MANAGING SPONTANEOUS DISASTER VOLUNTEERS

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“Uncoordinated, uncontrolled masses of spontaneous volunteers can interfere with disaster relief operations and cause a secondary disaster.”
TODAY’S AGENDA

- Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Disasters
- Avoiding a “disaster within a disaster”
- How Volunteer Management fits into Donations Management
- Volunteer Reception Center Exercise
The BIG Picture – DONATIONS MANAGEMENT

- 3 components
  - Managing donated services (volunteers)
  - Managing donated goods
  - Managing donated cash
HISTORY...
Hurricane Andrew (1993)

- Issues with managing spontaneous volunteers and unsolicited donated goods.
  - A National Steering Committee within FEMA developed recommendations for States to manage unsolicited goods, unaffiliated volunteers, and cash donations.
Thousands of spontaneous volunteers showed up to help, but there was no management process in place

- Officials recommended that local and state disaster plans include a process to organize and manage volunteers
HISTORY...
Hurricane Floyd (1999)

- NC had no structured process in place for managing volunteers, so a plan was developed “on the fly”
  - After the event, the Governor’s Office (State Commission) developed a plan and began using a national model
Again, thousands of volunteers self-deployed; the federal government (FEMA) was tasked to address spontaneous volunteer management issues

- April 2002, a National Leadership Forum on Disaster Volunteerism brought together a group of experts to address the challenges of spontaneous volunteers in disasters
- 10 key principles were developed to address the management of spontaneous volunteers
HISTORY...
Hurricane Katrina (2005)

- Confusing messages re: volunteers
- No lodging available; volunteers showed up anyway
- Some Gulf states had poor, or no, processes in place for managing the masses of volunteers that self-deployed
- The White House Report tasked FEMA with providing states with additional support
What Has Been Done at the Federal Level?

- In response to the donations problem generated during Hurricane Andrew in 1993, FEMA invited its planning partners (voluntary agencies, State and local governments, and other Federal agencies) to address the problem of unaffiliated or spontaneous volunteers and unsolicited donated goods.

- The National Steering Committee developed planning assumptions and recommendations for States to manage unsolicited goods, unaffiliated volunteers, and undesignated cash donations; these key elements became the initial National Donations Management Strategy.
After the terrorist attacks in the US on September 11, 2001, it was determined that the management of spontaneous volunteers needed to be addressed at the national level. In April 2002, a National Leadership Forum on Disaster Volunteerism (UPS, Points of Light Foundation, and FEMA) brought a diverse group of agencies and individuals together to address the challenges of spontaneous volunteers in times of disasters.

Modeled after the National Donations Management Strategy, 10 key principles were developed to address the management of unaffiliated volunteers specifically and to supplement the national strategy on donations management.
The strategy and key principles are intended to give a basic understanding to the major questions about volunteer and donations management.

Emphasized throughout is that a plan and procedures should be developed by States and their voluntary agency partners to implement these guidelines.

The plan should specify how a State will manage a volunteer and donations operation in a disaster.

National VOAD Volunteer Management Committee has continued the work of the National Leadership Forum on Disaster Volunteerism.
NATIONAL VOLUNTEER & DONATIONS MANAGEMENT STRATEGY
PRINCIPLES OF MANAGING UNAFFILIATED VOLUNTEERS

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. 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.

3. 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.

4. 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.

5. 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.

6. 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.”

7. 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.

8. 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.

9. 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.

10. 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 are not part of a recognized voluntary agency and often have no formal training in emergency response. They are not officially invited to become involved but are motivated by a sudden desire to help others in times of trouble. They come with a variety of skills. They may come from within the affected area or from outside the area. (also known as: “convergent,” “emergent,” “walk-in,” or “spontaneous.”)
PREVENTING A DISASTER
WITHIN THE DISASTER:
The Effective Use and Management of Unaffiliated Volunteers
Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster:

The Synergy of Structure and Good Intentions
What ARE Spontaneous Volunteers?

- People that show up after a disaster to help
- People that are not affiliated with a response organization
- People that may not be trained
Message to Volunteers…

Be Patient!

- Disaster officials may consider a “moratorium” on volunteers until the disaster area is accessible and safe to enter.
- Volunteer needs may not be determined for days after the incident.
- There are often greater needs for volunteer help when the community enters the long-term recovery period.
What Are Some Challenges?

- They may be unaware of hazards involved in disaster work and become injured as a result.
- They may not be self-sufficient, adding to the population risk.
- They may not work in the most effective manner because they are not affiliated with an experienced agency.
- They may be reactive in nature, with a short-lived commitment.
Why Should Volunteers Join an Agency Active in Disaster Response?

- They might be in a better position to find meaningful volunteer work
- Many agencies provide volunteer training
- They might have a better chance of being provided insurance and liability protection
BEST PRACTICE
AND NATIONAL MODEL

Volunteer Reception Center
(aka Emergency Volunteer Center)
A VRC is...

- A place, outside the disaster area, where the time and talents of volunteers are efficiently and effectively linked with disaster relief and recovery efforts
  - Volunteers go to the Center to register to help
  - Organizations who need volunteers call the Center to “place an order” for volunteers
  - Center staff match volunteers with known needs
  - Staff is provided pre-disaster training and participate in an exercise
VRC and the Media

- Media messaging is very important
- Know what the message should be
- Have a concise and consistent message
- Educate the public about the Volunteer Reception Center
  - Place for volunteers to register to help
  - Place for organizations/agencies to call for help
Taking a couple steps away from disaster volunteer management...
Welcome to “Managing Donated Goods”
It’s a bear to manage donated goods...
Immediately after an incident, voluntary agencies are often the first line of assistance for families and individuals.

Much of the assistance that is provided comes from public donations.

Cash donations to voluntary organizations active in the relief effort are preferred.

But...if you want to collect donated goods...
“Drives” vs. “Yard Sales”

- Conduct a donated goods “drive”
  - Media – get the message out
  - Make sure the donations are needed
  - Sort goods prior to shipping
  - Arrange for transportation
  - Contact warehouse to arrange for arrival

- Organize a community “yard sale”
  - Donate proceeds to a voluntary organization that is responding to the disaster
Hurricane Katrina in 2005 reinforced the need for a web-based system for the efficient and effective management of donated goods.

The solution, developed by AidMatrix Foundation, is offered by FEMA free to all states.

Tested in California wildfires, Midwest floods, hurricanes and tropical storms.

Over 20 states have entered into an agreement to use the system in disasters.
Similar AidMatrix web-based systems have been used internationally after disasters...
STATE DONATIONS MANAGEMENT CONCEPT

- Management process is led by a state-level Manager
- Volunteer & Donations Management Coordination Team
- Provides oversight for the state’s process for managing spontaneous volunteers (VRC)
- Processes offers of donated goods
- Provides guidance for cash donations
- Manages Hotline or Call Center
- Writes portion of the State Emergency Operations Plan that relates to Donations Management
At the End of the Day…

While we know there will be an overwhelming outpouring of generosity from the public after a disaster, the federal government and many state governments have worked to create more effective processes for managing volunteers, goods, and cash.

Recent disasters reflect the processes are improving

- Donated goods are being distributed in a timely manner
- Spontaneous volunteers are being matched with organizations that need their help
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