

## What do Cluster Coordinators do?



The planning, management, and information infrastructures are coordinated by a single focal point in the form of the 'Cluster Coordinator', through whom discussion and subsequent decision-making is channeled. The perceived credibility of the Cluster Coordinator does not so much depend on his or her technical qualifications related to the sector concerned – important though some form of qualification is – but on how he or she demonstrates application of the correct management skills. This is not to be confused with 'personality' traits or 'leadership' skills which have tended to dominate the search for 'core competencies' until now. More important than any of this, though, is **the extent to which the Cluster Coordinator can demonstrate impartiality, autonomy and independence from his or her Cluster Lead Agency 'parent' affiliation.**

### CORE COMPETENCIES OF A CLUSTER COORDINATOR

- **Field experience:** A Cluster Coordinator should have at least three years direct experience of field operations so that (s)he understands the realities and constraints faced by organizations working with disaster-affected communities
- **Technical qualifications:** It is not necessary for the Cluster Coordinator to be technically qualified in all areas relevant to the Cluster's mandate, although (s)he must be sufficiently qualified to know how to brief technical experts, and know when those experts are under-performing.
- **Management Expertise:** A good Coordinator is also a good manager. And good managers, in the

context of Clusters, are active listeners, provide relevant and timely information, convene as few meetings as are required, and keep them short, focused, and action-oriented when they do.

- **Leadership ability:** This 'soft' skill — more akin to diplomacy than military-style ordering — is about persuading people to think about cooperation and collaboration through participatory and transparent approaches that 'listen' and 'involve'. At the individual level, Coordinators have to build trust among and between groups of stakeholders with often divergent views and ways of doing things.
- **Independence from the parent agency:** An effective Coordinator is a truly 'honest' broker. This means that a Cluster coordinator should not, at the same time, be responsible for running programmes that may be in conflict of interest with the aspirations of the Cluster, and which may divert attention from what is a full-time and complex job.

Coordinators have to build trust quickly among and between groups of stakeholders with often divergent views and ways of working.

Specific responsibilities of the Cluster Lead Agency at the country level include ensuring the following:

- Inclusion of key humanitarian partners
- Establishment and maintenance of appropriate humanitarian coordination mechanisms
- Coordination with national/local authorities, State institutions, local civil society and other relevant actors
- Participatory and community-based approaches
- Attention to priority cross-cutting issues (e.g. age, diversity, environment, gender, HIV/AIDS and human rights)
- Needs assessment and analysis
- Emergency preparedness
- Planning and strategy development
- Application of standards
- Monitoring and reporting
- Advocacy and resource mobilization
- Training and capacity building
- Provision of assistance or services as a last resort;

### PRIORITY TASKS

- Manage coordination at national and sub-national level
- Assess Needs
- Avoid gaps and duplications
- Develop a Cluster Strategy and Workplan
- Manage information content and flow
- Apply appropriate technical standards
- Monitor performance
- Build capacity
- Mobilize resources
- Report

To do this, Coordinators will have to demonstrate super-human qualities by successfully doing the following:

### MANAGE THE COORDINATION PROCESS

- Set up and chair a Strategic Advisory Group (SAG)
- Develop and facilitate adherence to the cluster's Strategic Operational Framework (SOF)
- Establish TORs and allocate focal points for Technical Working Groups (TWIG)
- Facilitate proactive engagement by Cluster partners in joint assessment of need
- Ensure relevance and validity of contextual, situational, gap, and capacity analysis
- Ensure information is properly used for planning and monitoring
- Manage effective meetings
- Ensure inter-cluster and cross-cutting issues are addressed
- Develop the Cluster workplan (if not already in the SOF)

### MANAGE INFORMATION CONTENT AND FLOW

- Web site content & functionality
- Data management (integrated and sector-specific Matrices)

- Graphics (coverage and trends)
- Maps (with multiple overlays)
- Contact list management (e.g. Googlegroups)
- 'How to Contact Us' poster

#### **REPORT**

- Situation Reports
- Bulletins

#### **ASSESS & MONITOR NEEDS**

- Rapid Needs Assessment (based on primary and secondary data)
- Comprehensive Village Integrated Assessment (+ MIRA)
- Survey (30 cluster random sample survey)
- Ensure linkages with needs assessments of other clusters and different phases of the disaster

#### **ADVOCATE**

- Represent the cluster to Government and the Humanitarian Coordinator
- Ensure proper crafting of the message

#### **FACILITATE STRATEGY DEVELOPMENT, which integrates**

- Disaster Risk Reduction
- Early Recovery
- Relief, Rehabilitation and Development linkages
- Logical Framework Analysis
- Strategic Operational Framework formulation
- Results-based planning

#### **ANALYSE**

- Risk, Hazard, and Vulnerability
- Who, What, Where, When (4W)
- Partner capacities
- Financial and Programmatic gaps and duplications
- Regional comparisons

#### **PROVIDE TERMS OF REFERENCE**

- Cluster
- Cluster Partners (including 'Good humanitarian Donorship')
- All coordination Team members (list)
- SAG & TWIG

#### **ESTABLISH AND MAINTAIN NATIONAL & SUB-NATIONAL (HUB) COORDINATION STRUCTURES**

#### **ENSURE CIVIL-MILITARY COORDINATION & COOPERATION**

#### **ENSURE LINKAGES WITH RELEVANT GOVERNMENT AUTHORITIES**

#### **BUILD CAPACITY**

- Transfer skills, budgets, and assets
- Link lessons learned to contingency planning

#### **MOBILIZE RESOURCES**

- Financial (Flash Appeal & Revision, CERF, common funding criteria, CAP, Pooled Funds)
- Human (Deputy, Information Management Team, Technical Adviser, Hub Teams — including informal secondments from participating agencies)
- Immediate material needs (short procurement practices)

"Good coordinators delegate everything, and facilitate anything. And they are never afraid to say 'Thank You, But No' .

#### **MANAGE MEETINGS**

- Large Meetings
- Agenda-setting & prioritization
- Meeting Notes
- Written and verbal translation
- Before-During-After actions correctly identified and responsibilities for follow-up allocated

#### **OVERSIGHT OVERALL CLUSTER PERFORMANCE**

- Real-Time Evaluations
- Cluster Performance

#### **ADMINISTER AN OFFICE START-UP**

- Hiring & Firing
- Book-keeping
- Material supplies
- Transport Management
- Translation and Interpreting

## MEMBERS OF A CLUSTER COORDINATION TEAM

The ideal is that the Cluster Coordinator acts as an 'honest broker' or 'neutral facilitator' independent of their parent agency affiliation (see section on 'role'). For large scale disasters, this is financially justifiable and operationally doable because of the scale of response required. Large-scale disasters also require more than one person to manage a Cluster effectively – in fact, as the list below appears to suggest, sometimes *many* more.

Just as it is dangerous to try to set up 'Cluster Lite' systems with too few resources to do the job, so is it counter-productive to set up 'Cluster Heavy' systems as this just raises transaction costs and the blood pressure of Heads of CLAs. Many CLAs are prone to suggesting in these financially straitened times that it is not necessary to mobilize technical specialists as part of the Cluster Coordination Team as the NGOs have adequate technical knowledge in-country anyway. While this may or may not be the case, the issue is not so absolute. For many of the technical specialisms needed to support the coordination function can come and go on a short term basis. Similarly, many of these functions reside in the private and/or academic sector in the affected country. It's just that we don't always know how to access such talent.

Nor should roles be confused with resources required to fulfill them.

### Example 1

The information management section of the Emergency Shelter Cluster in Islamabad for the Pakistan earthquake response in 2005, consisted of no less than sixteen people at one point. Far from being an expensive overhead, this level of resourcing was deemed cost-effective and commensurate with evolving requirements at the time in relation to the vast expenditure on shelter programmes. Ditto for Haiti. After all, of the sixteen, only one was an international 'information manager' while the others were national data entry clerks, GIS mappers, and needs assessment field monitors – all of whom had degree-level qualifications and half of whom were volunteers. These arrangements in the Capital were replicated in the five operational field (sub-national) coordination 'hubs', albeit on a slightly smaller scale. Such levels of investment are required during large scale disaster events – a lesson learned (and applied) by the WASH Cluster during the Cyclone Sidr response in Bangladesh in 2007 [the organigram for which can be found at [www.clustercoordination.org](http://www.clustercoordination.org)]

### Example 2

In the Jogjakarta earthquake response a year later, similar numbers of architectural students from the Gadjadara University were involved in such information management practices – with over 300 volunteer enumerators working on survey work at one point, as well as others supporting the Cluster's technical working groups (TWIGs) with computer aided design (CAD) technology. All virtually free of cost.

For smaller scale interventions, however, separating the role of coordination from programme responsibilities within the Cluster Lead Agency is neither financially nor operationally justifiable. A single person might have to act in both capacities in such an event – so called 'double hatting'. In such cases, the coordinator must go to great lengths not to compromise his or her impartiality, and must always make it clear in what capacity he or she is speaking. Where the Cluster Coordinator has had limited exposure to the rough and tumble of international humanitarian coordination management, or is a national of the affected country, thought must be given to transferring skills and/or protecting his or her independence by having an 'international' mentor.

Optimal staffing of a Cluster coordination team would include:

### International

- Cluster Coordinator
- Deputy Cluster Coordinator (could be a national staff or NGO staff member, especially in later stages)
- Information Manager
- GIS Mapping Specialist (later, a national officer)
- Technical Adviser (from the Cluster Lead Agency or an NGO)
- Communications and Reports Officer ( ... an ideal job for an aspiring intern)

### National

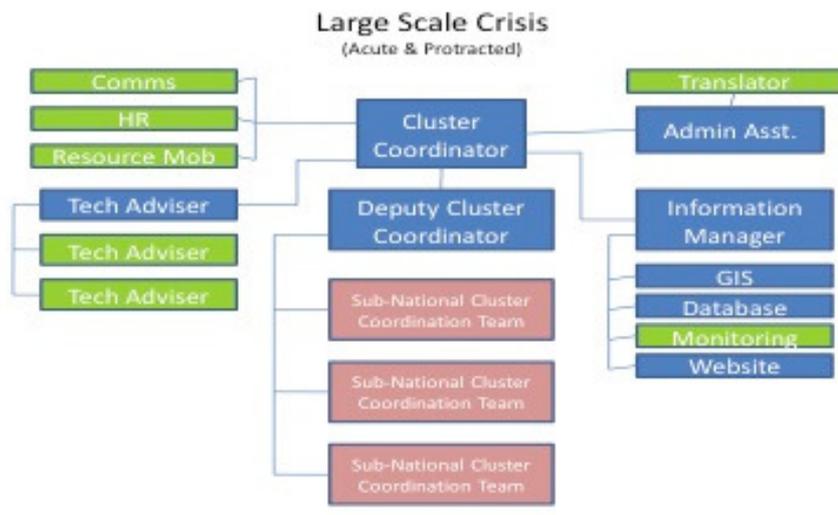
- Executive Assistant / Secretary / Fixer (someone senior and experienced in local administration)
- Data Manager(s)
- Driver(s)
- Translator(s)

The following organigram reflects the optimum staffing requirements for the establishment of a Cluster coordination team for a large scale emergency response.

The blue boxes refer to the core team which would be needed in any scale of response, although some posts could be held by national staff. It is quite possible that some functions, particularly GIS mapping, data management and monitoring require more than one person, especially at the beginning of a crisis.

In addition, each sub-national team (pink boxes) requires a dedicated coordinator and information manager, plus adequate operational support to sustain stand-alone functionality. Operational support costs may be considerably higher for such teams if they are required to establish themselves in areas with no previous presence.

It should be assumed that such structures will need to be sustained for at least nine months, although twelve months or more is not unusual. Experience suggests that smaller scale crises require Clusters to be activated for at least three months.



The size or scale of a coordination team should be **proportional to the number of agencies there are to coordinate, the complexity of crisis, the aggregate amount of resources to programme and the level of service delivery** rather than the scale of the disaster as such. During the Pakistan floods response of 2010, for example, the sheltering need of a few districts was greater than the entire post-Tsunami sheltering needs of Aceh (!) yet there were simply not enough agencies on the ground to justify a massive level of coordination.

Although there is a minimum cost for coordination, overall **recurrent cost should be roughly proportional to the value (not cost) of assistance being provided** – not need *per se*. Experience suggests that such costs should not exceed 3% of the total aggregated Cluster programme budget. For smaller crises, the proportionate cost could conceivably rise to c.7%.

[For more on this subject, see the 'Cost-Benefit' section]



*This is a section from Clusterwise 2. Reproduction is encouraged. It would be nice if the author, James Shepherd-Barron, and [clustercoordination.org](http://clustercoordination.org) were acknowledged when doing so.*

<http://james.shepherd-barron.com/clusterwise-2/4-what-do-cluster-coordinators-do/>