Volunteer and Donations Management: Plans and Strategies

PURPOSE
Discusses national strategies and methodologies for developing volunteer and donations management plans.

SUMMARY
Volunteer and donations management plans should be developed by each state to prepare for an emergency. In the event of a major emergency, an influx of unaffiliated volunteers and unsolicited donations will hinder response operations unless planned for and managed effectively by the state. The state serves the responsible agency for volunteer and donations management operations.

DESCRIPTION
Each state is responsible for developing a plan for volunteer and donations management. Volunteer and donations management can be separate but connected functions. Consequently, some states choose to develop separate donations management and volunteer management plans, while others include both volunteer and donations management in the same plan. Regardless, both volunteer and donations management plans should be integrated into each state’s emergency operations plan to improve preparedness for a major emergency.

Many national strategies have been developed for both volunteer and donations management. These documents can be used as guidelines by planners when drafting state and local volunteer and donations management plans.

Lead Agency
Developing state volunteer and donations management plans is a preparedness activity that includes identifying the appropriate Lead Agency and support agencies to be responsible for the planning and implementation of the plans. The Lead Agency should work with other state and local voluntary organizations to identify support agencies for specific roles. The Lead Agency for donations management should be capable of receiving, storing, and distributing donated goods to the community in need. Thus, the Lead Agency in charge of volunteer management should be an established voluntary agency with a volunteer base and experience in managing spontaneous volunteers as well.

National Guidelines and Strategies
When developing a volunteer and donations management plan, emergency planners should refer to the national guidelines from the National Donations Steering Committee and the National Leadership Forum on Disaster Volunteerism.
The National Donations Management Strategy
State and local planners should base their donations management plans on the assumptions and recommendations outlined in the National Donations Management Strategy’s ten points:

1. Donations management activities may begin before a disaster is declared in order to mitigate the potential donations problems in the response phase of disaster operations.

2. State donations management should plan for unsolicited goods and spontaneous volunteers, domestic and foreign, especially during a large-scale disaster.

3. State policies may affect designated goods when roads and safety are impacted.

4. State and local governments are the lead in donations operations, though a close working relationship with voluntary agencies is necessary.

5. The federal government and the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster have support roles in donations management.

6. State donations management must make full use of existing voluntary agencies and community organizations capabilities.

7. Donations management must be a flexible plan; there is no single approach to donations management.

8. Agencies must use a united team approach to donations management. No single agency can manage donated goods and services.

9. The federal government encourages cash donations to recognized nonprofit voluntary organizations with disaster experience.

10. Information management is essential for a successful donations management operation.

National Principles for Managing Unaffiliated Volunteers
Emergency planners should use the ten national principles outlined in Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster: The Synergy of Structure and Good Intentions when developing a plan for managing unaffiliated and spontaneous volunteers during a disaster. The ten national principles are:

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 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. The Volunteer Coordination Team (VCT) is the mechanism for ensuring the effective utilization of this human resource.

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.

**National Response Plan: Donations Management Annex**
The National Response Plan (NRP) contains a Volunteer and Donations Management Support Annex that outlines the federal role in donations management during a major disaster. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is the lead federal coordinating agency for volunteer and donations management and serves a support function to the states. FEMA also has Voluntary Agency Liaisons (VAL) in each of its ten regional offices across the countries that help coordinate the federal efforts with state and local voluntary agencies. Supporting agencies outlined in the NRP include the US Department of State, US Department of Transportation, US Department of Defense, US Agency for International Development, and other federal, state, and local government agencies.

**State Donations Management Annexes**
The National Emergency Management Association (NEMA) keeps an updated list of state emergency operations plans with donations management annexes.
Memorandum of Understanding
Each state’s volunteer and donations management plan should include standard operating procedures (SOP) and any memoranda of understanding (MOU) between the state emergency management agency and other voluntary organizations. An MOU specifies the responsibilities of each agency to clarify their role and responsibility in the event of a disaster. All MOUs signed between voluntary agencies and the Lead Agency in the state should be included in the appendix of the state volunteer and donations management plan. NVOAD and FEMA signed a memorandum of understanding in 1997 stating that they will cooperate in all phases of emergency operations and details their respective roles and responsibilities.

New York City’s MOU with New York Cares
New York City has an MOU with New York Cares, which establishes New York Cares as the Lead Agency in New York City for coordinating disaster volunteers. (See the Lessons Learned Information Sharing Good Story: New York City’s Disaster Volunteerism Task Force)

Activating the Donations Management Plan
Volunteer and donations management plans serve as vehicles to manage the public’s generosity during a disaster and provide assistance to victims as soon as possible. Depending on the type of event, a volunteer and donations management plan could be activated before or after the event. Several factors can determine whether and when a state’s volunteer and donations management plan is activated. Each Lead Agency must decide based on the event when to activate its state volunteer and donations management plan.

Media Coverage
Large numbers of volunteers and donations arrive when the media coverage is high. If the media does not pay the event much attention, people are less likely to offer help. The level of media interest depends on the magnitude of the event. A national terrorist incident is likely to get more press coverage than to a small, localized incident.

Anticipated Events
Another factor that can affect the activation of the volunteer and donations management plan is whether the emergency is anticipated or a surprise. Hurricanes that are predicted allow people to prepare for them; therefore, volunteer and donations management plans are often activated prior to such disaster events.

Initial Response Activities
After the plan has been activated, initial response activities include:

- Activating the Donations Coordination Team (see Lessons Learned Information Sharing Best Practice: Volunteer and Donations Management: Donations Coordination Team)
- Identifying and establishing donations facilities, including warehouses, distribution sites, volunteer reception centers, staging locations, and the Donations Coordination Center (see Lessons Learned Information Sharing Best Practice: Volunteer and Donations Management: Managing and Distributing Donated Goods)
- Establishing the phone bank and public information operations (see Lessons Learned Information Sharing Best Practice: Volunteer and Donations Management: Phone Bank Operations)
REFERENCES

- Emergency Management Institute, Federal Emergency Management Agency (http://www.training.fema.gov/emiweb/)
- Federal Emergency Management Agency (http://www.fema.gov)
- National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (http://www.nvoad.org)
- Points of Light Foundation (http://www.pointsoflight.org)
- Points of Light Foundation, Preventing a Disaster within the Disaster: The Effective Use and Management of Unaffiliated Volunteers. (http://www.pointsoflight.org/downloads/pdf/programs/disaster/disasterbook.pdf)

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