

National VOAD Membership Committee –

On behalf of OneStar Foundation – the Texas State Service Commission, I wish to commend SEWA International for their commitment and dedication to supporting vulnerable populations in the wake of man-made and natural disasters in the State of Texas.

I first encountered SEWA while serving as the Federal Volunteer and Donations Taskforce Lead for the State of Texas during Hurricane Harvey in 2017. While working with Brazoria County in South Texas following the storm, the State was made aware of a severely impacted Cambodian farming village that had been destroyed and was rejecting all government assistance with recovery. The storm had effectively destroyed most homes within the village and completely wiped out the greenhouses that the community used to farm and produce income. This is when SEWA stepped in! After several unsuccessful attempts by other NGO and government agencies to assist the villagers after the storm, SEWA was able to connect with the community in their native language and negotiate proper and culturally appropriate support for the community to assist as they recovered from the storm. In all, SEWA rebuilt or repaired 125 homes in the village and 120 greenhouses providing safe and secure shelter for residents and restoring the community's livelihood. SEWA was one of many NGO organizations that attempted to assist the Cambodian village and was the only organization accepted by the locals and allowed to assist in recovery. In addition to this targeted support, SEWA also leveraged 75,000 volunteer hours following Harvey and provided case management for 1,800 individuals in Texas following the storm.

Following Harvey, I was reassigned within OneStar to lead the Outreach and Development arm of the AmeriCorps Texas Program, working to develop innovative national service programs to meet the dynamic needs of Texas communities. In this role, I immediately began working with SEWA to develop an AmeriCorps program with a focus on disaster preparedness, recovery, and case management. This began a multi-year partnership between SEWA and OneStar Foundation where I acted as the organizations POC assisting SEWA as they developed a remarkably strong program model focusing on development of disaster preparedness and case management initiatives supporting Texas communities in all phases of disaster. During this time SEWA never stopped connecting with OneStar and AmeriCorps Texas to learn how to plug into statewide disasters and support underserved communities in Texas. I have been left truly impressed as I watched SEWA not only start a new AmeriCorps program (a challenging feat in itself), but do so during the early days of 2020 as the COVID-19 pandemic was beginning to emerge. Even so, SEWA re-organized their model to meet the situation and was able to successfully launch their program while supporting COVID relief efforts across the state registering over 6,000 individuals for COVID vaccines, supplying more than 800 volunteers to support FEMA mega vaccine clinics, and distributing masks and PPE to more than 1 million individuals.

Having worked in the emergency management field for the last decade, I have interfaced with organizations of all types and affiliations. It is because of this experience that I can affirmatively tell you that SEWA International is exceptional. This is made evident by the multiple nominations of both individual volunteers as well as the organization for several categories of the Texas Governor's Volunteer Awards hosted by OneStar in 2022. As a member of the Texas VOAD Board of Directors and the Manager of Disaster Resilience for OneStar Foundation, it is my distinct pleasure to recommend SEWA International for membership to National Voluntary Organizations Active in Disaster (NVOAD)

Sincerely,

Taylor Wolter  
Manager Disaster Resilience  
OneStar Foundation