



# GETTING INVOLVED

## Emergency Management Volunteer Programs

Volunteers are critically important to emergency management operations. They bring a wide variety of skills and expertise that can be utilized to enhance the existing emergency response framework. This document will guide you through the various volunteer organizations that you may encounter as well as provide tips for volunteering and implementing volunteer programs within your own organization.

### Considering Volunteering?

- 1. Join an established, recognized volunteer group.** Established volunteer groups often already have ties to the traditional emergency response partners and have been built into their plans. Additionally, emergency response partners prefer organized volunteer groups compared to spontaneous, single volunteers as they are easier to manage.
- 2. Do not self-deploy.** As difficult as it may be to sit back while things go wrong, it is very important to not show up until you are called upon. Emergency response efforts are often chaotic and unexpected volunteers make things more difficult. The organization will let you know when you are needed.
- 3. Ensure you and your family are prepared.** As a volunteer, you are part of emergency operations and need to be personally prepared for the situation. You cannot help others unless you can help yourself. Also make sure your family can take of themselves while you are gone.

### Tips for Implementing a Volunteer Program at Your Organization

- Identify a coordinator to manage the program and the volunteers
- Determine what needs the volunteers will fill for your organization during an incident
- Create a list of roles that volunteers will fill and identify the expected responsibilities for each role
- Develop a strategy for recruiting volunteers
- Create an application form in which applicants can identify skills they may have and any relevant experience. This can help you identify what role they may be most useful in.
- Create a training program for your volunteers. Consider reaching out to local response partners such as the fire department or police department to see if they offer any trainings. Additionally, Secure Community Network (SCN) hosts a wide variety of trainings from Stop the Bleed to Countering Active Threats to Greeter-Usher Training.
- Even more important than recruiting your volunteers is retaining them
  - Make sure your volunteers feel appreciated. A simple thank you goes a long way.
  - Provide them with the resources they need to carry out their assigned responsibilities
  - Be flexible with their schedules and personal needs
  - Continuously keep them engaged. Disasters may not happen every day or even every year and most people volunteer because they want to help. Schedule regular trainings and exercises or utilize them for special events.

## Additional Resources



### Medical Reserve Corps (MRC)

The MRC was created following President George W. Bush's 2002 State of the Union Address and was established by the Office of the Surgeon General, a component of the Department of Health and Human Services. MRC units are comprised of medical and public health professionals, as well as those without healthcare backgrounds. The goal of these units is to strengthen public health, improve emergency response capabilities, and build community resiliency. They are often housed within the local health department.

- Utilize the [Find MRC Units](#) tool to find your nearest unit
- To join a local MRC, you may be required to do the following:
  - Submit an application
  - Have a background check completed
  - Complete required training courses—typically FEMA online courses—and provide proof of completion

### Community Emergency Response Team (CERT)

The CERT program was developed by the Los Angeles Fire Department in 1985 and implemented nationally in 1993 by FEMA. The program offers community members an opportunity to learn basic emergency response skills so that they can assist their communities during an incident. CERT programs are typically hosted by a government agency such as an emergency management agency, fire department, or police department.

- To find out if you have a local CERT, utilize FEMA's [Find a CERT](#) tool
- To join your local CERT, you may be required to do the following:
  - Submit an application
  - Have a background check completed
  - Complete the [CERT Basic Course](#)
  - Complete other FEMA Online Courses

### Volunteer Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD)

The National VOAD (NVOAD) was created in response to Hurricane Camille, which hit the Gulf Coast in 1969. After the hurricane, it was identified that all the response partners worked independently, causing help to survivors to be haphazard and delayed. VOAD are coalitions of organizations that have traditionally responded to disasters with the goal of sharing knowledge and coordinating resources for emergency management efforts. Organizations that are part of this coalition include the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity International, and NECHAMA. While originally founded at the national level, VOAD exists at the state and local levels as well.

While individuals cannot join a VOAD, the institution can help you find a reputable, established organization to volunteer with. NVOAD has a list of [current member organizations](#) that includes national organizations active in disasters. They also provide a list of [State/Territory VOAD](#) for a more localized list of organizations active in disasters.

- Create opportunities for them to socialize together, from gatherings to social media groups