

ENSURING VOLUNTEERING IS SUSTAINABLE

ABOUT THESE PROJECTS

This is an overview of the *Sustainable volunteering* cluster of Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC research projects. This cluster has two linked studies:

1. **Out of uniform: building community resilience through non-traditional emergency volunteering** – Professor John Handmer, Dr Josh Whittaker and Dr Blythe McLennan, RMIT University and Dr Michael Eburn, Australian National University.
2. **Improving the retention and engagement of volunteers in emergency service agencies** – Dr Michael Jones, Associate Professor Andrew Sense, Dr Yoke Berry, Bill Calcutt, Nick Popov and Valerie He, University of Wollongong.

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CONTEXT

This cluster aims to develop new models, strategies and approaches for volunteering that support emergency management to:

- Improve the long-term sustainability of the volunteer workforce.
- Better engage the potential of volunteering to build disaster resilience in Australian communities.

OUT OF UNIFORM

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 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. It is likely that 'informal' volunteers will provide much of the surge capacity required to respond to more frequent emergencies and disasters in the future.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

There are many examples of government and non-government organisations, as well as motivated individuals and groups, finding new ways to harness the capacities of non-traditional emergency volunteers. However, these examples are isolated and have not yet been integrated into new and more inclusive models of volunteering. This project is developing new models to provide a framework for engaging with this potential additional workforce.

With this in mind, this project has three key objectives:

- Identifying how non-traditional emergency volunteering contributes to building community resilience to disasters throughout different phases of emergency management.
- Identifying ways the emergency management sector can promote community resilience through support of non-traditional emergency volunteering.
- Developing and evaluating alternative models for emergency volunteering that are inclusive of non-traditional volunteering and volunteering organisations.

The project is currently focused on conducting case studies of non-traditional volunteering. The first three case studies examine community-led preparedness (Be Ready Warrandyte), community-led recovery (Community on Ground Assistance in Kinglake), and spontaneous volunteer management (Volunteering Queensland's Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather).

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

A literature review has been completed on 'informal' emergency volunteering. Three forms of informal emergency volunteerism were identified.

Emergent volunteerism involves new forms of volunteerism that occur in response to unmet needs. Research has focused largely on 'spontaneous' volunteers, but



▲ Above: SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEER GROUPS, SUCH AS CHRISTCHURCH'S STUDENT VOLUNTEER ARMY, HAVE FORMED WITH A SPECIFIC INTENT. PHOTO: EVE WELCH, UNIVERSITY OF CANTERBURY.

new forms of volunteerism may emerge before an event; for example in prevention and preparedness activities, and may be deliberate and carefully planned. Examples include citizen-led search and rescue parties, and groups that form to help those affected clean up or rebuild (BlazeAid after the 2009 Black Saturday bushfires, the Mud Army after the 2011 Queensland floods).

Extending volunteerism involves groups and organisations that do not have regular emergency functions but extend their activities to volunteer in times of crisis (e.g. a football club or school committee).

Digital volunteerism represents a new mode of volunteerism. In particular, social media and web-based mapping software have allowed citizens to freely produce and disseminate their own emergency-related information. Examples range from basic use of sites like Facebook to share information through to more complex uses involving data mining and crisis mapping.

A second report identifies key shifts in the volunteering landscape as a whole and considers the possible implications for Australian emergency volunteering. It identifies four key large-scale forces of change that are reshaping the nature of volunteering: the transformation of life in the 21st Century, the revolution in communication technology, growth of private sector involvement, and a rise in government expectations. These changes have led to three previously uncommon forms of volunteering: episodic (shorter-term engagements), corporate (and skills-based) and digital.

END USER STATEMENT

The community expects us to do everything we can to help them respond and prepare for emergencies. It does not matter where the volunteers come from and whether they are the traditional type of volunteers or not, the bottom line is that our communities deserve to be supported. We as agencies have to find ways to include communities in that.

An important aspect for end users of these projects is to make sure that the outcomes of the research give agencies a chance to understand the issues, and importantly, what changes need to be made to ensure agencies are inclusive of what happens in the community and the volunteers that want to come from the community, as well as our traditional brigade volunteers.

- Lucas van Rijswijk, Coordinator Volunteer Strategy, Tasmania Fire Service.

IMPROVING THE RETENTION AND ENGAGEMENT OF VOLUNTEERS IN EMERGENCY SERVICE AGENCIES

BACKGROUND

Significant time and money is invested in volunteers by agencies. Retaining volunteers saves substantial time and resources, increasing the capacity of individual brigades and units. Two areas contributing to the problem of retention have been attributed to poor leadership and cultural value alignment.

The project has several aims but the core issues addressed are:

1. Retaining volunteers beyond their initial training period.
2. Increasing the skills acquisition of emergency service brigades and units.

RESEARCH ACTIVITY

The study is identifying the personal and shared values that motivate people to volunteer in emergency services, and is evaluating the importance of individual, group and organisational values that align to volunteer commitment and retention.

In the first stage (June to December 2015) an organisation-specific case study is seeking to determine the distinctive and dominant personal and shared values of New South Wales State Emergency Service (NSW SES) volunteers. In the second stage (December 2015 to June 2016), NSW SES volunteer units will be engaged to explore local strategies to address values conflicts and misalignments. The volunteers will be asked to complete a survey indicating how much they relate to (are like) a series of descriptions of 40 different types of people.



◀ **Left:** RESEARCH WILL EVALUATE THE VALUES THAT MOTIVATE PEOPLE TO VOLUNTEER. PHOTO: ACT SES.

This will be complemented by at least 20 focus group meetings with SES volunteers across NSW to explore the shared values preferences of different groups.

Another component of the project will evaluate the effectiveness of a Leadership Development Program fine-tuned to the unique psychological needs of volunteers, investigating whether leadership intervention can affect positive changes in both the leaders' leadership style and their direct reports' perceptions of the leader and reported job satisfaction (intention to leave, job satisfaction, basic psychological needs satisfaction). This program was developed for use by emergency service volunteer leaders, and was piloted in the NSW SES and New South Wales Rural Fire Service in 2014.

Over the next 12 months the training will be offered to NSW SES volunteer leaders. Support and participation from other

agencies is being sought so that the findings better express the value sentiments across the country.

RESEARCH OUTCOMES

Findings from an already completed pilot Leadership Development Program suggest that volunteers whose needs are satisfied (competence, relatedness and autonomy) and whose leaders take an autonomy supportive (versus controlling) approach may be more satisfied with their volunteering job and are less likely to want to leave.

In regards to volunteer leaders, participants learnt to adopt autonomy supportive approaches over coercive approaches to leading their volunteers. The leadership skills of volunteer leaders appear to have improved after attending the program.

Confirmation of the pilot findings is expected as more participants pass through the program.

The Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC is a national research centre funded by the Australian Government Cooperative Research Centre Program. It was formed in 2013 for an eight-year program to undertake end-user focused research for Australia and New Zealand.

Hazard Notes are prepared from available research at the time of publication to encourage discussion and debate. The contents of *Hazard Notes* do not necessarily represent the views, policies, practices or positions of any of the individual agencies or organisations who are stakeholders of the Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC.

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