

Disaster Volunteer Reception Center (VRC)

Agency Orientation Packet



A tool for community agencies requesting volunteers from a VRC

Purpose

The purpose of this packet is to provide basic information about a Volunteer Reception Center that is now serving the region impacted by _____(disaster name). The information, forms and instructions contained in this packet will help your organization to safely and effectively utilize the many spontaneous volunteers wanting to help.

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What is a VRC?

A Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) is an operation in which spontaneous, unaffiliated disaster volunteers are registered and referred to local agencies to assist with relief efforts. At the VRC, volunteers will:

1. Complete a registration form and sign a general release of liability statement
2. Accept a referral to an organization needing their services (Referral includes a description of their duties and complete address and contact information for the agency to which they have been referred)
3. Receive a form of identification approved by local officials
4. Participate in a safety briefing
5. Agree in writing to follow all safety instructions and directions from supervisors at their work sites.

What are my agency's responsibilities when requesting/accepting volunteers from the VRC?

Agencies requesting/receiving volunteers from the VRC should use generally accepted procedures for managing volunteers, including the provision of:

1. Orientation to your organization and the volunteer position
2. Job training to prepare the volunteer for the work expected of him/her
3. Safety training specifically related to the position
4. Supervision and feedback on the volunteer's efforts
5. Recognition for the assistance the volunteer provided to the organization and disaster survivors

What happens when the volunteer's job is completed?

Recycle the volunteer! You may either invite them to become a permanent volunteer for your organization and provide additional training and opportunities for them to serve, or you may encourage them to return to the VRC for another assignment.

What if, for any reason, the volunteer doesn't meet the needs of my organization?

If a volunteer doesn't have the skills or ability you need, or doesn't seem to be a good fit for your organization, please let the VRC know! A quick phone call to the VRC can help a volunteer find a more appropriate service opportunity OR can prevent a difficult volunteer from being referred to other agencies.

What are the risks associated with using spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers?

The risks inherent in utilizing unknown volunteers are about the same as with any volunteer opportunity, provided that the generally accepted volunteer management procedures listed above are used. In many cases, the risk of not using unaffiliated volunteers to help survivors can be greater than the risk of using them. Florida has many examples from the 2004 and 2005 hurricane seasons of unaffiliated volunteers providing life-saving assistance to disaster survivors.

This packet includes the following forms:

Request for Volunteers – When you contact the VRC to request volunteers, please provide all information requested on the form. You may choose one of the following options: **

- ☐ Fill it out and fax it to the VRC at () _____
- ☐ Call the VRC phone bank at () _____ and provide the information in the order in which it appears on the form.
- ☐ Email the form as an attachment to _____
- ☐ Contact the VRC via ham radio or other communication as directed and provide the information in the order in which it appears on the form.
- ☐ Send the completed form to the VRC via a runner or courier.

**** VRC should check the options that are available at this VRC.**

Sample Safety Briefing – This sample briefing should be edited to provide safety information pertinent to the current disaster, to protect volunteers from avoidable injuries and illnesses resulting from their participation in the relief effort. Every volunteer under the supervision of your organization should attend a safety briefing and be provided a copy to take home. To re-enforce the expectation that all volunteers will follow the recommended safety guidelines, ask each volunteer to sign a statement that they have received, understand and will follow the safety guidelines provided to them.

Release of Liability – Customize this form to include your organization's name. Use as needed to ensure and document that the person signing it understands that there are risks associated with the activity for which the Release is being used. As with any Release of Liability, it is not intended to prevent legal action from being taken against your organization. It does serve as evidence that you had informed the signer of possible risks and that he/she accepted responsibility for adverse events resulting from their participation.

Authorization to Perform Free Services – Customize this form for use when your organization and its staff or volunteers offer a free service to a homeowner, such as debris removal or temporary roof repairs.

FEMA Disaster Assistance Policy (DAP 9525.2) available at www.fema.gov – Organizations that will use volunteers to complete work that is eligible for FEMA reimbursement should become familiar with this resource. Your county may include as local match the value of the hours worked by some volunteers, when submitting the county's request for FEMA reimbursement. **This can be a tremendous value to the county but only if you have carefully documented:**

- The dates and number of hours volunteers served on work that is eligible for reimbursement
- Description of the type and location of the work

Worksite Sign-in / Sign-out Record – Stress to all of your worksite supervisors the importance of utilizing this or a similar form at each worksite. You are likely to be asked by your board and funders, the State Commission on Volunteerism, the media and others what your organization and volunteers contributed to the relief effort. These records:

- Are vital to support a request for FEMA reimbursement, if eligible
- Allow you to quantify and thoroughly document your organization's contribution
- Facilitate a quick response to media inquiries and showcase your accomplishments