



# Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy

COORDINATION OF VOLUNTEER EFFORT  
IN THE IMMEDIATE POST DISASTER STAGE



An Australian Government Initiative

The development of this strategy has been funded through the Australian Government's National Emergency Management Projects (NEMP) grant programme. Projects funded through NEMP enhance the nation's disaster resilience by supporting measures to strengthen communities, individuals, businesses and institutions to minimise adverse effects of disasters in Australia.

The Community Engagement Sub-Committee (CESC) of the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) was tasked to develop a strategy for the efficient and effective coordination of volunteer effort in the immediate post-disaster stage. The strategy has been developed by Leadbeater Group Pty Ltd in collaboration with a national project working group.

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# Executive Summary

In Australia, the work of emergency management volunteers is being augmented through an increasing trend toward informal or 'spontaneous' volunteerism. In all jurisdictions there are examples of individuals and groups who are motivated, often as a result of traditional and social media coverage, to assist disaster-impacted communities. These spontaneous volunteers can contribute a wide range of skills and experience to the work of the emergency management sector. They may come from within the impacted community, including those who have been personally affected, or they may travel to the disaster area from elsewhere. Many more 'potential' spontaneous volunteers will contact recovery agencies to offer their assistance, and can number in the tens of thousands in the case of large-scale events.

Spontaneous volunteerism can provide the surge capacity that is critical in the disaster clean-up phase. However, it can also represent significant challenges for emergency managers and the community. Offers of assistance can overwhelm relief and recovery agencies, while the work of coordinating and managing volunteers can detract from the critical work of assisting the affected population.

*The Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: coordination of volunteer effort in the immediate post disaster stage* (the strategy) has been developed to recognise the inevitability of spontaneous volunteerism in contemporary disaster management and to help harness its value and contribution to disaster resilience. It is based on a set of principles adapted from the Commonwealth Government's *Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit (2010)* and includes policy considerations and suggested actions as a guide for jurisdictions and emergency management agencies in the effective engagement, coordination and management of spontaneous volunteers.

The strategy examines definitions of volunteerism and the motivations of spontaneous volunteers. It explores barriers to engagement, including emergency management culture, risk and liability and access to funding and resources, and highlights the implications for government of these issues. The project also included a review of jurisdictional programs and arrangements for coordinating spontaneous volunteers together with brief case studies of Queensland's Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) program, Victoria's Managers of Spontaneous Emergency Volunteers (MSEV) program and the response by South Australia's State Recovery Office and Volunteering SA&NT to the 2015 Sampson Flat bushfires.

The strategy draws upon and acknowledges a major research project currently being undertaken by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Collaborative Research Centre (BNHCRC). The three-year, '*Out of Uniform: building community resilience through non-traditional emergency volunteering*' project is due for completion in 2017. It will provide a comprehensive and unprecedented examination of issues surrounding the support and integration of spontaneous volunteerism in the Australian emergency management sector.

# Overview of Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy

Figure 1 provides an overview of the goal, objectives and principles that comprise the Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy together with a summary of the suggested actions for jurisdictions and emergency management agencies. Please see page 18 for further details and policy considerations.

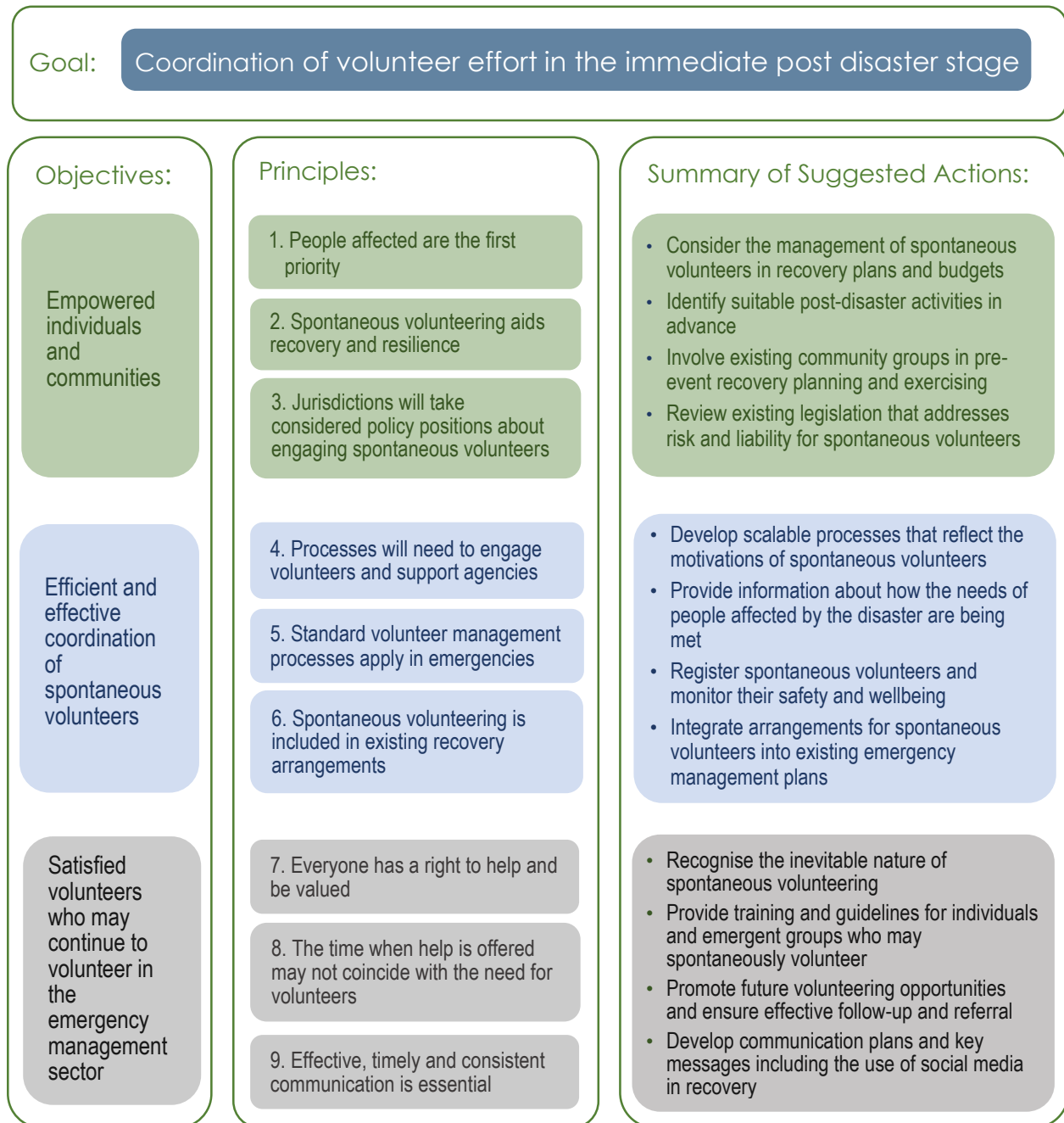


Figure 1. Overview of Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy goals, objectives, principles and suggested actions

## Introduction

The number of volunteers who regularly contribute their time and skills as members of emergency management agencies in Australia has been estimated at more than 500,000.<sup>1</sup> This substantial volunteer workforce is engaged in a wide range of activities relating to disaster preparedness, mitigation, response and recovery and its vital work benefits urban, regional, rural and remote communities across the country.

Increasingly, this workforce is augmented by a growing number of informal or 'spontaneous' volunteers who are motivated, often as a result of coverage in traditional and social media, to assist impacted individuals and communities in the aftermath of disaster. Large-scale emergencies have seen significant numbers of people travelling to affected areas, or connecting with recovery agencies to offer their help. Examples of this trend include the aftermath of the 2009 'Black Saturday' bushfires in Victoria which saw approximately 22,000 spontaneous volunteers offer their assistance,<sup>2</sup> or the 23,000-strong 'Mud Army' who registered to help following the 2011 Brisbane Floods.<sup>3</sup>

Social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter are also having a major impact on spontaneous volunteerism as seen in the aftermath of the Canterbury earthquakes in 2010 and 2011, and more recently, during the 2013 Tasmanian bushfires. In the example of the Student Volunteer Army in Christchurch, social media was used to mobilise student volunteers who delivered 75,000 volunteer hours, clearing 360,000 tonnes of liquefaction as part of the clean-up work.<sup>4</sup> The 'Tassie Fires – We Can Help' Facebook page was spontaneously established in January 2013 to link those needing assistance with offers of support. It saw '241,034 people click on page content in its first 18 days of operation.'<sup>5</sup>

Spontaneous volunteers come from all walks of life and contribute a wide range of skills and experience to the work of the emergency management sector. Unprompted offers of assistance can come from people living or working within impacted communities, including people who have been personally affected by the disaster, people seeking to volunteer remotely from the area such as in nearby towns or cities, as well as those who travel to the disaster area from elsewhere. Some may volunteer for short periods – a few hours or perhaps a day, while others will still be actively involved in recovery efforts many months after the initial impact.

Contemporary research identifies the value and importance of spontaneous volunteering both in terms of the therapeutic effects for people directly and indirectly affected by a disaster, and the opportunity to translate emergent volunteer responses to more sustained civic engagement and/or 'formalised' volunteering.<sup>6</sup> It is important that the likelihood and impact of spontaneous volunteerism is recognised and planned for by

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<sup>1</sup> National Emergency Management Volunteer Action Plan, 2012

<sup>2</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, 2010

<sup>3</sup> Rather, F., in Lindquist, et al, 2013

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.sva.org.nz>

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.tassiefireswecanhelp.com/numbers>

<sup>6</sup> Barraket et al, 2013; Whittaker et al, 2015

emergency management agencies, acknowledging that offers of assistance can be productive, but can also overwhelm agencies working to support those affected by emergencies.<sup>7</sup>

This strategy has been developed in recognition of the inevitability of spontaneous volunteerism in contemporary disaster management and to reflect the value such activity represents in relation to the nation's commitment to disaster resilience. It is not intended to mandate a prescribed jurisdictional approach, but rather, to provide broad guidance on what should be taken into account when considering the coordination and management of spontaneous volunteers.

In developing the strategy, a range of sources has been drawn upon. In particular, the *Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit* produced by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Australian Red Cross in 2010; and, a major research project currently being undertaken by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Collaborative Research Centre (BNHCRC). The three-year project, '*Out of Uniform: building community resilience through non-traditional emergency volunteering*' notes:

*Despite highly specialised and capable emergency management systems, members of the public are usually first on the scene in an emergency or disaster and remain long after official services have ceased. Citizens may play vital roles in helping those affected to respond and recover, and can provide invaluable assistance to official agencies.*

*Citizen participation is a key principle of disaster risk reduction and resilience building.*

*However, emergency management relies largely on a workforce of professionals and, to varying degrees, volunteers affiliated with official agencies. Individuals and groups working outside of this system have often been seen as a nuisance or liability, and their efforts are largely undervalued.*

*Given increasing disaster risk worldwide due to population growth, urban development and climate change, it is likely that 'informal' volunteers will provide much of the surge capacity required to respond to more frequent emergencies and disasters in the future.<sup>8</sup>*

The '*Out of Uniform*' project, due for completion in 2017, will provide an important and comprehensive resource to benchmark best practice in supporting and integrating spontaneous volunteerism in the Australian emergency management sector. The scope and relevance of the project will, at its completion, provide a valuable framework of knowledge against which this Strategy and the *Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit* should be reviewed.

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<sup>7</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, 2010

<sup>8</sup> Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 2015

## Objective

The objective of the *Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of Volunteer Effort in the Immediate Post-Disaster Stage* is:

- The efficient and effective coordination of spontaneous volunteers in the immediate post-disaster phase of an emergency
- To contribute to empowered individuals and communities
- Satisfied volunteers who may continue to volunteer in the emergency management sector.

## Background

The Community Engagement Sub-Committee (CESC) of the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) has been tasked to review existing programs and develop a strategy for the efficient and effective coordination of spontaneous volunteer effort in the immediate clean up stage post disaster (the *Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy*). The Strategy examines a range of principles pertaining to spontaneous volunteerism and identifies policy considerations and recommended actions in relation to those principles, including the identification, facilitation, and coordination of community resources, and the efforts of both emergent groups and individual spontaneous volunteers.

The Strategy references the Commonwealth Government's *Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit (2010)* and its development has included a summary of jurisdictional programs for coordinating volunteer effort post disaster together with case studies of jurisdictional initiatives related to spontaneous volunteers. The *Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy* provides an outline of government's responsibilities in relation to spontaneous volunteers. It does not address existing agency volunteers, its specific focus being spontaneous volunteerism in the immediate post-disaster stage.

## National Strategy for Disaster Resilience

The National Strategy for Disaster Resilience,<sup>9</sup> which was adopted by the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) in February 2011, recognises that a national, coordinated and cooperative effort is needed to enhance Australia's capacity to prepare for, withstand and recover from disasters. It identifies disaster resilience as a shared responsibility for individuals, households, businesses, communities and governments, and its purpose is to provide high-level guidance on disaster management to federal, state, territory and local governments, business and community leaders and the not-for-profit sector.

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<sup>9</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, 2011



Priority Action 3.7 of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience focuses on supporting capabilities for disaster resilience. It calls for 'greater flexibility and adaptability within our emergency services agencies and communities to increase our capacity to deal with disasters.' In relation to spontaneous volunteerism, the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience has a priority outcome requiring that:

- Recovery strategies recognise the assistance the community is likely to provide in the immediate recovery phase, and allow for the identification, facilitation and coordination of community resources.

## National Principles for Disaster Recovery

In spite of the inherent challenges, disaster recovery can provide an opportunity to improve local conditions by enhancing social and natural environments, infrastructure and economies, thereby contributing to a more resilient community. The National Principles for Disaster Recovery<sup>10</sup> identify that successful recovery relies on:

- Understanding the community context
- Recognising the complex and dynamic nature of emergencies and communities
- Using community-led approaches that are responsive, flexible, engaging communities and empowering them to move forward
- A planned, coordinated and adaptive approach based on continuing assessment of impacts and needs
- Effective communication with affected communities and other stakeholders
- Recognising, supporting and building on community, individual and organisational capacity.

These principles have particular relevance for spontaneous volunteerism as they establish the importance of assessing gaps between existing and required capability and capacity, and support the development of self-reliance. They incorporate the need to quickly identify and mobilise community skills and resources, acknowledging that existing resources will be stretched, and that additional resources required may be provided by a range of stakeholders and may only be available for a limited period. The principles identify that successful recovery should provide opportunities to share, transfer and develop knowledge, skills and training, both in planning for and recovering from disasters.

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<sup>10</sup> Community Recovery Handbook 2, Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p. 21-25

## Definitions of Spontaneous Volunteerism

According to the definition provided by Emergency Management Australia (EMA), a 'volunteer emergency worker' is a person 'who engages in emergency activity at the request (whether directly or indirectly) or with the express or implied consent of the chief executive (however designated), or of a person acting with the authority of the chief executive, of an agency to which either the State emergency response or recovery plan applies.'<sup>11</sup> Traditionally, this definition has applied to volunteers who are formally affiliated with an emergency service organisation, and who act under the respective organisation's direction and authority.

Definitions of 'unofficial', 'unaffiliated', 'informal' or 'spontaneous' volunteers in relation to disaster recovery are widely acknowledged in research literature, with 'potential spontaneous volunteers'<sup>12</sup> described in the Commonwealth Government's *Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit* as:

...individuals or groups of people who seek or are invited to contribute their assistance during and/or after an event, and who are unaffiliated with any part of the existing official emergency management response and recovery system and may or may not have relevant training, skills or experience.<sup>13</sup>

The *Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit* also identifies 'casual volunteers' as individuals or groups of people who undergo checks and training in advance of an emergency, but remain otherwise unaffiliated with any part of the existing official emergency response and recovery system.<sup>14</sup>

This definition is further classified into three sub-groups of spontaneous volunteers:

*Professional*: skilled and trained but previously unaffiliated – usually from outside the disaster area

*Spontaneous within affected area*: usually motivated by community ownership – unaffiliated and may be unskilled and/or untrained

*Spontaneous out of area*: converging on the scene from outside the community – unaffiliated and may be unskilled and/or untrained.<sup>15</sup>

In addition to the response of individuals to disaster, the response of organisations has been usefully defined as a four-part typology<sup>16</sup> based on 'tasks' undertaken in the recovery setting (regular and non-regular) and the 'structure' of organisations (old and new). The four types of organisational response to disaster are:

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<sup>11</sup> Emergency Management Australia, 1998

<sup>12</sup> This definition describes those who ring or register to help as 'potential' spontaneous volunteers, who only become spontaneous volunteers once they have undergone the relevant induction and checks for the role they will undertake. In this sense, the definition is limited as some volunteers will not, at any stage, be affiliated in any formal sense, but may still undertake a role as a volunteer.

<sup>13</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, p. 5

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 6

<sup>15</sup> Ibid. p. 6

<sup>16</sup> Whittaker et al, 2015, citing Dynes (1970) p. 5

*Type I – Established* organisations performing routine tasks through existing structures (such as emergency services undertaking response activities)

*Type II – Expanding* organisations whose routine activities are non-emergency related, but who undertake these activities through new structures in response to emergencies (for example, social welfare organisations that expand their activities to disaster relief)

*Type III – Extending* organisations with established structures who undertake new and unexpected activities in response to disaster (such as sporting clubs or local businesses that mobilise to assist the relief and recovery effort)

*Type IV – Emergent* organisations which are groups with new structures and tasks, often forming during or immediately after the emergency in response to unmet needs, or the perception of needs not being met by existing organisations.

Increasingly, volunteerism is experiencing a shift away from the model of long-term commitment to one particular group or organisation to more informal, episodic patterns of engagement. This is likely to result in more volunteers seeking to help with time-limited activities such as post-disaster clean-up, either as individuals or as part of emergent groups, in preference to more traditional ongoing volunteer roles. This change represents an opportunity for jurisdictions and emergency management agencies to reframe their approach to volunteering to more effectively engage with spontaneous and casual volunteers.

**For government:** The definition and categories of spontaneous volunteers and groups is important in recognising the assistance the community is likely to provide in the immediate recovery phase. From a coordination and management perspective, volunteers who are 'spontaneous, out of area' and/or members of 'emergent groups' are likely to be a key focus for jurisdictions and recovery agencies. Volunteers in these categories may not have local knowledge of, or connections within the affected community, or any experience of the complexities of the post-disaster phase.

A key strength of emergent groups is their ability to quickly and successfully mobilise local resources and capacity. However, they are unlikely, at least initially, to have any formal structure through which to coordinate their contribution and activities. Their efforts may be at cross-purposes with more formalised recovery arrangements and their areas of focus may not align with those prioritised through strategic recovery plans.

Establishing codes of conduct and ensuring effective induction training for volunteers are examples of strategies used by some emergent groups responding in the post-disaster phase. The development by jurisdictions of guidelines that identify and encourage good governance and observance of legislation would provide valuable support to emergent groups in their critical establishment phase and assist their integration with existing recovery arrangements.

## Motivation of Spontaneous Volunteers

The actions of citizens who converge on disaster sites to provide assistance and to form emergent groups to address local needs are, according to a significant body of research dating back to the 1950s,<sup>17</sup> an inevitable and well-established aspect of recovery. Barraket, et al. note that 'individuals with an existing predisposition for volunteering their services and time will find ways to participate' and further, that such actions play 'an important psycho-social role in individual and collective resilience during and after natural disaster.'<sup>18</sup>

Researchers have identified as many as seven categories of spontaneous volunteers distinguished by their motivations, including returnees – victims or survivors of the incident; the anxious – those seeking empowerment through action; helpers – people who are altruistically motivated; the curious – 'disaster tourists'; exploiters – those seeking recognition or gain or to exert power; supporters – encouraging and expressing gratitude to emergency workers; and mourners and memorialisers.<sup>19</sup>

In the context of the immediate post-disaster phase of a disaster, it is useful to note the various 'prompts to volunteer' identified in research following the Queensland storms in 2008 and the Victorian bushfires in 2009. A survey of 255 spontaneous volunteers conducted by the Centre for Disaster Studies at James Cook University<sup>20</sup>, identified that:

- Media coverage was the main prompt for people to volunteer with 81.2% ranking it as very important or important, followed by 'talking with other people about the event' which was identified by 61.7% of respondents.
- Three-quarters of respondents offered their help within a week of the event.
- 91.3% of respondents identified the event itself as important or very important in their decision to volunteer, while nearly all respondents (97.9%) agreed that 'feeling the need to do something for those who needed help' was important or very important.
- Most respondents (61.7%) were prepared to do anything and more than half (55.4%) reported that what they wanted to do was related to their qualifications or work experience.
- Importantly, almost two-thirds (65.2%) of respondents to the survey reported that their volunteering offers had not been used at all.

Aside from the loss of additional capacity and experience, failure to effectively engage spontaneous volunteers can pose an inherent risk to reputation for governments and emergency management agencies. Research shows that while some volunteers will retain a positive approach in the face of their offers of assistance not being

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<sup>17</sup> McLennan, et al, 2015, p. 17

<sup>18</sup> Barraket, et al, 2013, p. 3

<sup>19</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, 2010, p. 7; Whittaker et al, 2015, p. 5

<sup>20</sup> Cottrell, A., 2010, p. 4-16

acknowledged or utilised, others can feel let down and disappointed by their experience, and even disinclined to volunteer in future:

*I felt I could have been useful in a number of ways...I did understand the chaos of the situation and the organisational problems posed by hundreds of volunteers; however, I thought it inappropriate that "volunteers" were requested and given a site to register but then knocked back with no interest being shown in offers to help "in any way at all". How do I feel about it now? Wondering if there is any use in volunteering at all.'*<sup>21</sup>

**For government:** Changes in patterns of volunteerism mean that the surge capacity needed in the immediate post-disaster phase of a disaster is increasingly likely to come from spontaneous rather than traditional volunteers.<sup>22</sup> McLennan, et al. observe that 'the future landscape of emergency volunteering is going to be populated by a much wider and more diverse range of players than in the past'.

It is important to note that while positive experiences for spontaneous volunteers may translate to continued future engagement, negative experiences may diminish the degree of support available in future and can represent a risk to organisations in terms of reputation and ongoing viability. Emergency management agencies may need support to recognise, understand and manage volunteer motivations and expectations, to proactively plan for scenarios that are likely to result in large numbers of spontaneous volunteers, and to develop more diverse and flexible opportunities that facilitate episodic volunteering.

## Barriers to Engaging Spontaneous Volunteers

Emergency management agencies and the communities they serve face a range of challenges in relation to the engagement and integration of spontaneous volunteers in the recovery phase of a disaster. The extent to which informal or unaffiliated volunteers are able to contribute to recovery is influenced by a number of factors which are represented here under three key themes of 'emergency management culture', 'risk and liability' and 'funding and resources'.

### Emergency management culture

The culture of emergency management and disaster recovery in Australia is traditionally prescribed by the command and control structure of emergency management agencies. Command and control approaches are underpinned by a range of assumptions identified through research<sup>23</sup> that can run counter to the nature of spontaneous volunteerism, namely that:

- Bureaucratic or government response occurs alone or in a vacuum
- Information outside of official channels is lacking or inaccurate

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<sup>21</sup> Ibid. p. 17

<sup>22</sup> McLennan et al. 2015

<sup>23</sup> Whittaker et al. 2015, citing Drabek and McEntire, (2003)

- Standard operating procedures will always function and be adequate in disaster situations
- Departures from bureaucratic guidelines may be detrimental
- Pre-disaster social structure is weak and disjointed
- Citizens are inept, passive or non-participants in disaster operations
- Emergency events depart sharply from pre-disaster behaviour
- Society breaks down during disaster
- Disaster is characterised by irrational victim behaviour such as panic or looting
- Ad hoc emergence is counterproductive.

Disaster research challenges many of these assumptions and argues in favour of 'loosening rather than tightening up the command structure' through a 'problem-solving' model based on a more realistic set of assumptions:<sup>24</sup>

- Emergencies may create some degree of confusion and disorganisation at the level of routine organisational patterns but to describe that as social chaos is incorrect.
- Emergencies do not reduce the capacities of individuals or social structures to cope. They may present new and unexpected problems to solve.
- Existing social structure is the most effective way to solve those problems. To create an artificial, emergency-specific authority structure is neither possible nor effective.
- Planning efforts should be built around capacity of social units to make rational and informed decisions. These social units need to be seen as resources for problem solving, rather than as the problems themselves.
- An emergency by its very nature is characterised by decentralised and pluralistic decision making, so autonomy of decision making should be valued, rather than the centralisation of authority.
- An open system is required in which a premium is placed on flexibility and initiative among the various social units, and those efforts are coordinated. The goals should be oriented towards problem solving, rather than avoiding chaos.

This problem-solving approach reflects and aligns with the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience and the National Principles for Disaster Recovery. However it represents a significant paradigm shift for traditional emergency management arrangements. New challenges emerge for jurisdictions and for agencies who must not only manage the disaster and recovery, but are increasingly required to identify roles and integrate the actions of spontaneous volunteers as part of the healing process and in the interest of community resilience.<sup>25</sup>

**For government:** Effective engagement of spontaneous volunteers is an opportunity to operationalise the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience by supporting the capacity of communities to be self-reliant. New, collaborative approaches will be needed that support the rights of individuals and groups to offer their assistance, and that recognise

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<sup>24</sup> Whittaker et al. 2015, citing Quarantelli (1988) and Dynes (1994)

<sup>25</sup> Barraket et al. 2013, p. 13

spontaneous volunteerism as a fundamental resource, rather than as a problem to be managed.

## Risk and liability

Considerable uncertainty surrounds the issue of liability in relation to spontaneous volunteerism, which in turn, presents as a significant barrier to the engagement and integration of spontaneous volunteers. Legislation has been introduced in a number of Australian States to limit the liability of 'Good Samaritans' and those who volunteer with community organisations. However the legislation is generally intended to apply in cases of medical emergency where life is threatened, and does not apply to those who act to protect property. Furthermore, the various Acts intend to protect volunteers from personal liability, but organisations for which they are volunteering may still be liable.<sup>26</sup>

The National Emergency Management Volunteer Action Plan 2012 (NEMVAP)<sup>27</sup> has, as a Recommended Action, a national review to identify any legal issues that may inhibit the attraction and retention of emergency management volunteers and the development of a national strategy to address those issues, including a communication strategy. In response to this action, information provided to the ANZEMC CESC in August 2013 identifies potential barriers to volunteering relating to Work Health and Safety Legislation; Legal Liability; Insurance – Personal Accident/Public Liability; Loss of Income/Entitlements; Workers Compensation; and, Police Checks/Working with Children Checks. However, the review dealt with barriers for volunteers defined as 'emergency management workers' under the various jurisdictional emergency management acts. The implications for 'spontaneous/self-activating volunteers, not specifically assisting a statutory service under the Act'<sup>28</sup> is unclear.

This perennial challenge is not confined to local jurisdictions. Research from the United States<sup>29</sup> cites differences in liability policies that vary from state to state, confusing and complicated legal language and uneven coverage of volunteers by other institutions or affiliations, the difficulty of covering unaffiliated volunteers, and the need for emergency managers to balance risk and liability against the benefit of having helpful volunteers.

**For government:** The risks associated with informal or 'casual' volunteering can be reduced by ensuring, wherever possible, that volunteers are registered, trained, briefed, credentialed, assigned appropriate tasks and supervised.<sup>30</sup> This is occurring in a number of jurisdictions through various volunteer registers and programs. However, the issue remains in instances where volunteers do not identify before a disaster or where volunteerism is emergent after the event. A national review of this area of legislation is needed to effectively support the utilisation of spontaneous volunteers and the implementation of the National Strategy for Disaster Resilience.

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<sup>26</sup> Whittaker, et al. 2015, citing Eburn (2003)

<sup>27</sup> Commonwealth of Australia, 2012, p. 23

<sup>28</sup> Community Engagement Sub Committee (CESC) Agenda Item 9, 5-6 August 2013

<sup>29</sup> Orloff, L. 2013

<sup>30</sup> Whittaker et al. 2015, citing Sauer et al.,(2014)

## Funding and resources

Coordinating spontaneous volunteers in the post-disaster phase of a disaster will require funding and resources if it is to be managed effectively. This can act as a barrier to their engagement, particularly if the issue is not considered until after the disaster occurs. A number of jurisdictions are proactively investing in programs that recruit and 'pre-register' potential volunteers in partnership with their respective volunteer sectors. In other instances, the management of spontaneous volunteers is incorporated as part of the overall cost of disaster recovery and may be funded through grants, or as a reimbursement of costs through National Disaster Relief and Recovery Arrangements.

Depending on the scale and impact of the event, many communities will spontaneously undertake their own recovery supported by a range of partnerships between government agencies, non-government organisations and the private sector.<sup>31</sup> Increasingly, corporate, non-government and faith-based organisations and public-private partnerships are playing a vital role in supporting and resourcing community recovery. As noted in the Commonwealth Government's *Community Recovery Handbook 2*, disaster recovery is often supported by the private sector who are embedded in the affected community. 'Electricity providers, insurance companies, banking sector, telecommunications, private media, retail outlets, private health providers, private education providers and major employers'<sup>32</sup> can all play an integral role in disaster recovery through the provision of funds and materials, and/or the in-kind assistance of staff who may, for example, be supported to spontaneously volunteer their time as part of a corporate social responsibility program.

In addition to considering this issue at a 'whole of community' level, the subject of funding also needs to be understood from the position of the individual spontaneous volunteer and of expanding, extending and emergent groups. Loss of income, out of pocket expenses, the availability of funds to purchase or increase public liability insurance, or to provide personal accident cover all add inexorably to the complex question of 'who pays?'

**For government:** According to Australian Bureau of Statistics data, 5.8 million people in Australia contributed 743 million hours to the community in 2014.<sup>33</sup> However, little is known about how many of those people would be categorised as spontaneous volunteers, and what the economic value of their contribution to disaster recovery would have been. It is also difficult to determine the value of investing in pre-event registration programs in the absence of a comprehensive cost/benefit analysis, particularly where 'benefit' also reflects improved social capital and increased resilience. An evaluation of the value of spontaneous volunteerism in the post-disaster phase of disasters would provide a legitimate basis upon which to assess future investment.

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<sup>31</sup> *Community Recovery Handbook 2*, Commonwealth of Australia, 2011

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>33</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015



## Summary

The capacity and contribution of spontaneous volunteers and of expanding, extending and emergent groups in the immediate aftermath of a disaster can be significant. Proximity and access to the disaster site can facilitate the actions of individuals and groups as first responders. Immediate post impact actions include assessing the effect of the disaster, undertaking search and rescue activities and providing first aid and relief to those directly impacted. Local knowledge, skills and experience, together with links into local community networks can support improvisation and innovative solutions as well as providing the required surge capacity needed to address large scale post-disaster activities. Spontaneous volunteers can be highly skilled and may have the trust of the affected community, as well as access to locally available resources, which can aid community recovery and help to build resilience.

However, spontaneous volunteerism can also represent significant challenges for emergency managers and the impacted community. Offers of assistance can overwhelm response and recovery agencies, while the work of coordinating and managing volunteers can detract from the critical work of assisting the affected population. Emergent groups may have unrealistic expectations of formal recovery arrangements or be unaware of the 'bigger picture' which can lead to misconceptions or duplication of effort. Skills, qualifications and experience can be difficult to verify, those intent on exploitation can misrepresent their motives, and untrained or inexperienced volunteers can pose a risk to themselves and others in a disaster environment.

Robust policies and procedures should be developed, in advance where possible, to support decisions by jurisdictions about whether or not they will actively engage and seek to utilise spontaneous volunteers in post disaster operations. Such decisions will depend on a range of factors, including (but not limited to) the scale and degree of impact of the event, the needs and capacity of affected communities, ongoing risks to health and safety, and the ability to resource relief and recovery activities.

Australian jurisdictions employ a range of approaches in the management of spontaneous volunteers in the post-disaster period. Appendix 1 outlines three examples of programs currently being used: The first, from South Australia, explores the response to the 2015 Sampson Flat bushfires and the arrangements in place between the SA State Recovery Office and Volunteering SA&NT to connect offers of help with those needing assistance. The second details Volunteering Victoria's *Managers of Spontaneous Emergency Volunteers (MSEV) Program* which aims to assist local governments through the provision of surge capacity to help manage spontaneous volunteers in the relief and recovery period. The third is Volunteering Queensland's *Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) model*, focusing on the pre-registration, training and coordination of volunteers. While they are quite different in their approach, these models all share a substantial focus on the relationships between emergency management stakeholders and considerable pre-planning to ensure their effectiveness in times of disaster.

In an effort to better understand the value, benefits and implications of spontaneous volunteering and the different approaches being taken by Australian jurisdictions, an evaluation and comprehensive cost/benefit analysis of the various models currently in use would be of value. This knowledge, together with a thorough review of legislation pertaining to liability and risk for individuals and organisations would help to challenge negative perceptions about spontaneous volunteerism and to support its integration into the recovery landscape.

It is important to note that, irrespective of any formal policy position or strategy, previous history and contemporary experience clearly demonstrate that community members will spontaneously volunteer in the aftermath of disaster. Policies and processes will be needed, whether or not jurisdictions and emergency management agencies decide to engage spontaneous volunteers in the post-disaster phase. The following principles, policy considerations and recommended actions are provided to help inform the development or review of locally-relevant plans, policies and guidelines for the effective management of spontaneous volunteers.

# Principles, policy considerations and suggested actions for managing spontaneous volunteers

The following principles have been adapted from the *Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit (2010)* to assist in the management of spontaneous volunteers in the immediate post-disaster stage. The policy considerations and suggested actions are offered as a guide for jurisdictions and emergency management agencies on issues which may require specific consultation, planning and policy development. They can also serve as a checklist to review policies already in place. Also provided are references to existing resources that may assist in planning for the management of spontaneous volunteers.

Principle 1	Policy Considerations	Suggested Actions
<p><i>The people affected by an emergency are the first priority</i></p>	<p>Volunteer efforts that do not align with the needs of affected people, or that are provided at inappropriate times can exacerbate the impact of the disaster and delay recovery.</p> <p>Engaging spontaneous volunteers through a coordinated and pre-planned approach can afford a degree of protection for those impacted, who may otherwise be overwhelmed by offers of assistance.</p> <p>Strategies such as confining disaster clean-up activities undertaken by spontaneous volunteers to roads and public areas, in the first instance, will help to protect affected individuals and households and allow them to engage with assistance at a time that is appropriate for them.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively establish processes to channel the efforts of spontaneous volunteers and to prevent those efforts from impacting negatively on people affected by the disaster.</li> <li>• Include the management of spontaneous volunteers in recovery plans and budgets to ensure appropriate resourcing is available.</li> <li>• Identify, in advance, the range of specific activities suitable to be undertaken by spontaneous volunteers, with an initial focus on roads and public areas.</li> </ul> <p><i>See Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit – Effective Management of Spontaneous Volunteers, p. 13</i></p>

Principle 2	Policy Considerations	Suggested Actions
<p><i>Spontaneous volunteering is valuable and aids community recovery and resilience</i></p>	<p>Spontaneous volunteers can provide the skills and surge capacity needed to support community recovery following a disaster.</p> <p>Community-led approaches to recovery, where community members are active contributors, deliver more effective and sustainable outcomes and can contribute to future preparedness and disaster resilience.</p> <p>A decline in 'traditional' volunteering is expected to result in an increase in informal, spontaneous volunteers. This represents both an opportunity and a challenge for agencies to identify, in advance, suitable volunteering activities for unaffiliated volunteers.</p> <p>Positive experiences for spontaneous volunteers may encourage ongoing volunteerism in the emergency management sector.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Acknowledge the role of community members as key contributors to disaster recovery and provide structures and resources to support, integrate and coordinate spontaneous recovery efforts within affected communities.</li> <li>• Consider involving existing community groups in pre-event recovery planning and exercising.</li> <li>• Identify opportunities for individuals and emergent groups to contribute during the post disaster phase.</li> <li>• Emergency managers should minimise restrictions on access to disaster-affected areas unless there are genuine and compelling risks that need to be managed.</li> </ul> <p><i>See Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit – Effective Management of Spontaneous Volunteers. p. 13</i></p> <p><i>See also Community Recovery Handbook 2, Commonwealth of Australia, 2011, p. 21, 26</i></p>

Principle 3	Policy Considerations	Suggested Actions
<p><i>Jurisdictions and agencies will take considered policy positions on whether they will engage spontaneous volunteers</i></p>	<p>Jurisdictions and/or emergency management agencies may determine not to encourage spontaneous volunteers, particularly where it is deemed that existing recovery resources are sufficient, or in cases where there is ongoing risk to safety as a result of the disaster.</p> <p>Clear, consistent communication of policy positions, context and justification will be needed to encourage adherence and address community and volunteer expectations.</p> <p>Decisions by jurisdictions and/or agencies not to engage spontaneous volunteers may have little bearing on the actions of those wanting to help.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Establish processes to record, assess, and allocate or decline offers of assistance.</li> <li>• Identify sufficient resourcing to ensure scalability and continuity of service, particularly in large-scale disasters.</li> <li>• Develop plans for effective communication and the channelling of interest to alternative volunteering opportunities, if required.</li> <li>• Recognise that any decision not to encourage spontaneous volunteerism <i>does not</i> mean it will not occur.</li> </ul> <p><i>See Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit – Operational Implementation, p. 7</i></p>

Principle 4	Policy Considerations	Suggested Actions
<p><i>Processes are needed to effectively engage spontaneous volunteers and to avoid agencies being overwhelmed with offers of support</i></p>	<p>Spontaneous volunteerism is influenced by the size, scale and type of disaster event, the degree of disruption to the lives of those affected, the number of fatalities and injuries, geographic location, and the nature and volume of media coverage.</p> <p>A failure by recovery agencies to meet the needs of the disaster-impacted community, whether perceived or actual, is likely to drive the actions of spontaneous volunteers, particularly through emergent groups. This, in turn, can result in further pressure on recovery agencies to manage duplication of effort or inappropriate activities.</p> <p>Timely, effective communication is critical in managing spontaneous volunteerism including, where appropriate, suggestions for alternative opportunities to assist impacted individuals and communities.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop processes that are scalable in relation to the anticipated volume of spontaneous volunteerism, and that engage with factors likely to motivate individuals and groups to volunteer.</li> <li>• Provide regular, timely information about actions being taken to meet the needs of those impacted by the disaster.</li> <li>• Where spontaneous volunteers are being engaged, provide specific information about volunteering opportunities and how their work will contribute to community recovery.</li> </ul> <p><i>See Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit – Draft Framework, p.4-5, and Draft Communication Strategy, p. 2-3</i></p>

Principle 5	Policy Considerations	Suggested Actions
<p><i>Standard volunteer management processes apply in times of emergency</i></p>	<p>Policies for the management of spontaneous volunteers must consider volunteer safety and wellbeing, including induction, risk management, workplace health and safety, fatigue management, post-event debriefing and psycho-social support.</p> <p>Wherever practicable, professional qualifications and the requirement for authorisations, such as police checks, working with children checks, etc., must be observed and verified.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Implement processes to monitor the safety and wellbeing of spontaneous volunteers during and after the volunteering period.</li> <li>• Ensure registration processes for spontaneous volunteers include the recording and verifying of professional qualifications and authorisations.</li> </ul> <p><i>See Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit – Draft Framework, p. 5</i></p> <p><i>See also, National Standards for Volunteer Involvement 2015, Volunteering Australia at <a href="http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/2015/03/national-standards-for-volunteer-involvement/">http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/2015/03/national-standards-for-volunteer-involvement/</a></i></p>

Principle 6	Policy Considerations	Suggested Actions
<p><i>Arrangements for managing spontaneous volunteers should be embedded within existing emergency management plans and operating guidelines</i></p>	<p>Spontaneous volunteers are a valuable resource, particularly when they are trained, assigned, and supervised within established emergency management systems.<sup>34</sup></p> <p>An essential element of every emergency management plan is the clear designation of responsibility for coordination and management of spontaneous volunteers.<sup>35</sup></p> <p>Indemnity for accidents, injuries and public liability represents a complex challenge in relation to spontaneous volunteerism.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Investigate the establishment of organisational sub-plans for spontaneous volunteers that form part of existing emergency management plans at all levels.</li> <li>• Consider the development of a 'spontaneous volunteer coordinator' role to oversee communication, referrals, screening, induction and rostering of spontaneous volunteers.</li> <li>• Review existing jurisdictional legislation that addresses risk and liability for spontaneous volunteerism to ensure that both volunteers and the organisations and agencies that engage them are protected.</li> </ul> <p><i>See Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit – Draft Framework, p. 4, and Effective Management of Spontaneous Volunteers, p.15-17</i></p> <p><i>See also National Emergency Management Volunteer Action Plan, 2012 – Commonwealth Government, April 2012, p. 23</i></p>

<sup>34</sup> National Voluntary Organisations Active in Disaster (NVOAD), Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in times of Disaster, p. 4

<sup>35</sup> Ibid. p. 4



Principle 7	Policy Considerations	Suggested Actions
<p><i>Everyone has a right to offer their assistance and to feel that their offer has been valued</i></p>	<p>Spontaneous volunteerism is a fundamental and inevitable part of disaster recovery.</p> <p>Spontaneous volunteerism that occurs within indigenous and CALD communities can be particularly important in meeting the needs of affected community members.</p> <p>Spontaneous volunteers will be of most value if they are flexible, self-sufficient, aware of risks, and willing to be coordinated by emergency managers.<sup>36</sup></p> <p>Volunteers who register to help in recovery, and who are not subsequently contacted or followed-up report feeling disappointed, frustrated and undervalued.<sup>37</sup></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Develop a code of conduct and a module of generic recovery training for 'just-in-time' delivery to spontaneous volunteers as part of their induction.</li> <li>• Consider the needs of volunteers from CALD and indigenous communities in terms of training and access to culturally appropriate volunteering opportunities.</li> <li>• Develop guidelines for emergent groups that will encourage good governance and integration with existing recovery arrangements.</li> <li>• Ensure effective and timely follow-up with potential spontaneous volunteers including consistent messaging about current and future volunteering opportunities.</li> </ul> <p><i>See Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit – Draft Framework, p.5, and Operational Implementation, p. 7</i></p> <p><i>See also, Community Recovery Workforce Framework (ANZEMC 2014), p. 7.</i></p> <p><i>National Emergency Management Volunteer Action Plan, 2012 – Commonwealth Government, April 2012</i></p>

<sup>36</sup> National Voluntary Organisations Active in Disaster (NVOAD), Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster, p. 4.

<sup>37</sup> Cottrell, A. (2010) Research Report: A survey of spontaneous volunteers, Centre for Disaster Studies, James Cook University, QLD.

Principle 8	Policy Considerations	Suggested Actions
<p><i>The time when spontaneous volunteers are needed may not coincide with when offers of help are being made</i></p>	<p>Disaster recovery is a long-term activity. In addition to the immediate clean-up phase, different needs and opportunities for volunteerism will evolve over time.</p> <p>While spontaneous volunteers may not be required at a specific point in time, it is likely that their assistance may prove valuable as recovery continues.</p> <p>Emergency management agencies should be alert to opportunities to translate spontaneous, informal or episodic volunteering into longer-term civic engagement.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the time of initial contact, ascertain the interest and availability of spontaneous volunteers to assist at a future time, particularly where there are limited opportunities to help immediately.</li> <li>• Ensure effective follow-up processes are in place.</li> <li>• Develop strategies to recognise the efforts and experience of spontaneous volunteers and to promote ongoing emergency volunteering opportunities.</li> </ul> <p><i>See Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit – Effective Management of Spontaneous Volunteers, p. 17</i></p> <p><i>See also, Community Recovery Workforce Framework (ANZEMC 2014) p. 14 and 20</i></p>

Principle 9	Policy Considerations	Suggested Actions
<p><i>Effective, timely, consistent communication is essential in the management of spontaneous volunteers</i></p>	<p>Communication strategies and general key messages in relation to spontaneous volunteering should be developed and in place well before any disaster event occurs.</p> <p>It is critically important to provide the most accurate, consistent, timely information to the impacted community and to those who may potentially volunteer, and to maintain the two-way flow of information throughout the recovery period.</p> <p>The role of social media has particular relevance to spontaneous volunteerism. Potential volunteers can be mobilised, community needs assessed, specific volunteering opportunities identified, and recommendations relating to donated goods can all be managed in 'real time' through social media.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Proactively develop a recovery communications plan template that incorporates information and key messages for spontaneous volunteers.</li> <li>• Consider any limitations to communication that may be encountered in the immediate post-disaster phase, e.g. damage to utilities and/or communication infrastructure, and develop contingencies.</li> <li>• Develop effective policies for the integration and use of social media as part of an overall communications strategy for recovery.</li> </ul> <p><i>See Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit – Draft Communication Strategy, p. 1</i></p> <p><i>See also, Red Cross 'Communicating in Recovery' at <a href="http://www.redcross.org.au/files/Communicating_in_recovery_resource.pdf">http://www.redcross.org.au/files/Communicating_in_recovery_resource.pdf</a></i></p>

# Appendix 1 – Three case studies of existing programs to manage spontaneous volunteers

The development of the Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy included a review of existing jurisdictional arrangements and identified the following three case studies as examples of specific programs designed to assist in the management of spontaneous volunteers.

## South Australia: Sampson Flat Bushfires – 2015

*The first activation of new arrangements for the management of spontaneous volunteers in South Australia occurred as a result of bushfires at Sampson Flat that began on 2 January, 2015. The fires, which burnt a total of 12,500 hectares, resulted in the loss of 27 homes, and saw 132 people receive treatment for injuries.*

*The activation sequence for arrangements to manage spontaneous volunteers included initial liaison between the State Recovery Office and Volunteering SA&NT. A '1300' telephone number and web URL for volunteer registrations was promoted via the media and various websites, with online registrations being encouraged. A roster of staff volunteers and team leaders was organised by Volunteering SA&NT to answer calls and operate the registration system which was available online from Saturday 3 January and open for telephone registrations from Sunday 4 January.*

*Senior officers from both organisations liaised daily and attended extraordinary meetings of the State Recovery Committee, thereby ensuring open communication and the quick resolution of any issues.*

*The volunteer registration system took the bulk of registrations – approximately 1300 - in the first two to three weeks of operation. All hotline calls were directed to Volunteering SA&NT via the interactive voice recognition system (IVR), as were all volunteer queries received at the relief centre. Volunteering SA&NT recorded a total of 1422 registrations of spontaneous volunteers.*

*An outcome of the arrangements was that recovery agencies working in the field were able to access additional volunteer assistance through Volunteering SA&NT. As surge capacity was required, Volunteering SA&NT provided lists of available spontaneous volunteers to recovery agencies such as Red Cross, Samaritan's Purse and Habitat for Humanity.*

*Communicating with, and managing the expectations of registered volunteers, whether or not they were deployed, was also the responsibility of Volunteering SA&NT. Volunteers were updated via regular text messages and/or emails. At the conclusion of the initial recovery efforts, all registrants were provided with information on other volunteering opportunities.*

## Victoria: Manager of Spontaneous Emergency Volunteers (MSEV) Project

*Recent disasters in Victoria have highlighted the challenges involved in managing spontaneous volunteers in recovery. This was acknowledged in the Victorian Emergency Management Reform (VEMR) White Paper (2012), which recommended the development of 'strategies to manage spontaneous volunteers during relief and recovery efforts'.*

*In response, Volunteering Victoria, in collaboration with the City of Greater Geelong, Volunteering Geelong and Australian Red Cross has developed a program to recruit, train, support, deploy and debrief a workforce of skilled volunteer managers to help manage spontaneous emergency volunteers during disaster relief and recovery.*

*The Manager of Spontaneous Volunteers or MSEV project includes the development of a tailored 1-day training program providing an introduction to emergency management and psycho-social support for experienced volunteer managers. It also includes access to online resources, mentoring and professional development for participants and the establishment of a state-wide database.*

*MSEVs are deployed in response to requests from local government recovery managers to assist with the registration, assessment, induction and supervision of spontaneous volunteers. Trained MSEVs are provided name badges, lanyards, tabards and manuals and are covered by personal accident and public liability insurance provided by Volunteering Victoria. MSEVs can be deployed for up to 7 days (or longer by mutual agreement) and have access to a peer support network, telephone helpline, and post-deployment debriefing and support.*

*The program's first year has seen 85 people undertake training and 30 applicants have been endorsed for inclusion on the MSEV database. Following a successful pilot in the Geelong region in 2014, Volunteering Victoria is expanding the MSEV project and is currently in discussions with 24 Victorian municipalities as the first stage of a state-wide rollout of the program.*

## Queensland: Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (CREW)

*Established in 2007, in the aftermath of Tropical Cyclone Larry, Volunteering Queensland's EV CREW model was developed in collaboration with the then Queensland State Community Recovery Committee to manage both pre-registered and spontaneous volunteering. The service, which was the first of its type in Australia, uses web-based customer relationship management (CRM) software to record and assess the skills, availability and interest of spontaneous volunteers against the predetermined needs of key disaster management agencies.*

*The EV CREW service and system is run by a team of paid and volunteer staff with access to an additional 800 volunteers to staff the EV CREW service centre in the event of an emergency. The system features a dedicated volunteering portal as a 'one-stop-shop' for organisations and individuals seeking to volunteer, through which the EV CREW team*

- encourages people to pre-register and train with a disaster response agency*
- offers information of interest to volunteers via email and website*
- provides advice on volunteer recruitment, training and management to agencies involved in disaster management*
- advises Government, not for profit and private sector agencies to ensure best practice compliance and capacity building*

*Since its inception, EV CREW has coordinated volunteering in response to the QLD floods and Tropical Cyclone Yasi (2010-2011), Tropical Cyclone Oswald and associated flooding (2013), ex-Tropical Cyclone Ita (2014), Brisbane area storms and flooding in the Tablelands Region (2015), Tropical Cyclone Marcia and South East Queensland floods (2015).*

*Prior to 2010, EV CREW was only operational in the period during and immediately following disaster events, but the system has been in full time operation since that time. 120,000 volunteer registrations have been recorded over the life of the program to date, with a peak of 27,000 registrations on the first day after the 2011 Brisbane floods.*

*The EV CREW system has been adopted by Volunteering ACT for the management of spontaneous volunteers and is currently being considered by Volunteering Tasmania, and in addition to the MSEV program by Volunteering Victoria.*

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