Managing Donations and Volunteers as a Part of Education Agency Emergency Management

Background

As Hurricane Irma approached the state of Florida in September 2017, Governor Rick Scott reported that more than 17,000 volunteers signed up to support the state through Volunteer Florida, and that countless organizations had signed on to donate goods, services, and funds (Fox News, 2017). Volunteers and donors in these situations present a paradox: people's willingness to volunteer versus the system's capacity to utilize them effectively (Points of Light, 2002).

When a major emergency event affects a school, school district, or institution of higher education (IHE), there are various functions that responding organizations have to activate in order to respond and recover effectively. These functions may include but are not limited to evacuation, accounting for all persons, medical services, sheltering in place, and continuity of operations. With all these required courses of action taking place simultaneously, it can be a difficult process to manage. The presence of volunteers, both unaffiliated, and affiliated, along with the influx of donations, can bring about another layer of functions and courses of action to consider.

> *"Uncoordinated, uncontrolled masses of donated goods and volunteers can interfere with disaster operations and cause a secondary disaster."*
>
> —Federal Emergency Management Agency

Education agencies are particularly unique because they are entrusted to protect the vulnerable populations they serve and often can become community response, recovery, and sheltering centers during and after a major emergency event. In these situations, education agencies must consider—in collaboration with their community partners—the following:

- How to protect and ensure the safety of students, staff members, and visitors while volunteers are on school or campus;
- Types of donations and volunteers and how they will be distributed/managed;
- Who will be involved in that process internally and externally;
- Systems and tools that will need to be put in place and maintained to manage volunteers, donations, and the various operational functions that come along with their influx; and
- How to communicate with organizations and individuals playing key roles in the process.

To help ensure these considerations are accounted for before a major emergency event occurs, it is recommended that education agencies on the K-12 and higher ed levels use a system to manage donations and volunteers. The system and processes should then be described within their emergency operations plans (EOP).

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Operational Aspects to Consider in Partnership With Key Organizations and Agencies

There are various operational aspects that emergency management planning and response teams at education agencies may consider when creating these plans in collaboration with key community partners. These include the following:

- **Managing information.** Effective communication is very important during major emergency events, especially when they prompt an influx of donations and volunteers and the possible activation of Memoranda of Understanding and Agreement (MOUs and MOAs). Key questions that may come up include the following:
  - How will information be communicated to volunteers, donors, and the public?
  - What types of information needs to be communicated?
  - Is it 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 and campus community?
- **Managing goods, facilities, and transportation.** The presence of volunteers and donors can increase the presence of goods and the need for facilities and transportation.
  - 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. Or, educational entities may be able to access the donations management systems of organizations that support them on a daily basis.
- **Managing volunteers/services.** An emergency has occurred and within a day, 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?
  - Are the volunteers affiliated with a group or did they just come to the site spontaneously?
- **Managing cash.** Cash presents another issue.
  - How will it be logged?
  - Who determines how it will be spent?

COMMON TERMINOLOGY

- **Undesignated Donations.** This includes services, new or used goods including clothing, toys, food, and vehicles, etc. offered independently/not through affiliated orgs.
- **Undesignated Cash Donors.** Funds that are offered by unsolicited sources.
- **Affiliated Volunteers.** Attached to a recognized voluntary or nonprofit organization and trained for specific disaster response activities.
- **Unaffiliated Volunteers.** Not members of a recognized voluntary agency and often have no formal training in emergency response.

- o   Is it undesignated or designated?
- o   How will funds be tracked to ensure they are being spent in compliance with the donor's intent?
- Managing the operation. There are many steps that go into matching verified donations to the specific needs of each educational entity and its community.
  - o   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 matched to the educational entity's needs?
  - o   How frequently will the educational entity update the public or make known additional needs?
    - ▪   What platform or tool will be used to interface with the school/higher ed community and the public to communicate unmet needs?
  - o   How will intended donations be vetted? Are donations bona fide, needed, and is it feasible to be accepted at the time?

The process of managing donations and volunteers will likely vary depending on the type, scope, and magnitude of the emergency event and the locality it affects—whether it is limited to a small geographic area, a state, or even a region. For example, in one state that is regularly affected by seasonal natural disasters, a few large nonprofits work through the governor's office to help meet the donations and volunteer management needs of educational entities. Another state collaborates with one foundation that then works with all the sectors in the state. In other states, there are multiple systems in place, such as a statewide system that is supplemented by city-based systems.

Following emergencies during which educational entities lack access to a central system, educational entities will likely want to partner with another organization, such as a nongovernmental organization, to use or share their existing processes or systems. As a part of this partnership, education officials can share their needs with the public and come up with a process to receive, track, and deliver donations, as well as keep the donor informed about how their donations were used.

Most of the operational functions that will need to be put in place to manage donations and volunteers during and after an emergency will involve collaboration with key agencies and organizations outside of the school, school district, or IHE. This includes the following:

- Emergency management agencies. Local, state, territorial, tribal, and federal governments are all important partners when education agencies need support with managing an influx of donations and volunteers. They can help ensure that donations are routed to the right places, support communication efforts, and provide help with the volunteer recruitment purpose, among other things. FEMA's Volunteer Agency Coordination Group helps stakeholders build relationships with and coordinate efforts across partners on all levels, including the government. Along with information-sharing, through their Voluntary Agency Liaisons, they can provide guidance and support-related voluntary, faith-based, and community efforts including clean-up, volunteer,

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and donations messaging and management; Volunteer Reception Centers; Multi-Agency Resource Centers; Long-Term Recovery Groups; and Philanthropic Agency Liaisons.

- **Community-based organizations.** As all major emergency events are local events, organizations within the school, school district, or campus community will often be the first in line to offer support to education agencies in the form of donations and volunteers during and after an emergency. Their support is critical, as they often have children who attend the education agency, partner with the education agency in other capacities, and are familiar with school/campus grounds. This means that they have a direct stake in supporting a successful recovery.

- **Faith-based organizations.** Whether an education agency is religiously oriented or not, faith-based organizations often step in to provide support to education agencies during and after disasters in the form of donations and volunteer support. They may collect funds for donation to a school, school district, or IHE; recruit volunteers during weekly services; and/or offer support in the form of sheltering, food kitchens, and counseling.

- **Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (VOADs)/Community Organizations Active in Disaster.** These groups, which exist on the national, state, and local levels, have experience and training in disaster mitigation, response, and recovery. These include groups like the American Red Cross, Habitat for Humanity, Points of Light, Save the Children, United Way, and the Salvation Army. Like community organizations, they are often the first to sign up to provide support during major emergency events that affect school and campus communities. For information on state/territory VOAD members, visit https://www.nvoad.org/voad-members/stateterritory-members/. For details on national members, visit https://www.nvoad.org/voad-members/national-members/.

- **Citizen Corps and CERT Programs.** Many education agencies and school/campus communities throughout the country host and train community emergency response teams (CERT). For example, University of California, Santa Barbara has an active CERT program on campus that would be utilized, as well as an emergency operations center that they would work in, to support the volunteer and donations management process. Benefits of having them involved in the process include it is more likely they have training on key emergency management, response and recovery processes and systems, and the educational entity and its community partners will know firsthand the volunteers and their skills, skill level, and experience. Key areas they may be trained in include basic disaster response skills such as team organization, search and rescue, medical operations, targeted outreach, integration of the whole school/campus community, and general disaster preparedness. Learn more about Citizen Corps and CERT via the FEMA site: https://www.ready.gov/get-involved.

Relation to EOP Development and Planning

The federal *Guide for Developing High-Quality School Emergency Operations Plans* (*School Guide*) and the *Guide for Developing High-Quality Emergency Operations Plans for Institutions of Higher Education* (*IHE Guide*) both note that "effective planning depends on a consistent analysis and comparison of the threats and hazards a particular [school or] institution of higher education faces" (*Guide for Developing*

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High-Quality, 2013). As core emergency management planning teams at education agencies across the country work to create EOPs to respond to and recover from major emergency events caused by natural disasters and adversarial and human-caused threats, they should also create plans to ensure they can manage the possible influx of donations and volunteers. Once the operational aspects and functions related to managing donations and volunteers are understood, emergency management teams at schools, school districts, and IHEs should incorporate them into a comprehensive Donations and Volunteers Management Annex that includes goals, objectives, and activities/courses of action for before, during, and after an emergency event.

Before

- *Create MOUs and MOAs with key agencies and organizations.* It is recommended that education agencies create MOUs and MOAs with key agencies and organizations in advance so that the roles and responsibilities of potential volunteers and support groups are clearly outlined. In addition, education agencies can take steps to protect their vulnerable populations, which include young children and those with disabilities and access and functional needs, by necessitating that partnering service organizations require all staff members to undergo a background check. This ensures that time is not spent during an emergency vetting volunteers who are ready and available immediately to provide needed support. Additionally, ensure that partner organizations consider those with disabilities and access and functional needs when training volunteer staff.

- *Designate key local, state, territorial, and federal points of contact.* When a major emergency event happens, the last thing emergency response teams at education agencies have time to do is determine who to call for support. Depending on the type of emergency, cell phone lines and Internet service may be compromised, which means that accessing this information will be even more difficult. Determine 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. If possible, print copies of contact information and distribute them to key members of the response team in advance.

- *Get training on the National Incident Management System and the Incident Command System.* Understanding how key stakeholders on the federal level operate and communicate in advance will ease any frustration with required processes during a major emergency event. This knowledge can also support required work with state and local emergency management agencies, who often serve as key points of connection between education agencies and the federal government when funding support or guidance is needed.

- *Develop systems to support information management.* Much of the work that education agencies will have to put into managing donations and volunteers will be related to information management. For example, some education agencies create electronic systems to track incoming and outgoing goods and services donated and volunteered during a major emergency event. In some cases, portions of this system are shared with the public to ensure that individuals or groups interested in offering support are always aware of exactly what is needed and exactly how to provide that need. This was the case for state emergency management

representatives within the Office of School Preparedness & Emergency Planning at the New Jersey Department of Education following Hurricane Sandy, which prompted the creation of a matrix system that allows them to generate a spreadsheet to detail incoming goods and funds, and to track where donations are distributed. Systems are also needed to communicate with partner organizations providing donations and volunteer support to ensure that everyone is aware of the current situation and to collaborate for spontaneous scenario-based planning that may be required as situations change during a major emergency event.

- *Determine which school, school district, and/or higher ed departments will be needed to support the process.* Support may be required from various education agency departments to manage donations and volunteers. It is important to determine which ones may be vital in advance, so that they are aware of their role and responsibility during and after a major emergency event. For example, the human resources department may provide support with spontaneous background checks, the communications departments may support the dissemination of key information to the public, and facilities management staff may help ensure that access control is maintained while volunteers are on campus.

During

- *Activate the plan.* The first thing that emergency response teams at education agencies should consider doing when a major threat or hazard has been confirmed is to activate the Donations and Volunteer Management Annex. This plan will outline key steps that emergency managers need to take in the event of an influx of donations and/or volunteers. They should meet with key stakeholders as soon as possible so that related systems and teams can also be activated and assembled, and to confirm any unique circumstances to consider based on the type of threat or hazard that caused the major emergency event.

- *Communicate needs clearly.* Work carefully with public information officers and other partners responsible for communicating needs to the public to ensure that needs are communicated clearly. This is where tools like social media and electronic systems may be helpful. Emergency management teams can use social media, education agency websites, or specially designed applications to constantly update the public on the types of goods, skills, services, and support needed. C.J. Huff, former Superintendent of Joplin Schools in Joplin, Missouri, reported that during response efforts to the 2011 tornado that struck their school district, they recognized the importance of setting up a system like this after one mass-distributed message to the public prompted the donation of a horde of musical instruments that, while appreciated, could not be used. When dealing with the media, education agencies need to be judicious about how public messages are used to solicit donations.

- *Confirm tracking/inventory requirements.* Some agencies on the local, state, federal, and national levels require that goods received and disseminated be carefully tracked and reported during and after a major emergency event that leads to the donation of funds or goods. In some cases, the requirements vary depending on the type of threat or hazard, when the event occurred, and the status of the education agency as private, public, for-profit, or nonprofit. Emergency managers and first responders at education agencies should consider taking time to confirm requirements as soon as possible to ensure that their school, school district, or IHE is in

compliance with any state, local, or federal laws and/or other agreements set up as a part of the donation process.

After

- *Revise the Donations and Volunteer Management Annex.* Emergency management teams at education agencies can learn a lot from events that happen. They can use this information to inform the revision of related plans, including plans to manage donations and volunteers. After an event, planning and response teams should set up a time to meet with key stakeholders to discuss the need to do things such as change MOUs and MOAs, revise response plans, update electronic systems, enhance communication plans, and engage the whole school and campus community in response and/or recovery. All changes should be recorded in the related annex, stored in the education agency's EOP, and shared with key stakeholders.
- *Manage event memorialization.* In some cases, major emergency events, such as school shootings, are memorialized by the education agency and/or the school or campus community as a way to remember the victims. For some education agencies and their partners, this can present the need to 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.

Sample Goals and Objectives for Before, During, and After

During the six step planning process outlined in the *School Guide* and *IHE Guide*, federal partners recommend that schools and IHEs create goals and objectives to achieve the best outcome for (1) before, (2) during, and (3) after a major emergency event occurs. Goals and objectives developed to support the management of donations and volunteers may be applicable to various threats and hazards, as illustrated in the examples below.

- Donation/Volunteer Management Goal Example 1 (before): Protect vulnerable populations and property while also determining how volunteer skills and services can be used.
  - Objective 1.1: Ensure that all MOUs and MOAs with partner organizations include a background and skill check requirement for volunteers.
- Donation/Volunteer Management Goal Example 2 (during): Create a system to continuously communicate the need for specific goods and services in partnership with key agencies and organizations.
  - Objective 2.1: Ensure that the education agency is receiving needed goods and services.
- Donation/Volunteer Management Goal Example 3 (after): Create a system to store goods and to process funds received post-recovery.
  - Objective 3.1: Manage donations received to memorialize major emergency events.

A variety of measures should be developed to manage donations and volunteers that emerge as a result of a variety of threats and hazards, as each threat may present different issues and/or require unique responses. It is recommended that education agencies highlight which action steps outlined to address the management process overlap with other action steps to address other functional areas. For

example, actions outlined in a Continuity of Operations (COOP) Annex within an EOP might provide recommendations to support the need to transport students and/or volunteer staff members to new educational facilities in the event of school, school district, or campus closure. A COOP Annex might also outline details on how education agency administrators can ensure that post-emergency operating costs account for wages to be paid to faculty and staff members who support shelter and other operations during the recovery phase. All courses of action should be categorized, by threat or hazard type, within a Donations and Volunteers Management Annex.

Key Resources

- **Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster, Corporation for National and Community Service.** This self-paced training can support education agencies with understanding various elements related to managing volunteers, including the benefits and burden they can bring, the fundamentals of volunteer management in a disaster response setting, principles for managing donated goods, and other things. https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/resource/hon-cncs-msvtd_participant_materials.pdf
- **National Incident Management System (NIMS) Web Page, FEMA.** This Web page provides information on NIMS and the Incident Command System that education agencies can use to help ensure they understand the national approach to incident management and response. https://www.fema.gov/national-incident-management-system
- **Volunteer & Donate Responsibly Web Page, FEMA.** This Web page outlines the ideal processes individuals and organizations can use to assist communities, including education agencies, affected by a disaster. It includes information on volunteering, donating cash, and donating goods. https://www.fema.gov/volunteer-donate-responsibly
- **Volunteer and Donations Management Support Annex, FEMA.** This sample annex describes the coordination processes and policies that education agencies can use in collaboration with state agencies to ensure the most efficient and effective use of unaffiliated volunteers and unsolicited donated goods. https://www.fema.gov/media-library/assets/documents/32282

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