

Unaffiliated Volunteers in Response and Recovery



**VOUNTEER
FLORIDA**

Acknowledgements

We owe our gratitude, admiration and a special salute to these Floridians who proved it can be done and must be done in Florida:

Gloria Black, former Executive Director, Seminole Community Volunteer Program, Seminole County,

who managed the unaffiliated volunteers in Seminole County after the 1998 tornado

Donna Bryant, Supervisor of Elections, Osceola County
Eleanor Foerste, Extension Horticulture Agent, Osceola County
Susan Moore, Human Resources Assistant, Osceola County
Reba Morse, Safety Coordinator, Osceola County

who ran the volunteer reception center in Osceola County after the 1998 tornado

A sincere thank you to these professionals who provided facts and figures for this project:

Dick Hudson, Budget Department Director, Osceola County
Betty Newton, Senior Analyst, Fiscal Services Department, Seminole County
Kathy Townsley, Budget Analyst, Osceola County

Special thanks to these experts who have walked this path through earthquakes, fires and floods and who graciously offered background information, encouragement and validation:

Margaret Melsh, Program Manager, The Volunteerism Project, Sonoma County, California
Mary Kenna, Director, Volunteer Center Services, FirstLINK, Fargo, North Dakota

The Volunteer Florida appreciates the work of the Points of Light Foundation and the contributors to the "Ready to Respond" manuals, which served as models for some of the forms and methods described in this manual.

We appreciate the contribution of these emergency management and volunteer professionals who facilitated the development of these ideas or reviewed and commented on this project:

Jackie Adams, former Executive Director, Volunteer Sarasota!, Sarasota County
Adraine LaRoza, President, Florida Association of Volunteer Centers
Cindy Marshall, Executive Director, Big Sun Volunteer Center, Marion County
Matt Myers, Director of Emergency Management, Osceola County
Ken Pineau, Director of Emergency Management, Collier County
Betty Tribble, Executive Director, United Way Volunteer Center, Hillsborough County

Volunteer Florida thanks the many Governor's Hurricane Conference 2000 attendees who participated in our survey on Florida's use of unaffiliated disaster volunteers.

Special thanks to Lorelee Wooten who served as an editor on the project.

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Introduction

As surely as disasters will happen, volunteers will come. Many emergency managers admit to being unnerved by the prospect of coping with convergent volunteers because there are so many unknowns. How many will come and when? Will any of them have the skills we really need? What happens if somebody gets hurt? Where will they stay? Who will feed them and how? How will they know where to go and what to do? Who will manage them?

As Florida's lead agency for Emergency Support Function 15 (ESF-15), Volunteers and Donations, Volunteer Florida will provide straightforward answers to these questions and some compelling reasons to include procedures for utilizing this powerful resource in your Comprehensive Emergency Management Plan (CEMP).

***Whether you plan or not, they
will come***



The Role of Volunteer Florida



Volunteer Florida works closely with the Florida Division of Emergency Management to plan for and ensure productive volunteer participation in disaster preparedness, response, recovery and mitigation. During the response and recovery phases of a disaster, Volunteer Florida coordinates the efforts of Florida's volunteer response organizations. Volunteer Florida staff at the State EOC operate an 800 hotline and issue PSAs to regional and national media, providing the public with direct access to official information about the volunteers and donations needed and not needed.

As your county ESF-15 lead organization establishes procedures for managing unaffiliated volunteers, or refines your existing plan, Volunteer Florida's Emergency Management staff will be available to provide technical assistance and insight into the process.



***Volunteer Florida coordinates
volunteer response and
recovery efforts***

What are Unaffiliated Volunteers and What Do We Do with Them?

Convergent, unaffiliated volunteers are those not associated with any recognized disaster response agency, but who possess other training, skills and experience and appear on the scene or call to offer assistance. No distinction is made here between the terms “convergent,” “unaffiliated,” and “spontaneous” and they will be used alternately throughout this booklet. Management of this resource is a function of ESF-15, Volunteers and Donations, but is distinctly separate from its coordination of the traditional volunteer response organizations and from its management of donated goods.

Because many unaffiliated volunteers lack the specific disaster training offered by the American Red Cross, The Salvation Army and others, there is understandable reluctance among emergency management professionals to consider convergent volunteers as a resource to be counted on in the event of a major disaster. It is logical for the traditional volunteer response organizations, as well, to be wary of well-intended but inexperienced volunteers whose efforts have sometimes hindered rather than helped response and recovery operations.

The key words in this dilemma are “major disaster.” When a community experiences a disaster of such magnitude that the capacity of local response organizations is severely challenged, volunteers will respond. Media coverage of such events brings graphic images of the victims and their damaged property into living rooms in neighboring counties and states. Such coverage evokes viewers’ compassion for the victims and gratitude that



“Unaffiliated” does not mean unskilled!

their own community has been spared. Hundreds or thousands will feel compelled and energized to take action.

Success Stories

Two Florida counties have demonstrated that it is not only possible but extremely cost-effective to harness this resource, organizing and empowering it to effectively serve communities struck by major disasters. When a rare F-4 tornado ripped through Osceola, Orange and Seminole Counties in late February, 1998, tearing apart homes, businesses and lives, calls from people offering assistance immediately began to pour in.

As Osceola County's professional responders and trained, affiliated volunteers rescued survivors and tried to protect property from further damage, several county employees began to set up a volunteer intake and dispatch center to handle the spontaneous volunteers offering to help. Day by day they designed new forms, implemented new procedures and organized the flow of convergent volunteers to help with the cleanup. Increasing numbers of volunteers showed up each day, as the surrounding communities realized the extent of the damage. Unaffiliated volunteers registered during the next few weeks totaled over 3,100. Hundreds more had helped during the first few days, but were never registered.

A review of Osceola's volunteer database, set up after the event, revealed that nearly 1,000 of these volunteers were residents of Osceola County, over 1,700 were from elsewhere in Florida and nearly 400 were from out of state. Many were individuals and families, groups from 38 churches, 10 schools and universities, 45 businesses and 35 other community or civic organizations.

To prevent congestion on roadways and to ensure the security of the impacted neighborhoods and businesses, the county arranged for buses to transport volunteers to the worksites. A list of the volunteers being transported, showing the date and time of the trip, accompanied each driver and helped organizers to keep track of hundreds of people each day. This documentation also corroborated records of volunteer hours, as Budget Department personnel prepared the county's request for FEMA reimbursement.



Osceola County Emergency Management Director Matt Myers and Budget Department Director Dick Hudson credit a major part of the county's successful recovery to the volunteers who responded and to the county employees who, under tremendous pressure, devised a workable system for managing them.

In Seminole County the Executive Director of the not-for-profit Seminole Community Volunteer Program, set up a reception center for volunteers under the awning of a volunteer's motor home. Located next to the county's command center in the middle of the disaster area, this makeshift volunteer center processed 1,400 volunteers during the next two weeks. Agency staff kept daily records of the volunteers at each site and how many hours each worked. At the beginning of every shift, volunteers signed in and received their assignments, along with color-coded ID bracelets. When they signed out at the end of the day, they turned in the bracelets and reported to the staff the kinds of work they had performed that day. The ID bracelets enabled Sheriff's deputies, using a block captain system, to enforce strict security measures.

Although Osceola and Seminole Counties managed to utilize many of the convergent volunteers, local emergency managers agree that volunteers could have been referred more quickly and the documentation of their hours and activities streamlined, had a plan been written ahead of time for the management of these volunteers.

If You Plan, They Will Come – Even If You Don't Plan, They Will Come!

The good news is that, no matter who or how many "they" turns out to be, the procedure for managing unaffiliated volunteers is the same. It's straightforward, logical and easy! It can be used in any size community, with



the participation of any combination of community resources, for any type of disaster, no matter how extensive the damage.

Though many are first-time disaster volunteers, unaffiliated volunteers bring with them a wide range of skills and professional training, often in short supply after a catastrophic event. "Unaffiliated" doesn't mean unskilled! Effectively used, spontaneous volunteers can supplement your response and recovery operations in many areas. Through a short screening process, a volunteer coordinator might learn that a spontaneous volunteer who listed "accountant" as his occupation also has the skills and tools needed to trim trees or owns a boat that could be used for search and rescue. Along with their skills, they bring strength and energy, optimism for the future of the affected community, and concern for those who are suffering, both survivors and weary responders.

Florida benefits from increasing public awareness of the need for everyone's participation in disaster recovery. Many government organizations and private corporations encourage their employees' community involvement by offering paid or unpaid leave to those who participate in disaster related activities.

Florida's Employee Disaster Leave law allows state employees, with supervisor approval, 15 days of paid leave per year to work in American Red Cross disaster recovery operations. Civic and fraternal organizations have become valuable sources of dedicated disaster relief volunteers. Colleges and universities encourage faculty and student participation in disaster recovery as a means to instill in their students a strong community ethic.

It will never be possible to predict exactly how many unaffiliated volunteers will show up, who they will be or what skills they will bring. But it is possible to be prepared to gain the maximum benefit from their contributions, and for them to leave your community knowing that they have eased the pain of a survivor, helped to protect or rebuild someone's property, and helped your community to recover from the disaster.

Great Reasons for Writing Unaffiliated Volunteers into your CEMP

For the following economic, logistical and psychological reasons, plan now to effectively utilize the unaffiliated volunteers who will respond if your community experiences a disaster.

Economic

After the tornado in Osceola County, the initial estimate for professional cleanup alone was over \$8 million. The actual cost of cleanup was only about \$1.4 million, largely due to the tremendous efforts of unaffiliated volunteers. Volunteer participation also shortened the estimated cleanup time from 90 days to about 55 days. The county's total reimbursement from FEMA is anticipated to be over \$2 million. The documented value of those volunteer hours covered \$240,000 of Osceola's approximately \$300,000 total match.

In Seminole County, the estimate for professional cleanup was \$1,525,000. The work contributed by spontaneous volunteers helped to bring the cleanup cost down to \$660,000. Because the Seminole Community Volunteer Program was able to set up its disaster volunteer center almost immediately, sufficient volunteer hours were documented to cover the entire \$330,000 county match for the \$2,242,199 FEMA reimbursement.

The economic advantages alone are a substantial reason to make this resource an integral part of your comprehensive plan – but not the only reason.

UNAFFILIATED VOLUNTEERS IN RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

County	Initial Cleanup Estimate	Cost/cleanup w/Volunteers	Total County Match	Match \$ Covered by Volunteers	Total Reimbursement
Osceola	*\$8M/90 days	\$ 1.4M/55 days	\$300,000	\$240,000	>\$2,000,000
Seminole	\$1,525,000	\$ 660,000	\$330,000	\$330,000	\$2,242,199

* A decrease in the scope of the work also contributed to this cost reduction.



hamper the organization’s response. The American Red Cross, The Salvation Army and many others have awesome responsibilities in the wake of a major disaster. Their work is hindered rather than helped, when, for lack of planning, a community places on them the additional burden of “doing something with” the spontaneous volunteers.

Every county in Florida will find that it has one organization whose non-disaster mission and position in the community make it a logical organization to coordinate the multi-agency utilization of spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers. It will not necessarily be the same agency or the same kind of agency in every county.

Logistical

“They” will come, so planning ahead for spontaneous volunteers is to everyone’s advantage. All of the traditional response organizations would, of course, prefer to operate strictly with highly trained people who know and follow their organization’s prescribed procedures. When responding to a major event, however, even these seasoned responders sometimes find themselves short-handed and unable to meet the community’s needs. When a response organization needs additional volunteers, it needs volunteers with the skills necessary to help meet its commitments to the community. Without an effective screening and referral process in place, the convergence of volunteers without those skills can

Public Perception

There is a third compelling reason to include this resource in your CEMP. Well managed convergent volunteers contribute to a positive public perception of your response and recovery effort. Professional responders and trained, affiliated volunteers must maintain a “big picture” perspective and remain focused on their missions. Unaffiliated volunteers, on the other hand, often have more time to meet the individual needs of survivors, to hold a hand or offer comfort and encouragement.

There are dozens of heart-warming stories from Central Florida of spontaneous volunteers helping to ease the pain of tornado survivors with their sacrifices of time, talent and compassion. In most cases the volunteers were empowered to serve by a dedicated professional responder. Such was the case in an Osceola County neighborhood, where volunteers searched through the rubble for anything that might be of value to the victims. They were inspired to thoroughness by a fireman named Rick, who refused to allow the strewn remnants of the victims’ lives to be bulldozed into piles and hauled to a landfill.

Volunteers boxed the items they recovered by address, to be sorted later. They found rolls of undeveloped film, a Navy uniform soaked with mud, a box of old service medals and the last piece of a survivor’s marriage certificate. The other pieces had been found some distance away and placed together like a jigsaw puzzle. A local dry cleaner cleaned the uniform, children’s stuffed toys and many other precious items for survivors at no charge. One compassionate volunteer, an artist, used trays of water and an array of paintbrushes to clean photos and personal documents, drying them in front of fans. Family Bibles and a 1963 yearbook were dried one page at a time.



In a disaster the size of Andrew it would have been impossible for recovery workers to spend time in this way. But when it is possible, such as after the Central Florida tornado, it is the commitment, love and compassion of spontaneous volunteers that makes it so.

Before a Disaster Occurs

Creating a Strong Local Network for Effectively Using Unaffiliated Volunteers

Each Florida county is a unique environment with its own assemblage of emergency management positions and personalities. Each jurisdiction also has its own distinct array of non-governmental resources – traditional response agencies and one-of-a-kind local organizations. From these resources, several may stand out as having the capacity to register and refer spontaneous volunteers in the event of a disaster and to develop a network of companies and not-for-profits who will provide for the basic needs of those volunteers. The organization you engage to coordinate your county's use of unaffiliated volunteers will be referred to here as the **Coordinating Agency (CA)**.

In some counties a local volunteer center has served as the coordinating agency. This model has worked because volunteer centers have experience in referring volunteers according to their skills, abilities and limitations. Many have been trained on effective procedures for registering, referring and documenting unaffiliated disaster volunteers.

Many counties have a government volunteer coordinator who recruits and places volunteers in county government departments. These employees are also likely to be adept at determining the skills and interests of spontaneous volunteers. In the absence of a professional community volunteer manager, a volunteer coordinator in a local not-for-profit organization, such as the United Way, American Cancer Society or Habitat for Humanity, may have the required volunteer management and network-building skills.



Each Florida county has a unique combination of community resources

Regardless of what organization you engage to take on this responsibility, familiarity of its people with the missions and staffs of local not-for-profits and experience as a convener and collaborator will be extremely valuable. It is important for your ESF-15 lead agency to establish regular communication with your coordinating agency to ensure mutual understanding of the CA's responsibilities and the procedures by which they will be carried out. Those responsibilities include:

Appoint a Disaster Response Coordinator – The CA will designate a staff member to serve as Disaster Response Coordinator. The coordinator will regularly attend local emergency management planning meetings and will affiliate the CA (if it's not already a member) with the local Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD), Interfaith or other local disaster coalition.

Educate local coalitions – The Disaster Response Coordinator will educate the member organizations of your VOAD or Interfaith regarding the CA's role of referring spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers to them during disaster recovery.

Build a community network – The Coordinator should gather information from VOAD members about their anticipated disaster volunteer needs. The Coordinator can then begin to build a network of civic, fraternal and other groups, encouraging their members to affiliate with a local disaster response organization and to become trained to help them in disaster. For example, members of a local garden club who become affiliated with and trained by a homeless shelter will be able to help immediately when needed and will not become unaffiliated volunteers who need to be registered, referred and trained after a disaster occurs. The Coordinator can also pursue mutual assistance plans with counterparts in neighboring counties.

Develop a volunteer referral plan – The Coordinating Agency's Disaster Response Coordinator will develop a disaster volunteer referral plan and gather the supplies needed to open a volunteer reception center. The Coordinator will participate with the ESF-15 lead agency in finding several locations suitable for housing the reception center; will arrange sources and transportation of needed equipment, including emergency communications; and will recruit, train and orient volunteer staff to help operate the reception center.

Arrange to transport volunteers – For security reasons, emergency management personnel will not allow volunteers to drive their own vehicles into impacted areas. The Coordinator should work with local ESF-15 personnel to develop a plan to transport volunteers from the reception center to the worksites. A school bus or city bus could be designated to provide transportation during the busiest times. Churches or charter companies might also donate the use of their buses.

Develop a public information plan – In cooperation with your ESF-15 lead agency, the CA will develop a public information plan for letting potential spontaneous volunteers know before a disaster occurs how to get involved if there is ever a need and, after a disaster, what help is and is not needed. This plan may include writing press releases in advance, for quick editing and dissemination to local and regional media, and securing a commitment from the local phone company for a complimentary 800 number and additional lines to be installed at the site where convergent volunteers will be registered.

Engage the business community – The CA can engage local businesses in planning to donate goods and services to future response and recovery efforts. A particular focus of the CA could be to secure contingency agreements for shelter for spontaneous volunteers in local or nearby hotels/motels, school dormitories, etc., and donated meals for the registration center staff.

Developing Mutual Support

Your Coordinating Agency will provide invaluable support to the local emergency management community. It is important to remember that your CA may operate with a budget consisting primarily of restricted funds – funds allocated or granted to the organization to be used for specific purposes. The agency will have a mission and specific goals it must achieve in order to continue receiving that funding. Your emergency management department can help to ensure that the CA is able to invest sufficient time to prepare for its new, official role in your CEMP by assisting the agency to secure additional funding for this purpose. A letter of support explaining the vital services your CA provides to the community after a disaster will assist the agency to garner the needed financial support from your local Community Foundation, United Way or other sources.



After the Disaster

Setting Up and Operating a Disaster Volunteer Reception Center

When a major disaster occurs, the large number of spontaneous, unaffiliated volunteers who converge to assist with recovery can be overwhelming to an already stressed community. Large numbers of unaffiliated volunteers will not be easily handled within the normal office setting and operating procedures of the Coordinating Agency.

A *Volunteer Reception Center (VRC)* provides a place where large numbers of volunteers can be efficiently processed and referred to agencies needing their services. The process described here provides an easy way to document volunteers being registered, requests for volunteers, VRC staff hours worked, and expenses incurred.

Set up to receive volunteers – Upon receiving instructions from the ESF-15 lead agency, the CA will prepare to process spontaneous volunteers in the agency's regular office or will set up a volunteer reception center at a site designated by the lead agency. The VRC Floor Plan included in this section can be adapted to meet your needs and physical setting. Ideally, the reception center would be set up under the supervision of the VRC Director. However, after a disaster, there is no guarantee that the Director will be the first to arrive. Paid staff and a few key volunteers should be trained to set up the VRC, in case it becomes necessary.



***The procedure is straightforward,
logical and easy***

Begin the registration process – The CA will begin processing and referring volunteers as soon as possible after the arrival of the first volunteers and the receipt of the first requests for volunteer assistance from response organizations. The process will include registering and quickly interviewing volunteers to determine their skills, abilities and limitations; referring each to a requesting agency with the name of the supervisor to whom they should report; providing identification tags or bracelets with the date and agency or ESF to which the volunteer was referred; and providing a basic safety briefing.

The Disaster Volunteer Registration and Referral forms and the Request for Volunteers form provided in Appendix 1, were created for use with a PC network and a Microsoft Access database, but are adaptable to other systems or to manual use. The procedures explained in the Job Descriptions section were used and modified during three successive disaster exercises conducted by volunteer centers.

The Disaster Volunteer Registration form is more detailed than many forms currently in use for two reasons. First, it can be used for both pre-registering local volunteers willing to help in disaster and for registering spontaneous volunteers post-event. Pre-registering people interested in disaster relief helps to get prospective disaster volunteers affiliated with an appropriate agency before an event occurs, and allows the volunteer center to recruit and train volunteers to help operate a volunteer reception center.

Second, if the VRC will be using a database capable of matching the skills of volunteers to specific requests from the community, greater detail facilitates a better match and provides contact options to help locate the needed volunteers later. The magnitude of a disaster might make gathering all of the information requested on the form

impossible; and the limited scope of some events, in which only sandbagging or clean-up are needed, might make some information unnecessary.

The Release of Liability Statement on the Disaster Volunteer Registration Form should be reviewed by your county Risk Management Department and any necessary changes made prior to using the form. (This would also be a good time to review the county's plan to purchase insurance to protect volunteers, the county and its residents during the response and recovery phases.)

The CA will not conduct background checks on volunteers or verify their credentials. Background checks, if required, and verification of credentials are the responsibility of the receiving organization.

Document all training, expenses and time donated – All VRC staff should be made aware of the need to maintain accurate documentation of their activities, including training provided to volunteers, expenses incurred through your Coordinating Agency's disaster relief efforts, and time and skills donated by unaffiliated volunteers.

It is important for VRC staff to provide safety briefings and, when appropriate, specific job training to all volunteers and to keep complete and accurate records of all such training. These records will minimize the effects of any possible legal action taken against the county or the coordinating agency, should a volunteer be injured or inadvertently cause damage to property or to others.

To ensure that your Coordinating Agency is not left with non-reimbursable expenses at the end of its disaster service, it is imperative to establish an agreement in advance between your local Department of Emergency Management and the CA. The agreement should detail what expenses will be reimbursed and what documentation is required to ensure prompt payment.

Procedures for documenting the hours and the type of work done by each volunteer should be determined jointly by the ESF-15 lead agency, the CA, and the county budget department, to ensure the maintenance of all information required to support a FEMA reimbursement application.

The Flow of Volunteers and Information through the Volunteer Reception Center

The following station descriptions explain the VRC floor plan that follows. Stations #1-6 labeled in bold font on the Floor Plan and the solid arrows connecting them represent the movement of volunteers through the registration and referral process. For security, safety and risk management reasons, all volunteers should complete the entire process.

Station #1 Registration / Orientation

At Station #1 greeters give volunteers instruction sheets, ask them to fill out registration forms and give them a brief orientation to the registration process. If possible, this station should be located outside or in a room adjacent to the main registration area, to minimize the commotion and stress inside the Volunteer Reception Center.

Station #2 Interviews

As interviewers are available, a Greeter ushers in new volunteers. At the completion of the interview, the

volunteer is given a referral form telling him where and to whom he should report to volunteer. He then proceeds to Station #3.

Station #3 Data Coordination

The volunteer presents his referral form to the Data Coordinator, who records the referral. The Data Coordinator communicates, as needed, with the requesting agency so that, when the need has been met, the request can be closed out. The volunteer takes his referral form to Station #4.

Station #4 Volunteer Identification

Volunteer ID staff attach a wristband to each volunteer, containing the volunteer's name, the agency or site to which the volunteer was referred and the date(s) on which the volunteer expects to work. The volunteer proceeds to Station #5.

Station #5 Safety Training

The Safety Trainer will document the attendance of each volunteer and present a prepared safety briefing appropriate to the specific disaster event. At the conclusion of the briefing, the trainer will refer volunteers to Station #6 for specific job training or to the transportation area for a ride to the job site.

Station #6 Specific Job Training

Job training specific to each worksite or function can be provided before volunteers depart for their work areas. If possible, training should be given by someone with first-hand knowledge of current operations at the site.

Other Support Functions

Other areas shown on the Floor Plan house necessary staff who do not deal in person with spontaneous volunteers:

Phone Bank

The critical function of the phone bank staff is to take calls from individuals and groups wishing to volunteer and from organizations needing volunteers. Each call is recorded and posted on the request board or forwarded to the Data Coordinator.

Data Entry

Data entry staff enter the Requests for Volunteers and the Volunteer Registration Forms into the computer. When the influx of volunteers subsides, staff can begin entering the referrals recorded on the Request for Volunteers forms and close out the completed requests. As needed by the interviewers and the data coordination section, data entry staff can print updated lists of the unfilled requests.

Supply Area

This area should be located in a room that can be secured and should be accessed only by VRC staff.

Public Information

The Public Information Officer is the only staff member to make statements to the media about the center's operation. All information should be approved by the VRC Director and coordinated with the local ESF-15 lead agency prior to dissemination.

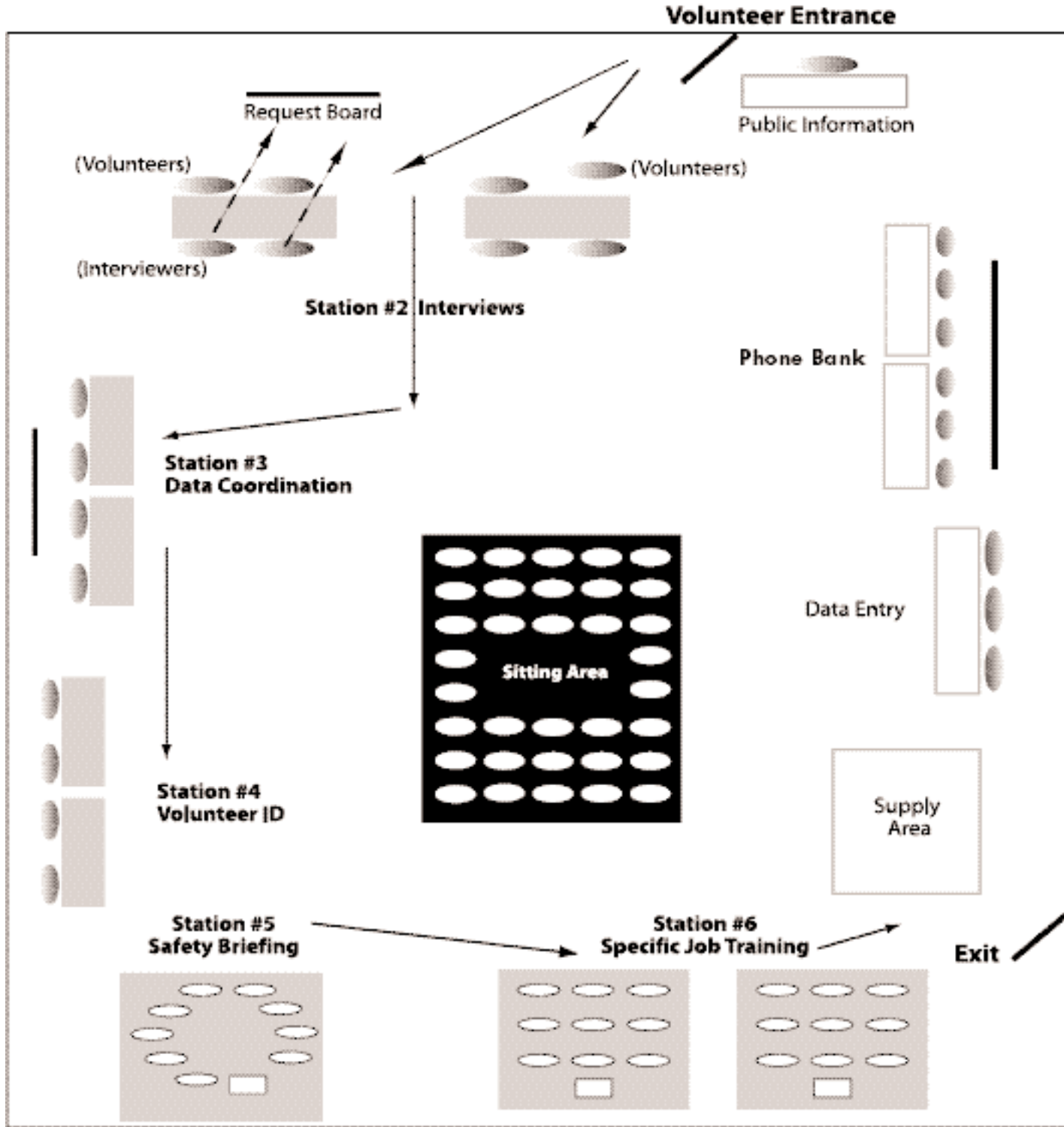
Runners

Runners are not shown on the VRC Floor Plan but are integral to the smooth operation of the center. Any station needing assistance raises a small flag to summon a Runner. Runners post new requests for volunteers on the request board, carry information from one station to another, escort guests, and deliver supplies to the stations.

Staff Break Area

Though not shown on the VRC Floor Plan, a break area should be established. Noise, frustration, the general sense of urgency and the intensity at which the VRC staff will be working will cause stress to build. Providing a quiet room with low light and ensuring that staff take short breaks whenever possible will help everyone to operate efficiently and minimize the stress.

Volunteer Reception Center Floor Plan



Assembling Volunteer Information for County Reimbursement

Documentation for Reimbursement and Risk Management

Counties that kept accurate records of the hours and kinds of disaster relief work done by volunteers have been extremely successful in counting those contributions toward their match for FEMA reimbursement. Developing a system for recording and maintaining the needed information is the crucial first step to success. All county personnel who will be supervising volunteers should be trained on the importance of thoroughly documenting the hours and kinds of work done by volunteers.

Worksite supervisors should be instructed to:

1. Maintain a supply of volunteer sign-in sheets at each volunteer worksite. (Use the sample provided in the Forms Appendix or develop one that meets your specific needs.)
2. Conduct a safety briefing as each group of volunteers arrives, regarding the specific hazards at the site. This step is critical to preventing injuries and minimizing the risks to the volunteers, the county, and the property on which the volunteers will be working.
3. Have all volunteers read the statement at the top of the sign-in sheet and sign in, recording their time of arrival and departure each day. (Review the statement with your Risk Management Department and

edit as necessary. Volunteers registered with the Volunteer Reception Center will already have signed a complete release of liability on their Disaster Volunteer Registration Form, but should sign the sign-in sheet each day, as well.)

4. At the end of each shift, turn in all volunteer sign-in sheets to a designated supervisor, who will turn them in to the county Budget Department.

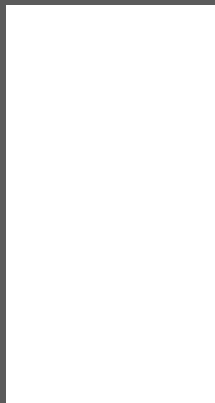
Strict adherence to these procedures will minimize the effects of any possible legal action taken against the Coordinating Agency or the county, should a volunteer be injured or inadvertently cause damage to property or to others.

Placing a Value on Work Done by Volunteers

All work that is allowable if done by county employees or contractors is also allowable when done by volunteers. Matching credit for contributions toward both direct and indirect costs will only be given, however, if the county and its contractors have established a rate for each type of work completed.

The rate applied to each type of volunteer work should be the rate at which a county employee would be paid, including fringe benefits, for the same or similar work, or the customary rate for that work in the local labor market.

Refer to Code of Federal Regulation 44, Section 13.24 and Section 206 Subpart H for additional information.



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