



P.O. Box 97028, Phoenix, AZ 85060
azvoad1@gmail.com | www.azvoad.org

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Dear Arizona Community Leader,

As wildfire season approaches, we are reaching out as members of the Arizona Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (AZ VOAD) to set expectations how local community members, organizations and businesses can support disaster relief and recovery efforts. In a disaster, your help is always needed. Recovery for the communities and survivors impacted by disaster can last months and years. It is only through the generous contributions of time and resources from volunteers and nonprofit/voluntary organizations that these communities and survivors can truly rebuild.

However, immediately following a disaster, large amounts of volunteers and donations converging on one place can be difficult to organize, and do not always meet the needs of the community. To ensure that your efforts are put to good use, we ask that you follow a these nationally recognized best practices on how to support impacted communities following a disaster.

Donations

Cash is Best

- **Monetary donations** are the most effective method of donating and helping survivors. It offers nonprofit/voluntary agencies the most flexibility in obtaining the needed resources and delivers money into the local economy, helping business recover. Identify a local organization that you trust and donate directly to them or donate to one of the Arizona Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster's (AZ VOAD) [vetted disaster nonprofits](#).
- **Unsolicited donated goods**, such as used clothing, household items, and mixed or perishable food, may not be needed. Receiving agencies often have to sort, package, transport, warehouse, or redistribute items that can't be used, redirecting valuable resources and manpower away from meeting the needs of disaster survivors. Unsolicited donations are often considered the "second disaster" for this reason.

Corporate or Business Donations

- **Get a list.** If you choose to send corporate or business donations over monetary donations, call your local emergency management office or nonprofit organization located in the impacted community for a list of needed items.
- **Logistics.** Critical items needed to support disaster survivors change rapidly. Some items needed immediately after disasters are not needed several weeks later. When organizing a disaster relief supplies collection, please consider the following:
 - Be clear on the timeline. When are the donations needed by and when will you send them?
 - Arrange transportation and verify the place to bring donations. Do not assume that donations of relief supplies will be transported at no charge. Best practice is to build relationships with a reliable source of transportation before a disaster.

- Ensure donated items are packed well and clearly labeled. Specific content lists should be taped to the outside of each box. Clothing, if requested, should be new and sorted by gender, size and season.

Volunteers

Register with a Nonprofit

- **Register** with a local nonprofit or voluntary organization before arriving in the disaster area, and make sure that nonprofit has been asked to respond by the local community.
- **Why Register?** Don't underestimate the complexity of a working disaster area. Immediately following a disaster, a community can become easily overwhelmed by the number of generous people who want to help. Registering with an established organization will help to ensure you are appropriately trained to respond in the most effective, safe way.
- **Which nonprofit/voluntary organization can I register with?** Arizona Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (Arizona VOAD) is an organization whose mission is to foster communication, cooperation, coordination and collaboration among all volunteer organizations who respond during and after disasters. *To learn more about volunteering with an Arizona VOAD member organization, click [here](#).*
- **Never Self-Deploy.** Individuals should never self-deploy to disaster areas.

Organizations and Groups

- **Join AZ VOAD.** If your organization is not part of Arizona VOAD or local Community Organizations Active in Disaster (COAD), consider joining. This will help the response of the disaster be more efficient and will reduce duplication of efforts and services. [Click here to apply for Arizona VOAD membership.](#)
- **Never Self-Deploy.** Volunteer groups should plan to be self-sufficient and coordinate their efforts through the local emergency management office.

Be Patient

Recovery lasts longer than media attention. There will be volunteer needs for many months after a disaster from cleaning up debris and tarping roofs to rebuilding homes and lives. Volunteers may be asked to step into a variety of roles depending on needs.

Thank you so much for your leadership and support.

Sincerely,

Sybil Smith, Arizona VOAD Chair

