



Volunteer Management in Disasters

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Volunteer Management Opinions

- “We don’t need volunteers just your cash!”
- “We don’t have time to mess with you people”
- “Volunteers are chewing up all our local resources”
- “Volunteer agencies are just out to grab some limelight”
- “Volunteers are a serious liability and risk to our community”



Volunteer Management

Consistent Terminology

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. 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).

Convergent 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. 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).

S. Alberta Flood Event





Lessons From S.A. Flood Event

- Alberta flood was a unique event
- Core shutdown resulted in thousands of people without access to their place of business
- Combined with a significant Social Media response
- Resulted in thousands of volunteers converging on the city seeking to lend a hand
- Challenge was in supervising, organizing or communicating with these volunteers to be effective
- **There was no denying the value of work provided by thousands of volunteers within Southern AB.**



Value of Volunteers

- Restorative value of neighbours helping neighbours
- Contribute to community resilience
- Stress relief for both direct survivors and community members (arguably all disaster survivors)
- Volunteers can be a force multiplier (in cases where they are well integrated into the plan)



Risk Posed by Volunteers

- Convergence; the secondary disaster
- Safety / OHS Compliance
- OHS Compliance
- Property Damage
- Volunteer Driven Response (instead of a plan)
- Fickle Volunteers
- Bad Press



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Volunteer Roles

- Operations
 - Sandbagging
 - Clean-Up
- Admin
 - Admin/Scribes
 - Recovery Centre Assistance
- Logistics
 - Extra Hands at Staging
- ESS
 - Psychological First Aid
 - Recovery/Reception Centre Assistance
 - Drivers



Volunteer Management Solutions

- No Silver Bullet – each disaster will be different
- Determine what you want from your volunteers – recruit and train them
- Develop a communications strategy similar to your GIK communications
- Anticipate where people will volunteer, plan for it
 - Develop Check-In Centers with Basic Orientation (Safety)
 - Clearly explain risks involved with volunteering
 - Provide PPE – engage stakeholders for donations
 - Have qualified jobs available for volunteers
 - Provide Supervision as possible (National Guard in WI)
- Thank your Volunteers after the event is over



Volunteer Management

Preparedness

- Plan for the function of Unaffiliated Volunteer Management and include it in your Emergency Response Plan
 - How will your community deal with unaffiliated volunteers?
 - What role will unaffiliated volunteers play post-disaster?
 - Who will take the lead on Volunteer Coordination?
- Form a Volunteer Coordination Team (VCT) to include representatives from the lead organization for the function of Unaffiliated Volunteer Management.



Volunteer Management

Preparedness

- Identify all potential partners and build cooperative relationships with potential partner organizations
- Develop a process for registering and deploying volunteer 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 OHS laws and insurance issues.



Volunteer Management

Preparedness

- Consider establishing a Volunteer Reception Centre (VRC) where large numbers of volunteers can be efficiently processed and referred to organizations in need of service.
 - Designate an entity to manage the VRC activities
 - Identify potential sites for the VRC (primary as well as contingency)
 - Develop forms and key documents for the VRC
 - Develop streamlined registration, screening and interviewing procedures for unaffiliated volunteers
 - Develop procedures for documenting pertinent activities (training, expenses, volunteer hours, value of donated time, skills, etc...)
 - Develop methods to evaluate volunteers' experience



Volunteer Management

Preparedness

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



Volunteer Management

Preparedness

- Conduct training and exercises for managing unaffiliated volunteers.
- Build the capacity of voluntary organizations to absorb and successfully integrate unaffiliated volunteers.
- Develop mutual aid systems and/or regional support for a VRC and the management of unaffiliated volunteers.
- Develop a “shut down” or demobilization plan for how the VRC will be phased out when it is no longer needed



Volunteer Management

Response

- Activate Unaffiliated Volunteer Plan and Activate VRT
- Activate VRC to serve as coordination point for unaffiliated volunteers
- Address Communication Needs
 - Use pre-determined public messages to let community know what services are needed – and NOT needed!
 - Activate a toll-free number or use 2-1-1
 - Ensure all stakeholders are have access to current information on recruitment and opportunities. (use websites or listserves)
 - Utilize pre-developed media plan and saturate media with consistent messaging



Volunteer Management

Response

- Maintain a database of volunteers with special skills for use during the recovery phase.
- Information to retain includes:
 - Name, Contact info
 - Availability
 - Skills (languages, computer, counseling, heavy equipment, medical, etc...)
 - Emergency Management Training
 - Task Preferences (animal care, child care, clean-up, damage assessment, driving, etc...)
 - Geographic area preferences
 - Phase of Emergency



Volunteer Management

Recovery

- Allow Long-Term Recovery Organizations to access volunteer database
- Follow-up with volunteers to promote long-term retention. Encourage affiliation with organizations that provide opportunities matching volunteers' skills and interests.
- Capture and document important facts, such as the dollar value of unaffiliated volunteers, success stories, and special activities.
- Recognize and thank volunteers for their service to the community



Final Considerations

- Volunteer Management requires a great deal of time and manpower
- You must balance the community desire to volunteer with the real needs of the community – risk of being ‘volunteer driven’
- Consider liability issues when it comes to volunteering – how are you training, tasking and supervising?
- Don’t discount the community benefit of neighbours helping neighbours – benefits are far greater than simply operational



RESOURCES

State Plan Examples that include Volunteer Management:

- www.nemaweb.org/donations_management/index.html

Volunteer and Donation Management Points of Consensus:

- National VOAD: www.nvoad.org

Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster

- National VOAD Volunteer Mgmt Committee 2008



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