

Volunteer FAQs

Q. When a large disaster occurs, how do I know if I should volunteer?

- It is recommended by national, state and local organizations that volunteers do not self-deploy.
- Ask yourself first “Is this the best time for me to be volunteering.”
It is recommended that volunteer try and not over-commit themselves and then later feel guilty.

Q. How do I start the process of becoming a volunteer?

- We suggest checking out the TX VOAD (Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster) website (www.txvoad.org.) You can see volunteer organizations local to your area including national organizations such as the American Red Cross.
- Check their website to see if you would qualify as a volunteer, what kind of training will be needed beforehand and if the organizations training is available on-line.

Q. What’s an example of the type of training that might be required to volunteer?

- See training requirements on the volunteer organization’s webpage. For example, HHS Disaster Mental Health requires taking some FEMA courses (IS100, IS200, IS300 and IS700), Psychological First Aid, Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) and some prior experience volunteering during disasters.
- Psychological First Aid (PFA) is one training course that may be required for other organizations as well.
It is free and available on-line at SAMSHA -
(<https://www.samhsa.gov/resource/dbhis/psychological-first-aid-pfa-online>),
and through the National Child Traumatic Stress Network -
(<http://www.nctsn.org/resources/training>.)

Q. How do I choose which volunteer activity is right for me?

- Complete the application process and background check (if required) and the organization will reach out to discuss their volunteer opportunities. Together you both can find the best match.

Q. What is the time commitment required to volunteer?

- It depends on the organization. Consider how much time you have to commit (some deployments may require a 2 or 3 week commitment & other local volunteer opportunities might be only for one hour.) Ask yourself what your daily schedule looks like, what special skills do you have to share, where are you willing to go, and how far are willing to travel?

Q. Why do I have to complete a background check to volunteer?

Volunteers are asked to do background checks for their safety and the public's safety to create a safe environment at the scene for everyone. HHS Disaster Mental Health volunteers must be licensed, which generally requires completing a background and a fingerprint screening.

Q. May I volunteer from home?

Yes. Some local volunteer organizations and localities will offer a brief training course and has a narrative that volunteers can use when they answer the phone.

Q. Which items should I be prepared to have on hand, or to take with me when I volunteer?

- Sturdy shoes, work boots
- Hat that provides good coverage, sunglasses
- Sunscreen
- Mosquito spray
- Refillable water bottle
- First Aid Kit
- Backpack to carry supplies
- Walking stick
- Long pants, or jeans
- Long sleeve shirt with UPF 50+ quick dry fabric
- Flashlight
- Cell phone charger
- Healthy snacks
- Contact information for someone to call in case of emergency

Q. Which items should I be prepared to have on hand at home?

Food & Water

- Non-perishable or "shelf stable" food
- A can opener, if needed
- One gallon of water per person, per day.
- For young children and infants: baby formula, sippy cup, and non-perishable food in pouches
- For pets, non-perishable food and water

Gather First Aid & Medications

- First-aid kit
- Medications (take pictures of the prescription labels)
- Medical devices
- Hand sanitizer
- Bug repellent
- Sunscreen
- Pet medications

Power Up

- Phone/electronics charger and cords, and at least one charged power bank
- Batteries
- Battery-powered radio
- Flashlight

Pack Some Personal Items

- Blankets or sleeping bags
- Toiletries, toilet paper, and feminine hygiene products
- One change of clothing for each person
- Sweatshirt or rain poncho for each person
- Pair of sneakers for each person
- For young children and infants: diapers and wipes
- Plastic resealable baggies and garbage bags
- Pet leashes and waste bags

Make Copies of Key Documents

- Driver's licenses, passports, and photo IDs
- Health insurance cards
- Prescription information
- Birth certificates
- Property insurance policies
- Emergency contact information