

Disaster Related Volunteerism

**Best Practices Manual Based
on Lessons Learned from
Hurricanes Katrina and Rita**



**Volunteers
of America®**
Greater New Orleans

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Introduction

The catastrophic disasters caused by Hurricanes Katrina and Rita created a living laboratory for distilling “best practices” in using volunteers for disaster relief. This manual presents a basic overview of existing literature on the subject, as well as case studies and the on-the-ground experience of organizations working in the Greater New Orleans Area after the 2005 hurricanes (including work done during the 2008 hurricane season). The manual seeks to:

- provide basic information on using volunteers in disaster relief
- reach and prepare organizations that have not yet planned on using volunteers in disaster relief
- present collaborative strategies for community disaster response
- define organizational structures required to effectively use volunteers
- increase the knowledge base of organizations already using volunteers
- highlight successful strategies and lessons learned by organizations responding to the 2005 hurricanes
- provide insight into how to manage the experience of volunteers, from recruitment to celebration.

This is a preparedness manual. Though it addresses post-disaster strategies, the environment after a disaster is too hectic for organizations to implement strategies without extensive preparation. Readers need to absorb the entire manual rather than parts. Taken as a whole, the manual is a guide to understanding the processes of specific disasters and the ultimate aims of preparedness.

The manual is not comprehensive. Some subjects, such as risk management and liability concerns, are complex and vary greatly among types of organizations in different locations. Organizations will need to research these issues as they apply to them.

Also, gathering information about the use of volunteers in the chaotic post-Katrina and -Rita environment was challenging at best. As a result, we created case studies using some of the limited data available from successful local and national disaster relief organizations operating in the Greater New Orleans Area. These cases show the creative ways organizations adapted to unique, changing environments.

Preparedness

Disasters of all kinds can strike any community at any time, so preparation is essential, even if an organization does not plan on engaging volunteers during a disaster.

Social service, community, faith-based, non-profit organizations and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs) should begin the process of planning for using volunteers during disasters by preparing the organization itself.

This section covers the basics of creating a disaster plan, creating or becoming part of a disaster response network, preparing the logistics of a disaster operation, pre-planning messaging and messaging strategies, securing mitigation and post-disaster funds, and strategies for using volunteers in preparedness efforts. It concludes with a few lessons learned from local organizations' experiences during Hurricanes Katrina and Rita. This covers the "how to" for preparedness. Details of disaster response strategies are covered in other sections that present end-goals of preparation.

DISASTER RESPONSE PLANNING

As mentioned above, the first step for organizations is developing their own disaster response plan. The plan's primary goals should be:

- protect the organization's assets
- mitigate damage
- resume critical functions
- restore normal operations as soon as possible.

The plan can be called a Business Continuity Plan (BCP) or a Continuity of Operations Plan (COOP). Sources for this manual use both terms, but we will use COOP.

A Disaster Planning Committee (or similar group) should create the plan, revise it periodically and lead in the event of a disaster. The committee should include upper management (director, CEO, CFO), program managers and facility managers. They will design the plan to protect the organization, staff, assets and programs that support the community.

The first task in developing a COOP is to prioritize the organization's critical internal processes and community functions. From there, create a strategy for re-starting lower priority functions and incorporating new functions if they arise. Compile a list of resources (staff, material, financial, etc.) and support activities for each function.¹ Since disasters are unpredictable, planners should also focus on how to maintain the organization's problem-solving abilities if unforeseen complications arise.²

A COOP should address other critical issues, including but not limited to the protection and preservation of vital business records—legal, financial, emergency operations, personnel, insurance documents and any

¹ Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan Template Instructions*, 2004. p.2

² Tuell, Kathy. President & CEO, The Florida Keys Children's Shelter, Phone interview. 17 & 19 Sept. 2008

documents pertaining to the organization's disaster responsibilities. Using software as a service (SaaS) is an easy way to protect your files, as well as provide access to those records from any location.³ This is also an excellent opportunity to review insurance policies and procedures.⁴

Employers should collect employees' contact information such as personal cell phone numbers, e-mails, emergency contacts and, if applicable, potential evacuation plans.⁵ Organizations should also incorporate their staffing needs during a disaster. Allow ample time for staff to prepare themselves and their families for evacuation and provide an emergency services directory and other critical information such as evacuation routes.⁶

Identify and prepare alternate facilities and offsite storage to house required equipment and personnel for the specified functions.⁷ When choosing this site, consider the need for and availability of transportation to it during a disaster.⁸ The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) recommends that the facility:⁹

- Possesses the “capability to perform essential functions within 12 hours and up to 30 days”
- Is equipped with “interoperable communications” (this topic is covered in detail in the messaging section)
- Is chosen with the “health, safety, and emotional well-being of personnel” in mind.

The Florida Keys Children's Shelter strongly recommends assessing the need and potential status of critical suppliers and service providers.¹⁰ Pair this with your prioritized list of organizational functions. For example, if your organization operates a food bank or soup kitchen, plan for several contingencies with your food suppliers, transportation contractors, etc., to continue that function.

A COOP should also assign appropriate staff roles in disaster operations, such as an internal point of contact, external point of contact/official spokesperson and managers responsible for specific disaster recovery roles. The CEO or executive director should be the main contact point for internal managers and staff—as well as the external contact or spokesperson, unless a public relations staffer is better-suited for the role. Other managerial responsibilities depend on an organization's specific situation and needs, determined in advance by the disaster preparations committee.¹¹

In addition to defining staff roles, a COOP should create an order of succession and delegation of authority for each function. If communication is interrupted and upper management is unavailable, this will ensure the organization can still function. For example, an evacuation can limit communication between program managers and upper management. With an order of succession, program managers will have a list of staff to contact and, by delegating authority, they can act independently, according to plan. This ensures that critical functions are not interrupted, even if intra-agency communication is.¹²

The final step in creating a COOP is training and testing. All staff members need to be trained in disaster procedures, such as how they will be notified, what role they will play and how communication will be handled

³ Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan Template Instructions*, 2004. p. 6

⁴ Tuell, Kathy. President & CEO, The Florida Keys Children's Shelter, Phone interview. 17 & 19 Sept. 2008

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan Template Instructions*, 2004. p.8

⁸ Tuell, Kathy. President & CEO, The Florida Keys Children's Shelter, Phone interview. 17 & 19 Sept. 2008

⁹ Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan Template Instructions*, 2004. p.8

¹⁰ Tuell, Kathy. President & CEO, The Florida Keys Children's Shelter, Phone interview. 17 & 19 Sept. 2008

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan Template Instructions*, 2004. p.4

before, during, and after disaster strikes. Training should be standard for new employees, and refresher courses mandatory for existing staff. All aspects of the plan should be tested regularly to assess effectiveness and test staff readiness. For example, test notification procedures to see how quickly you can alert all staff members, or activate your alternate site procedures to determine if they get you operating in a timely manner. Conduct inter-agency exercises, and work out any problems before they are magnified by a real disaster.¹³

The Disaster Preparations Committee should also look into mitigating the impact of a potential disaster, such as repairing and securing physical structures and offsite data storage. We suggest that organizations research and pursue any available mitigation funds and grants.¹⁴

Volunteer San Diego, in its report on using unaffiliated volunteers in disaster relief, suggests aligning your organization's plan with local emergency preparedness guidelines and nationally published suggestions from administrations such as FEMA.

Whether or not your organization uses volunteers regularly, or plans to use them in disaster relief and recovery, some part of your disaster plan should include provisions for their use. A report from Volunteer Florida on managing unaffiliated volunteers in disaster relief, points out several reasons to plan on using volunteers—logistical, economic and public relations. Usually, unaffiliated volunteers will come to a disaster area, looking to help any way they can. This can place a burden on organizations such as the American Red Cross that use highly trained disaster volunteers. Other organizations should seriously consider finding ways to use and accommodate the volunteers. If they don't, a disaster could develop within the disaster. By planning ahead for the provision, potential uses and accommodations for volunteers, organizations can take advantage of this tremendous outpouring of support.

Economically, in a broad sense, volunteers can reduce overall disaster clean up and recovery costs. For example, following a tornado in late February 1998, Osceola County, Florida, completed an estimated \$8 million clean-up for \$1.4 million, in 55 days rather than the estimated 90, due largely to unaffiliated volunteers.¹⁵

FEMA also may provide reimbursements for volunteer hours and costs associated with using them.¹⁶ It is recommended that potential reimbursements be researched online. This manual will cover strategies for tracking these eligible expenses in later sections, but it is critical to learn the requirements and create the necessary partnerships before the disaster.

Finally, disaster volunteers can provide positive public relations opportunities for organizations. Volunteers often work directly with survivors, adding a personal touch to recovery efforts that can convey a proactive, progressive image for your organization.¹⁷

Creating a COOP is extensive and complicated. This section presented the basics and a few specific tips. FEMA has a template COOP plan with detailed instructions and other resources. See www.fema.gov/government/coop/index.shtm.

¹³ Federal Emergency Management Agency, *Continuity of Operations (COOP) Plan Template Instructions*, 2004. p.9

¹⁴ Tuell, Kathy. President & CEO, The Florida Keys Children's Shelter, Phone interview. 17 & 19 Sept. 2008

¹⁵ Florida, The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, *Unaffiliated Volunteers in Response and Recovery*, 2000. p. 9

¹⁶ Tuell, Kathy. President & CEO, The Florida Keys Children's Shelter, Phone interview. 17 & 19 Sept. 2008

¹⁷ Florida, The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, *Unaffiliated Volunteers in Response and Recovery*, 2000. p. 9

RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT

A successful community response to disaster depends on the support network an organization develops in advance. Every disaster model we reviewed emphasizes the importance of creating interagency relationships and maintaining them during normal operations. This comprehensive network would include local and national non-profits, government agencies at all levels, social service organizations, community and faith-based organizations and commercial interests. Volunteer Florida's report on its 2004 hurricane season recommends the following:

- Create relationships, as soon as possible, among local officials and organizations that use, recruit, and/or refer volunteers (such as volunteer centers).¹⁸
- Clearly define roles and responsibilities for all parties in relation to the local emergency management command structure.¹⁹
- Agree on memorandums of understanding (MOUs) that define disaster-related expenses eligible for reimbursement and reimbursement procedures.²⁰
- Organizations (especially volunteer centers and other organizations working regularly with volunteers and in disaster situations) should use their pre-disaster network to create a physical support network to protect their pre-designated locations, communications, utilities and other components.²¹
- Where appropriate, work to resolve issues that may arise if volunteer work overlaps with the work of paid contractors.²²
- Before the disaster, finalize plans for volunteer training and safety, organizational risk management relating to volunteers, and mental health care for staff and volunteers.²³ (See the Volunteer Reception Center description in the response section for more.)
- Unify forms and procedures for processing and tracking volunteers across all network organizations. Make sure tracking software is interoperable.²⁴

Volunteer Florida recommends identifying a Coordinating Agency (CA), which is typically the Volunteer Center or other community agency with a professional volunteer coordinator. An effective CA should be experienced in referring and managing volunteers. If there is no local agency with this type of experience, any non-profit with a volunteer coordinator or volunteer management experience can fill this role.²⁵ Responsibilities of the CA, performed in conjunction with the government agency in charge of emergency support for volunteers and donations management, include:²⁶

- Appointing a disaster response coordinator
- Educating local coalitions
- Building a community network
- Developing a volunteer referral plan
- Arranging to transport volunteers
- Developing a public information plan.

¹⁸ Florida, The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, *Unaffiliated Volunteer Management: Florida's Record-breaking 2004 Hurricane Season*, 2005. p. 10

¹⁹ Ibid. p. 11

²⁰ Ibid. p. 11

²¹ Ibid. p. 14

²² Ibid. p. 16

²³ Ibid. p. 20

²⁴ Ibid. p. 21

²⁵ Florida, The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, *Unaffiliated Volunteers in Response and Recovery*, 2000. p. 10

²⁶ Ibid. p. 11

While developing this network can seem daunting, Volunteer Florida shows how to do it programmatically. Their “Operation Step Up,” started in 2002, was designed to build the capacity of Volunteer Centers to manage disaster volunteers through organizational training and, most important, building relationships with local emergency management agencies.²⁷ The new relationships helped create a stronger disaster-response network and make the best use of volunteers.

MESSAGING

Volunteers are likely to flock spontaneously to a disaster area, even before it is safe. Organizations should have a plan to communicate with these volunteers and let them know when and where they are needed. A messaging plan can also increase efficiency of the volunteer response—it keeps them out of harm’s way and prevents them from overwhelming local resources.

Volunteer Florida, in its report on the 2004 hurricane season, recommends all agencies, from Volunteer Centers to government emergency planners, send out the same “consistent, unified message.”²⁸ through volunteer hotlines and web-based communications. Coordination before the disaster is essential in making this happen. Each partner should know what details about local conditions will be in the message. Volunteers should be told what they are needed for or why they are not needed. When the message is changed, everyone needs to be informed.

Organizations should consider their size when planning a messaging strategy. Smaller groups should consider using a community disaster response network as a messaging vehicle. This frees up some organizational capacity by putting the work of communicating with the public and potential volunteers in the hands of a larger entity. Larger organizations and disaster networks should distribute their public messages through government agencies and media outlets so that volunteer needs, and information about the support available to disaster victims, are communicated with information about the disaster itself.

Finally, to the extent possible, messages should be created before the disaster and include your organization’s role in the disaster, who your partners are, what your volunteer needs might be and when your organization might use them.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Successful management of unaffiliated volunteers after a disaster is essential. Objectives for managing these volunteers are straightforward, but developing ways to achieve them is difficult. Strategies vary and depend on the extent of the disaster, available resources and size of the volunteer response. It can be as simple as establishing a call center, or as complex as setting up multiple fully staffed Volunteer Reception Centers. To be as effective as possible, these strategies require planning and an established community disaster response network.

²⁷ Florida, The Governor’s Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, *Unaffiliated Volunteer Management: Florida’s Record-breaking 2004 Hurricane Season*, 2005. p. 7

²⁸ Ibid. p. 13

Organizations within the disaster response network that currently work with volunteers should be identified as the main partners. This group should include the local Volunteer Center (or an equivalent organization), local chapter of the American Red Cross, and state and local emergency response offices. The collaboration's main objectives should be:²⁹

- coordinating necessary logistical support for the management strategy
- drafting and signing appropriate MOUs within the collaboration and with other organizations
- identifying funding and reimbursement sources
- educating and engaging social service, community, faith-based and non-profit organizations that could benefit from volunteers.

Operating a Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) is the most commonly explored volunteer management strategy in the disaster relief literature that was reviewed. The VRC can process, track and match large numbers of volunteers with appropriate organizations and needs. Activated only when local resources are overwhelmed, VRCs take a great deal of coordination and planning. More details are in the Relief Section.

FUNDING

Existing disaster models show that securing funding or reimbursement for disaster activities begins in the preparation phase. Tracking requirements, eligible activities and reimbursement schedules are often too complicated to decipher on the fly during a disaster. They should be fully understood in advance. A way to capture data on volunteer hours and expenses eligible for reimbursement should also be prepared beforehand.

This can be as simple as preparing an Excel spreadsheet, or using volunteer-tracking software such as eCoordinator or Volunteer Works. Excel is simple enough that even inexperienced users can create spreadsheets quickly. However, it is not a database, so creating reports with it can be time-consuming and error-prone. Volunteer tracking programs are a better tool. You can use them to create fast, accurate custom reports, but they are complicated and require users to have more training to be used to their full potential. During the 2004 Florida hurricane season, Volunteer Centers began using eCoordinator after the disaster—after they had started processing volunteers. While the staff felt it “could have been a very useful tool,” pre-disaster training was necessary for users to master all the program's functionality and avoid frustration.³⁰

Disaster funding can come from several different sources. Mitigation grants may be available from large local organizations or local FEMA office. Cost-sharing agreements are an important part of the process of developing the community disaster response network. Reimbursements from federal agencies, particularly FEMA, may be available for certain “eligible activities,” which include costs associated with volunteer management.

²⁹ Florida, The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, *Unaffiliated Volunteers in Response and Recovery*, 2000. p. 11

³⁰ Florida, The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, *Unaffiliated Volunteer Management: Florida's Record-breaking 2004 Hurricane Season*, 2005. p. 22

Experiences with funding differ greatly from organization to organization and disaster to disaster. The best way to take advantage of your available funding in your community is to identify sources during the preparation phase. See the donated resources section³¹ in FEMA's Public Assistance Policy Reference Manual for policies related to volunteers (full text available online³²). These are starting points—it is critical to speak with local or regional FEMA contacts to work out details and create a partnership in advance.

RISK MANAGEMENT

Risk management and liability are critical issues, and often obstacles, for organizations seeking to use volunteers in disaster relief. Disaster areas are inherently dangerous, and exposing volunteers to these dangers, in turn, exposes organizations to risk. After a disaster, volunteer operations can be delayed or prevented without proper risk-management preparation. Every organization's approach to risk management will differ, depending on its function, disasters it may deal with, size, assets, and existing legal status. When it comes to liability and insurance issues, organizations should consult local emergency management agencies, their insurance company and legal counsel. It also may be helpful to confer with similar organizations with disaster experience, or check nonprofitrisk.org, which focuses on risk management issues for non-profits. A sample liability waiver is included in the Appendix. Other examples can be found online.

VOLUNTEER SPECTRUM

Before the disaster, people willing to become disaster volunteers generally come from the local area. It is possible for volunteers to receive disaster relief training from the American Red Cross and then be deployed outside of their area, but these are in the minority. Plan on recruiting local volunteers during the preparedness phase. These volunteers can be prescreened and trained to respond to disasters particular to the area. For example, if a community is prone to flooding, volunteers can be recruited for sandbagging. Such volunteers can also take part in disaster preparation drills, and be included in an evacuation plan (see the section on the New Orleans CAEP below).

However, in case of large-scale disasters, local volunteers may become victims, with no time and resources for volunteering.³³ This situation is largely unpredictable because catastrophes are unpredictable. As a fallback, organizations planning to use volunteers should have a recruitment or outreach plan to bring in volunteers from outside their community. This plan can include temporary staff from other regional offices. For example, after Hurricane Gustav, Catholic Charities USA staff members gave parallel support to Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans.³⁴ Creating relationships like these before the disaster can greatly increase an organization's ability to respond to it.

³¹ http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/9525_2.shtm

³² <http://www.fema.gov/government/grant/pa/9500toc.shtm>

³³ Tuell, Kathy. President & CEO, The Florida Keys Children's Shelter, Phone interview. 17 & 19 Sept. 2008

³⁴ D'Aquin, Colleen, Director of Emergency Management, Catholic Charities Archdiocese of New Orleans, personal interview, 1 May 2009

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

Though this may seem simple, having a well-maintained database of partner organizations is vital in the event of disaster. The database should include the organization's basic contact information, specific contact information for staff members (volunteer coordinators, housing coordinators, etc.) and information about the organization's activities. A current mission statement, operational activities, disaster responsibilities and commitments, and potential disaster volunteer needs should be included and regularly updated.

For example, in anticipation of mandatory evacuations for Hurricane Gustav in 2008, the Volunteer Services Department at Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans attempted to compile this information over a few days. Though it was simple to confirm basic contact information for our partners in the Greater New Orleans Disaster Recovery Partnership, confirming information for staff positions with higher turnover (such as volunteer coordinators) was more difficult because of time constraints. Determining potential volunteer needs on the fly was also difficult. Having this information in advance would have been an advantage.

The City of New Orleans has developed a city-assisted evacuation plan (CAEP), to evacuate tourists and residents without the means to get out of harm's way, which relies heavily on local volunteers. The CAEP for Hurricane Gustav, August 2008, used more than 200 volunteers³⁵ whose main responsibility was to help evacuees through the registration process, load them onto buses and provide food, water, and information.³⁶

Widely viewed as a success, the volunteer component resulted from extensive planning and coordination from the Volunteers in Government of Responsibility Program in the Mayor's Office of Public Advocacy. This grassroots effort recruited locals in coordination with neighborhood organizations and tapped into AmeriCorps members along the Gulf Coast.³⁷

Finally, before disaster strikes, specifically plan the work, care and feeding of trained, affiliated volunteers. There is always the possibility that local infrastructure will be too decimated to provide food, water and shelter—and you will have to guarantee these services are provided. Partnering with a local relief organization (American Red Cross, Salvation Army, Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster chapter) is highly recommended. These organizations may have the ability to train volunteers in advance, refer their own volunteers to your organization and support them during major disasters.

³⁵ evacuteer.org. "About us," <http://www.evacuteer.org/about/>, 23 June 2009

³⁶ Fogarty, Robert. Volunteers in Government program coordinator, City of New Orleans, Mayor's Office of Public Advocacy, personal interview, 1 July 2008

³⁷ Ibid.

Response

Immediately after a disaster, the response phase begins. In general, the main goal of this phase is preservation of life and property in a dangerous post-disaster environment. This phase can be further divided into the “emergency response” and “relief response” phases.³⁸

For our purposes, the response phase is the post-disaster logistical set-up. Its timeframe is bound by the disaster itself and, depending on its scope, the time residents or volunteers are allowed to enter the affected area. Untrained volunteers should be discouraged from entering the disaster area during this phase. Their presence could burden local resources, and endanger themselves and disaster survivors. As a result, the goal for organizations using spontaneous volunteers is to put their plans in place in conjunction with partner organizations, while staying out of the way of first-responders or trained volunteers.

MESSAGING

A disaster of any magnitude will attract media attention that will, in turn, draw spontaneous volunteers. This is the time to release your pre-planned messages to the media. Outside volunteers should be asked to stay away. Make it clear that the desire to volunteer is appreciated, but the disaster area is still dangerous and their presence will hinder the capacity of local organizations. Volunteer Florida (2004 report) recommends that contact information for potential volunteers be recorded in a database.³⁹ Clear messaging and recording volunteer information will make volunteer recruitment easier in the future.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Operating a Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) is the most commonly explored volunteer management strategy in disaster relief literature reviewed for this manual. The VRC is a procedure by which large numbers of volunteers can be processed, tracked, and matched with appropriate organizations and needs. Its major functions include:⁴⁰

- taking volunteer requests
- registering and referring volunteers
- orienting volunteers
- tracking volunteer and staff hours
- tracking reimbursement eligible expenses.

Activated only when local resources are overwhelmed by the disaster, VRCs take a great coordination and planning. The real work during the response phase is acting on MOUs, adjusting plans as situations dictate and drawing on pre-disaster relationships to get the operation off the ground. The designated coordinating agency does the bulk of the initial work.

³⁸ National Voluntary Organizations Active In Disaster. “Long-Term Recovery Manual” Revised and Approved 29 Jan. 2004. pp. 3-4

³⁹ Florida, The Governor’s Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, Unaffiliated Volunteer Management: Florida’s Record-breaking 2004 Hurricane Season, 2005. p. 12

⁴⁰ Louisiana, Louisiana Serve Commission, “Volunteer Reception Center Guide” 2008

VOLUNTEER SPECTRUM

As we noted, it is dangerous to be in a disaster area immediately after the catastrophe. Only trained, affiliated volunteers should be used during this period. This includes volunteers from large national or international relief organizations such as American Red Cross, groups such as CERT (Community Emergency Response Team) that volunteer with local emergency responders and local volunteers trained specifically for disaster relief.

For organizations without trained disaster volunteers, partnering with these larger organizations is an effective, efficient way to bring them in. Strategies for creating partnerships are discussed later. Even if you haven't included using trained volunteers in your pre-disaster partnerships, keep communications and relationships open, while keeping out of the way of first responders.

The chaotic environment in the Greater New Orleans Area after Katrina and Rita made gathering specific information about the use of volunteers challenging. The largest quantity of data comes from large national organizations, such as American Red Cross, and government entities. A seasoned disaster relief organization, the American Red Cross Southeast Louisiana Chapter operated after the hurricanes largely as it does during any major disaster. Existing staff were able to handle the logistics and follow standard protocol, due to their national coordination of donations and volunteers. In response to Katrina, the chapter deployed its disaster standard of 300 volunteers per day, a number which increased as residents returned.⁴¹

Government-affiliated volunteer organizations, such as CERT, also were active in the Greater New Orleans Area in the immediate aftermath of the hurricanes. The Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) program developed from an initiative started by the Los Angeles City Fire Department in 1985. Partnering with a local CERT team is highly recommended. CERT focuses on training ordinary citizens in disaster preparedness and response. Training has been available nationally through FEMA since 1993. CERT can provide or find a variety of training, from basic preparedness to search and rescue. However, since local CERT teams have varying structures and work differently, the best way to start a partnership is to have staff attend basic CERT training. From there, you can form an effective, unique partnership.⁴²

Immediately after Katrina, Citizen Corps members and CERT teams helped first responders, worked with the Orleans Parish Office of Emergency Planning (OEP) staff, and even recruited members of local HAM radio clubs to work communications when the phones were out. While CERT training is available to anyone, a more dedicated group of volunteers make up the CERT Auxiliary. These volunteers, who complete additional training, are given great disaster-response responsibilities. Since the storm, relationships among OEP, the first-responder community and the CERT Auxiliary include regular meetings and a special place in emergency planning.⁴³

⁴¹ Salmeron, Bill. Emergency Services Director, American Red Cross Southeast Louisiana Chapter, personal interview, 5 June 2008

⁴² Community Emergency Response Team; "About CERT," <https://www.citizencorps.gov/cert/about.shtm>, 30 Jan 2009

⁴³ Pickering, Eric. New Orleans Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness Auxiliary Division, personal interview, 24 July 2008

ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS

It is more and more common for volunteers to seek opportunities through the Internet. Organizations and community disaster response networks should use the Internet as a way to keep spontaneous volunteers out of the disaster area until they are needed. A simple banner on a lead organization's website or information on sites that post volunteer opportunities (Points of Light's 1-800-volunteer.org, Volunteer Match or Network for Good) can thank volunteers for their interest, let them know they aren't needed yet and that they should stay out of the disaster area. This same banner can also link volunteers to a data collection point, where they can register to receive information once volunteers are needed, or provide a number for a local call center, which can also record their information for future referrals.

The catastrophic damage caused by Katrina and Rita rendered most disaster plans insufficient. This led to missed opportunities and lost resources after the storm. While it was clearly unsafe for unaffiliated volunteers to enter the region in and around New Orleans right after Katrina, pre-trained and vetted volunteers could have been used in evacuations, to support large relief organizations and prepare for the arrival of unaffiliated volunteers. The American Red Cross of Southeast Louisiana felt these tools would have been helpful in the post-Katrina response phase:⁴⁴

- Volunteer/donations hotline specific to the disaster
- Structured coordination of volunteers with other organizations
- Spare office/disaster location.

It is easy to look back and see where volunteers could have been used. But, given that the Greater New Orleans Area is prone to major disasters, areas facing similar threats would be wise to train volunteers extensively and deploy them in creatively.

While an organization is setting up disaster relief services, it also needs to prepare to track volunteer hours and reimbursable expenses. Pre-planned tracking tools and processes should be ready to receive volunteer information. Determine what volunteer information needs to be tracked, based on the scale of the disaster and the level of expected volunteer involvement. For example, with enough time and opportunity, outcomes of volunteer work can be tracked in more quantifiable detail and more volunteer information, such as demographics, can be gathered. With a widespread or large-scale disaster, it may be realistic to collect only a minimum of information, such as that on VRC volunteer registration and referral forms in the Appendix.

Generally, reimbursable expenses are utilities, office supplies, food and housing provided by the disaster volunteer operation. This is not a complete list. Again, effective reimbursement agreements must be made before the disaster. All staff need to know the method for tracking volunteer hours, tracking reimbursable expenses and the importance of capturing data. As with most response-phase activities, the goal is to act on your preparedness plans. However, new funding may become available during this time. If so, set aside time and make the effort to pursue it.

⁴⁴ Salmeron, Bill. Emergency Services Director, American Red Cross Southeast Louisiana Chapter, personal interview, 5 June 2008

Relief

During the relief phase, organizations deploy their volunteers on the ground to provide for the basic needs of disaster victims and begin clean up. For the purposes of this manual, the relief phase begins when it is safe for volunteers to enter the affected area, when local infrastructure can handle these volunteers and when organizations are prepared to manage them. It ends when services are no longer needed or when volunteers are no longer needed to provide them. This section presents volunteer management options as examples of the many ways an organization can respond to disasters of different magnitudes.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Depending on the size, scale and location of the disaster, an organization can employ any number of volunteer management strategies. Here are details about the most effective such strategies in a variety of situations.

Volunteer Reception Center

Operating a VCR is a major focal point of existing Best Practices for using volunteers in disaster relief. It is a highly efficient, widely used strategy to manage spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers. Its operations are broken down into eight volunteer processing stations, and several support stations that facilitate how the center processes volunteers. What follows is a brief description of how the many pieces of the center function individually, and how they relate to each other, in order to make the VRC work. This section has been adapted from the Louisiana Serve Commission's Volunteer Reception Center Training Manual (2008).

Station # 1—Registration/Orientation

The first stop for volunteers is the registration/orientation station. Volunteers receive registration forms, instruction sheets, and a brief introduction to the registration process. Examples of these forms are in the Appendix. The registration/orientation station is adjacent to a waiting area and, ideally, separate from the rest of the VRC. This station needs staff, who are called “greeters,” a supply of appropriate documents and a system for the in-and-out flow of documents. Ideally, the entire VRC should open as a unit, but this station can begin to function independently. For example, if spontaneous volunteers arrive before the community is ready to receive them, or if the logistics (phone lines, staff, office supplies) of the VRC are not set up, they can be pre-registered and contacted later when they can be fully processed. Overall goals of the registration station are to begin capturing volunteer data, educate volunteers about the process and manage their expectations, and regulate the flow of volunteers through the rest of the VRC process.

In addition to explaining the forms and the process, greeters at this first station should recognize the contributions of the volunteers and let them know that the process works for them as well as the organizations needing volunteers. This is key to managing volunteer expectations. Most spontaneous volunteers want to get to work right away. It is important to impress upon them that, while they are urgently needed, without this process their work will not have the greatest impact and they may endanger themselves and others. Greeters can help smooth the flow of volunteers by communicating with runners about any congestion in the waiting area and other parts of the VRC.

Station #2—Interviews

At the second station, staff interview volunteers one-on-one to learn their skills, interests and availability. From there, interviewers take the volunteers' information and match it with volunteer requests. The entire VRC should be physically set up to facilitate a logical, orderly flow of volunteers, with the interview station at the beginning. The station itself needs interview forms (examples in the Appendix), equal numbers of chairs for interviewers and volunteers and a display board for incoming volunteer opportunities.

The goals of the interview are to find the best match between volunteer and opportunity and add a personal touch to the process. An appropriate match is essential to the efficiency of the volunteer disaster response. Those with special skills, prior training, or general experience can work more effectively and quickly than a randomly matched volunteer. For example, if the disaster includes wind damage resulting in downed trees, volunteers who know how to use power tools, such as chainsaws, will be needed. An effective interview will identify volunteers with this experience. A well-matched volunteer requires less training time and quickly gains the requesting agency's confidence.

The VRC process may seem impersonal and unnecessary to volunteers, especially if they are unfamiliar with disaster volunteering and just want to get out and work. But, an effective interview lets volunteers know they are being treated as individuals whose needs and uniqueness are valued. The interviewer should ask targeted questions and rely on a well-coordinated flow of information among the phone bank, data coordination and interview stations.

All available opportunities should be displayed on a board behind the interview table. The list should include the requesting organization, number of volunteers needed, activity, time(s) and date(s) of the work and any special information such as age restrictions. A dry erase board, which can be quickly and clearly changed, is the best way to track this constantly changing information.

Finally, it is important that only interviewers and data collection staff be allowed to change the listings and that volunteers not see the board. It may seem secretive to keep volunteers in the dark, but this works best, especially when volunteers are needed at a site that may seem less than desirable. For example, help may be needed at clean-up site or water distribution center rather than someplace more "fun." If volunteers start cherry-picking preferred placements, efficiency is lost.

Station #3—Data Collection

After getting a referral, the volunteer brings it to the data collection station. Here, their referral is recorded, the volunteer request is adjusted accordingly and the volunteer is added to the training roster. This station also receives volunteer requests from the phone bank and passes them to the interview station. The data collection station should be near the interview table, phone bank and training area, as you can see in the VRC floor plan in the Appendix. This station can begin functioning as soon as organizations start to request volunteers, even before volunteers arrive or a physical station is set up.

The goals of data collection are to keep all accurate, organized and documented information flowing. This is essential for reporting to funders and partner organizations, releasing information to the public and capturing data needed for reimbursements. To accomplish this, the data collection station needs appropriate registration, interview, and referral forms, runners to deliver information to other stations and a data entry support function. Examples of forms are in the Appendix. Runners and the data entry support function are discussed later.

Tracking volunteer contact information is useful when the VRC closes—primarily for sending evaluation questionnaires. Evaluating the VRC’s success is helpful in acquiring funding in the future and evaluating its success internally. From these evaluations, the process can be refined and tailored to fit the community’s unique circumstances.

Station #4—Safety Training

All volunteers need a basic safety briefing at the VRC before entering a work site. Here is how it should work. The staff safety trainer gets a list of volunteers from the data coordinator and documents each one’s participation. The safety training area can be a table for a one-on-one briefing or a sitting area for training small groups, with size and location appropriate for the VRC. Optimally, the training area should be close to the data collection station. Trainers and the training station must be prepared to receive volunteers as soon as the referral process starts. The goals of training are to orient volunteers to the safety hazards of a dangerous, unfamiliar environment and to reduce the liability of any organization involved with the volunteers, including the requesting organization and the organizations who cooperate in the VRC. Training materials should be prepared beforehand and adapted to the disaster as quickly as possible. A good choice for trainer is a local emergency planning office staffer or first-responder.

Station #5—Volunteer Identification

After they have been documented and referred and completed the safety briefing, volunteers should receive an identity bracelet or card. This ID should include name, agency or site to which they are referred and the date(s) they expect to volunteer. All this information is available on the volunteer’s referral form. Located at the farthest end of the VRC from the reception area, this station should start working as soon as possible to refer volunteers. The ID bracelet or card provides another element of safety in the post-disaster environment. Materials needed to produce the bracelets or cards should be on hand before the disaster. After receiving their ID, volunteers proceed to their sites or to any necessary extra training.

Station #6—Additional Training

Some partner organizations may want to conduct additional training for their volunteers before they arrive on site. Extra training could cover procedures, safety, equipment or any other topic specific to that disaster. If there is space available, the director may allow this training to take place at the VRC.

Support Functions

VRCs have four physical and two staff support functions that do not deal directly with volunteers but facilitate the process: phone bank, data entry/recordkeeping, supply area, public information, runners and staff break area.

Critical to the functioning of the entire VRC, the phone bank takes calls from those seeking volunteer opportunities and information and receives and documents calls from organizations requesting volunteers. Calls should be posted on the request board behind the interview station and forwarded to the data coordinator.

Data entry/recordkeeping supports the data coordinator. After the center closes each day or the influx of volunteers subsides, volunteer registration, requests and referral forms need to be recorded on a computer and the original forms filed. If computers are unavailable, you can input data at a later date, but it is important that forms be accurately filed.

Only VRC staff should have access to the *supply area*, which should be located in a secured area outside the main VRC. It needs to house the contents of the VRC Go Kit. See the Appendix for a complete list of these supplies.

The *public information officer* should be the VRC director, the sole staff member responsible for communicating with the media. All information should be in line with the most up-to-date messages and information, provided by the community disaster response network's lead agency.

Runners, who support the entire VRC, move materials and information from station to station, lead volunteers through the process and help ease the flow of volunteers through the stations. The Appendix contains more details about the public information officer and runner positions.

Finally, the VRC must include a *staff break* area. Taking a break from the stress and urgency helps the staff stay efficient and lessens stress. Include as many creature comforts—coffee, water, comfortable seating—as possible.

Staffing Recommendations

Ideally, a VRC requires these 12 staff positions, working in shifts or full-time as the situation dictates:

- VRC Director
- Greeters
- Identification Coordinator
- Master Data Coordinator
- Phone Bank Staff
- Safety Trainer
- Data Entry
- Host/Hostess
- Interviewer
- Notification/Scheduling Team Member
- Runners
- Shift Manager

Detailed descriptions for all positions are in the Appendix.

Staffing the VRC starts during the preparedness phase, with the management positions (VRC director, master data coordinator, and shift managers) filled first. Start with the director, who is in charge of the entire operation. Draw from a pool of experienced managers in organizations that manage volunteers during disasters. For example, the director of the local Volunteer Center would be a logical choice. This organization will refer spontaneous volunteers during any disaster. This director's expertise would be an asset and their position in the disaster response network would bring connections and resources to recruit and train staff for other management positions. For other management jobs, the prerequisites are experience and position-specific skills. For example, the master data coordinator needs to be trained on the VRC's computer programs, and shift managers should have experience managing large numbers of volunteers.

To fill other staff positions, organizations responsible for the VRC can use their normal volunteer recruitment strategies, or search the disaster response network for qualified, motivated candidates. These volunteers must be committed to working at the VRC and be oriented to every station and support function. Brief them as well on how the VRC will open and how they will be contacted. Continue to recruit staff members after the center opens. Interviewers should be on the look-out for volunteers who would be good staff members. If there is a particular need, managers should inform the data coordinator and interviewers.

These are simply the basic guidelines for operating a VRC. For all the pieces to function together and improve the efficiency of the volunteer response, there must be adequate preparation and quick action in setting up and staffing the center. Details about doing these tasks well are covered in the preparedness and response sections.

Virtual Volunteer Reception Center

A virtual VRC can perform many functions without actually having volunteers on-site. By using volunteer websites, computer software, phone bank and other creative methods, you can process volunteers. The following example comes from the real experiences of Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans and Hands On New Orleans, after Hurricane Gustav in September 2008.

In the days leading up to Gustav, many local disaster-response organizations focused on communicating with other organizations to determine which ones had a plan for using volunteers in case a large disaster recovery effort was necessary. Most took a "wait and see" approach, with a few contingency plans and little detail. Some, focused on long-term rebuilding, had no plans to use recovery volunteers. Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans and Hands On New Orleans encouraged those with a plan to create an account on volunteerlouisiana.gov and list their anticipated volunteer opportunities. They also asked agencies without a plan to register so, if the need arose, they could post them quickly and easily.

Using this state site was helpful for many reasons, the most notable being that Gustav was potentially a state-wide disaster. There was no way to tell if the hurricane would require a New Orleans-specific volunteer response. Organizations used the site to reach a wide audience and encouraged organizations in Baton Rouge and other cities to register as well.

Another benefit was a banner placed on the site's home page informing volunteers they were not currently needed, but asking them to register as potential volunteers after the possible disaster. It was important to get out the word that unaffiliated, unskilled volunteers should not enter any possible disaster area before the storm, but that they would be needed once parishes re-opened. Because potential volunteers could enter their contact information into the website, the virtual VRC staff could easily call and email them once they were needed.

After preparatory contacts were made and evacuation orders issued, the only thing to do was wait to see where the storm would hit and how hard. As a storm makes landfall, little preparation can be made. At this point, those setting up a volunteer response should recognize, and try to ease, the emotional stresses that naturally descend at such a time. The organizations preparing for Gustav found it important to allow people to evacuate, get settled and wait—instead of discussing "worst case scenarios."

Once people returned after the storm, they saw that New Orleans was not hit as badly as had been predicted. This meant a volunteer office could be up and running quickly. Because the damage covered a large geographical area, Volunteers of America of Greater New Orleans and Hands On New Orleans staff members decided not to set up a physical VRC, but to use volunteerlouisiana.gov as a platform for a virtual VRC. They worked with the Louisiana Serve Commission to gather volunteer requests and refer volunteers.

The physical space was simply a conference room in an office, with a white board set up on an easel at one end. There was always at least one computer on, ready to record new volunteer opportunities or check contact information. The board captured immediate volunteer needs—usually feeding sites or cleanup crews leaving for other regions within a few days. The staff also kept track of ongoing volunteer opportunities with longer duration.

The virtual VRC had two main staff members, aided by volunteers. One staff contacted agencies and received volunteer opportunity requests. The other was in charge of all contact with volunteers. Volunteers and agency staff helped make calls whenever a new list of potential volunteers arrived from volunteerlouisiana.gov.

The virtual VRC had two main staff members, aided by volunteers. One staff contacted agencies and received volunteer opportunity requests. The other was in charge of all contact with volunteers. Volunteers and agency staff helped make calls whenever a new list of potential volunteers arrived from volunteerlouisiana.gov.

One Volunteers of America employee, experienced in working with disaster recovery groups, processed all incoming requests. The staff member got requests on intake forms via fax or email, entered them into the volunteerlouisiana.gov format and posted them on the website and the white board.

Once volunteer opportunities were set up, volunteers were referred in three different ways. Hands On New Orleans handled the volunteer referrals because of their experience in episodic volunteering.

VRC staff contacted every volunteer who had signed up on volunteerlouisiana.gov. The calls gave the staff an opportunity to assess the volunteer and make an appropriate referral. Through emails, the staff gave volunteers an overview of opportunities available. They were also able to assess volunteers through their replies. The VRC staff set up a email box separate from personal or work accounts and accessible only by a few point persons. Their system ensured that every response email was answered.

The second way was through incoming calls from volunteers who had not signed up beforehand but called the Hands On New Orleans office where our VRC was located. When taking these calls, the staff assessed each volunteer in the same way they assessed pre-registered volunteers.

Volunteers also referred themselves to opportunities posted online. This occurred because the hurricane effected a large geographical area which included many rural communities without a VRC. And, most people could easily do many of the available opportunities—clearing debris, serving meals, helping at aid stations. Because these opportunities were posted online, volunteers could find opportunities close to home. The only downside of self-referral is the difficulty in tracking volunteers. Some volunteers showed up without calling ahead. One way to prevent this is to withhold addresses or specific details from the online postings. This forces volunteers to call for more information, allowing organizations to screen and schedule.

There are other things to note about the Hurricane Gustav virtual VRC. The storm had minimal impact in New Orleans, allowing staff to get back into the city quickly. Phone lines, Internet access and utilities were soon restored. Volunteers opportunities that flowed into the VRC required minimal training and explanation. The flow of volunteers was also relatively small compared to the post-Katrina response. All of these factors made the virtual VRC possible.

There are several lessons to take away from the virtual VRC. Because of the multiple methods of referring volunteers, tracking numbers was not efficient nor easy. While posting opportunities online made it easier for volunteers to find places to serve, these volunteers could not be counted. This problem could be addressed by preparing. While some of the staff had VRC training prior to Gustav, the virtual VRC was new to them. The ideology was in place, but not the methodology. Not all of the staff was trained in disaster volunteer response and they took a "learn as you go" approach. Advance training in contacting volunteers, screening and tracking would have made things more efficient and helped staff understand more thoroughly the goals of a VRC.

It is also important for all communications to be on the table from the beginning. Because several organizations were working together, there were many messages coming from many places. Some of the staff were not sure what was happening at any given moment. This is another indication of how important preparedness is.

The idea of a virtual VRC worked well in this situation because of the level of the disaster. A full-blown physical VRC would have been overkill in New Orleans after Gustav. It is worth considering ways to adapt the VRC to fit the needs of the disaster or how an adapted VRC can support a larger area.

MESSAGING

As the VRC and other volunteer management strategies start to process volunteers, the collective messaging of the community disaster response network should be frequently updated. Messages need to reflect the conditions on the ground and include the need for volunteers. Information should be consistent across all organizations. Again, a key in achieving this is to draw upon pre-disaster relationships. The VRC structure also includes a position for a public information officer, the sole staff member responsible for communicating with the media.

VOLUNTEER SPECTRUM

In an ideal situation, the relief phase is the first time spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers arrive in the disaster area. These volunteers present unique challenges and benefits, especially when compared with affiliated, trained volunteers. First, it is impossible to predict how many unaffiliated volunteers will arrive once it is safe to come in. Second, it is more difficult to determine a spontaneous volunteer's skills and more difficult to efficiently place them. Third, many spontaneous volunteers have little or no means of transportation, a place to stay, or even a place to eat.

It is impossible to predict how many spontaneous volunteers will arrive, but, generally, depending on the size of the disaster, they will outnumber affiliated volunteers. This can be a benefit. Large numbers are needed to clean up immediately after the disaster. However, their presence can overwhelm local resources, even if they are kept out of the area until they are needed and even if organizations can manage them. Without the means to provide their own housing and food, they further tax limited resources. Finally, when there is no way to assess a volunteer's skills, mismatches occur. Someone with valuable construction experience could be placed in an office. A well-planned volunteer management strategy, a VRC and close coordination among community organizations can correct missteps.⁴⁵

The value of these volunteers is also monetary. Work typically done by local government employees or contractors may be eligible for FEMA reimbursement if it is performed by volunteers. The rate of reimbursement for volunteer work is the same as the rate established by local government and contractors, or the customary rates for the job in the local labor market. See Code of Federal Regulation 44, Section 13.24 and Section 206 Subpart H⁴⁶ as well as the Public Assistance Policy Reference Manual referenced in the preparedness section.

⁴⁵ Florida, The Governor's Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service, Volunteer Florida, *Unaffiliated Volunteers in Response and Recovery*, 2000. p. 8

⁴⁶ Ibid. p. 18

Rebuild

The focus of the rebuild phase, for our purposes, is returning the disaster area to its pre-storm state. Rebuilding or repairing houses, businesses, and community spaces are common activities for volunteers and rebuild organizations. During this phase, organizations can start replenishing their local volunteer base, as residents now have time and resources to volunteer.

At this point, the challenge for organizations using volunteers is to adapt to a changing environment. As local services and infrastructure return to pre-disaster levels, it's more difficult to get volunteers, and other resources, who likely will come from other areas. This section features a case study that explores strategies used by two New Orleans organizations to handle the changing environment in the rebuilding phase.

VOLUNTEER SPECTRUM

As the recovery proceeds, resources become scarce, including volunteers. Organizations need to ask those who have already volunteered to come back and recruit new volunteers and new types of volunteers. Volunteer education and advocacy efforts start to pay off in the leaner rebuild phase.

As in the recovery phase, unskilled volunteers from out-of-town will work primarily on construction and beautification projects. As more specific needs become apparent in the rebuilding phase, it makes sense to recruit skilled and professional volunteers in fields such as construction, medicine, business and legal. These skilled volunteers are needed throughout the recovery process, but they are more likely to volunteer themselves during the earliest phases. During rebuilding, they must be recruited.

As recovery transitions to rebuilding, social service organizations that rely on long-term local volunteers will have a base population from which to recruit. Organizations can hope that locals will have recovered themselves and will return to, or start, volunteering. Volunteer Centers can play a role in recruiting these volunteers.

CORPORATE VOLUNTEERISM IN POST KATRINA NEW ORLEANS

So far we have focused on two types of volunteers—spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers and group volunteers, who come from faith-based and secular organizations. A third type is corporate volunteers. These volunteers arrive as part of a corporate-sponsored project and present unique benefits and management challenges. These groups can be very large, can accomplish a great deal of work and often bring a donation from the corporation or corporate foundation. However, communications between the volunteer organization and corporation can be more complicated than with other groups. If a donation is involved, there can be stipulations, expectations and other wrinkles unique to a corporate volunteer project.

Because corporate groups are so large, they can, with proper coordination, have a profound impact in helping to meet rebuilding goals. Unskilled tasks, such as cleanups, painting, gutting houses and landscaping, lend themselves easily to large group projects. These are not the only projects corporate groups can handle. Think creatively about other possibilities.

Corporate volunteer groups may also provide resources. These may come in several forms: a grant that is part of the corporation or foundation's normal operations, a lump-sum negotiated during the project's planning

phase or the result of a corporate volunteer fee. Some nonprofits charge an administrative fee for each volunteer, to underwrite the cost of staff hours and materials. Some apply higher fees to corporate volunteer groups than to other volunteers as a way to expand their capacity. If the project is large enough, it is reasonable to ask the corporate group to donate supplies and equipment. These donations can help boost capacity for future projects.

Corporate projects, a great public relations opportunity, can bring media attention and community exposure to your organization and the corporation. This can help attract future volunteers, donations and more corporate projects. And, by telling the story of your organization and the affected community to a corporate audience, you reach a different pool of potential volunteer and donors.

Communication among the volunteer organization and the volunteer group is critical to success. Remember that your main contact person probably will not be experienced in volunteer coordination or philanthropy. The group's size and the project timeline can complicate communications. Communication problems also can affect public relations efforts. For example, when your organization or your corporate partners issue a press release, you need to agree in advance on how mission statements, logos and other elements will be used. The best way to handle communications with corporations is to be prepared, detailed and allow a lot of time for working things out. Keep management involved in the process.

While corporate donations are attractive, pursuing them may lead an organization to stretch its mission to accommodate the corporation's mission. At first, this can seem harmless, especially if there is a potential to boost your capacity. Remember, though, that if you compromise your core mission, you threaten your ability to serve your target population. It is always advisable to seek additional funding, but if the fit is not right, it may be wiser to pursue other opportunities.

In some cases, the project is primarily a public relations opportunity for the corporation. Avoid such partnerships. The project will not help the community and drain your organization's resources.

In post-Katrina New Orleans, organizations face an ever-changing volunteer and funding environment. As the recovery has progressed, easily accessible funds and volunteers have dried up, and organizations have had to find more creative ways to continue their work. This case study examines how two organizations (Rebuilding Together New Orleans and the Crescent City Art Project) have adapted to the local environment slightly more than three years after Hurricane Katrina.

Case Study: Rebuilding Together New Orleans

Since Katrina, Rebuilding Together New Orleans, a Preservation Resource Center program, has engaged several corporate service groups, including the National Basketball Association (NBA), Timberland and Starbucks. They've developed a successful process for recruiting corporate partners and managing corporate volunteers. They have several ways, active and passive, to recruit new partners. To make boost their online presence, they received a Google AdWords grant, which they found through word of mouth. These grants, given to non-profits in the form of advertising dollars, allow organizations to choose keywords that bring them to top of the search list and adds them to the "sponsored links" at the top of search pages. The Google grant generated cold calls from corporations seeking to donate money and volunteer opportunities. More information from Google is online.⁴⁷

⁴⁷ <http://www.google.com/grants/>

The organization also cultivated relationships with the New Orleans Visitor's Bureau and tourism industry contacts, such as hotel concierges. Targeted recruiting strategies, which fall under the umbrella of standard resource development, include:

- researching corporate foundation (many corporate entities use a foundation to handle their philanthropy)
- researching requests for proposals (RFPs)
- researching foundations with similar missions and making a proposal through upper management
- setting up face-to-face meetings with corporations and foundations.

Researching corporate foundations, RFPs, and philanthropic foundations falls under the umbrella of standard resource development. Rebuilding Together works hard to develop corporate partnerships. If the organization's upper managers take a business trip, they research corporations and foundations in the area and set up meetings with promising contacts.

The organization also outlines different levels of corporate support:

- monetary donation to the organization
- volunteer teams
- partial home sponsorship
- full home sponsorship
- special projects.

In a *partial home sponsorship*, the corporation covers some of the cost of rebuilding a home. The sponsor is officially linked, via name, logo and prominent mention in press releases, to the project. With volunteer teams, Rebuilding Together charges the full corporate volunteer fee, as it would without corporate sponsorship. For corporations that sponsor the entire cost of rebuilding an entire home, Rebuilding Together does not charge a volunteer fee and works closely with the sponsor to accommodate their schedule and other needs.

Rebuilding Together devotes their entire organizational capacity to special projects with corporate partners. This allows them to operate multiple work sites and accomplish a tremendous amount of work simultaneously, but it also places a great deal of responsibility on both parties because planning and documentation are complex. The organization and corporate sponsor must create and agree upon detailed budgets, MOUs and schedules. This long planning process is akin to that of a business negotiation. In fact, Rebuilding Together recommends treating corporate volunteer projects as business partnerships. Both parties should feel that they have gained something at the end of the project. Examples of special project partners Rebuilding Together has worked with are the NBA and Starbucks.

Offering a variety of opportunities helps Rebuilding Together capture more corporate partners. They also grant more flexibility in the use of their organizational capacity, which can counter some negative effects of corporate donations.

All corporate projects can create residual relationships. As with any volunteer group, it is important to send corporate volunteers home as advocates for your organization and community. They can be a source of future volunteers and donations, from the corporation (officially and unofficially) and their own social circles. Some corporations also encourage their employees to donate money by matching their gifts. One way to cultivate good will with these valuable volunteers is to give them a commemorative take-home packet—photos and homeowner bios included—containing information about the organization, the disaster and their project.

Rebuilding Together also recommends that off-site, upper management and office staff plan and manage the project as much as possible to shield volunteer and site managers from complications. To a work site manager, the corporate project should be like any other.

Massive corporate volunteer projects can do seemingly contradictory things—they can strain an organization's capacity and provide a unique opportunity to expand future capacity. While these projects usually occur after a major disaster like Katrina, their scale illuminates many best practices for dealing with corporate groups in general.

Case Study: Crescent City Art Project

Here's an example of a corporation with a positive culture that helped create a beneficial volunteer event. In October, 2008, Starbucks Corp. brought its Leadership Conference, attended by more than 10,000 employees, to New Orleans. Rebuilding Together New Orleans and the Crescent City Art Project (CCAP) were among eight organizations receiving grant money and volunteers from the Starbucks Creators of a Strong Tomorrow (C.O.A.S.T.) Fund, formed to support projects during the conference.

In a two-hour project at the Convention Center, about 1,900 Starbucks volunteers helped CCAP paint more than 1,350 murals and 150 mosaic benches, which were donated to 25 New Orleans schools. This supported CCAP's mission "to transform school landscapes from mundane environments to ones of color, art, and education by way of engaging individuals in service."

How was CCAP chosen? Once the organization heard about the C.O.A.S.T. Fund grants and volunteers, they began six months of planning. The staff submitted an RFP for three potential projects: 1,000 permanent murals for schools, mobile art works for public spaces such as City Park and 150 mosaic benches. Each project was geared to the huge number of volunteers Starbucks could provide. CCAP temporarily expanded their capacity through donated materials and volunteer fees. Throughout the long application, awarding and planning process, managing communications and coordination was tedious and difficult due to multiple contacts within the corporation and the staff at the New Orleans Ernest N. Morial Convention Center.

Because the project was so large, CCAP needed local volunteers to manage groups of Starbucks volunteers. They recruited them by word of mouth, volunteer newsletters and online postings with organizations such as Hands On New Orleans. These volunteers—essential to the project's success—attended a two-hour training to become volunteer leaders, responsible for managing small groups of 20. The training gave leaders an extensive overview of the project, CCAP itself and basic volunteer management.

CCAP set up an informative display in the work area to help Starbucks volunteers learn more about New Orleans and its recovery. Starbucks coordinators encouraged volunteers to visit the display, and there was a constant line waiting to view it.

Though the project was successful, there was room for improvement, reported CCAP staff in an interview. Issues included:

- Deliverables, such as the paintings and volunteer hours, needed to be tracked more accurately.
- Relationships with volunteers and corporation could have been better cultivated.
- The project temporarily increased capacity but did not generate long-term growth.

Keys to resolving these issues are detailed planning and relationship-building before the event. For example, a simple tracking system, prepared in advance, would provide greater accuracy in tracking volunteer hours and

details of the project deliverables, as well as capture other data. After the project, this data can be used to build relationships with volunteers and the corporation and bolster future capacity-building efforts in the future.

Giving out the commemorative volunteer packets mentioned above and the use of accurate data can help create stronger relationships. Ideally, this leads to more volunteers and donations. Finally, with accurate, reliable numbers, you can create a project description that will make an impressive case for your organization when you approach potential funders.

Better project planning also helps improve relationships over the course of a project. In a large project with many points of contact, it may be wise to dedicate one staff member to relationship management. Job responsibilities would be boosting the project's capacity-building and securing long-term relationships with the corporation and volunteers. Regardless of whether an organization chooses an existing staff member or new permanent or temporary staffer, the "relationship manager" needs to get to work as soon as possible in the project-planning phase. Early on, the volunteer organization should seek funding for this position from the corporation.

The relationship manager should work constantly to smooth communication problems with the corporate sponsor and build a deeper rapport with the corporate staff. Through this work, the manager can identify and push for more capacity-building resources. Creating a stronger relationship in the planning phase paves the way for a long-term bond after the project is completed. The goals are to keep the ties strong, work on long-term capacity building and help the corporation feel it has a stake in the organization's future.

The Volunteer Experience:

Coordination, Management, Interaction, Communication

This section is designed to provide insight on how to help enhance each volunteer's experience. It is heavily influenced by Volunteers of America Greater New Orleans' experience in the post-Katrina volunteer response. It addresses issues from every stage of the volunteer cycle: Recruitment, registration, engagement, appreciation and follow-up. Though examples are specific to the Katrina disaster, the issues apply to any community and organization which recruits and relies on volunteers. Volunteering is a universal human experience rather than a local or regional issue. All these issues we cover should be considered at each stage of any volunteer engagement.

COST VS. BENEFIT ANALYSIS OF VOLUNTEERISM

Many organizations fail to assess their volunteer programs in a business sense by looking at program outcomes and sustainability. Instead, they primarily focus on the volunteers themselves. Volunteers are precious and valuable, but placing the primary emphasis upon them often does more harm than good. While volunteers should never be overlooked, services to those in need must always take priority.

Organizations focusing on volunteers often find themselves making any and all accommodations to accept a free resource being offered. They give little thought to whether the volunteers are effectively improving service quality to disaster victims. In such cases, organizations end up using valuable resources on those with a desire to serve rather than those in need.

Simply put, if the resources spent accommodating and engaging volunteers is greater than the value of their service to persons in need, refer them to another organization. For example, if a group wants to spend four hours on a single day rebuilding a house, it might be better to refer them to a food bank where training and orientation is quicker and easier.

If you do have to decline or refer volunteers elsewhere, make sure you clearly explain your decision. Volunteers need to understand that you must use them to deliver greatest benefit to persons in need. While skilled, professional and social service volunteering—in fields such as construction, legal, accounting, mentoring, tutors and mental health—doesn't lend itself to single days of service, there are many opportunities that do. In addition to food banks, these include playground builds, clean-ups and plantings.

In educating potential volunteers, organizations should encourage them to be self-sufficient and flexible in their scheduling and availability. Ask them to take care of their housing, transportation, meals, equipment and supply. Many volunteers are unaware of all that is involved in the placement process. Once they do understand, they often are happy to provide more for themselves and even change plans for their service trip to meet your needs.

MANAGING EXPECTATIONS

This is absolutely essential to ensuring volunteer satisfaction. Mismanagement of this process is perhaps the most common complaint among volunteers in all kinds of projects. Volunteers rely heavily on the host organization to provide information about their service opportunity. If you fail to accurately and completely describe the project and the tasks involved in advance, volunteers may feel like you are being dishonest or deceitful. For every dissatisfied volunteer, countless potential volunteers are lost, especially in the age of the Internet, e-mail and social networking sites. Volunteers are likely to share their experiences--positive or negative.

After a disaster, it may be challenging to give volunteers complete details in advance. Obviously, in this environment, everything varies--funding, weather, supplies, availability of leaders and more. If you can't guarantee certain aspects of an opportunity, be open with volunteers. Explain the variables and ask the volunteers to expect nothing but the unexpected. Preparing them for the possibility that not everything will go as planned will help earn their trust and establish a rapport. Generally, volunteers enter service with good intentions and are likely to be satisfied with any opportunity. What they don't like, however, is volunteering with the expectation of building homes and arriving to find they will be picking up trash.

Under no circumstances is it acceptable to purposefully misinform volunteers. Though volunteers are a limited commodity, an organization should never present an opportunity deceptively simply to appeal to volunteers and gain a commitment.

VOLUNTEER EDUCATION

Volunteer education is absolutely critical to your organization's efforts to efficiently engage, place and refer volunteers. Because it is so important, you should start educating potential volunteers during your initial contact.

In a post-disaster environment, volunteers from other areas have little knowledge of the affected region. Though well-intentioned, they often remain uninformed or misinformed about many important items—the region's needs, volunteer opportunities, importance of the volunteer response, housing, transportation, resources, safety, weather and the local political and cultural climate. It is your responsibility to provide volunteer education on these subjects. Remember that the more informed a volunteer, the greater the impact that volunteer will have. And, you won't spend your valuable time addressing issues that could have been avoided.

Simply providing a brief introduction to the subjects above will make the volunteer's experience more meaningful. Just as informed volunteers are happy volunteers, uninformed volunteers are often unhappy volunteers. Frustration is frequently a byproduct of a lack of information.

Any organization serving in disaster preparedness or recovery efforts should create an educational brochure, Power Point presentation, video, website page or electronic document for volunteers on the subjects above and others that need to be addressed.

EDUCATION OF VOLUNTEER COORDINATORS

The task of educating volunteers also includes educating your staff, especially volunteer coordinators, who are ultimately the main connection with your volunteers.

As you train your Volunteer Coordinators, focus on the intricacies of volunteer coordination and management. Include information about the affected area. Make sure they understand community-wide needs, history, culture, food, entertainment and public transportation. What we said about volunteers applies similarly to Volunteer Coordinators. The more information a Volunteer Coordinator has, the more likely their volunteers are to enjoy their service and experience. In turn, satisfied volunteers become ambassadors for the disaster area. Volunteers who fall in love with the people, places, food and music of the affected area go home, spread the word and become activists.

CULTURAL COMPETENCY

There's another educational element in managing a large volunteer response from outside the disaster area. Your organization needs to promote ethnic and cultural understanding among all parties involved—incoming volunteers and residents of the affected area. If you do this, you can help improve the residents' acceptance and perception of volunteers and the volunteers' perception of those they serve. In the end, residents of the affected areas need to be the driving force that directs volunteer response.

In addressing a multi-cultural volunteer base, organizations should carefully consider the most appropriate ways to communicate with and care for volunteers. Failing to reach out to volunteers from various cultures will result in a narrow volunteer base. Unaddressed cultural differences can lead to strained relationships among residents and volunteers. Residents, feeling volunteers are serving themselves rather than the community, may not welcome volunteers. In turn, volunteers may view residents as ungrateful.

Regional cultural understanding is as important as cultural understanding. For example, the New Orleans area moves at a slower pace than the Northeast. Conversation is highly valued, and work is done more leisurely. Volunteers from the Northeast may interpret this as laziness or lack of a work ethic. In similar fashion, New Orleans area residents may view Northeastern volunteers as cold and impersonal. Similar misunderstandings can also occur among those from urban and rural areas.

While differences can be frustrating, addressing these issues and pointing out that they are caused by regional and ethnic cultural characteristics can help ease any friction.

MAKING THE CONNECTION — HELPING YOUR VOLUNTEERS UNDERSTAND THEIR IMPACT

Generally, volunteers enter service with a strong desire to make an impact on people in need. While building homes and playgrounds provides a visible, tangible gratification of that desire, other opportunities such as food banks and administrative support do not. It is up to your organization to give volunteers a thorough understanding of the impact and value of their work.

Make sure volunteers understand the full scope of their contribution. Remind them that all volunteers in a disaster area are not only rebuilding homes, they are rebuilding lives and restoring hope. Disasters do more than destroy buildings, they devastate people. Volunteers often overlook the mental and emotional toll on those

affected. The human toll may not be as noticeable as a damaged home, but it is of great importance. Volunteers, no matter what their job, contribute to the mental, emotional, physical and economic recovery of disaster victims and their communities.

Here is a great example of how a New Orleans area Volunteer Coordinator communicated the importance and overall impact of service to his volunteers:

“After Katrina, a Volunteer Coordinator was directing 40 corporate volunteers who were bused to a worksite for a single day of service. Supplies were late and the group could not do their project. Many volunteers were upset that they spent time and money to serve the region and felt they had not made any impact.

As they were raising these concerns, the Volunteer Coordinator saw a man looking out the window of his FEMA trailer at the volunteers in his devastated neighborhood.

He told his volunteers, “Whether or not you realize it, you have already made an impact, just by being here. You’ve given hope to that man simply by standing here in your volunteer T-shirts. He now knows that his community hasn’t been forgotten and that committed volunteers are helping its recovery.”

Every organization and Volunteer Coordinator working in disaster preparedness and recovery needs to communicate this holistic view of the impact of volunteerism.

VOLUNTEER ADVOCATES/AMBASSADORS

As we have mentioned earlier, organizations must create not only effective volunteers but also advocates and ambassadors for the affected area. This is especially true in major disasters and catastrophes. Again, the best way to create an advocate is to provide volunteers with a great experience. Volunteers should walk away from their service with a profound connection to the region and its people.

Remember that volunteerism is mental and emotional engagement as well as service. Encourage volunteers to converse with local residents—especially those affected by the disaster, eat local cuisine, listen to local music and experience the local environment.

Inform volunteers that their service projects are just the beginning of their service to the region. Remind them that they can continue serving by becoming ambassadors for those affected and those working to help them. Ask them to share their experiences with friends, family, co-workers, political representatives and everyone back home. A personal story is more effective than media coverage in reaching people. And, as we’ve seen after Katrina, media interest often wanes long before needs are met.

CELEBRATING YOUR VOLUNTEERS

Strike a balance in focusing on disaster victims at the same time you recognize and celebrate your volunteers. Recognition is critical and can be accomplished in many ways, but what is most important is that it happens. T-shirts, certificates, awards, appreciation dinners, videos and photos can all effectively celebrate volunteers. Remember, though, that it is not always necessary to do something tangible. Sometimes, simply saying “thank you” is all an organization can afford.

A common and valuable celebration in post-Katrina New Orleans is “dinner with the homeowner.” Organizations can arrange a meal for families whose homes were rebuilt and the volunteers who helped with the rebuilding. This allows the people in need to express their gratitude to volunteers directly. This kind of get-together has an immeasurable impact that cannot be matched with material tokens of appreciation. As we’ve mentioned, the personal elements of a volunteer experience have the greatest impact, and supporting these efforts will help you form a strong relationship with volunteers.

MATCHING SKILL SETS

To effectively engage volunteers in service, organizations should treat volunteer opportunities as brief job placements. With this in mind, seek and recruit volunteers with the best skills for each opportunity.

After a disaster, there are so many different kinds of needs, most all volunteers can find something appropriate to do. However, because volunteers are a limited resource, organizations tend to use anyone who volunteers, even though referring them to another organization that may be a better fit that would result in a greater impact on recovery. It would be unwise to place a lawyer in a manual labor job when another organization is seeking pro bono attorneys to give legal aid to those affected.

Organizations should stay informed about the efforts and needs of other organizations in the area. A good way to do this is by contacting your local volunteer center or coordinating agency for volunteer referrals and placements. Do not be afraid to share your volunteers with other organizations that offer a better match. Remember: the primary focus is serving those in need, and maximizing the potential of each volunteer is the best way to gain the greatest improvement in the lives of victims. The benefits gained by establishing strong relationships among organizations far outweighs the loss of a few volunteers.

Organizations should also help volunteers understand how they can better prepare and acquire the skills needed to help in recovery. After Katrina, many rebuilding and construction organizations addressed this issue creatively at no cost. For example, they suggested volunteers take classes at Home Depot or Lowe’s before their service. This helped volunteers be better prepared and more efficient.

LONG-TERM VOLUNTEERS IN LEADERSHIP ROLES

In disasters and catastrophes with a lengthy recovery process, long-term volunteers (those serving more than four weeks) are one of the greatest resources.

While, as noted previously, some opportunities require little training and supervision, other opportunities require much more. Therefore, the longer the volunteer serves, the greater the return on the initial investment in training and supervision. In fact, depending on the nature and skill level of an opportunity, it might not be in an organization’s best interest to engage a volunteer for less than four weeks.

Long-term volunteers are also valuable because they can become volunteer leaders or site supervisors. With training and support, long-term volunteers can manage and lead short-term volunteers or be the contact person for volunteers being housed. Do not, however, assign a volunteer to a position that may continue after the volunteer’s service is over.

One way to encourage long-term volunteers is by offering free room and board, and even a small stipend, if resources allow. Many volunteers who want to give their time would be able to do so for longer periods if they had some support for their living expenses. This is by no means a requirement for long-term volunteers, simply an incentive, if resources are available.

CARE FOR THE CARE GIVER

Remember that working and caring for those affected by disaster is stressful. The physical, mental and emotional toll of disaster-recovery work is significant. Caregivers, the organization's staff and long-term volunteers, must take time to nurture themselves. If they don't, the result will be a drop in efficiency, burn-out and a high turnover rate. This cripples the recovery. No one benefits when staff or volunteers are stressed. Organizations also must bear the expensive and time-consuming costs of training new staff and volunteers.

To make sure these caregivers are rested and energized, encourage vacation time, weekends off, exercise and healthy eating. On occasion, allowing them to work from a remote location can provide a helpful respite. If necessary, suggest caregivers seek mental and emotional support. Caring for persons in need after a disaster can expose caregivers to situations they cannot handle on their own. Keep staff and volunteers informed about all available support resources. Urge caregivers to use them.

VOLUNTEER COORDINATOR SUPPORT GROUPS

It is common for Volunteer Coordinators to feel overwhelmed and unsupported. They often operate in a silo-like environment. Others within their organization may know little about the volunteer process and all it entails. In large-scale disasters, volunteer coordinators should start support groups where they can share their frustrations, best practices and inspirations.

These groups can be arranged formally or informally. Often, an informal group will foster more sharing because of its less-rigid structure. Group dinners, outings and social events are all venues for such discussions.

The resulting camaraderie supports thoughtful discussion, boosts knowledge and helps ease frustrations and challenges. Note, however, that while it is certainly acceptable for Volunteer Coordinators to occasionally rant about their challenges, groups should emphasize support and encouragement rather than complaining or other negative expressions.

MAINTAINING THE RELATIONSHIP

Organizations should maintain their carefully cultivated relationships with volunteers. A good post-service relationship will help improve volunteer retention rates and make volunteers more likely to return and recruit others to volunteer.

Plan how to maintain these relationships. This plan can include monthly newsletters, social networking profiles (Facebook, MySpace, etc.), e-mail updates, blogs, mailers and other methods that work. Regardless of the method you choose, emphasize volunteer appreciation, current volunteer needs and updates of your organization's efforts. Taking this approach helps volunteers feel appreciated and understand the impact they

made. It also keeps them informed about current needs. This is vital as the recovery evolves to need different kinds of volunteer efforts.

In short, keep your volunteers informed and keep the door open for future service. Repeat volunteers are a great resource. Already trained, they prove more effective on return trips.

REFERRAL UPON CEASING OPERATIONS

By its nature, disaster-related volunteering will go through stages and then end. Organizations should develop and implement a process to refer volunteers to other organizations when they have stopped working in an area, or when they no longer require specific volunteer skills.

However, realize that your efforts within an affected region do not end when you cease to operate there. An organization committed to recovery should encourage its volunteer base to continue to serve through organizations still operating. Establishing a structured referral process before you leave allows you to continue to help.

You can use a similar process when you are still working but no longer need volunteers with certain skills. For instance, if your organization has moved from debris removal to rebuilding, we recommend that you refer your unskilled volunteers to organizations still doing cleanup. In turn, ask them to refer skilled volunteers to your rebuilding project. This allows all organizations to get the best use of all volunteers.

Volunteer Housing

ASSESSING THE NEED

The need for volunteer housing will depend on the size and scale of the disaster. Hurricanes Katrina and Rita created a catastrophe so grand, it highlighted the importance of volunteer housing. After these 2005 storms, housing became a major obstacle to volunteer recovery efforts.

Regardless of whether your organization includes volunteer housing in your disaster-related volunteer response plan, it is a valuable resource. Having housing available for volunteers can lower their costs and help them bond with your organization. While not all organizations will be able to establish a housing program, we recommend every organization consider it.

Evaluate the costs of establishing housing, zoning requirements, projected number of volunteers and logistical obstacles. The value of supplying volunteer housing must outweigh the costs of all the resources spent. Otherwise an organization may deplete resources designed to serve persons in need.

Think broadly when you assess the potential benefits of volunteer housing. Do not undertake simply a financial assessment, but take into account all possible benefits, outlined below. Each of these must be examined in depth to fully calculate the anticipated value.

Increase in volunteer numbers

Many who want to volunteer to help in disaster recovery can't afford it. Volunteer housing programs can help. In fact, they often result in an increased number of volunteers.

Reduction in commute time to and from project sites

Often overlooked, this benefit can make a great difference, especially in rural areas without hotels or other housing options. Post-Katrina, groups housed in New Orleans were bused to volunteer opportunities more than an hour's drive each way in southern Plaquemines Parish. There was simply no housing in the affected area. Organizations in Plaquemines would have increased their volunteers' workday by three hours daily if they had housing close by. Volunteer housing is also crucial in cities where the disaster is so destructive, there is little housing left. This was the case after Katrina and Rita.

Establishing a relationship between an organization and its volunteers

By supplying housing, organizations enjoy a great opportunity to strengthen relationships with their volunteers, a benefit that often leads to repeated or extended service trips. Practices such as volunteer community meetings, volunteer-client dinner nights, appreciation walls and volunteer reflection sessions can help deepen this bond.

Revenue generation for additional organizational costs

Many organizations charge volunteer housing fees to support not only their housing program, but also other program expenses. This leads to increased capacity to serve more persons in need. We address the decision-making for establishing fees later in this section.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES

Of course, no one can predict every benefit and challenge that volunteer housing will bring. But a careful evaluation will prepare organizations as thoroughly as possible. Below is a look at some obstacles that can crop up.

Cost

This is often the primary concern in deciding to supply volunteer housing. To evaluate how much it will cost, consider rent or purchase price, property tax, staff, furnishings, utilities (water, gas, electric, Internet, phone, sewer service and cable), maintenance, cleaning supplies, toiletries and food (if you decide to serve meals).

Securing a facility

There are many considerations here. Look at location, cost, condition, availability of viable options, length of availability, zoning, amenities and more.

Staffing

You will probably need additional staff to properly manage your volunteer housing facility. The staff will have many duties such as addressing housing inquiries, taking reservations, establishing and enforcing rules, check-ins and check-outs, cleaning, maintenance, food preparation, financial oversight, resource development, volunteer recruitment, marketing/public relations and more. The size and scale of your housing will determine your staffing needs. In Post-Katrina volunteer housing, the staff ranged from a single person to 30 full-time equivalents.

Evaluating need, maximizing efficiency

Is volunteer housing necessary? Figuring out the answer can be difficult. The volunteer response to any given disaster is unpredictable at best, and anticipating the need for housing is challenging. After major disasters, volunteerism usually peaks during traditional school breaks. As a result, volunteer housing facilities are commonly booked solid during these times, but unable to fill beds at other times. Include the seasonal nature of volunteering into your evaluations of anticipated costs and revenue. To maximize efficiency, all available beds in the facility must be filled at all times.

Liability

All organizations should be aware of issues of liability. Consult with an attorney before establishing any volunteer housing program.

COLLABORATION OPTIONS

Organizations may want to research other options for housing volunteers. Partnerships, collaborations and referrals to private accommodations can be possible alternatives. Here are some options that sprang up in the Greater New Orleans Area post-Katrina New Orleans.

Volunteer rates at local hotels/motels, bed and breakfasts, and hostels

In the wake of disasters, especially major disasters, local businesses need the economy to rebound quickly. They may be open to giving volunteers special rates. A cautionary note—while discount rates work well for volunteers,

hotels will often cancel them during peak periods or as time moves on. This is usually long before recovery efforts are complete. Do not view discounted hotel rates as a long-term option or as an option in rural areas.

Volunteer housing partnerships

After Katrina, several volunteer housing partnerships formed. Two or more organizations typically operated a single facility, sharing costs, resources and management duties. Organizations with limited resources and a pressing need to house volunteers should explore this option. Before you seal the deal, consider the mission of any potential partners and look realistically for a good match. It is essential for all details of the partnership to be clearly identified in writing.

Volunteer housing collaborations

Another option is volunteer housing collaborations. How does this work? A housing provider may work with other organizations without housing by opening its facilities to their volunteers. The housing provider receives revenue-generating volunteers, and the other organizations have a place for their volunteers to stay. One possible problem is that during peak times, the housing provider usually gives priority to its own volunteers.

ESTABLISHING THE PROGRAM

If, after completing a thorough analysis, your organization decides to start a volunteer housing program, here are some ways to begin.

Identifying a facility

Volunteer housing facilities can be set up in portable trailers, churches, schools, single-family residences, campsites, commercial properties and other locations. The first step must be checking zoning regulations and permit requirements. In some areas, governments may grant temporary zoning permits for such a facility, recognizing the value of post-disaster volunteerism.

Organizations may rent or buy property, or refurbish a facility in return for using it during a period of time. This last option is common in large-scale disasters when many property owners seek ways to rebuild damaged buildings with few resources.

Give special attention to a prospective building's plumbing capacity. Large numbers of volunteers mean a great demand for showers and bathroom access. Shower trailers and portable toilets can help meet this need when bathrooms can't be added.

Pricing

Deciding how much to charge volunteers for housing is a tough decision. Some organizations struggle with this because they see it as a moral question. They wonder whether they should ask volunteers to pay for accommodations at all.

In the New Orleans area, volunteer housing ranged from free to more than \$100 per person per night for accommodations at a private condo, with project coordination and three meals daily included. Typically, most volunteer housing ranged, per person per night, from \$5, with no meals, to \$30, with three meals. Special weekly rates were often available. Free housing and meals are a great incentive to long-term volunteers (serving more than three months) whom are highly sought for skilled opportunities and volunteer leadership.

Remember, volunteer housing revenue can also be used to support other program costs, so higher-end rates are not out of the question. Our recommendation is that, no matter what you charge, you educate volunteers about why housing fees are charged and how the fees are used. Most well-intentioned volunteers understand that housing charges allow organizations to serve an area longer and support programs to help victims.

Scheduling

We recommend you establish strict check-in and check-out schedules for efficient, streamlined operations. If you don't, expect to staff your housing facility 24 hours a day. Even with guidelines, volunteers should have some flexibility in arriving and departing. Establish a three-hour window in which volunteers can check in or out. This greatly reduces stress on housing staff and other volunteers staying in the facility. Most housing facilities are set up in a bunkhouse style, and late night or early morning arrivals and departures will disturb others. Some organizations require volunteers to check in on a specific evening and check out on a specific morning, often mandating a one-week stay.

Whatever rules you enact, the housing staff should always have ability to accommodate special requests for housing on a case-by-case basis. Policies that are too rigid can strain relationships with volunteer groups.

Housing reservations

Reservation requirements, highly recommended, will alleviate the problems that result from a casual, informal confirmation process. When volunteers arrive without a confirmed reservation, the facility can easily become over-booked and not have space for those who confirmed. Recommend that organizations request reservations at least two weeks in advance.

Volunteer arrivals, even for those with confirmed reservations, can be uncertain. Requiring a non-refundable deposit when the reservation is made helps address this problem. We have seen too many volunteer groups confirm reservations in hopes that they will be able to travel to the region, then canceling at the last minute when they can't. This, of course, results in a loss of revenue for the housing facility. We also have seen incoming volunteers make numerous reservations at various locations in case one falls through. This leads to multiple organizations being limited in their capacity to house needed volunteers—all because of one group.

Another common issue is that the number of volunteers changes right before or upon arrival. Because reservations effectively limit the facility's capacity and its ability to generate revenue, we recommend charging for all beds reserved even though a smaller number of volunteers show up. Set a deadline for changing reservations. This helps to ensure that the housing providers can use every opportunity to maximize revenue.

Again, let volunteers know the reasons that lead to the policies. Make them aware of the financial constraints of maintaining a housing program. Housing that loses money results in diminished services to disaster victims.

Provisions—meals, bedding/linens, laundry services and more

Most incoming volunteers have probably not stayed in such a facility before, so they may expect hotel-like accommodations. They may anticipate linens, toiletries, a laundry facility and meals, especially with higher-priced accommodations. The more provided for volunteers, the higher the cost of the housing program. So, find a balance between providing a clean, comfortable, inviting living space and operating a cost-effective program.

Again, our recommendation is to manage the expectations of incoming volunteers long before their arrival. Let there be no surprises upon check-in. Volunteers usually understand the condition of the accommodations if they are informed in advance. Do not let a volunteer expect a hotel-like room if they will sleep in a bunkhouse with 100 other volunteers, four showers and portable toilets.

Rules and regulations

Regulations for volunteer housing vary as greatly as the organizations operating them. There is no right or wrong way to set rules, and the success of this process will likely be influenced by trial and error. The key is setting regulations that let volunteers enjoy safe, sanitary conditions at all times.

- **Age Restrictions**—Because of the bunkhouse, communal style of many volunteer facilities, setting age restrictions can reduce liability issues. However, organizations restricting its housing to those ages 18 and older will miss the revenue generated by youth groups and families. If youth are allowed, we recommend that they be separated from adults.
- **Curfew**—This is another common point of contention for housing providers. Being too strict with curfew can result in a limited client base. But, to show respect for other volunteers, curfews or quiet hours are often necessary, especially in a bunkhouse or communal setting.
- **Gender Separation**—Some volunteers request that the genders be separated, others prefer a coed facility. When you consider this issue, think about how shower rooms, bathrooms and bedrooms should be handled. Scheduling gender-specific restroom and shower times is a way to handle this issue without the need for completely separating bathrooms and showers.
- **Chores**—In order to limit costs, housing providers may mandate that volunteers help clean and maintain the facility. Forming a daily team of volunteers to help with such tasks can result in great savings over the life of the program.
- **Alcohol, Cigarettes, Illegal Substances**—Illegal substances should be banned at all facilities. Organizations may want to allow alcohol and cigarettes. Some organizations allow volunteers to come back from serving and enjoy a drink, while others strictly forbid it. Whatever the decision, we recommend a ban on intoxication and smoking inside the facility out of respect for other volunteers.

Acknowledgements

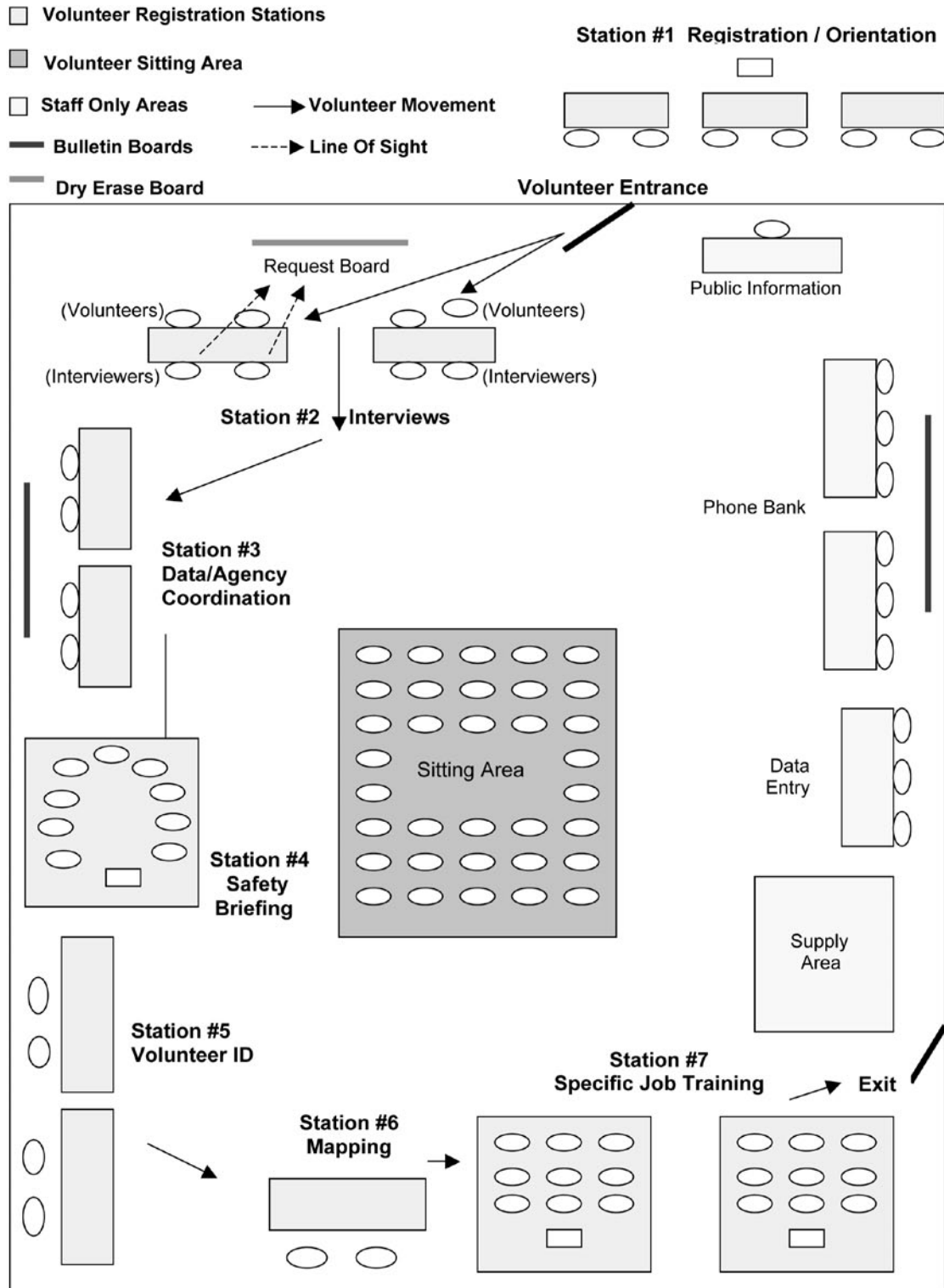
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- Project Homecoming/The Presbytery of South Louisiana
- New Orleans Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness Auxiliary Division
- Volunteer Florida
- Volunteer Ascension

Appendix

All forms included in this appendix are compliments of Volunteer Florida. Please do not duplicate or modify without written consent. You may find additional forms and publications at www.volunteerflorida.org.

Volunteer Reception Center Floor Plan



Volunteer Reception Center

Signage

You will need one enlargement, unless otherwise specified, for each of the 17 station or directional signs shown in the left column. All signs should be laminated and large enough to be read from across a large room.

SIGNS NEEDED	WHERE TO POST
Disaster Volunteer Reception Center (2)	On street visible from either direction
Station #1 Registration	Registration / orientation area
Enter	Volunteer Entrance to VRC
Station #2 Interviews	Interview Area visible from Volunteer Entry
Station #3 Data/Agency Coordination	Data Coordination visible from Station #2
Station #4 Safety Briefing	Volunteer ID area visible from Station #3
Station #5 Volunteer I.D. Tags	Safety Training visible from Station #4
Station #6 Job Training	Job Training visible from Station #5
Exit	Exit visible from Stations #5 and #6
Staff Only (2+ as needed)	Staff rest area, supply area, etc
Phone Bank	Agency Coordination area
Public Information Officer	Public Information Officer's Table

Forms

VRC Safety Training Attendance Record

I have attended and received the safety briefing conducted by (volunteer center name) at the Volunteer Reception Center. I understand and agree to follow the safety instructions provided.

[illegible]

Disaster Volunteer Registration Form

(Please print clearly. Submit at Volunteer Reception Center or fax to _____)

Mr. ___ Mrs. ___ Ms. ___ Name _____ Birth Date _____ Day Phone _____
 E-mail address _____ Evening Phone _____
 Home Address _____ City _____ ST _____ Zip _____
 Emergency Contact _____ Relationship _____ Emergency Phone _____
 Your Occupation _____ Employer _____
 Business Address _____ City _____ ST _____ Zip _____
 Are you a year-round resident? ___ Yes ___ No Months you are available _____
 If you have any health limitations, please explain _____
 I am willing to volunteer in: ___ this county ___ a neighboring county ___ anywhere in the state ___ anywhere in the U.S.
 Are you currently affiliated with a disaster relief agency? If yes, name of agency: _____
 Special skills and/or vocational/disaster training: _____

SKILLS: Please check all that apply.

MEDICAL

___ Doctor – Specialty: _____
 ___ Nurse – Specialty: _____
 ___ Emergency medical cert.
 ___ Mental health counseling
 ___ Veterinarian
 ___ Veterinary technician

COMMUNICATIONS

___ CB / ham operator
 ___ Hotline operator
 ___ Cell phone # _____
 ___ Satellite phone # _____
 ___ Public relations
 ___ Web page design
 ___ Public speaker

Language other than English:

___ French
 ___ German
 ___ Italian
 ___ Spanish
 ___ Ukrainian

OFFICE SUPPORT

___ Clerical – filing, copying
 ___ Data entry – Software: _____
 ___ Phone receptionist

SERVICES

___ Food
 ___ Elderly/disabled asst.
 ___ Child care
 ___ Spiritual counseling
 ___ Social work
 ___ Search and rescue
 ___ Auto repair/towing
 ___ Traffic control
 ___ Crime watch
 ___ Animal rescue
 ___ Animal care
 ___ Runner
 ___ Specific disability Service _____

STRUCTURAL

___ Damage assessment
 ___ Metal construction
 ___ Wood construction
 ___ Block construction
 ___ Cert. # _____
 ___ Plumbing
 ___ Cert. # _____
 ___ Electrical
 ___ Cert. # _____
 ___ Roofing
 ___ Cert. # _____

TRANSPORTATION

___ Car
 ___ Mini van
 ___ Maxi-van, capacity _____
 ___ ATV
 ___ Own off-road veh/4wd
 ___ Own truck, description: _____
 ___ Own boat, capacity _____
 ___ Type: _____
 ___ Commercial driver
 ___ Class & license #: _____
 ___ Camper/RV, capacity
 ___ & type: _____
 ___ Wheelchair transport

LABOR

___ Loading/shipping
 ___ Sorting/packing
 ___ Clean-up
 ___ Operate equipment –
 ___ Types: _____
 ___ Have experience
 ___ supervising others

EQUIPMENT

___ Backhoe
 ___ Chainsaw
 ___ Generator
 ___ Other: _____

Office Use Only

1 ☐ 2 ☐ 3 ☐ 4 ☐ 5 ☐

Disaster Volunteer Registration Form (Side two)

Release of Liability Statement

I, for myself and my heirs, executors, administrators and assigns, hereby release, indemnify and hold harmless [Coordinating Agency, local governments, State of _____, the organizers, sponsors and supervisors of all disaster preparedness, response and recovery activities (check with local Risk Management and Emergency Management Departments re who should be included)] from all liability for any and all risk of damage or bodily injury or death that may occur to me (including any injury caused by negligence), in connection with any volunteer disaster effort in which I participate. I likewise hold harmless from liability any person transporting me to or from any disaster relief activity. In addition, disaster relief officials have permission to utilize any photographs or videos taken of me for publicity or training purposes. I will abide by all safety instructions and information provided to me during disaster relief efforts.

Further, I expressly agree that this release, waiver, and indemnity agreement is intended to be as broad and inclusive as permitted by the State of _____, and that if any portion thereof is held invalid, it is agreed that the balance shall, notwithstanding, continue in full legal force and effect.

I have no known physical or mental condition that would impair my capability to participate fully, as intended or expected of me.

I have carefully read the foregoing release and indemnification and understand the contents thereof and sign this release as my own free act.

Signature _____ Date _____

Guardian, if under 18 _____ Date _____

Volunteer's credentials were recorded as presented. Verification of credentials and any background check required are the responsibility of the receiving agency.

This volunteer was referred to the following agencies:

Date	Need #	Agency	Contact Name	Contact's phone #
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Return this completed form to:

(Coordinating Agency name, address and fax number)

Notes:

Disaster Volunteer Referral

Name of Volunteer _____ Date _____

Referred to (agency) _____ Need # _____

Agency contact name _____ Phone _____

Address of Agency/Site _____

Directions to Site _____

Title/description of volunteer assignment _____

Dates & hours volunteer will work _____

Note: Verification of volunteer's credentials is the responsibility of the agency receiving the volunteer.

VRC Staff Initials:

Inter-viewer	Data Coord.	Safety Brief
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Disaster Volunteer Referral

Name of Volunteer _____ Date _____

Referred to (agency) _____ Need # _____

Agency contact name _____ Phone _____

Address of Agency/Site _____

Directions to Site _____

Title/description of volunteer assignment _____

Dates & hours volunteer will work _____

Note: Verification of volunteer's credentials is the responsibility of the agency receiving the volunteer.

VRC Staff Initials:

Inter-viewer	Data Coord.	Safety Brief
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Staff Tasks

VRC DIRECTOR

Work Location—Volunteer Reception Center (VRC)

Responsibilities and Duties—Oversee the operation of the Volunteer Reception Center. You will:

- Clearly identify one entrance and one exit
- Set up the room for efficient flow of volunteers and information
- Brief and assign tasks to staff and volunteers of the VRC
- Monitor the operation and make necessary adjustments
- Maintain all records of safety and job training provided to volunteers, and hours worked in the VRC by employees and volunteers
- Maintain records of expenditures
- Resolve challenges as they arise

Qualifications—Needs to be knowledgeable about all aspects of the Volunteer Reception Center including all of the various position titles. Also, needs to have some management experience and effectively be able to run the entire Volunteer Reception Center.

Commitment Required—Full time participation when the VRC has been activated.

Training—Training in each of the VRC positions prior to activation. Previous supervisory and management training experience preferred.

Volunteer Supervisor—Volunteer Center Director

DATA ENTRY

Work Location—See the VRC floor plan

Responsibilities and Duties—Your job is to enter the information from the Volunteer Registration and Request for Volunteers forms into the database so that the parish has an accurate record of who participated in the recovery effort, what kinds of work they performed and when.

- After the initial influx of volunteers has subsided, you may have time to begin entering the referrals recorded on the Request forms and to close out the completed Requests. As needed by VRC staff, print updated lists of the unfilled Requests and ask a Runner to distribute copies to Phone Bank staff, Data Coordination, Interviewers and, if requested, the VRC Director.
- Even if you are familiar with the software being used by the VRC, please ask for a brief orientation before beginning your first shift. Accuracy is more important than speed. The information you enter will be used to determine the amount of money the parish will receive from the Federal Government as a result of the disaster.
- If you have difficulty using the computer, please ask for help immediately. Do not attempt to fix the problem yourself.

Qualifications—Be comfortable with computers and ability to enter information into a database.

Commitment Required—8-hour shift

Volunteer Supervisor—VRC Director and Shift Manager

GREETERS

Work Location—Near the entrance of the Volunteer Reception Center (see the VRC floor plan)

Responsibilities and Duties—Ideally, you will be working with a partner, orienting volunteers inside and outside the volunteer entrance. Your job is to greet people with a friendly and firm demeanor, determine the purpose of their visit and direct them accordingly.

- If they are volunteers, give them a Volunteer Instructions sheet and ask them to fill out a registration form. If the VRC is too full at the time, ask them to have a seat in the waiting area.
- If they are media personnel, direct them to the VRC or the Public Information Officer.
- If they are disaster survivors, refer them to the appropriate organization.
- If they have food, clothing, etc. to donate refer them to the appropriate agency unless it is food for the Volunteer Reception Center staff. If it is food for the VRC staff, take the individual to the Host/Hostess. For safety reasons, unsolicited donations of food for Volunteer Reception Center staff will not be accepted!
- If there is a long wait, some volunteers may not understand the reason and may become impatient. Please thank everyone for volunteering, briefly explain the process and ask everyone to be patient or to come back later.

Qualifications—Have a friendly demeanor and be able to approach people and talk with them

Commitment Required—8-hour shift preferred

Volunteer Supervisor—VRC Director and Shift Manager

HOST/HOUSTESS

Work Location—Volunteer Reception Center

Responsibilities and Duties—Provide congenial hospitality to all who enter the VRC.

- Set up area at the VRC for coffee, water, juice and snacks where volunteers can help themselves.
- Provide and offer on a cart coffee, water, juice and snacks to volunteers as they are filling out their paperwork and waiting to be interviewed .
- Replenish supplies with sugar, creamer, napkins, etc. as they are running low and ensure that bathrooms are stocked with paper towels and toilet paper.
- Be available to inform volunteers of the locations of the restrooms and to answer any simple questions they may have, i.e., how much longer do I have to wait? etc.
- Always have a pleasant attitude and be willing to help at all times

Qualifications—Knowledgeable about all aspects of the Volunteer Reception Center including all of the various position titles. Needs to have a pleasant attitude.

Commitment Required—8 hour shifts.

Volunteer Supervisor—Volunteer Reception Center Director, Volunteer Center Director

IDENTIFICATION COORDINATOR

Work Location—See the VRC floor plan

Responsibilities and Duties—Ask if the volunteer for his/her Referral form. If they have not been referred, thank them for coming and ask them to please wait in the sitting area in the center of the room.

- Clearly write on the white portion of an ID wristband the name of the volunteer, dates he/she will be working, and the name of the agency to which the volunteer was referred, as shown on their Referral form.
- Place the ID wristband securely on the volunteer's wrist.
- Explain to the volunteers that the ID will be valid only for the date(s) written on the band. Authorities will not permit them to enter any of the disaster impacted areas on any other day, without a current ID wristband. If volunteers plan to work more than one day, you may write the beginning and ending dates of their service. Thank them for coming.
- If you need assistance, please raise your flag or put on the hat to summon a Runner.

Qualifications—Ability to clearly write the volunteer's information on their ID band.

Commitment Required—8-hour shift preferred

Volunteer Supervisor—VRC Director and Shift Manager

NOTIFICATION/SCHEDULING TEAM MEMBER

Work Location—From home if phone lines are operable. If not, the VRC.

Responsibilities and Duties—The Notification Team Member will be notified after a disaster and told whether the Volunteer Reception Center has been activated, where it will be located, and when it will be opened. Then, the Notification Team Member will initiate the phone tree and call the other volunteers. You will be responsible for making sure that all the trained Volunteer Reception Center volunteers are notified. You must also gather information on who can volunteer and at what times and develop a schedule for the volunteers. In addition, after calling the volunteers, you must work on getting refreshments for the VRC.

Qualifications—Must have good phone and communication skills. Also, must be a responsible person who will be in charge of making sure other volunteers are notified.

Commitment Required—As long as it takes to call the trained volunteers

Volunteer Supervisor—Volunteer Center Director

INTERVIEWER

Work Location—See the VRC floor plan

Responsibilities and Duties—Your job is to do a quick interview of the prospective volunteer and refer him to a job at an agency appropriate to his abilities and interests.

- Volunteer requests will be posted on a board in front of you (behind the volunteers being interviewed) and will be erased as they are filled. If the center has a computer system, you might also receive a printed list of the current needs.
- When a new volunteer approaches, ask for his/her registration form. Verify its completeness and accuracy, and use it as a guide from which to inquire more about the volunteer's skills. Check a photo picture ID to verify identity.
- At the conclusion of the interview, keep the registration form and have the volunteer take their Referral Form to Data Coordination
- Before signaling the Greeter that you are ready for another interview, take a minute to jot down in the Notes section anything about the volunteer you feel is important, that the volunteer did not include on his registration form (a special skill, an obvious physical limitation, etc.) If your center decides to use the blind field labeled Office Use Only, check the appropriate box. Place his Volunteer Registration Form in the bin or file.
- Key points to remember are:
 - Disaster registration differs from a normal volunteer intake—there is less time to try to fit each volunteer into an ideal assignment.
 - Refer the volunteer on the spot if possible—it may be impossible to contact him later. If the volunteer has special training or unusual skills that you think might be needed soon, ask him to wait in the sitting area and to check the volunteer request board for new requests for their specialized skills.
 - Be sure to watch for volunteers who would work well in the Volunteer Reception Center.
 - It is likely that some volunteers will exhibit the stress of the disaster—an extra measure of patience and understanding is needed.
 - You may be called upon to train volunteers to assist with the interviewing.

Qualifications—Must have good communication skills and be able to interview people to find out their skills

Commitment Required—8 hour shift

Volunteer Supervisor—VRC Director and Shift Manager

MASTER DATA COORDINATOR

Work Location—Volunteer Reception Center

Responsibilities and Duties—Your job is to match the Referral Forms to the Requests and to close out the Requests when they have been filled or are no longer needed. You may have to call an agency contact to clarify the agency's Request. When you speak with an agency contact, record the information on the Request form in the section called Follow-up Contacts with Requesting Agency.

- When a volunteer brings you his Referral form, enter his name and the date of the referral on the Request form to which he was referred. Place your initials on his Referral form. If you have time, call the agency contact to let him know who or how many volunteers have been referred. Confirm with the agency contact whether you should continue referring volunteers or close out the request.
- When a request has been filled, raise your flag or put on the hat to call a runner and ask him to remove that request from the board.
- Enter the date and reason the request was closed (completed, no longer needed, etc.) at the bottom of the Request form. If your Requests for Volunteers have been entered into a database, be sure to enter the date and reason the Request was closed as soon as possible. Place open Requests in one file and closed Requests in the other, in either numerical order or alphabetically by agency.
- You will also be overseeing the operation of the Volunteer Reception Center data entry. If there is computer access, you will:
 - ensure the information from the phone bank is being entered by the data entry person.
 - ensure the database is updated when volunteer positions are filled.
 - ensure smooth communication between data entry and volunteer coordinators.
- If there is no computer access, you will:
 - Receive agency information from the phone bank and/or runner.
 - Ensure runner hand writes the agency information on the master board for the Interviewers.
 - If the runner is too busy, once the Interviewers fill a position at an agency, the Interviewer will give you the volunteer's application. You will see where the volunteer was referred and mark off on the master board that the position was filled
 - Remove the agency from the master board once all volunteer positions have been filled.
 - Give the volunteer's application to the runner to give to the data entry person.
 - Ensure all activity is documented and entered into the database

Qualifications—Knowledgeable about all aspects of the Volunteer Reception Center including all of the various position titles. Needs to possess good communication, organizational skills and computer skills.

Commitment Required—8 hour shifts.

Volunteer Supervisor—Volunteer Reception Center Director and Volunteer Center Director

PHONE BANK STAFF

Work Location—See the VRC floor plan

Responsibilities and Duties—You will be handling two types of calls, those from agencies requesting volunteers and those from people wanting to volunteer. The information you record about each call must be complete and in sufficient detail to facilitate matching volunteers to the needs.

- When you receive a call from an agency, fill out a Request for Volunteers form while you are speaking with the agency caller. If there is a computer available for entering the needs into a database, Data Entry staff should enter the need as soon as possible.
- Next, call a runner by raising the flag at your station. Ask the Runner to post the volunteer request on the dry erase board in view of the Interviewers (Station 2) and then to give the Request for Volunteers form to the Data Coordinator (Station 3).
- When people call to volunteer, thank them and give them the following registration options:
 - If they choose to register online or by fax, they will be e-mailed or called to discuss possible assignments and given further instructions. If the caller represents a group that wishes to volunteer together, ask them to be patient while you determine where they can be of most help. It might take one day or several to match them with a need, especially if they are coming from out of town. Post the caller's inquiry on the board behind the Phone Bank. When a match (a mission) is found for that volunteer, e-mail or call them back and schedule a time for them to come to the VRC to sign their online registration form, pick up their referral form and ID bracelet(s), and attend a safety briefing. Make sure that the volunteer's online registration form is waiting with the Interviewers (Station 2) on their arrival date.
 - If they choose to register in person at the VRC, they will be given instructions when they arrive.

Qualifications—Must be able to communicate over the phone with people and record what your conversations were about.

Commitment Required—8-hour shift preferred

Volunteer Supervisor—VRC Director and Shift Manager

RUNNERS

Work Location—See the VRC floor plan

Responsibilities and Duties—Your job is to carry information from one station to another within the VRC. When a station needs you to pick up forms, restock their supplies or escort a volunteer from one place to another, they will signal you at their station.

- Please watch carefully for this signal and respond promptly, in order to keep the information and volunteers moving smoothly through the registration and referral process.
- When you are asked to post a new Volunteer Request on the board, be sure to use only the markers provided and write neatly and large enough so that the interviewers can see the requests clearly. After posting the request on the board, give the Request form to the Data Coordinator (Station 3).

Qualifications—Must be able to move around the Volunteer Reception Center to visit the different stations.

Commitment Required—8 hour shift

Volunteer Supervisor—VRC Director and Shift Manager

SAFETY TRAINER

Work Location—See the VRC floor plan

Responsibilities and Duties—Your job is to brief all new volunteers on what to expect at their job sites, how to be safe while volunteering and how to take good care of themselves after their experience. When a small group has gathered, thank the volunteers for offering to help.

- Pass around a clipboard with an attendance sheet and check to be sure that all participants have signed it.
- Read the entire Safety Training sheet slowly, emphasizing the importance of following supervisors' instructions at the worksite. Encourage everyone to attend a debriefing, if available, at the end of their shift. Ask if there are any questions. If a question arises to which you do not know the answer, summon a runner. Ask the runner to summon the VRC Director or other VRC staff to answer the question. When your briefing is concluded, explain where the volunteers should move to the ID area.
- File the attendance sheet for each class in the folder and turn them in to the VRC Director daily. If the content of your safety briefing changes (new material is added or safety instructions change), staple a copy of the new safety training script to the attendance sheet of the first class in which the new script was used. Maintenance of these records is important to help protect the Coordinating Agency and local disaster officials from liability, should a volunteer be injured on the job.

Qualifications—Must be able to talk to groups about safety issues. Also, must be able to answer questions volunteers might have about safety.

Commitment Required—8 hour shift

Volunteer Supervisor—VRC Director and Shift Manager

SHIFT MANAGER

Work Location—Volunteer Reception Center

Responsibilities and Duties—Oversee the operation of the Volunteer Reception Center. You will:

- Clearly identify one entrance and one exit
- Set up the room for efficient flow of volunteers and information
- Brief and assign tasks to staff and volunteers of the VRC
- Monitor the operation and make necessary adjustments
- Resolve challenges as they arise

Qualifications—Needs to be knowledgeable about all aspects of the Volunteer Reception Center including all of the various position titles. Also, needs to have some management experience and effectively be able to run the entire Volunteer Reception Center.

Commitment Required—8 hour shifts

Volunteer Supervisor—Volunteer Reception Center Director, Volunteer Center Director.