damage to or loss of property. Humanitarian assistance provided by US forces is limited in scope and duration. The assistance provided is designed to supplement or complement the efforts of the host nation civil authorities or agencies that may have the primary responsibility for providing humanitarian assistance. Also called HA.<sup>2</sup>

## Impartiality

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** Third-party attitude that is more active than (passive) neutrality. Equidistant behavior of a third party when it deals with conflict parties or acts in a conflict zone; even-handedness in mediation, usually linked to the mediator having no stake in the substance of the conflict issue.<sup>4</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** The NGO community is generally perceived as an impartial and independent actor with regard to humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations. This enables them to engage a wide variety of audiences and communities without affiliation-based resistance. If the NGO is perceived to have ties, implicit or explicit, to government agencies or other parties with private agendas, this impartiality may be jeopardized. This may lead to a fragmenting or destabilization of the organization as a whole or target operations in certain geographic or substantive areas.

**Military Definition:** *No direct definition.*

*Related military term- neutrality:* In international law, the attitude of impartiality during periods of war adopted by third states toward a belligerent and subsequently recognized by the belligerent, which creates rights and duties between the impartial states and the belligerent. In a United Nations enforcement action, the rules of neutrality apply to impartial members of the United Nations except so far as they are excluded by the obligation of such members under the United Nations Charter.<sup>2</sup>

## “Hearts and Minds” Campaign

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** An overall strategy aimed at unlocking a crisis in the context of an insurgency based war. The strategy combines counter-insurgency tactics with economic, social, and political measures to re-engage and gain the support of an alienated population<sup>7</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** The concept of “winning hearts and minds” implies political motivations for support other than fundamental NGO principles such as the humanitarian imperative. Thus, government departments and agencies that employ “Hearts and Minds” campaigns (also called quick impact projects or QIPs) may be at odds in terms of mission, vision, and purpose which can lead to conflicts of interest between governments and NGOs in the field. NMRAs feel strongly that these campaigns act as a deterrent for interactions between NMRAs and military entities.

**Military Definition:** *No direct definition.*

## Leverage

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** A method of grant making practiced by some foundations. Leverage occurs when a small amount of money is given with the express purpose of attracting funding from other sources or of providing the organization with the tools it needs to raise other kinds of funds.<sup>1</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** Within the planning, implementing, and execution phases of disaster relief initiatives, the term leverage may be used to describe the practice of utilizing certain actors and/or resources. However, some actors may take offense if they are referenced as being “leveraged” as it implies a one-sided benefit.

**Military Definition:** In the context of joint operation planning, a relative advantage in combat power and/or other circumstances against the adversary across one or more domains (air, land, sea, and space) and/or the information environment sufficient to exploit that advantage.<sup>2</sup>

## Mission

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** States the overall purpose for an organization.<sup>1</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** In some contexts, NGOs know the term in reference to the purpose and goals of their organization. Some NGOs involved in field operations may or may not reference “mission” as a term to describe deployments or periods of activity where their organization is executing a task or series of tasks related to disaster relief and/or humanitarian assistance.

**Military Definition:** 1. The task, together with the purpose, that clearly indicates the action to be taken and the reason therefore. (JP 3-0) 2. In common usage, especially when applied to lower military units, a duty assigned to an individual or unit; a task. (JP 3-0) 3. The dispatching of one or more aircraft to accomplish one particular task.<sup>2</sup>

## Partner

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** A person or entity that has agreed to enter into a specific relationship with the other. To be true partners, entities will need to have defined the scope of cooperation with each other, and both must have rights and responsibilities within that relationship.<sup>1</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** The term “partner” may be used to describe relationships between any number of humanitarian response actors. However, the application of the term is done on a case by case basis and many NGOs and PSOs may be reluctant to enter into a partnership with certain government authorities, specifically military entities. These NMRAs may find partnerships with agencies such as USAID or UN groups to be more appropriate.

**Military Definition:** *No Direct Definition.*

*Related military term- alliance:* The relationship that results from a formal agreement (e.g., treaty) between two or more nations for broad, long-term objectives that further the common interests of the members. See also coalition; multinational.<sup>2</sup>

## Partner (Implementing)

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** Organizations that collaborate with the “appealing organization” to implement a project, usually under a sub-contracting relationship. These can be national government institutions, national or international NGOs, or other organizations such as private sector. FTS users should bear in mind that it is difficult to represent the several channels that funding may pass through: for example, a donor government may fund an international NGO, which in turn funds a national NGO, which in turn funds local government, etc. In these cases, FTS shows the primary funding transaction between international donor and recipient agency (in this example, the international NGO).<sup>6</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** There are varying levels and types of partners and partnerships within HA/DR operations. During program implementation (within disaster zones), it may be advantageous for any or all parties to develop implementing partners to expedite aid delivery, coordinate logistics, or conduct general HA/DR operations more efficiently. These implementing partnerships may be done with or without official agreements or contracts depending upon the circumstances, environment, and actors involved. An example of this is the UN Cluster System which acts a coordinative method where NMRAs (predominantly NGOs) come together to forge implementing partnerships.

**Military Definition:** *No Direct Definition.*

## Permissive Environment

**NMRA Recognized Definition:** *No common direct definition.*



**Contextual Significance:** Permissive environments offer a setting where HA/DR operations can be conducted without risk of reprisal from groups which may pose a threat such as political parties and rebel groups. In permissive environments, interaction between NMRAs and other sectors carries a smaller risk and the threat of potential harm (both physical harm and harm to reputation) is less likely. **Military Definition:** Operational environment in which host country military and law enforcement agencies have control as well as the intent and capability to assist operations that a unit intends to conduct.<sup>2</sup>

## Private Sector

**Definition:** The part of an economy whose activities are under the control and direction of nongovernmental economic units such as households or firms.<sup>5</sup>

**Contextual Significance:** Private sector is a term that is often used by military parties to refer to all actors outside of government (public sector). As an alternative, the terms 'NGO' and 'PSO' offer a clearer delineation which indicate not-for-profit and for-profit entities respectively.

**Military Definition:** An umbrella term that may be applied in the United States and in foreign countries to any or all of the nonpublic or commercial individuals and businesses, specified nonprofit organizations, most of academia and other scholastic institutions, and selected nongovernmental organizations.<sup>2</sup>

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