



## Presentation Summaries & Speaker Biographies

MNVOAD Annual Conference - 2026

## Presentation Summary

<b>Presentation Title</b>	America's Disaster Management at a Crossroads
<b>Scheduled Time</b>	9:00-10:00 am
<b>Synopsis</b>	<p>Since the founding of the United States, two-hundred and fifty years ago, the nation has faced many deadly and destructive disasters. The way that the people and their local, state and federal governments have responded to disasters has changed significantly across time. As American history often shows in many areas, the United States has been a seedbed of innovation and advancement in dealing with disasters. Several major developments in how disasters are managed got their start in the United States, spreading from here to other nations.</p> <p>Our story has not always been one of progress and improvement, however. Several historical periods saw stagnation, or even retreat, in our nation's disaster management system. These episodes of erosion appeared to result from outside influences, with only a limited connection to disaster management efforts.</p> <p>Today, disaster management once again stands at a crossroads. There are very powerful external forces exerting intense influence on America's emergency management system. This time however, there are also powerful internal (primary) disaster forces increasingly stressing disaster management. We are at a decisive point. Regardless of the path that America chooses for its disaster management system, it will certainly have significant impacts on the American people - including disaster victims, voluntary agencies, private industry, and government at all levels.</p>

## Speaker Biography

<b>Name</b>	Eric Waage
<b>Title/Role</b>	Emergency Management Director
<b>Organization</b>	Hennepin County Emergency Management
<b>Brief Biography</b>	<p>Eric Waage has been the Director of Emergency Management for Hennepin County, Minnesota, since late 2011, where he leads county-wide disaster readiness, response, recovery, and mitigation programs. His significant initiatives include integrating meteorology and emergency management, improving local hazard assessments, forging</p> <p><b>Brief Biography, Eric Waage continued:</b></p> <p>new partnerships and enhancing public warning systems. Waage has worked every major disaster impacting Hennepin County since 2007. He has also supported disaster responses in other states, including the Alabama Emergency Operations Center in the wake of the 2011 Southeast Tornado Outbreak, the New York State Emergency Operations Center during Hurricane Sandy, and commodity distribution sites in the Florida Keys following Hurricane Irma.</p> <p>Waage retired from the Army as a Lieutenant Colonel. During his military career, he engaged in disaster response missions ranging from search and rescue to wildfire suppression as a helicopter pilot; commanded a specialized team tasked with detecting and identifying weapons of mass destruction within the United States; and led the National Guard's disaster support program for the State of Minnesota. He was assigned to the DEA's Organized Crime Drug Enforcement Task Force and later to the FBI's Joint Terrorism Task Force in Minneapolis. During the Iraq War, he commanded an Army Aviation Support Battalion that operated throughout central and southern Iraq. Waage holds a Master's in Strategic Studies from the United States Army War College and is currently a Doctoral Student in Emergency Management at Jacksonville State University.</p>

Presentation Summary

<b>Presentation Title</b>	The Evolution of Volunteerism: Decoding New Trends and Collaborative Strategies
<b>Scheduled Time</b>	10:15 – 11:15
<b>Synopsis</b>	The volunteerism landscape is rapidly shifting, evolving, and changing in the ways in which people choose to serve. Organizations need to understand what volunteering can look like in the future so we can move at the speed of the communities we serve and provide the opportunities to meet volunteers where they are. This session will unveil critical data- driven insights that you need to future proof your strategy based on MAVA's field-based research and network surveys; we will illuminate four key trends shaping the next decade of service.

[Speaker Biography](#)

<b>Name</b>	Niila Hebert
<b>Title/Role</b>	<u>Executive Director of Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement</u>
<b>Organization</b>	The Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA)
<b>Brief Biography</b>	<p>Niila is the Executive Director of the Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement and an established leader in community engagement, fundraising, program development, and volunteerism. As a longtime <b>Brief Biography, Niila Hebert, continued:</b></p> <p>servant leader, Niila is a board member and volunteer who is passionate about the impact volunteers—and the professionals who work with them—can have on their communities. Highly skilled in creating partnerships, Niila catalyzes transformative change through collaborative engagement. She is a DEI trainer and inclusion champion, bringing her core values of equity, access, and justice to her advocacy for Black and LGBTQ+ communities. She is also a Certified Volunteer Administrator (CVA) and a Certified Professional Project Manager (CCPM).</p> <p>Niila received her Bachelor’s Degree from California State University, Long Beach, majoring in Communications with a minor in Black Studies. She currently serves on the boards of Nexus Community Partners, Until We Are All Free, Sweet Potato Comfort Pie, and the MN Freedom Fund.</p> <p>About MAVA The Minnesota Alliance for Volunteer Advancement (MAVA) is an intermediary that aims to enhance the capacity of community-based partners to adapt to evolving needs in the region.</p> <p>Its mission is to advance the power of volunteerism to deepen community impact and foster an equitable volunteer ecosystem for historically underrepresented communities by centering community voices, building communities of practice, and curating space for collective learning.</p>

Presentation Summary

<b>Presentation Title</b>	Legal Lifelines: Integrating Civil Legal Services into Disaster Preparedness, Response, and Recovery
<b>Scheduled Time</b>	10:15 – 11:15
<b>Synopsis</b>	Disasters do not just damage property — they disrupt lives, livelihoods, and legal stability. From housing disputes and insurance claims to guardianship issues and access to benefits, civil legal needs surge in the aftermath of crises. This session will explore how incorporating civil legal services into disaster preparedness, recovery, and response can protect vulnerable populations, reduce long-term recovery times, and strengthen community resilience. Attendees will learn the importance of legal service integration in the disaster management cycle and tools for building partnerships with legal aid organizations. Equip your disaster response toolkit with the legal resources needed to ensure comprehensive, equitable recovery for all.

**Speaker Biography**

<b>Name</b>	Claire Hardi
<b>Title/Role</b>	Disaster Project Coordinator
<b>Organization</b>	Justice North
<b>Brief Biography</b>	Claire Hardi is the former Disaster Preparedness & Response Coordinator at Justice North Civil Legal Aid based in Duluth, MN. In this role, she coordinated the agency's legal response to disasters and provided disaster preparedness education for the public and community partner organizations. She recently transitioned into a new role at the agency as their Access Hub Coordinator for New American services where she helps facilitate equitable access to immigration related legal and social services across 35 northern Minnesota counties.

**Presentation Summary**

<b>Presentation Title</b>	Prepare for Kindness - Donations Management
<b>Scheduled Time</b>	10:15 – 11:15
<b>Synopsis</b>	When a disaster occurs, people want to help. Proactively prepare yourself and organization to respond in a disaster situation and learn of other ways to support external disaster relief efforts. Explore options and actions that can be taken to prepare for the kindness of others. Otherwise, an organization may be overwhelmed by enthusiastic spontaneous volunteers and unusable donations. Volunteers plus Donations do not have to equal a Disaster during or after a Disaster occurs.

Speaker Biography

<b>Name</b>	Jeanne Rasmussen
<b>Title/Role</b>	Volunteer Resources Coordinator
<b>Organization</b>	MN Homeland Security and Emergency Management
<b>Brief Biography</b>	Jeanne Rasmussen is the Volunteer Resources Coordinator at the State of Minnesota’s Division of Homeland Security and Emergency Management in the Department of Public Safety. Jeanne focuses on assisting local communities in preparing for disaster-related volunteer and donation management. She serves as a liaison with MNVOAD (Minnesota Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster) groups and other partners. In addition, she provides guidance to Community Emergency Response Team (CERT) Programs throughout the state. Jeanne has an extensive background as a volunteer manager and instructor and has served as a disaster volunteer for many years.

Pre

## Presentation Summary

<b>Presentation Title</b>	Skyline Tower Fire Response
<b>Scheduled Time</b>	11:30 – 12:30
<b>Synopsis</b>	<p>This presentation documents the response to a large-scale apartment fire and power outage at Skyline Apartments (1247 St. Anthony Ave., St. Paul) that occurred October 25–26, 2026, displacing 1,000+ residents. The response was delivered in close coordination with CommonBond Communities, the City of St. Paul, The Salvation Army, and other local partners, and lasted 32 days.</p> <p>Large low-income high rise apartment complex. With over 500 units it is the largest single-building subsidized housing complex in the U.S. west of Chicago. Managed by CommonBond Communities. Opened in 1971 as part of HUD's section 236 program.</p> <p>Incident: Building systems failure and water damage at 1247 St. Anthony Ave (Skyline Towers) Impact: Full evacuation of residential high-rise; long-term displacement and phased reoccupation Population Initially Affected: 244 households / 396 individuals Response Model: Unified Command using ICS structure This Summary is focused on Initial Response Actions (Oct 26-31)</p>

## Speaker Biography

<b>Name</b>	Shylo Stevens
<b>Title/Role</b>	Manager of Programs
<b>Organization</b>	CommonBond
<b>Brief Biography</b>	<p>Shylo Stevens was born and raised in Minnesota and is the mother of a growing and energetic little boy. She has been with CommonBond Communities since 2022. Originally starting as a Teen Program Coordinator, she has worked her way up to the role of Manager of Programs. Her day-to-day work includes overseeing a series of Youth &amp; Teen Programs across the Twin Cities, as well as managing the implementation of Arts &amp; Aging Programs throughout the greater Twin Cities region. She is passionate about youth work, human rights, and advocacy.</p>
<b>Name</b>	Alecia Leonard

<b>Title/Role</b>	Vice President, Advantage Services
<b>Organization</b>	CommonBond
<b>Brief Biography</b>	<p>Alecia Leonard is Vice President of Advantage Services at CommonBond, where she leads programs that support housing</p> <p>Brief Biography, Alecia Leonard, continued:  stability, education, health, community engagement, and permanent supportive housing. With more than 15 years of experience in housing and community development, Alecia has guided interdisciplinary teams and championed equitable, data-driven strategies. Previously, she was Regional Vice President at Urban Strategies, Inc., partnering with residents and community partners to drive equitable, community-led redevelopment initiatives across neighborhoods nationwide. Alecia holds a Master’s in Social Work from the University of Minnesota and a Bachelor’s in Social Work from Bethel University. She is passionate about advancing equity and creating pathways for individuals and families to thrive in stable, vibrant communities.</p>

<b>Name</b>	Samantha Best
<b>Title/Role</b>	<u>Community Disaster Program Manager</u>
<b>Organization</b>	Red Cross
<b>Brief Biography</b>	<p>Samantha joined the American Red Cross in January 2025 as the Community Disaster Program Manager for Southern (SW) Minnesota. Her professional background spans emergency management, multiple areas of law enforcement, and emergency preparedness, providing a strong foundation for her work in disaster response and community coordination. During the Skyline Tower response, Samantha began her deployment as an Operations Management Supervisor on the Feeding Team before transitioning into the role of Feeding Manager. She concluded her service on the operation as the Assistant Director of Operations. Across each position, she centered volunteer and partner coordination, as well as the cultural and individual needs of clients—ensuring that thoughtful, community-focused decision making guided every action.</p>

<b>Name</b>	Joe Reinemann
<b>Title/Role</b>	North Central Division Information and Planning Cadre Volunteer Lead MN-DK Region RC Respond RAST
<b>Organization</b>	Red Cross
<b>Brief Biography</b>	<p>Joe Reinemann has been a volunteer with the Red Cross for over 13 years. He serves locally responding to house fires and other local disasters, in the Minnesota-Dakotas Region as on the</p> <p>Joe Reinemann, Brief Biography Continued: Disaster Services leadership team, and with the North Central Division as a Planning Section Chief for larger scale disasters. He served as the Job Director on the Skyline response from the start of the response until transitioning the role to Steve Hartman in early November.</p>

<b>Name</b>	Dave Schoeneck
<b>Title/Role</b>	External Relations - Minnesota and Dakotas
<b>Organization</b>	Red Cross

**Brief Biography**

After a four-decade career in communications and public relations in Minnesota, Dave Schoeneck joined the American Red Cross as a Volunteer in 2002.

During the Skyline Apartment Multi-Family Fire (DR 79626), he served as Assistant Director of External Relations. His Red Cross roles include External Relations/Public Affairs Manager (ER/PA/MN – Type 2), Regional Communications Director Volunteer Partner, and Minnesota and Dakotas Region Lead for Government Operations.

His Red Cross awards include the 2022 North Central Division Nominee for the Presidential Award for Excellence and the 2023 Regional Communications Volunteer of the Year.

He has deployed to hurricanes Irene, Sandy, Matthew, Harvey, Florence, Dorian, and Imelda; the Iowa Floods; the Washington State Wildfires; and more than 60 regional fires, floods, and tornadoes.

He is a graduate of FEMA's Advanced Public Information Officer Course

## Presentation Summary

<b>Presentation Title</b>	Northern MN Derecho Long-Term Recovery Committee
<b>Scheduled Time</b>	1:30-2:30
<b>Synopsis</b>	Recovery from disasters extends far beyond the initial response. Join the United Way of the Bemidji Area to learn how they supported their communities through storm response and long-term recovery. They will highlight how they mobilized volunteers, managed resources, fundraised, coordinated Long Term Recovery Groups, provided Disaster Case Management, and will work toward creating a COAD, showing what a local United Way can contribute to sustained, coordinated recovery.

## Speaker Biography

<b>Name</b>	Denae Alamano
<b>Title/Role</b>	Executive Director and Board President of United Ways of Minnesota
<b>Organization</b>	United Way - Bemidji Area
<b>Brief Biography</b>	Denae Alamano is the Executive Director of United Way of the Bemidji Area, where she has spent the past nine years navigating complex community challenges. During her tenure, she has helped lead responses to three major crises, including COVID-19, the Red Pine Apartment closures, and a recent large-scale windstorm where her community lost over 9 million trees. Alamano led her community through storm relief and long-term recovery without disaster-response training but with a vast knowledge of community resources, volunteer mobilization expertise, and the ability to fundraise quickly.

## Presentation Summary

<b>Presentation Title</b>	Psychological First Aid
<b>Scheduled Time</b>	2:45 – 3:45
<b>Synopsis</b>	<p>I look forward to the opportunity to share this basic introduction to the importance of Psychological First Aid as a tool for all responders. My presentation will be an overview of what Psychological First Aid is and is not. My purpose is to provide exposure and awareness of the importance of all people responding to provide care, support, and comfort to survivors of disasters and trauma being aware of how they interact with those survivors and the effects of their words and actions facilitating survivor recovery.</p> <p>My intention is to provide an overview and referrals to support further training sources for gaining proficiency in practicing Psychological First Aid for all responders. I look forward to collaborating with you in those endeavors.</p>

## Speaker Biography

<b>Name</b>	Bruce Norgard
<b>Title/Role</b>	Disaster Spiritual Care – Regional Lead
<b>Organization</b>	Red Cross
<b>Brief Biography</b>	<p>His education includes a Bachelor of Science Degree with majors in Business Management and Social Work from UW–River Falls, a Master of Arts Degree in Theological Studies from Bethel Seminary, and Master’s Degree Certificates in Pastoral Ministry from North Park Seminary and Free Lutheran Seminary. He is a Board-Certified Chaplain through the Association of Professional Chaplains and an Ordained Pastor through the International Ministerial Fellowship.</p> <p>His professional and volunteer background includes service as a Retired Pastor and Retired Hospital Chaplain. He currently serves as the North Central Division Disaster Spiritual Care Advisor for the American Red Cross, the Regional Lead for Disaster Spiritual Care for the MN/Dakotas and Illinois Regions, provides pulpit supply for sacramental rituals, and serves as President of the Truman Lions Club.</p> <p>He holds Life Memberships in Disabled American Veterans, the Veterans of Foreign Wars, and the American Legion.</p>

## Presentation Summary

<b>Presentation Title</b>	Field Observer Course – 6 Module Overview
<b>Scheduled Time</b>	2:45 – 3:45
<b>Synopsis</b>	<p>Field Observer: Essentials is a practical breakout session designed to introduce the core knowledge and skills needed to serve effectively as a field observer in disaster and incident environments. Participants will gain an overview of the field observer role, including safety, situational awareness, accurate observation, clear reporting, and the importance of documenting conditions in a way that supports incident leadership and partner agencies.</p> <p>This session is ideal for volunteers, responders, and support personnel who want a strong foundation in field intelligence gathering without requiring an advanced technical background. Attendees will leave with a better understanding of how field observers help turn on-scene observations into useful, actionable information that strengthens coordination, decision-making, and overall incident effectiveness.</p>

## Speaker Biography

<b>Name</b>	Ryc Lyden
<b>Title/Role</b>	Assistant Section Emergency Coordinator – Liaison, MNVOAD President, NVOAD Community Preparedness Chair Red Cross and The Salvation Army volunteer.
<b>Organization</b>	Minnesota Amateur Radio Emergency Services
<b>Brief Biography</b>	<p>Ryc Lyden brings a broad and deeply experienced background in emergency services, disaster response, and public safety. He has served 54 years with the American Red Cross, 7 years with The Salvation Army, and 9 years with Amateur Radio Emergency Services. His experience also includes 12 years in search and rescue, 12 years in EMS, 8 years as a Minnesota State Radiological Officer, 4 years with Minneapolis Fire Rescue, 8 years with the Air National Guard, and service as a Community Affairs Officer with Ramsey County.</p> <p>With decades of service across volunteer, military, and emergency response roles, Ryc is known for practical leadership, operational knowledge, and a strong commitment to helping communities before, during, and after disasters.</p>

<b>Name</b>	Gwen Martin, Capt.
<b>Title/Role</b>	Emergency Management Director/Deputy Public Safety Director
<b>Organization</b>	Cottage Grove Police Department
<b>Brief Biography</b>	<p>Captain Gwen Martin has been with the Cottage Grove Police Department since 2000, having previously worked as a paramedic and as a community mental health social worker. She began working as a Community Service Officer/Paramedic, then spent 9 years as a police officer/paramedic and 8 years as a patrol sergeant before being promoted to captain in 2018. She currently serves as a Deputy Director of Public Safety/Police Captain and as the city's Emergency Manager. Captain Martin is a licensed peace officer, a paramedic, and she holds a B.A. in Psychology, an M.A. in Police Leadership, and a Ph.D. in Emergency Management. Additionally, Captain Martin has deployed to numerous events, exercises, and disasters—including fires, flooding, and civil unrest—serving as a Deputy Commander of MN-1 AHIMT, the state's Type III All-Hazard Incident Management Team, and as a Medical Unit Leader (MEDL) with a MNICS Type III wildfire Incident Management Team. She brings with her a wealth of background experience in social work, paramedicine, law enforcement, and emergency management.</p>

