

RELATED TERMS

- Hurricane Katrina
- Evacuee



**Lessons Learned
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LESSON LEARNED

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Citizen Corps Councils: Specifying Needs in Volunteer Requests

SUMMARY

When recruiting volunteers, Citizen Corps Coordinators should consider including specific instructions in their announcements. These instructions should contain the number of volunteers needed, the required skills, and where and when volunteers would be expected to report for duty.

DESCRIPTION

In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, approximately 27,000 New Orleans evacuees were transported to Reliant Park in Houston, Texas. The American Red Cross (ARC) tasked the Harris County Citizen Corps with the mobilization and organization of Houston-area volunteers to staff and manage the temporary shelters. On the morning of August 31, the Harris County Citizen Corps Coordinator sent out an e-mail to all 10,000 registered Citizen Corps members in which he made a general request for volunteer assistance. The Coordinator received responses to his request at the rate of 1,000 per hour before the Harris County Citizen Corps website crashed and his personal e-mail went offline. The time spent offline subsequently slowed the Citizen Corps Council's response time.

At 10 pm on August 31, 2005, the Incident Commander sent word to the Harris County Citizen Corps Coordinator that evacuees were en route to the Reliant complex. The Coordinator then sent a second, more detailed e-mail to volunteers. This message specified the number of volunteers needed, the skill sets volunteers should have, and where and when volunteers should arrive. By including these details, the Citizen Corps Coordinator pre-empted many of the volunteer responses that helped crash the system earlier. Within an hour of receiving the second e-mail, Citizen Corps members began arriving at the specified volunteer entrance. These specific volunteer requests proved much more effective in managing local Citizen Corps members' response to, and participation in the massive Reliant Park volunteer effort.

For more information please see the *Lessons Learned Information Sharing* Good Story entitled "[Harris County, Texas Citizen Corps' Response to Hurricane Katrina.](#)"

When appealing to a large group of potential volunteers, Citizen Corp Coordinators should consider including detailed information on the number of volunteers needed, the required skills, and where and when volunteers should report for duty. These instructions could help prevent an overwhelming volunteer response from disrupting the contacting system.

CITATION

Mark Sloan, Harris County Citizen Corps Coordinator. Interview with *Lessons Learned Information Sharing*. 7 Sep 2005.

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