

Donations and Volunteers: Managing Resources for Emergencies at Education Agencies

READINESS AND EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT FOR SCHOOLS TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE CENTER

The presence of volunteers, both affiliated and unaffiliated, and the influx of donations during and after an emergency can be addressed through a comprehensive emergency operations plan (EOP). Education agencies and their planning teams must consider developing a system that addresses the different types of donations and volunteers, how they will be distributed and managed, who will be involved in that process internally and externally, and how to communicate with organizations and individuals playing key roles. Furthermore, an EOP should consider how to ensure the safety of students, staff members, and visitors while volunteers are on campus, as well as the tools needed to maintain and manage volunteers, donations, and the various operational functions that come with their influx.

Operational Aspects to Consider

There are various operational aspects that core planning teams at education agencies should consider when creating these plans in collaboration with key community partners. These include managing information, goods, facilities, transportation, volunteers, services, and cash.

Information management

Effective communication is very important during major emergency events, especially when they prompt an influx of donations and volunteers and the activation of a [memorandum of understanding \(MOU\)](#), [mutual aid agreement \(MAA\)](#), or [interlocal agreement](#). Key questions that may come up include the following: How will information be communicated to volunteers, donors, and the public? What types of information need to be communicated? Is information available in various formats and languages to ensure accessibility? Is it documented and tracked in a particular place and by a particular person, group, or agency? How is information communicated to the whole school or campus community?

Goods, facilities, and transportation management

The presence of volunteers and donors can increase the presence of goods and the need for facilities and transportation. For example, how will volunteers be transported to and from the emergency location? How will goods be stored and distributed? Where will they be distributed? How will they be tracked for reporting purposes? Some states have a donations management framework that educational entities can use or build upon. Educational entities may be able to access the donations management systems of organizations that support them on a daily basis.

Volunteer and services management

When an emergency has occurred and the school or campus is bombarded with individuals who would like to offer their services, who determines whether their services are needed and/or can be used? Part of that determination may depend on whether the volunteers are affiliated with a group or they just came to the site spontaneously with no formal training in emergency response.

Cash management

Cash presents another issue. How will it be logged? Who determines how it will be spent? Is it undesignated (funds that are offered by unsolicited sources) or designated? How will funds be tracked to ensure they are being spent in compliance with the donors' intent?

Other operations management

There are many steps that go into matching verified donations to the specific needs of each educational entity and its community. For example, how will the operations team collect and determine the specific needs of the educational entity and its community? Will there be a survey? What platform will be used to collect and track available resources and match them to the educational entity's needs? How frequently will the educational entity update the public or make additional needs known? What platform or tool will be used to interface with the school/higher ed community and the public to communicate unmet needs? How will intended donations be vetted? Are donations bona fide and needed, and is it feasible to accept them at this time?

Key Partnerships

Most of the operational functions that will need to be put in place to manage donations and volunteers will involve collaboration with key agencies and organizations outside of the school, school district, or institution of higher education (IHE). They include the following:

- **Emergency management agencies**—They can help ensure that donations are routed to the right places, help with communication efforts, and help with the volunteer recruitment process. Emergency management agencies at the local, state, territorial, tribal, and federal levels can provide guidance and support on the management of and messaging related to cleanup, volunteers, and donations. [FEMA Voluntary Agency Liaisons](#) help stakeholders build relationships with and coordinate efforts across partners on all levels, including the government.

- **Youth-serving organizations**—They often care for children who attend the education agency, partner with the education agency in other capacities, and are familiar with school/campus grounds. This means that youth-serving organizations have a direct stake in supporting a successful recovery.
- **Faith-based organizations**—They may collect funds for donation to an education agency, recruit volunteers during weekly services, and offer support in the form of sheltering, food kitchens, and counseling.
- **Voluntary organizations active in disaster (VOADs)**—These groups exist on the national, state, and local levels. VOADs have experience and training in disaster mitigation, response, and recovery.
- **Community emergency response team (CERT)**—Many high schools and IHEs have integrated teen CERT and campus CERT programs into their curricula. Key areas that CERT students may be trained in include general disaster preparedness; basic disaster response skills, such as team organization; search and rescue; medical operations; targeted outreach; and integration of the whole school/campus community.

Donations and Volunteers Management Annex

Core planning teams at education agencies should create plans to ensure they can manage the possible influx of donations and volunteers. This can be accomplished via the six-step planning process outlined in the [Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#), [The Role of Districts in Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans](#), and the [Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education](#). The result can be a comprehensive Donations and Volunteers Management Annex in the EOP that addresses what should happen before, during, and after an emergency. This annex should address a variety of threats and hazards and may reference other annexes, such as the Continuity of Operations Annex.

Before

Actions to take before an emergency occurs include the following:

- **Create MOUs and MAAs with key agencies and organizations.** Clearly outline the roles and responsibilities of potential volunteers and support groups. Mandate that partnering service organizations require all staff members to undergo background checks.
- **Designate key local, state/territorial, and federal points of contact.** Identify the contact information of key stakeholders in advance, and ensure that multiple modes of contact are included to account for any disruptions in phone or internet service. Print copies of contact information and distribute them to key members of the response team in advance.
- **Train staff members and volunteers on the [National Incident Management System](#) and the [Incident Command System](#).** Understand how key stakeholders on the federal level operate and communicate in advance, as well as how to work with state and local emergency management agencies for funding support or guidance.
- **Develop systems for information management.** Ensure that you have an electronic system to track incoming and outgoing goods and services donated and volunteered during a major emergency event. Create a system to communicate with partner organizations to ensure that everyone is aware of the most up-to-date situation.
- **Determine which departments will need to be involved in the process.** Identify the departments (e.g., human resources, communications, and facilities management) that may be vital in advance. Notify those departments so that they are aware of their roles and responsibilities during and after a major emergency event.

During

Courses of action to take during an emergency focus on coordination. These may include the following:

- **Communicate needs clearly.** Use tools such as social media, websites, and electronic systems to constantly update the public on the types of goods, skills, services, and support that are needed. Be judicious about how public messages are used to solicit donations when dealing with [the media](#).

- **Confirm tracking/inventory requirements.**

Determine whether you are required to carefully track and report on the goods and funds received and disseminated. Ensure that requirements are addressed in the donation process so that your education agency is compliant with any laws or agreements.

After


Strategies to apply after an emergency focus on recovery, including the following:

- **Conduct an [after-action review](#) and develop an [after-action report](#).** Discuss and document strengths and weaknesses, and update the EOP accordingly.
- **Manage [event memorialization](#).** Create systems and/or storage facilities to receive and track donations and to manage student and community volunteers who sign up to support events hosted on anniversary dates.

Resources

- [Managing Donations and Volunteers Before, During, and After School and Campus Emergency Events](#), Webinar (REMS TA Center)
- [Enhancing School and Higher Ed Safety Leadership Capabilities](#), Web Page (REMS TA Center)
- [Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster](#), Training Package (AmeriCorps)
- [Volunteer and Donate](#), Web Page (U.S. Department of Homeland Security [DHS], Federal Emergency Management Agency [FEMA])
- [Volunteer and Donations Management Support Annex](#), Publication (DHS, FEMA)



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