



Severe Weather Outreach Volunteer Handbook

Severe Weather Outreach Volunteer Program

Program Purpose

The Severe Weather Outreach Volunteer Program mobilizes trained volunteers to support people experiencing unsheltered homelessness during dangerous weather events in Mecklenburg County. Volunteers assist Hearts for the Invisible Charlotte Coalition's outreach efforts by sharing shelter information, distributing weather-related supplies, and helping protect vulnerable neighbors during periods of extreme cold, snow, ice, or extreme heat.

Program Goals

The program is designed to:

- Encourage unsheltered individuals to seek safe shelter during severe weather
- Provide clear, accurate information on expanded shelter capacity
- Distribute essential seasonal supplies to those who decline shelter
- Support coordinated community response with local government, emergency management, and shelter partners
- Reduce harm and risk during weather emergencies

Severe Weather Activation Criteria

Severe weather outreach is activated on an as-needed basis rather than on a fixed calendar schedule.

Extreme Cold / Winter Weather

Protocols are typically activated in response to forecasts of:

- Temperatures at or below 32°F
- Heavy snow, dangerous ice, or other hazardous winter weather conditions

Extreme Heat

Protocols are generally activated when:

- The heat index, or feels-like temperature, is expected to be 105°F or higher for at least two hours

Community Coordination

Severe Weather Outreach operates in coordination with community partners, which may include:

- Mecklenburg County
- City of Charlotte
- Charlotte-Mecklenburg Emergency Management Office (CMEMO)
- Hearts for the Invisible Charlotte Coalition
- Roof Above
- Salvation Army Center of Hope

These partners monitor weather conditions, shelter capacity, and community needs throughout the activation period.

Volunteer Role

Volunteers serve as part of outreach teams deployed to known homeless encampments and unsheltered locations. Their role is to assist trained outreach leads in engaging with individuals respectfully and safely.

Volunteer responsibilities may include:

- Sharing information about severe weather shelter options
- Encouraging individuals to go indoors to a shelter or other safe location
- Providing directions, access instructions, or transportation coordination details if available
- Distributing winter or heat-relief supplies, or blankets and cold-weather supplies
- Reporting urgent needs to team leads
- Documenting outreach activity as directed

Volunteers are not expected to act as case managers, medical responders, or security personnel.

Core Outreach Approach

Outreach during severe weather should follow this sequence:

1. Engage individuals with dignity and respect
2. Inform them that severe weather protocols are active
3. Explain shelter options and how to access them
4. Encourage movement to shelter or another safe indoor location
5. If shelter is declined, provide weather-appropriate supplies when available
6. Notify team leads of urgent health, safety, or emergency concerns

Safety Principles

Volunteer safety and participant dignity are central to the program.

Volunteers should:

- Follow instructions from HFTICC
- Avoid entering tents, structures, vehicles, or isolated areas
- Maintain respectful, nonjudgmental communication
- Call 911 in any medical emergency or life-threatening situation
- Avoid making promises about shelter or services, beyond confirmed information
- Defer conflicts, mental health crises, and medical concerns to trained staff or emergency responders

Weather-Related Supplies

Supplies will be available at HFTICC's office (618 N. College Street) for people to get prior to heading out. A meeting time will be disclosed at activation. Volunteers are also welcome to gather and distribute their own supplies. Depending on season and availability, supply kits may include:

Cold Weather

- Blankets
- Hats
- Gloves
- Hand warmers
- Socks
- Coats
- Resource cards with shelter access information

Heat Response

- Water
- Electrolyte drinks
- Cooling towels
- Sunscreen
- Hats
- Resource cards with cooling center or shelter information

Training Requirements

All volunteers should complete a basic orientation before deployment. Training will cover:

- The mission of Hearts for the Invisible Charlotte Coalition
- Severe weather activation criteria
- Outreach safety protocols

- Trauma-informed and respectful engagement
- Supply distribution procedures
- Emergency escalation procedures
- Documentation and confidentiality expectations

Activation and Notification Process

When severe weather protocols are activated:

- Staff or volunteer leaders notify approved volunteers by text, email, or phone
- Volunteers are informed of activation dates, meeting location, shift times, and weather conditions
- Volunteers confirm availability
- Teams are assigned based on need, training, and capacity

Volunteer Expectations

Volunteers must:

- Attend required training
- Follow all safety and outreach protocols
- Treat every person with dignity and respect
- Maintain confidentiality and professionalism
- Arrive prepared for outdoor conditions
- Communicate clearly about availability and concerns