



Volunteer Reception Center Full Scale

After-Action Report

06/09/2026

The After-Action Report/Improvement Plan (AAR) aligns exercise objectives with preparedness doctrine and related frameworks and guidance. Exercise information required for preparedness reporting and trend analysis is included; users are encouraged to add additional sections as needed to support their own organizational needs

EXERCISE OVERVIEW

Exercise Name	Volunteer Reception Center Full Scale
Exercise Dates	06/09/2026 to 06/09/2026
Scope	This exercise is a Full-Scale, planned for 1 day at the Jackson County Health Department. Exercise play is limited to the establishment and operation of a Volunteer Reception Center by the Rotary District 6510 Disaster Committee through SIRCOAD. Exercise activity will focus on the processing, screening, assignment, deployment coordination, tracking, and demobilization of spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers in response to simulated tornado-related requests for assistance.
Focus Area(s)	Mitigation, Response
Capabilities	Community Resilience, Logistics and Supply Chain Management, Operational Communications, Operational Coordination, Public Information and Warning
Objectives	1 - Establish and Operate a VRC, 2 - Public Information and Warning, 3 - Operational Coordination, 4 - Operational Communications
Threat/Hazard	Tornado
Scenario	The Southern Illinois Regional Community Organizations Active in Disaster (SIRCOAD) will coordinate the activation of a Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) in response to a request for activation by the Jackson County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Management resulting from a tornado in their jurisdiction. The Rotary International District 6510 Disaster Committee will establish, staff, and operate the Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) as a community partner of the Southern Illinois Regional Community Organizations Active in Disaster (SIRCOAD).
Sponsor	Williamson County Emergency Management Agency - Local
Participating Organizations	Jackson County (IL) Sheriff's Office of Emergency Management - Local, Rotary District 6510 Disaster Response Team - Non-Profit, Southern Illinois Regional Community Organizations Active in Disaster (SIRCOAD) - Other NGO
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ANALYSIS OF CAPABILITIES

Aligning exercise objectives and capabilities provides a consistent taxonomy for evaluation that transcends individual exercises to support preparedness reporting and trend analysis. Table 1 includes the exercise objectives, aligned capabilities, and performance ratings for each capability as observed during the exercise and determined by the evaluation team.

Objective	Capability	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
1 - Establish and Operate a VRC: Within 60 minutes of activation, participating agencies will establish and operate a Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) to receive, register, screen, brief, assign, and track spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers in support of disaster response and recovery operations, in accordance with the jurisdiction's VRC plan, ICS structure, safety procedures, and partner agency resource needs.	Response - Operational Coordination		X		

Objective	Capability	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
2 - Public Information and Warning: Within 30 minutes of VRC activation, the VRC, EOC, and Public Information Officer will coordinate public information and warning activities to provide timely, accurate, accessible, and approved messaging regarding volunteer needs, reporting instructions, safety expectations, and methods for the public to assist, in accordance with the jurisdiction's public information procedures, VRC plan, and Joint Information System protocols.	Response - Public Information and Warning		X		

Objective	Capability	Performed without Challenges (P)	Performed with Some Challenges (S)	Performed with Major Challenges (M)	Unable to be Performed (U)
3 - Operational Coordination: Within 30 minutes of VRC activation, VRC leadership will establish and maintain operational coordination with the EOC, voluntary organizations, requesting agencies, and VRC functional areas to support the organized intake, processing, assignment, tracking, and demobilization of spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers in accordance with the jurisdiction's VRC plan, ICS structure, and approved resource request procedures.	Response - Operational Coordination		X		
4 - Operational Communications: Within 30 minutes of VRC activation, VRC staff will establish and maintain operational communications with the EOC, voluntary organizations, requesting agencies, and assigned VRC functional areas to support volunteer intake, processing, assignment, accountability, safety, and demobilization in accordance with the jurisdiction's VRC plan, communications procedures, and ICS structure.	Response - Operational Communications		X		

Table 1. Summary of Core Capability Performance

Ratings Definitions:

Performed without Challenges (P): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s) and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. Performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.

Performed with Some Challenges (S): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s) and did not negatively impact the performance of other activities. Performance of this activity did not contribute to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers, and it was conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws. However, opportunities to enhance effectiveness and/or efficiency were identified.

Performed with Major Challenges (M): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were completed in a manner that achieved the objective(s), but some or all of the following were observed: demonstrated performance had a negative impact on the performance of other activities; contributed to additional health and/or safety risks for the public or for emergency workers; and/or was not conducted in accordance with applicable plans, policies, procedures, regulations, and laws.

Unable to be Performed (U): The targets and critical tasks associated with the capability were not performed in a manner that achieved the objective(s).

The following sections provide an overview of the performance related to each exercise objective and associated capability, highlighting strengths and areas for improvement.

1 - Establish and Operate a VRC

Within 60 minutes of activation, participating agencies will establish and operate a Volunteer Reception Center (VRC) to receive, register, screen, brief, assign, and track spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers in support of disaster response and recovery operations, in accordance with the jurisdiction's VRC plan, ICS structure, safety procedures, and partner agency resource needs.

The strengths and areas for improvement for each capability aligned to this objective are described in this section.

Response - Operational Coordination

Strengths

The capability level can be attributed to the following strengths:

Strength 1: The VRC successfully established functional operations and completed several core volunteer processing tasks. The evaluator noted that the VRC layout and workstations

were established without issue, and volunteer registration and screening procedures were completed without issue. This demonstrates that the basic VRC operating model was understood by exercise participants and that the intake, registration, and screening components were effective.

Strength 2: The VRC also demonstrated the ability to provide safety briefings and job/task instructions to volunteers. The evaluator documented that safety briefings were completed each time, although an omission occurred during the first three briefings regarding check-out procedures. This indicates that the safety briefing function was operational and repeatable but requires standardization to ensure all required information is consistently communicated.

Strength 3: The VRC identified and managed at least one unsuitable or limited volunteer appropriately. The evaluator noted that a volunteer wearing shorts was told they would be limited in where they could assist because they did not have long pants. This reflects appropriate attention to safety, personal protective requirements, and assignment suitability.

Areas for Improvement

The following areas require improvement to achieve the full capability level:

Areas for Improvement 1: Volunteer assignment and deployment coordination should be strengthened.

Analysis: The evaluator noted that assignment matching could have been more effective because one individual was performing both data/agency coordination and deployment responsibilities, creating potential problems if operations became busier. This suggests a need to more clearly separate functional responsibilities or provide additional staffing for high-workload positions.

Areas for Improvement 2: Volunteer accountability procedures require improvement.

Analysis: The evaluator observed that one volunteer was fully vetted, issued a bracelet, and then placed on standby before deployment. The evaluator noted that the bracelet should not have been issued until deployment because the volunteer could have left for staging or the assignment area and become unaccounted for. This creates a potential accountability gap and should be corrected through a defined process for when credentials, wristbands, or deployment identifiers are issued.

Areas for Improvement 3: Check-out and demobilization procedures were not fully developed or consistently communicated.

Analysis: The evaluator noted that the safety person did not initially instruct the first three volunteers to check out with the EOC before leaving for the day, and that the VRC did not

appear to have a full plan in place, expecting EOC/Staging to manage check-in and check-out. Future VRC operations should include a clearly documented demobilization process that identifies who is responsible for volunteer return, check-out, reassignment, and final accountability.

2 - Public Information and Warning

Within 30 minutes of VRC activation, the VRC, EOC, and Public Information Officer will coordinate public information and warning activities to provide timely, accurate, accessible, and approved messaging regarding volunteer needs, reporting instructions, safety expectations, and methods for the public to assist, in accordance with the jurisdiction's public information procedures, VRC plan, and Joint Information System protocols.

The strengths and areas for improvement for each capability aligned to this objective are described in this section.

Response - Public Information and Warning

Strengths

The capability level can be attributed to the following strengths:

Strength 1: The VRC demonstrated strong internal communications during volunteer movement through the VRC process. The evaluator specifically noted "fantastic execution between stations for volunteer handoffs." This indicates that functional areas such as intake, registration, screening, assignment, and briefing were able to exchange information effectively during volunteer processing.

Strength 2: The VRC selected primary communications methods and used multiple means to support operational coordination. The evaluator noted that the VRC chose to use an application and then phone communications. This demonstrates that staff were able to identify available communications tools and use alternate methods when needed.

Strength 3: Mission requests and volunteer assignment information were generally communicated. The evaluator noted that receiving and relaying mission requests, volunteer assignment information, safety concerns, and operational updates was completed. This reflects that the VRC was able to perform the basic communications functions necessary to support volunteer management operations.

Strength 4: The VRC used a whiteboard to document requests for assistance. This provided a visible, shared reference for mission needs and supported internal situational awareness within the VRC.

Areas for Improvement

The following areas require improvement to achieve the full capability level:

Areas for Improvement 1: Initial communication between the VRC and EOC was not completed without prompting.

Analysis: The evaluator noted that staff had to be reminded twice before completing the task. Future operations should include an activation checklist requiring immediate EOC contact and confirmation of communications capability.

Areas for Improvement 2: The communications point of contact role requires additional clarification.

Analysis: Although someone was assigned, the evaluator noted that the assigned person was "somewhat unclear on responsibilities." A written position checklist should be developed for the Communications Unit or VRC communications point of contact, including responsibility for EOC contact, message logging, radio/phone monitoring, status reporting, and communications problem-solving.

Areas for Improvement 3: Coordination of resource requests and volunteer assignment information was described as "somewhat clunky."

Analysis: This indicates that, while the task was performed, the process lacked efficiency or standardization. A standardized message flow should be established to define how requests move from the EOC or requesting agency to the VRC, Assignment function, Deployment Coordination Point/MOC, and field assignment location.

Areas for Improvement 4: Recurring communications-based status updates were not provided at the required interval.

Analysis: The EEG requires updates to VRC leadership and the EOC every 30 minutes or as directed. The evaluator documented that this was inconsistent and completed only once at 14:30. Future VRC operations should use a scheduled reporting cycle and a standardized VRC communications/status report form.

Areas for Improvement 5: Radio feedback interfered with effective communication.

Analysis: The evaluator noted that radios had significant feedback due to the number of radios in close proximity and later identified continued difficulty hearing radios because of that feedback. Future exercises should test radio placement, reduce co-located radio interference, identify a quieter communications location, and establish alternate communications methods when radio traffic becomes unreliable.

Areas for Improvement 6: Deployment instructions and check-out procedures were not consistently communicated.

Analysis: The evaluator noted that the Safety Manager forgot to tell the first few volunteers to check out with Deployment before leaving. The evaluator also noted that one volunteer who was supposed to report to Deployment was sent to the wrong location. This creates potential accountability and safety issues. Deployment instructions should be standardized, written, and verified before volunteers leave the VRC.

3 - Operational Coordination

Within 30 minutes of VRC activation, VRC leadership will establish and maintain operational coordination with the EOC, voluntary organizations, requesting agencies, and VRC functional areas to support the organized intake, processing, assignment, tracking, and demobilization of spontaneous unaffiliated volunteers in accordance with the jurisdiction's VRC plan, ICS structure, and approved resource request procedures.

The strengths and areas for improvement for each capability aligned to this objective are described in this section.

Response - Operational Coordination

Strengths

The capability level can be attributed to the following strengths:

Strength 1: VRC leadership and internal coordination were established early in the exercise. The evaluator noted that several functions were completed before the evaluator returned from an errand, including establishment of VRC leadership structure and internal operational alignment. While this limited direct observation, the evaluator's notes indicate that these functions were in place during exercise conduct.

Strength 2: The VRC demonstrated an effective process for routing and documenting resource requests. The evaluator noted that all requests were routed through one person and then posted on a large whiteboard. This provided a visible tracking method and supported a common operating picture within the VRC.

Strength 3: The VRC also demonstrated effective problem-solving when a resource gap was identified. During a roof-tarping need, participants recognized they did not have all required resources and made a call to obtain the needed resources before deployment. This reflects appropriate coordination, issue identification, and resource management before committing volunteers to the field.

Strength 4: Volunteer assignment functions were generally completed. The evaluator noted that receiving and validating mission requests appeared to be completed, most of which was done through scripts, and that assignment/deployment coordination and matching volunteers to assignments were completed.

Areas for Improvement

The following areas require improvement to achieve the full capability level:

Areas for Improvement 1: Communications between the VRC, EOC, and deployment area were inconsistent.

Analysis: The evaluator noted that communications occurred but were not consistent from the VRC. The evaluator also observed that the VRC Manager and Communications Manager appeared to struggle with communications. This issue affected operational coordination and should be addressed through improved communications procedures, workstation placement, and defined information flow.

Areas for Improvement 2: The Communications Manager's location and support structure should be improved.

Analysis: The evaluator noted difficulty hearing the radio and recommended that the Communications Manager be stationed in a quieter location and that a runner be used between communications and the VRC. This is a practical corrective action that would improve message accuracy and reduce missed information during noisy or high-activity operations.

Areas for Improvement 3: Recurring status updates were not provided at the required interval.

Analysis: The EOC required operational updates to be submitted to the EOC every 30 minutes or as directed. However, the evaluator documented that this occurred only once at 14:40, and another section noted that status updates were only completed once from the VRC, with uncertainty regarding updates from the deployment area. This indicates a need for a formal reporting schedule, assigned reporting responsibility, and a standardized VRC status report format.

Areas for Improvement 4: Deployment area responsibilities were not clearly communicated.

Analysis: The evaluator noted there was not a clear accountability process and that personnel at Deployment were not fully informed of their responsibilities. This creates risk for volunteer tracking, assignment control, and demobilization. Future exercises and real-world operations should include a defined Deployment Manager checklist, assignment tracking procedures, and a clear reporting relationship between the MOC, VRC Manager, and EOC.

Areas for Improvement 5: Demobilization and reassignment procedures were not fully observed or validated.

Analysis: The evaluator noted that demobilization was not fully observed and that the VRC Manager stated release would be handled by EOC/Staging, but there was little observed communication regarding demobilization, reassignments, or continued needs. This should be addressed by creating a specific demobilization workflow that includes volunteer return, check-out, reassignment, documentation, and final accountability.

4 - Operational Communications

Within 30 minutes of VRC activation, VRC staff will establish and maintain operational communications with the EOC, voluntary organizations, requesting agencies, and assigned VRC functional areas to support volunteer intake, processing, assignment, accountability, safety, and demobilization in accordance with the jurisdiction's VRC plan, communications procedures, and ICS structure.

The strengths and areas for improvement for each capability aligned to this objective are described in this section.

Response - Operational Communications

Strengths

The capability level can be attributed to the following strengths:

Strength 1: The VRC demonstrated the ability to establish and maintain communications in support of volunteer intake, processing, assignment, accountability, safety, and demobilization. The exercise objective required communications with the EOC, voluntary organizations, requesting agencies, and assigned VRC functional areas within 30 minutes of activation. Evaluator observations noted "fantastic execution between stations for volunteer handoffs," indicating that internal communications between VRC stations supported effective movement of volunteers through the process.

Strength 2: VRC staff identified communication methods for operations, including use of an application and phone communications. This supported the target of establishing reliable communications between the VRC, Deployment Coordination Point / MOC, EOC, SIRCOAD, Rotary District 6510 Disaster Committee, requesting agencies, and field assignment locations.

Strength 3: Requests for assistance were placed on a whiteboard, which provided a visible method for tracking unmet needs and mission information during VRC operations. While documentation practices require improvement, this provided a basic common operating reference for staff during the operational period.

Strength 4: The Deployment Coordination Point / MOC evaluation noted initial confusion regarding roles, reporting location, and communication protocols; however, as the day progressed, communication improved. This demonstrates that participants were able to adapt during exercise play, clarify expectations, and improve coordination as operational issues were identified.

Strength 5: Both evaluation guides assigned a final capability rating of "S," meaning the capability was performed with some challenges. The rating definition indicates that the targets and critical tasks were completed in a manner that achieved the objectives and did not negatively impact on other activities, though opportunities to improve effectiveness and efficiency were identified.

Areas for Improvement

The following areas require improvement to achieve the full capability level:

Areas for Improvement 1: Communications roles and responsibilities were not clearly understood or consistently documented.

Analysis: Although a communications point of contact was assigned, evaluator notes indicated the assigned individual was "somewhat unclear on responsibilities." The MOC evaluation also noted that Rotary staff did not have a clear picture of the Deployment Manager/Specialist positions and were confused about which MOC they were to report to. This indicates a need to better define, brief, and document communications roles before activation.

Areas for Improvement 2: Status updates to VRC leadership and the EOC were not provided at the required frequency.

Analysis: The VRC communications objective required updates on volunteer status, unmet needs, and operational barriers to VRC leadership and the EOC every 30 minutes or as directed. Evaluator notes indicated that this was inconsistent and was only completed once at 14:30. The evaluation also noted that recurring communications-based status updates only happened once.

Areas for Improvement 3: Volunteer assignment and deployment communications were inconsistent

Analysis: The evaluation noted that coordination of resource requests and volunteer assignment information was "somewhat clunky." Additionally, one volunteer who was supposed to report to deployment was sent to the wrong location, and the safety manager forgot to instruct the first few volunteers to check out with deployment before leaving. These issues affected the clarity of deployment instructions and the ability to confirm volunteer arrival, status, reassignment, or demobilization.

Areas for Improvement 4: Communications equipment and radio use created operational challenges.

Analysis: Evaluator observations indicated that radios had significant feedback due to the number of radios operating in close proximity. The evaluator also noted issues hearing radio traffic because of feedback and a lack of consistency with communication. These challenges reduced the effectiveness of radio communications during VRC and MOC coordination.

Areas for Improvement 5: Documentation of significant communications and operational updates was incomplete.

Analysis: The exercise expected documentation of significant communications, mission updates, requests for assistance, operational issues, and unresolved information needs. Evaluator notes stated that requests for assistance were placed on a whiteboard, but no other documentation for operations or informational needs was observed.

Areas for Improvement 6: Site identification and signage for the Deployment Coordination Point / MOC were insufficient.

Analysis: The MOC evaluator noted confusion about which MOC Rotary staff were to report to and recommended signage that could be set up. Clear site identification is necessary to reduce reporting delays and ensure personnel, volunteers, and partner agencies understand where to report.

APPENDIX A: EXERCISE PARTICIPANTS

Participating Organizations
Emergency Management
Williamson County Emergency Management Agency
Jackson County Sheriff's Office of Emergency Management
Southern Illinois Regional Community Organizations Active in Disaster
Rotary District 6510 Disaster Committee