



Volunteer Management and Data Tracking During COVID-19

In all Federally declared disasters, the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) can reimburse local and state governments for the cost of disaster recovery through a cost-share agreement. A Federal declaration has been issued for the COVID-19 pandemic, and as such, the assistance of nonprofit and voluntary organizations in tracking volunteer time is being requested to help meet cost-share agreements.

Volunteer hours help communities recover in two ways:

- 1) Volunteer work is essential to helping the community respond and recover physically, emotionally, and spiritually.
- 2) **Volunteer hours have a dollar amount attached to them by the Federal government to aid communities in recovering the cost of relief efforts.**

Volunteer hours must be documented in an auditable way in order for hours to count towards the cost-share. Tracking volunteer hours is simple. You will need to document:

- **Volunteer's Name** - *first and last*
- **Location of Volunteer Work** – *the specific address of the service site*
- **Hours Worked** – *a sign-in time and a sign-out time*
- **Type of Work** – *a brief description, i.e.:*
 - *"Donations Management" for loading, unloading and sorting donations*
 - *"Mass Feeding" for packaging, cooking, serving, or distributing food to residents or volunteers*

It is also beneficial to note if the volunteer used any equipment, since some types of equipment, such as vehicles and miles driven, also have reimbursable dollar amounts attached.

The easiest way to document COVID-19 volunteer hours is to use a sign-in sheet at a central volunteer check-in location. It is a good idea to have volunteers fill out an intake and waiver prior to service. This may be information you already collect when a volunteer applies to your organization.

Be aware, the more corresponding information you have about your volunteers, the more likely your data will stand the test of audit. The less you have, the less likely your data will lead to reimbursement. Please try to use intake forms and waivers whenever possible. See the attached intake for an example of forms that have been used in the past.

Once the system is in place, it is easy to maintain with just a couple of volunteers to assist with the paperwork.

A spreadsheet can be used to help track the information you are collecting in your physical forms. Using a spreadsheet can help you ensure you are not duplicating or missing information. However, while a database is useful to help calculate volunteer hours for your own organization's purposes, it is not absolutely necessary for the FEMA cost-share reimbursement.



Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) Volunteer Management and Data Tracking

Q: What counts as a COVID-19 related volunteer activity?

A: This is a unique disaster response, much different from any previous disaster declaration, so specific guidance is still being created. Until then, it is better to track any activities that may be considered a COVID-19 related activity, to ensure as many eligible hours as possible are documented. This could include meal packaging and distribution, call center assistance, sewing face masks, and more. When in doubt, track it.

Q: We already have a tracking system that collects this information, do we need to also enter it onto the sample form?

A: No. If your tracking system includes the Volunteer's Name, Location of Volunteer Work, Hours Worked, and Type of Work, there is no need to also put the information in the sample form. It is provided only as a resource for organizations that may not already have a tracking system in place.

Q: Where do I turn in my sign-in sheets and information?

A: For right now, please just begin to collect the listed volunteer information. Additional information will be shared by Volunteer Iowa and the Department of Homeland Security and Emergency Management. In most cases, the local Emergency Manager is responsible for collecting data, compiling a report, and requesting reimbursement from FEMA through the cost-share agreement. When it is time to submit your organization's hours, you will need to identify the jurisdiction the volunteer activity is supporting, (ie school system, city, county) since there may be multiple applications submitted and this will help identify where those hours align.

Q: When should I start tracking volunteer hours?

A: If you already tracked this information with your systems, please retain the information starting on March 8, 2020. If you did not track this information previously, please start as soon as you are able.

Q: Does tracking volunteer hours guarantee reimbursement?

A: No. The decision to reimburse local and state governments for disaster response expenses through the cost-share depends on a number of factors, including whether the state government has requested reimbursement. *However*, it is important to note that while reimbursement is not guaranteed, tracking volunteer hours is the *only* way reimbursement is possible. Even if reimbursement is not guaranteed by tracking volunteer hours, no reimbursement is possible without those hours being tracked. Tracking volunteer hours is a best practice that should be followed after *every* disaster situation.