

# 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 completing case studies of non-traditional volunteering in different phases of emergency management throughout Australia. Researchers have also developed a proposed framework for assessing the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of four broad, alternative strategies available to emergency management organisations (EMOs) for engaging with non-traditional emergency volunteers and voluntary organisations.

## RESEARCH OUTCOMES

**Case studies:** A number of case studies have been undertaken or are in progress. These include studies of: Be Ready Warrandyte (a community-led initiative to increase the number of households in the Greater Warrandyte area with an effective bushfire plan; Community on Ground Assistance (a citizen-led project to help people affected by



the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires to rebuild and recover); EV-CREW (Volunteering Queensland's model for centrally coordinating spontaneous volunteers in emergencies); faith-based volunteering after the 2015 Pinery bushfire in South Australia; digital volunteering in Vanuatu after Cyclone Pam (2015); and a historical study of spontaneous volunteering after Cyclone Tracy (1974).

**Engagement strategies:** A framework has been developed to assist EMOs assess the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) of alternative strategies for engaging with non-traditional emergency volunteers. Four broad strategies for engaging non-traditional volunteers are identified:

- **Ignore** non-traditional volunteers and fail to put plans in place to engage with them. Responsibility is seen to lie with official agencies and impacted communities, which are considered capable of responding independently of other organisations and volunteers.
- **Resist** engagement with non-traditional volunteers by attempting to dissuade, stop or exclude them. Again, responsibility is seen to lie with official agencies and impacted communities.

- **Accept** or tolerate non-traditional volunteers as inevitable participants in emergency management and plan for them without directly engaging or encouraging their participation.
- **Embrace** non-traditional volunteers and voluntary organisations as legitimate participants in emergency management and either engage them directly or actively encourage and facilitate their involvement.

The framework's application as a decision support tool will be tested in workshops with end users in coming months.

## END USER STATEMENT

'This research continues to make a valuable contribution to the BNHCRC and researchers have emerged as respected subject matter experts within the Australian voluntary sector. The project has not only helped the emergency management sector to better understand the changing nature of volunteerism, but has helped to define and build awareness of potential alternative models of volunteering to cater for the ever-changing nature of the volunteer life cycle. Researchers have successfully contributed to academic papers, national conferences and have worked with grass roots movements to help influence change and drive innovation across the sector'. – Robert Dugdale, Country Fire Authority

