



Hurricane Recovery Volunteering 101

Preparing to be an effective volunteer

Here is an overview of everything you need to know before signing up for your volunteer experience in the hurricane-affected areas. These are some of the common questions that our volunteers seem to be asking, either before or during their trip. Hopefully, this will answer most of your questions and concerns about volunteering. The guide is meant to be generic to all LDR sites along the Gulf Coast so please understand that more detailed information will be provided to you by your local volunteer coordinator.

How long should we plan on staying?

Any amount of time that you can give for volunteering on the Gulf Coast is needed, even if only for a long weekend. Most volunteer groups stay for a week or two which is great. One strong need along the coast is for long-term volunteers, those people willing to stay for a month or even longer. Many of our housing sites have a series of RV hookups so that long-term volunteers have the option to bring home along with them and stay for as long as they are able.

Is there a minimum age requirement?

We ask that all volunteers be 16 years old and above. All volunteers from age 16-18 should be accompanied by an adult, at least 1 adult for every 5 youth. This cut off is not meant to exclude anyone, but is meant for the health and safety of those people who might be not physically developed enough to handle the hard work and often stifling heat of the Gulf Coast.

What training do we need to volunteer?

There is plenty of work to be done which means that not everyone who volunteers needs to be a skilled carpenter or a licensed electrician. However, it is good for all volunteers to have completed a basic course or a refresher in construction and tool safety before their trip. Perhaps a member of your congregation with a construction background can lead your group through a brief course on hammering nails and using circular saws.

What should we do to prepare?

Remember that the work that you are doing is also a ministry. In addition to basic construction training, it would be good to spend some time preparing for your trip with prayer and reflection. [Click here](#) for some tips on Pastoral and Spiritual Care for volunteers to help you in preparing for this ministry. During your trip, your group should plan on doing a daily reflection or prayer time together to decompress from the things that you experienced that day.

What forms do we need to complete?

There are a series of forms that all volunteers need to complete prior to their trip. These forms will be sent to you by the local coordinator where you will be working. There will be a volunteer information form which includes questions about contact information, emergency contact information, doctors, insurance, health concerns, current medications, etc. There will also be a volunteer liability release form. In the case that there are minors traveling with your group, they will need to have a release form signed by their parent or guardian and notarized.

How should we plan on getting there?

Transportation to and from the area, as well as during your trip, is the responsibility of your group. If your group plans on flying to and from your trip, rather than driving, please understand that, in some cases, it is difficult to rent a large (10-15 passenger) van in locations along the coast so you will need to plan accordingly. This might mean flying into an airport located closer to the perimeter of the damaged areas and driving the rest of the way.

How will we get around once we are there?

In addition to arranging transportation to and from your work site, all groups are required to have transportation to get themselves around once they are there. In some cases, the volunteer housing facilities do have vans or buses which they use to transport volunteers to and from the worksites each day. However, this should be clarified with the volunteer coordinator and not assumed to be universal.

Where will we be staying?

This volunteer experience will be unlike any vacation that you have ever taken! Such high numbers of residents from the Gulf Coast have been displaced that there simply are no rooms in the inns. The housing will be primitive – you may spend the nights on a cot, set up in a church fellowship hall, a gym, a warehouse, a tent. You will probably share a shower trailer and toilets with 100+ other people. Glamorous? Not exactly. But it will be an unforgettable experience.

What exactly is a “Tent City”?

Following the hurricanes this fall, there were tent cities that went up all along the Gulf Coast. Some of them were being built and used by displaced residents while still others were being built by agencies to house the thousands of volunteers coming down to work. A tent city is usually a series of tents, each tent housing anywhere from 8 to 50 volunteers on cots. The tents are usually set up on a series of palettes and plywood to provide a more solid floor and keep moisture out. Conditions can be very different depending on the time of year that you travel. During the summer months, temperatures average in the 90s, and the tents can be difficult to cool. On the other hand, the winters can be cold and the tents are equally as difficult to heat. Be sure to plan accordingly.

How much does it cost to volunteer? Is there a suggested donation?

Lutheran Disaster Response estimates that it costs \$20 per day to house and feed a volunteer. With this in mind, we ask all groups to consider a donation of \$20 per person per day. If LDR paid for the housing and meals of every volunteer for the next eight to ten years, the cost would add up to over \$60 million, leaving nothing for building materials and other supplies.

What should we plan on doing for food?

As with most mission trips, the meal schedule will more than likely be breakfast and dinner at the housing site, a brown bag lunch eaten at the work site, and additional snacks or beverages. If you are assigned to a location where meals are provided, the group is invited to consider a donation (suggested donation is \$20 per day per volunteer; see above) to support the ministry of the site. If your site does not have meals, groups will need to provide their own food and cook for themselves.

Should we bring food with us?

If you are asked to provide your own food, it is best to purchase food once you have arrived. This saves from having to bring everything with you, and, more importantly, it helps to re-build the local economy. As mentioned above, some housing sites do have food that will be prepared and served to volunteers while other sites may ask volunteers to be more self-sufficient.

What sort of work will we be doing?

Volunteers will be doing a variety of work activities while on the coast. These may include, but are certainly not limited to: cleaning or “mucking” houses, gutting and bleaching houses, hanging new sheetrock or drywall, roofing, painting, building volunteer housing, cooking, sorting and distributing donated goods, etc. One very simple job, that might affect the people you will be working with the most, is listening to their stories – their grief, their anger, their frustration and their happiness.

Should we bring tools with us? Should we bring construction materials?

Everyone volunteering along the coast, even during the same week, may be doing drastically different types of work. This is because the type and extent of damage caused by the storms was drastically different. Money donated to LDR is spent on building materials and other supplies. However, the volunteer coordinator at your site, prior to your arrival, will inform you of additional tools that it would be helpful for you to have. In most cases, volunteers should expect to bring a hammer and other basic building tools with them. At some times, the work being done will require specialized tools in which case LDR will purchase those necessary tools or hire professional crews to complete the job.

What should we pack to bring?

The following is a basic packing list for doing volunteer work:

Clothing

Sturdy, waterproof work shoes
Sneakers
Poncho
Jacket
Jeans or work pants
Socks
Shirts
Underwear
Sleepwear
Work gloves
Hat/bandanas

Health and Hygiene

Any Prescription medicine
Necessary non-prescription meds
Sunscreen (15+)
Hand sanitizer
Deodorant

Miscellaneous Items

Driver’s license
Health Insurance card
Important phone numbers
Money
Phone card
Bible and devotional materials
Notebook and pencils or pens
Umbrella
Camera and film
Spare batteries
Flashlight
Bedding
Pillow
Towels and washcloth
Water bottle

Feminine needs
Mouthwash
Toothbrush, toothpaste, and dental floss
Soap, shampoo and conditioner
Shaving cream and razor
Insect spray
First-aid supplies

How do I sign up my group (or myself) to volunteer?

After reading this, please visit our [“Volunteer Sign-Up” page](#), which will prompt you for basic contact information and information about your volunteer group. Once you have completed the form, it will be sent directly to our volunteer coordinators working in the affected areas, and they will contact you to set up your trip. **Please understand that filling out the sign-up form does not mean that your group has been booked to volunteer. This only happens after the volunteer coordinators have verified their availability and contacted you directly to plan your trip.**