



## Volunteer Reception Centers

No. CC-2013-7 August 19, 2013

**Learning Objective:** The student will become familiar with the establishment of Volunteer Reception Centers (VRCs) to coordinate spontaneous volunteers.

Experience tells us that planning is the key for success in disaster operations. Spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers will emerge. You can turn them away or engage them to the benefit of the community. You can create VRCs where you can employ these people to help others.

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.

It is impossible to overstate the importance of planning in general, and more so when talking about engaging spontaneous volunteers. These folks have a tremendous amount of enthusiasm and often have technical skills that you can exploit to your community's advantage. "Grab" them while they are still full of energy and enthusiasm; organize them; put them to work where you need it; take care of them with breaks, good supervision, meaningful work, food, and drink as needed; and keep them informed.

For best results, you should implement a Volunteer Annex in your Emergency Operations Plan. Create a Volunteer Coordination Team that will be activated and responsible for collecting, identifying, in-processing, assigning, accounting for and tracking, and release of the spontaneous volunteers.

At the VRC, distribute "go kits" that include office supplies, forms, lists, maps, and special equipment. Forms and job aids can be used to help in emergency registration/orientation, interviews, data entry and coordination, volunteer identification, safety training, public information, and even job training.

More information can be found in the Emergency Management Institute's (EMI's) IS-244.B: "Developing and Managing Volunteers." It is an online course that can be directly accessed through <http://training.fema.gov/IS/>.

Volunteers are a strong tradition in the United States. It is a tradition you can build upon to enhance your community's resilience in the worst of circumstances. For further information regarding volunteers, check the website listed above or contact Dr. Cortez Lawrence at [cortez.lawrence@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:cortez.lawrence@fema.dhs.gov) or the EMI's Dianne Walbrecker at [dianne.walbrecker@fema.dhs.gov](mailto:dianne.walbrecker@fema.dhs.gov).



A Volunteer Reception Center provides a starting place to coordinate the work performed by spontaneous volunteers. (Photo courtesy of Jocelyn Augustino, Federal Emergency Management Agency)