

National Leadership Forum on Disaster Volunteerism

April 16-17, 2002

Washington, DC

Convened by: United Parcel Service, the Points of Light Foundation and the Federal Emergency Management Agency.

The response to the September 11 terrorist attacks brought increased awareness to a serious and ongoing challenge — how to engage and manage volunteers in disasters, especially those of significant magnitude. The need for providing guidance to the public on disaster volunteerism emerged as an important lesson from this tragic event, and many disaster response leaders agree that additional tools, training and resources are needed to better manage volunteers in connection with preparing for, preventing, responding to and recovering from disasters.

The National Leadership Forum on Disaster Volunteerism convened senior leadership and operations experts from the volunteer and emergency management communities to further efforts to improve our nation's ability to engage volunteers appropriately and effectively in all phases of disaster.

FORUM GOALS

- Identify challenges and opportunities associated with disaster volunteerism.
- Develop draft recommendations and action steps for addressing the challenges and leveraging the opportunities.
- Secure commitment from participating organizations to work toward the recommendations proposed.

Both meeting organizers and participants agree that all three objectives were met, while recognizing that the Forum was a first step in the process of improving disaster volunteerism. Additional discussion and input encompassing all three objectives is necessary before finalizing any plans or strategies for implementation.

FORUM PARTICIPANTS

Over 90 people representing more than 45 organizations attended. A complete list of Forum participants is attached.

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NATIONAL LEADERSHIP FORUM ON DISASTER VOLUNTEERISM
Meeting Summary

TUESDAY, APRIL 16

WELCOME AND OPENING COMMENTS

*Lea Soupata, Senior Vice President of Human Resources,
United Parcel Service and Chair of the Board of Trustees, The UPS Foundation*

Several years ago, The UPS Foundation identified a disconnect in the field of volunteerism – not in terms of the number of people willing to volunteer, but rather the capacity of nonprofit organizations to effectively engage them. September 11 has given us cause to increase the quality of our preparedness. This meeting is an opportunity to share lessons about the infrastructure needed to manage disaster volunteers effectively and to work together to identify and establish such systems.

‘FRAMING THE ISSUE: THREE PERSPECTIVES ON DISASTER VOLUNTEERISM’

- Three panelists were asked to respond to the following questions:
 - What is the biggest challenge to effective volunteerism?
 - What are the most serious concerns regarding effective disaster volunteerism?
 - What opportunities do you see related to improving disaster volunteerism?

Scott Ingram, Director of Community Services, Volunteer Center of Tucson

- Consider the military model – always plan for the unthinkable and ensure clear lines of authority and good communication.
- Before September 11, volunteer organizations and first responders often struggled to identify and coordinate volunteer roles.
- Spontaneous volunteers will come forward, regardless of previous planning and coordination levels. We must determine how to best divert or redirect them away from the disaster scene to more appropriate roles.
- Volunteer management is too often an afterthought. A more structured approach is required, particularly when hundreds or thousands of volunteers want to be engaged.
- What is needed for successful, professional volunteer management?
 - *Advance Planning*—coordination (before a disaster) among the emergency management community, agencies that use volunteers and those that manage them.
 - *Connectivity*—a single link between the emergency management community and whomever is managing the volunteer effort.
 - *Training and Practice*—identify appropriate service roles and conduct training exercises (several times a year) in order to help volunteer/emergency community understand job responsibilities (helps connect these groups and keep volunteers engaged); promotes volunteer affiliation.
 - *Infrastructure*—Web-based database to coordinate volunteer management efforts; national, replicable models for training.

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- Leverage the existing Volunteer Center network to create a professional volunteer structure in coordination with emergency management agencies.
- Volunteer managers must be linked to state and local level emergency management agencies across the country.

Tom Weidemeyer, COO, United Parcel Service and President, UPS Airlines

- UPS delivers 13 million packages everyday to over six million customers in over 200 countries around the world. Our business requires contingency planning – there is never a moment when UPS is not adjusting its plans somewhere.
- Consider the principle of supply chain management. In business, this means getting the right things and the right people to the right places at the right time. In disaster management, this means ensuring that the people, volunteers, donated goods and money all flow in the right direction at the right time.
- A highly integrated supply chain in business includes connectivity between vendors, transportation suppliers, end customers and producers. In disaster response, collaboration between emergency management personnel, volunteer organizations and others is necessary for the most effective use of existing skills and knowledge.
- UPS Survey on Volunteer Attitudes (1998) – 50% percent of respondents said they would volunteer more, provided they were recognized for their work and that they believed the organization was well-managed and made good use of their time. More than one-third said they stopped volunteering because an organization made poor use of their time.
- Paradox—people’s willingness to volunteer vs. system’s capacity to use them effectively.

Jim Schwartz, Deputy Assistant Chief of Operations, Arlington County Fire Dept.

- On September 11 our nation was attacked, but our communities responded.
- Planning is based on experiences and assumptions – September 11 and the terrorist threat provided a new set of experiences with which to replace old assumptions.
- Despite volunteer roots, professional first responders have been largely oblivious to the range of organizations that provide volunteer support services.
- Volunteerism, especially disaster volunteerism, faces challenges similar to the emergency response community – volunteers who were unable to give as much as they wanted.
- America’s Fire Service operates by several principles of management and the incident command system, which harnesses two similar principles: central authority and span of control. Break an incident down into parts, so that everything does not go back to one person making every decision.

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- Communities must strengthen their response capabilities by understanding and integrating the various systems among emergency management, emergency responder and volunteer communities. Volunteer organizations must increase their awareness of incident command, their role in that system, and develop relationships with emergency management and first responders.
- A hallmark of success at the Pentagon was based on relationships. When the FBI agent and the Chief of Defense Protective Services showed up at the command post, there were existing relationships.
- Certain disasters (*e.g.*, biological) require resources that exceed the current capacity of the emergency management and emergency response communities. Response to these events will likely be based in neighborhoods and the smallest elements of communities, which is where the greatest opportunities for volunteers are found.
- Communication – appropriate volunteer messages must come from one voice. Leaders must be prepared to thank volunteers, indicate that they may be called upon soon, but turn them away as appropriate.
- One event that challenges a community may soon be followed by a second event. Do not send all resources to one place.
- In Arlington County, a volunteer task group is assisting the emergency management system to focus on volunteer issues.

CLOSING COMMENTS BY DOUG BROOKMAN, FACILITATOR

The next day will focus on more lessons learned and lead to practical recommendations and action steps to improve the future effectiveness of disaster volunteerism.

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WEDNESDAY, APRIL 17

WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS

Evern Cooper, President, The UPS Foundation and Vice President, UPS Corporate Relations

A tragedy the size and scope of September 11 illustrates the critical need and timely opportunity to expand our collective efforts in supporting effective volunteerism. Collaboration will strengthen our organizations' capacity to appropriately and effectively engage volunteers in all phases of disaster. UPS is committed to working with the best partners to leverage our collective human and financial resources to ensure that the right tools, training and systems are in place to enable emergency management personnel to engage volunteers in disasters. Today's meeting should begin to identify practical, specific, achievable steps we take as a group and as individual organizations to improve disaster volunteerism.

Michael Brown, General Counsel and Acting Deputy Director, FEMA

September 11 is a defining moment in our nation's history and an opportunity that we cannot lose. This moment allows us to take lessons learned, and practices that we have been using for the past 20 years, and reevaluate those practices. People should be able to effectively respond and volunteer in all hazards. Citizen Corps should take an all-hazards approach for people to be leaders in their community and be prepared for whatever type of disaster faces a community. Forum participants can seize the moment and become a leader in a nonprofit organization or the community. September 11 can have a positive legacy that society can be proud of.

Robert K. Goodwin, President & CEO, Points of Light Foundation

In this new era of jeopardy, the best solution to being able to protect, sustain and nurture democracy, as well as our lives, is to ensure that everyone in the community understands their role and what they can bring to a particular circumstance to ensure a degree of stability. By building on the ideas of connectivity, by fostering and continuing to nurture the fires of relationships, by understanding our respective roles and how they supplement and complement one another at the community and national level, we will not only be best prepared for the next national crisis, but more importantly, we will also be about the business of building community.

KEYNOTE

John Bridgeland, Assistant to the President and Director, USA Freedom Corps

- The President's call to every American to give at least two years of service to their communities, their country and the world is an aggressive call to spawn citizen preparedness and citizen service in this country.
- Why the Call to Service? The most common reason why people volunteer is not because it is required, not that it is necessarily enlightening; it is simply because someone asked.
- USA Freedom Corps: The Peace Corps, the reauthorization and appropriations to the Corporation for National Service, and the Citizen Corps.

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- Freedom Corps will place AmeriCorps and Senior Corps volunteers in local communities in public health, public safety and emergency response arenas. They will help to create a local infrastructure to sustain high quality service opportunities.
- Citizen Corps – During a Homeland Security Office meeting the point was made that citizens are ultimately the people on the front lines that have to respond to situations first. First responders play a vital role, but citizens have to be prepared to assist response efforts.
- Service is a wonderful thing because the experience of service can transform someone’s life. The President likes to talk about the gathering momentum of millions of acts of kindness, goodness and decency.
- The convening of intellectual firepower in this room around an issue that is so fundamental to what we are fighting for abroad and at home, is inspiring.

CASE STUDY PRESENTATIONS

Participants heard brief presentations on four disasters and efforts to engage volunteers in the response efforts. (If you would like a copy of one or more of these case studies, please contact Carol Clegg with the Points of Light Foundation at 202-729-8161.)

World Trade Center

Annie Grunewald, NYC Office of Emergency Management; Sheryl Parker, New York Cares; Steve Rosenthal, Cross Cultural Solutions; Jerry Pannozzo, Mayor’s Voluntary Action Center

Prior to September 11, New York City had a VOAD of 30 members that had been in place for three years. This organization helped to facilitate relationships among key groups and initial discussion around spontaneous volunteers. In addition, there was a Memorandum of Understanding between the New York City Office of Emergency Management (OEM), New York Cares and the Mayor’s Voluntary Action Center for dealing with volunteers during disasters. Four months prior to September 11, human service exercises had enabled voluntary organizations to talk about steps that would be taken during a disaster.

September 11 Response

- Key organizations: OEM, NY Cares, Cross Cultural Solutions, Mayor’s Voluntary Action Center.
- Organizations were inundated with volunteer calls. The state immediately established a hotline to capture those individuals wanting to make donations and/or volunteer.
- OEM designated NY Cares as the primary organization for handling volunteers and incoming calls. NY Cares faced two obstacles: (i) determining what work was being done and what work volunteers could do; and (ii) mobilizing people to meet those needs.
 - NY Cares filled volunteer requests directly from the Emergency Management Center and reached out to agencies through and beyond its network to gauge volunteer needs.

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- With no existing database for registering skills and names of volunteers, volunteer mobilization was difficult. NY Cares asked its corporate partners for lists of projects appropriate for teams of corporate volunteers and established an online volunteer registration process.
- Eventually, the systems allowed overextended partner agencies to completely hand over the volunteer management role to NY Cares.
- Cross Cultural Solutions (CCS) established an emergency call center on September 16 to act as a clearinghouse between thousands of calls and hundreds of volunteers needed.
- The Mayor's Voluntary Action Center (MVAC), located seven blocks from Ground Zero, had to mobilize volunteers with no office communication systems.
- MVAC communicated with volunteer administrators from home computers. Have a contingency plan established for reaching people through alternative means.

Lessons

- Create partnerships before a disaster, usually through task forces or information sessions.
- In large-scale disasters, there is a role for spontaneous volunteers.
- People who want to volunteer should be viewed as part of the healing process.

Oklahoma Tornado

Tom Hazelwood, Executive Secretary for Disaster Response, United Methodist Committee on Relief and Patty Youngblood, Executive Director, Volunteer Center of Central Oklahoma

- The response involved a partnership between the United Methodist Committee on Relief (UMCOR) and the Volunteer Center of Central Oklahoma (VC) – a program of the American Red Cross.
- UMCOR had significant disaster expertise, but limited knowledge of the local community, which the VC provided. The VC also was able to present itself as a neutral broker between different groups, including religiously affiliated organizations.
- UMCOR immediately implemented an established disaster response plan. The “four C’s” of National VOAD – cooperation, coordination, communication and collaboration – were implemented as UMCOR worked with partnering agencies.
- The State of Oklahoma requested that UMCOR manage all unsolicited volunteers.
- Media coverage was so extensive and the volunteer numbers so widely published that UMCOR quickly became overwhelmed.

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- UMCOR volunteers were trained in disaster response and on site when the VC director arrived, but they had never coordinated such a volume of spontaneous volunteers. The VC director assisted using her volunteer management expertise.
- Organizations were in continual communication and behaviors were modified. For example, the VC encountered liability issues when it tried to recruit volunteers and direct them to organizations working on site. UMCOR stepped in to assume the liability.

Lessons:

- Efforts succeed when organizations communicate and are flexible in their roles. Contingencies are needed because the volunteers and materials planned for are often different in reality.
- Organizations must learn and leverage each other's strengths.
- It would be invaluable to have a group of trained National Disaster Volunteer Center staff that could operate like other national disaster teams who go in and get local entities set up to manage their own disaster.

Loma Prieta Earthquake

Margaret Melsh, Manager, Ready to Respond, A Disaster Response Program of The Volunteerism Project

- There are three legs of the disaster response system implemented by The Volunteerism Project: (i) organizations that engage volunteers in disaster response, (ii) organizations that supply and mobilize volunteers, and (iii) supporters who make it possible.
- Two types of spontaneous volunteers: (i) volunteers who reached the scenes before emergency response personnel, and (ii) previously untrained volunteers who went to help disaster relief and community based organizations (the most numerous).
- The more rural area affected by the earthquake, South Bay, responded to the disaster with few institutional players. The Volunteer Center of Santa Cruz County was at the table and had a contract with the county office of emergency services to respond to disasters.
- In the urbanized central San Francisco Bay area, the disaster response was fragmented and not as well coordinated. The system was overwhelmed and no one was ready for the large numbers of spontaneous volunteers.
- Volunteer Centers asked those calling in to volunteer to help answer phones. The strategy has been institutionalized.
- Non-English speaking individuals and immigrants were confused and uncertain as to where to turn for help, given that initial information available was almost exclusively in English. Cultural and language barriers between non-English speakers and staff also led to broad communication and sensitivity problems.

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Lessons

- Lessons learned from Loma Prieta have informed more recent responses. Volunteer Centers now collaborate to respond to disasters and share staffing and other resources. They have developed common procedures, forms and written plans to back each other up and have developed joint training exercises.
- Volunteer Centers must claim their place in disaster response at all levels, local, regional and national.
- Collaboration between government offices of emergency management, the American Red Cross, the Salvation Army, food banks, VOAD, the VOAD member organizations, and all disaster-related organizations must occur.
- Financial support is needed to create opportunities for sharing best practices.
- Spontaneous volunteers are not going away. While they present challenges, they also bring value to the work of disaster response.

Owensboro, KY Tornado

Ronn Padgett, Director, Kentucky Division of Emergency Management and Dave Boyer, Donated Goods and Services Coordinator, Kentucky Division of Emergency Management

- Using volunteers in Kentucky has been part of a disaster response plan since the super-outbreak of tornadoes in 1974.
- CNN spent significant time in Owensboro and created an “outbreak” of spontaneous volunteers.

Lessons:

- Links between emergency managers and the volunteer community must grow and expand.
- Build partnerships in advance – this makes handling problems as they arise much easier. Recognize potential issues in advance and find responses with existing partners.
- The need for volunteers does not dissipate in the first 24, 48, 72 hours after an event, or even in the weeks following an event. When thinking about volunteers, remember that there are long and short-term roles for volunteers.
- Volunteer interest will develop immediately following a disaster. Don't wait until disaster occurs to educate volunteers. Establish systems to disseminate information about disaster response in advance.

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CAPTURING ‘LESSONS LEARNED’ FROM RECENT HISTORY

Forum participants contribute to a timeline of key events, strategies, individuals, successes and trends that have influenced the field of disaster volunteerism. See attached Exhibit 1.

ENVISIONING THE FUTURE OF DISASTER VOLUNTEERISM

Using challenges and lessons learned shared during the Forum, participants worked in groups to develop vision statements for the future of disaster volunteerism. See attached Exhibit 2.

APPLYING LESSONS LEARNED: Working Group Discussion and Recommendations

Participants divided into smaller groups to develop a prioritized listing of practical, achievable strategies and activities to improve the effectiveness of disaster volunteerism. The working groups were charged with examining how disaster volunteer management could be improved during all phases of disaster – Prevention/Mitigation, Planning and Preparedness, Response and Recovery – and developing supporting recommendations.

The groups’ discussion highlighted lingering confusion around terminology used to describe the four phases of disaster, and further underscored the need for expanded public education on appropriate definitions. For purposes of this summary, the four phases are described using definitions developed by FEMA.

A fifth group focused on the cross-cutting theme of partnerships and how they can facilitate and support more effective work in all phases of disaster. For each focus area, the working groups sought to identify initial actions steps for implementing the recommendation, the resources and partners needed for effective action, and what will constitute success.

Working Group #1: Prevention/Mitigation

Disaster mitigation includes a wide range of initiatives and activities at the household, community, state or national level that aim to reduce the damaging effects of disasters of all kinds.

Recommendation: Secure Buy-in of Volunteer Organizations

Action Step	Identify a champion/lead organization, possibilities include local/state governments and state Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD)
Partners	Faith-based groups, media, local businesses, higher education, professional organizations, Volunteer Centers and Cares organizations
Resources	Community foundations, insurance firms, local companies and fraternal organizations; leverage existing partner resources (equipment and volunteers)
Success	All groups are engaged, everyone is at the table