

## Interview

### Mr. Steve MacBeth, Chief Operating Officer for Team Rubicon Canada

*Editorial Note: the author is the Founder and Principal of the Canadian Journal of Emergency Management. This transcript has been edited for clarity and length, consistent with our standardized editorial process. Strict processes were followed to eliminate potential conflicts of interest in publishing this transcript.*

#### **Question (Simon Wells): What is the "elevator pitch" for Team Rubicon Canada?**

*Answer (Steve MacBeth):* Team Rubicon is a veteran-led humanitarian organization that serves global communities before, during, and after disasters and crises. During the 2016 wildfire in Fort McMurray, Alberta, a group of Canadian veterans sprung to action. Within days, over 80 volunteers from Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States deployed to bring “minds and muscle” to the disaster zone. Since 2016, Team Rubicon Canada (TRC) has utilized the expertise of military veterans, emergency responders, and skilled civilians to respond to over 100 missions globally. We serve two communities: those needing humanitarian services and our volunteer community. In humanitarian services, TRC scales nationally to respond locally. We can integrate with governments or operate independently. We provide incident management, debris removal, hazard mitigation, expedient home repair, spontaneous volunteer management, site management and logistical services. We seek to respond where the need is greatest and thrive in ambiguity and austerity.

Our veteran community benefits from a sense of community, a reinforcement of their identity and value of purpose once they leave the Canadian Armed Forces or the emergency services. Our organization provides them with a sense of purpose through training that spans EM skills and foundations to mental resilience training that assists in returning to civilian life. Operations and projects connect them with Canadian civil society, and recruiting, training, and readiness events build cohesion as they follow their personal humanitarian and volunteer journey.



**Figure 3:** Team Rubicon Canada and Canadian Armed Forces members together in response to Hurricane Fiona (Fall 2022).

**Question: Tell me about your volunteers – how do you recruit them? Are they all military veterans?**

*Answer:* Our volunteers come from all walks of Canadian society. I am constantly amazed by the diverse sets of Canadians that I meet in our teams. Yes, TRC is veteran-led and has its roots in the veteran community, but we are an inclusive organization. It's a mindset, not a qualification. We like to call our civilian volunteers "Kick-Ass Civilians". We recruit volunteers through word of mouth, deliberate community engagement, and various information channels. Once someone is interested, we benefit from a proprietary, world-class volunteer management system called Roll Call, in which Team Rubicon manages 160,000 volunteers globally. An individual has to go to [www.team-rubicon.ca](http://www.team-rubicon.ca), click on the "volunteer" button and through an automated system, will be enrolled and background checked. They can immediately begin online training and engage with the volunteer community. After passing the background check, they will be contacted by a regional volunteer leader, onboarded, and given an opportunity to earn their grey shirt.

**Question: "Disaster volunteers are first to arrive and last to leave". Does this statement apply to TRC?**

*Answer:* It does, and we must be careful to utilize our resources where they benefit most. We recognize that we may not have the scale of other organizations, so we seek to target our deployments where we can have the most effect. We have capabilities that span the continuum of response, recovery, and restoration of resilience, and volunteers that are motivated for each phase. In the Hurricane Fiona response operation, for example, scaling nationally brought volunteers from British Columbia, Alberta, and Ontario into Nova Scotia and Prince Edward Island, where some of our volunteers already resided. Volunteers who live in an affected community sometimes need 72 hours or more to recover from disaster. During Hurricane Fiona, we activated elements outside the disaster zone as soon as it approached landfall; we further showed agility by surging in resources while also accessing local knowledge through our local Greyshirts.



*Figure 4: With an estimated 36 hours until Hurricane Fiona makes landfall, a Team Rubicon Canada member loads equipment into a truck.*

**Question: Is your work request-based? When does your engagement with the community begin?**

*Answer:* We strive to build community relationships through our nationally-based volunteer network and targeted engagement with federal, provincial, and municipal emergency management (EM) organizations. This investment in relationships translates into the ability to communicate clearly and quickly when a crisis emerges. We never "self-deploy" and only activate when invited. But we can proactively approach communities or governments, just as we did with Nova Scotia's Emergency Management office before Hurricane Fiona, to offer our support. We've also contributed to Derecho wind storms, fire mitigation operations and other operations in the last six months alone, with all these engagements occurring in coordination with community leaders.

**Question: How does Team Rubicon Canada quickly assess disaster impacts so that you can determine what is needed? How do you mobilize capabilities and resources rapidly?**

*Answer:* Besides our nationally based volunteer pool, we use tools on the ESRI platform that allow us to share damage and hazard assessments in near real-time. We've also leveraged tools and products from our partners to help us collect data, assign tasks for different teams in the area of operations, and produce a common operating picture. Our skilled and trained reconnaissance teams specifically deploy to map disasters and create understanding. If technology fails, we can describe and report the situation accurately.

**Question: Even after immediate disaster response and recovery needs begin, disaster-affected communities are still overwhelmed. How and when does Team Rubicon Canada transition out of a community?**

*Answer:* Team Rubicon Canada works closely with the affected community and keeps the lines of communication open to ensure an understanding of our abilities and where we can continue to be of service. As a charity, we face the realities of limited resources, including people, equipment and finances. Communication allows us to achieve balance, and we seek every opportunity to continue to return to help and interact with the community. For example, we were initially deployed to Lytton, British Columbia, for 85 days before pausing, but then returned for further operations when we had capacity. We've also spent extended time in Prince Edward Island recently and throughout Eastern Ontario following the devastating Derecho wind storms.

**Question: How do you work with partners like law enforcement organizations or other non-profit organizations?**



*Figure 5: Before a morning briefing during the Hurricane Fiona response, with Team Rubicon*

*Answer:* We seek to integrate with all partners and to be an effective team in the field. We are a secular, non-political organization focused primarily on affected populations. We will work with anyone at any time to achieve the greater good. We have great relationships with police and fire services, especially since many of our members come from these backgrounds and can inter-operate with them. They inherently know the frictions that exist and how to navigate them. On a recent deployment, our volunteers included a fire chief from British Columbia, a Royal Canadian Mounted Police veteran from Alberta, a Toronto Police Service veteran, a deputy fire chief from Peterborough, and an inspector from the Ontario Provincial Police (in addition to other ex-military and fantastic civilian

volunteers). We have lots of depth and breadth of experience to liaise with the emergency services.

**Question: What is your top priority at Team Rubicon Canada for the next 1-3 years?**

*Answer:* To continue to pursue excellence in humanitarian services. To do that, we want to continue to align our systems and efforts with the Canadian humanitarian landscape and be a leader in the response phase of disasters and emergencies. We want to continue growing capacity and capabilities in demand during humanitarian crises and establish deep local ties that allow our national organization to enable locally. We are conscious of the National Adaptation Strategy and the Emergency Management Strategy for Canada and believe we are well positioned to assist Canada in facing the challenges in these documents. We agree that climate events will continue to increase in severity and frequency and that the Sendai Framework and whole-of-society response is the way forward.

**Interviewee biography**

Steve MacBeth was born in Moose Jaw, Saskatchewan, and joined the Canadian Armed Forces' primary reserve force in 1993. He transferred to the regular force in 1996 and completed his basic training before being posted to Winnipeg as a soldier in 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. After graduating from the Royal Military College in 2003, he joined the 1st Battalion, Royal Canadian Regiment as a rifle platoon Commander. In Steve's military career, he served in several roles including but not limited to: Commanding Officer NATO's enhanced Forward Presence Battle Group - Latvia, Chief of Operations of the Canadian Special Operations Regiment, and Chief of Staff 2 Canadian Mechanized Brigade Group. Steve has deployed on multiple overseas operations including but not limited to Bosnia, Afghanistan, and Latvia. Steve transitioned from the Canadian Armed Forces to the New Zealand Defence Force in 2019 where he served as deputy Commanding Officer of the Queen's Alexandra's Mounted Rifles as well as in various senior staff positions. Steve and his family chose to leave uniformed service in 2022 and returned to Canada, where he is now the Chief Operating Officer of Team Rubicon Canada. A veteran-led Disaster Relief organization. Steve holds an undergraduate and master's degree from the Royal Military College of Canada and is currently completing doctoral studies at Massey University, New Zealand.

**Interviewer Biography**

"Simon Wells is the Founder and Principal of the Canadian Journal of Emergency Management. He is a Certified Emergency Manager with experience in multiple roles with several levels of government. He proudly calls Scarborough, Ontario home."