Managing Spontaneous
Volunteers in Times of Disaster:

The Synergy
of Structure
and Good
Intentions

This is an update of the 2004 publication of the same name that, like its predecessor, it was developed and printed with the generous support of The UPS Foundation. This publication is offered as a basis for developing a national strategy on working with unaffiliated volunteers and is based on an analysis of effective practices and models. It is an outgrowth of an earlier publication, *Preventing a Disaster Within the Disaster: The Effective Use and Management of Unaffiliated Volunteers,* which outlined the challenges involved in working with unaffiliated volunteers and offered recommendations on how to develop a national strategy.

>> Quick Reference Guide

Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster:

>> The Synergy of Structure and Good Intentions

When disaster – natural or man-made – strikes a community, specific emergency management and nonprofit organizations automatically respond according to a pre-established plan. Each of these designated organizations has a specific role to play in ensuring an effective response to and recovery from the disaster's devastation. Yet one element within the present system continues to pose a challenge: spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers.

Spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers – our neighbors and ordinary citizens – often arrive on-site at a disaster ready to help. Yet because they are not associated with any part of the existing emergency management response system, their offers of help are often underutilized and even problematic to professional responders. *The paradox is clear: people's willingness to volunteer versus the system's capacity to utilize them effectively.*

The events of September 11 dramatically illustrated the need for better planning in this arena, and the issue of unaffiliated volunteers began receiving increased attention. In April 2002, UPS, the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network, and FEMA (Federal Emergency Management Agency) convened a National Leadership Forum on Disaster Volunteerism. The Forum brought together leadership and operations experts from the volunteer and emergency management communities, Volunteer Centers, firefighters, local government emergency management staff, and those with years of hands-on experience. Participants representing over 45 organizations identified challenges and opportunities associated with disaster volunteering; developed preliminary recommendations and action steps for addressing the challenges of spontaneous volunteers; and secured commitment from participating organizations to work toward the recommendations proposed.

The Forum's initial work and findings were important first steps. Quite evident, however, was the need for additional tools, training and resources to implement recommendations at the local level. In the spring of 2003, the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) coalition established a Volunteer Management Committee to continue this work. The committee consists of representatives with hands-on experience in emergency management and volunteer management. Members were chosen for their broad expertise as well as their ability to secure a commitment of resources by their organizations towards implementing the recommendations. The committee is staffed by the Points of Light Foundation and funded by a grant from The UPS Foundation.

The committee began the arduous task of compiling effective practices and models for emergency management planning and implementation in the area of unaffiliated volunteers. Modeled after the successful National Donations Management Strategy, the committee has developed draft unifying Principles on the Management of Unaffiliated Volunteers and a companion Concepts of Operation. These documents are intended to serve as a basis for a national strategy that fundamentally recognizes the extraordinary resource volunteers can be in an emergency management system structured to integrate and fully utilize their contributions.

Given the limited resources available at the federal, state, and local levels, the successful integration of citizen involvement in an emergency management setting is imperative to prepare for, respond to, recover from, and mitigate the effects of disasters in our communities. Success, however, will require new levels of cooperation and commitment to partnership among the voluntary sector, professional first-responders, and all levels of government. While this may be a challenging goal, the priority and long-term value of this work cannot be denied.

Managing Unaffiliated Volunteers

>> National Principles

The management of unaffiliated, often spontaneous, volunteers in times of emergency is guided by the following principles and values:

1. **Volunteering and Community Life**
Volunteering is a valuable part of every healthy community. Volunteers come from all segments of society and often provide essential services. Everyone has the potential to contribute strength and resources in times of emergency.

2. **Volunteering and the Emergency Management Framework**
Volunteers are necessary to efficiently assist those impacted by disasters. Their proven value, however, can only be maximized when they are fully integrated within the emergency management framework.

3. **The Value of Affiliation**
Ideally, all volunteers should be affiliated with an established organization and trained for specific disaster response activities. However, the spontaneous nature of individual volunteering is inevitable; therefore it must be anticipated, planned for, and managed.

4. **Volunteer Involvement in the Four Phases**
There are valuable and appropriate roles for unaffiliated spontaneous volunteers in mitigation, preparedness, response, and recovery – as well as in other areas of community need. The response phase provides an opportunity to direct volunteers toward longer-term affiliation and community involvement.

5. **Management Systems**
Volunteers are a valuable resource when they are trained, assigned, and supervised within established emergency management systems. Similar to donations management, an essential element of every emergency management plan is the clear designation of responsibility for the on-site coordination of unaffiliated volunteers. The Volunteer Coordination Team (VCT) is the mechanism for ensuring the effective utilization of this human resource.

6. **Shared Responsibility**
The mobilization, management, and support of volunteers is primarily a responsibility of local government and nonprofit sector agencies, with support from the state level. Specialized planning, information sharing, and a management structure are necessary to coordinate efforts and maximize the benefits of volunteer involvement.

7. **Volunteer Expectations**
Volunteers are successful participants in emergency management systems when they are flexible, self-sufficient, aware of risks, and willing to be coordinated by local emergency management experts. Volunteers must accept the obligation to "do no harm."

8. The Impact on Volunteers
The priority of volunteer activity is assistance to others. When this spontaneous activity is well managed, it also positively affects the volunteers themselves and thus contributes to the healing process of both individuals and the larger community.

9. Build on Existing Capacity
All communities include individuals and organizations that know how to mobilize and involve volunteers effectively. Emergency management experts and VOAD partners are encouraged to identify and utilize all existing capacity for integrating unaffiliated volunteers.

10. Information Management
Clear, consistent, and timely communication is essential to successful management of unaffiliated volunteers. A variety of opportunities and messages should be utilized in order to educate the public, minimize confusion, and clarify expectations.

11. Consistent Terminology
When referring to volunteer involvement in emergency management, it is helpful to use consistent terminology. The following terms and definitions are recommended:

Affiliated volunteers are attached to a recognized voluntary or nonprofit organization and are trained for specific disaster response activities. Their relationship with the organization precedes the immediate disaster, and they are invited by that organization to become involved in a particular aspect of emergency management.

Unaffiliated Volunteers, also known as Spontaneous, Emergent, and/or Convergent Volunteers, are individuals who offer to help or self-deploy to assist in emergency situations without fully coordinating their activities with emergency management at the local, state, territorial/tribal nations or federal level. They are considered "unaffiliated" in that they are acting independently, as an individual or group, outside of the recognized coordination system of the impacted jurisdiction(s).

C*onvergent Groups* include individuals that may have a distinguishable identity, organizational structure and a collective desire to assist. These groups do not have an affiliation with emergency management at the local, state, territorial/tribal or federal level. They are considered "Convergent" in that they are acting independently, as an individual or group, outside of the recognized coordination system of the impacted jurisdiction(s).

NOTE: These principles are valid and applicable for volunteers deployed both within the United States and internationally.

Managing Unaffiliated Volunteers

>> Concepts of Operation

The Volunteer Management Committee of the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD) developed these concepts of operation to serve as guidance in planning for and managing unaffiliated volunteers during all phases of emergency management. The intent is to provide recommendations on structure and process based on best practices in the field, while at the same time allowing flexibility for adaptation to specific local communities and various types of disasters. These recommendations are offered as a framework upon which to build local emergency management strategies related to unaffiliated volunteers. This booklet is meant to be user-friendly. Helpful checklists are included for the use of readers.

>> Voluntary Organization Information

Use the following Web sites to find local voluntary organization information

- Citizen Corps Councils — www.citizencorps.gov/councils/

- Local VOAD listing —   www.nvoad.org/membersdb.php?members=State

- Volunteer Centers — www.pointsoflight.org/centers/find_center.cfm

>> Mitigation

- Identify existing local volunteer coordination processes and protocols.

- Determine priority needs and roles prior to an event through outreach to organizations that can utilize unaffiliated volunteers. Identify potential volunteer opportunities to expedite community involvement following a disaster.

- Review local and state hazard analysis and collect community demographic information for implications regarding the management of unaffiliated volunteers.

- Develop relationships with local, state, and national Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) member agencies and/or with groups with regional or national capabilities to manage unaffiliated volunteers during disaster operations.

- Emphasize the importance of collaboration in pre-disaster planning. Encourage involvement with existing community coalitions such as Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COADs) and Citizen Corps Councils.

- Research existing volunteer liability issues and laws that affect unaffiliated volunteer utilization. Encourage agencies and organizations that will receive unaffiliated volunteers to clarify their limits of liability protection.

- Develop media and public education campaigns that encourage people to undertake pre-involvement and affiliation with existing voluntary organizations.

  Develop standardized public education and media messages to use before, during, and after disaster events.

  Stress the need to avoid a "disaster within the disaster" with regard to the involvement of unaffiliated volunteers.

  Establish relationships with ethnically diverse media outlets and community leaders to ensure messages are designed to reach all segments of the community.

- Utilize Citizen Corps efforts, where appropriate, to create optimum conditions for volunteer involvement.

- Utilize resources that support volunteering such as State Service Commissions, state Associations of Volunteer Centers, networks of volunteer administrators, and Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) member agencies to create awareness and recognition of the role of volunteers in homeland security and emergency management.

>> Preparedness

- Write a plan for the function of Unaffiliated Volunteer Management and include it in the local or state emergency operations plan as an Appendix.

- Form a Volunteer Coordination Team (VCT) to include representatives from the lead organization for the function of Unaffiliated Volunteer Management. (The VCT can be integrated into an EOC organizational structure, and, if possible, include the VCT component in local ICS planning and preparedness). Representatives from other partner and stakeholder organizations — such as emergency management, Community Emergency Response Teams (CERT), Retired Senior Volunteer (RSVP), AmeriCorps/VISTA programs, local churches, and civic organizations — should also be included.

- Ensure the VCT is a component of the COAD, Citizen Corps Council, local VOAD, or other disaster collaborations.

- Identify and train a state-level lead for unaffiliated volunteer management utilizing existing sources of expertise such as the State Office of Volunteerism, the Corporation for National & Community Service (CNCS), and the state Association of Volunteer Centers. These state-level resources should support community coordination efforts and be prepared to support a local unaffiliated volunteer management function in a time of disaster.

- Encourage formation of disaster coalitions such as Citizen Corps Councils, COADs, or local VOADs to promote interagency coordination, communication, collaboration, and cooperation.

- Develop relationships and exchange information among first responders, emergency management personnel, and voluntary organization staff.

- Identify all potential partners and build cooperative relationships with organizations such as:

Universities	Civic Associations	Voluntary Agencies
Youth Groups	Foundations	Senior Programs
Schools	Faith-based Organizations	National Service Programs
Ethnic Associations	Corporations/Businesses	Hospitals
Neighborhood Groups	Special Needs Groups	Professionals in Volunteer Coordination

>> State Plan Examples

To view examples of state plans that include Unaffiliated Volunteer Management, visit www.nemaweb.org/donations_management/index.html.

MANAGING SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS IN TIMES OF DISASTER: THE SYNERGY OF STRUCTURE AND GOOD INTENTIONS

■ Build a Volunteer Reception Center "Go Kit."

>> Volunteer Reception Center "Go Kit"

"Go Kits" include office supplies, forms, lists, maps, special equipment, etc. Every "Go Kit" should include processes, tools, and forms that support the following functions:

■ Registration / Orientation

■ Interviews

■ Data Entry and Coordination

■ Volunteer Identification (issued on behalf of receiving agency, if appropriate)

■ Safety Training

■ Job Training (this may be done at the VRC, or by the end-user organization)

■ Phone Bank

■ Facilities Management (supply area, break areas, waiting room)

■ Logistics/Supplies

■ Public Information

■ Runners

■ Prepare to establish a Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) where large numbers of volunteers can be efficiently processed and referred to organizations who are in need of services.

Designate an entity (for example, a local Volunteer Center or team of experienced volunteer resource managers) to manage VRC activities.

Identify potential sites for the VRC and develop contingency plans in the event that pre-identified sites are unavailable. Some considerations in selecting a site include: the provision of adequate space for all VRC functions, availability of parking, accessibility, and proximity to the affected area. Determine what organization is responsible for obtaining the site and paying incurred costs (such as rent, maintenance, damages, and utilities) following a disaster.

Develop forms and key documents for the VRC such as:

Volunteer Instructions

Disaster Volunteer Registration Form with Release of Liability

Safety Orientation Checklist

Disaster Volunteer Referral

Role Descriptions

Work Site Sign-in/Sign-out Record

VRC Volunteer Sign-in/Sign-out

Coordinating Agency Employee Sign-in/Sign-out

Expenses Incurred by Coordinating Agency

>> Preparedness (continued)

Develop streamlined registration, screening, and interviewing procedures for unaffiliated volunteers that include:

<table>
<tr><td>Database that catalogs needed skills</td><td>Approximate number of volunteers needed to perform tasks</td></tr>
<tr><td>Information about individual volunteers (for example: skills, interests, availability, geographic location)</td><td>Compatibility of relevant computer systems</td></tr>
<tr><td>Contact information for voluntary organizations</td><td>Back-up plan for power failures and portability</td></tr>
<tr><td>Tasks, roles, and time commitment requirements for individuals and groups of volunteers</td><td></td></tr>
</table>

Train paid staff and key volunteers to set up the VRC.

Develop procedures for documenting pertinent activities, training, expenses, volunteer hours, dollar value of donated time, skills, and success stories.

Establish agreements with local or state emergency management agencies regarding expense reimbursement and required documentation.

Develop methods to evaluate volunteers' experience — both process and outcome — from organizations that utilized referred volunteers, emergency management staff, and from volunteers themselves.

>> Preparedness Checklist

- Write a Plan
- Form Volunteer Coordination Team
- Ensure VCT Is Component of Disaster Collaborations
- Identify and Train State-Level Lead
- Encourage Formation of Disaster Coalitions
- Develop Relationships/Exchange Information
- Identify Potential Partners
- Prepare to Establish a Volunteer Reception Center

- Build a Volunteer Reception Center "Go Kit"
- Designate Entity to Manage Groups of Unaffiliated Volunteers
- Review Insurance Policies
- Develop Communication Tools
- Conduct Trainings and Exercises
- Build Capacity of Volunteer Organizations
- Develop Mutual Aid Systems
- Develop "Shut Down" Plan

>> Communications Tools

Consider keeping on hand templates of the following communication tools:

- Pre-scripted News Releases (that provide information regarding volunteer opportunities, needed skills, and how to volunteer)
- Affiliation Information (for individuals on how and where to affiliate)

- Website, List-serves, Toll-free Hotlines
- Media Outreach Strategy (that targets all segments of the community, including culturally and linguistically diverse populations)

- Designate an entity to manage groups of unaffiliated volunteers in coordination with the VRC. Develop a process for registering and deploying these groups with appropriate attention paid to their leadership structure, support needs, availability, transportation, etc.

- Review applicable liability and insurance policies and determine liability authority regarding the engagement of volunteers. Ensure that organizations accepting referred volunteers are aware of applicable state liability laws and insurance issues.

- Develop a variety of communication tools (see table above).

- Conduct training and exercises for managing unaffiliated volunteers. Work with community partners and emergency management agencies to expand community exercises to include managers of unaffiliated volunteers.

- Build the capacity of voluntary organizations to absorb and successfully integrate unaffiliated volunteers. Develop tools and strategies for creating alternative roles and management structures appropriate for emergency, and short-term implementation.

- Develop mutual aid systems (like the Emergency Management Assistance Compact) and/or regional support for a VRC and the management of unaffiliated volunteers. Communities and/or states should consider incorporating VRCs and the function of Unaffiliated Volunteer Management resources into deployable teams in order to assist jurisdictions in need and to develop capacity and experience.

- Develop a "shut down" or demobilization plan for how the VRC will be phased out when it is no longer needed.

>> Response

- Implement the Unaffiliated Volunteer Management Plan.

- Activate the Volunteer Coordination Team (VCT). Use pre-identified and trained staff to fill key roles. The VCT will function within the Emergency Operations Center (EOC) as the primary coordination cell for unaffiliated volunteers.

- Activate the Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) to serve as the coordination point for unaffiliated volunteers, develop partnerships with community and responding agencies, identify volunteer opportunities, and fill staffing needs. Operational considerations include the following steps:

  Implement a plan to register and place unaffiliated volunteers.

  Implement a process to determine volunteers' skills, interests, and ability to do the assigned work.

  Identify organizations' needs and volunteer opportunities. Develop or identify opportunities for volunteer groups as well as individuals. As needed, do targeted recruiting of volunteers to fill positions.

  Refer unaffiliated volunteers to appropriate response agencies after initial screening.

  Ensure that receiving organizations are aware of their responsibility for any additional credentialing or identification procedures.

  Provide information on available medical and mental health services to ensure the well-being of all workers.

  Provide security within the VRC and other facilities where volunteer management is taking place.

  Provide a hazard-free work environment.

  Evaluate process and outcomes by all stakeholders (VCT members, emergency management agencies, recipient agencies, and unaffiliated volunteers).

  Recognize the efforts of individual volunteers and the community.

- Address communication needs:

  Coordinate with the Public Information Officer at the Emergency Operation Center (EOC).

  Utilize pre-developed public messages about how and where to volunteer. Let all segments of the community know what resources are needed during the response and recovery phases of the disaster.

  Use a flexible outreach strategy to maximize media and public interest generated by the disaster.

  Implement the pre-developed media plan. Ensure that messages to the media and public are standardized and consistent.

  Ensure that receiving organizations are aware of their responsibility for any additional credentialing or identification procedures.

  Provide ongoing contact with each volunteer after they have completed their service if they remain unaffiliated. Provide information on other opportunities, organizations, and the benefits of affiliating before a disaster.

  Activate a dedicated toll-free number, or use other community resources such as 2-1-1.

  Ensure that all stakeholders (such as voluntary organizations, community-based groups, and government) have access to current information on volunteer recruitment and opportunities. Utilize available technologies, such as Web sites and listservs.

When collecting information on volunteers, consider tracking the following types of data:

- Name
- Address
- Phone/Fax/E-Mail
- Availability
- Skills (languages, communications, computer, counseling, heavy equipment operator, medical, etc.)
- Previous Emergency Training/Certification
- Task Preferences (willing to provide animal care, animal rescue, child care, clean-up, damage assessment, data entry, driving, etc.)
- Geographic Area Preferences
- Phase of Emergency (skills and interests are most suited to use in mitigation/preparedness/response/recovery)

- If necessary, activate state or regional mutual aid agreements to support the Volunteer Coordination Team (VCT) or the Volunteer Reception Center (VRC).

- Maintain a database of volunteers with special skills for use during the recovery phase. The VCT should promote close coordination with long-term recovery groups to identify new or ongoing opportunities. Ensure the continuity of service to stakeholders and volunteers as the transition from response to recovery is completed.

>> Recovery

- Strengthen and maintain the long-term activation of the Volunteer Coordination Team (VCT) in support of the recovery operation. Provide for the continuation of services offered to stakeholders and unaffiliated volunteers during the response phase. Tasks of the VCT during recovery may include:

  Activate a broad-based volunteer referral system that includes organizations involved in recovery and those with which volunteers can affiliate.

  Coordinate with agencies to update, develop, and share hard copy and web-based portfolios of prospective volunteer roles and skills needed for recovery.

  Provide support to long-term recovery organizations by leveraging volunteers from response to the recovery phase, as appropriate. As needed, develop volunteer roles and encourage participation in mitigation and preparedness activities.

  Identify roles for groups of volunteers, not just individuals.

- Review applicable liability and insurance policies, and determine liability authority, regarding the engagement of volunteers. Ensure organizations accepting referred volunteers are aware of applicable state liability laws and insurance issues.

- Provide stakeholders with database access, screening, and other ongoing support.

- Ensure the availability of services for volunteers, including counseling, operational debriefing, health screening, or mental health.

- Share resources and pertinent information with agencies utilizing unaffiliated volunteers. Examples of helpful information are:

  Psychology of volunteerism   Reasons to affiliate

  Template for messages   Motivation techniques

- Coordinate and liaise with various groups, organizations, and government programs to secure funds, grants, and other resources. In addition to accessing traditional voluntary organizations as resources, VCT members might acquire resources through the Corporation for National and Community Service, Citizen Corps, The U.S. Department of Labor *National Emergency Grants* (NEG), Workforce Development, and the Hazard Mitigation Grant Program. One example of utilizing the resources of nontraditional voluntary organizations might be hiring volunteer coordination specialists for long-term recovery using Department of Labor emergency grants.

- Capture and document important facts, such as the dollar value of unaffiliated volunteers, success stories, and special activities. Utilize photographs, print and video stories from the media, and feedback from organizations.

- Collect information from volunteers about their experience. Use this input for evaluation and future planning.

- Recognize and thank volunteers for their service to the community.

- Follow-up with volunteers to promote long-term retention. Encourage affiliation with organizations that provide opportunities matching volunteers' skills and interests.

- Evaluate important functions such as the engagement of volunteers, execution of tasks, and committee functionality. Ensure that recommendations and revisions are made to the Unaffiliated Volunteer Management Plan.

- Demobilize the Unaffiliated Volunteer Management function when conditions warrant.

These Principles and Concepts were developed by the Volunteer Management Committee of National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD). They serve as the philosophical framework for the effective management of unaffiliated volunteers during all phases of emergency management. For further information, please contact: DisasterVolunteering@PointsofLight.org

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Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster:
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>> Glossary

CERT: Community Emergency Response Teams

CNCS: Corporation for National Community Service

COAD: Community Organizations Active in Disaster

EOC: Emergency Operations Center

FEMA: Federal Emergency Management Agency

ICS: Incident Command System

NEG: National Emergency Grants

NVOAD: National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

RSVP: Retired Senior Volunteer Program

VCT: Volunteer Coordination Team

VOAD: Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster

VRC: Volunteer Reception Center

POINTS OF LIGHT
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NATIONAL VOLUNTARY ORGANIZATIONS ACTIVE in DISASTER

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