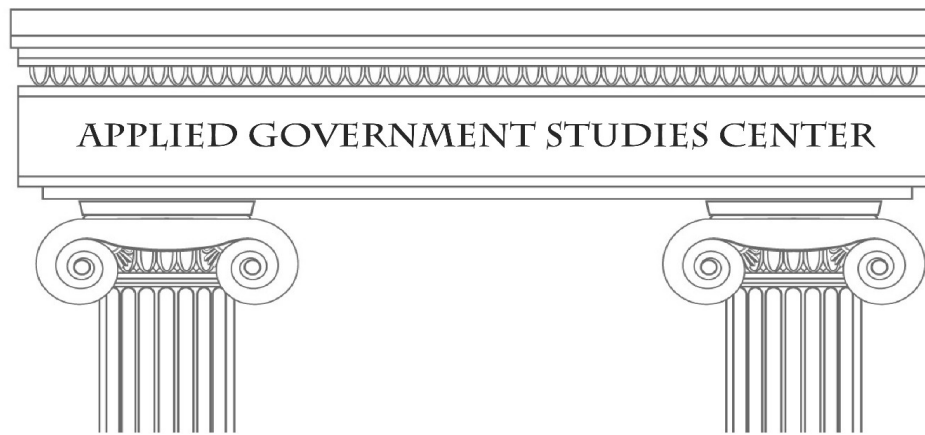




Regional Volunteer Emergency Operations Training Model South Central Pennsylvania Example

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September 25, 2026

[Published by the Applied Government Study Center www.agscenter.org]

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents a regional volunteer management training model designed to strengthen emergency response capabilities across South-Central Pennsylvania with trained and effective volunteer cadres. The model focuses on coordinated volunteer operations, evacuee management, and multi-county collaboration during disasters and large-scale evacuations. It is intended for nonprofit organizations, volunteer groups, emergency management agencies, and community partners seeking to improve readiness and resilience.

The training model is fully replicable and can be adapted for other regions with similar hazards or interstate evacuation corridors. It addresses known weaknesses in volunteer management observed in

past disaster operations and provides a structured, scalable approach to building a reliable volunteer force.

An appendix provides case studies of volunteer management and training weaknesses obtained from after action reports and other sources.

INTRODUCTION: ABOUT THIS REGIONAL VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT MODEL

This report presents a regional volunteer management training model designed for South-Central Pennsylvania, covering Lebanon County, Berks County, Lancaster County, Dauphin County, and York County. Although tailored to the hazards, infrastructure, and interstate evacuation corridors of this region, the structure and content can be replicated in other areas with appropriate modifications. The concepts, modules, and operational practices described here are intentionally scalable and adaptable for counties and multi-county coalitions.

Regional volunteer management programs are strongly recommended because county-level volunteers may themselves be victims of disasters and therefore unavailable to assist during critical operations. A regional approach increases resilience by ensuring that trained volunteers from neighboring jurisdictions can support affected areas when local resources are overwhelmed or compromised. This model encourages shared training standards, coordinated communication, and unified operational procedures across multiple counties.

Volunteer management has been a documented weakness, reported in after action reports, in several disaster operations nationwide. Common challenges include unclear assignments, insufficient coordination, spontaneous volunteer surges, lack of evacuee support, and inconsistent communication between jurisdictions. These gaps can hinder response effectiveness, delay shelter operations, and reduce the quality of care provided to evacuees and affected residents. By establishing a structured, regionally coordinated volunteer program, jurisdictions can significantly improve readiness, reduce operational friction, and enhance the overall resilience of the communities they serve.

PURPOSE OF THE TRAINING

This training prepares volunteers across South-Central Pennsylvania to support emergency operations, assist evacuees traveling through the region, and coordinate effectively with county emergency management agencies. The agenda provides practical skills, safety awareness, communication procedures, and scenario-based practice to ensure volunteers can operate confidently during disasters, large-scale evacuations, and multi-county incidents.

The goal is to build a reliable, quickly available trained volunteer force capable of supporting shelters, reception centers, welfare checks, traffic control, and evacuee routing along major interstate corridors.

TRAINING AGENDA

MODULE 1 — Welcome, Orientation, and Regional Context. Objectives: Introduce hazards, evacuation corridors, volunteer expectations Topics: Flooding, storms, winter weather, hazmat; Interstates 81, 83, 78, and 76 evacuees from major cities; multi-county coordination; prevent self-deployment

MODULE 2 — Roles and Structure Across Counties. Objectives: Explain volunteer roles, Incident Command Systems basics, evacuee support Topics: Operations, Logistics, Planning and Intelligence, Human Services; traffic flow; registration; mass care; check-in/check-out

MODULE 3 — Safety and Risk Awareness. Objectives: Safety fundamentals, varied environments, evacuee interaction Topics: personal protective equipment; rural, urban, waterway hazards; crowd management; stop-work authority; deferring to Fire/EMS/Law Enforcement

MODULE 4 — Skills Stations. Objectives: Hands-on practice Stations: Shelter setup; traffic support; welfare checks; light search and rescue; optional evacuee reception center setup

MODULE 5 — Communication and Coordination. Objectives: Improve communication, strengthen coordination, evacuee routing Topics: Radio/phone etiquette; reporting; routing evacuees; communicating volume to emergency operations center; spontaneous volunteer management

MODULE 6 — Regional Scenario Exercise. Objectives: Real-world decision-making Scenarios: Flooding; severe storms; interstate evacuation surge; reception center activation; traffic management; shelter expansion

MODULE 7 — Recovery Phase Training. Objectives: Long-term recovery, extended evacuee support Topics: Debris removal; resident assistance; vulnerable populations; extended sheltering; Red Cross and other Volunteer Organizations Active in Disaster coordination; response to recovery transition

MODULE 8 — Wrap-Up and Next Steps. Objectives: Follow-up actions, continued engagement Topics: Joining roster; activation procedures; upcoming drills; feedback

CONCLUSION

This training model strengthens regional readiness, improves volunteer availability and capability, and ensures South-Central Pennsylvania can support both local residents and evacuees traveling to or through the region during emergencies. The structure can be adapted for other regions seeking to improve volunteer coordination, reduce operational gaps, and build resilience against disasters. Volunteers who complete this program will be prepared to assist safely, communicate effectively, and contribute meaningfully to response and recovery operations. The training should be periodically repeated for new replacement volunteers.

Appendix: U.S. Case Studies Demonstrating Volunteer-Management And Training Weaknesses During Disaster Operations

This appendix provides real-world examples from major U.S. disasters where volunteer-management and volunteer training weaknesses were documented in official after-action reports, government investigations, and nonprofit evaluations. These cases illustrate why structured, regional volunteer management programs and adequate training are essential for effective disaster response.

Case Study 1: Hurricane Katrina (2005)

Location: Louisiana, Mississippi **Documented Issues:**

- Massive spontaneous volunteer convergence overwhelmed local and federal systems.
- No unified process for credentialing, assigning, or tracking volunteers.
- Volunteers performed rescue and relief tasks without training or safety oversight.
- Duplication of effort occurred because volunteer groups operated independently.

Sources: FEMA Katrina After-Action Report; GAO-06-643; U.S. House “Failure of Initiative” Report.

Relevance: Katrina demonstrated that without structured volunteer management, spontaneous volunteers can overwhelm operations and create safety risks.

Case Study 2: Joplin Tornado (2011)

Location: Joplin, Missouri **Documented Issues:**

- Over 60,000 volunteers arrived within the first week.
- City officials struggled to track volunteers and ensure safety in debris zones.
- Unaffiliated volunteers entered hazardous areas without PPE.
- Nonprofits reported difficulty integrating spontaneous volunteers.

Sources: Joplin Tornado Recovery After-Action Review; Missouri SEMA reports.

Relevance: Volunteer convergence can exceed local capacity, requiring regional coordination and pre-planned volunteer intake systems.

Case Study 3: Hurricane Sandy (2012)

Location: New York, New Jersey **Documented Issues:**

- Emergent volunteer groups filled major gaps but operated outside official ICS structures.
- Government agencies lacked mechanisms to integrate community-led volunteer networks.
- Communication between official responders and volunteer groups was inconsistent.

Sources: FEMA Sandy After-Action Report; NYC OEM Evaluation; RAND Corporation studies.

Relevance: Community-based volunteer networks are powerful but must be integrated into formal response systems to avoid duplication and confusion.

Case Study 4: California Wildfires (2017–2020)

Location: Sonoma, Napa, Paradise, and other regions **Documented Issues:**

- Spontaneous volunteers attempted rescues and fire suppression without training.
- Law enforcement struggled to control access to evacuation zones.
- Nonprofits faced overwhelming donations and volunteer offers without adequate management systems.

Sources: CAL FIRE After-Action Reports; Sonoma County Emergency Management Review.

Relevance: Untrained volunteer self-deployment creates safety hazards and diverts resources unless structured intake and assignment systems exist.

Case Study 5: Hurricane Harvey (2017)

Location: Texas **Documented Issues:**

- Hundreds of volunteer boat rescuers conducted rescues independently.
- Emergency managers had limited ability to track or coordinate volunteer rescue operations.
- Communication gaps created safety risks for both rescuers and evacuees.

Sources: Texas Harvey After-Action Report; FEMA Harvey AAR.

Relevance: Volunteer rescue groups can save lives but require coordination, communication, and accountability frameworks.

Case Study 6: COVID-19 Pandemic (2020–2022)

Location: Nationwide **Documented Issues:**

- Traditional volunteer pools were unavailable due to health risks.
- Nonprofits lacked surge volunteer plans.

- States struggled to coordinate medical and non-medical volunteers.
- Credentialing delays slowed deployment of volunteer medical personnel.

Sources: National VOAD COVID-19 Impact Report; GAO-21-104.

Relevance: Volunteer shortages can be just as disruptive as volunteer surges; regional volunteer programs improve resilience.

Case Study 7: Maui Wildfires (2023)

Location: Maui, Hawaii **Documented Issues:**

- Community volunteers provided food, water, and rescue support before official agencies arrived.
- Lack of coordination led to uneven distribution of aid.
- Untrained volunteers lacked safety guidance in hazardous burn zones.

Sources: Hawaii Emergency Management Agency preliminary review; nonprofit coalition reports.

Nonprofit : Community volunteers are essential but require structured support, pre-disaster training, safety guidance, and integration with official operations.

Cross-Case Summary

Across these U.S. disasters, the following volunteer-management and training weaknesses were consistently documented:

- Spontaneous volunteer convergence overwhelmed local systems.
- Lack of credentialing and tracking created safety and accountability issues.
- Volunteer groups operated outside formal ICS structures.
- Communication between agencies and volunteer organizations was inconsistent.
- Volunteer self-deployment created operational and safety risks.
- Nonprofits lacked resources to manage large volunteer operations.
- Emergent volunteer networks filled gaps but lacked integration.
- Volunteer shortages (COVID-19) disrupted operations as severely as volunteer surges.

These case studies reinforce the need for **regional volunteer management programs and training**, especially in areas where local volunteers may be affected by the disaster and unable to respond.

This article was researched and written, in part, with Copilot AI assistance as directed by the author