



International Year of Volunteers  
10th anniversary  
2011

A toolkit on

# Volunteerism for Disaster Preparedness and Response



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## What is Volunteering?

Generally, volunteering is described as an unpaid activity where someone gives their time to help an organisation or an individual who they are not related to. When one chooses to give his/her time and energy to benefit other people for a selfless cause, it is known as volunteering. Apart from occasional volunteering opportunities like those during disasters or emergency situations etc., one could do voluntary work with any kind of legitimate organisation, including:

- A charity, voluntary organisation, an NGO or community group
- A public sector organisation, like your disaster management authority
- A social enterprise supporting your local community, etc.

The United Nations' definition of Volunteering covers three crucial characteristics of volunteering. According to this- "There are three key defining characteristics of volunteering.

**First**, the activity should not be undertaken primarily for financial reward, although the reimbursement of expenses and some token payment may be allowed.

**Second**, the activity should be undertaken voluntarily, according to an individual's own free-will, although there are grey areas here too, such as school community service schemes which encourage, and sometimes require, students to get involved in voluntary work and Food for Work programmes, where there is an explicit exchange between community involvement and food assistance.

**Third**, the activity should be of benefit to someone other than the volunteer, or to society at large, although it is recognised that volunteering brings significant benefit to the volunteer as well.

Although people tend to think of volunteering as helping others, it is actually an exchange change. It's common to hear volunteers say that they get back so much more than they give. Of course, the people who are helped out by volunteers mostly benefit from the service.

One may want to volunteer to- help others, learn new skills or use existing skills, explore an area of personal or professional interest, learn more about a particular subject, gain a greater sense of self-esteem, do a civic duty, give back to the community, be a part of the team of like-minded people, contribute to a cause that has affected/may affect him/her personally, feel needed and keep oneself busy in worthy pursuits, enjoy meeting new people and to make positive changes in one's life, simply by doing anything of the above stated reasons to volunteer.

## Why should you become a volunteer?

Volunteering is the practice of people working on behalf of others or a particular cause without payment for their time and services. It is generally considered a selfless activity, intended to support needy communities, to promote environment protection or to improve human quality of life. But people also volunteer for their own skill development, to meet others, to make contacts for possible future employment, to have fun doing new things, and a variety of other reasons that could be considered selfless. Not just this, volunteering also provides you better opportunities of getting paid work, by helping you to:

- learn new skills and personality traits
- practise the skills you have
- learn management and coordination of programmes
- put some volunteering experience on your CV
- pick up good ideas from other people
- show future employers that you can stay committed to a task
- gain intellectual capacities
- meet people who can help you find a paid work
- get recognition for your selfless work in professional world
- have things to talk about in a job interview
- get references for future career prospects
- develop a sense of social entrepreneurship

## Volunteering is also a great way for you to:

- give something back to your community
- do something you enjoy
- find new interests and get involved
- stay mentally and physically active and healthy
- ease off your own stress or trauma by helping others
- enhance your value-systems through meeting inspiring people
- pass on your skills to others
- have a balanced daily routine
- meet new people, communicate with them and gain inner confidence
- encourage others by placing your own example
- develop interpersonal and leadership skills
- learn innovative ways to face unexpected challenges

## Basic qualities of an ideal volunteer

A volunteer is considered to be a generous person who decides to come forth to help others, especially in difficult times. However, there are certain general qualities that ideal volunteers are expected to have in themselves-

- **Enthusiasm** – a positive attitude is vital
- **Compassion** – an empathy with the plight of victims of an unfortunate situation
- **Common sense** – knowing the difference between right and wrong, good and bad
- **Awareness** – being able to recognise other people's needs and able to look for ways to meet those needs as a result of training and your own life experiences
- **Commitment** – demonstration of one's passion for a cause
- **Self-confident** – able to work both autonomously and as part of a team
- **Good communication** – able to relate to both fellow workers and those you are trying to help and a willingness to make suggestions for improvements
- **Self-assured** – able to take constructive criticism to improve one's own skills and ability to help others

In situations where the work is mission-based and requires lot more than general qualities, the organizations look for volunteers who possess the following six qualities:

1. **Flexibility:** In the volunteer world we can spend hours planning and organizing something just to have it unravel in a few minutes. It takes someone with the ability to adapt and be flexible in those situations that really affects the outcome.
2. **Energy:** Volunteering can take a lot of energy. There always seems to be a lack of sleep and to hit the ground running each day can be kind of rough.
3. **Creativity & Imagination:** Many organizations believe that people who are creative and have good imaginations are great to be around. When individuals use their talents, creativity, passion and humour, they bring life into the tasks at hand.
4. **Integrity:** As a volunteer, people trust you with their assets, community, and organization– which is indeed a great responsibility. Relationships between community/organizations can be hindered by an individual's thoughtless acts.
5. **Sacrifice/Selflessness:** Volunteering is just that- sacrificing of one's time, energy and services without expecting anything in return.
6. **Adaptability:** Adapting to constantly changing and uncomfortable conditions is a standard aspect of the volunteer experience. Learning to expect the unexpected and "roll with it" are excellent volunteer qualities.

## What is a disaster?

According to the definition of the 'United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)', a disaster is “serious disruption of the functioning of a community or a society involving widespread human, material, economic or environmental losses and impacts, which exceeds the ability of the affected community or society to cope using its own resources.”

If we break it down a little further for better understanding, a serious disruption is-

- Loss of human life, illness or injury to humans
- Widespread or severe property loss or damage
- Widespread or severe damage to the environment

And this serious disruption could be caused by-

- Earthquake, Flood, Storm, Forest Fire, Cloudburst, Avalanche or other natural calamities
- Terrorist Attack, Explosion or Fire, Spill/Leakage of a Chemical, Gas or Fuel etc.
- Stampede, Infestation, Plague or Epidemic
- A failure of, or disruption to, an essential service or infrastructure
- Any event similar to those already mentioned

### Classification of Disasters:

Disasters are generally divided into Natural or Man-made, although complex disasters, where there is no single root cause, are more common in developing countries.

- **A Natural disaster** is the effect of a natural hazard\* (like floods, earthquake, cloudbursts, landslides etc.). It leads to financial, environmental or human losses.
- **Man-made disasters** are disasters resulting from man-made hazards (threats having an element of human intent, negligence, or error; or involving a failure of a man-made system), as opposite to natural disasters resulting from natural hazards.

A specific disaster may spawn a secondary disaster that increases the impact. A classic example is an earthquake that can cause landslide, resulting in the blockage of a river and formation of a lake, which, when bursts can create flood situation.

#### \*Hazard:

A dangerous phenomenon, substance, human activity or condition that may cause loss of life, injury or other health impacts, property damage, loss of livelihoods and services, social and economic disruption, or environmental damage.

## Different phases of a Disaster Management Cycle

Disasters have a cyclic four stage lifecycle. Understanding this lifecycle helps us to be prepared for disasters, respond safely and recover quickly and effectively. At each stage there are different things to know, different actions we should take and different ways we connect with people. These stages can change rapidly and often overlap.

### *The four stages of Disaster Management are:*

- **Mitigation**

Mitigation activities reduce the impact of natural disasters through the identification of hazards. Hazards are risks that could affect your household, causing you to evacuate or that could impact your evacuation plans. Hazards can include having power lines near trees, living in a street with only one access point, or having a creek behind your house. At a macro level, it also involves legislation, land-use planning and technical solutions.

- **Preparedness**

Preparedness is an ongoing set of activities in which people plan, prepare/organise and train for disaster situations. This includes tasks such as having a First-Aid kit and basic items required during and after a disaster, making an evacuation plan, simulating disaster situations and appropriate responses, and discussing emergency preparedness with the community, concerned departments, governmental and non-governmental organizations and agencies having expertise in disaster-related fields.

- **Response**

Response is responding to the immediate needs of the emergency situation and it primarily includes actions like Search and Rescue, First Aid etc. A well rehearsed emergency plan developed during the preparedness stage enables more effective responses at all levels.

- **Recovery**

Recovery involves activities and decision making necessary to restoring the affected area to its previous state, often taking the opportunity to build back better by reducing pre-disaster risks inherent in the community and infrastructure. This stage often involves rebuilding, reemployment and repair of essential infrastructure.



## Volunteerism for Disaster Preparedness and Response

Many people want to volunteer their time to help those who have been affected by a disaster or traumatic event. The support that volunteers provide makes an enormous contribution in getting communities back on track as quickly as possible. Immediately after any disaster, volunteers play a crucial role in rescuing the survivors and bringing emergency relief and medical aid to them. As relief and aid arrives from other places, volunteers' responsibilities extend to post-disaster recovery and rehabilitation activities.

In regions affected by disasters, volunteers help to coordinate relief efforts, share information between governments and relief agencies, mobilize resources and rehabilitate devastated communities. Their rapid deployment, their skills and prior experience in disaster response deliver immediate assistance to communities overwhelmed by the destruction at hand, bringing hope to many thousands of people. Often their presence also serves as a communication channel from the grassroots to national governments, donors, international aid organizations and UN agencies – a crucial exchange to tailor assistance to local needs and conditions.

## Guiding principles for volunteering during disasters

The management of unaffiliated, often spontaneous, volunteers in times of emergency is guided by the following principles and values:

- **Volunteering and Community Life**

Volunteering is a valuable part of every healthy community. Volunteers come from all segments of society and often provide essential services. Everyone has the potential to contribute strength and resources in times of emergency.

- **The Value of Affiliation**

Ideally, all volunteers should be registered or affiliated with an established organization and trained for specific disaster response activities. However, the spontaneous nature of individual volunteering must be anticipated and managed.

- **Volunteer Involvement in the Four Phases**

There are valuable and appropriate roles for unaffiliated spontaneous volunteers in mitigation, preparedness, response and recovery.

***MUST READ: Excerpts from the 'UN Volunteers' thematic paper on 'Disaster Risk Reduction, Governance and Volunteerism'***

“Volunteers are generally first on the scene in disaster situations. Since the extent of damage including both material loss and loss of human lives is greatly influenced by the initial response to a disaster, this observation carries particular weight. Yet, while the role of volunteers in disaster response is being increasingly documented and understood, knowledge about voluntary action in reconstruction, relief management and, above all, in disaster preparedness is very limited. Resolution 56/381 of the UN General Assembly on support for volunteering singles out disasters as one of the leading areas where volunteers contribute to society. Nonetheless, despite the increasing understanding about the many forms of disasters and their consequences and how to predict them, the presence on the ground of volunteers and volunteer involving organizations is rarely factored into disaster risk mitigation activities.”

“A sound governance structure for disaster reduction allows and encourages expressions of volunteerism and norms of social reciprocity during natural disasters. In reality, governance and institutional policy frameworks for incorporating volunteers and volunteer involving organizations (VIOs) into risk reduction management systems are largely absent. At its most benign, this results in wastage in terms of missing out on the impact of well prepared and coordinated volunteer responses. At its worst, overlooking the spontaneous but often untrained volunteer responses at the planning stage can result in life-threatening situations for disaster victims as well as for volunteers themselves.”

Public awareness and recognition of the role and contribution of volunteers and VIOs is a critical ingredient to a comprehensive risk reduction management plan. In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, the first response, both spontaneous and organized, generally comes from local communities. To take full advantage of community resilience after a disaster, affected communities need to be well prepared. A first step in this direction is the formal recognition of the value of local volunteer efforts. Such recognition needs to be translated into provision of adequate financial and human resources and the integration of effective volunteer management practices into disaster management programmes.

- **Management Systems**

Volunteers are a valuable resource when they are trained, assigned, and supervised within established disaster management systems. There should be clear designation of responsibility for the on-site coordination of volunteers.

- **Shared Responsibility**

The mobilization and management of volunteers is primarily a responsibility of local administration and non-profit organizations, with support from the state level. Specialized planning, information sharing, and a management structure are necessary to coordinate efforts and maximize the benefits of volunteer involvement.

- **Expectations from Volunteers**

Volunteers are successful participants in disaster management system when they are flexible, self-sufficient, aware of risks, and willing to be coordinated by local disaster management experts. Volunteers must accept the obligation to “do no harm.”

- **Build on Existing Capacity**

All communities include individuals and organizations that know how to mobilize and involve volunteers effectively. All stakeholders are encouraged to identify and utilize all existing capacity for integrating the volunteers.

- **Information Management**

Clear, consistent, and timely communication is essential to successful management of the volunteers. A variety of opportunities and messages should be utilized in order to educate the public, minimize confusion, and clarify expectations.

## Role of volunteers in Disaster Risk Reduction

Considering the complexities of a disaster management cycle, it is very challenging to ensure effective measures in all phases of disasters. It requires time, capacities and resources—specifically human resources, to deliver quality services related to disaster risk reduction. A majority of the organization and agencies working in this field believe that volunteers can provide or assist in providing a number of services before, during and after a disaster. Following are some of the most crucial roles volunteers can play in disaster risk reduction:

- 1) **Advocacy:** Volunteers may also act as advocates for change by representing the needs of the community to local and State governments.
- 2) **Bulk Distribution:** Volunteers can assist in the procurement and distribution of basic commodities like food, water, health and sanitary needs, medicines, bedding, shelter construction material etc.
- 3) **Clean-Up and Rebuilding:** Volunteers can help individuals clean-up, repair, and rebuild their homes damaged by disaster.
- 4) **Communication Services:** Volunteers can assist in providing emergency communication to fellow agencies and local government personnel who are responding to the disaster.

- 5) **Community Disaster Education:** Volunteers can get involved in community disaster education. For example, they can distribute pamphlets and give presentations to community groups on how to prepare for disasters.
- 6) **Community Outreach:** Volunteers can contact individuals and organizations to educate them about the local disaster relief operation, the existing damage, and possible ways they can support the relief effort.
- 7) **Construction, Repairs and Retrofitting:** Volunteers can assist in safe construction of new houses, making repairs to the buildings damaged by disaster, and in retrofitting of existing buildings.
- 8) **Counselling:** Volunteers can provide individual and family counselling and emotional support to the victims of a disaster.
- 9) **Damage Assessment:** Volunteers can physically review areas affected by disaster in order to assess the damage caused by a disaster assign a value that can be used to estimate resources required for rebuilding or reconstruction.
- 10) **Debris Removal:** Volunteers can assist in debris removal and assist in activities such as mucking out and cutting and clearing trees from entry ways.
- 11) **Disaster Planning:** Volunteers can work with communities before disasters occur to help them take steps to minimize the effects of disaster and prepare them for coping with any possible disaster situation.
- 12) **Donations Management:** Volunteers can assist governmental or relief agencies in donation management for both cash and in-kind donations. These systems address receiving, transporting, warehousing, and distributing donations during disasters.
- 13) **Emergency Assistance:** Volunteers can provide emergency assistance immediately following a disaster including food, clothing, shelter, bedding, comfort supplies, etc.
- 14) **Financial Assistance:** Volunteers can provide assistance to relief agencies in raising funds, financial aid and/or long-term rehabilitation grants.
- 15) **Financial Planning:** Volunteers can help disaster victims locate personal financial records, review their current financial situation, and provide advice to help them recover from the financial effects of disaster.
- 16) **Funeral Services:** Volunteers can assist in arranging funeral services for families that have lost loved ones in a disaster.
- 17) **Health Care:** Volunteers can provide first aid on disaster sites and can also support other health care organizations that provide assistance to disaster victims.
- 18) **Identification of victims:** Volunteers can help in locating the disaster victims and provide information to inquiring family and friends outside the impacted area.

- 19) Livestock and Pet Care:** Volunteers can focus on the care of animals during disaster- including rescue, sheltering, feeding, etc.
- 20) Mass Care:** Volunteers can provide a variety of mass care activities such as-
- Identifying and setting up shelter facilities
  - Distributing food and other goods to the shelters
  - Feeding disaster victims (either in shelters or through mobile feeding units)
  - Providing temporary shelter for disaster victims
  - Providing housing for disaster relief workers
  - Rendering first aid when necessary
- 21) Mental Health Services:** Volunteers can provide assistance to disaster victims and relief workers to alleviate mental stress and anguish caused either by the disaster or the disaster relief operation.
- 22) Mitigation Planning:** Volunteers can assist in the mitigation phase of emergency management by assisting in activities like rebuilding homes outside of flood zones, retrofitting buildings in earthquake prone areas, and educating families on mitigation measures in the home.
- 23) Mobile Feeding:** Where needed, volunteers can assist in managing mobile feeding units to serve hot meals to disaster victims and relief personnel on site.
- 24) Organizational Mentoring:** Volunteers can work with local agencies, community-based organizations and NGOs that lack disaster experience to help them develop their abilities and respond effectively to the needs of disaster victims.
- 25) Relocation Services:** Volunteers can help in moving individuals and families from damaged areas to shelters and other temporary or permanent housing facilities.
- 26) Resource Coordination:** Before, during, and after an emergency or disaster, volunteers exchange information on the acquisition and use of personnel and materials resources. This information helps in effective and efficient allocation of resources and helps to reduce the duplication of services.
- 27) Special Needs:** Volunteers can assist in identifying populations that have special needs and then meeting those needs (e.g., the elderly, disabled, or orphaned; a particular religious group with special dietary needs).
- 28) Technical Assistance:** Volunteers can assist in providing telecommunications and management information systems support to the disaster management team.
- 29) Training:** Volunteers can also train community-based volunteers in major response and recovery activities and provide trainings to disaster-affected individuals.

- 30) Translation Services:** Volunteers can play the role of linguists for the purposes of transcribing documents and communicating with disaster victims.
- 31) Transportation Services:** Volunteers can contribute to enhance the transportation services for disaster victims, particularly individuals with special needs such as the elderly and the physically disabled. They may also help in bringing donated goods from outside the disaster area to areas in need.
- 32) Warehousing:** Volunteers can assist in locating and setting up central locations for storing and organizing donated goods including food, cloths, medical supplies, etc.

### HP SDMA Volunteer Registration Form

**Title:** Mr. / Ms. / Mrs. **Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Gender:** *Male* \_\_\_\_\_ *Female* \_\_\_\_\_ (Tick mark the appropriate one)

**Marital Status:** *Married* \_\_\_\_\_ *Unmarried* \_\_\_\_\_ (Tick mark the appropriate one)

**Father's /Husband's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Correspondence Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ **PIN-** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mobile Number:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Phone Number:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Email Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

**Date of Birth:** \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ / \_\_\_\_\_ (Date/Month/Year)

**Blood Group:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Mention ONLY if you know your Blood Group correctly)

**Current Occupation:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Qualifications:** \_\_\_\_\_ (Mention the most recent qualification only)

**Technical Skills (if any):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Experience of working in a disaster situation (if any):** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

**Reference (with name, address and contact details):** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\*\*\*\*\*

**DECLARATION:** "I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the information provided by me in this form is correct and that I am interested in becoming a volunteer for the HP SDMA."

**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Date:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Place:** \_\_\_\_\_

## References and Recommended Links

- **United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)**  
[www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)
- **United Nations Volunteers (UNV)**  
[www.unvolunteers.org](http://www.unvolunteers.org)
- **United Nations International Strategy for Disaster Reduction (UNISDR)**  
[www.unisdr.org](http://www.unisdr.org)
- **National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA)**  
[www.ndmindia.nic.in](http://www.ndmindia.nic.in)
- **Himachal Pradesh State Disaster Management Authority (HP SDMA)**  
[www.hpsdma.nic.in](http://www.hpsdma.nic.in)
- **National Institute of Disaster Management (NIDM)**  
[www.nidm.gov.in](http://www.nidm.gov.in)
- **International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies**  
[www.ifrc.org](http://www.ifrc.org)
- **The Points of Light Foundation**  
[www.pointsoflight.org](http://www.pointsoflight.org)
- **National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster**  
[www.nvoad.org](http://www.nvoad.org)
- **Volunteering England**  
[www.volunteering.org.uk](http://www.volunteering.org.uk)
- **Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)**  
[www.fema.gov](http://www.fema.gov)



## Contact Information

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**Department of Revenue,**  
**Himachal Pradesh Secretariat,**  
**Shimla 171002**

**Phone: +91 177 2625657**

**Email: [sdma-hp@nic.in](mailto:sdma-hp@nic.in)**

**Website: [www.hpsdma.nic.in](http://www.hpsdma.nic.in)**

**NOTE:** To register for volunteer with HP SDMA, print the 'HP SDMA Volunteer Registration Form' (on Page No. 11) and post the duly filled-in and signed form at the address stated above. Please do not forget to write 'Volunteer Registration Form' on the top of the envelope. Interested individuals can also send the scanned copy of the duly filled-in and signed form via email as an attachment. If you prefer sending the form via email, do remember to type 'Volunteer Registration Form' in the subject field.

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A Toolkit on Volunteerism for Disaster Preparedness and Response

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*Empowered lives.  
 Resilient nations.*

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