



Mud Army and SES volunteers working together at the 2011 Queensland floods. Photo: Queensland Fire and Emergency Services

- Key Topics:
- non-traditional recruitment [2]
  - resilience [3]
  - volunteering [4]


Out of uniform: building community resilience through non-traditional emergency volunteering [5]  
How people volunteer to keep their community safe from natural hazards is changing. As our work and life commitments change, many people do not have the time to dedicate to traditional ways of volunteering with an emergency service, undergo the required training and develop the ability to respond to potentially dangerous situations. But they still want to help, and they still want to volunteer.  
This project investigated current and emerging issues around volunteering and volunteers responding to disaster events, and the different factors that can influence people’s participation in non-traditional emergency volunteering.

Project: detail Notabs

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# Description

How people volunteer to keep their community safe from natural hazards is changing. As our work and life commitments change, many people do not have the time to dedicate to traditional ways of volunteering with an emergency service, undergo the required training and develop the ability to respond to potentially dangerous situations. But they still want to help, and they still want to volunteer.

There is also now more attention being given by the emergency management sector to non-traditional or informal emergency volunteers – people who volunteer without affiliation with the established organisations that have recognised roles in emergency and recovery plans. Agency leaders show a variety of attitudes and approaches to non-traditional emergency volunteers – some see them as creating legal and occupational health and safety risks for the agency, and as distracting the organisation from its core business. Others view them as a basis for surge capacity, a valuable resource and almost always the initial responders.

This project investigated current and emerging issues around volunteering and volunteers responding to disaster events, and the different factors that can influence people's participation in non-traditional emergency volunteering.

Case studies were undertaken, selected to ensure coverage of different stages of disaster risk management, hazard types and types of non-traditional emergency volunteering. They include community led preparedness (Be Ready Warrandyte), community-led recovery (Community on Ground Assistance in Kinglake), spontaneous volunteer management (Volunteering Queensland's Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather), the role of volunteers from faith-based groups in recovery (Pinery fire, South Australia), digital volunteering following 2015's Cyclone Pam in Vanuatu, and a review of the national surge capacity for response that occurred for Cyclone Tracy in Darwin (1974).

These case studies have identified four key large-scale forces reshaping the nature of volunteering in the 21st century. These are changing lifestyles and values and the changing nature of work; the impact of new communications technology; greater private sector involvement; and growing government expectations of and intervention in the voluntary sector.

Five key areas of focus have also been identified to best capitalise on emerging opportunities, providing evidence and impetus to shift away from a reliance on traditional, structured volunteering models, to models that are more flexible, adaptive and inclusive of newer and diverse volunteering styles.


Emergency management organisations are aware of this shift in the volunteering landscape and its impacts, and in some instances are already responding. Findings from this project are being used to address these areas, with change makers at organisational, jurisdictional and national levels driving a shift towards more flexible, adaptive and inclusive volunteering models.

The research has influenced key national initiatives, with findings used extensively for the development of the National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy by the Australia–New Zealand Emergency Management Committee. The strategy provides advice to emergency service agencies on best practice principles, as well as what they need to be aware of, and what they need to consider and plan for when working with spontaneous volunteers. Important issues such as legal obligations and social media are also covered, with this research integral to the strategy's content.

Building on this, the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience is drawing directly on the research to develop a new handbook on spontaneous volunteer management. The handbook will provide important guidance for organisations on how to incorporate the principles of the National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy, and the most recent research on spontaneous volunteering, into their own plans and procedures.

The research is also impacting the development of new strategies in volunteer management at the organisational level, for example informing new directions and developments in the Department of Fire and Emergency Services Western Australia and the New South Wales SES. Be Ready Warrandyte, a community group in one of Melbourne's high bushfire risk suburbs, has also drawn extensively on the research to help educate and support their local community.

The project has provided an important and comprehensive resource to benchmark best practice in supporting and integrating spontaneous volunteerism for emergency service agencies across Australia. The scope and relevance of the project will provide a valuable framework of knowledge for the future.

Download:  
 Out of Uniform project overview [47]

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[49]



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[50]



CRC researcher heads disaster committee  
COMMUNICATION, FIRE IMPACTS

11 APR 2019

[51]



Quiet achievers recognised for research impacts  
CHILD-CENTRED, EDUCATION

21 JAN 2019

[52]



12 DEC 2018

A new model for helping  
COMMUNICATION, NON-TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT

[53]



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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, MITIGATION

[54]





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[55]



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[56]





New online - November 2017

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[57]



'Unofficial' volunteers  
COMMUNITIES, NON-TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT

01 MAR 2017

[58]



19 DEC 2016

New online - December 2016  
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, LAND MANAGEMENT

[59]



06 DEC 2016

Out of uniform: workshoping about non-traditional volunteers  
NON-TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT, RESILIENCE

[60]



New online - October 2016

13 OCT 2016

[61]



Newsletter 6 - Out of uniform  
NON-TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT, RESILIENCE

15 AUG 2016

[62]





27 JUN 2016

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COMMUNITIES, DECISION MAKING

[63]



05 APR 2016

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EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT, NON-TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT

[64]





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[65]



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[66]



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[67]



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COMMUNITIES, NON-TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT

15 OCT 2015

[68]



Newsletter 4 - Out of uniform  
NON-TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT, RESILIENCE

30 JUL 2015

[69]



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COMMUNITIES, SCENARIO ANALYSIS

16 JUL 2015

[70]





10 JUL 2015

Ensuring volunteering is sustainable  
NON-TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT, RESILIENCE

[71]



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[72]





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[73]



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Newsletter 3 - Out of Uniform  
VOLUNTEERING

[74]



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[75]



07 OCT 2014

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COMMUNITIES, FIRE SEVERITY

[76]



Newsletter 2 - Out of Uniform  
VOLUNTEERING

22 SEP 2014

[77]



Insights from an end user in Wellington  
VOLUNTEERING

11 SEP 2014

[78]





Newsletter - Out of Uniform  
COMMUNITIES, VOLUNTEERING

07 MAY 2014





















[79]

Publications

Year	Type	Citation
2020	Journal Article	McLennan, B. [8], Whittaker, J. [9], Kruger, T. [11] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">Navigating authority and legitimacy when ‘outsider’ volunteers co-produce emergency management services</a> [80]. <i>Environm</i>
2019	Report	McLennan, B. [8] <a href="#">Emergency volunteering shared learning network</a> [85]. (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 2019). Google Scholar [86] BibTeX [87] EndNote XML [88]
2018	Journal Article	<a href="#">Conditions for effective coproduction in community-led disaster risk management</a> [89]. <i>Voluntas</i> <b>28</b> , 16 (2018). DOI [90] Google Scholar [91] BibTeX [92] EndNote XML [93]
2017	Conference Paper	Rumsewicz, M. [94] <a href="#">Research proceedings from the 2017 Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC and AFAC Conference</a> [95]. <i>Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC &amp; AFAC annual conference 2017</i> (Bus
2017	Conference Paper	Whittaker, J. [9], Kruger, T. [11] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">Out of uniform (building community resilience through non-traditional emergency volunteering): what have we learnt?</a> [99]. <i>AFAC17</i> (Bushfire
2017	Conference Paper	Jennings, F. [46] <a href="#">A community's experience of bushfire response and recovery</a> [103]. <i>AFAC17</i> (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 2017). Google Scholar [104] BibTeX [105] EndNote XML [106]
2017	Report	Kruger, T. [11], Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">Recovery volunteering after the Pinery fire, South Australia 2015: an explorative case study</a> [107]. (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 2017). G
2017	Report	Handmer, J. [6], Whittaker, J. [9] & Kruger, T. [11] <a href="#">Out of uniform - building resilience through non-traditional volunteering: annual report 2016-17</a> [111]. (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 2017)
2017	Report	Kruger, T. [11], Handmer, J. [6] & Whittaker, J. [9] <a href="#">Strategies for non-traditional emergency volunteers: a risk-benefit framework for decision-making</a> [115]. (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 2
2016	Conference Paper	Rumsewicz, M. [94] <a href="#">Research proceedings from the 2016 Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC and AFAC conference</a> [119]. <i>Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC &amp; AFAC annual conference 2016</i> (Bu
2016	Conference Paper	Molloy, J. [123], Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">Harnessing the capacities of spontaneous volunteers: application and adaptation of the Queensland model</a> [124]. <i>AFAC16</i> (Bushfire and Natu
2016	Conference Paper	Whittaker, J. [9] <a href="#">Opportunities and challenges of citizen-led recovery in post-disaster settings</a> [128]. <i>AFAC16</i> (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 2016). Google Scholar [129] BibTeX [130] EndN
2016	Journal Article	McLennan, B. [8], Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">The changing landscape of disaster volunteering: opportunities, responses and gaps in Australia</a> [132]. <i>Natural Hazards</i> <b>84</b> , (2016). DOI [133]
2016	Journal Article	Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">The changing landscape of disaster volunteering: opportunities, responses and gaps in Australia</a> [137]. <i>Natural Hazards</i> <b>84</b> , (2016). Google Scholar [138] BibT
2016	Journal Article	Molloy, J. [123], Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">Centralised coordination of spontaneous emergency volunteers: the EV CREW model</a> [141]. <i>Australian Journal of Emergency Management</i> <b>31</b> ,
2016	Journal Article	McLennan, B. [8] <a href="#">Extending into community-led preparedness and planning just enough (but not too much?)</a> [145]. <i>Australian Journal of Emergency Management</i> <b>31</b> , (2016). Google Scholar [146]
2016	Report	Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">Briefing paper: A proposed framework to assess strategies for engaging non-traditional emergency volunteers</a> [149]. (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 20
2016	Report	Handmer, J. [6] & Whittaker, J. [9] <a href="#">Out of uniform: building community resilience through non-traditional volunteering: Annual project report 2015-2016</a> [153]. (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CR
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2015	Conference Paper	Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">Building Community Resilience Through Informal Emergency Volunteering Conference Paper 2014</a> [161]. <i>Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC and AFAC Wellin</i>
2015	Conference Paper	Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">The future of ‘non-traditional’ emergency volunteering: what will it look like and how can it work? - Peer reviewed</a> [165]. <i>Adelaide Conference 2015</i> (2015). Gc
2015	Journal Article	Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">A review of informal volunteerism in emergencies and disasters: Definition, opportunities and challenges</a> [169]. <i>International Journal of Disaster Risk Reductio</i>
2015	Report	Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">Informal Volunteerism in Emergencies and Disasters: A Literature Review</a> [174]. (2015). Google Scholar [175] BibTeX [176] EndNote XML [177]
2015	Report	Whittaker, J. [9] & Handmer, J. [6] <a href="#">Community-led bushfire preparedness in action: The case of Be Ready Warrandyte</a> [178]. (Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, 2015). Google Scholar [179] BibT
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2014	Journal Article	Eburn, M. [190] <a href="#">Exposing hidden value trade-offs: sharing wildfire management responsibility between government and citizens</a> [191]. <i>International Journal of Wildland Fire</i> <b>24</b> , 162-169 (2014).

Presentations & Resources



DATE	[196]	TITLE	[197]	DOWNLOAD	KEY TOPICS
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07 Aug 2014		Sharing Responsibility and Non-Traditional Volunteering [201]		 1.63 MB	[202] (1.63 MB) recruitment
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01 Oct 2014		Fire Australia Spring 2014 [205]		 9.97 MB	[206] (9.97 MB) [207], risk ma
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17 May 2016		Out of uniform [222]		 2.54 MB	[223] (2.54 MB) [207], non-tra
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25 Nov 2020		A new model for helping [248]			communication [236], non-

Posters



Out of uniform: Building community resilience through non-traditional emergency volunteering

Citizens may play vital roles in helping those affected to respond and recover, and can provide invaluable...



Community-Led Bushfire Preparedness in Action: The Case of Be Ready Warrandyte

COMMUNITIES [207], FIRE [251]

Be Ready Warrandyte (BRW) was an award-winning, community-led bushfire preparedness project instigated by...



Out of Uniform: Building Community Resilience Through Non-Traditional Emergency Volunteering

NON-TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT [2], RESILIENCE [3]

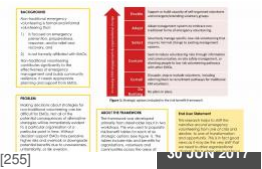
The public is usually first on the scene in an emergency or disaster and remain long after official services...



Out of uniform: building community resilience through non-traditional emergency volunteering

[253]

INFRASTRUCTURE [254], RESILIENCE [3]  
Citizen participation is a key principle of disaster risk reduction and resilience building.



Strategies for non-traditional emergency volunteers  
[255]

NON-TRADITIONAL RECRUITMENT [2], RESILIENCE [3]  
A risk-benefit framework has been designed to assist decision-makers in emergency management organisations (...)



Emergency volunteering 2030: a sector-wide snapshot  
[256]

COMMUNITIES [207], EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT [242]  
Key findings: The difference between a future where emergency volunteeringstruggles or flourishes rests on...

Linked Projects

Policies, institutions and governance  
[257]

GOVERNANCE AND INSTITUTIONAL KNOWLEDGE [258]  
A/Prof Michael Ebum  
Australian National University [259]



[259]

Improving the retention and engagement of volunteers in emergency service agencies  
[260]

SUSTAINABLE VOLUNTEERING [261]  
A/Prof Michael Jones  
University of Wollongong [262]



[262]

Community volunteering and disaster recovery  
[263]

SUSTAINABLE VOLUNTEERING [261]  
Dr Fiona Jennings  
RMIT University [7]



[7]

Volunteered geographic information, community engagement and bushfire preparation  
[264]

SUSTAINABLE VOLUNTEERING [261]  
Dr Billy Haworth  
University of Sydney [45]



[45]

<https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2016/new-online-december-2016> [60] <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/blogpost/tarn-kruger/2016/out-uniform-workshopping-about-non-traditional-volunteers> [61] <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2016/new-online-october-2016> [62] <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2016/newletter/6-out-uniform> [63] <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2016/examining-bushfire-policy-and-preparedness-black-saturday> [64] <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2016/new-blogs/paul-davis/2016/utilisation-real-challenge> [65] <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2016/newletter/5-out-uniform> [66] [https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2016/magazine-explodes-crc-research-case-studies-and-technology](https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2016/extending-community-led-preparedness-just-enough-not-too-much) [68] [https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2015/newletter/4-out-uniform](https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/blogpost/lythe-mclennan/2015/extending-community-led-preparedness-and-planning-just-enough-not) [70] [https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2015/ensuring-volunteering-sustainable](https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2015/science-direct-views) [72] <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2015/student-recognised-international-scholarship> [73] [https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2015/newletter/3-out-uniform](https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/blogpost/josh-whittaker/2015/engaging-masses-how-we-try-and-do-it) [75] [https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2014/mercury-rising-live-streams-available](https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2014/sustainable-volunteering-how-can-we-do-it-differently) [77] <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2014/newletter/2-out-uniform> [78] [https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2014/newletter-out-uniform](https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/blogpost/john-richardson/2014/insights-and-user-wellington) [80] <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/publications/biblio/bnh-6733> [81] <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/17477891.2020.1727829> [82] 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