

Volunteer Recruitment and Management



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Volunteer Recruitment and Management



Session Objective

This session is for emergency managers and related professionals working with all types of volunteers and coordinating with voluntary agencies. Content will include procedures and tools for building and working with voluntary emergency management organizations.

Session Outline

- Volunteers in Emergency Management
- Developing a Volunteer Program
- Special Issues

Volunteer Recruitment and Management



VOLUNTEERS IN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Volunteer Recruitment and Management



Volunteers in Emergency Management

The United States has a long history of volunteerism - a history that has gotten stronger since the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001. People of all ages and with all types of skills volunteer - and, with the President's emphasis on volunteerism, the current trend can be expected to continue.

So what does this mean for your volunteer program? In a nutshell, it means that your volunteer program can become as important to your community as you make it. Americans *want* to volunteer. Your job will be to develop a program that matches volunteer skills to agency needs so that both the volunteer *and* your agency accomplish their goals.

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What is a volunteer?

A **volunteer** is an individual who, beyond the confines of paid employment and normal responsibilities, contributes time and service to assist in the accomplishment of a mission.

Think for a moment about why people volunteer. Then, write down several reasons for volunteering in your notes. We'll share some of your reasons in just a minute.

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Types of volunteers

Professional. These are volunteers who are licensed or have a specialized skill. Professional volunteers include medical service providers such as physicians, nurses, emergency medical technicians; mental health professionals; lawyers; building contractors and inspectors; computer technicians; clergy; accountants, etc. These people may volunteer individually or as a group.

Unskilled. These volunteers do not already have the skills that could be useful to emergency management programs, but they do offer their time and can be trained.

Spontaneous. These are people who volunteer in the immediate aftermath of a disaster or an emergency. They may be skilled or unskilled and may be from the affected area or from outside the area. Channeling spontaneous volunteers - especially if they present in large numbers as they did in New York City following September 11 - presents special management challenges.

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Types of volunteers

Affiliated. These volunteers are attached to a recognized *voluntary agency* that has trained them for disaster response and has a mechanism in place to address their use in an emergency.

A ***voluntary agency*** (or ***VOLAG***) is an established organization whose mission is to provide emergency services to the community through the use of trained volunteers. Examples of VOLAGs include The American Red Cross and many church-related agencies such as The Salvation Army, Mennonite Disaster Services, or the Southern Baptist Disaster Relief. Most, if not all, of these organizations have registered nonprofit (501(c)3) status, and many belong to the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD).

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Involving Volunteers - Benefits and Challenges

Think about some of the benefits you've realized in working with volunteers. Please share some of those benefits with the group.

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Involving Volunteers - Benefits

Volunteers offer much more to emergency management than free labor. In fact, the benefits of involving volunteers are many. Volunteers:

Provide services more cost effectively.

Provide access to a broader range of expertise and experience.

Increase paid staff members' effectiveness by enabling them to focus their efforts where they are most needed or by providing additional services.

Provide resources for accomplishing maintenance tasks or upgrading what would otherwise be put on the back burner while immediate needs demand attention.

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Involving Volunteers - Benefits (continued)

Enable the agency to launch programs in areas in which paid staff lacks expertise.

Act as liaisons with the community to gain support for programs.

Provide a direct line to private resources in the community.

Facilitate networking.

Increase public awareness and program visibility.

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Involving Volunteers - Challenges

Along with the many benefits of involving volunteers, there are also challenges—some real and some perceived—around working with volunteers.

Training and supervision of volunteers take a lot of time.

Volunteers do not stay, so the time spent training them is wasted.

Technically competent people do not volunteer.

Volunteers threaten paid staff by competing with them.

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Involving Volunteers – Challenges (continued)

Volunteers lower professional standards.

Volunteers become territorial and/or attempt to take over.

Insurance rates will increase.

Volunteers are not available during business hours.

Using volunteers interferes with the ability to negotiate for additional funding or new paid staff positions.

Note that training and supervision is an actual challenge inherent with both volunteers and paid staff.

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Involving Volunteers – Challenges (continued)

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Involving Volunteers

Many perceived obstacles about using volunteers are actually misperceptions and the result of poor planning and/or management. You may face very real challenges when developing a volunteer program in your agency, such as a sparse population spread over great distances (in rural areas) from which to draw volunteers. These challenges can often be overcome through adequate planning, good management, and some creativity.

Read the scenario below and decide whether it is illustrative of an obstacle to involving volunteers.

You have received reports that one of your volunteers is becoming confrontational with victims coming in to inquire about disaster assistance. After speaking with the volunteer, you learn that she has lost a family member in the disaster.

How would you handle this situation?

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Developing a Volunteer Program

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The Roles and Responsibilities of a Volunteer Program Director

If your agency chooses to develop and/or manage its own agency volunteer program, it will no doubt need one person to be in charge of the program (referred to here as the Volunteer Program Director). Whether that person is you or someone that you coordinate with, the Volunteer Program Director's responsibilities should include:

Planning for volunteer involvement.

Overseeing the implementation of the overall volunteer strategy.

Setting volunteer program policy, perhaps in conjunction with a committee.

Developing and managing the volunteer budget. (Don't forget the cost of developing training manuals, Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs), etc.)

Promoting and publicizing the volunteer program.

Volunteer Recruitment and Management



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The Roles and Responsibilities of a Volunteer Program Director (continued)

Recruiting, selecting, assigning, training, and supervising the volunteers.

Coordinating with staff and programs with which the volunteers interface.

Each of these tasks should be developed as part of the process of volunteer program design.

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The Roles and Responsibilities of a Volunteer Program Director (continued)

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Steps in Developing a Volunteer Program

There are seven steps in developing your volunteer program, including several that concern working with individual volunteers. One goal of performing the activities in the steps is to get you started on creating products tailored to your own use when you return to your workplace and work with volunteers.

The steps are:

1. Agency and Program Needs Analysis
2. Writing Volunteer Job Descriptions
3. Recruiting Volunteers
4. Placing Volunteers
5. Training Volunteers
6. Supervising and Evaluating Volunteers
7. Program Evaluation

Let's brainstorm for a few minutes on ways to approach each of the above items.

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SPECIAL ISSUES

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Dealing with spontaneous volunteers

People who call to volunteer or just show up after a disaster are called *spontaneous* (or *emergent*) *volunteers*.

Let's begin examining this issue with three scenarios that illustrate the potential benefits and challenges of spontaneous volunteers.

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Dealing with spontaneous volunteers

Scenario 1

A boat carrying 50 passengers and crew on a large lake in the Midwest is caught in a heavy storm and capsizes. Approximately a dozen nearby boaters rush to the overturned vessel. Some dive repeatedly under the boat and help locate and free many people who are trapped underneath. Others pull people from the water and bring them to shore. All of the victims are rescued before professional first responders even reach the site.

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Dealing with spontaneous volunteers

Scenario 2

In response to a flash flood disaster, volunteers are sent out to conduct a needs assessment in the community. Two of the volunteers meet a family that apparently needs food, clothing, and other essentials. Touched by the family's plight, the workers "adopt" the family for the afternoon. The volunteers take the family to a local shopping center where they pay for food and clothing out of their own pockets. As it turned out, the family had no damages from the flood but was typical of hundreds of families from this economically depressed area of the State.

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Dealing with spontaneous volunteers

Scenario 3

A plane hits a tall building filled with office workers. People are escaping the burning building into the streets. A chiropractor's assistant is walking down the street and sees the people running toward him. He hurries toward those in need and helps a woman who had fallen. He continues to help people flee until they are out of danger. Then he joins a construction crew that pulls debris from the street so the emergency vehicles can get through. For the next few days, he does not go to his paid job, but continues to work tirelessly at various volunteer jobs to help the victims of this disaster. This man goes on to become a paid staff member for a voluntary agency.

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Dealing with spontaneous volunteers

As illustrated by the first scenario, spontaneous volunteers present potential benefits:

They supply extra (or immediate) assistance that may be needed in an emergency. For example, sometimes lots of people are needed for unskilled work, such as sandbagging rising streams. Thus they can fill in when the response is shorthanded.

They represent a willing workforce, some of whom may go on to become trained, affiliated volunteers who can be counted on in future disasters.

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Dealing with spontaneous volunteers

Unaffiliated volunteers have not been screened (i.e., had background checks). Thus, some “volunteers” may have motives other than helping. They may be potential terrorists, or at least “rip-off artists.” Sometimes these “volunteers” show up repeatedly following successive disasters. Those volunteers who are honest (and it’s not always easy to tell the difference until it is too late) may need close supervision because of their lack of training - which was the challenge illustrated by the second scenario.

Even though spontaneous volunteers can potentially create problems if they “just show up,” it is best to have a plan for how to deal with them - because they will show up. Any major disaster will bring out spontaneous volunteers who are unaffiliated. And in all fairness, they can be valuable assets if you have a system for using them.

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Dealing with spontaneous volunteers

Volunteers who are not needed should be tactfully sent home to avoid their potential interference with the response effort. However, if possible, their information (i.e., name, address, and phone number) should be saved and entered into a database. Someone can then follow up after the emergency to recruit these individuals to become affiliated and trained volunteers.

Volunteer success story

In one documented case in Florida, the community used unaffiliated spontaneous volunteers for cleanup after a tornado. Osceola County completed its cleanup 35 days sooner and \$6.6 million less than initial estimates because of volunteer help. As a bonus, by keeping records of volunteer hours for categories of work, the county could apply volunteer work as the major portion of its matching share requirement for FEMA disaster assistance.

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Legal considerations

Information provided in this section is not intended to replace legal advice from counsel. It is meant to help you become aware of and understand how the law might affect volunteers in emergency management. Proper management practices can help you to minimize legal problems. *You should consult your community's legal advisor whenever you have questions.*

Volunteers for government agencies may be subject to the Federal tort claims act. A *tort* is an act that harms another person, whether intentional (e.g., assault) or unintentional (e.g., negligence). Most lawsuits are based on injuries resulting from negligence. Negligence is defined as not acting with the care that a reasonable person would have used.

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Legal considerations (continued)

If a volunteer assisting in the disaster response accidentally harms a person or their property, the law generally recognizes that the employer is responsible for the actions and inactions of his or her employee. The term “employee” covers both paid and unpaid staff. Thus, losses that result from employee actions are the responsibility of the employer.

The Volunteer Protection Act of 1997 provides legal immunity for volunteers working in disaster-related functions who are working within the scope of their assigned responsibilities, are acting in good faith, and are not guilty of gross negligence.

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Legal considerations (continued)

Despite legal protection from liability, in certain circumstances, insurance is still needed. There are different types and levels of liability insurance:

Insurance for nonprofit organizations includes:

- General liability
- Automobile
- Directors/officers
- Personal injury

Insurance for individuals includes:

- Personal automobile
- Malpractice policies
- Personal injury

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Managing volunteer stress

During the course of performing their assigned duties, some volunteers may witness scenes that can cause extreme stress reactions, including:

- Death and injury
- Property devastation
- Extreme emotional reactions of victims

In addition, disaster response work often takes place under less than ideal working conditions. Long hours and skipped meals can contribute to volunteer stress.

Remember that stress is already a part of everyone's life but is usually compounded in a disaster situation. Give your volunteers the resources they need to handle it.

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