



# Volunteer Reception Center Manual

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# Introduction

There is no time when the resources of a Volunteer Center are more appreciated than in a time of disaster. People in disaster training understand the value of an organization that can quickly mobilize and deploy large numbers of volunteers to meet a broad array of community needs. The skill and ability to match citizens desiring to help with a specific need in the community are exactly what disaster response systems across the country typically lack.

During times of disaster, large numbers of untrained volunteers with little or no connection to disaster relief agencies come forward to help. These spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers, also called convergent volunteers because they often converge at the scene of a disaster, can actually become a hindrance unless there is a designated place where their time and talents are efficiently linked with disaster relief and recovery efforts.

Clearly, mobilizing volunteers for disaster response fits within the mission of a Volunteer Center. Every Volunteer Center that currently recruits and refers volunteers possesses the core competencies necessary to mobilize and deploy spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers in a time of disaster. However, there needs to be a coordinated plan for each Volunteer Center such that valuable time and resources will not be wasted in a time of crisis.

Collaborative planning will help a Volunteer Center determine how its expertise and resources can strengthen the efforts of other agencies; it will also ensure a coordinated response when disaster strikes. For instance, spontaneous unaffiliated volunteer, sent by Volunteer Center, can work alongside trained volunteers to expand the capacity of major disaster relief agencies. Spontaneous volunteers can also fill staffing gaps and enhance the ability of community-based organizations to respond to their constituents. Finally, some Volunteer Centers may organize teams designed to offer direct services for providing relief to individuals and families with limited or unavailable resources.

**This manual is not a blueprint, but a guide.** With a well-considered disaster response plan in place, your Volunteer Center will be ready to act quickly and efficiently to serve your community's emergency needs.

## ***Program Goal:***

The goal of the component is to prepare communities to effectively utilize and derive maximum benefit from the contributions of spontaneous volunteers, and to motivate the public to become affiliated with a relief agency before a disaster occurs.

***Anticipated Successful Program Outcome:***

***Disaster Volunteer Management*** will strengthen local governments, volunteer agencies, and private sector organizations as new volunteers affiliate with local relief agencies. The community will derive the benefits of planning and organization as the effectiveness of spontaneous volunteers increases. A strong partnership will develop between response agencies and the Volunteer Center as senior volunteers find meaningful and stimulating opportunities to help their community before and after disasters.

# Frequently Asked Questions

## **What is the Disaster Volunteer Management Program?**

The goal of the Disaster Volunteer Management component is to:

- Prepare communities to effectively utilize and get maximum benefit from the contributions of spontaneous volunteer
- Motivate the public to become affiliated with a relief agency before a disaster occurs

## **What is a VRC?**

VRC stands for Volunteer Reception Center. The VRC will be activated following a disaster, and will serve as the starting point for both volunteers and people or agencies needing volunteer assistance. The VRC will connect individuals or groups desiring to help with the locations in need of assistance.

## **When would the Volunteer Reception Center be activated?**

The VRC will be activated immediately following a disaster, typically 12-72 hours following a disaster.

## **What are the locations for the VRC's?**

The location will depend on the area or areas affected by the disaster. A VRC is more of a concept than a location.

## **What are unaffiliated volunteers?**

Unaffiliated volunteers are those not associated with any recognized disaster response agency, but possessing valuable training, skills, and experience. They appear on the scene or call to offer assistance.

## **How long will the VRC be activated?**

The VRC will be activated as long as the disaster recovery efforts require volunteers.

## **How will trained Volunteer Reception Center volunteers know if they are needed?**

There will be a notification team, or phone tree, that will notify volunteers when they are needed.

## **Who is the Volunteer Reception Center contact person(s) for the Media?**

The Public Information Officer are the only person permitted to release information to the media.

## **Section1: Emergency Contact Information**

### Volunteer Center Staff:

- Denise Rucker  
Office: (256) 435-0591  
Cell: ()

**Need at least 7 more people**

# Section 2: VRC Supplies and Equipment

## Disaster Coordinator's "Go Kit" Contents

### Office Supplies:

Dry erase markers (set of 4)  
Dry eraser  
Pens (box of 12)  
Highlighters (12)  
Pencils (box of 12 sharpened)  
2 Lined pads of paper  
Copy paper, 1 ream  
Flip chart pad (1)  
3 x 5 Index Cards (100) & file box  
File folders and labels (50)  
3 hanging file folders and labels  
Push pins (100)  
Clipboards (25)  
Stapler (4), staples (2 boxes)  
Masking and clear tape (2 rolls each)  
Staff name tags  
Post-its:  
3 packs of 3" x 3"  
1 Post-it fax pad  
#10 envelopes (1 box)  
Binder clips  
Small (2)  
Medium (2)  
Large (2)  
Scissors (2)  
Pencil Sharpener (not electric)  
Paper Clips (100)  
Hospital ID bracelets (500)  
ID bracelet tool and markers

### Forms:

Volunteer Instructions (500)  
Disaster Volunteer Registration (500)  
Disaster Volunteer Interview List (500)  
Request for Volunteers (500)  
Disaster Volunteer Referral (500)  
Employee & Volunteer Log (14 each)  
Expenses Incurred Log (14)  
Disaster Volunteer Handbook (100)  
VRC Manual (25)

### Lists and Maps:

VRC floor plan  
City and county maps  
Emergency phone list  
VRC job descriptions

### Equipment:

Battery-operated radio and batteries  
Battery-operated clock (optional)  
Coffee urn, cups, coffee, creamer,  
and sugar  
Large ice chest  
Disposable camera  
Phone system (MIS)  
Laptops (MIS)  
Printed signs  
Card tables (14)  
Printer  
Fax machine

## Signs for Volunteer Reception Center

Signs	Where to post
Volunteer Reception Center (2+ as needed)	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	Next to Station 2
Station #4 Safety Briefing	Safety Briefing visible from station #3
Station #5 Volunteer ID	Next to Station #3 - Exit visible
Exit	Exit, visible from station #3 and #4 and #5
Transportation to worksite (with arrows)	Near exit and outside, as needed
Staff only (2+ as needed)	Staff rest area, supply area, etc.
Current needs	Dry erase board in Interview area
Phone Bank	Phone bank area
Offers of Volunteer help	Top left of bulletin board in phone bank
Individuals	Beneath "Offers of volunteer help sign"
Groups	Beneath "Offers of volunteer help" sign
Other Resources	Top right of bulletin board in Phone Bank
Public Information Officer	Public Information Officer's table
Street Sign	At corner where volunteers turn into the VRC



## **Section 3: Planned Procedure**

### *Activation to Completion*

1. The disaster is approaching. The Volunteer Reception Center Staff, also known as the "go team" gather necessary VRC "Go Kits", make contact with EMA and remain on standby regarding VRC activation 72 hours pre-storm.
2. Twenty-four hours post disaster, the Emergency Manager will determine if activation of the Volunteer Reception Center is required. If yes, the resource allocation and alternate site plans are to be implemented with appropriate security and road access.
3. Upon confirmation of VRC activation, the "Go-Team" will be contacted and briefed of the situation and provided with the location the VRC. Lead volunteers initiate the phone tree to other trained VRC volunteers. If no phone communication is available, all volunteers will meet at the \_\_\_\_\_. EMA and all Public Safety will be given information regarding location.
4. Lead volunteers arrive at the designated site and set-up.
5. "Station" volunteers arrive and get a brief overview
6. Volunteers will be directed to walk-in to the Volunteer Reception Center , or call 211.
7. Government officials and agencies, voluntary agencies active in disaster, and community based organizations will be directed to report their volunteer requests via the 211 Information and Referral Helpline, or faxing the VRC Volunteer Request Form enclosed in this manual.
8. The VRC officially opens.
9. The notification team member works with the American Red Cross & Salvation Army on getting refreshments for the VRC. This volunteer continues with volunteer scheduling of Station Captains and volunteers to work each station.
10. The VRC Director will monitor the flow of information and volunteers at the VRC and will make recommendations to the Emergency Manager on the feasibility of handling the volunteer requests and provide progress reports as needed.

## Section 4: Training

- All of the volunteers working at the Volunteer Reception Center should be previously trained for their specific position tasks. There are specific position descriptions (listed in the *Procedures* section).
- The volunteers will go through a tabletop training exercise to get acclimated with their positions.
- Retention of Volunteers: Following the tabletop training exercise, there will be a quarterly meeting to keep the volunteers engaged and trained for a disaster if it should occur.

### **TIPS ON EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF DISASTER VOLUNTEERS**

- Plan carefully
- Commit to provide trained leadership
- Set realistic goals for each day's work
- Help volunteers see where they fit in the "big picture"
- Organize effectively
- Refer to written checklists for each job to be done
- Create a master list of all jobs with a one-line description of task and to whom volunteers report and post it.
- Staff responsibly
- Make assignments to volunteers based on their skills, interest and experience
- Train people in how to do their job; give them the information they will need for success as well as a vision of what you are doing.
- Supervise in an enabling way.
- Help people to be successful.
- Praise their good work; correct errors immediately.
- Help people feel important, included, valuable.
- Watch for signs of burnout and rotate tasks or relieve volunteers appropriately.
- Be specific, brief, clear in giving instructions.
- Use humor to help people over the rough spots.
- Always be fair.
- Remind volunteers that their efforts are helping the entire community.
- Keep people informed.
- Watch for signals that people want increased responsibility.
- Recognition, recognition, recognition

## **The flow of volunteers & information at the VRC physical location:**

The following station descriptions explain the VRC floor plan (See Appendix). Stations #1-5 labeled in bold on the floor plan and the solid arrows connecting them represent the movement of volunteers through the registration and referral process. For security, safety, and risk management reasons, all volunteers should complete the entire process.

### **Station #1 Registration / Orientation**

At Station #1 greeters give volunteers instruction sheets, ask them to fill out registration forms and give them a brief orientation to the registration process. If possible, this station should be located outside or in a room adjacent to the main registration area, to minimize the commotion and stress inside the Volunteer Reception Center.

### **Station #2 Interviews**

As interviewers are available, a greeter ushers in new volunteers. At the completion of the interview the volunteer is given a referral form and directs the volunteer to Data Coordination. He then proceeds to Station #3.

### **Station #3 Data Coordination**

The volunteer presents his interview checklist and referral form to the Data Coordinator, who makes and records the referral. The Data Coordinator communicates, as needed, with the requesting agency so that, when the need has been met, the request can be closed out. The volunteer takes his referral form to Station #4.

### **Station #4 Safety Briefing**

The Safety Trainer will document the attendance of each volunteer and present a prepared safety briefing appropriate to the specific disaster event. At the conclusion of the briefing, the trainer will refer volunteers to station #5 for ID.

### **Station #5 Volunteer ID**

Volunteer identification staff attaches a wristband to each volunteer, containing the volunteer's name, the agency or site to which the volunteer was referred and the date(s) on which the volunteer expects to work. The volunteer proceeds to the transportation area for a ride to the job site or to drive themselves to the worksite.

### **Other Support Functions**

Other areas shown on the Floor Plan house necessary personnel that do not deal directly with spontaneous walk-in volunteers:

**Phone Bank (211)** - The critical function of the phone bank staff is to take calls from individuals and groups wishing to volunteer and from organizations needing volunteers. Each call is recorded and posted on the request board or forwarded to the Data Coordinator.

**Data Entry/Record Keeping** - Data entry staff enters the Requests for Volunteers and the Volunteer Registration forms into the computer. When the influx of volunteers subsides, staff can begin entering the referrals recorded on the Request for Volunteers forms and close out the completed requests. Data entry staff can print updated lists of the unfilled requests as needed for the interviewers and the data coordination section. If computers are not available, Requests for Volunteers and Volunteer Registration Forms will be filed alphabetically in separate folders for input at a later date.

**Supply Area** - This area should be located in a room that can be secured and should be accessed only by the VRC staff.

**Public Information** - The VRC Director is the only VRC leader to give statements to Public Information Officer. The PIO is the only person to make statements to the media about the Center's operation. All information should be approved by the lead agency prior to dissemination.

**Runners** - Runners will be located throughout the VRC. They will be in charge of transporting material from one station to another.

**Staff Break Area** Though not shown on the VRC Floor Plan, a break area should be established. Noise, frustration, the general sense of urgency and the intensity at which the VRC staff will be working will cause stress to build. Staff should take short breaks whenever possible to operate efficiently and minimize the stress.

**Section 5:  
VOLUNTEER RECEPTION  
CENTER POSITION  
DESCRIPTIONS**

## **VRC Director**

**Your job is to oversee the operation of the Volunteer Registration Center.**

**You will:**

- Clearly designate one entrance and one exit
- Set up the room for efficient flow of volunteers and information
- Brief and assign tasks to staff and volunteer of the center
- Monitor the operation and make staffing changes when necessary
- Maintain all records of safety and job training provided to volunteers, and hours worked in the VRC by employees and volunteers.
- Turn all records in to the Emergency Management Agency weekly or at the end of activation

You should meet and thank all volunteers who help in the VRC and instruct them to sign in and out on the Volunteer Sign-in / Sign-out record, daily. Instruct paid staff to sign in and out daily as well. In a fast paced disaster response, both paid and volunteer staff will need regular reminders to sign in and out.

Items needed:

- ID Badge and Vest
- Tables and chairs (layout)
- "To Go Kit"
- Equipment & additional Supplies

**Greeters**  
**(Station # 1 Registration)**

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 there to volunteer, thank them, give them a “Volunteer Instructions” sheet and ask them to fill out a registration form. When the form is completed, direct them to the next available interviewer at Station # 2.
- If they are media personnel, direct them to the Public Information Officer or VRC Director.
- If they are disaster survivors, refer them to the appropriate relief organization (if you do not know where to send them, ask them to have a seat in the waiting area and ask the Director)
- If they are bringing cleaning supplies, nonperishable food, etc. to donate, refer them to an agency that is accepting donated goods. 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, if they prefer, to come back later.

Items Needed:

- ID Badge or Vest
- Sign (Station # 1 Registration)
- Table and/or clipboards and chairs for volunteers to use when completing forms
- Supply of “Volunteer Instructions”
- Supply of Disaster Volunteer Registration Forms
- Supply of Release of Liability Forms
- Pens

## **Interviewers**

### **Station # 2 Interviews**

Your job is to do a quick interview of the prospective volunteer and refer him/her to a job at an agency or area appropriate for his/her abilities and interests. Requests for volunteers will be posted on a board in front of you (behind the volunteers being interviewed) and will be erased as the needs are filled. If the VRC has a computer system, you might also receive a printed list of current needs.

When a new volunteer approaches, ask for his/her registration form. With the volunteer, verify its completeness and accuracy, and use it as a guide from which to inquire more about the volunteer's skills. At the conclusion of the interview, keep the top copy of the registration form and give the carbon copy to the volunteer. Note: in the event we are not using carbon copied forms, you will keep the registration form. When the volunteer accepts an assignment, complete a Referral form, filling in all information requested, give it to the volunteer and instruct him to report to Data Coordination (Station # 3).

Before you signal the Greeter that you are ready for another interview, take a minute to jot down any notes about the volunteer you feel is important and that the volunteer did not include on his registration form (a special skill, an obvious physical limitation, etc. Place his/her registration form in the 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 ideal assignments.
- Refer the volunteer on the spot if possible – it may be impossible to contact him/her later. If the volunteer has special training or unusual skills that you think might be needed soon, ask him/her 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 VRC. (It may seem self-serving, but if the VRC has sufficient staff and works effectively, the community will benefit!)
- It is likely that some volunteers will exhibit the stress of the disaster – they might be victims themselves. An extra measure of patience and understanding is needed.
- You may be called upon to train new volunteers to assist with interviewing.

Items Needed:

- ID Badge or Vest for each Interviewer
- Supply of referral forms
- Tables & chairs
- Pens
- Sign (Station # 2 Interviews)
- File for maintaining Volunteer Registration Forms in alphabetical order



## **Data/Agency Coordinator Station # 3 Data/Agency Coordination**

When a volunteer brings you his/her Referral form, pull the corresponding Request for Volunteers form from the file. Enter his/her name and the date of the referral on the bottom of the Request form. Place your initials in the appropriate box on Referral form. Direct the volunteer to Station # 4 for a Safety Briefing.

As you have time, call the agency contact to let him/her 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, ask a runner to confirm that the request has been removed 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 computer 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, alphabetically by agency.

You (or a runner) 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".

### Items Needed:

- ID Badge or Vest
  - Sign (Station # 3 Agency/Data Coordination)
  - Tables & Chairs
  - Phone (optional)
  - Two files – one for open Requests and one for closed requests
  - Pens
- Computer, if available

## **Phone Bank Staff**

You will be handling two types of calls, those from agencies or individuals requesting volunteers and those from people wanting to volunteer. **The information you record about each call must be in print, legible, and complete** to facilitate matching volunteers to the needs. DO take control of each call immediately. It is much more efficient to ask the questions in the order in which they appear on the form. (If the caller takes control you will find yourself scribbling in the margins and will not get all the required information.)

**When an agency calls to request volunteer**, fill out a Request for Volunteers form while you are speaking with the agency caller. If there is a computer available for entering the request into a database, Data Entry staff should enter the need as soon as possible, or could enter the data directly while speaking to the caller.

**When an individual (home/business owner) calls to request volunteer assist** with debris removal, tarp, food, water, etc. Complete the top portion of the Access to Property form, make a copy of form and staple. Give form to Data Entry staff to enter information. *(Note: depending on disaster, this may change... to be determined by VRC Director, or Call Center Manager)*

Next, call a runner to post the volunteer request on the 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:

- They may register in person at the VRC, and will be given instructions when they arrive.
- They may register online, and will be emailed regarding possible assignments and given further instructions. (You may need to refer groups to the GOFBCI website, [www.servealabama.gov](http://www.servealabama.gov), this will be determined by the VRC Director/Call Center Manager). If the caller represents a group that wishes to volunteer together, ask him/her to be patient while you determine where they can be of most help. It may take one day or several to match a volunteer with a need, especially if he/she is coming from out of town.
  - When a match is found for that volunteer, email or call him/her back. Print a copy of the registration form (already completed online) and schedule a time for him/her to come to the VRC to complete the registration process.

Items Needed:

- ID Badge or Vest
- Sign (Phone Bank)
- Supply of Request for Volunteer forms
- Supply of Access to Property forms (for individual assistance)
- Tables & Chairs

- |   |
|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Phones</li><li>• Pens</li><li>• Note Pads</li></ul> |
|---|

## **Data Entry**

Your job is to enter the information from the Volunteer Registration and Request for Volunteers forms into the database so that an accurate record can be maintained of who participated in the recovery effort, what kinds of work they did and when it was performed.

After the initial influx of volunteers has subsided, you may have time to begin entering the referrals recorded on the Request for Volunteers 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 document the number of agencies and volunteers participating in the relief efforts and the number of hours served.

**If you have difficulty using the computer, please ask for help immediately. DO not attempt to fix the problem yourself.**

Items Needed:

- ID Badge or Vest
- Table & chairs
- Printer
- Pens
- Computer

## **Safety Trainers Station # 4 Safety Briefing**

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 all 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 supervisor's 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, ask for the VRC Director or other VRC Staff to answer the question. At the conclusion of the briefing, direct volunteer to Station # 5 Volunteer ID.

Attach a copy of the safety briefing handout to the attendance sheet for each class, file them in a folder and turn them into the VRC Director daily.

**Maintenance of these records is important to help protect the VRC, voluntary agencies and emergency management officials from liability, should a volunteer be injured on the job.**

Items Needed:

- ID Badge or Vest
- Sign (Station # 4 Safety Training)
- Grouping of 10 or more chairs
- Clipboard with attendance sheets
- Supply of Attendance sheets
- Supply of Safety Training Handouts
- Pens
- Stapler
- List of any additional training/ safety tips for a specific worksite.

**Volunteer ID Staff  
(Station # 5 Volunteer ID)**

Thank all volunteers for coming out and ask to see their referral forms. Clearly write on an ID wristband the name of the volunteer (first initial & last name is fine), date, name of agency/worksites volunteer was referred (if applicable). Place wrist band on volunteer's wrist.

Explain to the volunteers that the ID is only good for that one day. (Note: change may be made at discretion of the VRC Director) Authorities may not permit them to enter any of the disaster impacted areas on any other day, without a current wrist band.

Some volunteers will be required to take additional training for their particular work. When your briefing is concluded, direct those volunteers to where job training is being provided. Direct all others to the exit (worksites).

Items Needed:

- ID Badge or Vest
- Tables and chairs
- Sign (Station # 5 ID Badges)
- Supply of volunteer wrist bands
- Fine point sharpie markers
- Scissors

## **Runners/Floater**

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 for you.

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.

One runner should be stationed at the board on which requests for volunteers are posted. As a volunteer is referred, place a tally mark or otherwise indicate next to that request the number of volunteer referred. This prevents referring too many volunteers to a request.

Runners posting new Request for Volunteers of the board, should use only the markers provided and write neatly and large enough so that the interviews can see the requests clearly. After posting the request on the board, give the Request form to the Data Coordinator (Station # 3).

Items Needed:

- ID Badge or Vest
- Dry Erase markers & Eraser

# APPENDIX (FORMS)

## **ALABAMA STATUTES REGARDING VOLUNTEERS**

Definition of Volunteer As Defined Under Alabama Volunteer Service Act (Code of Alabama, Section 6-5-336) A person performing services for a nonprofit organization, a nonprofit corporation, a hospital, or a governmental entity without compensation, other than reimbursement for actual expenses incurred. The term includes a volunteer serving as a director, officer, trustee, or direct service volunteer.

Volunteer Protection under the Alabama Volunteer Service Act: Any volunteer shall be immune from civil liability in any action on the basis of any act or omission of a volunteer resulting in damage or injury if:

- (1) The volunteer was acting in good faith and within the scope of such volunteer's official functions and duties for a nonprofit organization, a nonprofit corporation, hospital, or a governmental entity; and
- (2) The damage or injury was not caused by willful or wanton misconduct by such volunteer