

VRC Planning Before a Disaster

Before a disaster ever happens, volunteer coordinators begin planning the course of events that will follow a disaster event respective to the management of spontaneous volunteers. During this process, officials will perform many of the following tasks:

- Draw up emergency operations plans for the function of spontaneous volunteer management (and, if possible, include the plan as an annex to a local or state emergency response plan)
- Form a volunteer coordination team, which includes representatives from local government, area nongovernmental organizations, churches, businesses, and other area organizations that are considered ‘stakeholders’ in the volunteer management effort. If possible, representation from this team will be given access to the municipal Emergency Operations Center and Incident Command System organizational structures to ensure that it is most closely tied into the actual response in the event of a disaster
- Train key officials in the management of spontaneous volunteers
- Form or foster the formation of disaster coalitions, such as Citizen Corps Councils or VOADs (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster), among others, to ensure that organizations form pre-disaster relationships, understand each other’s capacities, and communicate well in times of need
- Develop relationships between voluntary organizations and first responders, which not only fosters increased understanding of what each needs and can offer, but helps to speed up the volunteer placement process once an actual disaster occurs
- Identify potential partners that may be called upon for assistance in managing volunteers, or into which spontaneous volunteer resources may be placed, including:
 - Universities
 - Youth Groups
 - Schools
 - Ethnic Associations
 - Neighborhood Groups
 - Civic Associations
 - Foundations
 - Faith-based Organizations
 - Corporations/Businesses
 - Special Needs Groups
 - Voluntary Agencies
 - Senior Programs
 - National Service Programs
 - Hospitals
 - Professionals in Volunteer Coordination

- Prepare for or establish the Volunteer Reception Center (VRC), where large numbers of volunteers can be efficiently processed and referred to organizations who are in need of services
- Build a VRC 'Go Kit,' which includes office supplies, forms, lists, maps, special equipment, etc., in order to support the following functions:
 - Registration / Orientation
 - Interviews
 - Data Entry and Coordination
 - Volunteer Identification
 - Safety Training
 - Job Training
 - Phone Bank
 - Facilities Management (supply area, break areas, waiting room)
 - Logistics/Supplies
 - Public Information
 - Runners
- Identify potential sites for the VRC and develop contingency plans in the event that pre-identified sites are unavailable.
- Develop forms and key documents for the VRC such as:
 - Volunteer Instructions
 - Disaster Volunteer Registration Form
 - Release of Liability
 - Safety Orientation Checklist
 - Disaster Volunteer Referral
 - Role Descriptions
 - Work Site Sign-in/Sign-out Record
 - VRC Volunteer Sign-in/Sign-out
 - Coordinating Agency Employee Sign-in/Sign-out
 - Expenses Incurred by Coordinating Agency
- Develop streamlined registration, screening, and interviewing procedures for unaffiliated volunteers that include:
 - Database that catalogs needed skills
 - Information about individual volunteers (for example: skills, interests, availability, geographic location preferences)
 - Contact information for voluntary organizations
 - Tasks, roles, and time commitment requirements for individuals and groups of volunteers
 - Approximate number of volunteers needed to perform tasks
 - Compatibility of relevant computer systems
 - Back-up plan for power failures and portability
- Train paid staff and key volunteers to set up the VRC.
- Develop procedures for documenting pertinent activities, training, expenses, volunteer hours, dollar value of donated time, skills, and success stories.
- Establish agreements with local or state emergency management agencies regarding expense reimbursement and required documentation
- Develop methods to evaluate volunteers' experience

- Determine priority needs and roles prior to an event in order to identify potential volunteer opportunities to expedite community involvement following a disaster
- Review local and state hazard analysis and collect community demographic information for implications regarding the management of unaffiliated volunteers
- Research existing volunteer liability issues and laws that affect unaffiliated volunteer utilization, and encourage agencies and organizations that will receive unaffiliated volunteers to clarify their limits of liability protection
- Develop media and public education campaigns that encourage people to undertake pre-involvement and affiliation with existing voluntary organizations