



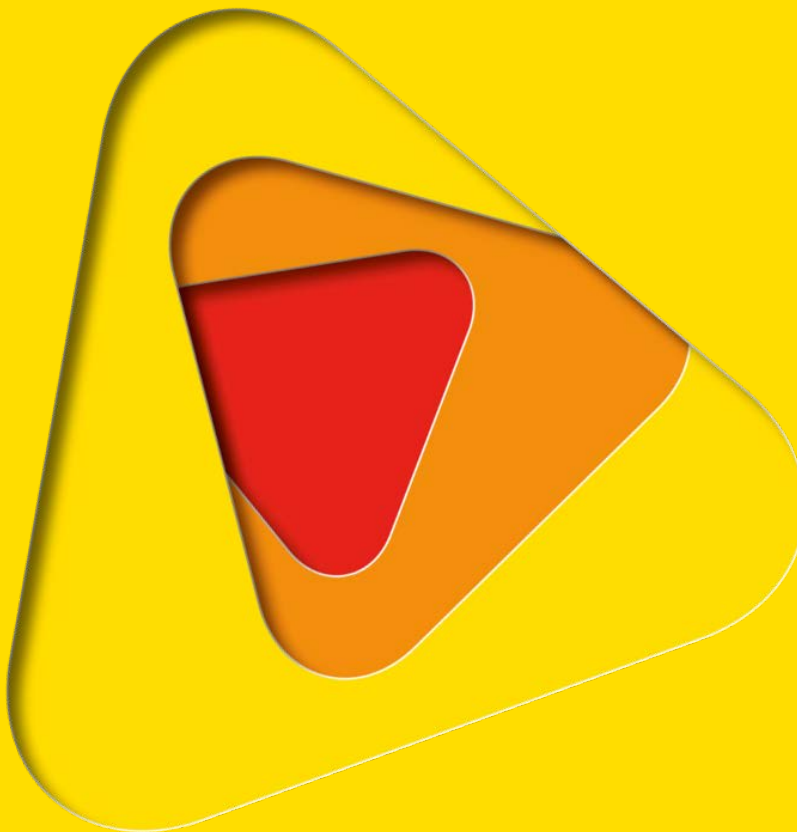
HARNESSING THE CAPACITIES OF SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS: APPLICATION AND ADAPTATION OF THE QUEENSLAND MODEL

Non-peer reviewed research proceedings from the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC & AFAC conference
Brisbane, 30 August – 1 September 2016

Blythe McLennan^{1,3}, Julie Molloy^{2,3}, Joshua Whittaker^{1,3}, John Handmer^{1,3}

1. RMIT University
2. Volunteering Queensland
3. Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

Corresponding author: blythe.mclennan@rmit.edu.au





Version	Release history	Date
1.0	Initial release of document	30/08/2016



Australian Government
**Department of Industry,
 Innovation and Science**

Business
 Cooperative Research
 Centres Programme

This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-Non Commercial 4.0 International Licence.



Disclaimer:

RMIT University, Volunteering Queensland, and the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC advise that the information contained in this publication comprises general statements based on scientific research. The reader is advised and needs to be aware that such information may be incomplete or unable to be used in any specific situation. No reliance or actions must therefore be made on that information without seeking prior expert professional, scientific and technical advice. To the extent permitted by law, RMIT University, Volunteering Queensland, and the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC (including its employees and consultants) exclude all liability to any person for any consequences, including but not limited to all losses, damages, costs, expenses and any other compensation, arising directly or indirectly from using this publication (in part or in whole) and any information or material contained in it.

Publisher:

Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC

August 2016



EXTENDED ABSTRACT

Spontaneous volunteers are defined in Australia as: ‘those who seek to contribute on impulse—people who offer assistance following a disaster and who are not previously affiliated with recognised volunteer agencies and may or may not have relevant training, skills or experience’ (Australian Red Cross 2010; Cottrell 2010). Spontaneous volunteering by unaffiliated members of the public following a disaster event is certainly not a new occurrence (Whittaker et al. 2015). Known in the sociological disaster literature as convergence, it is recognised as an inevitable and normal response to — particularly large-scale — disasters (Drabek and McEntire 2003; Sharon 2004). A related term that is not commonly used in Australian emergency management is ‘emergent volunteerism’. This ‘involves new forms of volunteering that occur in response to unmet needs, whether perceived or real’ (Whittaker et al., 2015, p.363).

Spontaneous volunteering has gradually gained in profile and legitimacy in Australia disaster management over the five to ten years (Australian Red Cross 2010). This process has sped up due to the combination of a number of high-profile volunteering efforts such as the Brisbane Mud Army, and the shift toward a resilience-based approach to disaster management (COAG 2011). Most recently, a National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy was endorsed by the Australia–New Zealand Emergency Committee in late 2015 that provides guidance to emergency management organisations.

From a management and policy perspective, until recently spontaneous volunteering has largely been portrayed as an unpredictable and uncontrollable nuisance and risk rather than as a legitimate part of response and recovery (Helsloot and Ruitenberg 2004; Scanlon et al. 2014). Certainly, having unexperienced and uninformed members of the public converge on a disaster site presents many real and difficult to manage health, safety and wellbeing risks for volunteers, residents and trained responders alike (Whittaker et al., 2015). It can also disrupt the formal response effort and divert resources away from the people and communities that are directly impacted (Fernandez et al. 2006).

Critically, however, sociological research on informal citizen responses to disaster shows that the above risks are far greater when there are no plans in place to manage and harness the capacities of spontaneous and emergent volunteers (Fernandez et al. 2006). It also shows that spontaneous and emergent volunteering can contribute significantly to a range of important activities in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, including search and rescue, first aid, and the assessment of community needs (Whittaker et al. 2015). Furthermore, failing to effectively utilise spontaneous volunteers can lead to loss of life or injury, property damage, and poor public perception of the disaster response (Fernandez et al., 2006).

Against this backdrop, this paper reports on a two-part, qualitative case study of the application and adaptation of a Queensland model for coordinating spontaneous volunteers. Emergency Volunteering CREW (Community Response to Extreme Weather), or EV CREW, is an initiative of Volunteering Queensland: a small not-for-profit organisation and the peak volunteering body for the state of Queensland. Based on the model of a recruitment agency, EV CREW is a volunteer management model specifically designed to address the challenges of spontaneous volunteer coordination in the post-disaster context (McLennan et al. 2016). Drawing on semi-structured interviews with internal and external stakeholders, it first examines key



outcomes and challenges experienced in the development and application of EV CREW in Queensland. It then explores how volunteering peak bodies in the ACT, Victoria, and Tasmania are adapting the learning and experience from Queensland to develop similar models in those jurisdictions.

APPLICATION AND ADAPTATION OF EV CREW MODEL

Key outcomes of the application of the EV CREW model reported by its Queensland stakeholders included that (see also Mclennan et al. 2016):

- Spontaneous volunteers are able to undertake more valuable and rewarding roles;
- More disaster recovery organisations (including not-for-profit organisations and community groups working in relief and recovery) develop capacity and experience in using and managing these types of volunteers effectively and safely;
- Community resilience is strengthened because volunteers are matched as locally as possible to foster local social connectivity and cohesion;
- All parties involved, including communities affected by disaster, have reduced risk and greater transparency compared to when spontaneous volunteering is uncoordinated;
- There are improvements in the effectiveness of the disaster management effort, particularly in local-level recovery, as well as a reduction in the 'crowd control' burden put on disaster management organisations.

Both internal (Volunteering Queensland and partner organisations) and external (recipient disaster management organisations) stakeholders felt that EV CREW supported disaster recovery organisations to make better use of the skills and resources that existed locally. Notably, all stakeholders felt that Volunteering Queensland value-added to the disaster response and recovery effort through its expertise in volunteer management, and all felt that the basic model of having a third-party, centrally coordinated system to manage spontaneous volunteers was sound and a valuable resource for local response and recovery organisations.

Compared to the research literature on spontaneous volunteering, the reported outcomes of the EV-CREW model placed greater emphasis on its contribution to supporting community resilience as compared to the disaster response effort, and on the important psychosocial benefits that impacted residents get from receiving volunteered support from within their community (compare with Gordon 2006 for example).

There were also some caveats, risks and challenges identified that are important to consider for future developments of this type of model. For example, some stakeholders suggested that central coordination by a third-party may only be appropriate and necessary in larger population centres, or where other local sources of coordination were not already in place. One participant gave the example of Emerald as a community where centralised coordination would not have been suited. In this mining community the mining company was already well-placed to coordinate mine workers to help with flood recovery in 2010, while informal social ties were sufficient in this small community (approx. 13,000) to underpin a locally led and self-organised recovery effort without the need for centralised coordination by a third-party.



Challenges for putting such a model in place included: difficulties in managing expectations of, and adequately delineating the roles and responsibilities between, the coordinating organisation and the recipient organisations; and a lack of funding to maintain and improve the model's operation. For example, Volunteering Queensland does not supply volunteer insurance, induction or occupational health and safety support for volunteers. However, there was some expectation amongst its organisational users of at least partial support for these services.

There were also risks identified stemming from the varied capacities of recipient organisations that may be unfamiliar with spontaneous volunteer management. They included the risk of poorly managed or ill-conceived volunteering opportunities turning people away from volunteering, and small community-based organisations becoming over-burdened or overwhelmed during an emergency event. In Queensland, these risks were reduced through one-on-one support offered by the EV CREW coordinator. However, external stakeholders felt that the model would be improved with a greater on-the-ground presence from Volunteering Queensland, both to assist with on-site volunteer coordination, and to increase the profile of the service amongst potential volunteers and organisational users. Notably, Volunteering Queensland has unsuccessfully sought funding in the past to train people to provide more comprehensive and hands-on support with volunteer management.

Interviews with stakeholders involved in adapting EV CREW for other jurisdictions are ongoing. Emerging themes include the importance of Volunteering Queensland's support and expertise alongside the model itself, particularly in the area of communications and messaging with the public. A noteworthy adaptation being made in Victoria is merging the Victorian version of the EV CREW model, called 'HelpOut' with a funded program to train spontaneous volunteer managers that will assist recipient organisations on-the-ground in a way that Volunteering Queensland did not have capacity for. A key difference in the way adapted models were being developed in other jurisdictions was in the greater degree of structure and rigidity placed around the model's operation compared to Queensland. This was partly due to different political and governmental contexts and partly due to the fact that the Queensland model was developed through on-the-ground experience with repeated disasters, unlike other jurisdictions. Rolling out the model during 'peace time' can provide a space for better pre-planning and relationship-building. However, there is also a danger that a lack of use on-the-ground could lead to a loss of momentum and insufficient capacity to mobilise the model due to lack of experience and inability to maintain skills over time.

Factors that emerged from the case study as being particularly important for enabling effective centralised coordination of spontaneous volunteers were: improving general communication with the public about disaster management processes and procedures during and after events; pursuing a high degree of collaboration between volunteering peaks, local governments, and local divisions of emergency service agencies, as well as other community organisations; and the need to have targeted plans and supportive relationships for spontaneous volunteer management in place amongst all organisations involved prior to disaster events occurring.



REFERENCES

Australian Red Cross (2010) Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit: Helping to manage spontaneous volunteers in emergencies. Commonwealth of Australia, Australian Red Cross, Canberra.

COAG (2011) National strategy for disaster resilience: building our nation's resilience to disasters. Council of Australian Governments, Canberra, ACT.

Cottrell, A (2010) Research report: A survey of spontaneous volunteers. Australian Red Cross, Carlton, Victoria.

Drabek, TE, McEntire, DA (2003) Emergent phenomena and the sociology of disaster: lessons, trends and opportunities from the research literature. *Disaster Prevention and Management* 12, 97-112.

Fernandez, L, Barbera, J, Van Dorp, J (2006) Spontaneous volunteer response to disasters: The benefits and consequences of good intentions. *Journal of Emergency Management* 4, 57-68.

Gordon, R (2006) Acute responses to emergencies: findings and observations of 20 years in the field.

Helsloot, I, Ruitenbergh, A (2004) Citizen Response to Disasters: a Survey of Literature and Some Practical Implications. *Journal of Contingencies and Crisis Management* 12, 98-111.

McLennan, B, Molloy, J, Whittaker, J, Handmer, JW (2016) Centralised coordination of spontaneous emergency volunteers: the EV CREW model. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management* 31, 24-30.

Scanlon, J, Helsloot, I, Groenendaal, J (2014) Putting it all together: Integrating ordinary people into emergency response. *International Journal of Mass Emergencies and Disasters* 32, 43-63.

Sharon, L (2004) Averting a disaster within a disaster: the management of spontaneous volunteers following the 11 September 2001 attacks on the world trade center in New York. *Voluntary Action* 6, 11-20.

Whittaker, J, McLennan, B, Handmer, J (2015) A review of informal volunteerism in emergencies and disasters: Definition, opportunities and challenges. *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction* 13, 358-368.