

How to Help Disaster Survivors Impacted by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma

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WASHINGTON – The compassion and generosity of the American people is never more evident than during and after a disaster. It is through individuals, non-profits, faith- and community-based organizations, private sector partners, and governmental agencies working together that will most effectively and efficiently help survivors cope with the cataclysmic impacts of Hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

Please follow a few important guidelines below to ensure your support can be the most helpful for Hurricane Irma disaster survivors.

DONATE TO RELIEF EFFORTS

The most effective way to support disaster survivors in their recovery is to donate money and time to trusted and reputable organizations.

Cash donations offer voluntary agencies and faith-based organizations the most flexibility to address urgently developing needs. With cash in hand, these organizations can obtain needed resources nearer to the disaster location. This inflow of cash also gives these organizations flexibility in determining what is most needed once on-scene after a natural disaster.

Please do not donate unsolicited goods such as used clothing, miscellaneous household items, medicine, or perishable foodstuffs at this time. While donators have loving intentions in providing these articles, when used personal items are donated, the helping agencies must redirect their staff away from providing direct services to survivors in order to sort, package, transport, warehouse, and distribute items that may not meet the needs of disaster survivors.

Donate through a trusted organization. At the national level, many voluntary-, faith- and community-based organizations are active in disasters, and are trusted ways to donate to disaster survivors. Individuals, corporations, and volunteers, can learn more about how to help on the [National Voluntary Organizations Active](#)



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Page 1 of 3

[in Disaster](#) (NVOAD) website. This can be the first step if you want to support response and relief operations in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands or the U.S. mainland.

TO PERSONALLY VOLUNTEER IN THE DISASTER AREAS

Hurricane Irma remains a Category 4 storm, with sustained winds of 150 miles per hour. The National Hurricane Center said Irma is “a life-threatening situation,” urging people to follow evacuation and other instructions from local officials. It is not advisable for volunteers to self-deploy to damaged areas, as it could create an additional burden for first responders.

To ensure volunteer safety, as well as the safety of disaster survivors, volunteers should only go into affected areas with a specific volunteer assignment, proper safety gear, and valid identification.

At this time, potential volunteers are asked to register with a voluntary or charitable organization of their choice, many of which are already in impacted areas supporting survivors on the ground.

The [National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster](#) is registering volunteers to help survivors affected by Hurricanes Harvey and Irma.

In addition to the national members, the Florida Division of Emergency Management (FDEM) is coordinating with volunteer organizations across the state and partnering with the [American Red Cross](#) (ARC) to provide shelter operations training to volunteers and AmeriCorps grantees. To volunteer, visit the [Volunteer Florida](#) website or call 1-800-FL-Help-1.

Most importantly, please be patient. Although the need is great, and the desire to help is strong, it is important to avoid donating material goods or self-deploying to help until communities are safe and public officials and disaster relief organizations have had an opportunity to assess the damage and identify what the specific unmet needs are.

Volunteer generosity helps impacted communities heal from the tragic consequences of disasters, but recovery takes time. There will be volunteer needs for many months, and years, after the disaster, so sign up now.



Hurricane Irma is still considered extremely dangerous, with the potential to affect large areas of several southeastern states. As the situation changes, needs may also change in these areas. Continue monitoring traditional and social media channels to learn more.

FEMA's mission is to support our citizens and first responders to ensure that as a nation we work together to build, sustain and improve our capability to prepare for, protect against, respond to, recover from and mitigate all hazards.

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