

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



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BACKGROUND

The public is usually first on the scene in an emergency or disaster and remain long after official services have ceased. Citizen participation is a key principle of disaster risk reduction and resilience building. However, emergency management relies largely on volunteers affiliated with official agencies and a comparatively smaller workforce of paid staff. Individuals and groups working outside of this system have often been seen as a nuisance or liability, and their efforts are largely undervalued. There is a significant and largely untapped opportunity for emergency management agencies to contribute to community resilience by supporting non-traditional emergency volunteers.

THE PROJECT

The project has three key objectives:

- Identify how non-traditional volunteering contributes to community resilience in different phases of emergency management;
- Identify ways the EM sector can support non-traditional emergency volunteering;
- Develop and evaluate alternative models of emergency volunteering that are inclusive of non-traditional volunteering.

The project is currently focused on conducting case studies of non-traditional volunteering. The first three case studies examine community-led preparedness (Be Ready Warrandyte), recovery (Community on Ground Assistance in Kinglake), and spontaneous volunteer management (Volunteering Queensland's Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather).

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

A literature review has been completed on 'informal' emergency volunteering. Three forms of informal emergency volunteerism were identified.

Emergent volunteerism: new forms of volunteerism that occur in response to unmet needs. Although research has focused on 'spontaneous' volunteers, new forms of volunteerism may emerge before an event,



and may be deliberate and carefully planned (e.g. citizen-led search and rescue, clean-up groups etc.).

Extending volunteerism: groups and organisations that do not have regular emergency functions but extend their activities in times of crisis (e.g. football clubs, school committees etc.).

Digital volunteerism: A new mode of volunteerism that may be emergent or extending. Social media and web-based mapping software have enabled citizens to freely produce and disseminate their own emergency-related information. Examples range from basic uses of sites like Facebook to share information, through to more complex uses involving data mining and crisis mapping.

A second report identifies key shifts in the volunteering landscape as a whole and considers the possible implications for emergency volunteering. It identifies four large-scale forces of change that are reshaping the nature of volunteering: the transformation of life in the 21st Century, the revolution in communication technology, growth of private sector involvement, and a rise in government expectations. These changes have led to three previously uncommon forms of volunteering: episodic (shorter-term), corporate (and skills-based) and digital.

Two case study reports have been prepared. The first focuses on Be Ready Warrandyte and demonstrates how community-led projects with strong leadership and governance, community buy-in, and support from EM agencies can increase community engagement and preparedness. The second focuses on Community On Ground Assistance, an organisation that formed after the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires in Kinglake, and highlights the challenges faced by informal volunteers when engaging with formal processes and procedures.

END USER STATEMENT

'The community expects us to do everything we can to help them respond and prepare for emergencies. It does not matter where the volunteers come from and whether they are the traditional type of volunteers or not, the bottom line is that our communities deserve to be supported. We as agencies have to find ways to include communities in that. An important aspect for end users of these projects is to make sure that the outcomes of the research give agencies a chance to understand the issues, and importantly, what changes need to be made to ensure agencies are inclusive of what happens in the community and the volunteers that want to come from the community, as well as our traditional brigade volunteers'.

- Lucas van Rijswijk, Tasmania Fire Service

