

**Broome County Community Organizations Active in Disaster, Inc.  
September 26, 2015 Volunteer Reception Center Drill**

# **AFTER ACTION REPORT**

**November 16, 2015**

## **HANDLING INSTRUCTIONS**

1. The title of this document is After Action Report –Volunteer Reception Center Drill.
2. The information gathered in this After Action Report is classified as Public. However, reproduction of this document, in whole or in part, without prior approval from Broome County COAD, Inc. is prohibited.
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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Broome County Community Organizations Active in Disaster (Broome County COAD) hosted a Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) drill with its member organizations and other community agencies on September 26, 2015 as part of National Disaster Preparedness Month. The VRC drill was in response to a major power outage scenario in which generator, cell phone, computer and security system failures caused gas to leak into main lines, leading to several building explosions. The drill reenacted the public seeking information on how to help and spontaneous, unaffiliated disaster volunteers coming to assist with relief efforts. During the drill, participants went through the process of setting up and running a VRC, in which volunteers (1) completed a registration form, (2) signed a general release of liability statement, (3) accepted a referral to an organization needing their services, (4) received a form of identification approved by local officials, and (5) participated in a safety briefing. The drill was designed to create a future plan of action to successfully utilize spontaneous volunteers with the agencies that may receive them as well as by the community as a whole in the case of a disaster.

Based on participant feedback, one of the greatest strengths of the drill was the receptive and welcoming nature of the volunteer staff. Many participants commented on the staff's knowledge of an array of different issues as well as their willingness and eagerness to help with questions. Participants also acknowledged how well developed and thought out the VRC was. Many thought that the overall planning, set up, and run through of the drill was very organized. Positive feedback was also given on the informative nature of the drill, both before and during the event. Many felt they had a better understanding of what the purpose of a VRC was after going through the drill.

On the other hand, a few weaknesses were identified from the drill, with one of the main critiques being volunteer processing. Many felt that the design of the stations was not conducive to a quick flow of participants, which subsequently created delays and bottlenecks among some of the stations. Another problem that was identified was the lack of volunteers present at the event. Participants felt that more staff were needed to fill positions and help with VRC flow. The time management, speed, data input and processing and management of volunteers at stations was not at the level it would need to be had this been a real world disaster, and many participants found these factors to create many inefficiencies in the drill.

Despite the many improvements listed, participants felt that the drill was well executed and many provided recommendations on issues they felt could enhance the drill even further. Many felt that future exercises could be enhanced by having more volunteers, better communication between staff and participants, more logistical organization, more realistic scenarios, better speed and efficiency, different formats for maps, and more information before and during the event about the actual event and its purpose. Overall, the response to the VRC drill proved to be successful and many of the considerations are being taken into account to be used to help plan for future drills and emergencies.

## Major Strengths

The major strengths identified during this exercise are as follows:

- The planning, set-up and execution of the drill was well developed and organized.
- There was a continual flow of information before and during the exercise which allowed participants to have a better understanding of a VRC.
- The exercise staff was receptive, eager to help and knowledgeable.
- The roles of the participants and exercise staff were communicated clearly before and during the exercise and there was always someone available to answer questions if there was any confusion.
- The exercise staff was efficient in dealing with “disruptive” volunteers and did their best to create an effective flow of volunteers throughout the exercise.
- The exercise participants and staff followed the exercise guidelines and cooperated when given instructions.
- The volunteers were flexible in accepting different assignments and performing different tasks.

## Primary Areas for Improvement

Throughout the exercise, several opportunities for improvement were identified. The primary areas for improvement are as follows:

- The ways in which volunteers were processed and stations were designed created long lines and bottlenecks that could be improved with better organization.
- The exercise needed more staff to prevent delays in processing volunteers and to help the drill flow more efficiently.
- The organization of each station could be improved to help exercise staff be faster and more efficient in response times and overall time management.
- The exercise needs to develop a more efficient form of communication between stations as well as staff and volunteers. Communication also needs to be more engaging with participants.
- There should be more concise, uniform information among all of the stations and less redundancy of information (some stations can be combined).
- There should be more physical space for each station.
- The exercise scenario during the event should be more realistic.
- There should be more than one session of safety briefings.

## SECTION 1: EVENT OVERVIEW

### Event Details

#### Event Name

Volunteer Reception Center Drill

#### Type of Event

Drill

#### Event Start Date

September 26, 2015

#### Event End Date

September 26, 2015

#### Duration

5 hours

#### Location

Family Enrichment Network, 24 Cherry St., Johnson City, NY 13790

#### Objectives

As a result of this exercise, Broome County COAD will:

1. Increase its capacity to set up and run a Volunteer Reception Center staffed by COAD member representatives and community volunteers.
  - As measured by the number of volunteers recruited for exercise.
2. Effectively test the process for registering and placing spontaneous volunteers in appropriate volunteer opportunities to aid in disaster recovery.
  - As measured by the number of “spontaneous volunteers” processed during exercise.
3. Increase participants’ understanding of disaster volunteers and the need for Volunteer Reception Centers.
  - As measured by answers on participant feedback forms.
4. Improve Broome County’s capacity for managing spontaneous volunteers during disaster.
  - As measured by completion of Volunteer & Donations Management Plan Annex.

### Participating Organizations

- American Red Cross
- Binghamton University Chapter of Alpha Phi Omega
- Binghamton University Decker School of Nursing
- Binghamton University BAT Program
- Binghamton University Transfer Student Association
- Binghamton Vet Center
- Broome County CERT (Community Emergency Response Team)

- Broome County COAD (Community Organizations Against Disaster)
- Broome County Council of Churches
- Broome County Health Department
- Broome County Sheriff's Office
- Davis College
- Decker School of Nursing Mary E. Mahoney Nursing Support Group
- Family Enrichment Network
- NYS Homes and Community Renewal
- Sarah Jane Johnson UMC
- United Way of Broome County
- US Small Business Administration
- Village of Owego

## SECTION 2: IMPROVEMENT PLAN

### Recommendations:

1. The setup design and organization of the stations should be reconsidered to allow for faster volunteer processing. For example, Station 3 and Station 4 could be combined so that half of the volunteers go to 3 while the other half go to 4. The Safety Briefing can be done multiple times instead of waiting for a certain amount of people or be given out as a handout to help process volunteers faster. The Safety Briefing could even be done at sign in to allow people to know what volunteering would entail so they can decide if it is something they would still want to participate in. Additionally, data should also be filed and organized in a much simpler way to save time and prevent confusion.
2. The drill could be improved by having more VRC staff. This would help with combating many of the delays that arose from volunteer processing and would also provide additional ‘runners’ between stations to those who are process high volumes of volunteers. Additional VRC staff would allow for more efficiency and would help to take stress off of individuals managing stations and allow them to take breaks.
3. A standard of communication should be set at the beginning so volunteers are all receiving the same information and answers to their questions as to eliminate any confusion that could arise. Staff should be briefed in more detail before the event so everyone is on the same page with protocols, locations, and positions.

## SECTION 3: CONCLUSION

Broome County COAD hosted a VRC drill in response to a major disaster in order to reenact the public seeking information on how to help and spontaneous, unaffiliated disaster volunteers coming forward to assist with relief efforts. The overall drill was designed to create a future plan of action to successfully utilize spontaneous volunteers with the agencies that would receive them as well as by the community as a whole in the case of a disaster. The greatest strengths of the exercise included the organization in the overall planning, set up, and run through of the drill, the receptiveness and knowledge of the VRC staff, and the informative nature of the exercise as a whole. Key weakness that were identified in the event included volunteer processing, under-staffing, and drill inefficiencies due to drill set up. Many participants felt that future exercises could be improved by having more staff at each station to ensure that volunteers can not only be processed quickly and efficiently, but also that staff can take breaks when needed. Additionally, many people felt that the organization and design of the stations could be improved to avoid repetition, ensure better flow, and improve communication among staff to ensure that all participants are all on the same page with important information.

## APPENDIX A: PARTICIPANT FEEDBACK SUMMARY

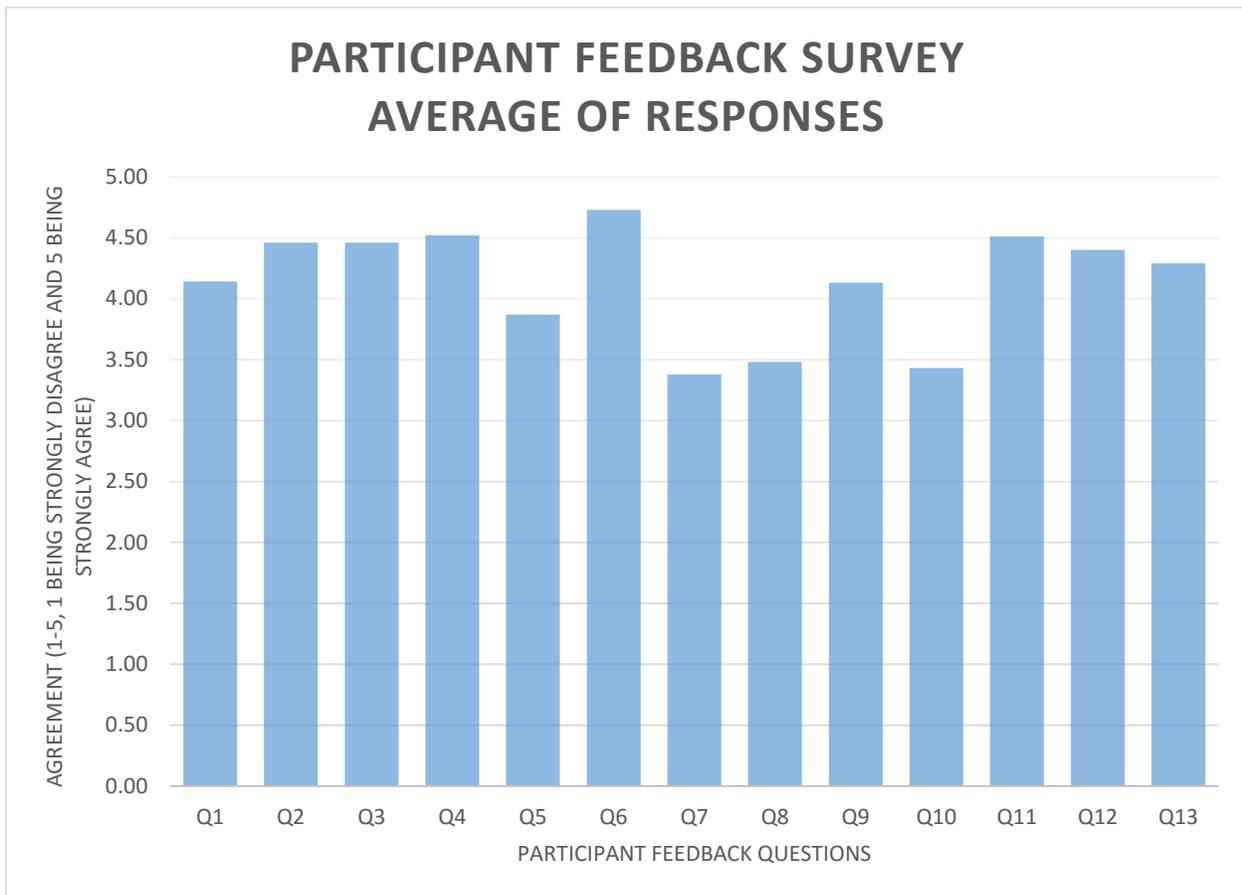
Total Survey Responses: 50

### Quantitative Data

*The following statements were rated 1-5, 1 being Strongly Disagree and 5 being Strongly Agree.*

	Average Score	Percent Agreed or Strongly Agreed (Ratings of 4 or 5)
Q1: I was given adequate information and instructions leading up to the exercise.	4.14	86%
Q2: I understood the role I played in today's exercise.	4.46	88%
Q3: I now understand the difference between affiliated and spontaneous volunteers.	4.46	86%
Q4: The exercise increased my understanding of, and the need for, Volunteer Reception Centers.	4.55	90%
Q5: Directional signage during the exercise was clear and easy to follow.	3.87	69%
Q6: Volunteer Reception Center Staff were courteous and kind.	4.73	94%
Q7: Spontaneous Volunteers were processed quickly and efficiently.	3.38	41%
Q8: The VRC was adequately staffed.	3.48	51%
Q9: The Volunteer Reception Center was easily navigated.	4.11	80%
Q10: Spontaneous Volunteer flow was well managed.	3.43	46%
Q11: I felt appreciated as a participant volunteering in this exercise.	4.51	94%
Q12: I felt my time was valued today.	4.4	86%
Q13: If a disaster struck in the future, I would seek volunteer opportunities through a Volunteer Reception Center.	4.36	80%

	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5	Q6	Q7	Q8	Q9	Q10	Q11	Q12	Q13
% Strongly Agree	32%	58%	68%	62%	25%	76%	22%	16%	31%	6%	61%	58%	55%
% Agree	54%	30%	18%	28%	44%	18%	18%	35%	49%	40%	33%	28%	24%
% Neutral	10%	12%	8%	10%	19%	4%	31%	31%	18%	40%	4%	12%	12%
% Disagree	4%	0%	4%	0%	6%	0%	22%	12%	0%	10%	0%	0%	4%
% Strongly Disagree	0%	0%	2%	0%	2%	0%	2%	4%	0%	0%	2%	2%	2%



### Qualitative Data

#### 1. I observed the following strengths during this exercise:

- Very informative.
- Communication
- Well-developed + thought out plan
- Everyone knew what they were talking about and were kind.
- People were very kind and eager to help and do their jobs. They were also very welcoming to all types of people and clearly trying to do their best.
- Very organized. Plenty of information provided by email before event.
- Very well organized exercise. Seemed to be good communication between stations and between stations and volunteers. Runner system w/ flag notification seemed to work well.
- All VCR Staff and volunteers were courteous (volunteers when not in role)
- An organized layout. Great VCR staff. Good job at preparing volunteers to help during an emergency.
- Flexibility
- The staff was very kind and receptive to any needs that we had. Disruptive volunteers were dealt with efficiently. I clearly understood my role and when I didn't, the staff was able to answer any of my questions.

- Staff was very kind and nice answering any questions. The Map area was a surprise to me. It was helpful.
- Staff that facilitated event were welcoming. Facility was clear - traffic pathways clearly marked.
- Director and staff were friendly and helpful. Good briefing - informative for participants.
- Positive leadership. Flexible volunteers
- Volunteers were polite and courteous. Supplies were organized. Briefing was informative.
- Good general plan and flow for volunteers. Friendly, helpful staff. Good direction and just in time training given to workers.
- Each station was organized and the staff was clear and courteous.
- The desire to do well, be efficient, and effective
- The exercise was well planned and organized
- Cooperation of participants - responsiveness of leadership.
- Desire to help by volunteers / staff
- Well planned /organized
- Everyone was willing to help and if they couldn't help they pointed you in the right direction.
- The people were very kind and helpful
- Receptive welcoming staff, good staff, effective processing
- Friendly staff, able to put up with a lot.
- Well planned!
- Well organized. Knowledgeable staff. Courteous, friendly.
- Seemed to flow nicely.
- Well run.
- Very easy to navigate. I knew my part and felt very appreciated. Gave me a better idea of what the purpose of VCR is.
- Officials at hand. Organized directions.
- Systemic flow to the stations.
- Helpful and caring faculty
- The basic set up was very good. Good flow routine: "Staff given their roles well and didn't tire of what they needed to do.
- Everyone was great. Station to station is a great idea.
- Cooperation, listening to feedback
- People were trying to help.
- A lot of volunteers willing to help.

**2. I observed the following areas for improvement during this exercise:**

- Station 3 needed more people. Some locations assigned were not on the map.
- Speed and efficiency
- Faster volunteer processing
- Safety briefing - I could not hear him, maps part was confusing
- Especially once it got a little busy, each station especially the data and safety briefing stations could be more efficient.
- Consider merging safety and identification tables. While safety table is waiting for enough people, admin could be filling out bracelets.
- Bottleneck processing volunteers between data collection, security briefing, and ID Station.
- Agency board is hard to read. Station 3 is bottlenecked, both in seating and process. Station 4 - too long a wait. Maps - Pinpoint agency locations and on pin, coordinate with

- names/address on a sheet. Assignment station, have full agency contact info on initial sheet. 1st sign in table - form is long. ID Should be requested at sign in table. Inconsistent responses about transportation.
- Spreadsheets for data entry should be ready to use and equipment should be checked to see if it works.
  - What is and how volunteer jobs are written. Communication; what needs to be done. What exactly the roles were. Ratio of VCR to volunteer was too large (VCR > Spontaneous volunteer). Speed!!!
  - Better time management. This could be done with more staff, especially in the safety briefing area.
  - Could have additional staff for increased cover/breaks, etc.
  - In certain stations, there seemed to be too many spontaneous volunteers in one area --> maybe there could be one/two more people at each station.
  - The volunteer flow in the Agency Data Area should be improved.
  - The role I played as volunteer coordinator did not provide me with a role that can allow me to give recommendations for what happened in the gym. The paperwork was complete and helpful that was given to me to prep for drill. It would be very helpful to give the participants "scene updates" to make the experience more realistic.
  - Need to work on volunteer processing - bottleneck simplification in areas to increase efficiency. Increase staffing in some areas.
  - Need for additional resources to hand out supplies at start. Consider access database instead of excel possibly for volunteer intake and agency requests.
  - More staff is needed in the data coordination section. Abbreviations should not be used on the referral form. Room either needs to be larger or the tables need to be farther apart.
  - Improve forms to allow for easier/quicker filling and management. Better flow management at specific stations. Reduce bottlenecks. Moving safety #4 to end.
  - Sometimes the lines for each station were a bit long, but the staff was kind.
  - Work on job boards: external categories (skilled, unskilled, professional meaning degrees or licensing). Additional pasting Space. More runners.
  - Some thought increased use of (illegible) would help organizational efforts.
  - Order of traffic flow (possible advertisement)
  - Streamline: the first two tables were redundant. Safety briefing: give at end w/ maps (Maps with pre-print maps, directions to main volunteer sites such as sheriff, schools, hospitals, churches, Red Cross). Combine streamline and safety briefing. Paperwork should be more concise. Call list could be developed to have volunteer info on hand ahead of time.
  - Data agency coordination station was understaffed - need (4) to assign and (2) (illegible words). Checking in (illegible) at each station w/ volunteer activity.
  - If possible have greeters w/ varied expertise on how to handle different issues (mental health, depressed, needing help themselves).
  - More engaging security debriefing, more staff at each station
  - Better communication between stations. Address + maps did not match up. More Staff per position.
  - Speed. Safety speech was a little flat when read. Some organizational issues.
  - Small things that each group identified.
  - Flow of volunteers - station 2, 3, 5. Perhaps safety briefing should be first, in case volunteers have 2nd thoughts and want to back out. More than one session of safety briefings. More people assigned to work sites. Maps - some locations couldn't be located.

- Better instructions + communication between stations. Different "difficult stations" - medical, agitation, phone distractions, minors.
- Better communication between stations. Better info about where to send people for missing persons/medical emergency.
- Respond quicker to situations that happen to volunteers.
- Allow for people to arrive without preregistration.
- Long wait line at table 3. A little slow response to people who needed medical attention. Last table asked me to use my phone since map guy didn't know where my assignment was.
- More volunteers filling out paperwork.
- No actual assignment locations or real address/phone #. Missions/assignment should be numbered and tabbed in a binder for quick access with accurate address, phone # and contact info.
- Maps, green bands, safety all had not enough faculty. Data coordination area: chaotic.
- The safety table needs to be changed. Reading the script was not effective. Paraphrasing or streamlining it might help.
- Station 3 should have more staff and paperwork taped and labeled on the table. Safety should have two stations for faster processing.
- In my role playing, I repeatedly told organizers that I don't have transportation. Each station gave me a different suggested solution until I would up back at my station for a different assignment... still very iffy with regard to my ability to help with no means of transportation.
- Need to better process volunteers, more time effective with input data and organization
- More people at job assignment table and map. Need to ask if there are questions or concerns.
- Better communication within the exercise.

**3. What specific information or training (if any) helped you (or could have helped you) prepare for this exercise? Please be as specific as possible.**

- Email was very informative
- Past VCR work in 2011
- I felt well prepared.
- More info in the beginning, like to describe my role as an actor or something like that so I would be less confused about what was real/simulated.
- Being a part of the planning committee was helpful in this case. In general, being connected with the media and being as informed in possible about the disaster would be important.
- knowledge of agencies
- Training from the CERT Team helped me understand how to communicate well with others and use the skills I was given to help out where I was needed.
- Take responsibility and help others. Trainings from BC Cert.
- I think the preparation of the "role playing" before they went into the gym hopefully helped make the drill better.
- Spontaneous volunteers & VCR FEMA courses
- Phone intake training - being able to take control of call. Being able to clarify requests being made during call.
- Exercise plan gave good general instructions. Data entry was not sure how to get forms for volunteers.
- None that I could think of. Patience most importantly.
- The (illegible word) of participants brought fresh, innovative ideas and perspectives
- Have already been trained at this level.

- Information as in "tools" needed
- The guidance of what kind of volunteer I should be was helpful.
- Online and email information, Rachel Jenkins talking to be about it, Spontaneous volunteer leaders friendly and informative
- CERT
- I coordinated volunteers in 2011.
- I didn't feel my skills were well utilized in regard to task assignments - training staff to better utilize my skills would make me feel more helpful.
- Needing to be patient and calm.
- Knowing the story line.
- None actually.
- More knowledge of the disaster and a specific job description.
- Computer competency in regard to excel for meeting
- My leadership positions.

**4. Please provide any recommendations on how this exercise or future exercises could be improved or enhanced.**

- More volunteers to aid in steps 2-4.
- Safety briefing louder, maps more clear.
- Increase efficiency. Never tell anyone to relax. Don't ask how your day is going in the midst of a disaster.
- More staff working data collection and ID Stations, security briefing as volunteers come through station rather than waiting for a group of 5. PIO could use assistant or a runner quickly available to gather and communicate info as well as handle needs if PIO is occupied speaking with the media.
- Agency board should be in column format (agency, role, date, #Req., Filled). Station 3 - filing system by agency, role. Make station 4 a video presentation, need sound barriers, handouts. Combine station 3/4, while waiting for 3 should can view video. At assignment table should ask for 2nd option the request was "filled" while I was waiting for verification. Should be 1st come, 1st serve.
- Be more precise in what needs to happen. Communication is key.
- More staff. Maybe there could also be more advertisement so more volunteers come.
- This was a great exercise.
- They should simulate a more disastrous situation. It wasn't real enough. Volunteer participants should be given more information prior to the activity to prepare.
- Role playing for this was so important. Providing volunteers with these rules may be helpful: disabilities, English limited, medication conditions, drama seekers, aggressive behaviors.
- Consider database with paper back up (not sure this may be done already) - be sure to keep "original" of all forms in binder.
- More staff on some stations.
- Some essential participants were absent. Perhaps event promotion could be more extensive.
- Prior to the actual exercise, have a walk through with key personnel to determine if all bases have been touched.
- Proceed exercise in stages to facilitate timely correction/adjustments.
- This exercise needs to emphasize how it plays into the larger scheme of EMS/Volunteer emergency preparedness - put it into context to give it more purpose.
- interpreters (deaf, ESL)

- More staffing.
- Make the technical adjustments and fixes and then focus on situations that will arise and how to handle them.
- Speed
- Incorporate the next step - going and helping a situation.
- It would benefit the exercise to have explicit instructions about where to send people.
- Put phones on loud and have participants text and on the phone. In a real situation volunteers would be trying to contact family and friends. Helping people find shelter and food, etc.
- Moving data entry / phone bank outside to sign in area.
- More volunteer coordinators.
- Realistic assignments, locations, organizations and address so they can be located on the map.
- Already have places marked on map and have it enlarged.
- Tag map was a problem - all sites to send volunteer to, should be pre-marked. Highlighted on a large map was (illegible word).
- Better understanding for spontaneous volunteers.
- Safety briefing: can this be handed out on a half sheet of paper (perhaps the back of another sheet already given out?)
- what to do with no power or computer (one of the two computers did not work)
- More people to help flow.
- Better communication throughout the exercise with volunteers.