



VOLUNTEERING AFTER A DISASTER IN NEW YORK CITY

NYC Service

NYC Emergency
Management

New York Cares



New York City
Voluntary Organizations
Active in Disaster

Introduction

Thank you for your dedication and service as a volunteer. This guide is designed to assist in making your experience volunteering in New York City safer, more productive, and connected to citywide volunteer efforts. In the following pages you will find information and answers regarding common questions about volunteering during disaster response operations in New York City.

Before starting your volunteer service you should familiarize yourself with the work that you or your group may encounter during an emergency response and with some of the key organizations and systems that you may interact with during your service in New York City. Emergency situations can pose dangers, please remain safe and be responsible as a volunteer.

Volunteer Coordination in New York City

New York City Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NYCVOAD)

NYCVOAD is a nonprofit, nonpartisan, membership-based organization that serves as a forum where organizations share knowledge and resources throughout the disaster cycle to help survivors and their communities. The mission of NYCVOAD is to strengthen the capabilities of organizations working in NYC to relieve human suffering caused by disaster. Direct services are provided by the member organizations, not NYCVOAD itself. A complete list of the local NYCVOAD members and information about how your organization can join NYCVOAD are available at nycvoad.org.

If you are volunteering through an organization, find out if your organization is a member of VOAD either nationally or locally through NYCVOAD. If your organization is a member of VOAD, please check in with NYCVOAD if you are planning to serve in New York City by contacting newyorkcityvoad@gmail.com.

NYC Volunteer Coordination Taskforce

During emergency events with high volunteer demand, the City activates a volunteer coordination taskforce to support the sourcing and matching of volunteer groups with disaster-related projects. This taskforce is led by NYC Service, a unit in the NYC Mayor's Office that promotes volunteerism. All volunteer organizations and groups serving after an emergency are encouraged to participate by filling out a capacity survey. The survey helps the taskforce understand what volunteer resources exist and connect them to projects in need. The taskforce will collect this information during times of emergency through surveys available at nyc.gov/helpnycnow (Site launch in fall of 2017).

Capacity Survey- The capacity survey serves two purposes:

First, it gives the taskforce information about what volunteer activity is happening in the city. It is important that volunteer groups from New York City and those that are deployed from elsewhere register with the volunteer taskforce so that resources can be used effectively.

Second, it gives groups of volunteers a way to be considered for potential projects. The taskforce will contact your group lead if there is a project available.

NYC Department of Emergency Management

New York City Emergency Management is the City agency that plans and prepares for emergencies, educates the public about preparedness, coordinates emergency response and recover, and collects and disseminates emergency information

The City's Emergency Operations Center (EOC) is activated during large-scale emergencies or special events. The EOC is a central location for staff members from City, State, and federal agencies to coordinate response efforts, centralize decision making, gather and disseminate information and to allocate and deploy resources.

Spontaneous Volunteers

If you are not affiliated with an organization, but would like to volunteer, you can be connected to volunteer opportunities that will allow you to give your time in a safe and useful way. Spontaneous volunteers are volunteers who look to volunteer after hearing about an emergency but are not associated with a volunteer organization. In New York City, spontaneous volunteers are managed by New York Cares, a nonprofit volunteer organization that can rapidly match volunteers with organizations based on need and availability. Please do not go to the scene of a disaster to see if you can help. Often there is no way to absorb these volunteers, and they are turned away or given work that is unsafe or not useful.

New York Cares

New York Cares meets pressing community needs by mobilizing caring New Yorkers in volunteer service. In 2016, New York Cares engaged more than 64,000 New Yorkers in volunteer service, and enabled them to make the city a better place. New York Cares works with over 1,300 nonprofits and schools across New York City in three main issue areas: improving education, meeting immediate needs, and revitalizing public spaces.

For more information, visit www.newyorkcares.org.

Volunteer Response during Emergencies

How to be an Effective Volunteer

Never Self-Deploy


It is important to never self-deploy, which is when volunteers congregate at the scene of an emergency without authorization. To maintain the safety and effectiveness of volunteer efforts, it is important to be connected to an organization. Self-deploying can hinder rescue efforts and cause confusion.

Assess + Report Needs

Identify any unmet needs and communicate those needs with your organization. Also, make sure to report any dangerous work conditions or illegal activity to your host organization, 311, or 911 in the case of emergency.

Stay Informed

Regularly check the news and weather for updates about emergency situations. The following public information channels will have the most updated information about the emergency and available resources.

 Notify NYC is the City's emergency notification service that communicates urgent information to New York City residents, commuters and visitors. In addition to sending e-mails, text messages, tweets, and phone calls. To register for Notify NYC, visit [NYC.gov/NotifyNYC](https://nyc.gov/NotifyNYC), follow @NotifyNYC or call 311 or (TTY:212-5044115).



311 is New York City's main source of government information and non-emergency services. 311 provides the public with quick, easy access to all New York City government services and information while maintaining the highest possible level of customer service. Information is available in over 170 languages and can be obtained by calling 311 or (212) 639-9675 from outside of New York City. You can also use TTY or Text Telephone at (212) 504-4115. You can also go to nyc.gov/311.



[Nyc.gov/emergencymanagement](https://nyc.gov/emergencymanagement)

Facebook- facebook.com/nycemergencymanagement

Twitter- [@nycem](https://twitter.com/nycem)

NYC Emergency Management will update its website and social media with emergency updates.

Communicate Emergency Information

Misinformation is common during emergencies so make sure that the information that you are sharing is from an accurate or official source. Notify your fellow volunteers and people you are helping about what is going on; spread the word about proper precautions and available resources.

Keep Volunteers Organized

Coordinate your volunteers, identify and assign tasks, and maintain safety while doing work. Check on other volunteers to make sure they are safe.

For more information on effectively managing volunteers, nonprofits and schools are encouraged to download the Great Volunteer Management System (GVMS) [here](#). Through a partnership between New York Care and NYC Service, the GVMS was developed as a single resource guide for all information on managing volunteers.

New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS)

NYDIS and its federation and local and national partners partner with local congregations to coordinate, equip and train congregations to provide volunteer group housing when there is a need for relief and recovery operations in New York City. Finding affordable, appropriate, safe, and functional housing for volunteer groups is one of the greatest challenges faced by volunteer-powered disaster response and recovery organizations. Post- Superstorm Sandy, New York Disaster Interfaith Services (NYDIS) led and implemented the Volunteer Group Housing Program (VGHP) to place volunteer in host congregations. NYDIS leveraged relationships with its member and partner organizations, the VGHP assisted houses of worship of many different faiths in maintaining, at its height, approximately 1,000 beds throughout NYC. The VGHP has the capacity to quickly stand up after a major disaster and begin efficiently housing volunteers in large numbers at experienced housing site in any borough of NYC.

For more information visit nydis.org

Volunteer Roles

There are many ways that volunteers help New York City respond to and recover from emergencies. The list below provides a few of the most common roles that volunteers have done in the past, although each emergency brings its own opportunities and potential roles for volunteers. Your duties will depend on the type of emergency and when you begin volunteering. It is important for you to understand your capability as certain roles require a background check, specialized training, or other special skills.

Chaplaincy Services: Organizations such as [Disaster Chaplaincy Services](#) and [New York Disaster Interfaith Services](#) have trained volunteers who can be asked to provide chaplaincy services during emergencies. These volunteers need to be trained and affiliated with one of these two organizations to work in open centers.

Debris Removal: Volunteers may assist with clearing streets, parks, and other areas of debris, for example following a coastal storm or tornado.

Shelters and Service Centers: Following an emergency, shelters, evacuation centers, and service centers may be opened by the City. These are staffed by trained volunteers and those with background checks, and volunteers for this role are identified before an emergency.

Feeding, Commodity Distribution and Canvassing: Volunteers help to distribute food, water, medicine etc. at fixed meal distribution sites, mobile feeding units, or in support of canvassing operations

Language Interpretation: Because of the diversity of languages in New York City, volunteers who have language capabilities who can interpret/communicate with affected residents may be very helpful during an emergency response.

Medical Assistance: Some volunteers, particularly those that are trained medical professionals, may provide medical services during emergencies. To learn more about how to use your medical training during emergencies, volunteer with [Medical Reserve Corps](#).

Mental Health: Trained volunteers may provide mental health first aid and mental health care to affected New Yorkers.

Muck out: Following a coastal storm or other flooding event storm debris, dirt, and damaged materials will need to be removed from buildings. It is important that volunteers receive personal protective equipment or other safety requirements. Volunteers should not start this work unless they are provided the appropriate masks, gloves, and suits. Volunteers should request and receive a safety brief outlining potential hazards, such as asbestos, and how to address them.

Rebuilding: If buildings are damaged or destroyed during an emergency, volunteers may be able to assist with build or repair projects.

Disaster Volunteer Resources

Unique Elements of New York City

Utilities and Infrastructure

The City's highly interdependent electricity, natural gas, and steam networks are among the oldest and most concentrated systems in the nation. New York City's infrastructure is vulnerable to many types of disruptions which may lead to outages and the need for a volunteer response.

Transportation

Most New Yorkers rely on public transportation. During an emergency incident, trains, subways, and buses along with bridges and tunnels may be unavailable temporarily or permanently. This may cause difficulties for volunteers entering and getting around in the city. It is important to confirm transportation with your organization. For information about service, visit www.mta.info.

Demographics/Social Landscape

New York City is a culturally diverse global center where over 200 languages are spoken; about 36% of the city's population is foreign-born. After English, Spanish, Chinese dialects such as Mandarin and Cantonese, and Russian are the most commonly spoken languages in New York City. If you can speak another language, your language skills may be of use during an emergency response. Make your volunteer organization aware of any language capabilities you may have.

New York City contains neighborhoods with high population density, high concentrations of low income households, older adults, people with access and functional needs, immigrants, and individuals with limited English proficiency. Please remain aware of the diverse array of abilities, cultural practices, and language needs while volunteering and interacting with residents of New York City.

NYC's Threats and Hazards

New York City is at risk of many types of hazards. You should be aware of these hazards because you are likely responding to the effects one of these hazards, and you may also be vulnerable to these hazards during your time here. To learn how to prepare for emergencies, visit [Ready New York](#).

Biological Events- Disease outbreaks can occur anywhere, due to either epidemics or biological terrorism.

Coastal Storms- Coastal storms can cause flooding, structural damage to buildings, transportation service failures, and widespread power outages.

Earthquakes- Although NYC does not sit on a major fault line, earthquakes can and have affected the area.

Extreme Heat- Extreme heat is one of the most common hazards facing NYC. During an extreme heat event the City opens cooling centers, and distributes information and supplies. If you are serving after any emergency in the summer months, be aware of the forecasted temperature.

Fire- Fire is the most common emergency in New York City and may pose a serious risk after disruptions.

Flooding- Flooding can cause structural damage to buildings, disrupt transportation services, and lead to power outages. Avoid flooded areas while serving and check the weather.

Hazmat- Dangerous materials may either cause emergencies, or after emergencies dangerous materials such as asbestos may be uncontained. It is important to wear personal protective equipment, and to report suspected hazmat situations.

Terrorism- Terrorist attacks tend to cause robust volunteer responses, and terrorism is a hazard that you should be aware of during your time in New York City. Always remain alert and report suspicious activity.

Tornadoes- Tornadoes have occurred in every borough of New York City and are typically created by powerful thunderstorms or coastal storms.

Utility Disruption- Prolonged power outages are potentially life-threatening and can cause major economic losses. Gas leaks can be flammable and have caused explosions. Water main breaks, drought, and water contamination can affect water quality and use. Remain alert for the smell of gas and downed power lines, and prepare to not have access to electricity, gas, and water during your service.

Winter Weather- Winter weather including snow, ice, and freezing temperatures is a major secondary hazard if you are serving in NYC during the winter months. Make sure to watch the weather and plan accordingly. Report vulnerable individuals and heat/hot water loss to 311.

Deployment Checklists

While assisting in a disaster response in New York City, it is important to understand the details outlined below. Please refer to these checklists throughout your service.

PRE-DEPLOYMENT

- If you are with a National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disasters (VOAD) organization, make sure your group checks in with the NYCVOAD prior to arriving.
- Understand the type of operations you may be involved in and the appropriate precautions and necessary equipment that you would need.
- Confirm your housing accommodations with your sponsoring organization. NYC has very limited housing so it will be difficult to arrange once you have arrived.
- Obtain contact information for your sponsoring organization and project leads
- Familiarize yourself and other volunteers with New York City, especially the affected area in which you will be working.
- Check the weather forecast for the time that you will be serving and take appropriate measures.

DEPLOYMENT

Upon Arrival:

- If you were deployed by a national organization, check in with your host organization for assignment and initial briefing.
- If you do not have a host organization already working in NYC, connect with NYC's Volunteer Management Task Force by visiting www.nyc.gov/helpnowNYC (Site launch in fall of 2017).
- If you are an unaffiliated volunteer (do not belong to a volunteer group organization), visit www.newyorkcares.org for volunteer opportunities.
- Before starting work, connect with existing operations and find out if and when there are any briefing meetings or trainings that you should attend.

During your deployment:

- Maintain situational awareness. Regularly attend community or other emergency briefings.
- Speak with other groups working in the emergency to let them know what you are doing and reduce duplication by working together.
- Find out about relevant safety regulations or recommendations.
- Conduct regular safety briefs and reviews of working conditions.
- Provide regular updates to your leadership and notify them of any concerns regarding your operations and volunteer needs.
- Track and report volunteer names, project and hours worked.
- Provide/access mental health resources for you/your volunteers.

DEMOBILIZATION

- As early as possible, inform your sponsoring organization, housing, and the community within which you are working when you will be leaving.
- Update your connection with the volunteer coordination taskforce and NYCVOAD when you are planning to demobilize your group and inform them of any continued/unmet needs
- Determine any outstanding projects and who you can transition the work to.
- Provide mental health resources for your volunteers and connect them with services that can be accessed after they return home.