

Spontaneous volunteers in emergencies in WA

An emergency or disaster event affecting Western Australians will trigger a range of responses and services from government and non-government agencies and organisations.

In addition, there is usually a groundswell of support from the community, with offers of time, goods and resources.

Definition and scope

“Spontaneous volunteer – an individual who is not affiliated with an existing incident response organisation or voluntary organisation but who, without extensive preplanning, offers support to the response to, and recovery from, an incident¹”

- Western Australia has established plans and protocols to help coordinate Government, non-Government and community response to emergencies
- Disaster and emergency response is focused on helping those affected
- Volunteers donate their time, willingly
- The safety of volunteers is critical
- Trained emergency services personnel are often engaged first, to protect the safety of the community and volunteers
- Much help from the community may be needed in the long pathway to recovery.

Volunteering WA's role

Volunteering WA:

- Is represented on committees convened by the Departments of Communities and Fire and Emergency Services, to support the involvement of volunteers in the provision of welfare assistance in times of emergencies
- Has a responsibility to²:
 - provide a Support Agency Officer/s as required;
 - provide strategic policy and advice regarding the provision of volunteering services within the welfare emergency management environment;
 - manage spontaneous non-affiliated volunteers (if and when activated); and
 - assist with other welfare functions as agreed.
- Operates WA's emergency volunteer registration website www.emergency.volunteer.org.au.

¹ ISO:22319 Spontaneous Volunteers

² [WA State Support Plan Emergency Welfare](#)

For volunteers

Our experience shows that Western Australians are generous and caring and many people want to help in emergencies.

If you are an **active volunteer involved in an organisation** already working to respond or recover from an emergency:

- You may wish to consider offering additional assistance to your volunteer organisation – existing volunteers can often be extremely valuable
- Keep up to date with communications to see if there are suitable volunteer opportunities
- Be aware of possible changes to your existing volunteer role or roster.

There will be volunteer organisations in the area which will be critical to understanding, coordinating and responding to local needs. They may include local Men's Sheds, sporting clubs, schools or affected Local Government Agencies.

Other organisations in WA that are often involved in disaster and emergency response include Fire and Emergency Services brigades groups and units, Country Women's Association (CWA), Salvation Army, Red Cross and Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA).

If you are a new **volunteer offering to assist with response to a disaster or emergency**:

- Be aware that accommodation is usually in very short supply so you may need to travel
- Consider your own physical and mental health and safety before volunteering
- Go online and register your availability on www.emergency.volunteer.org.au
- Understand that your offer is appreciated, even if you might not be deployed (particularly in early stages of response when the area may not be safe)
- If engaged by a voluntary organisation, understand where, when and how the organisation can involve you to help those affected by the emergency
- You may have legal protections and volunteer insurance when volunteering and following directions of an established voluntary organisation³.

There are a number of informal volunteering groups that may spring up in disasters (particularly mobilised by social media). They may provide invaluable and rapid support to local communities but may not have access to protections for you as a volunteer⁴.

Please do not take goods or materials to site as donations. Financial donations can be better targeted to help communities, families and individuals in most need.

³ For more information see the FAQ [How am I protected by legislation under the law?](#)

⁴ This [guide for informal-volunteering-groups](#), developed in response to COVID-19 community-based volunteering, provides more information on things to consider

For voluntary organisations

The most important work to be undertaken in deploying spontaneous volunteers in emergency response and recovery, is best undertaken before the emergency.

Develop a plan for involving spontaneous volunteers and consider the following:

- Understand the motivations of spontaneous volunteers
- Clarify issues of liability
 - conditions for protection from civil liability under legislation
 - health and safety of volunteers
 - volunteer personal and accident insurance⁵
 - extension of Employee Assistance Program to volunteers
- Understand local emergency management protocols and any concerns of stakeholders regarding the involvement of spontaneous volunteers
- Assign an experienced volunteer coordinator
- Identify risks and suitable volunteer tasks / roles
- Reduce risks for volunteer tasks
- Streamline the selection process
- Develop induction and training materials
- Establish communication plan and channels
- Develop ways of monitoring tasks
- Plan to recognise and thank volunteers.

Register your organisation's need for volunteers to assist in emergencies [Volunteering WA's emergency website www.emergency.volunteer.org.au](http://www.emergency.volunteer.org.au)

Once on the ground, help spontaneous volunteers to make a safe contribution by:

- Providing overall briefings on the situation
- Ensuring they are:
 - briefed on and understand the value of the tasks they will undertake
 - briefed on risks, risk mitigations and safe working practices
 - provided with appropriate PPE
 - given a clear point of contact in the organisation
- Ensuring they are aware of the importance of:
 - taking care of their own safety
 - adhering to shift-times
 - taking regular breaks and consuming adequate food and water
 - being mindful of their mental and emotional well-being
- Providing opportunities to de-brief
- Keeping lines of communication open to understand any issues or concerns.

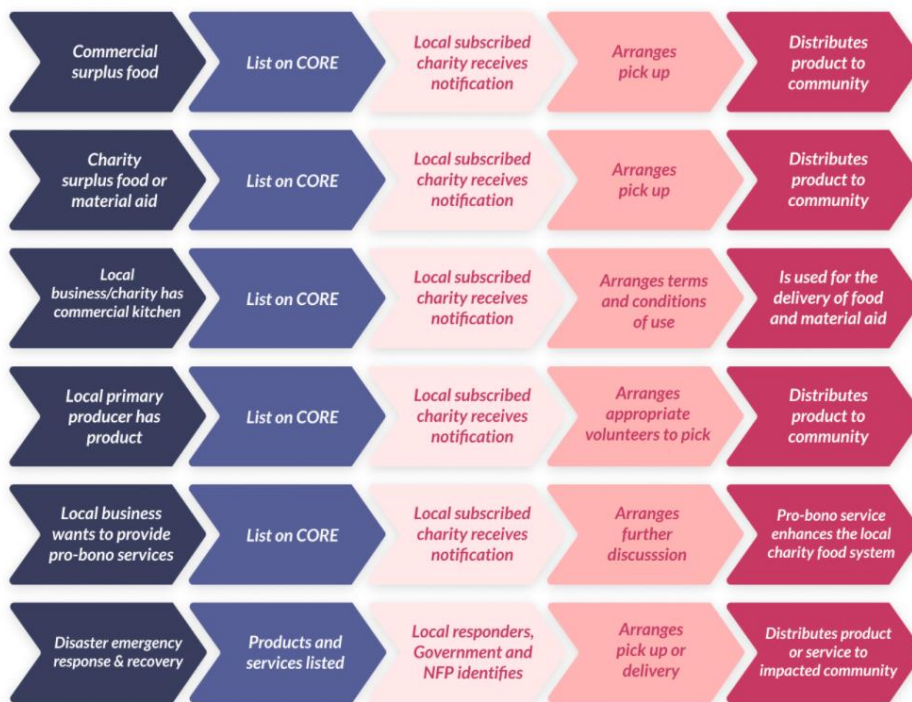
⁵ This may be provided by the Local Government Authority, by agreement

For business and the private sector

Many businesses assist in emergency response and recovery in Western Australia by donating goods and services.

You can register donations at the Community Organised Resource Exchange (CORE) platform, initiated and operated locally by the Western Australian Council of Social Services (WACOSS) www.coreexchange.org.au.

How CORE can be used



Volunteering WA – We are here to help

Volunteering WA can help your organisation to prepare for the safe and effective involvement of spontaneous volunteers. Please contact us to discuss how we can best work together.



Empowering people and communities to enrich WA

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