

Frequently Asked Questions **in the Response to Hurricanes Harvey and Irma**

What is the Surge Capacity Force?

The Post-Katrina Emergency Management Reform Act mandated the creation of a Surge Capacity Force (SCF) that will be “capable of deploying rapidly and efficiently after activation to prepare for, respond to, and recover from natural disasters, acts of terrorism, and other man-made disasters, including catastrophic incidents.”

Who administers the Surge Capacity Force program?

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) manages the program, though every Department/Agency has a Surge Capacity Force point of contact who can field your specific questions.

How long do you need me to serve?

Surge Capacity Force deployments will not exceed 45 days, and volunteers may be released sooner if the assignment is complete

What kind of work does a Surge Capacity Force volunteer perform?

The greatest need right now is support to disaster survivors by helping them navigate the available programs and register for Federal disaster assistance. However, you could be asked to work in one of ten program areas: Logistics, Public Assistance (debris monitoring), Individual Assistance (aid to survivors), Disaster Survivor Assistance (outreach to the public about available disaster assistance programs), Information Technology, Human Resources, Finance, External Affairs, Acquisition, and Planning. The SCF program will collect additional information on your individual employee skills to potentially fill roles across all of FEMA’s disaster programs on an as needed basis.

Who can volunteer?

Any permanent, full-time, or temporary full-time federal employee. More information on the registration process and associated requirements is available through your Department’s designated coordinator as announced by your Agency head.

What if I would like to volunteer but my supervisor does not approve my request?

Supervisor approval is required and there are no exceptions. However, given the urgency of the need, supervisors are strongly encouraged to allow their employees to participate.

Who is my point of contact?

For registration purposes and pre-deployment updates, your Agency will identify your POC. If you have questions during your deployment, FEMA will assign a mentor to assist and coordinate resolution of concerns, when needed.

When I travel as a Surge Capacity Force volunteer, do I need to pay for any travel-related costs out of pocket? Agency travel rules apply for all Surge Capacity Force members selected to deploy. Each Department or Agency is responsible for ensuring members are aware of travel guidelines and reimbursement policy. Each member is required to possess a government-issued travel card.

Will my health care coverage cover me should I get sick or injured while deployed? What about workers' compensation?

As a federal employee, both your health care coverage and worker's comp will remain with you during deployment.

Who pays my salary while deployed?

Employees volunteering for the Surge Capacity Force remain in a paid status and continue to be paid by their Department/Agency for a normal 80 hour pay period. Departments/Agencies will be reimbursed by FEMA for overtime pay through the Disaster Relief Fund to eligible employees consistent with applicable law and regulations. Overtime will be approved by deployment supervisors. Employees receiving overtime pay under Title 5, United States Code, are subject to biweekly and annual premium pay limitations (see <http://www.opm.gov/oca/pay/HTML/FACTOT.asp>). FEMA does not pay hazard pay.

How will I account for my time?

Time sheets will be approved by Field Team Leads and transmitted in batches from the field back to your Department and Agency POCs for inputting into the appropriate timekeeping system.

Will travel expenses be reimbursed?

Yes. Employees are to use their government travel cards for all expenses incurred while deployed. Agencies maintain responsibility to process travel authorizations and vouchers. FEMA will issue mission assignments to Agencies to reimburse costs associated with deployment, to include overtime.

What are conditions like in the field?

Conditions will be challenging. The Surge Capacity Force is only activated when the incident is catastrophic. Living conditions are often austere during deployments and include, but are not limited to, no running water, no electricity, sleeping in tents or other non-conventional forms of housing (e.g., ships) and weather extremes. In the aftermath of a disaster, housing is often in low supply, and limited hotel space is needed for disaster survivors.

How do I know when to deploy?

All deployments are issued using FEMA's Deployment Tracking System (DTS). Once you become a registered Surge Capacity Force volunteer, you will be given instructions to activate your DTS account and can identify the e-mail or phone numbers through which you want to receive deployment notifications. These can include work and personal emails and phone numbers.

Can I just show up at a major disaster and help out?

No. All personnel should wait for their deployment orders to ensure they arrive where and when they are most-needed. Self-deploying is against policy and travel expenses will not be reimbursed.

Can I make travel arrangements before I am officially deployed?

No, you must wait until you receive and accept your deployment. At that point, you can make travel arrangements according to your Agency's policy.

Can FEMA use my other professional skills, such as attorney, security specialist, safety officer, etc.?

The greatest need right now is Disaster Survivor Assistance, which does not require specialized experience. Volunteers will be trained on how to perform this mission immediately upon deployment at the personnel mobilization center in Anniston, Alabama. At that time, we will work with you to identify any potentially relevant skills. The Surge Capacity Force offers specialty training in 10 areas based on carefully identified needs during the critical response period when the Surge Capacity Force is activated. Volunteers should be prepared to serve within their specialty and inform their FEMA mentor of any special qualifications they have that might come in handy. The ten areas are: Logistics, Public Assistance (debris monitoring), Individual Assistance (aid to survivors), Disaster Survivor Assistance (outreach to the public about available disaster assistance programs), Information Technology, Human Resources, Finance, External Affairs, Acquisition, and Planning.

What kind of training will I receive for SCF?

Due to the extraordinary nature of these disasters, measures are being taken to expedite deployment and consolidate initial training with just-in-time orientations in the field. Upon arrival to the personnel mobilization center in Anniston, Alabama, you will receive all relevant training and guidance for your specific assignments.