SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEER ENGAGEMENT in RECENT EMERGENCIES IN WA

NDRR Grant Funded Project

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report is a comprehensive examination based on extensive interviews conducted with spontaneous volunteers and the organisations that interacted with them during five recent emergencies in Western Australia. It identifies procedural gaps, best practices, and provides recommendations for effectively engaging with spontaneous volunteers to enhance safety and resilience in the region. The willingness of individuals to provide immediate assistance during disasters represents a valuable and essential resource. The report delineates the challenges encountered and lessons learned in managing and coordinating spontaneous volunteer efforts. We extend our gratitude to Disaster Relief Australia, the Mindaroo Foundation, The Salvation Army, Margaret River Community Resource Centre, the Wooroloo Community Team, the Shire of Carnamah, and the City of Swan for their invaluable insights and contributions to this report.

Managing large-scale disasters, encompassing both natural and man-made events, as well as pandemics, presents a formidable challenge for governments globally. The World Disaster Report of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies has highlighted the significant impact of over 3700 natural hazards in the past decade, affecting an estimated 2 billion people and causing extensive economic damage. This report furnishes vital recommendations for the pre, during, and post-emergency phases, drawing from experiences during Cyclone Seroja, the Wooroloo bushfires, Margaret River fires, Fitzroy Crossing floods, and the COVID-19 pandemic. Each emergency has provided unique insights into spontaneous volunteering, emphasising the imperative for enhanced engagement strategies.

Key findings include:

- Spontaneous volunteers often self-organised before official activation by local authorities.
- In the absence of clear directives, spontaneous volunteers sought opportunities to contribute independently.
- Efforts by spontaneous volunteers often remained siloed from the official response framework.

While formal volunteer recruitment and management structures were often lacking during these emergencies, this report encapsulates lessons learned to facilitate effective engagement with and management of spontaneous volunteers in future crises. Leveraging these insights, the report delineates stages in the spontaneous volunteer lifecycle and the predominant tasks undertaken by spontaneous volunteers. It advocates for emergency-specific, volunteer-specific, and organisation-specific strategies tailored to each phase.

Noteworthy recommendations aimed at assisting organisations that engage with spontaneous volunteers and enhacing clarity among spontaneous volunteers include:

- **Designating a spontaneous volunteer coordinator as the primary point of contact.**
- **Establishing proactive plans for deployment upon the arrival of spontaneous volunteers.**
- **Developing a uniform communication campaign with key messages before a disaster**
- **Preparing a comprehensive list of tasks and job descriptions in advance for efficient task allocation.**
- **Implementing a uniform communication strategy and registration process.**
- **Involving philanthropic entities in preparatory efforts within each locality.**
- **Ensuring clear communication of safety procedures prior to volunteer registration.**
- **Identifying channels for community donations.**
- **Establishing a feedback mechanism to maintain communication with volunteers and inform them of future opportunities.**

INTRODUCTION

About Volunteering WA

Established in 1988 as a not-for-profit organisation, Volunteering WA is the peak body for volunteering in Western Australia with almost 800 organisation and community group members. We work in partnership with community, corporate, educational and government organisations to engage with, lead and advance volunteering in Western Australia. Our purpose is to empower people and communities to enrich WA, and our vision is for a society in which everyone is inspired to make a difference.

Volunteering WA (VWA) possesses the capability to assume a pivotal role in facilitating the coordination of spontaneous volunteers during times of disaster and emergencies. As the host of the emergency volunteering platform[1], VWA serves as a centralised hub where both existing and prospective volunteers can access information regarding active campaigns, thereby enabling them to enlist for volunteering opportunities not only within Western Australia but across the nation. The platform furnishes up-to-date details regarding available tasks, including their nature, duration, and location, allowing individuals to register, undergo matching with organisations requiring volunteers, and receive ongoing communication pertaining to current and forthcoming tasks

What is a spontaneous volunteer?

Spontaneous volunteers are individuals or groups of people who have a strong desire to help. They are not affiliated with a volunteer involving organisation or formal emergency responders. Various terms including community volunteers, emergent volunteers and informal volunteers are often used interchangeably with the term spontaneous volunteer. These individuals perceive the immediacy of the situation and believe that their skills, resources, and experiences can help their community recover faster from the disaster. Based on their location and the type of activity they perform, spontaneous volunteers can be categorised into four types: local leaders, local helpers, external leaders and external helpers (Ahmad, 2024)

Background

Around the world, it is a widely accepted practice that when disasters strike, the local authorities and official emergency response organisations take control and handle the situation by utilising their resources, assisting the local communities in need from the response phase to recovery phase. They often collaborate with trained and recruited volunteers (traditional volunteers) and spontaneous volunteers (unaffiliated but offer support for the recovery and response efforts) to do this. The willingness of individuals to offer immediate help during disasters is a valuable and imperative human resource.

Spontaneous volunteers can be an essential building block in recovery and response efforts, helping with evacuation, rebuilding of both the physical infrastructure, and a sense of support and community spirit.

Spontaneous volunteers come in all ages and sizes. After the Christchurch earthquake in 2011, students from the local university organised an army of volunteers, 10,000 strong, to assist with the clean-up. They also collaborated with the farmers who assisted them with heavy equipment and vehicles to help deliver food across the city. These spontaneous volunteers self-organised before the local authorities became activated.

Sometimes spontaneous volunteers emerge, only to find that the system is unable to utilise them. In Texas and Louisiana, USA, there was mass mobilisation of volunteers, that arrived only to find themselves in the wrong places due to lack of communication. Not knowing what needed to be done, they looked for ways to help. Research suggests that on-site spontaneous volunteers distract professional responders from their primary duties, and that they are rarely incorporated into the formal planning (Twigg, 2017). During 2017 Hurricane Harvey, this lack of coordination led to the emergence of grassroots community organisers that filled the void left by the systems failure. Self-organised spontaneous volunteers managed and facilitated the volunteers, but their response efforts remained siloed from the official response, leading to duplication of effort and loss of valuable resources.

The recent disasters in Western Australia, including bushfires, floods, and cyclones, have shown an outpouring of support from spontaneous volunteers. While spontaneous volunteering has existed for a long time, and these volunteers may provide essential support, their arrival at the scene of major disasters may also pose coordination

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[1] emergency.volunteer.org.au

and management challenges. At times, the authorities would like to engage with spontaneous volunteers but face pressures to exclude them due to safety and other reasons[2]. This tension is called the "involvement/exclusion paradox."

The examples above underscore the imperative for swift and organised action by authorities to ensure an efficient and effective emergency response. Failure to promptly organise can lead to community-driven initiatives attempting to fill resultant gaps. These instances emphasise the necessity of preparatory measures that activate upon the arrival of spontaneous volunteers. It is crucial that existing plans delineate the various roles for spontaneous volunteers and leverage their invaluable contributions to their fullest extent. Such strategic preparedness not only enhances emergency management but also fosters a positive volunteer experience, potentially catalysing future recruitment endeavors.

A structured strategy tailored specifically for spontaneous volunteers is paramount due to the distinctive nature of volunteer coordination compared to that of professional relief workers. Spontaneous volunteers diverge significantly from traditional volunteers, often appearing at disaster sites with minimal warning. While considerable efforts have been made to forecast their numbers, assess their capabilities, and anticipate their availability, their movements remain largely unpredictable, similar to the unpredictability of disasters themselves. Despite this unpredictability, tapping into the wealth of resources and expertise they offer is vital for effective and sustainable emergency management.

Volunteers epitomise a community's latent strength and serve as the cornerstone of response and recovery efforts during emergencies. Volunteer-involving organizations must introspect their engagement practices and ensure the existence of both a strategic framework and operational plan to effectively engage and collaborate with volunteers, encompassing both traditional and non-traditional volunteers such as spontaneous volunteers.

About this report

Nine interviews were carried out to understand existing perspectives on spontaneous volunteer role and how their engagement in recovery and response efforts could be better coordinated. This report complements existing international standards for managing spontaneous volunteers (ISO 22319) and the National standards for Volunteer Involvement with insights from spontaneous volunteers and organisations that managed them. As part of the NDRR project, Volunteering WA is developing a Spontaneous Volunteer Management System for WA. This report responds to the NDRRF priority 1 of "Understanding Disaster Risk" through building of increased knowledge of local spontaneous volunteer capability and system to harness and deploy this capability. This need is particularly evident in regions where due to the geographical size and low population density, regional communities are particularly vulnerable. It notes existing engagement with spontaneous volunteers, uncovers the concerns of the stakeholders,

[2] Harris, M., Shaw, D., Scully, J., Smith, C. M., & Hieke, G. (2017). The involvement/exclusion paradox of spontaneous volunteering: New lessons and theory from winter flood episodes in England. Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly, 46(2), 352-371.

identifies tasks suitable for spontaneous volunteers and offers suggestions to develop better strategies that will assist with future spontaneous volunteer engagement and coordination. The growing risk of natural disasters reinforces the need for effective spontaneous volunteering strategies that are robust and firmly embedded into management practices.

Internationally, there is a drive to develop sets of models and methodologies to support spontaneous volunteer coordination. Volunteering Queensland links spontaneous volunteers with councils and community organisations in times of natural disaster using the Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) (McLennan, Molloy, Whittaker, & Handmer,2016). There are also social media-based systems such as those provided by NSW Emergency Service (2021), and system based dedicated to coordinate volunteers such as KUBAS (Betke et al.,2024). Mayorga et al. (2017) presented a queuing system to model the uncertain arrival and departure of spontaneous volunteers during recovery phase, while Ludwig et al. (2017) presented public displays where volunteers could enter their details at the site, select the tasks that are visible and update it in real time. Rauchecker and Schryen (2018) suggested a system to assign volunteers to tasks at the disaster site. Sperling and Schryen (2022) address the issue of coordinating heterogenous and large sets of spontaneous volunteers during the immediate aftermath of a disaster in the response phase.

The Swedish Fire Response Association co-production initiative[3] presents a good example of direct collaboration with citizen volunteers. Volunteering WA hosts the emergency volunteering platform designed to match individuals (that register during an emergency campaign) with an organisation needing volunteers. Registered individuals can receive communication about the current and future volunteering opportunities.

Spontaneous volunteers are hard to reach. This report uses in-depth interviews from nine participants to unpack how volunteer managers, who engaged with spontaneous volunteers, managed, and coordinated them. It also provides insights from spontaneous volunteers who participated in recovery and response efforts during recent emergencies in Western Australia. The report presents recommendations on how to bridge existing gaps, and improve future engagements between local governments, volunteer involving organisations and spontaneous volunteers during disasters.

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[3] E. Ramsell, S. Pilemalm and T. Andersson Granberg, "Using Volunteers for Emergency Response in Rural Areas: Network Collaboration Factors and IT support in the Case of Enhanced Neighbors", in Proceedings of the 14th International Conference on Information Systems for Crisis Response and Management, Albi, 2017, pp. 985-995

STUDY PARTICIPANTS AND EMERGENCIES

To explore the engagement of spontaneous volunteers during recent disasters in WA, lived experiences were collected from nine participants representing local governments, local community centres, volunteer involving organisations that engage with spontaneous volunteers, and spontaneous volunteers who participated in recovery and response efforts. The five emergencies under study were Cyclone Seroja, Wooroloo bushfires, Margaret River fires, Fitzroy Crossing floods, and the COVID-19 pandemic. The interview process for the data collection commenced in August 2023.

Cyclone Seroja[4] heavily impacted Western Australia's Mid-West region in April 2021, the Wooroloo Bushfire[5] February 2021 caused extensive damage to residential properties within the City of Swan and Shire of Mundaring. The Margaret River fires burnt down almost 6000 hectares of precious forest in 2021, recorded as one of the state's worst bushfire disasters. The Fitzroy River flooding[7] in January 2023 resulted in damaged and isolated communities and infrastructure and COVID-19 pandemic[8,10] swept across the globe, causing widespread disruptions to daily life, overwhelming healthcare systems, decline in traditional forms of volunteering and triggering unprecedented economic and social challenges. It also created an awareness about the importance of non-traditional spontaneous volunteers[9]. Together these emergencies offer a more nuanced understanding of issues including relocation of remote indigenous communities.

The spontaneous volunteer lifecycle

A unique contribution of this report is the identification of the spontaneous volunteer lifecycle. The following section will discuss the gaps identified and recommendations in relation to the six aspects of the life cycle; planning, arrival, orientation and training, safety and compliance, engagement, collaboration and coordination, and their recognition and farewell depicted in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Spontaneous Volunteer Lifecycle (Ahmad, 2023)

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4 www.bom.gov.au/cyclone/history/seroja.shtml
5 Wooroloo Bushfire | 2020/21 Annual Report (dfes.wa.gov.au)
6 www.abc.net.au/news/2021-12-10/margaret-river-memories-of-destructive-2011-blaze-bubble-up/100690250
7 www.dfes.wa.gov.au/emergencywa/recovery?tab=flood
8 Trautwein, S., Liberatore, F., Lindenmeier, J., & von Schnurbein, G. (2020). Satisfaction with informal volunteering during the COVID-19 crisis: An empirical study considering a Swiss online volunteering platform. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 49(6), 1142-1151.
9 csrm.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/volunteers-and-volunteering-during-COVID-era-australia
10 Trautwein, S., Liberatore, F., Lindenmeier, J., & von Schnurbein, G. (2020). Satisfaction with informal volunteering during the COVID-19 crisis: An empirical study considering a Swiss online volunteering platform. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly, 49(6), 1142-1151.

PLANNING FOR SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS

Spontaneous volunteerism constitutes an inherent and unavoidable aspect of disaster recovery, with indigenous and CALD communities highlighting its particular significance in meeting the diverse needs of affected individuals. Aligned with the WA Implementation Plan 2020 (WAIP 2020), which underscores the importance of community-centric resilience, this report contributes to the overarching objective of bolstering adaptive community resilience. It advocates for the integration of arrangements for managing spontaneous volunteers within existing emergency management plans and operational guidelines. Across the five emergencies scrutinised, spontaneous volunteers emerged as invaluable assets. Recommendations for proactive planning encompass:

- Clearly designating responsibility for coordinating and managing spontaneous volunteers, potentially through the appointment of a spontaneous volunteer engagement officer or coordinator tasked with assessing volunteers' interests and availability.

- Defining the relationship between spontaneous volunteers and emergency management organisations and agencies.

- Establishing protocols for indemnity to safeguard against accidents, injuries, and public liability for both volunteers and engaging organisations.

- Developing organisational sub-plans for spontaneous volunteer engagements, encompassing codes of conduct, policies, procedures, and suitable tasks.

- Strategising communication channels and key message content to be disseminated to spontaneous volunteers pre-emptively.

- Proactive planning for communication campaign, aligning it with the expectations and preferences of local communities and ensuring guidance regarding interim activities while awaiting deployment as well as information on necessary gear and equipment.

- Raising awareness of associated risks, implementing risk mitigation measures, and emphasising the coordination of tasks by emergency managers.

   Engage local philanthropic entities in the to absorb spontaneous volunteers and ensure their resources such as equipment, donations and perhaps even accommodation in the initial stages could be harnessed.

- Acknowledging that the timing of spontaneous volunteer needs may not align with offers of assistance, necessitating long-term planning.

- Formulating scenarios to guide spontaneous volunteer engagement across various phases of disaster recovery, encompassing immediate cleanup and evolving needs and opportunities over time.

- Consider the role of peak bodies such as Volunteering WA that can offer assistance with brokering spontaneous volunteers.

Table 1 depicts the stages to facilitate planning for spontaneous volunteers. The trigger point would be once the existing capacity is reached. All fields could be discussed in the planning phase to reduce ambiguity. An interesting suggestion relates to the limitations. It was suggested that any false reliance on local resources must be mentioned for contingency planning.

Table 1: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers

Trigger point	Pre-approved Tasks	Number of SV per volunteer manager	Location	Duration of tasks	Limitations	Identification and registration
When to include SV	Tasks suitable for SV	Ratio could be 1:5 or 1:7	Evacuation centre or elsewhere	Hours, days or longer term	Any false reliance on resources?	

" *Keep in mind that if authorities do not organise quickly, the community will try to fill that void.***"** *~ (Participant 7)*

ARRIVAL OF SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS

> **" *The reality is you will always have untrained volunteers and they need to be given work"*** ~ *(Participant 7)*

Research suggests that spontaneous volunteers are sure to arrive[11]. The review of spontaneous volunteer engagement in five recent emergencies in WA confirmed existing research on self-organised spontaneous volunteerism. At least three participants shared that spontaneous volunteers initiated self-organised efforts and were not engaged by the local authorities during the disasters. In many instances, this was partly due to lack of expectations from authorities regarding possible roles for spontaneous volunteers. Four organisations suggested the need to educate LGAs on what they can/should do for awareness raising and assist with streamlined spontaneous volunteer engagement.

Often the community volunteer groups noticed gaps and stepped forward to assist with some of the recovery efforts. Community volunteer groups are made up of individuals who come together to perform a specific type of volunteering. This can include beach clean-up, neighbourhood watch groups or groups that serve food at a shelter. Community volunteer groups are different from a not-for-profit organisation or a charity as the structure is quite fluid and casual. The community groups that emerged during these disasters were self-organised at a very local level, spontaneous volunteers with established relationships and reach within the local community set up Facebook or WhatsApp groups. These groups enabled spontaneous volunteers to perform tasks, noting that many of the spontaneous volunteers were utilised seamlessly.

> **Example of Collaboration:** One of the participants suggested pre-established agreement to assist the local authorities with the arrival of spontaneous volunteers. In the case of the Wooroloo bushfires, an emergency volunteering organisation was approved by the one of the Shires to participate in the community recovery and response efforts. Another City in WA shared that they have a MOU with a local volunteer involving organisation to manage volunteers and donations.

- Consider the first point of contact to be a dedicated spontaneous volunteer manager/coordinator who understands their motivations and facilitates them.
- Clear communication protocols for engaging with spontaneous volunteers upon their arrival must be delineated within policies and procedures to support spontaneous volunteer managers and/or coordinators.
- Identify trigger points for surge requirements, reception procedures, registration protocols, and ensure provision of comprehensive job descriptions outlining all potential tasks (and associated risks, if any) for spontaneous volunteers to expedite task allocation.
- Organise necessary insurance for spontaneous volunteers to integrate them immediately.
- Open communication- using key messages such as "We need you, you are important," (Participant 7) coupled with specific instructions regarding location, timing, duration, registration procedures, required gear, and any necessary training or experience to set clear expectations, ensure safety of volunteers, and mitigate potential liabilities.

> **" *It's really important for people to feel like they need to do something when their community is in trouble. The thing that helps you the most is having something to do, not sitting there worrying about it."*** ~ *(Participant 6)*

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[11] Harris, M., Shaw, D., Scully, J., Smith, C. M., & Hieke, G. (2017). The involvement/exclusion paradox of spontaneous volunteering: New lessons and theory from winter flood episodes in England. Nonprofit and voluntary sector quarterly, 46(2), 352-371.

- Recognise the pivotal role of social media in facilitating spontaneous volunteerism, particularly mobilising local communities, conducting needs assessments, and advertising volunteering opportunities in advance.

- Maintain a roster for volunteer rotation to avoid burn out, and a checklist to address all emerging risks.

- Collaborating organisations that assist emergency responders to consider compartmentalising tasks in advance to reduce parallel processing and confusion upon spontaneous volunteer arrival.

- Decide on branding to facilitate volunteers and avoid confusion (for example, avoid changing vest, a hat or a T-shirt when moving from one organisation to the next).

- Utilise relationships, resources and friendships to assist with better management of donations.

- Share clear guidelines about insurance that could be implemented immediately upon arrival. It was noted that often it is the volunteer involving organisation that provides the insurance for all volunteers[12].

The Australian approach to managing emergencies recognises four phases of emergency management cycle: prevention, preparedness, response and recovery. While spontaneous volunteerism can be present in preparation phases, such as preparing for floods and storms, generally spontaneous volunteers emerge at the scene of the disaster and participate in response and recovery phases. During the five emergencies studied, spontaneous volunteers were present from the first day during Cyclone Seroja, however they appeared in the second week during the Wooroloo bushfires. Spontaneous volunteer experiences were very different in both instances. While they expressed chaos and confusion during Cyclone Seroja, their experiences during the Wooroloo Bushfires were positive. By the time spontaneous volunteers arrived during the Wooroloo bushfires the local volunteer-based groups and not for profits had already set up stations and were able to absorb them easily.

During the Wooroloo Bushfires, the community could identify gaps and initiate self-organised efforts to bridge those gaps. Margaret River Community was also able to put together a register and use a Facebook Messenger group where all of the volunteers knew what they were doing. Different chat groups were created for different tasks and if they had a request come through, they knew where to go and how to help. This might not be the case with other communities, especially those that are remote and have limited access to the internet.

ORIENTATION AND TRAINING

During the five disasters investigated, it was noted that a large percentage of spontaneous volunteers emerged from the local community. These spontaneous volunteers were well connected and initiated self-organised efforts.

> ❝ *Every time I walked into the evacuation centre there were friends who were there, who were members of the footy clubs, the sporting clubs. They all just came in and just made things happen. So, there was always, tea and coffee and someone to talk to. There was always a freshly made sandwich whenever you went in. You know, they fed us to the gills. But that was the spontaneous volunteering, knowing that the only thing we can do right now is make sure that you're ok"*
> *~ (Participant 6)*

The local emergency services did not engage in any orientation activities but noted that pre-planning for such emergencies would have prevented some issues from emerging. In particular, there was a concern to recognise the demands and limitations on professional volunteers, especially in case of larger scale emergencies, multiple emergencies and regional areas, when more professional volunteers are needed. The EV Platform may offer a solution by acting as a platform where emergency management organisations could identify appropriate volunteers by communicating directly with individuals who have registered their interest to volunteer, thus facilitating speedy mobilisation and longer-term relationship building with volunteers.

> **The following suggestions were made by the participants to enhance the orientation and training process:**
> 1. **Consider a structured plan for the arrival stage that is flexible enough to adapt to changing circumstances.**
> 2. **Having predefined roles and responsibilities for spontaneous volunteers that adapt with changing circumstances.**
> 3. **Volunteering WA may assist with a pre-registered data base of volunteers to facilitate quick mobilisation and a centralised communication hub to ensure information flows**
> 4. **Duty cards with roles and safety requirements displayed at set locations and handed to individuals**
> 5. **Checklists to read before registration.**
> 6. **Create awareness about platforms such as the Emergency Volunteering Platform where individuals can register their interests and stay informed.**
> 7. **Ensure two-way communication**
> 8. **Clarify logistics**

Orientation

Spontaneous volunteers that are in a leadership position in their community may make decisions without consulting local authorities that impact local communities. This can be mitigated by having strategies in place for the orientation phase and by having a dedicated spontaneous volunteer coordinator to communicate with the spontaneous volunteers and oversee their activities. This will also ensure local authorities are on board.

> ❝ *The key was to have small and clear area of focus to make the spontaneous management plan effective"* *~ (Participant 7)*

- Consider a check in/ check out system where volunteer coordinators make notes about any medical or dietary needs.
- Ensure that spontaneous volunteers comprehend the importance of minimising harm and trauma to the communities affected by the emergency, in addition to the emergency itself. This may involve creating awareness about refraining from taking photographs of individuals' belongings on the streets and related social media use.
- Tap into local community Facebook groups to share important information and remind individuals when their assistance would be most impactful.

> ❝ *Keep in mind the power of social media and online technology to share safety messages widely"* ~ (Participant 2)

- Clarify that the organisation that decides to engage with the spontaneous volunteer is responsible for the screening of all volunteers to ensure they are suitable for the role.
- Provide educational resources and clear instructions for each stage of the disaster (such as safe procedures for leaving stock feed to prevent fire hazards, or alternative donation drop-off locations if evacuation centers are unable to accommodate certain items).
- Consider crafting two clear plans; how spontaneous volunteers could assist local councils (for example fencing around the roadsides) and local individuals (for example, fencing around the individual properties) as spontaneous volunteers may be engaged for both.
- Volunteer coordinators could record spontaneous volunteer suggestions and solutions, and upon completion of their tasks, the lessons learnt and best practices to use in future emergencies.

Figure 2 identifies some common tasks that were performed by the spontaneous volunteers in this study. Organisations that engage with spontaneous volunteers can use this information to compartmentalise tasks that are most suitable for spontaneous volunteers.

Figure 2: Common Tasks performed by Spontaneous Volunteers
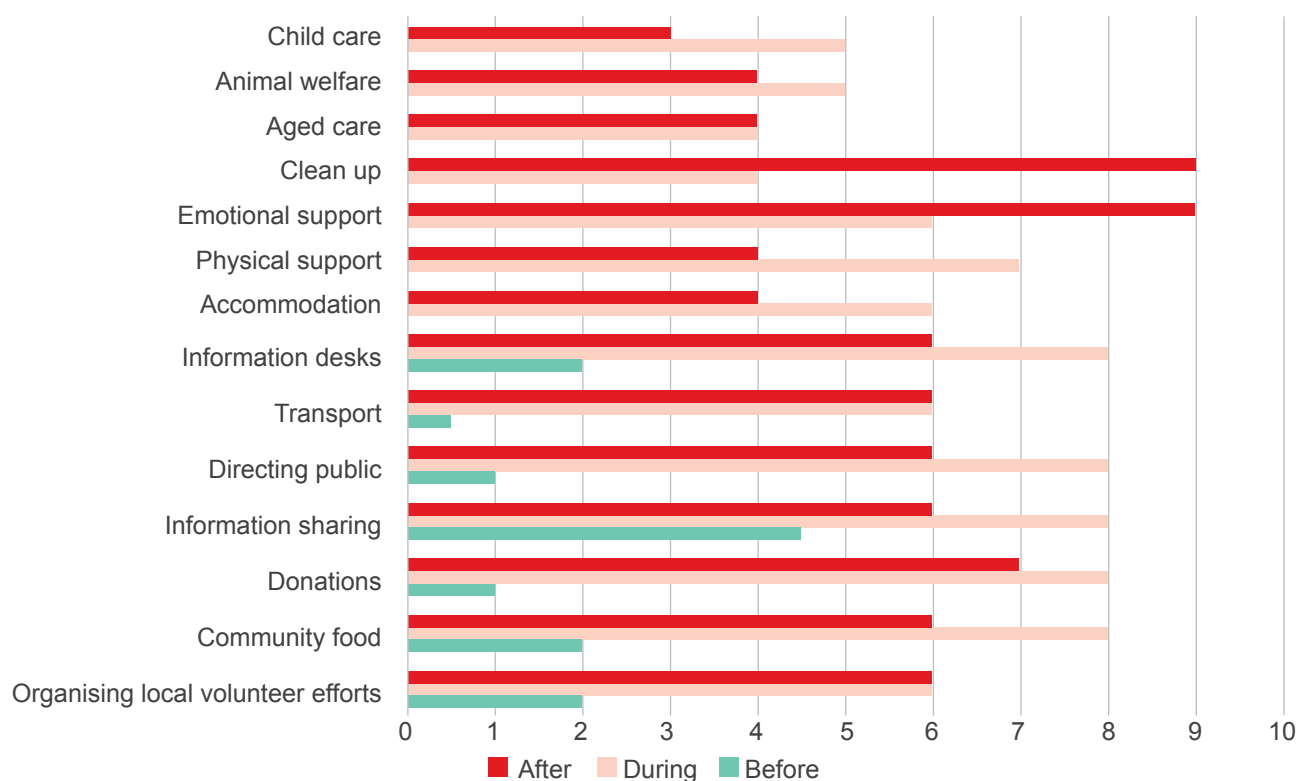
Training

Through the participant interviews, it became clear that there was no spontaneous volunteer training involved in any of the five disaster situations investigated in this study. Generally, it is up to each organisation to decide how (if at all) it wishes to involve spontaneous volunteers and the resulting briefing/training that would be required. One of the participants shared a suggested training model that was brought to their attention post-disaster.

❝
The key was to have small and clear area of focus to make the spontaneous management plan effective"
~ *(Participant 7)*

SUGGESTED TRAINING MODEL

Training in one particular emergency volunteering organisation identified by a participant revolved around creating an awareness as to why spontaneous volunteers were being coordinated, clarifying expectations, providing initial safety training on arrival, understanding the spontaneous volunteer role upon activation, providing skill based training for particular roles so the spontaneous volunteers understand the workloads.

The aim of training was to keep the volunteers gainfully engaged to fulfill their desire to help and inform about safety and compliance. It was also clarified that training did not involve any kind of power tools or heavy equipment, rather it was more around managing expectations so that the spontaneous volunteers were aware that their work was adequate.

As part of the training session, it was reiterated that no task was mundane and that even if the spontaneous volunteers were moving objects, they were assisting the homeowners who would have taken weeks to get thus far.

ENSURING SAFETY AND COMPLIANCE

Local authorities and emergency services organisations might want to consider clarifying where all individuals assisting with recovery and response efforts could find information about safety and compliance. Suggestions included having clear messaging depicted in both pictures and words, making it accessible and inclusive to create a better understanding of why it is important to complete the registration process and read through safety information. It is acknowledged that Volunteering WA has an existing EV Platform that has the capacity to harness community good will and deploy it in an effective and coordinated manner. It provides access to well designed and rewarding roles identified by various organisations that are sensitive to local needs and conditions.

❝ *Each emergency is going to have its own personality"*
~ (Participant 6)

The information sheet could have
1. **an overview of the incident and the structures in place**
2. **an overview of the insurance and liability issues**
3. **the types of tasks available**
4. **the safety and security procedures that must be adhered to**
5. **protocol on the use and sharing of information, for example photographs**
6. **how to report an incident and who to get in touch with**
7. **the importance of signing in and signing out**
8. **not leaving tasks without informing the task supervisor**

These policies and procedures need to be revised regularly to ensure best practices are maintained.

COLLABORATION, COORDINATION AND ENGAGEMENT

❝ *There is no single way to interact with spontaneous volunteers"*
~ (Participant 9)

Coordinating the engagement of spontaneous volunteers is the heart of a successful spontaneous volunteer management system. Some of the suggestions to consider include:

- Have pre-prepared checklists available.
- Ensure open two-way communication.
- Ensure recognition; the local authorities in many instances recognised the work that was being done.
- Listen to the local communities' needs to support them accordingly.
- Direct collaborative efforts were recommended (rather than managing spontaneous volunteers).
- Consider engagement of spontaneous volunteers for 'peripheral support' (See Figure 2) such as food, water, accommodation, taking care of uniforms, supporting families of official responders etc.
- Utilise community leaders to manage communications (due to their knowledge of the local needs).

One of the organisations' solution to the collaboration issues was the use of of colourful post-it notes to compartmentalise tasks. Another organisation used simple rostering and provided ID to facilitate volunteers and ensure that they were able to assist at the right time.

Key points identified by participants to keep in mind when rostering spontaneous volunteers include:

- availability of spontaneous volunteer coordinator to supervise spontaneous volunteers
- type of tasks and the time required for the completion of those tasks
- number of volunteers available
- number of safety vests/ hats/ protective gear available
- the level of risk associated with the task and the supervision required

Barriers to collaboration

Lack of strategies for collaboration was recognised as a barrier to collaboration. Adhering to, and implementing the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, in addition to ensuring that effective management practices are in place, was expected to support organisations to attract, manage, ensure safety of volunteers and perhaps even retain volunteers for future opportunities. This meant having clear coordination mechanisms in place, speedy registration process, open communication and ensuring expectations were set clearly.

The participants said there was a perception of a divide between the different agencies, and also between paid workers and volunteers that made it difficult to collaborate and coordinate at the time of the disaster. Among the issues highlighted by the participants was a perception that paid workers may be placed higher in the hierarchy compared to the volunteers but don't necessarily have the local knowledge and don't necessarily invite local knowledge.

Additionally, bureaucracy was also cited as a barrier that could be addressed using open communication as shared by participant 4:

> ❝ *I love volunteering, but I just couldn't, couldn't in the end. I couldn't deal with bureaucracy and that sort of stuff"* ~ (Participant 4)

A unique suggestion was considering a list of philanthropies in the preparation phase that could be utilised for funding, or to train during the preparation phase. Having established relations could assist with collaboration during the disaster, particularly with childcare, age care, and pet care assistance. Such collaborations would especially be fruitful in the case of evacuation centers where pets may not be allowed. It was suggested that local authorities could consider having arrangements in place in advance to avoid issues.

Depending on the scale of the disaster, volunteer managers could maintain a ratio of 1:5, 1:7 or even 1:10 to ensure the right guidance and collaboration. The focus would be to build good relationships and ensure open communication.

CONCLUSION AND KEY FINDINGS

This report documents lessons learnt from five recent emergencies in WA, specifically in the management of spontaneous volunteers. These lessons have informed the upgrade of the Emergency Volunteering Platform as well as a training program to harness and deploy this capability most efficiently in times of need. The report records existing capability and gaps identified in emergency management, as well as recommendations for future emergencies.

While each emergency is unique, the issues identified by participants are similar, and relate to pre-planning, open communication, early integration, listening and responding to community needs, integrating local knowledge with skilled emergency response, clarifying points of coordination, establishing clear roles, creating escalation plans, and identifying responsibilities of the stakeholders. Western Australia has always been impacted by natural hazards such as bushfires, cyclones and floods. Spontaneous volunteer engagements during the recent emergencies in WA show that resilience is all around us.

Before the disaster:

1. Design appropriate strategies for spontaneous volunteers that are specific to the organisation, the emergency context, and the type of volunteering that may occur.
2. Plan for spontaneous volunteer arrival to eliminate chances of confusion.
3. Assign a spontaneous volunteer coordinator/manager to understand motivation of spontaneous volunteers, builds relationships, outlines direction for future emergencies, and is responsible for the engagement, safety and recognition of spontaneous volunteers.
4. Clarify issues of liability.
5. Prepare a list of tasks and job descriptions in advance that can be shared via existing platforms such as the Emergency Volunteering Platform in case of an emergency.
6. Create a uniform and simple communication campaign and registration process.
7. Engage philanthropies in the preparation phase in each location.
8. Identify avenues for donations for the community.

During the disaster:

1. Create awareness about the spontaneous volunteer coordinator as the first point of contact.
2. Facilitate the registration process.
3. Ensure safety procedures are read and understood before registration.
4. Consider collaboration within the relevant emergency volunteering organisations responding at the location.
5. Compartmentalise tasks for spontaneous volunteers.
6. Ensure clean vests that clearly identify the different organisations are issued promptly to avoid incovenience.

After the disaster:

1. Consider a feedback and communication loop.
2. Inform volunteers about future opportunities.

The rich data highlights the need for enhanced focus on working with the local communities (including spontaneous volunteers) in a way that meets their needs. The report highlights the importance of open communication and information channels before, during and after an emergency. Resilience is strengthened when all stakeholders work together before, during and after an emergency. This approach would also maximise opportunities to connect, work together and develop locally appropriate, community-led policies and procedures, and activities that will strengthen resilience. This report is intended to be a starting point for the spontaneous volunteer management system for WA.

By synthesising the insights gleaned from the experiences of Western Australians, Volunteering WA has gained a nuanced understanding of spontaneous volunteer engagement. This report meticulously dissects these experiences into a comprehensive lifecycle framework for spontaneous volunteering, laying the groundwork for the strategic planning, execution, and evaluation of future engagement initiatives. It also identifies the barriers faced by spontaneous volunteers and provides guidance on collaborating to reduce vulnerability. It is anticipated that this will support spontaneous volunteers and make future engagements more efficient.

The report underscores the pivotal role of the volunteering peak bodies to help engage with spontaneous volunteers. Depending on the type of emergency, the size of the affected area, the population affected, the existing effectiveness of the official emergency responders and their communication, Volunteering WA can assist with brokering spontaneous volunteers using its EV Platform. The report also identifies the importance of having a designated spontaneous volunteer coordinator who can oversee spontaneous volunteer engagement. This role entails overseeing communication, relationship management, and contributions, leveraging local insights and resources to bolster community resilience.

Often community leaders and local helpers may be in a better position to manage communications, relationships and contributions due to their knowledge of the local needs. They might also feel they are more worthy of participating in recovery efforts, compared to those from outside their community. Therefore, engaging such individuals in planning rather than excluding them is anticipated to bring about positive results and build community resilience.

The report also recommends early activation of a communication campaign that is consistent across the board and can appropriately advise spontaneous volunteers and channel offers for help. The communication strategy could leverage technology, utilising social media platforms to streamline coordination and communication. The structures in the emergency management plan to support this would include determining the roles of spontaneous volunteers, creating a plan for integrating them during an emergency, coordinating and collaborating with them to take advantage of the resources that they bring with them, to ensure a coordinated approach. Understanding and planning for spontaneous volunteers that step forward to help for

various reasons (public duty, connection to the area, humanitarian reasons etc.) will ensure seamless recovery and response efforts.

Despite all efforts, the timing of the disaster may have an impact on the level of volunteer response. If two disasters occur in quick succession (for example, the Wooroloo bushfires and Cyclone Seroja) many of the human and non-human resources might get exhausted earlier on. Organisations may want to consider contingency plans to be in place for the different types of incidents according to the different levels of response. Spontaneous volunteering is recognised as informal and flexible in its character. It is important to ensure that strategies employed by volunteer involving organisations are flexible and adapt to both individuals and groups, catering for their unique characteristics.

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APPENDIX A - THEMES AND RECOMMENDATIONS CHECKLIST

Key themes and recommendations checklist

KEY THEMES	RECOMMENDATIONS	DONE
Before the disaster		
Designing strategies specific to the organisation, the emergency context, and the type of volunteering that may occur	Planning appropriate strategies for the arrival of spontaneous volunteers to avoid confusion Clearly outline the trigger point when extra surge for each community would be required	
Plan for each step of engagement with spontaneous volunteers	Prepare a list of tasks and job descriptions in advance that can be modified to suit the disaster situation	
Open and clear communication	Creating a unified communications campaign	
Engaging philanthropies	Identifying and creating relationships in the preparation phase in each city	
Identify avenues for donations	Create an awareness of items that already exist with the official responders and items and monetary aid that might be needed	
During the disaster		
Consider a spontaneous volunteer engagement officer	As a first point of contact, consider appointing a spontaneous volunteer engagement officer who can coordinate with them during disasters and listen to the needs of the local communities to support them accordingly	
Ensuring a uniform and simple registration process	Have simple registration forms that require the same information across all volunteer involving organisations	
Collaboration within the various organisations	Ensure all volunteer involving organisations in the emergency management space work together to support each other	
Compartmentalising tasks	Divide tasks into discrete categories to speed up task selection and completion. This may include duty cards with roles and safety requirement displayed at set locations and handed to the individuals	
Ensure safety	Ensure checklists are read and signed before registration	
Avoid branding issues	Reduce confusion and inconvenience caused by variety of branded clothing/items issued by different organisations	
After the disaster		
Consider a feedback and communication loop	Encourage all spontaneous volunteers to complete feedback surveys	
Future engagement and retention	Inform spontaneous volunteers about future opportunities available to them	

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