Vermont Emergency Management

June 2024

**Spontaneous Volunteer Annex**

Spontaneous volunteers are community members who show up during or following an incident wanting to help, having no previous affiliation with volunteer organizations. During major events in Vermont, we have seen the extent to which Vermonters are motivated to support their communities in times of need. Spontaneous volunteers have immense capacity to support response and recovery efforts – they often know their communities better than responders, they can provide insight into the needs of vulnerable residents, and many possess invaluable skills. But you should consider the safety of spontaneous volunteers in the assignment of tasks to avoid additional injuries or complexities to the response. This annex offers some suggestions if you are planning to use spontaneous volunteers. This document is not a replacement for professional legal advice nor is this document a complete guide to safety precautions. This document merely provides some recommendations to consider when utilizing spontaneous volunteers. It’s best to talk to a lawyer or other local officials who can give you advice for your particular circumstances.

**Affiliating volunteers**

Local organizations that already support volunteering may be able to organize volunteers, taking that work off the shoulders of emergency management and responders. If you have such organizations in your town, encouraging spontaneous volunteers to affiliate with these organizations may streamline the process and take some work off of your team. During blue sky days, consider what organizations in your area already support volunteers, and talk with them about if and how spontaneous volunteers can join them:

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| **Organization** | **Point of Contact** | **Notes: What types of services? how would volunteers join?** |
| *Example organization* | *John Smith, 123-4567, jsmith@example.org* | *Volunteer-run meal distribution program, can plug volunteers in to meal prep and distributing food to shelters and individuals in need. Have volunteers reach out to point of contact.* |
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**Supporting Volunteers through Emergency Management**

If you are managing volunteers not affiliated with an organization, getting to know what skills exist in the community and planning tasks volunteers can perform will help plug them in to your work smoothly. Does your town have HAM/amateur radio operators? A snowmobile or ATV club? What local knowledge and skills might help during an incident?

Listing groups with particular skills can help identify resources for your emergency management team during and following an incident:

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| **Person/Group** | **Skills** | **Points of Contact** | **Notes** |
| *Example: HAM radio club* | *Amateur radio operations to support emergency communications* | *John Smith, 123-4567 Johnsmith@example.org*  *Jill smith, 234-5678*  *Jillsmith@example.org* | *4-person club, two within walking distance of EOC if needed, able to support communications* |
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**Managing Volunteers**

Who in your town will coordinate volunteers during and following an incident? The EMD will likely be handling multiple tasks, so this should fall to another role in the EOC or emergency management team.

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| **Volunteer Manager:** | **Contact:** |

**Gathering Point**

Deciding on a volunteer gathering point can help organize spontaneous volunteers. If you have an organization affiliating and leading volunteers, your team can direct volunteers to that location. If not, choose a gathering point that is likely to be accessible in a variety of incidents, but not in the way of life safety response. Consider ease of accessing this gathering point from your EOC in the event that communications are compromised and runners or short-range radios are being used to communicate with the volunteer manager.

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| **Volunteer Gathering Point:** |

**Preparing Volunteers**

Make sure volunteers have the PPE to keep safe while doing their work. At minimum:

* Sturdy close-toed shoes
* Clothing appropriate for the weather
* Work gloves
* Water and snacks
* Some working method of communication, or be in contact with a volunteer manager in possession of working communication
* A buddy (see below)

This list can be posted with all volunteer requests, and as a reminder at your volunteer gathering point. It is also useful to have volunteers work in pairs, to make sure no one volunteer wanders off to an area by themselves without any accountability. Volunteers can come with their own buddy, or be paired by the volunteer manager. This buddy system will keep volunteers safer and more easily accounted for.

**Volunteer Tasks**

There are often many roles for volunteers without specialized training, especially under the guidance of a supervisor with more skills. These are more effective when planned at least partially in advance. In the aftermath of an incident, what tasks can untrained volunteers perform in your town? Who will supervise these tasks? What gear/PPE will they need?

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| **Task** | **Supervisor** | **Needed Gear** |
| *Ex: Extra shelter support* | *Shelter manager* | *Masks and gloves available in case of need for cleaning or covid safety* |
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We know that the reality is that some Vermonters will be out clearing roads, making meals and doing other community support work without our guidance. The role of the emergency management team is to provide guidance and organization where possible and useful, but also know that some volunteer efforts will be going on outside of the structure we provide.

**Some Considerations for Use of Spontaneous Volunteers**

Managers and other leadership should not send volunteers into unsafe situations, and assignments should be vetted by leadership including the organization’s attorney when appropriate. Managers and leadership should develop procedures to evaluate spontaneous volunteers’ skills and limitations. This procedure should include an evaluation process to determine (1) whether it is safe to accept a volunteer’s services and (2) a process to evaluate what, if any, types of assignments they can safely provide. In the event, managers and/or leadership determine assignments are appropriate, such assignments should be led by and carefully observed by the organization’s managers and leadership.

**Tracking Volunteer Hours**

Tracking the hours volunteers work on each project will be important for reporting in-kind donations to FEMA. The number of hours on each project can be tracked via a sign-in sheet listing the volunteer name, date, project, time in, and time out. A sample tracking sheet is on the next page.

**Additional Resources for Consideration**

* [FEMA Independent Study Developing and Managing Volunteers](https://training.fema.gov/is/courseoverview.aspx?code=is-244.b&lang=en)
* [FEMA Community Emergency Response Team](https://community.fema.gov/PreparednessCommunity/s/about-cert?language=en_US)
* [Vermont League of Cities and Towns Resource Library](https://www.vlct.org/resource-library)

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| **First Name** | **Last Name** | **Date** | **Project** | **Location** | **Time In** | **Time Out** |
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