



# Guide to Managing Spontaneous Unaffiliated Volunteers

*A Guide for Local MRC Units*



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## Guide to Managing Spontaneous Unaffiliated Volunteers

Spontaneous Unaffiliated Volunteers (SUVs) are an unavoidable and important part of the disaster response and recovery spectrum. You must plan for their participation; otherwise, they may cause an overwhelming disruption when they participate in a response. Planning for SUVs will also help you avoid disenfranchising potential volunteers. An important aspect of community recovery (both physical and psychological) is engaging those citizens who feel the need to help. After an event occurs, you can recruit SUVs for further training and yearlong participation in activities, including preparedness, and mitigation.

Properly managing expectations can help ensure a successful response. This applies to volunteers as well as the disaster victims, the public, and your partners. In your communications, orientations, and trainings, you should provide as much detailed information and advice as possible regarding what volunteers will experience and what they should do if events go beyond their training. This information will reduce stress and facilitate operations.

It is unlikely that the Medical Reserve Corps (MRC) will be the primary agency responsible for working with unaffiliated volunteers. However, the MRC unit should take advantage of the opportunity to bring in new volunteers, even if the volunteers lack credentials and training for the present event. To facilitate this effort, the MRC unit should work with local partners to develop strategies for managing SUVs.

Strategies for managing spontaneous volunteers include Volunteer Coordination Teams, Volunteer Reception Centers, Just in Time Training, Position Descriptions, Job Action Sheets, and pairing trained, experienced Medical Reserve Corps volunteers with spontaneous volunteers. Because planning is the most important strategy, remember to develop your messages, forms, registration process, training, and other plans ahead of time. Keep in mind the need to provide security, implement safety measures, manage stress, and provide recognition after the event.

### ***Strategies for Managing SUVs***

A **Volunteer Coordination Team (VCT)** comprises representatives from the lead agency for managing volunteers and/or partner volunteer programs. The VCT is part of the Emergency Operations Center structure and acts as the primary coordination entity for unaffiliated volunteers (and possibly affiliated volunteers). The VCT can and should support the recovery phase of the disaster.

**Volunteer Reception Centers (VRCs)** are sites that act as a point of referral to support disaster activities and the multiple volunteer agencies involved. VRCs are a relatively new concept in disaster management and may not exist in your locality. Find your local volunteer center, contact your local county or city emergency management, or work with your local Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) to discuss plans for this type of operation. Through local media or proximity to the disaster site, you can notify unaffiliated people that they can register if they want to help. After volunteers register and identify their interests and skills, they are matched to the appropriate volunteer organization. It is usually the responsibility of the organization to verify volunteers' personal information, train the volunteer for their particular role, and ensure that all other requirements of the organization are met.

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**Just in Time Training** (JITT) is a critical piece of the management of SUV and serves as a refresher for affiliated volunteers. This training is usually developed in advance and can be presented in multiple formats, including Microsoft PowerPoint, DVD/CD, and via the Web. Many JITT exist for disaster response; you can find them by searching the Web. You should also contact your partners for sources of JITT and consider building a local library of JITT as part of your all-hazards approach. If you need to develop your JITT on demand, PowerPoint presentations or handouts are effective and relatively portable. Work to develop an accurate presentation using simple language, and avoid jargon that may not be understood by the new volunteer. Remember to include a small orientation that highlights proper check-in/check-out procedures, the importance of safety, to whom to report in case of emergency, and expectations or codes of conduct. JITT can be incorporated into the VRC and led by affiliated volunteers, if necessary.

**Position Descriptions** vary in length and complexity and are important for recruiting appropriate volunteers. The descriptions are used to advertise potential positions through the VRC, media, Internet, or at staging.

**Job Action Sheets** are also critical for successful spontaneous volunteer management. These are written in a checklist format and used to outline the tasks and duties of the volunteer in that role. These are very valuable because they define parameters for the volunteer's actions, allows for transition between roles, and creates consistency.

**Utilize trained and trusted volunteers** to supervise and orient spontaneous volunteers. Ensure that volunteers are available for the following activities: answering requests from interested SUVs, conducting registration, verifying SUV information, and conducting orientation and training.

### ***Example SUV Timeline***

- Volunteer sees disaster coverage on the news or is in proximity to the disaster.
- Volunteer is referred to the VRC or directly to your volunteer program.
- Volunteer's personal information is collected and validated, licensure is verified if applicable, and a background check is performed if possible.
- Volunteer is oriented and receives JITT.
- Volunteer is placed in a role immediately or scheduled to work at a later date.
- Volunteer supports operations (be flexible in your scheduling and shifts to accommodate a volunteer's other commitments, if possible, and try to provide breaks to avoid burnout).
- Volunteer is recognized (e.g., certificate, letter, newspaper article, commemorative item, recognition event).
- Volunteer is asked to participate in year-round activities to enhance his or her community's resiliency for the next event.

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## ***Additional Resources***

National VOAD Volunteer Management Committee, "Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster: The Synergy of Good Structure and Good Intentions." December 2004.

<http://www.citizencorps.gov/downloads/pdf/ManagingSpontaneousVolunteers.pdf>

Mary V. Merrill, "Developing Volunteer Job Descriptions." World Volunteer Web, United Nations Volunteers program. September 2005.

[http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/resources/how-to-guides/manage-volunteers/doc/\\_developing-volunteer-job-descriptions.html](http://www.worldvolunteerweb.org/resources/how-to-guides/manage-volunteers/doc/_developing-volunteer-job-descriptions.html)

U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Federal Emergency Management Agency, "FEMA National Emergency Responder Credentialing—Medical and Public Health." March 2008.

<http://www.FEMA.gov>

The Corporation for National and Community Service.

<http://www.nationalserviceresources.org>