

Digital Options for Volunteer Management in Emergency Response and Recovery

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As part of its work on the Spontaneous Volunteer Management System (SVMS) template, BRPC was tasked by the Western Region Homeland Security Advisory Committee (WRHSAC) to provide guidance and analysis regarding available digital platforms to support volunteer management during emergency response and recovery.

Volunteers are an essential part of emergency response and disaster recovery. Research shows that communities that utilize volunteers are more resilient and recover from disasters faster. However, if not effectively planned for and managed, volunteers can become a disaster within a disaster that commands precious time and resources and detracts from emergency response. Moreover, volunteer time, if properly tracked and documented, can be an essential part of a local entity's required 25% match during federally declared disasters. The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) generally refers to volunteer efforts as "donated resources," and they can greatly reduce the financial burden placed upon municipal organizations during a disaster. Therefore, the motivation for strong volunteer management systems and supporting digital tools is two-fold: volunteers can help to supplement existing emergency response resources, and can also provide the required local match needed to access FEMA grant funding after disaster declarations, thus supplementing and expediting local recovery efforts.

The digital options explored in this report have applicability to several types of emergency management user groups - municipalities (and associated emergency management departments) and volunteer based organizations such as those involved in Community Organizations Active in Disasters (COAD), an umbrella organization that works to connect and coordinate local organizations with official local and regional emergency response and recovery efforts. These two groups will likely be involved in the coordination and management of volunteers during a disaster.

There are several aspects of volunteer management that would benefit from the integration or utilization of digital or online systems. These aspects include:

- Overall volunteer management, including registration, credential management, job/task assignment, hours tracking, etc.
- Donation management
- Coordination of ongoing and long term recovery operations, such as might be managed by a municipality or COAD members

The focus of this document is to inform planners, municipalities, COAD members, and emergency responders of the options available to help in volunteer management during emergency response, and provide an overall recommendation for how these programs could be implemented in our region and integrated into emergency planning.

For a comparison chart of all options, see Table 1 at the end of this document.

Volunteer and Donation Management

Resources to Consider

Jayne Craven of Coyote Communications maintains a list of available volunteer management software. This short list of volunteer management programs was developed from her larger inventory.

<http://www.coyotecommunications.com/tech/volmanage.html>

Idealware and Techsoup Global. 2011. A Consumer's Guide to Software for Volunteer Management. Available from: http://idealware.org/sites/idealware.org/files/volunteer_management_v5.pdf.

CiviCRM – CiviVolunteer Extension

<https://civicrm.org/>

<https://civicrm.org/extensions/civivolunteer>

CiviVolunteer is an extension for the open source CiviCRM software platform. CRM stands for “Constituent Relationship Management.” CiviCRM and CiviVolunteer are available free of cost. Donation management is also a major component of this software as a CRM program. The volunteer management portion of the software is primarily configured for events, but could be adapted to meet emergency response needs.

Delightful Labor

<http://www.delightfullabor.com/userGuide/>

Delightful Labor is another open source software tool for non-profit management. It can handle donation as well as volunteer management functions. Like CiviCRM, the volunteer management portion of the software is primarily configured for events, but could likely be adapted for emergency response scenarios. Delightful Labor can help to track and document data from volunteers including skills, hours worked, etc.

GivePulse

<https://www.givepulse.com/>

GivePulse is an online tool that connects volunteers with non-profits and organizations. GivePulse allows an organizing group to list events, manage registrations, as well as collect data about hours worked by volunteers. GivePulse can also help to manage donations. As with other programs mentioned above, GivePulse could likely be adapted for emergency response.

Get Connected and Get Connected Disaster Response Module (Galaxy Digital)

<http://www.galaxydigital.com/get-connected/united-ways>

<http://www.galaxydigital.com/get-connected/disaster-response-module/>

Get Connected is an online volunteer portal developed by Galaxy Digital. It is specifically designed for use by volunteer based organizations, specifically regional United Way groups, who would likely serve as site administrators and managers when this program is used. Get Connected also has an additional disaster response module that can be added into the portal to aid in emergencies, and can provide for donation management. The system allows volunteers to register online and sign up for disaster relief events. Volunteers are able to be credentialed if they have signed up in advance. Multiple users can work on the site simultaneously, and there are features that allow for text messaging and emailing of volunteers en masse. Moreover, the system allows for data reporting and tracking. We have grouped Get Connected into the

category of volunteer management programs; however, it can provide for donation management, as well as some level of ongoing long term recovery operations support.

Get Connected is currently used by the United Way of Pioneer Valley; however, it is not currently used by Berkshire or Franklin County United Way organizations. The two Western Massachusetts COADs met with the Pioneer United Way to explore the use of this valuable tool in regional emergencies. Subsequently, BRPC confirmed that the Pioneer Valley United Way would consider hosting Get Connected for the region by paying the annual fee and managing the system on behalf of the four counties and the two COADs in our region, subject to further planning efforts and mutual aid agreements.

Benefits:

- Creates online database of volunteers and allows them to browse for volunteer opportunities
- Generates reports on volunteer data
- Disaster response module can be easily activated in an emergency situation, providing an on demand “digital command center” to manage volunteers and donations

Drawbacks:

- May have to be supplemented with physical VRC location for training and deployment of volunteers.
- Top down approach – i.e., volunteers can be managed and deployed, but impacted individuals cannot request help through the system.
- May take some time and effort to establish in all four counties

Long Term Recovery

Recovers.org

<https://recovers.org/>

Recovers.org is a web-based system that connects those impacted by disasters with volunteer help. The site can also provide a centralized hub for those offering to donate items and money to aid in disaster relief. Recovers.org can launch a municipality specific website (i.e. Pittsfield.recovers.org) soon after a disaster. Several Western Mass. communities are already signed up to utilize Recovers.org. Once launched, a Recovers.org site is ideally managed by a municipal agency, COAD member group or other local organization. Locally, Recovers.org was founded by two Monson residents and was first deployed during the Monson tornado that impacted Western Mass in 2011.

Currently, the Western Mass. communities of Williamstown, Great Barrington, Franklin, Hatfield, and Longmeadow are registered with Recovers.org. Recovers.org has a unique interface that allows for both interaction of residents and the organizations involved in disaster response. Organizations can help manage volunteers and deploy them, but also, individual residents can use Recovers.org to request help from these organizations.

During a disaster, Recovers.org staff members will help to provide IT support and can work with key responders to ensure that site function is maintained through additional training and outreach. While most Recovers.org sites are maintained at the municipal level, it is a very flexible system and it is possible to create a site for a group of towns or even an entire county. This could allow for a more efficient response managed by only a few site managers, rather than each municipalities trying to manage its own Recovers.org sites during an emergency.

Benefits:

- Provides a searchable database that tracks volunteer information, hours worked, donations, etc.
- Connects impacted persons with immediate help, providing situational awareness and allowing municipalities to focus on other aspects of response and recovery.
- Allows donations to go directly to a community instead of passing through third party organizations.
- Very fast to establish: a Recovers.org website can be created for free in about 10 minutes.
- Volunteers are able to identify their specific skills when they sign up using key words.

Drawbacks:

- Unclear specifically how spontaneous volunteers would be integrated into relief efforts. Will require additional research to see how spontaneous volunteers are credentialed and deployed using this system. A physical Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) location might still be necessary if using Recovers.org.

For a summary of the Recovers.org system, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xds44OiybD0>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mlMIK3bXnP0>

Crisis Cleanup

<https://www.crisiscleanup.org/>

Crisis Cleanup is a web based system that connects relief organizations with those that need help in a “craigslist” type system. Impacted people use the system to enter their needs (i.e. I need help mucking out my basement), and then relief organizations can claim these tasks and deploy individuals to help out.

Benefits:

- Free of cost.
- Ideal for management and coordination of affiliated volunteer organizations.

Drawbacks:

- No ability to manage donations or spontaneous volunteers.
- Limited ability for governmental organization involvement (although website indicates this will be changing).
- Program is geared toward use by COAD organizations only.
- Unclear how/if documentation and tracking of volunteer time/tasks can be performed.

For a summary of the Crisiscleanup.org system, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yCxI5YHyX5k>

Sahana EDEN (Emergency Development ENvironment)

<http://eden.sahanafoundation.org/>

Sahana EDEN is a free, open source software program that aids in humanitarian relief. Sahana EDEN allows for staff and volunteer management, asset and inventory tracking, and mapping. EDEN also has specific features to help with shelter management.

Benefits:

- Free of cost.

Drawbacks:

- Focused toward large humanitarian relief efforts (i.e. Haiti Earthquake, etc).
- Unclear how this system could manage monetary donations, but is likely possible.

For a summary of the Sahana EDEN system, please visit:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oNdLC3B-mdA>

Outreach

Recovers.org

Based on feedback from the WRHSAC Pan/Planning Committee about the two recommended volunteer management platforms (Recovers.org and Get Connected), BRPC conducted additional outreach to users of these platforms to better assess their practicality and ease of use. The communities of Williamstown, Great Barrington, Hatfield, Longmeadow, Fitchburg, and West Boylston were emailed regarding their use of the Recovers.org site. Great Barrington and Williamstown had not actively used the site. They had been preemptively registered by town staff or officials in preparation for the future. While this certainly speaks to the ease with which a community can register with Recovers.org, it does not provide any feedback on usability. With the exception of Hatfield, no other communities responded to emails requesting information about Recovers.org. However, Hatfield's experience with Recovers.org - albeit limited - is extremely positive. The response from Cindy Doty, EMD of Hatfield can be seen below.

Good evening,

Yes, we do have the Recovers.org for Hatfield. Our experience with it has been practice only; as fortunately, we have not experienced an emergency situation since we have had the program. Practicing with it, using it, I have found the staff at Recovers.org to be extremely helpful, accommodating, always ready and happy to answer any question or suggestion that may come up. They have been very responsive.

It will be our go-to social media tool in time of emergency. It is simple to use and covers an area of contact and volunteerism that was completely missing for us.

Hope this helps.

Cindy Doty

Town of Hatfield

United Way – Get Connected

Outreach for Get Connected was conducted initially through an interview with LaTonia Naylor, the Community Impact Manager of the United Way in the Pioneer Valley. There are over 100 agencies who have signed up through Get Connected to find and receive volunteers through the website. Volunteers can make a profile that includes their interests and skills, and request to volunteer through Get Connected at organizations of their choice. If a disaster were to strike, Get Connected would be able to make a page specific to the recovery effort and volunteers would be able to select that in the same fashion. The Red Cross utilized Get Connected during the 2011 tornado recovery effort and they have been contacted by BRPC for a review of Get Connected. No response has been received yet.

Recommendations

There are a variety of online tools and software programs that can be utilized to aid in volunteer management during emergency/disaster response. From this initial assessment, we feel that Recovers.org and Get Connected are the two most promising options for further exploration. This is for a variety of reasons, including:

1. Both of these options are currently being utilized in Western Mass., albeit in a limited capacity. However, this means that their use could potentially be extrapolated to the rest of the region, and that there is existing local knowledge regarding their use.
2. Both programs have or allow for management specific to a disasters/emergency response, and specifically mention the use of spontaneous volunteers.
3. Both programs can manage monetary donations.

Recovers.org is free of cost, has been utilized in several incidents (including locally in Western Mass.), and is focused solely on emergency response and recovery. While we have included this as a digital option related to long term recovery, it appears to be able to aid in all three aspects of volunteer management (initial volunteer response and donation management, as well as long-term recovery) and it is fast to establish and easy to use. We believe COAD groups and local municipalities should take a hard look at this option and familiarize themselves with it.

Additionally, as another locally utilized system, Get Connected is a promising option. However, since its use is limited to United Way groups and has a significant expense associated with it, there could be some barriers to implementing this system in our region. Nonetheless, since Get Connected can be used in non-emergency situations, it might make a good addition to the digital repertoire of Franklin and Berkshire County United Ways. It could help with their day to day volunteer management activities, and also be deployed specifically during a disaster. Perhaps the United Way of Pioneer Valley could be leveraged to help educate the other United Way groups in the region about the benefits of using Get Connected or the region could agree to coordinate one system through the Pioneer Valley United Way.

More outreach should be conducted to software providers and local organizations already utilizing these programs (United Way of Pioneer Valley) to see if they would be willing to sign and MOU with local COAD groups, MACCs or REPCs to establish a strategy for digital volunteer management going forward. Both Recovers.org and the Get Connected system should also be more fully explored to identify their limitations and how they could be integrated into BRPC's Spontaneous Volunteer Management System (SVMS) template. For example, it is still unclear specifically how the credentialing, training, and deployment of Spontaneous and Unaffiliated Volunteers (SUV) could be conducted with Recovers.org or Get Connected. The systems would likely need to be supplemented with a physical VRC location to perform these functions. Both systems appear ideal to rapidly identify needs in the community and deploy affiliated volunteer organizations in response. However, there is one crucial difference here. Get Connected only allows response organizations to coordinate and deploy volunteers. Recovers.org allows for this, but also allows impacted residents to use the system to directly ask for help.

Moreover, while an unfortunate aspect of thinking and planning for emergency response and recovery, both Recovers.org's and Get Connected's data tracking and documentation features need to be explored further to see how they meet FEMA documentation requirements for donated resource reimbursement if at all.

Additionally, it appears that both the United Way’s Get Connected and Recovers.org can function at the regional level. Recovers.org staff report that while for the most part, Recovers.org sites are started for individual municipalities, they can be created for a region or for a group of towns – meaning scale of use is flexible. As well, multiple administrators can use one Recovers.org or Get Connected account at any given time, meaning individual response organizations could combine efforts effectively using the same website.

Both Recovers.org and Get Connected are strong options to help with volunteer management in Western Mass. Due to the immediate availability and flexibility that Recovers.org offers in span of operations, ease of use and cost; we believe municipalities and response groups should actively pursue this option first to help with volunteer management while the United Way’s Get Connected option is developed by the COADs and other regional groups such as the MACCs and REPCs. This two-pronged approach provides immediate local and regional volunteer and donation management capabilities that can be leveraged and coordinated later with the United Ways’ Get Connected option to provide redundant local and regional capacity to support both small and large-scale emergency events.

	CiviVolunteer	Delightful Labor	GivePulse	Get Connected	Recovers.org	Crisis Cleanup	Sahana EDEN
<i>User/Manager Focus</i>	Non-profit/Municipal	Non-profit	Non-profit	Non-Profit (specif. United Way)	COAD members/Municipalities	COAD members	NGO/International Humanitarian orgs.
<i>Volunteer Mgmt.</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes (SUV’s mentioned)	Yes (SUV’s mentioned)	No	Could be adapted
<i>Online volunteer portal</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Unknown
<i>Donation Mgmt.</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	Yes
<i>Long Term Recovery</i>	Could be adapted	Could be adapted	Could be adapted	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Data Tracking/Reporting</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Limited	Unknown	Unknown
<i>Cost</i>	Free	Free	Free (monthly fee for addt’l features)	\$4500-5000/year	Free (fee for addt’l features to be added soon)	Free	Free
<i>Resource Mapping</i>	No	No	Unknown	Unknown	Yes	Yes	Yes
<i>Impacted individuals can use system</i>	No	No	No	No	Yes	Yes	No
<i>Current use in Western Mass?</i>	Unknown	Unknown	Unknown	United Way of Pioneer Valley	Used during Springfield Tornado. Several Western Mass. communities are already registered with the site.	Unknown	Unknown