

# Volunteers Play Integral Role in Disaster Relief and Recovery Efforts

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WASHINGTON – Volunteers representing dozens of local, state, and national organizations are working alongside federal, state, tribal, territorial, and local responders to address the immediate needs of survivors affected by Hurricanes Irma and Harvey.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) is advising people who want to help survivors affected by Hurricanes Irma and Harvey to do so through affiliation with the voluntary organizations that are active in the ongoing disaster operations. Those interested in volunteering are requested to do so through organized volunteer organizations and not to self-deploy to affected regions.

National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) serves as the primary point of contact for voluntary organization coordination in FEMA's National Response Coordination Center, supporting Emergency Support Function 6 (Mass Care, Emergency Assistance, Housing, and Human Services) under the National Response Framework.

National VOAD continues to work with a network of more than 50 national agencies, and 55 state and territorial VOADs, providing countless volunteers and services to support response and recovery efforts. National VOAD members, including voluntary, non-profit and faith-based organizations, are working closely with affected communities to provide mobile feeding in areas where there are power outages, to assist with debris removal, and as needed, to support with temporary roofing for disaster survivors.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS) is a federal agency that improves lives, strengthens communities, and fosters civic engagement through service and volunteering. Those interested in volunteering are encouraged to view CNCSs website at [www.serve.gov](http://www.serve.gov) for more information.



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With a large response effort spanning multiple states, the American Red Cross is working closely with government agencies and community organizations to coordinate this multi-state relief response. Partners like **AmeriCorps**, **Islamic Relief USA**, the **National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP)**, and the **National Baptist Convention USA** are assisting to provide help and comfort.

Examples of ongoing work include:

- **The American Red Cross** has opened shelters in Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, and Texas, and has been mobilizing trained disaster workers across the region. Sunday night more than 5,600 people stayed in 80 Red Cross or community shelters in regions affected by Hurricanes Irma and Harvey, and thousands of Red Cross disaster workers are lending a hand. Almost 300 emergency response vehicles are traveling through affected neighborhoods, distributing hot meals and relief supplies.
- **The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS)** has activated 23 AmeriCorps Disaster Response Teams, including FEMA Corps, to support recovery operations in areas affected by Hurricane Irma, including Florida, Georgia, and Puerto Rico. These AmeriCorps members are supporting recovery and shelter operations with the American Red Cross, Save the Children, and FEMA.
- In addition, Florida-based Senior Corps programs have been identified to support Save the Children, to create child-friendly spaces in shelters. Locally serving AmeriCorps and Senior Corps members are on standby as the agency coordinates with [Volunteer Florida](#), the governor-appointed state service commission, and other partners to assess additional resources needed.
- **Salvation Army** reports serving more than half a million meals to people who have been displaced or have had their homes damaged by Hurricane Irma in south-eastern states of the United States. This is in addition to the church and charity's ongoing emergency response in many of the Caribbean islands, and in reaction to Hurricane Harvey in Texas.
- **Habitat for Humanity International** reported local Habitats are checking on homes and conducting assessments in their communities, and are helping families with long-term hurricane recovery. The international organization has



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created a social media campaign that allows supporters to share their message of support, by using the #HabitatHammersBack hashtag.

- **NECHAMA**, a Jewish non-profit social service organization, has mobilized hundreds of students to aid in post-disaster rebuilding efforts across the United States. Through partnerships with local communal organizations, their volunteers assist in all aspects of recovery including: assisting in cleaning up, removing debris, cleaning and sanitizing homes, hanging drywall, painting, flooring, and more.
- **United Way** is standing up Volunteer Reception Centers to coordinate unaffiliated volunteers from other states, and tie them in with established organizations performing response and recovery operations.
- **Team Rubicon** is an organization which unites the skills and experiences of military veterans with emergency responders, Team Rubicon's Area Command is established in Houston to coordinate and support responses in multiple communities of Texas, including Rockport, Magnolia, Friendswood, Beaumont, and others across Harris County. Currently, 212 volunteers have deployed to hurricane-impacted communities in Texas, while another 495 provide remote support, including 374 men and women who have taken over 5,000 requests for assistance through the Crisis Cleanup hotline.
- **Feeding America** has secured 1 million pounds of food and supplies for Hurricane Irma relief efforts, and that number is expected to grow as the need intensifies. In Georgia, food banks are working to provide meals to many evacuees from Florida currently taking refuge in Georgia. Feeding America food banks strategically positioned water, snacks, and supplies in advance of the storms.
- In Florida, the **Statewide Independent Living Council** and **Portlight Strategies** set up food and water distribution centers for survivors with disabilities. Portlight Strategies also distributed approximately two dozen generators to disability organizations in Florida to create recharging stations for power wheelchairs or other equipment for impacted individuals. The **Pass it On Center**, together with Portlight and other disability partner organizations, created a durable medical equipment portal to coordinate collection and distribution of equipment to affected individuals.
- In Houston, Texas, Portlight worked with the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities to coordinate storage and distribution of durable medical equipment to survivors with disabilities.



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The activities of charitable, faith-based, and non-profit voluntary agencies are far reaching, and anyone interested in providing assistance to disaster survivors may visit the National VOAD website at [www.nvoad.org](http://www.nvoad.org) to learn more. Individuals' support is instrumental in helping these communities recover, and according to the National VOAD, there are several ways to help disaster survivors. They include:

- *Donation of Cash* - A financial contribution to a recognized disaster relief organization is the most effective donation to make. Public support of these voluntary organizations with financial contributions helps ensure a steady flow of important services to people in need after a disaster.
- *Volunteering* - Volunteer with a recognized organization involved in disaster response and recovery. While newly recruited volunteers may not complete training in time to assist with current response efforts, they will be prepared to help with the next disaster event.
- *Donation of Goods* - Before taking action, confirm what is needed and donate in-kind goods that are specifically requested or needed by recognized organizations. Receiving and managing unsolicited donated goods often redirects voluntary agencies' valuable resources away from the services required to meet the needs of disaster survivors.

Just as the federal government works closely with 50 plus National VOAD members, as well as many other voluntary, community, and faith-based organizations, states and territories have their own State Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOAD) organization. For information on VOADs in affected areas, please visit the following: [Florida](#); [Georgia](#); [Texas](#); [Puerto Rico](#); [U.S. Virgin Islands](#).

The compassion of the American people is already evident in their response to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma, and preparations for Hurricanes Maria and Jose.

For more information on current activities, visit <https://www.fema.gov/hurricane-harvey>, <https://www.fema.gov/hurricane-irma> or <https://www.fema.gov/hurricane-maria>.

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