

## **When natural or human-caused disasters strike, people look for ways to help survivors.**

As we struggle to find ways to help our fellow human beings, we must weigh our options, and our feelings, carefully.

Before heading to a disaster area, consider the complexities of the situation. To make the most of your efforts and assist impacted communities best, consider these tips for donating and volunteering responsibly:

- **Cash is the fastest way to assist disaster survivors.** Cash offers voluntary agencies the most flexibility in obtaining the most-needed resources.
  - Many charities specialize in providing relief in disaster areas, yet they face significant financial barriers to getting their staff, equipment, and supplies into impacted areas.
  - Donations helps put experienced disaster responders on the ground, and gives them the tools they need to help survivors recover.
  - Organizations typically prefer cash donations because they allow organizations to:
    - Purchase food, water, medicine, and equipment from secure and familiar supply chains
    - Buy materials locally — which can help rebuild the local economy
    - Conserve resources — money is always necessary and cheap to send, but the cost to ship material supplies can be expensive.
      - Remember, material supplies such as used clothing, miscellaneous household items, and mixed or perishable food require helping agencies to redirect volunteer labor away from providing direct one-on-one assistance to sort, package, transport, warehouse, and distribute items that may not meet the needs of disaster survivors.
  
- **Donate through a trusted organization.** At the national level, many voluntary, faith- and community-based organizations are active in disasters, and are trusted ways to donate in order to help disaster survivors.
  - If you need help in determining who to give to, the Texas Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (Texas VOAD) website has a list of [vetted disaster relief organizations](#) who are providing services to our residents. Texas VOAD represents more than three dozen faith-based, community, nonprofit and non-governmental organizations.
  - Additionally, National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster website has a list of [vetted disaster relief organizations](#) who provide help to disaster survivors. National VOAD is the recognized non-governmental leader of the disaster preparedness, response, and recovery sector. National VOAD members and partners represent a powerful force of goodwill in America.
  
- **Affiliate with existing non-profit organizations before coming to the disaster area.** Immediately following a disaster, a community can become easily overwhelmed by the amount of generous people who want to help. Contacting and affiliating with an established organization will help to ensure that you are appropriately trained and supported to respond in the most effective way.
  - The impulse to help when others who are suffering is commendable. However, volunteering inside a disaster area can be dangerous, stressful work in extreme environments.

- At this time, the situation is not conducive to volunteers entering the impacted zone, however the need for volunteers is inevitable. If you'd like to volunteer, please register with a [National VOAD Member](#) of your choice or fill out the [online form](#) to be connected to responding organizations as the situation becomes safe for volunteers.
- **Do not self deploy.** Seeing images of disaster may compel you to head to the impacted area. Don't underestimate the complexity of working in a disaster area. Until a need has been identified and the local community impacted has requested support, volunteers should not enter.
  - Be sure to affiliate with existing voluntary organization before coming to the disaster area, and that organization has been asked to respond.
  - Wait until it is safe to travel to volunteer sites and opportunities have been identified.
  - Once assigned a position, make sure you have been given an assignment and are wearing proper safety gear for the task.
- **Be patient.** Recovery lasts a lot longer than the media attention.
  - There will be volunteer needs for many months, often years, after the disaster - especially when the community enters the long-term recovery period.