

# Planning a Volunteer Work Trip with Presbyterian Disaster Assistance

A HOW TO GUIDE



**PRESBYTERIAN  
DISASTER ASSISTANCE**

OUT OF CHAOS, HOPE





## Dear Group Leader,

Welcome and thank you for volunteering with PDA! Whether this is your first time planning a volunteer work trip or you're a seasoned group leader, I hope you will find this guide helpful as you begin to pray and plan for your upcoming trip.

Since the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, Presbyterian Disaster Assistance has been known for offering high quality volunteer accommodations for work groups. Today, we continue to take great pride in our PDA Host Sites and their amenities. We hope our accommodations will be a comfortable home away from home while you volunteer with PDA.

This planning guide contains information that can be helpful as you plan a volunteer work trip with PDA. Please feel free to reach out to the PDA Call Center with any questions you may have.

As you prepare for your volunteer service experience, know that PDA is praying for you and the community you will serve as they face the tedious work of disaster recovery.

When you volunteer, remember that this is not your ministry or your church's ministry. This is God's mission field and we are all coparticipants in this work of shared ministry and disaster recovery.

Gratefully,

*Rev. Nell M. Herring*

**PDA MISSION SPECIALIST  
FOR VOLUNTEER MINISTRIES**



### A Note Regarding Language:

Presbyterians have a long history of engaging in mission work. Unfortunately, this terminology is often associated with colonialism, patriarchy, and white supremacy. Instead of calling this a mission trip, you are invited to present this opportunity as a volunteer work trip. It is our hope that this language conveys mutuality and respect for all in the work of disaster recovery.



We are eager to host you and your volunteer work team at one of our PDA Host Sites very soon!



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# Picking a PDA Host Site



## Travel

One of the major factors that determines which site or sites may be a good fit for your group is how you plan to get there. If your group has the financial resources to pay for flights, the door is open to go to any of our current PDA Host Sites. If flying isn't for you, consider what Host Sites exist within your region that would be a good distance to drive.

## Disaster

Another factor that work groups consider is the type of disaster recovery they'll be doing. Some groups feel compelled to respond to a disaster because they have experienced similar types of disaster (a group from Florida may choose to help with hurricane relief in Texas). Each PDA site is responding to a local disaster so no matter where you serve, you will be helping the local community recover.

## Choosing a PDA Host Site

SCAN THIS QR CODE TO  
SEE WHAT PDA HOST  
SITES ARE ACCEPTING  
RESERVATIONS



If you aren't sure where to volunteer, contact the PDA Call Center to discuss your options.

## Amenities

Most of our PDA Host Sites have on-site showers, bedrooms, community spaces, and kitchen facilities for you to use during your stay. For specific questions about what a PDA Host Site has to offer, contact the Host Site Coordinator.



## Scheduling

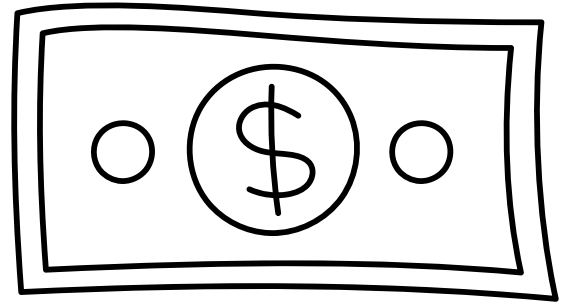
Contact the Host Site Coordinator to get on their schedule for your desired trip dates. They will equip you with a manual with host site-specific information that will be helpful for you as you plan each aspect of your trip.

## Online Registration

Each member of your group will have to fill out PDA's online registration form. The Host Site Coordinator will send you the link to register once you've scheduled your volunteer work trip.



# Financial Planning



## Per Diem

Each PDA Host Site has a per diem cost per person per night. These costs are around \$20-\$45 per night. Groups should arrive with a check or pay these costs prior to arrival unless other arrangements have been made with the Host Site Coordinator.

100% of this cost goes to the facility to help maintain the property. These funds help offset the church's additional facility expenses, cover emergency issues, offset general wear and tear, and maintain the volunteer spaces for guests.



## Travel

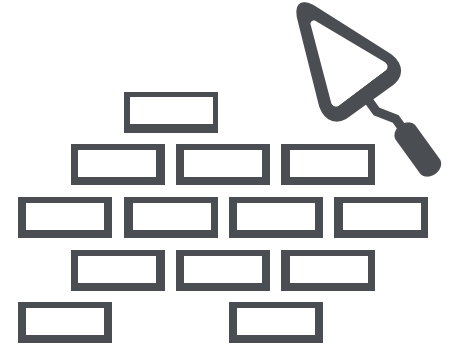
Whether you are flying or driving, you and your volunteers will need to plan for the cost of travel. Vehicle maintenance, gas money, travel day meals, and miscellaneous expenses will all need to be considered as you plan for the overall cost of the trip. Fundraising can be a great way to offset the cost of travel expenses and get the rest of your community engaged in this effort even if they aren't coming on the trip.



## Food

Most PDA Host Sites have a kitchen where you and your group can prepare meals. Local grocery stores are listed in host site manuals so you can choose where to shop once you arrive. Some groups choose to bring someone with them who will be in charge of cooking all meals while other groups take turns in the kitchen. You may also choose to eat at local restaurants. Both eating in and dining out are investing in the local economy as it recovers from the disaster.

# Work Partnership



## Connecting with your Work Partner

PDA partners with other national organizations, Long Term Recovery Groups (LTRGs), and local non-profits to help with community-led disaster recovery efforts. Your Host Site Coordinator will be able to introduce you to your work partner and typically, they will make all the work arrangements for your group. You may be asked to provide a skills assessment for the work partner so they can find projects that fit your experience level. You will also be asked to sign a liability form.



## What NOT to Expect

It is not likely that you will know what type of work your group will be doing until you arrive at your work site. Since our work partners have volunteers week after week, the projects your group will complete will likely depend on what other contractors and volunteers completed the week before. Due to this, you probably won't know what type of work you'll be doing until you arrive at the work site. Depending on the size of your group, you may not all be working at the same work site. Please plan to be flexible when you are at the work site.



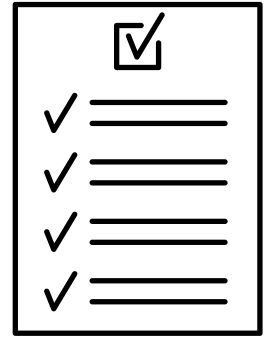
## What to Expect

Trust that your work partners and supervisors will prioritize your safety. They will do their best to make sure you have safe, helpful, and meaningful work to do. If you feel like this is not the case, advocate for your needs or ask for another project. For example, if you aren't comfortable on a ladder, ask for a project that won't require a ladder. If you have concerns, please let your Work Site Supervisor or Host Site Coordinator know as soon as possible.

**Please note that while PDA does not collect or require medical liability information, as a group leader, you are expected to have the necessary medical insurance information for each of your volunteers should a need arise during your volunteer work trip.**



# Preparing Your Volunteer Group



We often get excited to go on volunteer work trips, but we don't always do the pre-trip work that is necessary for volunteer service. Here are some things to keep in mind as you and your group prepare to serve.

## Cultural Humility

When assisting with community-led recovery efforts at PDA Host Sites, it is important that all volunteers respect that the community they are serving has experienced significant trauma. Every person you interact with will have been impacted by the disaster. Some may have lost power while others will have lost property and perhaps even loved ones.

It is important that volunteers do not make assumptions about what it is like to live through a disaster or how people who have experienced disaster might feel.

## Ministry of Presence

Oftentimes, our presence as volunteers is even more significant than the work we do. This is why it is important to stress the importance of how volunteers show up in spaces.

If you interact with a homeowner, put down your tools and listen to what they have to share. Try to leave behind any preconceived notions about disaster and recovery. Humility and empathy are often the most helpful tools in disaster ministry. Be sure to convey this to your group before you begin your volunteer work trip.

## Educational Resources

As you and your team prepare to serve, it is important that you educate yourselves on the disaster, the culture, and the location where you'll be serving. It is likely that those you encounter will think and act differently than you do.

The more you do to learn about the community before your trip, the more respectful you will be to your hosts and homeowners when you arrive. Your Host Site Coordinator will also be able to provide you with helpful information about their community.

PDA also has resources available for your group to utilize before, during, and after your volunteer experience. These resources include educational materials, Bible studies, prayers, and devotions. For more information on how to access or utilize these resources, contact the PDA Call Center.



# Arrival



## Paperwork/Payment

Be sure that all your paperwork and all registrations are completed at least 2 weeks prior to your departure. Double check with the Host Site Coordinator to ensure they have received all the necessary information. Before you leave, make sure you have a check to give the host site coordinator when you arrive.

## Travel

Check in with your Host Site Coordinator the day of travel so they know when to expect you. When you arrive, they will meet you at the facility, provide you a tour of the building(s), and give your group a brief orientation.



## PDA Blue T-Shirts

Upon arrival, each member of your group will receive your official PDA Blue T-Shirt. You are encouraged to wear this shirt while you work. When you wear your PDA shirt out in the world, people will recognize it because of the caliber of the PDA Volunteers before you and the decades of work PDA has done in the field of disaster recovery. You will create the legacy that comes behind you. Wear your shirt with pride and with respect.



## Sleeping Arrangements

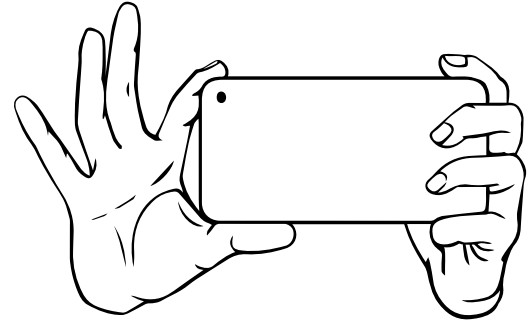
Each site has different sleeping accommodations. Some are large bunk rooms while others may have smaller rooms with a few beds. It will be up to the group leader (a.k.a. you) to determine what sleeping arrangements are best for your volunteer work group. Feel free to ask your Host Site Coordinator ahead of time about what sleeping accommodations their site has so you can plan ahead what arrangements will be best for your group.

## Support the Local Economy

One way you can continue the work of disaster recovery is to spend money in the community. Go out for dinner, visit local attractions, and support small businesses. Ask for local recommendations that are unique to the community so you can learn to appreciate it in the same way your hosts and homeowners do. Host sites may list local information in the host site manual to help you get started.



# Sharing Stories



These days, everyone has a camera in their hands and it can be tempting to snap a photo without thinking. It is important to always ask permission to take photos or videos of people and places while you serve as a PDA volunteer in community-led disaster recovery efforts.

## Photo Etiquette

It is important that people consent to having their photo taken. Before reaching for your camera, make sure you've asked the subjects, "may I take your picture?" Not everyone wants to or is able to have their picture taken so please ask permission. It is important to respect the dignity of the community you are entering into and the people you meet.

In sharing photos, videos, and stories, you amplify the voices of those who have been affected by disaster. Though it is cool that you are volunteering to help with disaster recovery, the story isn't about you or the work that you did while volunteering. The story is about resilience and community-led disaster recovery efforts. Any images or videos collected on volunteer work trips should be taken with respect and permission.



## Capturing A Moment

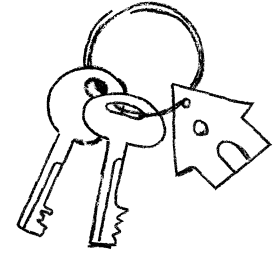
The picture below features three PDA volunteers listening to the stories of a homeowner. The homeowner was comfortable with volunteers taking photos of her house and of her as long as her face was not showing. In addition to the homeowner, all the volunteers in this picture also gave permission for their photos to be taken throughout their week of service and used by PDA. It can be helpful to ask permission to take photos of homeowners and work site partners at the beginning of your week to see what they are comfortable with.



## Share Photos with PDA

We would love to feature stories and pictures from your trip on PDA's social media. Send pictures with a caption and a story to [pda.callcenter@pcusa.org](mailto:pda.callcenter@pcusa.org) to be featured! Along with your photos, write us a paragraph or so about where you served, what you did, and what is happening in the pictures. Please only submit photos that you (and PDA) have permission to share.

# During Your Stay



## Stewardship

Be a good steward of your site! Clean the kitchen daily and take out the trash as needed. The building and all amenities are there for you to enjoy, not destroy. Please be respectful of the facility and anything shared with you during your visit.

## Devotions

You may choose to do devotions in any number of ways. We encourage you to invite members of your group to take turns leading devotions. Whether you use something you wrote, utilize something you like, or you borrow from a PDA devotional, taking time to pray is an important part of your trip.



## Departure

Make sure you check in with your Host Site Coordinator regarding any closing procedures (taking out the trash/gathering linens in one location). While not all sites require you to clean, please do not leave a mess for those who clean in between groups. Be sure to leave any building keys at the site so that future groups can use them.

**If you have any questions about the information provided in this planning guide, please contact the PDA Call Center at 866-732-6121 or [pda.callcenter@pcusa.org](mailto:pda.callcenter@pcusa.org).**

