

'OUT OF UNIFORM': BUILDING COMMUNITY RESILIENCE THROUGH NON-TRADITIONAL EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING



Joshua Whittaker, Blythe McLennan, John Handmer

Centre for Risk & Community Safety, School of Mathematical & Geospatial Sciences, RMIT University, Melbourne

PROJECT BACKGROUND

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

Citizen participation is a key principle of disaster risk reduction and resilience building. However, in most developed countries, EM relies largely on a workforce of professionals and, to varying degrees, volunteers affiliated with official agencies. Individuals and groups working outside of this system have often been seen as a nuisance or liability, and their efforts are largely undervalued. Given increasing disaster risk worldwide due to population growth, urban development and climate change, it is likely that 'informal' volunteers will provide much of the surge capacity required to respond to more frequent emergencies and disasters in the future.

WHAT IS 'NON-TRADITIONAL'?

People contribute to EM in many ways, including as accredited volunteers with emergency services ('traditional volunteering'). However, others contribute in other, less formal ways. These include people who volunteer through existing, non-emergency groups and organisations (e.g. sporting clubs), groups that form in response to needs (real or perceived) that are not being met, and individuals who volunteer 'spontaneously'. New technologies and social media are also enabling people to participate in EM in new ways.



PROJECT OBJECTIVES

- Identify how non-traditional emergency volunteering contributes to community resilience throughout the different phases of EM.
- Identify ways the EM sector in Australia and New Zealand can promote community resilience through support of non-traditional emergency volunteering.
- Develop and evaluate alternative models for emergency volunteering in Australia and New Zealand that are inclusive of non-traditional volunteers and volunteering organisations.

RESEARCH DESIGN

The research objectives will be achieved through:

- A global review of key concepts and models of emergency volunteering, focusing on approaches to non-traditional volunteering (Year 1).
- A review of trends influencing emergency volunteering in Australia and New Zealand (Year 1).
- A series of case studies of non-traditional volunteering, including emergency services and other groups and organisations (Years 1 and 2).
- Development and evaluation of alternative models of emergency volunteering (Years 2 and 3).
- An assessment of the legal implications of non-traditional volunteering for emergency services and other groups and organisations (Year 3).
- A key part of the research is to learn from End User experience with non-traditional volunteering. Please contact us if you have examples, evidence or other information relating to non-traditional volunteering that you would like us to consider.
Email: blythe.mclennan@rmit.edu.au

The project will deliver a range of outcomes including practical guidance for end users on how to engage with non-traditional volunteers; the development of new approaches and models for engaging non-traditional volunteers; and an assessment of possible risks and liabilities associated with the involvement of non-traditional volunteers in EM.

