Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers

Australian Institute for
Disaster Resilience

Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers

Handbook 12

Australian Government

Attorney-General's Department

Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection

The Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection provides guidance on national principles and practices for disaster resilience.

The Handbook Collection:

- provides an authoritative and trusted source of knowledge about disaster resilience principles in Australia
- aligns national disaster resilience strategy and policy with practice, by guiding and supporting jurisdictions, agencies and other organisations and individuals in their implementation and adoption
- highlights and promotes the adoption of good practice in building disaster resilience in Australia
- builds interoperability between jurisdictions, agencies, businesses and communities by promoting use of a common language and coordinated, nationally agreed principles.

The Handbook Collection is developed and reviewed by national consultative committees representing a range of state and territory agencies, governments, organisations and individuals involved in disaster resilience. The collection is sponsored by the Australian Government Attorney-General's Department.

Access to the collection and further details are available at the Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub[1] (the 'Knowledge Hub').

Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection

Handbook 1   Disaster Health

Handbook 2   Community Recovery

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Handbook 5   Communicating with People with a Disability: National Guidelines for Emergency Managers

Handbook 6   National Strategy for Disaster Resilience: Community Engagement Framework

Handbook 7   Managing the Floodplain: A Guide to Best Practice in Flood Risk Management in Australia

> **Guideline 7-1**   Using the National Generic Brief for Flood Investigations to Develop Project Specific Specifications
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[1] https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/collections/handbook-collection

Australian Emergency Management Manual Series

The current Manual Series contains 46 publications.

The manuals have not been reviewed since 2011 or earlier; the Manual Series is undergoing a review which will see relevant manuals move into the Handbook Collection or other collections, or be archived. Current and past manual editions will remain available on the Knowledge Hub.[1]

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[1] https://www.knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/manual-series

Acknowledgements

AIDR also acknowledges the valuable input of the following individuals and groups:

- Ambulance Victoria – Justin Dunlop
- Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council
- Australian Government Attorney-General's Department
- Australian Government Department of Agriculture and Water Resources
- Australian Government Department of Social Services
- Brisbane City Council – Vicki Anderson, Sharon Henry
- Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre
- Conservation Volunteers Australia
- Echo Youth and Family Services – Wayne Collins
- Emergency Management Victoria – John Schauble
- Green Cross Australia – Lew Short
- Habitat for Humanity – Ben Sarre
- Justice Connect – Anna Lyons
- Knox Council – Andrew Williams
- Latrobe Community Emergency Management Forum – Stuart Strachan
- Melanie Irons, provisional psychologist
- Metropolitan Fire Board, Victoria – Stephen O'Malley
- Moreton Bay Regional Council – Carl Peterson
- Parks & Wildlife, Western Australia – David Rawet
- Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology – Fiona Jennings
- Surf Life Saving Australia – Pamela Simon
- Virtual Operations Support Group, Victoria
- Volunteering Western Australia – Jen Wyness
- Walking Forward Disaster Relief Team, Victoria – Jenna Kelley
- Western Australian Police Force – Tracie Farrington

AIDR also acknowledges important contributions made in response to the national discussion paper.

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Using the handbook

The handbook comprises three sections and is supported by a collection of companion tools including supporting resources, further reading and case studies that will be updated and expanded over time. Two important source documents – the national *Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of volunteer effort in the immediate post disaster stage*, and the *Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit* – are referenced extensively in this handbook and are due for review. Once the review of these documents is complete, the handbook content will be updated as required.

PART 1

This section explores spontaneous volunteering in an emergency management context, including the various ways communities respond to disasters and the different categories and motivations for spontaneous volunteering. Part 1 also provides past examples of spontaneous volunteering and examines the context in which contemporary policies and strategies have been developed. This section of the handbook is recommended for those wanting to understand the broad scope and evolving nature of spontaneous volunteerism and its relationship to effective community response and disaster recovery.

PART 2

This section describes a range of principles and policies organisations can adopt to help support and coordinate spontaneous volunteers. Part 2 also provides detailed information about the national *Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of volunteer effort in the immediate post disaster stage*. This strategy outlines the nationally agreed principles for the management of spontaneous volunteering, together with policy considerations and suggested actions that should be adapted to the reader's specific circumstances. It establishes the minimum policy standards and practice that should inform an organisation's approach to planning for spontaneous volunteers. This section is recommended for anyone needing to understand the contemporary national policy landscape relating to spontaneous volunteering and disaster recovery.

PART 3

Through a set of guiding questions, strategies and advice, this section aims to help operationalise the principles identified in Part 2. It will assist with the development and implementation of effective policies, plans and processes that will address the responsibilities and requirements of organisations working with spontaneous volunteers. It also identifies various case studies that can provide additional context and examples of strategies and approaches from within Australia and internationally. This section is recommended for those responsible for planning and developing their organisation's approach to working with spontaneous volunteers.

Part 1
Introduction

About this handbook

PURPOSE

This handbook outlines nationally agreed principles in planning for spontaneous volunteers in disasters. It provides guidance on planning for and supporting communities responding to disasters by providing general guidance on ways to incorporate the principles into plans and activities. The handbook recognises the important role spontaneous volunteers can play in emergencies and disasters.

CONTEXT

This handbook supports the national *Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of volunteer effort in the immediate post disaster stage*[1] (the 'National Strategy') endorsed by the Australia-New Zealand Emergency Management Committee on 2 October 2015.

The handbook also provides a link between the National Strategy and the *Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit*[2] (the 'Resource Kit') developed in 2010 by the Australian Red Cross for the former Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA).

The development of this handbook in 2017 has drawn upon current and ongoing activities regarding spontaneous volunteers, building on the expertise, capability and knowledge of organisations and individuals across Australia and internationally, including the disaster and emergency management sector, community groups, government and non-government organisations, volunteering peak bodies and other associations.

The handbook recognises that there are variations in legislative powers, arrangements and terminology across jurisdictions. The handbook should therefore be used in conjunction with applicable state or territory legislation, plans, guidelines and local arrangements, as well as other handbooks in the Handbook Collection.

This handbook is available on the Knowledge Hub.[3]

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[1] https://www.emv.vic.gov.au/how-we-help/volunteers/national-spontaneous-volunteer-strategy

[2] https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/spontaneous.pdf

[3] https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-12-communities-responding-to-disasters-planning-for-spontaneous-volunteers

WHO IS THIS HANDBOOK FOR?

This handbook is intended to provide guidance to all organisations that have a role or responsibility to help communities following a disaster when spontaneous volunteering occurs. These include Commonwealth and state/territory government departments, emergency management agencies, local governments, non-government organisations, community groups, volunteering involving organisations (VIOs) and emergent groups that form in response to a disaster.

Within these organisations, the handbook is most likely to be used by people who manage spontaneous volunteers and develop policies, capabilities, emergency management plans and other documents within their own jurisdictions, agencies, organisations, and communities that incorporate some aspect of spontaneous volunteer management.

The handbook may also be of value to educators, planners and others in the business and private sectors who provide support to communities impacted by disaster.

It is expected that international organisations involved in disaster resilience will also use the handbook.

WHAT'S IN A NAME?

There are four challenges associated with the term 'spontaneous volunteering' that need to be acknowledged when it is being used.

First, the same term can mean different things. For example, it sometimes refers only to the 'unaffiliated' people and groups with weak or no ties to the local community that converge on a disaster site from outside to help. However, others see spontaneous volunteering as an important component of community resilience that includes local people, and brings community capability and resources to disaster response and recovery efforts.

Second, 'spontaneous volunteering' is often associated with mass numbers of unorganised people turning up unannounced at disaster sites, complicating response and relief efforts for both the communities that have been impacted and the trained responders. However, as the diagram in Figure 1 highlights, the ways that people help following disaster are far more diverse and can be far more organised, albeit often in informal ways.

Third, while the term 'spontaneous volunteer' has gained traction in emergency management, it is not necessarily a term that resonates or is meaningful to the people to whom it refers. Many people who volunteer spontaneously following a disaster do not see themselves as 'volunteers' but rather simply as people offering help. This is particularly so for some cultural groups in society for which social obligation and other understandings of helping behaviour are more dominant and for whom the Western idea of 'volunteering' may be alienating. Thus, many people may not wish to be labelled, or managed, as volunteers, and may not be attentive to messages from organisations about spontaneous volunteering.

Fourth, the term is arguably incongruent with an important aim of policy and strategy in this area, including this handbook, which is to increase and improve planning, support and coordination for community responses to disaster. This makes the label 'spontaneous', with its implications of actions that are

unexpected and impulsive, somewhat at odds with these aims. Similarly, many jurisdictions have volunteer registration systems in place that allow people to pre-register their interest to assist in times of disaster. This, again, is at odds with a label that implies that community responses to disaster events are necessarily undertaken impulsively and in a disorganised way.

Background

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Key themes

- Community responses before, during and after a disaster are a valuable resource in disaster and emergency management.

- There are many ways that people within local communities or with strong, weak or no former ties to it respond voluntarily to disasters. This includes via informal helping, through emergent and extending groups that are not a part of the formal emergency management system, and via the expanding and established organisations that do make up the formal system.

- Un-evidenced and damaging myths about disasters unleashing widespread social chaos and panic within impacted communities still exist but are slowly being dispelled.

- Social media and mobile technologies are valuable tools that give people greater capacity to access, create and share disaster information, and to organise themselves to respond to disasters compared to the past.

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COMMUNITIES RESPONDING TO DISASTERS

Australian communities have always rallied to respond to threats and help each other in times of disaster and emergency. Communities respond as individuals, households, and informal and formal groups to help themselves and others when a disaster occurs. Local communities and ordinary people who are not necessarily trained by, or affiliated with, formal emergency management organisations are often the first to respond to a disaster or hazard event. People within the local community, with support from local governments, are also often the ones who stay to support each other with the long-term physical, social, psychological and economic impacts of a disaster long after formal disaster recovery arrangements have ended. Many communities also respond to the risk of a disaster well before an event occurs, acting to reduce their own

and others' risk through preparation and mitigation activities.

Australian communities also benefit from a substantial, formal emergency management capability and capacity, as outlined in *Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook 9 Australian Emergency Management Arrangements*[3] (AIDR 2017) (Handbook 9). This includes considerable paid and volunteer forces trained by and affiliated with both governmental and non-governmental emergency management organisations (EMOs). The number of volunteers who regularly contribute their time and skills as members of EMOs in Australia has been estimated at more than 500,000. This substantial volunteer workforce is engaged in a wide range of activities relating to disaster prevention, preparation, response, and recovery and its vital work benefits urban, regional, rural and remote communities across the country.

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[1] https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-9-australian-emergency-management-arrangements

VALUING AND UNDERSTANDING COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO DISASTER

Research and experience shows disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery are more effective when community responses before, during and after disaster events are anticipated, planned for and integrated with the formal emergency management system (see Further reading). In the past, however, this has been hampered by the existence of fear and persistent myths about community responses to disasters. These include that disasters commonly unleash panic and social chaos, lead to widespread antisocial behaviour, and leave people helpless and dependent upon external assistance.

These myths are slowly being dispelled and replaced by a more accurate and informed picture of community resilience in the face of disaster. Experience and research repeatedly shows the most common response of communities to disaster is to become more cohesive than normal, working together through informal and formal networks and groups to overcome challenges, meet local needs and help themselves and those around them (see Further reading). In the immediate aftermath of a disaster, there is a strong tendency for people to self-organise into emergent groups that are created 'on the fly' to meet self-identified needs. This is often done using social media outside what would be considered normal response arrangements. Some of the ways local communities respond to disasters through emergent groups include undertaking search and rescue and providing first aid; setting up relief centres and providing emergency accommodation and food; assessing immediate community needs; coordinating community action; and providing psychological support and counselling. It is not uncommon for 60-90 per cent of disaster survivors to engage in some form of volunteering to help others following the disaster (see Case Study 1).

There is growing recognition of the valuable resources and capacities within local communities that contribute to overall disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. People from within the local community, including those not trained by emergency management organisations, can have valuable and locally relevant knowledge and experience, social networks and skills that are important for the effectiveness of local disaster management across all phases. Community participation is shown to improve longer-term outcomes for the wellbeing of people who have been directly impacted; speed up the recovery process; and increase community capability for local disaster management. It also helps to build supportive relationships, trust and shared responsibility between communities and government agencies, and can foster greater civic engagement and social capital within a community far beyond the context of disaster management.

'CONVERGING' ON DISASTER SITES

When disasters occur, it is not only the communities physically impacted that respond. It is normal and common for people to converge on a disaster site from outside to help. This convergence of people is also accompanied by a convergence of information and resources, including equipment and donated goods and services (see Case Study 2). When not appropriately planned for, this convergence can create a significant burden on the impacted communities and trained responders, and may disrupt the work of those assisting communities (see Case Study 24). However, this outpouring of help also contributes to building a powerful therapeutic community to support disaster victims, contributing to 'a sense of relief by people facing the daunting tasks of recovery, the restoration of hope by those dealing with despair, and a renewal of belief in the kindness of the human race'.[1]

The rise of social media platforms like Facebook and Twitter, as well as the prevalence of mobile technologies, has been an important catalyst for increasing both the scale and visibility of this convergence in more recent times. These technologies have increased people's virtual exposure to disasters through access to real time disaster information online. Thus, even people who are far from the physical disaster site can now watch a disaster unfold, feel impacted or moved by it, share information about it, and be motivated to respond (see Case Study 3). As a result, formal organisations are no longer the only source of disaster information nor the gatekeepers of this information. This increases the need for clear, consistent and highly accessible public messaging to be provided during and after disaster events.

These technologies have reduced barriers to participating in disaster response and recovery relating to communication, distance and information. Social media gives people greater capacity to organise themselves to respond to disasters independently of formal arrangements, both on-site and online (see Case Study 4 and Case Study 5). This has fuelled a growth in 'digitally enabled emergent volunteering' following disasters that includes remote, digital volunteering as well as on-the-ground volunteering mobilised and organised via social media platforms.

Previous disasters demonstrate that Australian communities widely expect to play an integral and influential part in responding to disaster events and disaster risk. Now, with fewer barriers to participation and greater access to real-time information about disasters, people are even more likely to look for, and find a way to play a part in, responding to disasters.

1   Phillips, BD 2014, 'Therapeutic communities in the context of disaster' *Hazards, Risks, and Disasters in Society*, eds. AE Collins, S Jones, B Manyena & J Jayawickrama (Amsterdam: Elsevier), pp. 353-4.

CHALLENGES FOR INTEGRATING COMMUNITY RESPONSES TO DISASTER

Over time, government policies and plans in Australia have put greater emphasis on the importance of recognising and integrating community response to disasters with those of the formal emergency management system. Today, principles of community participation, resilience, and shared responsibility are enshrined in key government policies and strategies at the national level (see Part 2).

There are some considerable, recognised challenges to putting these principles into practice, and integrating community and government responses to disaster in ways that build community resilience and improve disaster management capability. Some of these stem from the need to manage the risks associated with emergent responses from people who are unfamiliar with disaster scenarios and disaster management arrangements, and who may not necessarily understand what impacted communities do and do not need. Particularly in the immediate post disaster phase, mass offers of help and donated goods can create a burden for both the impacted communities and the organisations helping them. Moreover, those offering to help may not be physically or emotionally prepared for what they will face in a disaster situation and may become victims themselves.

A second set of challenges concerns integrating the more adaptive, informal responses of communities into the structured, formal arm of government-directed disaster management. There are also challenges related to variable community capabilities and resources, and a lack of knowledge about disaster management arrangements, processes and responsibilities within some Australian communities.

Such challenges are not insurmountable, however, and the benefits are considerable for communities, volunteers and organisations (see What are the potential benefits?). Alongside this, there is a growing commitment within the broader Australian emergency management community to improve the ways their groups and organisations plan for, support and integrate community responses. In Australia, and internationally, experience in integrating informal, community responses with the formal emergency management system is growing (see Case Study 6; Case Study 7; Case Study 8; and Case Study 9). However, in the past there have been limited resources available to provide guidance for groups and organisations that reflect collective experience. This handbook contributes to filling this void and helps pave the way towards a more integrated, effective, resilience-based and whole-of-society approach to mitigating the risks and consequences of disasters in Australia.

TYPES OF COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO DISASTERS

The ways communities in Australian society respond to disasters is diverse, organic, and specific to both community and type of disaster event. Communities are rich and complex, and exist in many shapes and forms, though generally sharing common characteristics or interests. They can be communities of place (defined by a geographical area such as a city, township, suburb or locality) or communities that share a similar interest, attribute, bond or passion (including faith-based groups, sporting clubs and other social networks).

Commonly, community response takes the form of informal volunteering – volunteering that takes place outside the context of a formal organisation (see Definition of volunteering). As a result, any attempt to describe or classify what informal volunteering looks like will never completely and accurately portray the ways a given community mobilises in a specific event.

The diagram in Figure 1 is one way to illustrate a more complete picture of the diverse disaster responses within society, including informal volunteering by community members and groups as well as formal volunteering affiliated with emergency management or other organisations. It consists of a bullseye to depict three layers or levels of response with decreasing ties to the local community impacted by a disaster, or exposed to disaster risk. The first, central layer represents responses from within a local, geographic community directly affected by a disaster event or exposed to disaster risk.[1] The second layer represents responses by individuals and groups from outside this community with strong ties to it through direct formal and informal networks and connections. The third, outer layer represents responses by segments of society with weak or no direct connections with the local community. The three layers overlap and are not distinct. The lines between them, particularly between who is and is not 'within' a local community, can be unclear and interpreted in various ways. While communities will respond in a variety of ways, increasingly communication through social media will be a common feature in the way communities and individuals mobilise and organise.

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1 Based on ideas communicated by Ronnie Faggoter, Director of the South Australian State Recovery Office.

Figure 1   A framework for understanding societal responses to disasters

The bullseye is also divided into five radial segments that indicate different ways people organise to respond to disasters.[1] In a clockwise direction, they are:

- Individuals and informal helping – as individuals, including through informal helping that is not structured or organised beyond interpersonal social relationships. This includes people and households responding to their own disaster risk or impacts. It also includes people informally helping others such as family, friends and neighbours, as well as people taking individual actions to help people they do not know personally, such as making donations to relief funds, or offering to volunteer with existing organisations (see Case Study 6), and assisting as bystanders to emergency events (see Case Study 14).

- Emergent groups – through the formation of new, emergent groups and networks that self-organise in response to a self-identified need (see Case Study 5; Case Study 10; Case Study 11; Case Study 12; Case Study 13; Case Study 15; and Case Study 18). For groups that emerge amongst people who have weak or no ties to a local community that is disaster impacted, traditional and social media play a big part in shaping perceptions of what community needs

exist and whether they are being met by the formal emergency management system. Although often considered more of a problem than an asset by formal organisations, experience shows self-organised emergent groups can be a particularly impactful and valuable form of community response to disaster events.

- Extending groups and organisations – through existing groups and organisations with established structures but no prior involvement in disaster management. This includes groups such as sporting clubs, community associations (see Case Study 17), non-government organisations, professional groups, and businesses, including corporate enterprises, that 'extend' their activities into new and unexpected areas in response to disasters (see Case Study 16). Many of these groups have existing volunteers and volunteer management capability as well as skills that can be quickly harnessed when disasters occur.

- Expanding organisations – through existing organisations whose routine activities are not disaster-related but which have a recognised role in times of disaster that is mobilised through new or temporary structures. Key examples are community welfare, faith-based and environmental organisations that mobilise to assist with relief and recovery when disasters strike, such as the Salvation Army, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), and Conservation Volunteers Australia.

- Established organisations – these are government and non-government organisations that have disaster-related core missions, routine activities and structures. Examples are state and territory fire and emergency service agencies, the Australian Red Cross, Surf Life Saving Australia and St John Ambulance (see also Australian Emergency Management Arrangements[2] and other member organisations of the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum). In more recent years, many state and territory volunteering peak bodies across Australia have also developed routine structures and activities that are disaster-related. These include formal roles in recovery planning, coordinating spontaneous volunteer involvement, and communicating with the public about how to offer assistance.

Generally, responses affiliated with the formal emergency response system are undertaken through established and expanding organisations, while unaffiliated community responses occur through individual and informal helping, emergent groups and extending groups. There are exceptions; for example, new emergent groups and networks may form within the affiliated emergency management community in response to unexpected needs. Additionally, informal emergent groups may also evolve into larger, more established or 'repeat emergent', volunteer-led groups over time (see Case Study 10; Case Study 13; and Case Study 18). It is also worth noting that people with weak or no previous ties to a disaster impacted community may come to identify and connect with a disaster-impacted community quite quickly and strongly through 'virtual' exposure to the disaster via social media.

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[1] Based on the Disaster Research Center typology of organised response to disasters: see Dynes RR 1970, *Organized behavior in disaster* (Lexington Books: Lexington, MA).

[2] https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-9-australian-emergency-management-arrangements

Spontaneous volunteering

Spontaneous volunteering is an important area of community response to disasters. It is a new term for a very old and typical prosocial behaviour: people who have no formal association with the emergency management system putting their hands up to help when a disaster happens. The term came into use in disaster and emergency management following the September 11 attacks in the United States in 2001, when more than 30,000 people unaffiliated with emergency response or recovery organisations converged on New York City in the days, weeks and months following the World Trade Center disaster (see Case Study 2).

Many other descriptors are also used to refer to approximately the same activity as 'spontaneous' volunteering: unaffiliated, emergent, converging, unorganised, unofficial, informal to name just a few. Within Australia, the term 'spontaneous volunteering' is the most commonly used. The National Strategy describes spontaneous volunteers broadly as:

> **individuals and groups who are motivated, often as a result of traditional and social media coverage, to assist disaster-impacted communities."** (p. 3)

The Resource Kit provides a more specific definition of a 'potential spontaneous volunteer' 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."** (p. 5)

There are some recognised challenges associated with the term 'spontaneous volunteering' (see What's in a name?). Despite this, the term is retained for this handbook as it is widely used and easily recognised in the Australian emergency management context. However, the scope of activity that is included in this handbook is broader than some uses of the term 'spontaneous volunteering' intend. It includes:

- formal and informal volunteering
- in response to a disaster event occurring
- by people that are not affiliated with the formal emergency management system, or not acting under direction of an EMO
- people that have indicated their willingness to assist at times of disaster who are pre-registered with organisations and/or on digital platforms.

It includes volunteering that takes place:

- across all three layers included in Figure 1 – within the local community impacted by a disaster, amongst people with strong ties to it, and amongst those with only weak or no ties to the community
- through offers to help made directly to EMOs or other organisations by unaffiliated individuals and groups when a disaster event occurs
- through programs and digital platforms that offer pre-registration capabilities
- through self-organised emergent groups
- through extending groups (including via corporate volunteering programs and through pro bono services volunteered by professional groups and associations)
- on-site, online or in combination
- when trained emergency management volunteers or staff self-deploy
- when bystanders, who are present at the time a disaster occurs, immediately help victims and responders.

For the purposes of this handbook, spontaneous volunteering does not include the informal ways people within local communities help themselves and each other through their pre-existing interpersonal relationships. This activity occurs organically within communities and does not generally need dedicated support or coordination by formal organisations as a volunteering activity.

WHO VOLUNTEERS SPONTANEOUSLY AND WHY?

Spontaneous volunteers can be everyone and anyone. Following the 2010-11 Brisbane floods, spontaneous volunteers who assisted with the clean-up included people who had volunteered before as well as a large number who were volunteering for the first time (see Case Study 19). They included men and women, all age groups, all educational levels and all employment statuses. This same, broad demographic base is shown amongst spontaneous volunteers elsewhere (see Case Study 5).

> " The single largest reason that people give for spontaneously volunteering following a disaster is 'a compelling need to help'."
> (Case Study 23)

People are commonly motivated to help for a mix of altruistic as well as personal reasons. This need is stronger for people who feel a connection to the impacted community – they may have friends or family who were impacted, or they may feel empathy through having directly experienced a disaster themselves in the past. Volunteering is also an important part of people making sense of the disaster, coping with its psychological impacts themselves, and regaining a sense of control that they may feel had been lost.

Volunteering to help can be an important antidote to feeling victimised and disempowered; both for people who have been physically impacted by the disaster, and those who have not but who are psychologically affected. People feel a strong personal responsibility to help when they feel their help would have a significant impact. For example, they may have skills they feel can be of assistance, or they are available to help because they are close by and have time they can commit to volunteering.

Two important and interacting external factors that shape people's motivations for volunteering are 1) the scale and impact of the event, and 2) the depth and type of media coverage a disaster event receives, including across social media. Coverage by traditional and new media influences, and sometimes distorts, perceptions that community needs are not being met, particularly amongst those who do not have strong ties to the impacted communities. This reinforces the importance of clear and consistent public communication from knowledgeable and trusted sources about what is already being done to help communities that are impacted, and what communities do and do not actually need at particular times.

Large-scale emergencies and disasters go beyond the ability of emergency service organisations to respond. They demand collective action in a society to deal with their effects, and the input of volunteers is necessary to meet the required surge capability to support the system with additional resources.

WHEN AND HOW DO PEOPLE OFFER TO HELP?

It is widely recognised that people offer assistance in the days and weeks immediately following a disaster event, and that offers drop off significantly over time (see Case Study 5). Importantly, this can leave a gap between when people are motivated to help (in the days and few weeks immediately following an event) and when people need that help (often in the longer-term; weeks, months and years afterwards). Large-scale and highly visible events, particularly in areas of high population, can lead to a massive influx of offers to help in the days and weeks following a disaster event. Without pathways for people to help being planned for and made available, this influx can create a large burden for both communities and responders and present a missed opportunity in the weeks and months afterwards.

Where pathways to offer help are not clearly available and communicated, people will seek to help any way they can. They may contact response agencies, non-governmental relief organisations, volunteering peak bodies, local governments, VIOs and community groups in the impacted communities. However, not all the people motivated to help want to do so via organised responses and management systems. Given the compelling need to help, some people have little regard or patience for slower-moving and more hierarchical formal systems and will seek out more direct ways to assist; in some cases, pointedly circumventing organised responses.

Where managed pathways to assist are not found or not wanted, people may seek out informal pathways. Some may seek out emergent groups on social media or contact individuals and households in the impacted communities directly. When people cannot find ways to assist that fit with their circumstances and their motivations, some will create their own avenues, increasingly via social media, and particularly when they perceive a need that is not being met by formal organisations (see Case Study 4 and Case Study 5).

Part 2 Policies and principles that support spontaneous volunteering

National Strategy for Disaster Resilience

The *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*[1], 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 for federal, state, territory and local governments, business and community leaders and the not-for-profit and volunteering sectors.

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* includes a priority outcome requiring:

- 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

Disaster recovery can provide an opportunity to improve local conditions by enhancing social and natural environments, infrastructure and economies. Despite the inherent challenges, the outcomes of a coordinated and well managed recovery can contribute to a more resilient community. *The National Principles for Disaster Recovery*[2] 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 and flexible in 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.

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1   https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/national-strategy-for-disaster-resilience

2   https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/05_2012/spontaneous.pdf

These principles have particular relevance for spontaneous volunteering, 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 capacity will be stretched, and that additional assistance 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.

National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement[1] (the 'Standards') were launched in 2015 and are managed by Volunteering Australia. They provide a framework for supporting the volunteer sector in Australia by identifying good practice guidelines for organisations to attract, manage and retain volunteers, and by helping to ensure the experience of volunteers is safe and positive.

The Standards cover:

1. Leadership and management
2. Commitment to volunteer involvement
3. Volunteer roles
4. Recruitment and selection
5. Support and development
6. Workplace safety and wellbeing
7. Volunteer recognition
8. Quality management and continuous improvement

They can be used as a guide to good practice, as an audit tool, to identify opportunities for improvement, and as a framework to assist in planning, establishing and reviewing a volunteer service.

National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy

The national Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of Volunteer Effort in the Immediate Post Disaster Stage (the 'National Strategy') was endorsed by the Australian and New Zealand Emergency Management Committee (ANZEMC) in October 2015. It was developed to recognise the inevitability of spontaneous volunteerism in contemporary disaster management and to help harness its value and contribution to disaster resilience.

The objectives of the National Strategy include:

- the effective and efficient coordination of spontaneous volunteers in the immediate post-disaster phase of an emergency
- supporting the empowerment and disaster resilience of individuals and communities
- facilitating positive experiences for volunteers, who may continue to volunteer in the emergency management sector or in other valuable community endeavours.

Based on a set of principles adapted from the Australian Government's Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit (the 'Resource Kit'), the National Strategy does not mandate a prescribed jurisdictional approach. Rather, it provides broad guidance on what should be taken into account when considering the coordination and management of spontaneous volunteers. The National Strategy 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.

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[1]   https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/resources/handbook-9-australian-emergency-management-arrangements

Goal: Coordination of volunteer effort in the immediate post disaster stage		
Objectives	**Principles**	**Summary of suggested actions**
Empowered individuals and communities	(1) People affected are the first priority. (2) Spontaneous volunteering aids recovery and resilience. (3) Jurisdictions will take considered policy positions about engaging spontaneous volunteers.	• Consider the management of spontaneous volunteers in recovery plans and budgets. • Identify suitable post disaster activities in advance. • Involve existing community groups in pre-event recovery planning and exercising. • Review existing legislation that addresses risk and liability for spontaneous volunteers.
Effective and efficient coordination of spontaneous volunteers	(4) Processes will need to engage volunteers and support agencies. (5) Standard volunteer management processes apply in emergencies. (6) Spontaneous volunteering is included in existing recovery arrangements.	• Develop scalable processes that reflect the motivations of spontaneous volunteers. • Provide information about how the needs of people affected by the disaster are being met. • Register spontaneous volunteers and monitor their safety and wellbeing. • Integrate arrangements for spontaneous volunteers into existing emergency management plans.
Satisfied volunteers who may continue to volunteer in the emergency management sector	(7) Everyone has a right to help and be valued. (8) The time when help is offered may not coincide with the need for volunteers. (9) Effective, timely and consistent communication is essential.	• Recognise the inevitable nature of spontaneous volunteering. • Provide training and guidelines for individuals and emergent groups who may spontaneously volunteer. • Promote future volunteering opportunities and ensure effective follow-up and referral. • Develop communication plans and key messages including the use of social media in recovery.

Table 1   National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy

The following principles are contained in the National Strategy and are intended to assist in the engagement, coordination and integration of spontaneous volunteers. They are offered here with an expanded context, as a guide for use in planning by jurisdictions, emergency managers, non-government, VIOs and community organisations. They can also serve as a good practice checklist to review policies and processes already in place.

PRINCIPLE 1 THE PEOPLE AFFECTED BY AN EMERGENCY ARE THE FIRST PRIORITY

In considering how spontaneous volunteers can be engaged and their efforts integrated, this principle establishes the needs of those who have been impacted by a disaster as the primary consideration. Despite their inherent value, volunteer efforts that are provided at the wrong time, or that don't reflect the needs and priorities of the people who have been affected, can exacerbate the impact of the disaster and may even delay recovery.

Emergency managers will have a key responsibility to ensure that the capacity and willingness of volunteers is harnessed in ways that will enhance capability and that will not negatively impact or overwhelm recovery efforts.

Given the inevitable nature of people wanting to offer their assistance, the coordination and integration of spontaneous volunteers should be included in recovery planning and budgeting activities to ensure effective, appropriately resourced processes are in place. This can provide a degree of protection for those affected by the disaster, as well as for the volunteers themselves. Specific activities suitable to be undertaken by spontaneous volunteers should also be identified in advance, together with processes to facilitate a coordinated response.

In the case of volunteers being utilised in post disaster clean-up activities, strategies should be developed that will allow for the timely engagement of volunteers, while also providing a degree of protection for individuals and households to be able to receive assistance at a time that is appropriate for them, when they are ready and in a position to accept it.

Policy considerations	Suggested actions
• 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. • 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. • 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.	• Proactively establish processes to channel the efforts of spontaneous volunteers and to prevent those efforts from impacting negatively on people affected by the disaster. • Include the management of spontaneous volunteers in recovery plans and budgets to ensure appropriate resourcing is available. • Identify, in advance, the range of specific activities suitable to be undertaken by spontaneous volunteers, with an initial focus on roads and public areas.

Resources
Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit

PRINCIPLE 2 SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERING IS VALUABLE AND AIDS COMMUNITY RECOVERY AND RESILIENCE

Spontaneous volunteers are key contributors to recovery, providing a source of local knowledge, skills and the surge capacity needed to meet the immediate demands of the disaster. Invariably, members of the impacted community will be the 'first on scene', and their actions have the potential to mitigate the effects of the disaster and to facilitate relief and recovery activities. In addition, volunteers who mobilise from outside the community can provide access to specialist skills and services, and can help to sustain and reinforce the momentum of recovery.

The integration of community members and spontaneous volunteers as active contributors to recovery can result in improved relationships with emergency management agencies, and more effective, efficient and timely clean-up and recovery processes. It can also increase community preparedness and enhance resilience to future disasters. Positive experiences for spontaneous volunteers can lead to them contributing to future volunteering activities.

Policy considerations	Suggested actions
• Spontaneous volunteers can provide the skills and surge capacity needed to support community recovery following a disaster.	• 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.
• 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.	• Consider involving existing community groups in pre-event recovery planning and exercising.
• 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.	• Identify opportunities for individuals and emergent groups to contribute during the post disaster phase.
• Positive experiences for spontaneous volunteers may encourage ongoing volunteerism in the emergency management sector or elsewhere within the community.	• Emergency managers should minimise restrictions on access to disaster-affected areas unless there are genuine and compelling risks that need to be managed.

Resources
Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit
Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook 2 Community Recovery

PRINCIPLE 3 JURISDICTIONS AND AGENCIES WILL TAKE CONSIDERED POLICY POSITIONS ON WHETHER THEY WILL ENGAGE SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS

Engaging and integrating spontaneous volunteers should, wherever possible, be an objective for emergency managers, and existing policies and procedures should reflect this approach. However, it will be important for organisations to consider the context and nature of a disaster and any residual risks when deciding whether or not to encourage spontaneous volunteering in relation to a specific event.

Emergency managers will need to consider factors such as access to the impacted area, available resources and any ongoing threat to safety and welfare. In some cases, existing recovery resources may be sufficient to meet the needs of the community. In others, an influx of helpers may put additional strain on already stretched capacity, diverting efforts and valuable resources away from those who have been directly affected by the disaster.

Where a decision is made not to engage spontaneous volunteers, being based on sound policy considerations, it is important to acknowledge and plan for the fact that volunteers may not be dissuaded in their efforts to help. A comprehensive communication plan should be developed for each event that clearly addresses the specific situation, reflects the expectations of the community and volunteers, and conveys timely, consistent information about any current and future opportunities to assist.

Policy considerations	Suggested actions
• 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. • Clear, consistent communication of policy positions, context and justification will be needed to encourage adherence and address community and volunteer expectations. • Decisions by jurisdictions and/or agencies not to engage spontaneous volunteers may have little bearing on the actions of those wanting to help.	• Establish processes to record, assess, and allocate or decline offers of assistance. • Identify sufficient resourcing to ensure scalability and continuity of service, particularly in large-scale disasters. • Develop plans for effective communication and the channelling of interest to alternative volunteering opportunities, if required. • Recognise that any decision not to encourage spontaneous volunteerism does not mean it will not occur.

Resources
Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit

PRINCIPLE 4 PROCESSES ARE NEEDED TO EFFECTIVELY ENGAGE SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS AND TO AVOID AGENCIES BEING OVERWHELMED WITH OFFERS OF SUPPORT

Spontaneous volunteering can be motivated by a range of factors relating to the specific disaster, the affected community, the way the event is reported in the media, and/or the individual or group wanting to assist. This complexity is further compounded given that, at the outset, and for some time after the disaster, it can be difficult to predict what the scale, degree of impact and likely duration of recovery will be. It is important that there are processes in place to engage and coordinate spontaneous volunteers that are designed to be flexible and scalable in relation to a specific event.

Any sense, whether real or perceived, that recovery agencies are unable to meet the needs of people who have been impacted, or that assistance is not being provided quickly enough, may often result in the rapid convergence of large numbers of volunteers. The capacity for recovery agencies to integrate volunteers in these circumstances can be quickly overwhelmed, and this can result in the escalation of non-urgent priorities, duplication of effort, and inappropriate or unsafe actions by volunteers.

Providing honest, consistent, accurate and timely information to volunteers and the community about the actions being taken to support recovery can help to address any misconceptions and to build confidence in the established processes.

Policy considerations	Suggested actions
• 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. • 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. • Timely, effective communication is critical in managing spontaneous volunteerism including, where appropriate, suggestions for alternative opportunities to assist impacted individuals and communities.	• 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. • Provide regular, timely information about actions being taken to meet the needs of those impacted by the disaster. • Where spontaneous volunteers are being engaged, provide specific information about volunteering opportunities and how their work will contribute to community recovery.

Resources
Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit

PRINCIPLE 5 STANDARD VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT PROCESSES APPLY IN TIMES OF EMERGENCY

Given the time pressures, the impacts of the disaster and the chaotic nature of the post disaster environment, it may not always be possible to observe all the checks and balances that exist and are applied during non-emergency situations. However, organisations that intend to work with, or find themselves working with, spontaneous volunteers will likely have a duty of care both to the volunteers and the broader community, as well as to their own staff and volunteers.

Responsibilities such as workplace health and safety, insurance, effective induction, briefing and debriefing, fatigue management and psychosocial support are not negated by the fact that the organisation may be operating in a recovery environment. Similarly, the requirement to check and verify qualifications, licenses and permits held by spontaneous volunteers still applies, particularly where they are a prerequisite for undertaking particular duties or tasks.

Policies and procedures that address the health, wellbeing and safety of spontaneous volunteers should be developed in advance of any emergency, together with registration processes that include the verification of qualifications and authorisations.

Policy considerations	Suggested actions
• Policies for the management of spontaneous volunteers must consider volunteer safety and wellbeing, including induction, insurance, risk management, workplace health and safety, fatigue management, post-event debriefing and psycho-social support. • Wherever practicable, professional qualifications and the requirement for authorisations, such as police checks or working with children checks, must be observed and verified.	• Implement processes to monitor the safety and wellbeing of spontaneous volunteers during and after the volunteering period. • Ensure registration processes for spontaneous volunteers include the recording and verifying of professional qualifications and authorisations.

Resources
Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit
The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

PRINCIPLE 6 ARRANGEMENTS FOR MANAGING SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS SHOULD BE EMBEDDED WITHIN EXISTING EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANS AND OPERATING GUIDELINES

Contemporary research and experience confirms the inevitability of spontaneous volunteering, and its potential to contribute to community resilience. It is important that the likelihood of spontaneous volunteerism is recognised and planned for by emergency management agencies to provide surge capacity and to embrace the goodwill offered by the community.

The benefits of spontaneous volunteering can be maximised and the associated risks reduced by ensuring, wherever possible, that volunteers are registered, screened and well-managed; provided with appropriate induction, briefings, equipment and supervision; and assigned suitable tasks. This is occurring in some 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.

Issues of risk, liability and insurance vary between jurisdictions and should be carefully considered and included as critical aspects of emergency planning in relation to spontaneous volunteers.

Policy considerations	Suggested actions
• Spontaneous volunteers are a valuable resource, particularly when they are trained, assigned, and supervised within established emergency management systems.[1] • An essential element of every emergency management plan is the clear designation of responsibility for coordination and management of spontaneous volunteers.[2] • Indemnity for accidents, injuries and public liability represents a complex challenge in relation to spontaneous volunteerism.	• Investigate the establishment of organisational sub-plans for spontaneous volunteers that form part of existing emergency management plans at all levels. • Consider the development of a 'spontaneous volunteer coordinator' role to oversee communication, referrals, screening, induction and rostering of spontaneous volunteers. • 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.

Resources
Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit

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[1] National Voluntary Organisations Active in Disaster (NVOAD), *Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in times of Disaster*, p. 4.

[2] Ibid, p. 4.

PRINCIPLE 7 EVERYONE HAS A RIGHT TO OFFER THEIR ASSISTANCE AND TO FEEL THEIR OFFER HAS BEEN VALUED

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, families or as part of emergent groups. This change represents an opportunity for organisations to reframe their approach to volunteering to more proactively engage with spontaneous volunteers. Rather than being seen as a 'problem to manage', this principle encourages an approach to spontaneous volunteering that recognises the inherent benefits for both the volunteers and the disaster-affected community.

In the case of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander or culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, spontaneous volunteering can provide a critical, locally relevant link between community members and the agencies and organisations responsible for providing assistance.

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.

Policy considerations	Suggested actions
• Spontaneous volunteerism is a fundamental and inevitable part of disaster recovery. • Spontaneous volunteering that occurs within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities can be particularly important in meeting the needs of affected community members. • Spontaneous volunteers will be of most value if they are flexible, self-sufficient, aware of risks, and willing to be coordinated by emergency managers.[1] • Volunteers who register to help in recovery, and who are not subsequently contacted or followed up, report feeling disappointed, frustrated and undervalued.[2]	• 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. • Consider the needs of volunteers from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities in terms of training and access to culturally appropriate volunteering opportunities. • Develop guidelines for emergent groups that will encourage good governance and integration with existing recovery arrangements. • Ensure effective and timely follow-up with potential spontaneous volunteers including consistent messaging about current and future volunteering opportunities.

Resources
Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit

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[1] National Voluntary Organisations Active in Disaster (NVOAD), *Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Times of Disaster*, p. 4.

[2] Cottrell, A 2010, *Research report: A survey of spontaneous volunteers*, Australian Red Cross.

PRINCIPLE 8 THE TIME WHEN SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS ARE NEEDED MAY NOT COINCIDE WITH THE TIME WHEN OFFERS OF HELP ARE BEING MADE

The long-term nature of disaster recovery is not well recognised and actual timeframes will often vary by months, and even years, compared to what is anticipated both by the people impacted by the event and by those working to assist their recovery.

Depending on the motivations of spontaneous volunteers, offers of help are most likely to peak in the days and weeks immediately following a disaster, and will experience a significant decrease beyond that time. This creates a challenge in that, very often, those needing help will not be in a position to accept it within that timeframe. People may still be displaced by the disaster, or only just returning to their community. They may still be working to understand and assess the impacts, or they may need help with tasks that occur well beyond the first flush of recovery activity.

An important opportunity exists not only to maximise the value of spontaneous volunteers in the short-term, but also to reframe our current understanding of recovery to emphasise the value and benefits of a much longer-term view of volunteering. Vital to this endeavour is a focus on enhanced community awareness and education about the recovery process, together with clear, accurate, timely and consistent messaging and communication to potential volunteers and the broader community. Assistance provided up to, and beyond, the first anniversary of a disaster will, in many cases, be every bit as valuable to those receiving it, as that which is provided in the first days and weeks. Rather than refusing poorly-timed offers of help or turning volunteers away, strategies should be developed for retaining and redirecting spontaneous volunteers to activities beyond the early stages of recovery. Such an approach can result in more timely and much needed help for those affected by the disaster, and a more meaningful and rewarding experience for volunteers.

Policy considerations	Suggested actions
• 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. • While spontaneous volunteers may not be required at a specific point in time, it is likely their assistance may prove valuable as recovery continues. • Emergency management agencies should be alert to opportunities to translate spontaneous, informal or episodic volunteering into longer-term civic engagement.	• 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. • Ensure effective follow-up processes are in place. • Develop strategies to recognise the efforts and experience of spontaneous volunteers and to promote ongoing emergency volunteering opportunities.

Resources
Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit

PRINCIPLE 9 **EFFECTIVE, TIMELY, CONSISTENT COMMUNICATION IS ESSENTIAL IN THE MANAGEMENT OF SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS**

The importance of an effective communication strategy addressing spontaneous volunteering cannot be overstated. Consistent, accurate, timely messages about whether or not spontaneous volunteers are needed, and how offers of help are being registered and coordinated can be the difference between volunteering efforts that are beneficial or detrimental to recovery and the community.

A communications plan, including general key messages should be developed, in advance, and then tailored to the specific circumstances of the disaster. The plan should include how information will be collected and disseminated and how communication with volunteers and the recovering community will be established and maintained. Consideration should be given to drafting a script and key messages to communicate information to potential volunteers.

The plan should also establish how organisations will communicate with each other, to share information and ensure messages are consistent and up-to-date with the evolving recovery situation. It should identify communication methods and consider any likely disruptions to technology and/or infrastructure.

Policy considerations	Suggested actions
• Communication strategies and general key messages in relation to spontaneous volunteering should be developed and in place well before any disaster event occurs. • 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. • 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.	• Proactively develop a recovery communications plan template that incorporates information and key messages for spontaneous volunteers. • Consider any limitations to communication that may be encountered in the immediate post disaster phase such as damage to utilities and/or communication infrastructure, and develop contingencies. • Develop effective policies for the integration and use of social media as part of an overall communications strategy for recovery.

Resources:
Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit communicating in recovery, Australian Red Cross

Part 3 Strategies for supporting and coordinating spontaneous volunteers

Key themes

Disaster and emergency management is more effective when community responses are anticipated, planned for and integrated within the formal system.

- The more involved that the affected community is in the response, relief and recovery efforts the more effective their recovery will be.

- While they will invariably be contributing to recovery efforts, members of the affected community may or may not identify as spontaneous volunteers.

- It is imperative that operational plans and personnel effectively engage with and involve the affected community.

Volunteers will have a range of motivations for volunteering, just as organisations will have a range of motivations and potential constraints upon how they respond.

- There is no single 'best practice' approach to supporting and coordinating spontaneous volunteers. Each organisation or group will need to develop plans that are appropriate for their specific organisation, the disaster context, and the types of volunteering that may occur.

- Broadly speaking, strategies for supporting and coordinating spontaneous volunteers can be more procedural or more enabling in their orientation.

- There are five levels of strategy commonly used by organisations to support or coordinate spontaneous volunteers: public communication, collaboration, channelling and brokering, support and capacity-building, and direct management.

- While organisations are encouraged to consider and plan for their relationships with spontaneous volunteers well in advance of any emergency, there will be some decisions to be made specifically in relation to the type, location and impact of the disaster that has occurred.

- Many organisations will develop plans and activities that operate across multiple strategic levels. However, the minimum levels recommended by this handbook for all organisations and groups are public communication and collaboration.

People may volunteer to help during any stage of an emergency or disaster. While offers may be made to help with prevention or preparedness activities or during the response phase, spontaneous volunteering will most commonly occur during the relief and recovery phase.

Careful consideration needs to be given about when and how to encourage spontaneous volunteers and to support their efforts for the benefit of those who are at risk from, or who have been impacted by, the disaster; the organisations, agencies or groups involved in managing recovery; and the volunteers themselves.

Making decisions about spontaneous volunteers

" **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."**
(National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy)

Any organisation, agency or community group with emergency management responsibilities needs to examine its position in relation to spontaneous volunteers as part of its emergency planning activities. There is, however, no single best practice approach to supporting and coordinating spontaneous volunteers that is applicable to all organisations and contexts. Instead, each organisation or group that is active in helping communities before, during and after emergencies will need to develop plans that are appropriate for their specific organisation and the disaster context, and that respond to the types of spontaneous volunteering that occur or may occur in their area of activity. These plans need to be sufficiently flexible to provide for an agile response that embraces spontaneous volunteers.

This section provides guidance for making decisions about spontaneous volunteering that are suited to specific circumstances. It describes two broad orientations for supporting and coordinating spontaneous volunteers, and presents several key questions to guide decision making about strategies for spontaneous volunteers by any organisation or group. The chapter is also supported by accompanying case study resources that will be updated over time to reflect developments, experiences and learning in planning for spontaneous volunteers both in Australia and internationally.

Procedural versus enabling orientations

Broadly speaking, strategies for supporting and coordinating spontaneous volunteers, can be more procedural or more enabling (problem solving) in their orientation. Figure 2 outlines key differences between procedural and enabling orientations.

Procedural	Enabling
• Assumption: Problems are most effectively solved through command-and-control structures, emergencies reduce the capacity of existing social structures. • Priorities: ensuring safety and maintaining control; informing; bringing spontaneous volunteers into traditional management structures. • Plans: detailed and lengthy; focus on prescriptive procedures for all anticipated circumstances and desired behaviour; rigid.	• Assumption: Problems are most effectively solved through existing social structures; command-and-control structures are not effective for mobilising community capacity. • Priorities: supporting decentralised decision making and improvisation; liaising; adapting management structures to integrate spontaneous volunteers. Agile outcome focused. • Plans: guidelines not prescriptions; focus on communication, relationships, and need preparation, training; adaptive.

Figure 2   Two orientations towards supporting and coordinating spontaneous volunteers

It is worth noting that practice in coordinating spontaneous volunteers has tended to be more procedurally oriented, while social research, in sharp contrast, tends to support more enabling approaches. However, in practical terms, most strategies are likely to fall somewhere in between the two, and to include elements of each orientation to varying degrees. Further, approaches will evolve from the early phase when the community will self-mobilise, as the event and the response continues structures will be developed that provide pathways to facilitate spontaneous volunteering. Several factors will impact where different organisations and groups' strategies fall on the spectrum between procedural and enabling approaches. The following guiding questions will help decision-makers to consider such factors directly in identifying the appropriate position for their organisations or groups.

Questions to guide decision making

The following questions can help guide organisations to make decisions about the level to which they engage with spontaneous volunteers. Organisations should answer these questions alongside consideration of the five levels of strategy outlined on page 30. Different strategies for engaging with spontaneous volunteers bring different sets of outcomes and consequences. Not all the potential outcomes and consequences of different options will be immediately evident to a particular organisation at a particular point in time. This is especially so for consequences that may arise for other key stakeholder groups, and for flow-on consequences that are longer-term and reach beyond an organisation's own specific areas and phases of function and responsibility. Further, some strategies may be better suited to particular situations, and hence questions about whether or not particular strategies are 'right' for different facets of the situations are also important to consider.

GENERAL RESPONSIBILITIES, OUTCOMES AND CONSEQUENCES

1 **What arrangements for coordinating spontaneous volunteers exist at the state or jurisdictional, regional and local level, and what is our role within them?**

The value and importance of effectively coordinating and managing the efforts of spontaneous volunteers is recognised by federal, state and local governments, emergency management agencies, and by non-government organisations, community groups and the media. In some states and territories, legislation is in place to direct how this work is undertaken. In others, there are more informal arrangements between recovery organisations, volunteering peak bodies, local and state government and communities that support the engagement of volunteers to assist in recovery activities. Additionally, other organisations and groups may also already be well-placed and resourced to support or manage spontaneous volunteers at various levels. It will be important to understand what is already in place and to identify responsibilities and opportunities for the organisation within the existing arrangements.

2 **What primary goals and motivations would we have in deciding to engage spontaneous volunteers?**

Organisations need to consider their primary goals and motivations for engaging with spontaneous volunteers as these can vary considerably across organisations and groups, with consequences for decision making. These may include to reduce risks and logistical challenges from large numbers of spontaneous volunteers; to increase the organisation's capacity to assist the community; to broaden its skill base or gain access to specialised skills; or to have the opportunity to build the organisation by recruiting new long-term members from those who spontaneously volunteer. More broadly, they may be to help to build community resilience or to catalyse collective psychosocial support into a 'therapeutic community' to support those who have been affected by a disaster.

3 **What are the potential benefits to the community, the volunteers and our organisation?**

Engaging with spontaneous volunteers can have benefits for the community, the volunteers and the organisation.[1] Benefits will depend on the types of spontaneous volunteering being considered, as well as other specific contextual and organisational factors.

Engaging spontaneous volunteers may increase the organisation's surge capacity and help it meet com-munity and volunteer expectations and needs; it could build local capability and potentially alleviate 'recovery fatigue' by mobilising a fresh workforce;

or it may increase the future preparedness and disaster resilience of the community.

[1] McLennan BJ, Kruger, T & Handmer, JW 2017, *Strategies for non-traditional emergency volunteers: A risk-benefit framework for decision-making* (Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University, Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre).

Potential benefits of engaging spontaneous volunteers

- **Community resilience**: build social capital and ownership of response and recovery; empower communities and build community leadership; assess, recognise, harness and strengthen community assets; build individual resilience amongst volunteers; increase awareness of response and recovery arrangements; increase future preparedness and disaster resilience; support disaster victims (and responders) through emergence of a therapeutic community

- **Government-community relationships**: build trust, networks, communication and collaboration; improve reputation of and faith in established organisations; strengthen the foundation for a whole-of-society approach

- **Effectiveness and capacity**: surge capacity; speed up response and recovery efforts and community outcomes; support access to local knowledge and skills; increase diversity of skills and backgrounds amongst helping organisations; meet needs that traditional responders are not able to; target support to meet unique needs of diverse communities (such as the elderly, people with disabilities, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and CALD communities, rural and remote communities, etc.); relieve recovery fatigue, provide recruitment opportunities

- **Efficiency**: maximise investment in training traditional responders; deliver cost benefits of increased volunteer workforce

- **Innovation and adaptation**: increase innovation in response and recovery; react and adapt to specific needs faster than established organisations; less restriction from formal structures

4 What are the potential risks to the community, the volunteers and our organisation?

Similarly, engaging with spontaneous volunteers may also bring risks for the community, the volunteers and the organisation, depending on the circumstances.[1] Of importance is the need to protect vulnerable groups in the community from potential negative consequences.

[1] McLennan BJ, Kruger, T & Handmer, JW 2017, *Strategies for non-traditional emergency volunteers: A risk-benefit framework for decision-making* (Melbourne, Australia: RMIT University, Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre).

Potential risks associated with engaging spontaneous volunteers

- **Community impact:** inconsistent quality and quantity of assistance; activities are counterproductive to community needs; volunteers may not be sensitive to psychosocial, cultural and practical needs and wishes of disaster survivors

- **Control and safety**: lack of specific training or induction; inadequate workplace health and safety processes; inadequate insurance; lack of checks to protect vulnerable groups (such as children); small numbers of volunteers may be motivated for spurious reasons ('disaster tourists') or have criminal intent; physical and psychological wellbeing of volunteers may not be addressed

- **Accountability and liability**: implications and responsibilities may be uncertain; insurance cover may be inadequate or unavailable; volunteers may assume or expect reimbursement of expenses

- **Suitability to role/task**: mismatches of skills/roles; capacity of volunteers; psychosocial preparedness for disaster situations; managing unrealistic expectations of volunteers and communities

- **Management effort/cost**: numbers may overwhelm capacity to manage and accommodate; management cost and workload increase

- **Government-community relationships**: negative experiences may undermine trust and damage reputations of established organisations; culture clashes with established organisations; competition or conflict with traditional emergency management volunteers and staff

5 What are the potential consequences if we don't support or coordinate spontaneous volunteers?

The potential consequences of not supporting or coordinating spontaneous volunteers are often overlooked by organisations and groups. However, they are potentially significant and should also be factored into decision making.

Potential risks associated with choosing not to engage spontaneous volunteers

- It will be harder to coordinate recovery efforts if volunteers are working outside the formal emergency management system, resulting in possible duplication of effort

- Potential risks associated with spontaneous volunteering may not be adequately managed

- Lack of psychosocial support for volunteers

- Valuable skills and resources to support the community may be lost or not utilised to their full potential

- Loss of access to local knowledge and skills

- Volunteers may feel frustrated that their offers to assist are not taken up – they may also decide not to volunteer in future

- The community may be critical of the organisation's decision not to engage with spontaneous volunteers, particularly if the provision of services or assistance is delayed

- Volunteers who are not engaged may set up 'in competition' with the organisation or be critical of its efforts

- With limited access to information, volunteers may create false expectations or prioritise non-urgent issues at the expense of issues that are a higher priority for the community

- Loss of recruitment opportunities

- Increased costs and reduced effectiveness due to lack of understanding and harnessing social assets in the community

- Opportunity to build community resilience is missed.

Potential benefits of not engaging spontaneous volunteers

- Externalise or avoid management cost and workload
- Externalise or avoid insurance and liability issues
- Avoid scope creep in organisation's roles and mission – capacity of spontaneous volunteers to adapt and innovate may be greater when working outside the emergency management system
- Opportunities for emergent leadership, social capital and self-organisation amongst spontaneous volunteers and communities may be greater
- Impacted community may be protected from the burden of dealing with convergers until they are ready for, and choose to, reach out for help

In addition to the previous, more general guiding questions, there are also important questions to consider about spontaneous volunteering in relation to a specific disaster or emergency.

IS SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERING RIGHT FOR THIS SITUATION?

1 Is it right for this scenario?

What is the nature of the emergency?

Depending on the type and scale of event, there may be hazard-specific issues that may impact volunteers. A range of existing or emerging risks, for example, exposure to smoke or hazardous materials, the presence of flood water, potential landslips, damaged infrastructure (roads, bridges, transport links), or deteriorating weather conditions could all have a bearing on volunteer safety and should be factored into decisions about how and when to effectively engage and coordinate spontaneous volunteers, if at all.

Will there be appropriate roles for spontaneous volunteers?

In large-scale events, hundreds, even thousands of offers of assistance can be received. How would the efforts of volunteers be coordinated and integrated with the activities being undertaken by agencies and the community? Are these activities happening in a particular location, or has the community been dispersed by the disaster, meaning that coordination will need to happen at multiple locations or at later times? And, if volunteers are engaged, what existing systems and plans are in place to integrate them and to maximise their efforts?

2 Is it right for this community?

How resilient is this community likely to be?

Members of an impacted community will invariably mobilise their skills and capacity as a first response to the effects of any disaster or emergency. Organisations working in relief and recovery must consider how they will engage with and support the community's own recovery efforts. Well-connected communities with strong, diverse networks are more likely to be able to respond effectively to the impacts of a disaster, and they may also be more adept at integrating the assistance of volunteers into their existing plans and structures. Alternatively, they may not require any assistance from outside the local community and their own family and friendship groups. In some communities, effective responses are facilitated by pre-existing community-based emergency planning and preparedness groups (see Case Study 15 and Case Study 17). Communities with a history or previous experience of disasters may also be better placed to understand the benefits and potential challenges of working with spontaneous volunteers.

Are there specific areas or instances of vulnerability?

The demography, location and risk profile of a specific community may all contribute to its potential for vulnerability. This effect can be localised to a particular population segment – frail, elderly people, for example, or people with disabilities or with limited financial resources. It may apply to a particular locality within the community – due, again, to the demographics of that area or in relation to the location's risk profile, such as the potential for flooding, or increased bushfire risk. In other cases, community vulnerability may be more generalised, as a result of significant isolation or economic decline. It will be important to consider the implications of community vulnerability and to what extent the actions of volunteers could alleviate or exacerbate it when deciding whether to encourage spontaneous volunteering.

What needs might this community have in a disaster?

There are likely to be a range of needs, both urgent and non-urgent, physical, economic, psychosocial, cultural, age-related and so forth. This will depend in part on the nature and scale of the disaster and the ways in which people have been impacted. Where local volunteers and groups can meet these needs, their efforts may benefit from support rather than coordination. There may also be a decision not to encourage additional support from spontaneous volunteers from outside the local community. However, where local resources are insufficient or are unable to respond, well-coordinated volunteer efforts involving people with weak or no ties to the local community can make an important contribution to relief and recovery.

What is the community's capacity to work with and/or coordinate spontaneous volunteers?

In some communities, local community organisations may already exist with capacity to coordinate

spontaneous volunteers. They may either have this responsibility as a core part of their role, such as local volunteer resource centres or neighbourhood houses, or they may extend their activities to take on this role, such as local service clubs like Rotary or Lions. In other instances, local government may have the primary responsibility for coordinating and managing volunteers (see Case Study 21), including offers of assistance from spontaneous volunteers in emergencies. Alternatively, community-based emergency management planning committees or groups may have developed locally relevant plans for recovery, which may also include the coordination of spontaneous volunteers (see Case Study 15).

3 Is it right for these spontaneous volunteers?

As Figure 1 in Types of community response to disasters shows, spontaneous volunteering can involve people from within the local community or outside of it, with strong, weak or no previous ties to that community. It can also involve volunteering that is individual or informal, self-organised through emergent groups, or coordinated through extending groups (existing groups and organisations with no disaster-related roles who extend their activities into this area when a disaster event occurs).

This distinction is significant because the needs, challenges, opportunities and contributions of peoples' responses within each of the segments across the three layers shown in Figure 1 are likely to be different. This will have consequences for the way these responses may form part of an integrated, whole-of-society response.

Broadly speaking, when disasters occur, the weaker the ties that individuals and groups have with the local community, the more likely their responses would benefit from more direct coordination. Conversely, responses from within the community with strong local ties are more likely to benefit from less directive and more collaborative support from those coordinating response and recovery. For example, individuals from within the local community will respond to help their friends, families and neighbours with very little or no need for coordination by an organisation. However, the potentially large response, or 'convergence', by individuals and groups without ties to the local community, through volunteering or donating money or material goods and services, needs to be planned for and coordinated to avoid potential problems and maximise potential benefits for local communities.

Similarly, emergent groups that form amongst people with weak or no ties to the local community will involve different integration and coordination needs and challenges than those that form within the local community, as will responses organised through extending groups across the three layers.

4 Is it right for my organisation or group?

Considering the previous questions will assist in answering the question of whether supporting or coordinating spontaneous volunteers is right for a particular organisation, and also which types and levels of strategy are most appropriate. In addition, organisations also need to evaluate their own internal capability and capacity to support or coordinate spontaneous volunteers. Some areas to consider are:

- volunteer management capacity; including workplace health and safety; recruitment and screening; psychosocial support; on-site team leadership and supervision; conflict resolution; scalability for large numbers of spontaneous volunteers (see The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement)
- existing staff and volunteers; including training and maintaining currency of relevant skills; acceptance of spontaneous volunteers by staff and traditional volunteers; role change and delineation
- liability and insurance – The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement require that volunteers are insured for personal injury and liability – issues of risk and liability vary between jurisdictions and should be carefully considered and included as critical aspects of emergency planning in relation to spontaneous volunteers (for examples of how organisations and groups have dealt with liability and insurance, see Case studies)
- who is already in the area, what other organisations could be well-placed to directly manage spontaneous volunteers or process material aid donations? Should we be partnering with other agencies on this or redirecting volunteers and volunteer goods to a specific place?

Strategic engagement before, during and after emergencies

There are five levels of strategy commonly used by organisations to support or coordinate spontaneous volunteers (see Figure 3). Working through the questions and planning considerations detailed in the previous section will help organisations to identify which of the five levels best align with their planned approach. Across all the strategy levels, organisations may take a more procedural or more enabling orientation in their engagement with spontaneous volunteers. This will often be shaped by the organisation's structure and its roles and responsibilities in emergency management.

Minimum engagement	Expanded engagement
Public communication	Channelling and brokering
Collaboration	Support and capacity building
	Active management

Figure 3   Five levels of strategy for supporting and coordinating spontaneous volunteers

The following information provides a definition for each strategic level together with some suggested actions for organisations to take before, during and after an emergency. It is well recognised that the first two to three days after a disaster is a critical period for those impacted and for organisations and agencies working in recovery. It is also a vitally important period for organisations to decide how they will engage with spontaneous volunteers and what form that engagement will take. While organisations are encouraged to consider and plan for their relationships with spontaneous volunteers well in advance of any emergency, as discussed in the previous section, there will be some decisions to be made specifically in relation to the type, location and impact of the disaster that has occurred.

This section will guide organisations in their response to spontaneous volunteering based on the specific level of strategy they are planning to adopt. Many organisations will develop plans and activities that operate across multiple strategic levels. The minimum levels recommended by this handbook for all organisations and groups are public communication and collaboration.

Five levels of strategy for engagement of spontaneous volunteers

Public communication

Broadly communicating with the public about spontaneous volunteering and other forms of offering assistance, in line with local and jurisdictional arrangements and agreements (see Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit and Case Study 6).

BEFORE AN EMERGENCY	• Develop a communication policy and plan in relation to spontaneous volunteering that can be tailored for specific emergencies as required, including consistent key messages and communication mediums. • Expect people to create and share their own disaster information via social media. Consider and plan for how you will engage with and monitor social media sources and information.
DURING	• Receive and, where appropriate, relay information about the location, type and scale of the emergency, and whether there are likely to be volunteering opportunities. • Ensure key stakeholders including MPs and the media have access to information pertaining to spontaneous volunteering in line with local and jurisdictional arrangements and agreements. • Identify and engage with significant social media sources of disaster information.
AFTER	• In the recovery phase, continue to receive, adapt as necessary, and relay information about the organisation's position on spontaneous volunteering; and communicate more broadly on other forms of offering assistance that align with the needs of the impacted community and local volunteering arrangements and processes.

Collaboration

Participating in networks and building relationships that facilitate coordinated and cooperative strategies for spontaneous volunteers amongst organisations and groups, appropriate to each organisation or group's goals, motivations, roles and position – this includes establishing relationships with groups not usually included in emergency management, for example, groups that understand the needs of different segments of the community (see Case Study 20; Case Study 27; and Case Study 26).

BEFORE AN EMERGENCY	• Identify and establish relationships that will support a coordinated response to spontaneous volunteering in line with the organisation's goals and desired outcomes, and agreed management of volunteer processes and responsibilities. • Agree on roles and responsibilities, and processes for referring volunteers and requests for assistance, and the identification and mitigation of risks.
DURING	• Stand up arrangements for collaboration including communication with stakeholders and partners. • Monitor information relating to the emergency including community impacts and requests for assistance.
AFTER	• Work with stakeholders and partners to ensure consistent, timely information and referrals and to help manage volunteer and community expectations. • Monitor and adapt pre-existing arrangements and processes as required to reflect new and/or evolving issues relating to spontaneous volunteers. • Provide advice and support to expanding and emerging groups working to support the impacted community. • Participate in event debriefs and after-action reviews to evaluate processes and identify opportunities for improvement.

For some organisations and groups, these levels may represent the full extent of their strategy. For others that can expand their strategies further, there are three broad levels of strategy in addition to public communication and collaboration which they may consider. These are: channelling and brokering; support and capacity building; and direct management.

Some organisations may adopt more than one of these, choosing, for example, to channel or broker interactions with some types of spontaneous volunteers, while directly managing or supporting other types of volunteers.

Channelling and brokering

Recognising, responding to and directing enquiries and offers from spontaneous volunteers to appropriate and useful places; may also involve facilitating and brokering volunteer-organisation interaction, for example, through registration, matching and referral services (see Case Study 6; Case Study 20; and Case Study 25).

BEFORE AN EMERGENCY	• Determine how offers of assistance will be received and managed. This may be through the development of processes to effectively screen and register volunteers and to match their skills against anticipated requests for assistance. Alternatively, it may be through the use of another organisation's processes (for example, volunteering peak body or local volunteer resource centre). • Establish relationships with key emergency management and recovery stakeholders to identify potential roles and activities that could be undertaken by volunteers and to provide advice on volunteer management, induction and debriefing. • Promote the organisation's intended role of channelling offers of assistance and brokering volunteering opportunities.
DURING	• Stand up and test pre-existing processes such as registration programs, templates, referral arrangements, etc. • Where possible and appropriate, begin disseminating information and key messages about how spontaneous volunteering will be supported and coordinated, as well as general advice about recovery timeframes, for example, that volunteers may not be required for some weeks or months after the disaster. • Connect with stakeholders through pre-existing relationships and gather information as it becomes available about disaster impacts and community needs. • Confirm volunteering requirements, such as police checks, working with children checks, volunteers with specialised skills and/or qualifications. • Consider the need for additional capability such as the establishment of a call centre, and access to additional computers, telephones or other IT requirements.
AFTER	• In the early relief and recovery period, prioritise the assessment of community impacts and needs, as well as existing and emerging capacity. What are the critical needs? What needs are already being met by others? How is the community responding to the disaster and how can their efforts be supported? • Implement the communications plan and disseminate key messages as early as possible to guide the most appropriate response from those wishing to volunteer. Where appropriate to the organisation's role, this information may include safety advice, information about 'no go' areas, processes for online and 'in person' registrations, and advice about volunteering opportunities and timeframes. • Work with partners and stakeholders to identify suitable opportunities and activities for spontaneous volunteers and provide advice/assistance to plan briefings, debriefings, rosters, and volunteer coordination activities.

Support and capacity building

Liaising with and supporting self-organised volunteers in emergent groups, and extending community groups; may also involve capacity-building through providing training and education, for example, about the emergency management system, and resources (see Case Study 8; Case Study 22; and Case Study 15).

BEFORE AN EMERGENCY	• Identify governance, risk and safety advice and guides for good practice that can be provided to emergent and extending groups.
	• Establish relationships that will facilitate the provision of support and capacity building during recovery, in line with the organisation's goals and desired outcomes.
	• Establish relationships with key emergency management and recovery stakeholders, service clubs and special interest groups (such as animal welfare organisations, 4WD clubs, environmental groups, etc.) and work with them to identify potential roles and activities that could be undertaken by volunteers, and how offers of help and referrals will be managed. Consider establishing and promoting a key point of contact for self-organised groups, that is, a community liaison officer.
	• Provide advice on working in a disaster setting; being sensitive to the needs and experiences of affected people; psychosocial impacts; volunteer management; rights and responsibilities, induction; debriefing; and self and community care.
	• Identify or develop simple modules of training that could be provided to spontaneous volunteers in a disaster relief setting.
DURING	• Connect with stakeholders through pre-existing relationships and gather information as it is available about disaster impacts and community needs.
	• Where possible and appropriate, begin disseminating information and key messages about how spontaneous volunteering can be supported and coordinated and general advice about principles and good practice for volunteering. Include information about recovery timeframes, for example, that volunteers may not be required for some weeks or months after the disaster.
	• Be prepared to offer advice and support as early as possible to any emerging recovery initiatives.
AFTER	• In the early relief and recovery period, prioritise the assessment of community impacts and needs, as well as existing and emerging capacity. What are the critical needs? What needs are already being met by others? How is the community responding to the disaster and how can their efforts be supported?
	• Continue to provide advice and guidance on good practice to emergent and extending groups, particularly about the rights and needs of those who have been impacted by the disaster. Use existing relationships to advocate, where appropriate, for emerging and extending groups to be included in recovery arrangements. Provide advice to emerging and extending groups about local arrangements and agreed recovery priorities, and the need to work collaboratively, maintain consistency and avoid duplication of effort.
	• Provide advice, mentoring and/or training, and, where required, access to grievance and dispute resolution processes.
	• Continue to facilitate connections between recovery stakeholders, emergent and extending individuals and groups, and the impacted community.

Active management

Actively managing spontaneous volunteers in accordance with The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement (see Case Study 8; Case Study 9; and Case Study 21).

BEFORE AN EMERGENCY	• Develop policies and procedures for engaging, screening, registering, rostering, deploying, coordinating and debriefing spontaneous volunteers that reflect good practice guidelines and align with existing emergency management arrangements. Consider how costs, insurance, risks and liabilities will be managed and how skills/qualifications/licenses/permits held by volunteers will be recorded and verified. • Identify potential roles and tasks for volunteers that align with the organisation's areas of responsibility, goals and desired outcomes, and/or partner with other organisations to whom spontaneous volunteers will be deployed. Agree on registration, referral and information management processes, and issues of cost recovery and liability. • Where possible, develop position descriptions for suitable tasks. Establish specific induction, training and debriefing procedures and materials, including workplace health and safety, code of conduct, fatigue management and arrangements for psychosocial support for volunteers and staff. • Promote the organisation's intended role to actively manage spontaneous volunteers.
DURING	• Stand up and test pre-existing processes such as registration programs, templates, and referral arrangements. • Where possible and appropriate, begin disseminating information and key messages about spontaneous volunteering opportunities and how they will be coordinated, as well as general advice about recovery timeframes, for example, that volunteers may not be required for some weeks or months after the disaster. • Connect with stakeholders and gather information as it becomes available about disaster impacts and community needs. • Confirm volunteering requirements, such as police checks, working with children checks, volunteers with specialised skills and/or qualifications. • Consider the need for additional capability and resources such as the establishment of a call centre, access to additional IT requirements, equipment (including protective equipment), team leadership, site management, catering, transport and/or accommodation.
AFTER	• In the early relief and recovery period, assess and prioritise community impacts and needs; existing and emerging community capacity; and volunteering opportunities. Adapt, as necessary, and implement existing communication and volunteer management policies and plans, and disseminate key messages as early as possible to guide those wishing to volunteer. • Work with partners and stakeholders to confirm suitable opportunities and activities for spontaneous volunteers. Plan and deliver volunteer inductions, briefings and debriefings, establish rosters, and undertake agreed roles and responsibilities. • Monitor the safety and wellbeing of volunteers and staff, and interactions between volunteers and the community. • Identify any potential to link spontaneous volunteers with ongoing or longer-term volunteering opportunities, either within or beyond the recovery period. • Participate in event debriefs and after-action reviews to evaluate processes and identify opportunities for improvement.

Preparing to work with spontaneous volunteers

As with any other aspect of emergency management, the successful support and coordination of spontaneous volunteers in an emergency will owe much to the work and planning that is undertaken before the event. As outlined in the previous section, organisations will need to make a range of decisions about when, how and if they will encourage spontaneous volunteers, and the level of strategy that will determine their preparations and activities. Wherever possible, work should be undertaken and plans and processes developed well before a disaster event, to facilitate collaboration and relationships, to ensure consistent communication and maximise positive outcomes.

BUILDING PARTNERSHIPS AND FACILITATIVE ARRANGEMENTS

The inevitability of spontaneous volunteering means that it should be an integral part of emergency planning. Depending on the jurisdiction and the circumstances of the disaster, there may be organisations that will have a stake in helping to coordinate or manage spontaneous volunteers. These could include volunteering peak bodies (Volunteering QLD, WA, Victoria, SA/NT, ACT, Tasmania, NSW), local government authorities, non-government agencies such as Australian Red Cross or Victorian Council of Churches, community organisations, service clubs such as Lions, Rotary, and APEX, and community-based emergency planning groups. Volunteers may also be mobilised and coordinated through corporate volunteering programs. Organisations should consider their capacity to engage and/or to partner with key stakeholders to pre-emptively plan for spontaneous volunteers. The establishment of memoranda of understanding can be a useful way of determining and recording roles and responsibilities in advance of any emergency.

BUILDING CAPABILITY AND CAPACITY

By evaluating its own context, an organisation can develop an enhanced understanding of its current capacity and can build the capability needed to support spontaneous volunteering. Key aspects for consideration include:

- What disaster roles and responsibilities does our organisation have, (if any) or likely to have?
- What are the potential impacts of a disaster on our organisation?
- What are the likely needs of our organisation following a disaster?
- What resources will we have or will we be able to draw on?
- What agreements or arrangements exist, or could be established, to describe how we will work with other agencies and organisations?

- What disaster training do we provide to our staff and volunteers?
- Does our training include, or can it be modified to include working with spontaneous volunteers?
- How could induction training be provided to spontaneous volunteers and what would it comprise?
- What level of insurance cover would we provide and are there any pre-conditions for providing cover that need to be observed (such as volunteer registration, induction, safety briefings, provision of personal protective equipment, etc.)?
- Will spontaneous volunteers be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses, and on what basis will such reimbursements would be made?

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

A critical aspect in preparing to work with spontaneous volunteers is to consider how information will be collected and managed. For example, it will be important to consider, in advance, where and how offers of spontaneous volunteering are likely to be received. This could include people turning up to a relief or recovery centre, those offering their help via social media sites, or on the organisation's website, or offers made to the organisation directly or via volunteering agencies or peak bodies either as part of a pre-registration process or spontaneously, in the recovery phase. In many cases, offers of help will be made via phone calls to the organisation, which, depending on the scale of the disaster, can result in a large volume of calls over several days or weeks, that may tie up or divert resources away from the organisation's primary activities.

The development of a comprehensive communication plan will help to ensure that messaging will reflect any decisions about when and how to engage with spontaneous volunteers and will encourage consistent content that is shared through appropriate and effective channels. A communication plan should include information about how offers to volunteer and requests for assistance will be managed. What information will be needed to effectively match offers of help with those who need assistance? What capacity is there to refer volunteers to other organisations, where their help may be better utilised? How will information be shared between organisations and volunteers? And how can the privacy of all stakeholders be assured?

The advent of social media has resulted in substantial changes in the way spontaneous volunteering occurs and is managed. It represents an unprecedented opportunity to communicate with large numbers of volunteers, in real-time. Recent examples have seen hundreds and, in some cases, thousands of people mobilised through Facebook and Twitter. Organisations that may be approached by people wishing to volunteer will need to have a strategy to utilise social media as a critical way of communicating with potential volunteers.

Practical considerations for communication include the development of clear, consistent messages for use when volunteers will be engaged and when they will not, information about how and when to volunteer, scripts for

call takers, volunteer registration templates, checklists and rosters (see Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit).

IDENTIFYING ROLES FOR SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS

An organisation's capacity to effectively use spontaneous volunteers will be greatly improved if time is taken in advance of any disaster, to identify potential roles for which volunteers could be utilised.

In many cases, there will be restrictions relating to the need for specialised training, as in the case of response agencies. In others, there will be a need for specific qualifications or licences, for activities as diverse as the provision of counselling or caring for children, to the operation of specialised machinery. However, there are also likely to be many roles that can be fulfilled, either through generalist volunteering, or by volunteers who have the required professional qualifications, licenses or permits.

The verification of qualifications and/or experience can be challenging in a post disaster setting, and this emphasises the value of an effective registration and matching process. Procedures should be established that enable volunteer skills, experience and qualifications to be recorded and, where required, verified by the organisation as part of its duty of care to those affected by the disaster. In some instances, for example in the case of food handling in Victoria, volunteers may be able to be supervised by a person holding the required qualification, which can facilitate the involvement of volunteers, even though they, themselves, may not be formally qualified.

There are likely to be a range of tasks that can be reasonably predicted prior to an emergency, such as general clean-up work, filling sandbags, receiving and/or distributing fodder and supplies, assisting with re-planting, and staffing telephones that may be suitable for spontaneous volunteers. The development of pre-existing position descriptions and identification, where required, of the minimum required skills and/or experience will streamline the support and coordination of spontaneous volunteers.

Psychosocial considerations

The disaster environment, by its nature, is inherently dynamic and likely to be highly stressful. The level of destruction, the incidence of injuries or fatalities and the potential for ongoing risk and disruption will mean a predominance of fear, grief, anger, emotional and physical distress.

Depending on the type of emergency and its impacts, the risks and effects of psychological trauma are a critical consideration both in relation to the impacted community and for those providing assistance. Organisations working in relief and recovery need to be able to recognise and respond to common individual and community responses to trauma. For individuals, these can include:

- hypervigilance, feeling the need to be on 'high alert' for further risk
- feeling detached or disconnected from others and/or their own situation
- being emotionally upset or, conversely, feeling emotionally numb, as if in a state of shock
- feeling fearful, stressed, overwhelmed, helpless, hopeless, anxious and/or angry
- experiencing extreme fatigue
- feeling highly connected to, and extremely protective of others, including family, friends and pets
- experiencing the re-emergence of symptoms and responses relating to previous instances of trauma
- feelings of 'survivor guilt' and isolation
- increased incidence of substance abuse
- increased incidence of family violence.

Community responses to trauma are equally complex and can include:

- a breakdown, whether temporary or long-term, of existing community networks and structures
- a condition of 'hyperbonding'[1] that sees new patterns of connection within the impacted community in response to a shared experience of the disaster
- the potential for parochialism and the formation of virtual community 'boundaries' that exclude outsiders
- the potential for 'survivor envy' that may emerge during community recovery/rebuilding.

Informational trauma can be experienced by people who are physically removed from the immediate impacts of a disaster through exposure to reports on social or traditional media or other sources of information about the event. Vicarious trauma can occur as a result of an individual's connection with people who have been directly impacted or as a consequence of their own previous experiences of trauma.

Spontaneous volunteers can be a source of psychosocial support for impacted communities, particularly those who are skilled at working in disaster recovery, or volunteers who may be from outside the affected area and not personally impacted. Conversely, inappropriate or poorly coordinated volunteer efforts can exacerbate and compound the psychological impacts of the disaster for individuals and the community, and may risk exposing spontaneous volunteers to traumatic situations they would otherwise not have experienced.

Well-planned recovery strategies and processes will be needed that engage with and reflect common trauma responses. For example, the mental impacts of trauma can affect a person's memory and may reduce their capacity to absorb and process information, or to make decisions. Organisations will need to consider how they will support spontaneous volunteers to be sensitive to the needs of impacted communities and individuals and to protect themselves from the effects of trauma. Identifying appropriate roles with clear descriptions, screening and skill matching of volunteers, ensuring team

leadership and site management, including scheduling and monitoring of volunteers is provided by suitably experienced people, and effective briefing and debriefing are all strategies that should be considered in planning how to work with spontaneous volunteers.

Consideration should also be given to the impacts on staff who will have responsibility for supporting and managing spontaneous volunteers. These responsibilities may come in addition to the staff member's primary role, and depending on the number of people seeking to volunteer, may quickly escalate to an overwhelming level. Spontaneous volunteers may have very specific expectations of the work they will be able to do or the level of interaction with impacted community members they will have. Additionally, members of the community may have strong views on whether the involvement of spontaneous volunteers is helping or hindering their recovery. Working to shape and manage these often competing expectations can result in additional stress for recovery staff, and care should be taken to ensure they have the appropriate support and access to additional assistance where required.

It may, in some circumstances, be necessary to decline offers of help or to stand down volunteers due to their lack of suitability or as a result of their own response to the disaster. Processes should be developed in advance for these circumstances to maximise positive outcomes and to reduce the risk of compounding trauma and distress for the community and the volunteer.

PSYCHOLOGICAL FIRST AID

Psychological first aid (PFA) is a valuable strategy for supporting people who have been impacted by a disaster. Like the assistance rendered for physical injuries through 'traditional' first aid, PFA is an approach used to help people impacted by or exposed to trauma to manage the psychological effects of the event and its aftermath.

The focus of PFA is to help people feel safe, connected to others, calm and hopeful. It promotes the importance of having access to physical, emotional and social supports and aims to assist people to feel able to help themselves. PFA recognises that people who have been impacted by a disaster will experience a range of initial responses, which, while normal and understandable, may affect their ability to cope. Therefore, the aim of PFA is to reduce initial distress, help individuals meet their current needs and to promote flexible approaches to coping with and adjusting to their experience.

While a small proportion of an impacted community may require additional mental health support, it is well recognised that most people will recover well on their own or with the support of their family, friends and community. PFA is a useful strategy in the first days and weeks following a disaster. It could serve as a basis for volunteer briefings prior to work being undertaken in the community and inform the approach utilised by spontaneous volunteers. Undertaking training in PFA could also be an effective strategy for organisations intending or preparing to work with spontaneous volunteers.

Longer-term recovery

According to research and experience, the first week following a disaster[1] is the period in which many spontaneous volunteers will seek to offer their support. This poses a challenge in that while there will be preliminary recovery activities underway, many people who have been impacted may not be ready to accept assistance from volunteers at this early stage. In addition, community groups and organisations who could accept volunteers may still be developing their respective responses and evaluating their existing capacity and needs.

Conversely, three, six, and/or twelve months after the disaster and beyond will often see periods of peak demand for assistance as recovery evolves and community members and volunteers become fatigued or are called back to their day-to-day responsibilities. These may be times where assistance from spontaneous volunteers can prove invaluable. However, if offers of assistance have not been well-managed in the early stages, this fresh energy and potential can be lost.

A key opportunity exists for organisations to challenge and reframe the existing, traditionally short-term view of recovery in favour of an understanding that is more representative of the long-term reality.

There are many examples of volunteering that takes place beyond the 'first flush' of media coverage – clean-up work, re-fencing, environmental projects, art and culture activities, anniversary commemorations and events, many of which have benefitted from the assistance of spontaneous volunteers who have maintained their interest and connection with impacted communities, even where they were not able to be used in the early days following the disaster.

Key elements in successfully establishing and maintaining this longer-term connection include effective registration of volunteers and their skills and areas of interest, in the first instance, together with regular, ongoing communication. Respecting the efforts of volunteers and acknowledging their contributions will further strengthen relationships.

Similarly, there are opportunities to engage with and establish ongoing relationships with emergent and extending groups involved in recovery. Groups that form or that extend their activities in response to the needs of early recovery can be supported and encouraged to transition their efforts to address the longer-term needs of the community, which in turn, can increase community capacity and resilience.

As part of the pre-emptive planning for spontaneous volunteers, organisations should consider identifying potential volunteering opportunities beyond those likely to be the focus in the first weeks. Education about the long-term nature of recovery and information about

roles that will likely become available over time can then be included in communication from the earliest stage, as well as information about how the registration and engagement processes with spontaneous volunteers are undertaken. Such approaches will strengthen the likelihood of transitioning short-term, spontaneous volunteerism into sustainable, long-term community involvement.

[1]   Cottrell, A 2010, *Research report: A survey of spontaneous volunteers*, Australian Red Cross, https://www.redcross.org.au/getmedia/7e716df6-2890-4a33-b1a9-9143a71f1122/ES0-Research-report.pdf.aspx

Monitoring and evaluation

Given the inherently complex and variable nature of spontaneous volunteering, organisations may not consider the value of monitoring and evaluation processes to measure the efficacy and impact of their own efforts, and that of volunteers. This is a missed opportunity to better understand how to manage the challenges, and measure and value the contributions made by those who spontaneously volunteer.

Ideally, processes to monitor and evaluate spontaneous volunteering should be developed and included at the initial planning stage. These should include the establishment of key performance indicators for assessing the effective integration and support of spontaneous volunteers, where that has been the aim, or alternatively, the successful management of any decision not to engage spontaneous volunteers. A formative evaluation should also include an assessment of policies, plans, systems, checklists and templates designed for use by the organisation in the coordination of spontaneous volunteering.

Where possible, evaluations can also be undertaken during the recovery period. Real-time evaluations that occur during the implementation phase allow for adaptation and refinement of policies and procedures. They should include direct input from spontaneous volunteers and members of emergent and expanding groups about their experiences and interactions with the organisation, as well as information from staff, stakeholder organisations and members of the impacted community about the benefits and any drawbacks or obstructions they experienced or observed.

Information and feedback generated through event debriefs and after-action reviews, together with formal and informal feedback and the collection of qualitative and quantitative data, can inform a summative evaluation at the end of the recovery period. Outcomes and findings can then be used to establish benchmarks, improve and refine organisational plans, policies and processes, and to address any identified gaps. Sharing experiences and lessons derived from evaluation will be of value to volunteers, recovery stakeholders and the broader community, and will demonstrate the organisation's commitment to continuous improvement.

Case studies

Note: Case studies have been selected based on their utility as learning resources. Inclusion here should not be taken an indication that these examples represent current best practice.

CASE STUDY 1 COMMUNITY RESPONSE TO KOBE EARTHQUAKE

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CASE STUDY 6 VOLUNTEERING QUEENSLAND'S EXPERIENCE WITH EV-CREW

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CASE STUDY 13 FIREFOXES

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CASE STUDY 15 EMERALD EMERGENCY SUPPORT TEAM

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CASE STUDY 19 THE BRISBANE 'MUD ARMY'

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CASE STUDY 21 GANNAWARRA SHIRE COUNCIL – MANAGING VOLUNTEERS IN EMERGENCIES

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Jurisdictional arrangements for spontaneous volunteering

Refer to the Australian Disaster Resilience Knowledge Hub for arrangements for spontaneous volunteering in each Australian state or territory.

Further reading

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Additional material is available online to support the use and application of this handbook. Supporting resources online will be updated to ensure currency as arrangements and experiences change over time.