



NECHAMA

JEWISH RESPONSE TO DISASTER



DEPLOYMENT MANUAL FOR INDIVIDUAL VOLUNTEERS

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1. WELCOME & INTRODUCTION

Our Mission

NECHAMA, rooted in the Jewish value of Tikkun Olam, repairing the world, provides comfort and hope to communities by engaging volunteers in disaster recovery work. NECHAMA has three overarching priorities: humanizing Jews and representing Jewish ideals in communities shattered by disaster; providing a platform for volunteers, particularly Jewish volunteers, to explore their identities and purpose; and spreading hope and offering tangible support to people and communities in desperate need of assistance.

Our Values

The Torah, the Hebrew bible, teaches us how to live a good and just life. There are many values incorporated in the Torah and these seven particularly inspire NECHAMA's work.

Tikkun Olam – Repairing The World – תיקון עולם

We don't have to look beyond the morning headlines or the evening news to see the brokenness in our world. The Jewish answer to that brokenness has always been action – to do what we can to repair it. When NECHAMA rebuilds a home, we are not just repairing a home, we are repairing the world.

Rachamim – Compassion – רחמים

The Talmud teaches that one of the most vital of Jewish values is *rachamim*, compassion – a caring concern for others. At NECHAMA, we approach each of our interactions with our clients, our coworkers, and community members with *rachamim*, with genuine compassion and a caring concern for others.

Lo Ta'Amod – Don't Stand Idly By – לא תעמוד

We are commanded “not stand idly by the blood of our neighbor.” The Talmud interpreted this verse as an obligation to come to the aid of others. Even if there is a risk to our own lives, we must respond to aid another. For us at NECHAMA, we come to the aid of others in distress; we do not stand idly by -- rather we respond rapidly and with passion to assist our neighbors in need.

Mipnei Darchei Shalom – Building Relationships – מפני דרכי שלום

The Talmud teaches that the Jewish community is obligated, not only to help and care for Jews, but to help and care for everyone. The scholar Maimonides took this teaching one step further and taught that it is in fact a commandment to come to the aid of the non-Jewish community. Wherever there is a need, NECHAMA provides support, whether it's

a Jewish community or not. We make no distinction when we respond to meet urgent humanitarian needs on behalf of the greater Jewish community.

Ahavat Orchim - Love The Stranger - אהבת אורחים

The most repeated commandment in the Torah is to care for the poor, the widow, and the stranger -- to love and care for those who are the most vulnerable. When we work with NECHAMA to rebuild the home of someone who was once a stranger, that person becomes part of our lives and we embody what the Torah teaches when it commands us to care for the poor, the widow, and the stranger.

Gemilut Chasadim - Acts of Lovingkindness - גמילות חסדים

Jewish tradition has long emphasized the importance of *gemilut chasadim*, doing voluntary acts of lovingkindness or service for others. The collection of proverbs known as the Ethics of the Fathers teaches that "the world rests upon three things: Torah, prayer, and *gemilut hasadim/acts of lovingkindness*." When we respond to a disaster as NECHAMA, we are truly performing acts of lovingkindness and in so doing, bring God's presence into the world.

Tzedekah - Charity/Justice - צדקה

The root of the Hebrew word *tzekekah* means justice and is required of each of us. The Jewish tradition requires that we each share what we have with those who have less. The community is obligated to ensure that everyone has food, clothing, and shelter. We are asked to give generously not only of our money, but also of our time and talent to make the world better. When NECHAMA assists a family, we are helping to fulfill the vital commandment found in the Torah: justice, justice you shall pursue!"

What We Do

NECHAMA's programs aim to provide disaster-affected communities with the resources needed to heal after experiencing destruction from natural disasters. The core function of our work is to address the immediate needs of post-disaster communities and provide the foundation for rebuilding and full recovery. Our direct service inspires volunteers, supports victims of disasters, and creates more resilient communities.

Immediate Response

NECHAMA's response work provides immediate services to disaster-affected areas, helping families in the first stage of the disaster recovery process. This often refers to debris removal and "mucking and gutting" homes, which involves removing mud, debris, and

water-damaged materials from homes after a disaster, and helping to mitigate the growth of mold. These critical first steps lay the groundwork for victims of disaster to return to their homes as quickly and safely as possible.

Continued Recovery

For communities that experience extreme disasters, NECHAMA often maintains a presence and provides further recovery work, beyond an immediate response. Through the support of local and national partners, we provide long-term assistance and rebuilding services. Our aim is to ensure that homes are rebuilt sustainably, and we often restore them better than their original condition.

Testimonials

“During the day, some of our volunteers – old and young alike – learned new skills, such as how to use power tools. We gathered with the owner’s brother and took a picture. While the actual picture is gone, it is etched in my mind because of the joy on the faces of the volunteers for a job well done and on the face of the brother’s owner, who was thrilled to have the help. We had made a difference for one person and his family. Through its deployments, NECHAMA – Jewish Response to Disaster continually facilitates these encounters and helps repair the world.”

–Rabbi Aaron Gaber



"In the evenings we would make dinner and sit down to eat with guests from the community who shared their stories. It was through those dinnertime conversations that the real meaning of our work came to light. It wasn't how many panels of drywall that were hung, but the strength and hope that these survivors drew from volunteers bearing witness to what they had been through. And offering a hand to help them on their road to recovery."

- Tracy Figueroa, Board Secretary



"It is not your duty to finish the work, but neither are you at liberty to neglect it.' This is a quote from Pirkei Avot I think about whenever I see disaster in our world. I'd always want to do something but never really know where to start. NECHAMA gives everyday folks, like myself, the ability to do just that. NECHAMA does such good work in our world. I am grateful to have found this incredible organization."

- Caleb Seidler, Volunteer from Charlotte, NC



2. ROLES, RESPONSIBILITIES & REQUIREMENTS

NECHAMA welcomes anyone with a passion to help others regardless of religious faith or background. No previous disaster response experience is necessary– our skilled team leaders will teach you everything you need to know to make a difference.

General Volunteer Information

- No prior disaster experience required
- Training will be provided on site
- Tools and PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) are provided
- Volunteers of all faiths are welcome. You do not have to be Jewish to join us
- We accept individuals and groups
- The minimum time commitment is a half-day, but most volunteers commit to at least one full day
- We work within the continental United States
- Minimum age: 14 years old (with adult chaperone)

While participation has very few prerequisites, be aware that much of the work involved can be physically demanding.

On-Site vs. Virtual Volunteering

Please note: Individuals seeking volunteer opportunities should refer to a separate, specific manual. This manual is intended for organizations/delegations.

On-Site Volunteering

Day Volunteers are people who choose to find their own accommodations or those who live locally.

- After signing up for a program, you will receive an email 24-72 hours before your volunteer day with the address where we'll meet.
- Our normal work hours are roughly from 8:30 AM to 4 PM.
- Please remember to pack a lunch and wear clothes you don't mind getting dirty or damaged.
- Some NECHAMA sites will not have a bathroom or running water, but we can direct you to a gas station nearby.

Residential Volunteers are those who choose to stay with us at our lodging site.

- Volunteering with us is free of charge. However, volunteers are responsible for covering their own travel expenses to and from our Base of Operations, including all transportation costs.
- Once staying with us, we provide three meals a day on workdays, basic accommodations, and transportation to our worksites.

Virtual Volunteering

Disaster relief work isn't limited to the field—virtual volunteering can be a valuable way to support NECHAMA's mission. We often aid with virtual case management after major disasters and we are always happy to have people spread the word about NECHAMA! If you're interested in exploring how you can contribute remotely, we encourage you to reach out to us directly by emailing info@NECHAMA.org. Your skills and time can make a meaningful impact, no matter where you are. Let's connect and find the right opportunity for you!

Volunteer Responsibilities & Expectations

Volunteers play a critical role in the success of our operations, taking on various tasks that ensure smooth and efficient responses. To ensure a safe, productive, and rewarding experience for everyone, we ask all volunteers to adhere to the following expectations:

1. Behavior

- Treat all team members, community members, and partners with respect and kindness.
- Maintain a positive attitude, even when challenges arise.
- Avoid behavior that could disrupt the team or compromise safety.

2. Accountability

- Be punctual and reliable. If you commit to specific hours or tasks, follow through or inform us if circumstances change.
- Take responsibility for your actions and contributions to the group.
- Maintain open communication with team leaders and peers.

3. Commitment

- Approach your volunteer role with dedication and enthusiasm.
- Stay engaged and give your best effort during your time with us.
- Respect the time, effort, and resources invested by the organization and your fellow volunteers.

4. Following Directions

- Listen carefully to instructions provided by team leaders and staff.

- Adhere to safety protocols and guidelines to ensure the well-being of yourself and others.
- Ask questions if you are unsure about any tasks or instructions.

By meeting these expectations, you contribute to a collaborative and effective environment where everyone can make a meaningful impact.



3. HEALTH & SAFETY GUIDELINES

Risk Factors for Jewish Institutions

Public involvement in humanitarian work can increase the visibility of Jewish institutions, potentially attracting unwanted attention from extremist groups or individuals with antisemitic sentiments. Given that Jewish organizations have historically been targets of hate crimes, publicizing our volunteer efforts may further elevate security risks. However, this reality does not deter NECHAMA's mission to provide comfort and hope to communities in need. Instead, it reinforces our commitment to proactive safety measures that protect our volunteers and staff. Through comprehensive security protocols, risk assessments, and strong partnerships with local authorities, we create environments where our teams can focus on their vital work with confidence and peace of mind. Our dedication to tikkun olam remains unwavering, guided by both courage and careful preparation.

Safety & Security Policies:

General Safety Protocols

Ensuring the safety of volunteers is a top priority during disaster response efforts. All volunteers should adhere to basic safety guidelines, including maintaining situational awareness, following instructions from team leaders, and using the buddy system to ensure no one is working alone in hazardous conditions. Volunteers should be familiar with emergency exits, evacuation routes, and designated meeting points in case of an emergency. Additionally, personal health and well-being must be considered—volunteers should stay hydrated, take necessary breaks, and report any injuries or medical concerns immediately.

Vehicle Safety & Awareness

NECHAMA's trucks and vehicles play a critical role in transporting volunteers and storing essential equipment, including first aid kits. To ensure safety and security, volunteers should remain aware of their surroundings at all times, especially when entering or exiting NECHAMA vehicles. Keys should never be left in an unattended vehicle, and doors should always be locked when stepping away, even briefly. All tools, first aid kits, and supplies must be properly secured before leaving the vehicle to prevent theft or tampering. Whenever possible, vehicles should be parked in secure areas, avoiding locations that may pose a higher risk. By taking these precautions, we help protect our team, equipment, and mission while serving communities in need.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

PPE is provided at each work site. The use of proper PPE is essential for reducing the risk of injury and exposure to hazardous conditions. Volunteers must wear appropriate gear based on their assigned tasks, which may include gloves, masks, hard hats, safety goggles, hazmat suits and appropriate footwear. When working in flood-affected areas, waterproof boots and gloves are recommended to prevent infections from contaminated water. N95 masks or respirators should be used in environments with airborne hazards, such as mold or dust. All PPE should be inspected before use to ensure it is in good condition and fits properly. Volunteers will also be trained on the correct use, removal, and disposal of PPE to minimize risks to themselves and the communities we serve.

Communication & Check-ins

Clear and consistent communication is vital for both safety and operational efficiency. Volunteers should always carry a charged mobile phone. In disaster zones, where cell service may be unreliable, alternative communication methods, such as two-way radios or satellite phones, will be established. In the event of an emergency, volunteers should immediately report incidents through the designated communication channels. By maintaining strong communication protocols, volunteers can work more effectively while ensuring their safety and the safety of their team.

First Aid & Medical Emergencies

In the event of an injury or medical emergency, volunteers should remain calm and act quickly to ensure the safety and well-being of those affected. All volunteers should be familiar with the location of first aid kits and trained in basic first aid procedures, including wound care, CPR, and recognizing signs of heat exhaustion or dehydration.

Minor injuries should be treated on-site using available first aid supplies, while serious medical emergencies require immediate contact with emergency services. Volunteers should report all injuries—no matter how minor—to team leaders to ensure proper documentation and follow-up care.

Safety Training

Safety training is provided at the work site to ensure all volunteers are prepared for potential hazards and understand best practices for staying safe. Training covers essential topics such as proper use of personal protective equipment (PPE), hazard recognition, emergency procedures, and safe tool handling.

Safety briefings are conducted before any work begins. Team leaders are available to address questions and provide additional instruction throughout the deployment to ensure all volunteers feel confident and well-equipped for their tasks.

Confidentiality Agreements

To protect the privacy and dignity of disaster survivors, all volunteers must adhere to strict confidentiality guidelines. Personal information about individuals affected by a disaster—including their names, locations, personal stories, or any identifying details—should never be shared publicly or discussed outside of official NECHAMA communications. Volunteers should avoid taking or sharing photos of disaster survivors without explicit permission and should refrain from posting sensitive information on social media. Additionally, any internal documents, response plans, or operational details should remain confidential to ensure the security and effectiveness of NECHAMA's relief efforts. By respecting these guidelines, volunteers help maintain trust with the communities they serve while upholding NECHAMA's commitment to ethical and responsible disaster response.

Ethical Guidelines

Whether you're religious or not, volunteering with a Jewish organization means people might see you as representing it. Because of this, volunteers should feel comfortable explaining why the organization, and they themselves, are volunteering to make the world a better place.

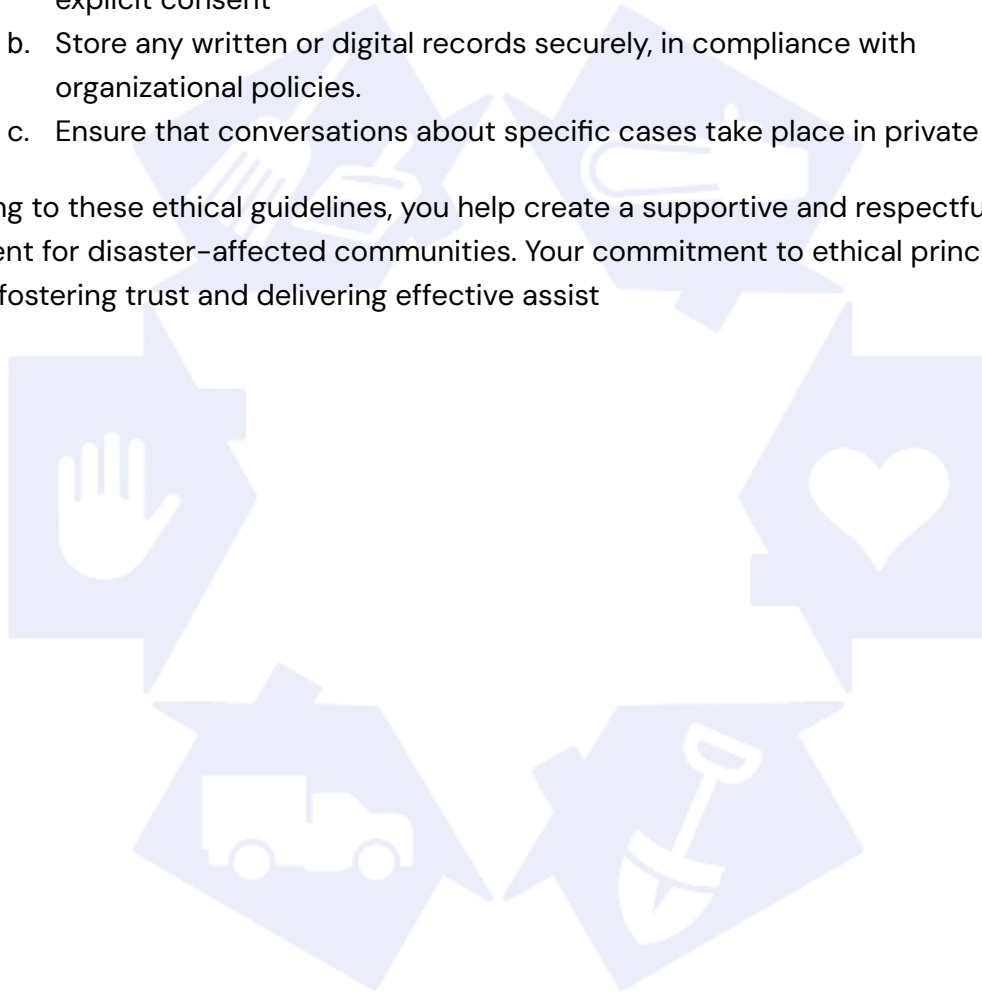
Volunteering in disaster response comes with immense responsibilities, especially when working with vulnerable populations. Adhering to these ethical guidelines ensures that we provide assistance with respect, dignity, and sensitivity.

Guidelines for working with vulnerable populations:

1. Respect Individual Dignity
 - a. Treat all individuals with kindness, empathy, and respect regardless of their circumstances.
 - b. Avoid making assumptions about people's needs; instead, ask questions and listen attentively.
2. Prioritize Safety
 - a. Ensure the physical and emotional safety of vulnerable populations by following organizational protocols.
 - b. Recognize signs of distress and connect individuals with appropriate professional support.
3. Understand Local Culture

- a. Take the time to learn about the cultural practices, traditions, and languages of the community you are serving.
 - b. Show respect for cultural differences by adapting your behavior accordingly.
 - c. Use inclusive and non-discriminatory language in all interactions.
 - d. Avoid making judgments or expressing personal opinions about cultural practices.
4. Uphold Privacy
- a. Do not collect or share personal details about individuals without their explicit consent
 - b. Store any written or digital records securely, in compliance with organizational policies.
 - c. Ensure that conversations about specific cases take place in private settings.

By adhering to these ethical guidelines, you help create a supportive and respectful environment for disaster-affected communities. Your commitment to ethical principles is crucial to fostering trust and delivering effective assist



4. POST-DEPLOYMENT RESOURCES

Support Channels

NECHAMA is committed to supporting our volunteers not just during deployment, but after as well. Whether you need emotional, logistical, or medical support, resources are available to help you navigate challenges that may arise during or after your volunteer experience.

- **Emotional Support:** Disaster response work can be emotionally taxing. If you find yourself feeling overwhelmed, stressed, or in need of someone to talk to, NECHAMA can provide guidance for support. Please connect with your team leader so they can support you. Alternatively, you may wish to connect directly with the [Disaster Distress Helpline](#). This is the first national hotline dedicated to providing year-round disaster crisis counseling for survivors of and responders to disasters. This toll-free, multilingual, crisis support service is available 24/7 to all residents in the U.S. and its territories who are experiencing emotional distress related to natural or human-caused disasters and it can be reached by calling or texting 1-800-985-5990.
- **Logistical Support:** For any issues related to travel arrangements, accommodations, equipment needs, or on-site coordination, please contact NECHAMA's Operations Director.

After-Action Items

After-Action Survey

After completing your volunteer deployment, you'll receive an after-action survey via email. This brief survey is an important feedback tool that helps us improve the volunteer experience, enhance safety protocols, and strengthen our disaster response efforts. Your insights—whether about training, on-site coordination, or overall support—are invaluable in helping us grow and serve communities more effectively. We encourage you to take a few minutes to complete the survey, as your feedback directly impacts how we support future volunteers and improve NECHAMA's mission-driven work. Keep an eye on your inbox, and thank you in advance for sharing your thoughts!

Donation to NECHAMA

We also invite you to increase your impact by paying it forward through a donation to NECHAMA. Your donation helps create meaningful service opportunities for future volunteers while ensuring that communities impacted by disasters continue to receive critical support. Thank you for your consideration!

Social Media

Social media is a great tool to share with others about how your experience was on-site with NECHAMA! We encourage you to post on your personal social media (feel free to tag us!) as well as commenting on our own social media posts.

