

RESPONSE TEAM · MARC TOOLKIT

MARC Planning Guide

How to stand up a Multi-Agency Resource Center in your county: timeline, site, floor plan, staffing, agencies to invite, day-of run sheet, and what happens after.

National Edition · October 2026

Prepared for county emergency managers, VOAD partners and long-term recovery groups.

Built on the national MARC Planning Resource (American Red Cross, Catholic Charities USA, The Salvation Army, 2015).

Free to copy and adapt. responseteam.org/tools/marc-toolkit/

The MARC in one page

A Multi-Agency Resource Center puts every agency a survivor needs in one building for one to three days. Survivors check in once, walk a short loop of tables, and leave with registrations started, claims opened and a recovery contact.

5 to 14

days after the disaster is the window. Earlier, people are still sheltering. Later, they have scattered.

1 to 3

days of operation. Include one evening and a Saturday for shift workers.

5,000+

square feet of open hall, plus two private rooms, restrooms and parking.

Who leads it

One lead agency owns the MARC. That is usually the **county emergency manager** or, for a federally declared event, the lead VOAD agency working with the state. The lead agency signs the facility agreement, names the Site Manager, sets the hours and approves every public message. Every other agency is a partner and brings its own people, paperwork and signage.

MARC	Local. Run by the county or VOAD. Any disaster, declared or not. One to three days. Many agencies, broad help.
DRC	Federal. Run by FEMA after a federal declaration. Open for weeks. FEMA programs first, partners alongside.
Both at once	Fine, and common. Coordinate so neither one pulls survivors away from the other. A MARC often opens before the DRC does.

No federal declaration? Hold one anyway.

Many disasters never reach a federal declaration. A MARC does not need one. FEMA and SBA will not be at the table, but your state's social services and labor agencies, legal aid, insurance carriers, Red Cross, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, the county extension office and local churches all will. That is still most of the help a family needs.

What a survivor leaves with

- | | |
|---|--|
| ☐ FEMA registration started (if declared) or a plan to register | ☐ Cleanup kit, tarp, water, comfort kit |
| ☐ Insurance claim opened or adjuster appointment set | ☐ Legal help for insurance disputes, contractor fraud, lost documents |
| ☐ SBA loan application started (declared events) | ☐ Name on the home repair and cleanup list |
| ☐ Replacement SNAP, cash assistance or Medicaid questions answered | ☐ Someone they talked to about how they are doing |
| ☐ Disaster unemployment claim filed | ☐ One phone number to call next week |

Countdown: from decision to doors open

The national planning resource describes five stages: steady state, planning, stand up, daily operations and stand down. Here is the same thing as a calendar for a county that decides on day 3 to open on day 10.

When	What happens	Owner
Before any disaster	Keep a short list of three possible venues you have walked through. Keep the state agency contact list in this toolkit current. Know who at the Red Cross, Catholic Charities and Salvation Army offices that cover your county answers the phone.	County EM
Day 1 to 3	Damage assessment. Rough count of affected households. Decide whether a MARC is the right tool: yes if more than roughly 25 households have real damage and need more than one agency.	County EM + EOC
Day 3: planning meeting	60 minutes, in person or on a call. Agenda: needs by category (page 7), agencies to invite, lead agency, venue, dates and hours, who is PIO, who runs registration. Leave with assignments and the opening announcement drafted.	Lead agency
Day 3 to 5	Send agency invitations (Forms Pack F6). Phone every one of them two days later. Sign the facility agreement. Order tables, chairs, pipe-and-drape. Book interpreters. Confirm childcare provider and background checks.	Lead agency, liaison
Day 7: announce	Public announcement at least 48 hours before opening (F7, F8). Radio, newspaper, county and city social media, school district robocall, church bulletins, flyers at shelters, pharmacies, grocery stores and the courthouse. Say what to bring.	PIO
Day 8 to 9	Confirm every agency by phone. Print forms and passports. Make the damage verification map. Staff schedule finished. Signage printed in English and Spanish.	Liaison, Site Manager
Day 9, afternoon	Set up the hall per the floor plan. Walk it as a survivor would. Partner preparation meeting at the venue: code of conduct signed, table assignments, hours, how referrals between tables work, media rules.	Site Manager
Day 10 to 12: open	Daily 15-minute huddle before doors open. Collect counts hourly. Fix problems the same day. Daily press note on what was provided.	Site Manager, all
Close + 48 hours	Compile numbers. Debrief partners (F10). Thank everyone publicly. Hand the registration list and unmet-needs list to case management or the long-term recovery group.	Lead agency
Close + 2 to 3 weeks	Decide on a second MARC. Survivors get FEMA and insurance letters in this window and come back with new questions.	Lead agency

Give the planning meeting a hard output

End it with one sheet: venue, dates, hours, lead agency, Site Manager, PIO, and the list of invited agencies with a name beside each. If a line is blank, someone owns filling it by tomorrow noon.

Choosing the building

Close to the damage, but not in it. Short drive for survivors, on a road people already know, with utilities that the disaster did not knock out. Walk it with the building owner before you sign anything.

Must have

- ☐ 5,000+ sq ft open hall (gym, fellowship hall, expo building, armory)
- ☐ Step-free entrance, accessible restrooms, accessible parking near the door
- ☐ Two private rooms with doors (casework overflow, quiet room)
- ☐ Power, heat or air conditioning, working plumbing
- ☐ Internet that can carry 6 to 10 laptops at once, or a plan for hotspots
- ☐ Parking for 60+ cars and room to direct traffic
- ☐ Fire exits clear, extinguishers checked
- ☐ Owner willing to sign a facility use agreement and name who pays for what

Good to have

- ☐ Kitchen or at least counter space and a refrigerator
- ☐ Loading door or paved pad for bulk distribution from a trailer
- ☐ A room that can be a children's area with a sight line to the waiting area
- ☐ Storm-safe area if you are opening in severe weather season
- ☐ Copier and a phone line
- ☐ Space for a 53-foot trailer to drop without blocking parking
- ☐ Free, or free to the county

Typical venues

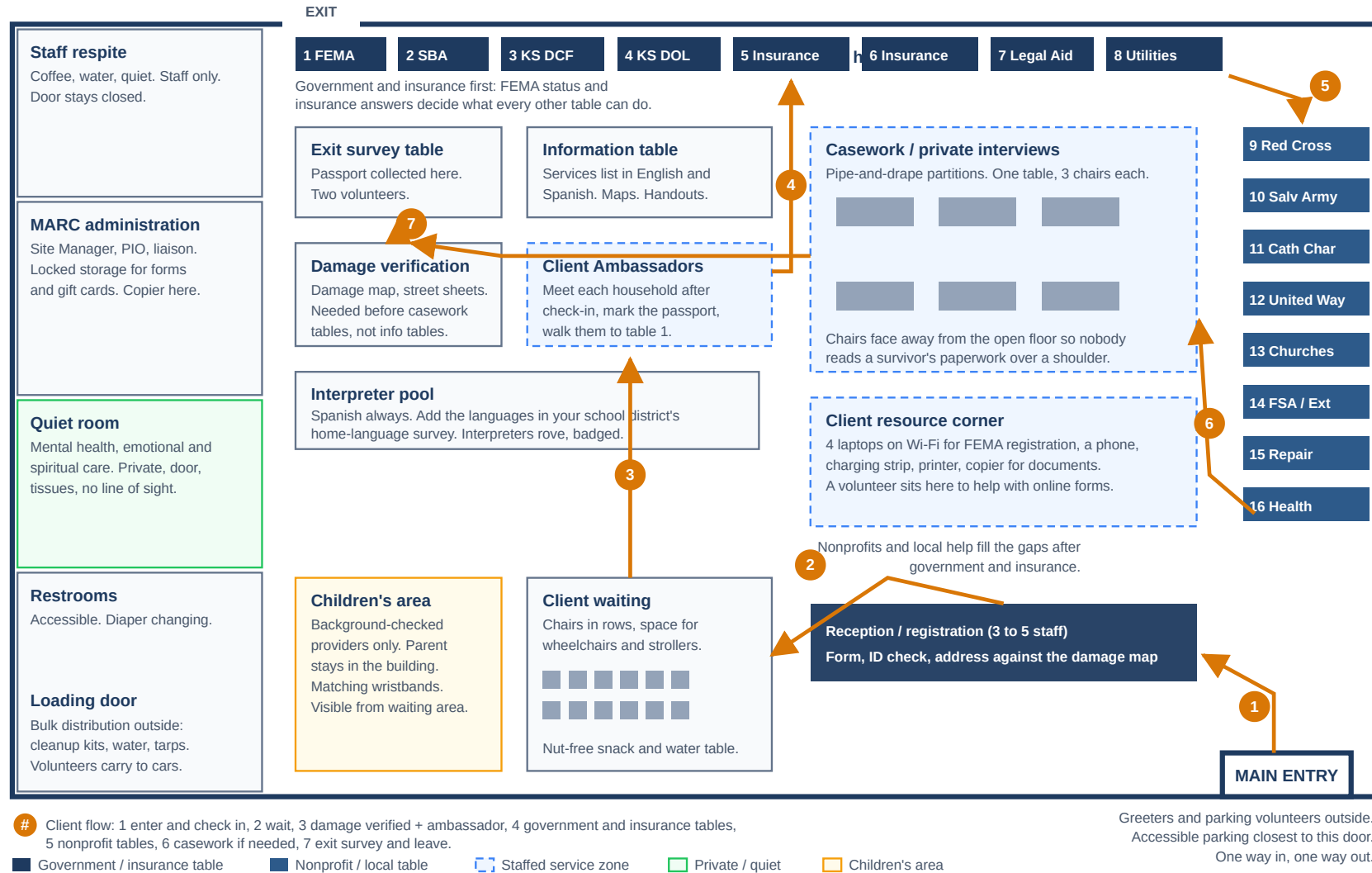
Venue type	Why it works	Watch for
School gym	Size, parking, accessible, known to everyone, often free after a disaster	Classes resume. Ask for a weekend plus one weekday evening.
County expo or fairground building	Huge, loading doors, parking, paved pads for trailers	Heat and cooling, internet, long walk from the parking lot
Church fellowship hall	Kitchen, classrooms for private rooms, volunteers come with it	Some survivors will not enter a church. Keep signage neutral.
Community college or civic center	Internet, accessibility, rooms	Cost and scheduling
National Guard armory	Secure, large, generator	Military setting can feel unwelcoming to some families

Rural counties: bring the MARC to the people

If damaged households are spread over 40 miles, run a half-day MARC in each affected town rather than one big one at the county seat. Three agencies in a community center beat ten agencies nobody can drive to. The same forms and passport work at any size.

Sample MARC Floor Plan

Gym or community hall, roughly 6,000 sq ft. Not to scale. Adapt table count to the agencies you confirm.



Adapted from Appendix M of the national MARC Planning Resource. Tables 1 to 8 are government and insurance; tables 9 to 16 are nonprofit and local. Swap names for the agencies you actually confirm, keep the order.

What a survivor experiences



- 1 **Greeter.** Welcomes the household, hands them a clipboard with the registration form (F1) and points to the waiting area. Spots anyone who needs a wheelchair, an interpreter or a quiet room right now.
- 2 **Registration.** Reception checks ID if they have it (never turn anyone away for lacking it), confirms the address, and logs the household on the sign-in sheet. One form per household.
- 3 **Damage verification.** Address checked against the damage map or street sheets. Verified households can see casework tables that give money or goods. Everyone can see information tables. Mark the result on the form.
- 4 **Client Ambassador.** Reads the needs checklist with the family, circles the tables they should visit on the passport (F2), and walks them to the first one. Ambassadors rove; they are not assigned to one family all day.
- 5 **Government and insurance tables first.** FEMA status and insurance status decide what every nonprofit can do, so these come first. Each table initials the passport.
- 6 **Nonprofit and local tables.** Red Cross, Salvation Army, Catholic Charities, churches, repair groups, extension office. They fill the gaps the first tables left.
- 7 **Casework.** Households with complex needs sit down with a caseworker in the private area and leave with a named follow-up contact.
- 8 **Exit survey.** Passport collected, five-question survey (F5), thank you, cleanup kit on the way out.

Data you must capture, and nothing more

Household name, phone, damaged address, current address, household size, needs checked, which tables were visited, and whether follow-up is wanted. That is the whole list. Keep forms in a locked box; only the lead agency and case management see them. Ask consent on the form before any agency gets a copy.

Verification is a filter, not a wall

If an address is not on the map, the Ambassador handles it: a photo on a phone, a neighbor, a utility bill. Information tables never require verification. Being strict here costs you trust with the exact people the MARC exists for.

Roles and how many you need

For a MARC expecting 100 to 150 households a day. Scale down for a small town, but never drop the Site Manager, reception or ambassadors.

Role	What they do	How many	Who usually fills it
Site Manager	Runs the building. Approves spending and press. Chairs the morning huddle. Mediates between agencies.	1	County EM or deputy, or Red Cross / Catholic Charities lead
Assistant Site Manager	Covers the Site Manager. Often also the partner liaison.	1	EM staff, VOAD member
Partner Agency Liaison	Keeps the agency roster, collects partner forms and code of conduct, assigns tables, tracks who is present.	1	VOAD or United Way
Public Information Officer	All public messaging, media at the door, daily summary.	1	County PIO, city communications
Safety and Security	Parking, crowd, exits, evacuation plan, incident log.	1 + 2 parking	Sheriff's office, CERT
Reception	Registration, sign-in, verification, forms filed.	3 to 5	EM staff, library staff, CERT, trained volunteers
Client Ambassadors	Navigate families, mark passports, catch anyone stuck or upset.	4 to 6	Red Cross casework volunteers, church volunteers, extension staff
Greeters	Door, clipboards, first read on needs.	2 to 3	Any trained volunteer
Interpreters	Roving, badged. Spanish always.	2 to 4	School district, hospital, churches, Catholic Charities
Childcare	Supervised play area. Parent stays in the building.	2 to 4	Licensed provider, Child Care Aware, Southern Baptist DR
Emotional and spiritual care	Quiet room. Not interchangeable with mental health, but both present.	2	Community mental health center, chaplains, Salvation Army, Red Cross DMH
Runners	Supplies, copies, water, fix problems.	2 to 3	CERT, youth groups with an adult
Partner representatives	At least one per agency for every open hour, with a backup.	1 per agency	The agency

The MARC is not a volunteer reception center

Spontaneous volunteers will show up. Have a sign and a phone number sending them to the volunteer reception center or the lead cleanup organization. Untrained walk-ins can set up chairs and hand out water. They do not sit at casework, childcare or health tables.

Who to invite

Match the invitation list to the needs you found in damage assessment. The full contact list with phone numbers is a separate sheet in this toolkit. Agencies in **bold** are typically members of your state VOAD.

Need	Invite	Notes
Registration and federal aid	FEMA Individual Assistance, SBA Disaster Loans	Only after a federal declaration. Otherwise laptops for DisasterAssistance.gov in case it comes later.
Food, cash, Medicaid	Your state's social services agency, Medicaid, WIC	Usually the state's ESF-6 lead. Ask about replacement SNAP for food lost to power outage.
Lost wages	Your state labor department, Disaster Unemployment Assistance	DUA only with a federal declaration. Regular UI otherwise.
Insurance	Every carrier with policies in the county; your state insurance department's consumer line	Farm Bureau, State Farm, American Family, Shelter are usually willing. Ask the local agents.
Legal	Legal aid , the state bar's disaster legal hotline	Insurance disputes, contractor fraud, lost documents, landlord issues, FEMA appeals.
Emergency relief	American Red Cross, The Salvation Army, Convoy of Hope	Comfort kits, cleanup kits, financial assistance, feeding at the MARC.
Casework and recovery	Catholic Charities, United Way , community action agencies	Catholic Charities often carries long-term disaster case management.
Cleanup and repair	Team Rubicon, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief, Samaritan's Purse, United Methodist ERTs, Habitat for Humanity , Mennonite Disaster Service	They sign up work orders at the table. This is where cleanup crews get their list.
Food supply	Your regional Feeding America food bank	Bulk distribution at the loading door.
Farm and ranch losses	USDA Farm Service Agency county office, the county extension office, your state department of agriculture	Livestock indemnity, fence, debris on cropland, stored grain. Essential in any agricultural county.
Health	County health department, Medical Reserve Corps , community mental health center, 988	Tetanus after debris work, prescription replacement, crisis counseling.
Children	Child Care Aware , school district	Childcare at the MARC, school re-enrollment, counselors.
Documents and identity	State vital statistics office, driver's license office, Social Security, Veterans Affairs	Replacement birth certificates, licenses, benefit cards.
Utilities and housing	Electric co-op or utility, gas, water, telecom; USDA Rural Development; local housing authority	Billing holds, deposit waivers, reconnects, rental help.
Pets and livestock	County animal control, the regional humane society, local vets	Lost pets, feed, boarding.
Money and donations	Community foundation, local bank or credit union	Relief fund disbursement, payment deferrals, fee waivers.

Things that are different where you are

Language

Spanish is the floor in most of the country, and many counties have more. Your school district's home-language survey is the best map of who lives in the damage area. Ask the district, the hospital and local faith communities for interpreters, and put a language card at reception so families can point.

Hours

Shift workers cannot come to a MARC that is open 9 to 4 on a Tuesday. Open at least one evening until 8 and a Saturday. Ask the largest employers in the county to post the flyer and to let people come during a shift.

Fear of government tables

Mixed-status households will not approach a table with a federal seal. Put nonprofit tables and the Ambassadors where they are seen first from the door. Say plainly on the flyer and at reception that nobody is asked about immigration status. Faith-based agencies are often the trusted door for these families.

Distance

In a rural county, damaged homes can be 30 miles apart. Plan satellite half-days in the smaller towns, or a mobile MARC with three agencies in a van, before you assume people will drive to the county seat.

Farms and ranches

Where there is agriculture, livestock loss, downed fence, debris on cropland and damaged grain storage are as urgent as a damaged roof. Invite the USDA Farm Service Agency county office and the county extension office to a table. Louisiana's agricultural MARC supplement (sources page) is a good model for rural service tables.

Hazards

Build the invite list from the hazard. Tornado and wind MARCs lean on insurance, debris and housing. Flood MARCs lean on mold, well water testing and public health. Wildfire and ice storm MARCs lean on utilities, FSA and feeding. Hurricane MARCs lean on all of it, plus long shelter stays.

A one-county checklist before you announce

- ☐ Interpreters booked for every language in the damage area
- ☐ At least one evening and one weekend block
- ☐ Flyers at large employers, churches, grocery stores, pharmacies, schools and the courthouse
- ☐ Spanish flyer reviewed by a native speaker, not just translated
- ☐ FSA and extension office invited if any farm or ranch was hit
- ☐ Satellite plan if damaged homes are more than 20 miles apart

Run sheet for an open day

Time	Action
7:30	Site Manager and Safety walk the building: exits, cords taped, signage up, restrooms stocked, first aid kit and AED located.
8:00	Partner agencies arrive and set tables. Liaison checks each one in on the Daily Agency Log (F4) and hands out the code of conduct if not yet signed.
8:30	Huddle, 15 minutes, everyone standing: who is here, who is missing, what changed since yesterday, where the lines were, one safety note. Ambassadors get the updated agency list.
8:45	Reception stocked: forms, passports, pens, clipboards, sign-in sheet, damage map, language card, locked box. Laptops online. Interpreters badged. Childcare open.
9:00	Doors open. Greeters and parking in place.
Every hour	Reception reads the sign-in count to the Site Manager. Runners refill water and forms. Ambassadors report any table with a line longer than six households.
Midday	Staff eat in shifts in the respite room, never at their tables. Snacks for clients restocked.
30 min before close	Last entries logged. Anyone still in line is served. PIO drafts the daily summary from the counts.
Close	Forms and passports counted and locked. Agencies note follow-ups owed. Site Manager, Liaison and PIO do a 10-minute debrief. Building secured.

When it goes sideways

Problem	Do this
Line at FEMA or insurance	Pull a volunteer with a laptop to start registrations in the line. Move that table's second chair out so conversations are quicker. Offer a callback slot.
Agency no-show	Never leave the table empty. Put their handouts and phone number there with a volunteer. Collect names for a callback list and hand it to the agency the same day.
Survivor with no documents	Serve them anyway. Start the missing-documents list; legal aid and the state vital statistics office can replace most things.
Distressed survivor	Ambassador walks them to the quiet room. No audience. Mental health or chaplain takes it from there.
Media inside	PIO only. No photos of faces or paperwork without a signed release. Interviews outside the hall.
Donations dropped at the door	Thank them and send them to the donations site. The MARC does not sort goods.
Severe weather warning	Safety Manager calls it. Everyone to the designated shelter area you identified at the walk-through.

Supplies

Setup

- ☐ Tables (2 per agency) and chairs (3 per table)
- ☐ Pipe-and-drape or partitions for casework
- ☐ Waiting chairs, 40+
- ☐ Extension cords, power strips, tape for cords
- ☐ Neutral MARC signs, directional signs, table tents
- ☐ Trash cans, liners

Reception

- ☐ Registration forms, passports, sign-in sheets (300)
- ☐ Clipboards and pens (30)
- ☐ Damage map, street sheets
- ☐ Locked file box
- ☐ Language card
- ☐ Badges and vests for staff
- ☐ Laptops (4 to 6), hotspots, printer, copier

Comfort

- ☐ Water, nut-free snacks
- ☐ Tissues at every table
- ☐ First aid kit, AED location known
- ☐ Hand sanitizer, restroom supplies
- ☐ Children's area: books, crayons, small table, wristbands
- ☐ Cleanup kits, tarps, comfort kits at the exit

After the MARC

Within 48 hours

- ☐ Totals: households, people, tables visited, needs by category, follow-ups owed
- ☐ Partner debrief: what worked, what did not, who was missing (F10)
- ☐ Public thank you naming every agency
- ☐ Facility returned clean, agreement closed out

Within two weeks

- ☐ Follow-up list worked: every "yes, call me" gets a call
- ☐ Registration data handed to case management or the long-term recovery group
- ☐ Unmet needs pattern read: if 40 households need roofing, that is the LTRG's first project
- ☐ Decision on a second MARC
- ☐ After-action report filed with your state VOAD and the state emergency management regional coordinator so the next county starts further ahead

Numbers worth collecting

Metric	Why
Households served and people in them	The headline number for the county commission and funders
Share of affected households reached	Tells you whether to hold a second one
Needs by category	Sets the long-term recovery group's priorities
Visits per table	Shows which agencies to invite next time and where the lines were
Follow-ups requested and completed	The MARC is only as good as the calls made afterward
Exit survey scores and comments	What survivors felt. Quote them in the after-action report.

Sources and further reading

This guide condenses and localizes public documents. Read the originals when you have time; they are the authority.

Resource	What it is	Where
Multi-Agency Resource Center Planning Resource, v1.0 (June 2015)	The national 68-page planning document from American Red Cross, Catholic Charities USA and The Salvation Army, reviewed by FEMA. Stages, site selection, roles, sample layout, client process, 28 appendices with forms and checklists. This toolkit's forms are modeled on its appendices.	preparecenter.org (search "MARC Planning Resource") or nationalmasscarestrategy.org
Multi-Agency Resource Center Basics (MARCBAS)	Red Cross 45-minute online course built on the planning resource. Open to partners with a free EDGE account.	redcross.org, EDGE learning system
FEMA IS-288.A: The Role of Voluntary Organizations in Emergency Management	Free independent study course.	training.fema.gov
FEMA State and Local Referral Lists	FEMA's per-state list of agencies and hotlines by need category. The contact sheets in this toolkit start from it.	fema.gov/assistance/individual/disaster-survivors/state-local-referral-lists
Your state VOAD	The roster of voluntary agencies in your state, and where your after-action report should live.	nvoad.org (member directory)
Your state emergency management agency	State EM and its regional coordinators, plus the state response plan.	Search for your state emergency management agency
Missouri SEMA, "MARCs" (2024 conference deck)	Short state-level overview of principles, roles, client process and site selection.	sema.dps.mo.gov
Multi-Agency Resource Center Planning Resource for Agricultural Communities	Louisiana supplement for rural and farm MARCs.	ladrc.org
Response Team playbook: What Is a MARC?	The explainer that goes with this toolkit, plus guides on standing up an LTR, partner roles and case management.	responseteam.org/playbook/marc-explainer/

About this toolkit

Prepared by Response Team (responseteam.org), a free resource hub for disaster recovery coordination built by the people behind Serve.Love. Free to copy, print and adapt. If you run a MARC with it, send us what you changed and we will fold it in for the next county. team@serve.love