



# Faith Communities & Disaster Volunteerism

**Volunteer service creates solidarity within and between communities. As a religious leader, you can volunteer in the community and also be instrumental in helping to engage others in disaster-related volunteer projects. It takes many different people with varied talents to help communities rebuild. Volunteering is an important part of individual and community healing after a disaster.**

## Volunteer Opportunities with NYDIS

- **NYDIS Volunteer Leadership Corps.** NYDIS maintains a volunteer leadership corps that is multi-faith and represents the five boroughs of NYC. To learn more, contact NYDIS at 212.669.6100 or visit [www.nydis.org](http://www.nydis.org).
- **Disaster Chaplaincy.** NYDIS recruits, screens, trains, deploys, and supervises chaplains on behalf of our member faith communities, working with response agencies during disaster relief and recovery.

## Other Disaster Volunteer Opportunities

Some organizations have formal disaster programs in which your congregants can participate. Some examples include:

- **American Red Cross in Greater New York:** [www.nyredcross.org](http://www.nyredcross.org). 1.877.REDCROSS.
- **The Salvation Army:** [www.salvationarmy-newyork.org](http://www.salvationarmy-newyork.org). 212.337.7200.
- **New York Cares:** [www.nycares.org](http://www.nycares.org). 212.228.5000.
- **NYC CERT** (Community Emergency Response Teams): CERTs are groups of neighborhood and community-based volunteers that undergo an intensive, 11-week training program in disaster preparedness and basic response skills. After completing training, these teams act to support their local communities by assisting the various emergency agencies that prepare for and respond to disasters. To learn more, see CERT at OEM's website, [www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem), or call 311.
- **Citizen Corps Council of New York City** leverages voluntary citizen involvement, through the coordination of interagency resources, to create a culture of preparedness among New York City's most vulnerable populations and to enable individuals citywide to prepare for, respond to, and recover from disasters. To learn more, visit [www.nyc.gov/oem](http://www.nyc.gov/oem) and click on "For City Agencies."
- **Medical Reserve Corps** volunteers include medical and public health professionals such as physicians, nurses, pharmacists, dentists, veterinarians, and epidemiologists. They supplement existing emergency and public health resources. Contact the MRC at 212.219.5512 or visit [www.medicalreserve.org](http://www.medicalreserve.org).



## Disaster Volunteer Opportunities for Your House of Worship

Within your faith community, there is an abundance of talent and many who will want to participate as volunteers in response and recovery efforts following a disaster. If you create plans to support your existing and disaster-specific programs, you will be in a position to take advantage of immediate offers of assistance. Some helpful ideas to get started are listed below:

- **Identify Partners.** Reach out to other congregations and faith communities that you are likely to partner with in disaster recovery. Identify ways to share resources and expand volunteer opportunities. Plug into community networks and strategize with partners about volunteer retention. NYDIS coordinates with volunteer programs and opportunities offered by our faith-based members and partners in order to maximize participation. To learn more about our members, visit [www.NYDIS.org](http://www.NYDIS.org).
- **Seek Expertise from Key Volunteer Managers.** New York Cares works with thousands of volunteers on a daily basis and offers good models on volunteer management. Visit [www.nycares.org](http://www.nycares.org). World Cares Center offers training opportunities in managing and working with volunteers. Visit [www.worldcares.org](http://www.worldcares.org).
- **Seek Expertise.** The publication listed below offers good guidance and volunteer management expertise.
  - **"Preventing a Disaster within the Disaster: The Effective Use and Management of Unaffiliated Volunteers."** You can find this document by going to [www.community.ups.com](http://www.community.ups.com), clicking on Volunteerism, and checking out their Best Practices Toolbox. It is published by the Points of Light Foundation & Volunteer Center National Network, and the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) through the National Leadership Forum on Disaster Volunteerism.

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## Managing Disaster Volunteers in Your House of Worship

It is important to preserve the volunteer spirit, and to help volunteers to stay motivated and prevent burnout. Ineffective management of volunteers can create serious complications. A strong volunteer program will help to overcome this problem. Some tips for creating a successful volunteer program include:

- **Have a Coordination Plan:** Without a plan in place to coordinate volunteers, it is difficult to manage and impossible to retain volunteers.
- **Pre-Identify Disaster Projects:** Likely types of projects (gutting homes, rebuilding, casework, donation collection and distribution, etc.) and the types of skills that will be needed. Develop volunteer job descriptions including skill sets.
- **Provide Training:** Train volunteers and educate them on expectations, procedures, reporting structures, etc., so that they know what is expected and can succeed within your structure.
- **Identify Skills:** Identify the skills your volunteers bring to the table and utilize them.
- **Encourage Full Participation:** Welcome all but be age, gender, and skill-set appropriate, according to your faith traditions practices.
- **Support and Care for Volunteers:** Ensure that volunteers have the support needed (supplies, guidance, health information, mental health resources). The safety and well-being of volunteers should always come first and it is important to have realistic expectations of volunteers.
- **Recognize Volunteers:** Be sure to recognize volunteers for the work they do in formal and informal ways. This does not have to be expensive; it can be done in low-cost, creative ways.
- **Provide Mental Health and Spiritual Care Services to Volunteers:** Remind volunteers to take time to take care of themselves, and provide them with support and resources, including NYDIS Disaster Tip Sheet on Mental Health and Self-Care.
- **Be Clear About Programs and Projects:** Provide detailed information about projects, purposes, goals, conditions, hygiene, food, work hours, health/safety concerns, etc. Be clear about the skills needed for projects, and match volunteers with projects that match skill levels and expertise. Ensure volunteers have meaningful and constructive opportunities to assist their communities.
- **Limit Work Hours/Give Time Off:** It is important that volunteers take time off from their work as disaster volunteers. This will allow them time to take care of personal matters and to rest, which helps to reduce burn-out.
- **Discourage Self-Deployment:** Do not respond to a disaster site or encourage others to do so until need has been determined. Conditions may not be safe or appropriate for volunteers.



### NYC Spontaneous Volunteer Management Plan

The NYC Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (NYCVOAD) and the NYC Office of Emergency Management (NYC OEM) developed this plan to provide guidance to the emergency response community and voluntary agencies for managing people who are not affiliated with a volunteer program prior to the disaster, but who feel compelled to volunteer.

New York Cares is the lead agency in mobilizing and managing spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers in response to disasters in New York City, with the help of NYC VOAD's Disaster Volunteerism Task Force. The New York Cares website ([www.nycares.org](http://www.nycares.org)) is the citywide resource on spontaneous volunteer needs, linking interested volunteers with appropriate agencies and projects. Individuals who wish to assist in the recovery effort can sign up for projects online, or call the New York Cares office at 212.229.5000 for assistance.



### As a faith community, you can link with New York Cares and the spontaneous volunteer program to:

- Share information about volunteer opportunities with your congregation and refer those whose skills do not match with your ongoing projects.
- Learn the process for requesting volunteers for your own programs and projects.
- Network and share ideas/resources with representatives from other disaster volunteer programs.
- List or learn about disaster volunteer opportunities on the "Community Grapevine" section of the New York Cares website. Go to [www.nycares.org](http://www.nycares.org) and check out the Volunteer section.

## NEW YORK DISASTER INTERFAITH SERVICES

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