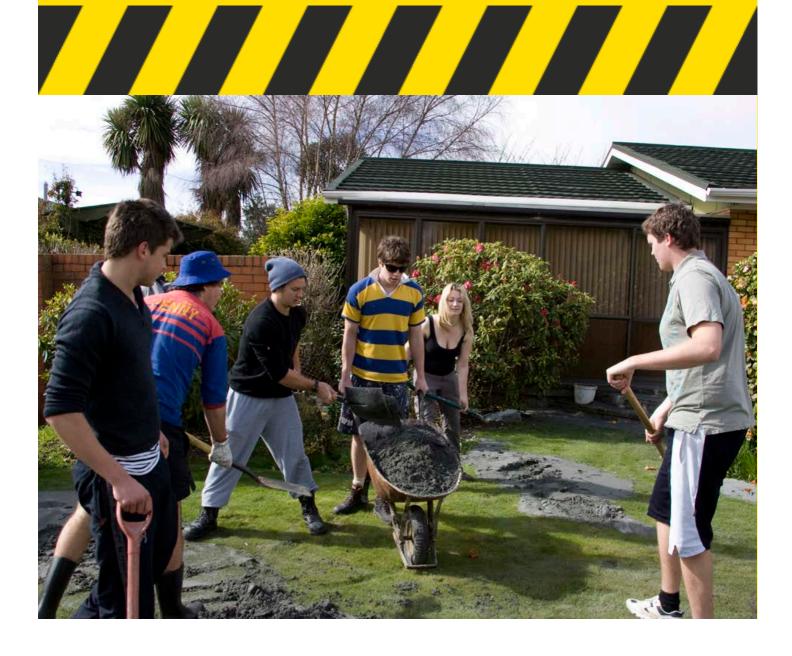**bushfire&natural HAZARDS CRC**

THE FUTURE OF 'NON-TRADITIONAL' EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING: WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE AND HOW CAN IT WORK?

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Cover: The Student Volunteer Army in action in Christchurch post-earthquake. Photo by Eve Welch, University of Canterbury.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ABSTRACT

THE FUTURE OF 'NON-TRADITIONAL' EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING: WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE AND HOW CAN IT WORK?

The future landscape of emergency volunteering and volunteer management in Australia is not going to be the same as the landscape of the past. Overlapping and interacting developments taking place both within the emergency management sector and external to it are likely to lead to forms of volunteering, and volunteer management and engagement, that are 'non-traditional' for the established emergency management sector becoming much more prominent in the future alongside more traditional emergency management volunteering. This paper considers the questions of what this non-traditional volunteering is likely to look like in the future and how EMOs can successfully engage with it. It outlines seven types of non-traditional emergency volunteering that are likely to feature more prominently in the future ('what will it look like?'). It then considers how EMOs can engage with it. It suggests in particular that the idea of 'coproduction' is a powerful way for EMOs to think about engagement with non-traditional volunteers that is aligned to a resilience-based approach in emergency management. It illustrates how coproduction can work, and the utility of the concept in this area, using the example of a community-led bushfire preparedness project in Victoria, Be Ready Warrandyte.

INTRODUCTION

The future landscape of emergency volunteering and volunteer management in Australia is not going to be the same as the landscape of the past. The traditional model of emergency volunteering employed in Australia is based on formal, accredited volunteers who are affiliated with emergency management organisations, and are mostly involved in response and recovery roles (e.g. Commonwealth of Australia 2012). This form of volunteering is crucial to Australia's emergency management capacity and it will remain central to any model of emergency volunteering into the future. However, overlapping and interacting developments taking place both within the emergency management sector and external to it are likely to lead to forms of volunteering, and volunteer management and engagement, that are 'non-traditional' for the established emergency management sector becoming much more prominent in the future alongside more traditional emergency management volunteering.

Developments within the emergency management sector include the policy focus on building community resilience to disasters before events occur, and fostering greater shared responsibility across government sectors and between governments and citizens (including NGOs, communities and businesses) (COAG 2011). This has spurred greater government attention to volunteering beyond the traditional emergency management volunteer workforce (Rafter 2013). This focus is certainly not restricted to Australia. At an international level also, there is growing emphasis on building "resilience to disasters through a 'bottom-up' process in the form of volunteer initiatives rooted in the community" (UNV 2011, p.xxiii).

Beyond the emergency management sector, broader socioeconomic, cultural and political shifts are reshaping people's choices about how, when, where and why to volunteer compared to the past. A recent review of key volunteering trends identified four key large-scale changes that are likely to impact on future emergency volunteering (McLennan *et al.* 2015b): 1) transformation in the way people live and work in the 21st Century, which includes increasing time demands of paid employment, cultural globalisation, rising aspirations, and shifting values (Hustinx et al. 2010; Rochester et al. 2010); 2) the revolution in communication technology (UNV 2011, p.26); 3) growth of private sector involvement in volunteering through employee volunteer programs and partnerships with non-profits (Haski-Leventhal et al. 2010); and 4) rising government expectations (and regulation) of volunteering, connected to greater outsourcing of public service delivery to volunteer-involving organisations (Rochester et al. 2010; Warburton et al. 2013; Hustinx 2014). These trends are evident both within Australia and internationally.

In light of these developments, this paper broadly examines what 'non-traditional' emergency volunteering is likely to look like in the future under these shifting conditions and begins to consider how EMOs can engage with it. It suggests in particular that the idea of 'coproduction' is a powerful way for EMOs to think about engagement with non-traditional volunteers that is aligned to a resilience-based approach in emergency management. It then illustrates how coproduction can work, and the utility of the concept in this area, using the

example of a community-led bushfire preparedness project in Victoria, Be Ready Warrandyte (McLennan *et al.* 2015a).

WHAT WILL IT LOOK LIKE?

Exactly what shapes non-traditional emergency volunteering will take in the future will depend on the way that EMOs, volunteer managers, and volunteers themselves respond and adapt to the developments taking place within the sector and more broadly. However, research suggests that seven key categories of non-traditional emergency volunteering are likely to feature more prominently. Each presents potential benefits for emergency management but also particular challenges and risks. While not all of these are new in the context of emergencies and disasters, they all fall outside of the more traditional model of emergency volunteering and therefore have not been formally factored into emergency planning in the past in a comprehensive way.

1. *Emergent volunteerism,* including 'spontaneous' volunteering, occurs in the context of emergent collective behaviour where people work together towards shared goals (Drabek and McEntire 2003) but in less formal ways that "typically lack formal elements of organisation" (Whittaker *et al.* 2015). It is increasingly recognised as an important component of community resilience, but is also difficult to integrate with formal emergency management.

2. *Extending volunteerism* involves groups and organisations that do not have regular emergency or disaster functions that extend their activities into this area to volunteer before, during or after a crisis (Whittaker *et al.* 2015). Like emergent volunteers, these volunteers often have intimate understandings of local needs and can draw on existing networks and resources to meet them. However, they are often unaware of the broader emergency management context.

3. *Digital volunteerism* can be thought of as a form of telecommuting (Cravens and Ellis 2014, p.1). It represents a new mode of volunteerism enabled by the increased accessibility of sophisticated yet simple information technology. Digital volunteering is likely to become increasingly prevalent in emergency and disaster management worldwide, with particular potential as brokers of crowdsourced disaster information (Hughes and Palen 2009).

4. A rapid growth of shorter-term, *episodic volunteering* and an associated decline in longer-term, high-commitment volunteering is one of the most widespread changes in volunteering styles reported in recent times (Cnaan and Handy 2005; Rochester *et al.* 2010). Although usually viewed in negative terms, episodic volunteering also has benefits that are well-suiterd to disaster conditions, with volunteers tending to exhibit greater flexibility, adaptability and pragmatism compared to more traditional volunteers, for example (Macduff *et al.* 2009).

5. *Employer-supported volunteering* is often referred to as corporate volunteering, but is not limited to big corporates. This form of volunteering is on the rise (Haski-Leventhal *et al.* 2010). It increasingly overlaps with and

reinforces a related trend towards *skills-based volunteering*, where the skills, training and experience of potential volunteers are purposefully matched with the specific needs of recipient organisations (Points of Light Foundation and Hands On Network n.d.).Benefits to recipient organisations from engaging with corporate volunteers are greater when ongoing relationships are established between them (Cavallaro 2006).

6. *Government outsourcing to, and regulation of, volunteers* through contracts with non-profit organisations and community groups has increased in the last decade (Warburton et al. 2013; Hustinx 2014). While not constituting a new type of volunteering per se, it does constitute a significant shift in the positioning of volunteers in relation to government with respect to the delivery of public services as well as in the organisational and regulatory contexts in which emergency volunteering takes place.

7. *Community-based emergency preparedness and planning* - is becoming an increasingly important component of emergency and disaster management internationally, replacing the top-down, interventionist approaches that dominated in the past (Allen 2006). Community-based initiatives rely on the involvement of volunteers that are able to represent their community in formal preparedness and planning activities. There is a nascent but growing interest in community-based approaches in Australian emergency management.

Each of these categorisations reflects a current focus in research, and each adds to our understanding of non-traditional emergency volunteering. To varying degrees, each of the categories emphasize a particular dimension of volunteering over others, such as duration (episodic volunteering), mode of delivery (digital), organisational context (emergent, extending and employer-supported), and positioning in relation to community and government (outsourcing and community-based preparedness and planning). Hence there is overlap between them and care should be taken not to rely on single dimension criteria to characterize volunteering per se. Indeed, this is a criticism of the growing focus on episodic volunteering that unduly emphasizes the duration of volunteer engagements above other dimensions (Cnaan and Handy 2005, p.31).

HOW CAN IT WORK?

It is clear that, with the growing prominence of these non-traditional forms and modes of volunteering, the future emergency volunteering landscape is going to be populated by a much wider and more diverse range of players than in the past. In this Internet age, these players are also going to be more interconnected and less centrally-controlled. Increasing numbers of them are likely to be from outside the established emergency management system. Many of them will not be affiliated with formal organisations, at least not in an ongoing way. Many will volunteer for shorter durations, possibly off-site (and on-line), and many will not have specific emergency management training. However, the large majority will also bring important resources to emergency management that can strengthen community resilience such as local knowledge, social networks, adaptability, innovation, and professional skills.

THE COPRODUCTION OF COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

How can EMOs engage with these diverse non-traditional forms of volunteering in ways that contribute to building community resilience and increasing shared responsibility while managing associated risks?

A key part of the answer to this question may lie in the concept and processes of coproduction. In general terms, coproduction is "the process through which inputs used to produce a good or service are contributed by individuals who are not "in" the same organization" (Ostrom 1996, p.1073). In the context of public services, coproduction involves "engagement of citizen-clients in the actual provision of public services, in complex, informal interactions with state agencies" (Joshi and Moore 2004). Coproduction is by no means a new idea, but it has received renewed interest since the 1990s (Bovaird 2007; Alford 2009). In disaster management, coproduction is particularly evident in citizen involvement in producing disaster-related information via social media (e.g. Rafter 2013), as well as the generation of new disaster knowledge across the science-policy interface (Scolobig and Pelling 2015). Indeed, volunteer-based, state government emergency services constitute a form of coproduction in themselves.

Using coproduction of emergency management as a conceptual framework for understanding and pursuing engagement between EMOs and non-traditional volunteers strongly reflects the principles and aspirations of a resilience-based approach to Australian disaster management. Coproduction "essentially redefines the relationship between public service professionals and citizens from one of dependency to mutuality and reciprocity" (Holmes 2011, p.22). In this sense, it is an expression of shared responsibility (McLennan and Handmer 2013). It is also potentially very confronting to EMO organizational culture and processes, as through coproduction "power, authority and control of resources are likely to be divided (not necessarily equally) between the state and groups of citizens" (Joshi and Moore 2004).

As a process, coproduction faces some considerable challenges that stem from the fact that it requires very different relationships between public sector staff

and citizen volunteers than have occurred in the past (Holmes 2011, p.25). There are issues of representation, accountability, and authority: who from a community gets to participate and who is excluded? There is also a risk of conflict or protracted negotiation that could undermine the process. It also requires public sector staff to adopt the role of motivating, advising, facilitating and enabling "citizen-client" contribution to service production rather than producing services directly. This calls for very different kinds of skills, for example in communication, negotiation and advice (Alford 2009, p.221-2).

In order to illustrate what coproduction of emergency management and community resilience between EMOs and 'non-traditional volunteers can look like in practice, as well as what it can achieve and how the challenges identified above can be addressed, the following section describes a case of coproduction in action, Be Ready Warrandyte (McLennan *et al.* 2015a). This example is not given with the intention of demonstrating how coproduction ought to be done, as coproduction can take many forms (Bovaird 2007). Rather, it is meant to illustrate key aspects of coproduction in an emergency management context, and to demonstrate the utility of the concept in this area.

THE EXAMPLE OF BE READY WARRANDYTE

Be Ready Warrandyte ('Be Ready') was a community-led bushfire preparedness project undertaken by the Warrandyte Community Association (WCA) in this area between May 2012 and June 2015. Its primary goal was "to have more Warrandyte households with effective bushfire plans" (WCA n.d.). Be Ready is notable for being an award-winning, community-led preparedness project. It is an example of two of the categories of non-traditional volunteerism identified above: extending volunteerism (by the WCA volunteers) and community-based emergency preparedness and planning.

Be Ready is a good example of the coproduction of community bushfire safety. The initial impetus for the project came from local Community Fireguard leaders and a local CFA brigade captain who were concerned about the low level of bushfire planning amongst residents following the community's near miss on Black Saturday. It was chaired by the President of the Warrandyte Community Association. Members on its committee of management included community volunteers from the WCA, Community Fireguard leaders, local CFA fire brigade captains, paid staff from the emergency management departments of two Councils, community safety personnel from two CFA Districts and representatives from its initial funders, the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD). The committee also contracted a local project management business – The Good Work Group – to help coordinate the project.

The Be Ready committee designed and delivered a diverse range of locally-targeted activities including: a community survey, a localised web page, a humorous video on bushfire planning, localised communication materials, interactive Bushfire Scenario Planning workshops, interactive sample fire plans, a public forum on fire bunkers and a tour of local bunkers, and a project on heat wave messaging.

Interviews with participants highlighted how it was able to adapt government communications, connect further into the community, devise and test more

innovative approaches, lead discussion on topics that need independence from perceptions of government bias or agenda, and bring local contexts, priorities, goals and knowledge into emergency management dialogues and planning.

The coproduced nature of Be Ready was also evident in participant interviews. One community volunteer described a *"foundational perspective"* on which the project was built as being *"We're in this together. None of us can do it on our own."* A professional EMO participant highlighted it thus:

> *"Prior to Be Ready Warrandyte the responsibility of fire safety for the Warrandyte community was the CFA. Now the CFA is just a player. They're just one of the participants."*

In line with the definition of coproduction, professional EMO representatives and volunteers from the WCA and the local CFA brigades all input considerable resources and skills to the project to produce a service that was widely recognized would not have been possible otherwise:

> *"I think it's actually made the emergency management community realise that the community have a great amount of power. That something that's born from right at the community level has the capacity to be fantastic and to really take off. And it works sometimes a lot better than trying to push the message down from the top."*
> (Professional EMO representative)

The Be Ready experience also reflected aspects of the challenges to coproduction. The challenge of representation and community authority identified in coproduction literature was recognized by some participants in this type of community-based project in general. It was largely addressed in Be Ready through the longevity and good standing of the Warrandyte Community Association in the local community and its close and respectful relationship with local governments. The potential for conflict and protracted negotiation, also identified in the coproduction literature, was also reasonably well overcome in the Be Ready project due to good governance processes, skilled leadership from the Chair, a commitment amongst the volunteers to *"work with"* the established emergency management system, and good working relationships amongst the committee members. This enabled professional EMO representatives to 'agree to disagree' with WCA and CFA volunteers over the appropriateness of conducting tours of local, private fire bunkers, for example.

The different roles needed of public sector staff in coproduction processes, as enablers, motivators and advisors, was also reflected in the Be Ready process. Professional EMO staff on the committee (from both the CFA and local government) actively contributed to the project and strongly represented it within their own organisations without trying to direct it. One explained their role thus: *"be open, be supportive and sit back. Do not dictate"*, while another emphasized that there still *"needs to be some advice"*.

Related to this different role, the EMO participants in the project suggested changes that their organisations needed to make to support both paid and volunteer representatives in this type of process. These included longer-term planning, providing structures for their representatives to work confidently within, recruiting and training volunteers specifically for their community engagement

skills, and developing organisational cultures that are more supportive of community engagement. In some respects, they reflected elements of a key dilemma in coproduction of public services, which is the capacity of public sector agencies to recognize, reward, and develop the appropriate skills amongst their staff (Holmes 2011). Notably, EMO participants in Be Ready indicated that these types of internal changes had already begun, while participants overall felt that the 'time was right' to pursue closer engagement between EMOs and community groups. One EMO representative summed this view up thus:

> "The previous Chief Officer said at a forum years ago he said "the day will come when how we engage with the community will be as important as how we suppress fires." I think we're there now. I think the community is willing."

CONCLUSIONS

The research reported here is beginning to answer the questions of what non-traditional emergency volunteering is going to look like in the future and how emergency management organisations can successfully engage with it. The seven categories of volunteering described, while adding to our understanding of current and emerging forms of non-traditional volunteering, tend to prioritise a particular dimension of volunteering over others. Some care should be taken not to rely too heavily on single dimension criteria to characterise volunteering out of context. Future work will extend on this to develop a multi-dimensional typology for characterising non-traditional emergency volunteering.

Answering the question of how emergency managers can support non-traditional forms of volunteering while assessing and managing the risks they present is an emerging research area where more work is needed. This paper suggested that a key part of the answer lies in the concept and processes of coproduction.

The Be Ready example shows that substantial benefits can flow from the coproduction of community safety and resilience by non-traditional volunteer groups and EMO representatives. It also showed that the challenges of coproduction may not be as difficult to overcome in this context as they might first appear.

Importantly, this paper does not argue that coproduction is a panacea for EMO engagement with non-traditional volunteers, nor that it is suitable for all such engagement, indeed it is not. However, it does hold that coproduction has considerable potential and power as a way for EMOs to think about engagement with the diverse and growing base of non-traditional emergency volunteers that is well-aligned with a resilience-based approach.

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