



IPERC

Interfaith Preparedness & Emergency Response Coalition

Evaluating the Emergency Evacuation Center Commitment

Navigating the Realities, Risks, and Rewards of Disaster Relief Partnership

1. Executive Summary & Mission Alignment

1.1 The Call to Action: Community Resilience in Times of Crisis

When disaster strikes a municipality, the immediate aftermath is defined by displacement, confusion, and a sudden, critical shortage of basic human necessities. While first responders focus on life-saving operations, the secondary crisis emerges: where do families go when their homes are uninhabitable?

True community resilience is not built by municipal government agencies alone; it relies on a web of trusted, local institutions capable of pivoting instantly to support those in need. Emergency Evacuation Centers are the cornerstone of this resilience. By stepping forward to seek designation as an American Red Cross (ARC) Emergency Evacuation Center (EEC), a faith community provides more than just four walls and a roof—it delivers immediate physical safety, stability, and dignity to vulnerable individuals during their darkest hours.

However, serving as an Emergency Evacuation Center is not a passive offering. It requires meticulous preparation, structural readiness, and a willingness to open a facility to the public under high-stress conditions. The decision to embark on this path must be intentional, well-informed, and deeply rooted in the collective will of the community.

1.2 "Why Us?": Aligning EEC Designation with Congregational Mission

For many houses of worship, the decision to become an Emergency Evacuation Center can feel like a daunting logistical distraction from daily operations. To gain genuine buy-in from leadership, governing boards, and broader membership, the initiative must be reframed: this is not an administrative burden; it is a profound extension of the faith community's core mission and service focus.

Every faith tradition possesses a foundational mandate to welcome the stranger, feed the hungry, and shield the vulnerable. Becoming a designated center translates these abstract spiritual values into concrete, lifesaving civic action. Consider how this alignment strengthens both the congregation and the surrounding neighborhood:

- **Living the Mission:** It moves the congregation's mission statement off the page and into the real world, providing a clear, visible manifestation of the community's values in action.



IPERC

Interfaith Preparedness & Emergency Response Coalition

- **A Trusted Sanctuary:** Houses of worship are uniquely suited for this role because they are already viewed as places of peace, neutrality, and safety by the general public. During a crisis, an established sacred space inherently lowers anxiety and fosters a sense of communal care.
- **Deepening Civic Capital:** Pursuing designation establishes vital partnerships with regional emergency managers, municipal leaders, and the American Red Cross. This integrates the house of worship into the formal civic infrastructure, making it an indispensable anchor of the neighborhood.
- **Unifying the Membership:** Mobilizing to prepare for and support an EEC team provides a powerful, shared purpose that can revitalize a congregation, engaging everyone from youth groups to seniors in tangible emergency preparedness work.

Ultimately, seeking designation is a statement of leadership. It tells your community that your house of worship does not just exist *in* the neighborhood but is actively *for* the neighborhood.

1.3 Governance & Board Requirements

Before entering into a formal agreement with the American Red Cross, the governing board must evaluate the legal and operational guardrails of the commitment. The decision path requires three key milestones:

- **Financial Alignment:** Review the comprehensive facility overhead and insurance impact statements.
- **Formal Resolution:** Pass a board resolution with a two-thirds majority to authorize the designation.
- **Corporate Record:** Legally document the authorization within the official meeting minutes to protect institutional liability.

2 Operational & Facility Readiness (The Internal Audit)

2.1 Space & Infrastructure: Physical Sourcing and Technical Assets

Designation as an ARC EEC requires a clear-eyed assessment of the facility's physical footprint and technical capabilities. Rather than viewing these as rigid compliance hurdles, the board should evaluate them as foundational infrastructure that ensures occupant safety and preserves institutional property.



IPERC

Interfaith Preparedness & Emergency Response Coalition

- **Capacity and Square Footage:** Evaluating the main assembly spaces (e.g., fellowship halls, gymnasiums) to determine the maximum capacity based on standard ARC metrics. This includes calculating dedicated sleeping zones separate from dining and administrative areas.
- **Hygiene and ADA Compliance:** Auditing existing restroom and shower infrastructure to ensure it can support an overnight surge population while meeting federal accessibility guidelines.
- **Power Resilience and Backup Systems:** Assessing the facility's electrical grid, specifically looking at the feasibility of staging or permanently integrating backup generators to maintain climate control, refrigeration, and lighting during widespread municipal power grid failures.
- **Technical Sourcing and Access Control:** Evaluating the building's edge networking and security systems. Implementing high-density PoE switches and mesh Wi-Fi networks ensures reliable communication for both emergency managers and displaced families. Simultaneously, deploying physical access control systems and integrated video surveillance allows the facility to secure non-public zones (like administrative offices, childcare wings, and sacred spaces) during public activation.
- **Space & Infrastructure:** Minimum physical requirements (e.g., square footage per person, ADA-compliant restrooms, backup power, secure storage, and specialized access control/networking).

2.2 Liability & Governance: Institutional Protections and Risk Management

Opening a private facility to the public under emergency conditions introduces distinct legal and operational risks. A robust decision framework requires establishing clear guardrails to protect the organization's assets, staff, and leadership.

- **Insurance and Indemnification:** Reviewing the institution's current commercial general liability policy alongside the standard ARC Statement of Understanding. It is critical to explicitly define where corporate liability ends and where Red Cross or municipal indemnification begins regarding property damage or personal injury during an active deployment.
- **Facility Use and Legal Alterations:** Formally updating building use policies to include emergency exemptions. This ensures that pre-existing long-term rentals or community usage agreements contain clear, legally binding "emergency preemptive clauses."



IPERC

Interfaith Preparedness & Emergency Response Coalition

- **Logistical Security:** Establishing secure, locked storage zones dedicated solely to equipment (such as cots, blankets, and specialized first-aid supplies) to prevent interference with daily facility maintenance.

2.3 Daily Operations Impact: Managing Institutional Interruption

EEC activation is an absolute preemption of normal facility usage. Governing boards must realistically evaluate the operational friction that occurs when a sacred space transforms into a 24-hour disaster relief hub.

- **Worship Service Contingencies:** Developing alternative plans for religious services, including temporary outdoor setups, remote streaming options, or shared-space arrangements with neighboring institutions if the main sanctuary or fellowship spaces are occupied.
- **Childcare and Educational Interruption:** Assessing the impact on weekday programs, such as preschools, daycare ministries, or after-school tutoring. Because serving as a public center introduces un-vetted individuals into the facility, strict segregation of youth programming is vital during activation.
- **Staff and Facility Overtime:** Quantifying the administrative strain on existing facility managers, custodial staff, and IT technicians who may be required to work extended hours to support the incoming emergency teams.

3 Operational Safeguards and Flexibility

Serving as an Emergency Evacuation Center is a modular, opt-in commitment that respects the primary mission and scheduled functions of the congregation.

- **Right of Refusal and Scale:** Participation is voluntary. Should an activation request conflict with existing commitments such as weddings, funerals, religious holidays, or facility construction, the congregation retains the right to decline without penalty. Furthermore, the congregation may limit its activation to short-term operations (such as a 1- or 2-day Reception or Evacuation Center) to avoid extended interruptions to weekday childcare or educational ministries. If a request is declined or scaled back, the American Red Cross will proceed to the next facility on the regional rotation list. Authority to decline or scale back rests with the same officers or staff vested with the authority to approve activation of the emergency evacuation center.
- **Spatial Restrictions:** The facility may designate specific areas as "off limits" for activation use. This includes, but is not limited to, the sanctuary, administrative offices, or other sensitive areas required for ongoing congregational operations.



IPERC

Interfaith Preparedness & Emergency Response Coalition

- **Pre-Activation Inspection:** A formal damage inspection form is completed and documented on the day of activation prior to the American Red Cross taking occupancy, ensuring a clear baseline for the facility's condition.

4 Resource and Liability Management

The partnership with the American Red Cross is structured to insulate the congregation from operational and financial burdens.

- **Liability and Insurance:** The American Red Cross maintains comprehensive damage insurance for the duration of its use of the facility.
- **Expense Reimbursement:** Any incremental costs incurred due to facility use—including, but not limited to, garbage removal and sanitation supplies—will be fully reimbursed or replaced by the American Red Cross.
- **Meal and Supply Protocols:** The American Red Cross does not utilize facility kitchen staff for food preparation. All meals provided to clients, staff, or agencies are sourced from health-department-inspected businesses. If meals are donated, they must originate from licensed vendors.
- **Pet Policy:** The congregation retains the authority to determine pet admittance. Should the facility decline to accept pets, the American Red Cross will make separate, appropriate arrangements for animal accommodation.

5 The Activation Reality (What Happens During a Disaster)

5.1 The Surge: Operational Realities of EEC Activation

When the American Red Cross activates a facility, the transition from a quiet house of worship to a fully operational disaster relief hub happens rapidly. Governing boards must look past the abstract concept of volunteering and understand the immediate physical and logistical shift that takes place within hours of a notification.

- **Rapid Facility Intake:** The immediate arrival of ARC logistics vehicles, supply drop-offs, and an influx of displaced individuals seeking safety. Assembly spaces must be cleared instantly to accommodate cot setup, registration desks, and triage areas.
- **High-Density Shared Environments:** Managing the psychological and physical realities of a crowd under extreme stress. The facility will operate on a 24-hour cycle, meaning constant foot traffic, noise, and the intensive use of mechanical and plumbing



IPERC

Interfaith Preparedness & Emergency Response Coalition

systems far beyond standard weekend service parameters.

- **Resource Consumption:** A dramatic escalation in utility usage, including water, heating, ventilation, air conditioning (HVAC), and edge network bandwidth as hundreds of occupants attempt to connect to emergency services and family members.

5.2 Scope of Activation

The facility is equipped to support various emergency operations, categorized by the nature and duration of the event:

- **Evacuation Center:** 1–2 days; sheltering individuals from weather-related events (fires, downbursts, power outages).
- **Reception Center:** 1–2 days; providing intake and interviewing services for clients affected by localized disasters (e.g., apartment fires, floods).
- **Intake Center:** 1 day; centralized locations for the distribution of disaster support services.
- **MARC (Mutual Agency Resource Center):** 1 day; a multi-agency coordination event involving federal, state, and local partners.
- **Dormitory:** Up to 2 weeks; short-term housing for those displaced by disaster without immediate alternatives.

5.3 Staffing & Burnout: Sustaining the Human Infrastructure

A successful EEC designation relies entirely on clear boundaries between external agency support and internal volunteer capacity. Boards must carefully distinguish between the services provided by the ARC and the operational burdens that remain the sole responsibility of the host institution.

- **The ARC Resource Footprint:** The American Red Cross typically provides professional managers, specialized caseworkers, standardized food service sourcing, cots, blankets, and fundamental medical/mental health support teams.
- **The Local Congregational Burden:** Local volunteers and facility staff must remain on-site to act as building liaisons. This includes executing immediate facilities maintenance, managing building-specific IT and network troubleshooting, and providing local situational context that out-of-town disaster teams lack.



IPERC

Interfaith Preparedness & Emergency Response Coalition

- **Mitigating Volunteer Fatigue:** Recognizing that a localized disaster affects your congregation's members as well. A robust plan requires building a deep, rotating schedule for your internal team to prevent burnout during deployments that can extend from a few days to multiple weeks.

5.4 Security & Safety: Boundary Enforcement in High-Stress Environments

Maintaining the physical security of the asset and the safety of everyone inside it is the most critical risk-management component of a live deployment. Under emergency conditions, clear physical boundaries prevent operational chaos.

- **Segregation of Demographics:** Strictly enforcing the separation of the client population from sensitive institutional zones. This requires utilizing pre-programmed access control systems to lock down administrative suites, financial offices, and youth/childcare wings completely.
- **Access Control and Credentialing:** Establishing a singular, controlled point of entry for clients, monitored by camera surveillance and staffed by ARC or local security personnel. All other peripheral doors must be switched to exit-only to prevent unvetted foot traffic from bypassing registration desks.
- **De-escalation and External Support:** Training the internal team to defer all structural security, behavioral disturbances, and medical emergencies to the formal ARC management team and local law enforcement partners. Local volunteers must never act as security enforcers; their role is to monitor institutional property and support the facility network.

6 The Step-by-Step Pathway to Designation

6.1 Phase I: Foundational Alignment and Institutional Consent

Embarking on the path toward Emergency Evacuation Center designation requires transparent governance and broad congregational alignment. Before engaging external agencies, a house of worship must build internal consensus to ensure the commitment is supported by both its leadership and its general membership.

- **Presentation of Information and Institutional Approval:** Preparing and delivering a comprehensive informational briefing to the general congregation or membership body. This phase culminates in a formal vote or consensus process to secure an explicit mandate to proceed with a physical facility evaluation.



IPERC

Interfaith Preparedness & Emergency Response Coalition

- **Pre-Inspection Site Survey and Internal Review:** Conducting an internal facility audit prior to inviting external inspectors. Institutional leadership evaluates the physical footprint, identifies potential sensitive or restricted zones, and performs a preliminary review of existing building infrastructure against baseline emergency needs.

6.2 Phase II: Technical Evaluation and Formal On-Site Inspection

Once internal approval is secured, the process shifts from a self-assessment to a collaborative technical evaluation with official disaster response experts. This phase establishes the definitive baseline of the facility's physical and operational suitability.

- **On-Site American Red Cross Technical Inspection:** Hosting the American Red Cross (ARC) disaster logistics team for a comprehensive facility walkthrough. Inspectors formally evaluate spatial capacity, electrical infrastructure, HVAC resilience, dietary/food preparation areas, hygiene facilities, and ADA accessibility to calculate the definitive maximum occupant capacity.
- **Execution of the Formal Letter of Agreement:** Presenting the finalized ARC technical assessment and facility terms to the institutional governing board. Following a comprehensive review of legal liabilities and operational guardrails, the board passes a formal resolution authorizing the executive leadership to sign the official Letter of Agreement (LOA).

6.3 Phase III: Operational Readiness and System Integration

Signing the legal agreement transitions the facility into an active readiness state. The final phase involves building the human infrastructure and establishing municipal awareness to ensure seamless deployment when a disaster occurs.

- **Formation and Training of the Internal Team:** Recruiting dedicated staff and congregational volunteers to form the institutional response team. Team members undergo specialized training to clarify their roles as building liaisons, facility technicians, and local resource guides, separating their responsibilities from those of external ARC disaster professionals.
- **Database Integration and Municipal Listing:** Finalizing the center's administrative profile to complete the designation process. The facility is officially integrated into the ARC national database and registered on the local municipality's emergency management resource list, rendering it fully visible and actionable for regional disaster response coordinates.



IPERC

Interfaith Preparedness & Emergency Response Coalition

7. Conclusion: A Shared Commitment to Community Resilience

Choosing the path of becoming an American Red Cross Emergency Evacuation Center is undeniably a serious and profound institutional commitment, requiring meticulous preparation and structural readiness. However, no house of worship walks this path alone. Throughout the evaluation, designation, and eventual live activation phases, your congregation will be fully backed by the extensive expertise and operational resources of the American Red Cross and vital municipal partners, such as local fire departments and emergency management agencies.

Ultimately, seeking this designation is a powerful, active statement of leadership and a tangible contribution to community preparedness. By integrating your facility into the formal civic infrastructure, you do more than just provide a haven; you lift your house of worship into the upper tier of the regional emergency response network, transforming your sacred space into an indispensable, life-saving anchor for the entire neighborhood.