

National Service and Disaster Response



Every year, communities across the nation suffer the effects of natural and man-made disasters that disrupt the lives of millions of Americans. Disasters can lead to human losses, social problems, economic harm, and environmental damage. The very nature of a disaster leaves individuals and families with broken or stressed support networks to assist with response and recovery.

The Corporation for National and Community Service (CNCS), a federal agency, provides strong support, expertise, and trained and dedicated volunteers to help communities to prepare for, mitigate, respond, and recover from natural and man-made disasters. CNCS supports nonprofits, educational institutions, faith-based organizations and other groups in engaging citizens in meeting economic, health, social, and environmental needs caused by disasters. This includes a range of activities, such as volunteer coordination, feeding operations, home repairs, environmental clean up, needs assessments, client casework, and long-term recovery.

From forest fires and floods, to hurricanes and tornadoes, to terror attacks and oil spills, participants in CNCS programs have provided critical support to millions of Americans affected by disasters since 1994. Reflecting the agency's growing expertise and commitment in disaster services, in 2007 the CNCS bipartisan board of directors made disaster preparedness and response one of its strategic priorities, and disaster services is one the agency's focus areas for its proposed 2011-2015 strategic plan. These activities cover the full range of disaster services from response, to long term recovery, preparedness and mitigation.

Sample Disaster Project Activities

- Volunteer Coordination
- Shelter Operations
- Debris Removal
- Warehouse Management
- Installing Accessibility Improvements on Homes and Shelters
- Case Management
- Disaster Recovery Center Support
- Volunteer Reception Center Support
- Long Term Recovery Committee Support
- Volunteer Base Camp Setup and Operation
- Public Information Outreach
- Operations Center Setup and Support
- Special Needs Assistance
- Home Construction/Repair
- Public Facilities Renovation
- Call Center Support/Setup/Operations
- Needs Assessment
- Pet Shelter Operations
- Preparedness Education

Coordination and Planning

To increase coordination at the federal, state, and local levels, CNCS has worked with the Department of Homeland Security and FEMA on the National Response Framework, created a Disaster Coordinator Cadre of specially trained staff available to go to disaster

zones to coordinate national service assets and mission assignments with FEMA, and signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster to enable smarter, faster cooperation with the group's members.

“Among the many who wear the name “hero” in our book of golden deeds performed here, the AmeriCorps volunteers will forever have a place of honor in our memory - idealistic young people, and seniors also, who came here and lived in Spartan conditions for month after month, in military tents, going out day after day to help the people of South Mississippi pull themselves out of the debris and rebuild.”

Biloxi Sun-Herald,
Sept. 12, 2007

National Service in Action

Through its programs AmeriCorps (State & National, NCCC, and VISTA), Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America, the Corporation for National and Community Service has responded to numerous natural and manmade disasters since 1994. Highlights include:

- Following the 2005 Gulf Coast Hurricanes Katrina, Rita, and Wilma, more than 110,000 participants in CNCS's AmeriCorps, Senior Corps, and Learn and Serve America programs have contributed more than 9.6 million hours to the relief, recovery, and rebuilding effort. They also have coordinated an additional 648,000 community volunteers, a major share of the overall volunteer force. Among other accomplishments, they have assisted 3 million people, completed nearly 55,000 damage assessments, refurbished more than 10,500 homes, constructed 2,000 new homes, served 1.6 million meals, and distributed more than 6,000 tons of food.
- Record-setting flooding during mid-June 2008 drastically impacted the Cedar Rapids-Iowa City, Iowa, area, with damages to some 5,390 houses and 1,049 commercial properties. Working with the Iowa state service commission and local nonprofits, CNCS mobilized hundreds of AmeriCorps members to assist in response and recovery efforts, including assessing damage, mucking out homes, connecting flood victims with resources, and supporting the volunteer reception center that has coordinated more than 7,400 volunteers who have provided 205,000 hours of service. AmeriCorps members are still assisting in a range of projects, including coordinating cleanup efforts, implementing weatherization and recycling programs, and supporting food and nutrition programs.
- In the wake of the 2010 Deepwater Horizon Oil Spill CNCS partnered with the Gulf Region State Service Commissions in efforts to strengthen the economic opportunities and expand the capacity of non profits to meet the growing social service needs throughout the region. In the early stages of the response more than 5,000 volunteers were engaged in activities ranging from shore monitoring to case management. AmeriCorps State and National, VISTA, AmeriCorps NCCC, Learn and Serve America, and Senior Corps all played significant roles in the oil spill response and long term recovery efforts.
- In response to flooding of the Rio Grande River caused by Hurricane Alex in 2010, AmeriCorps NCCC teams helped affected families repair roofs, replace drywall and paint.
- Senior Corps members joined with the Tennessee Emergency Management Agency to help develop Tennessee's bioterrorism plan to provide smallpox inoculations to the state's 5.7 million residents.
- The Hoopa Tribal Civilian Community Corps (TCCC) worked with other AmeriCorps members to help people in Winona and Fillmore Counties in Minnesota recover from flooding.
- Partnering with Serve Rhode Island, AmeriCorps NCCC members responded to the March 2010 flooding of the Pawtuxet River, capturing and tracking work requests for clean up assistance, referring requests to volunteer organizations, and coordinating response organizations and agencies.
- In 2010, AmeriCorps St. Louis, NCCC, and Hoopa TCCC members deployed to Ebenezer City, Mississippi, to respond to a nearly mile-wide tornado that tore through 17 counties. The members provided volunteer coordination, removed debris, and conducted home repairs.
- In the summer of 2000, 55 AmeriCorps NCCC members fought forest fires in Montana, Colorado, Utah, Nevada, and Wyoming. They served as members of initial attack teams, cut fire lines along the perimeter of the fires to prevent their continued spread, prevented burnt areas from flaring up again by extinguishing hotspots, and participated in other fire containment activities

To learn more about how national service supports communities affected by disasters, or how you may work with us to make communities safer, please contact the CNCS Disaster Services Unit at kdegraff@cns.gov or visit our website at NationalService.gov.

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