

Introduction to spontaneous volunteers

Speed read

- Spontaneous volunteers are individuals or groups of people who seek or are invited to contribute their assistance during and/or after a disaster or emergency.
- Spontaneous volunteers are unaffiliated with any part of the official emergency management response and recovery system and may or may not have relevant training, skills or experience.
- Australia has developed the [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) and the [National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy](#), providing guidance on the coordination and management of spontaneous volunteers.

Key points

Spontaneous volunteers can be everyone and anyone. It is widely recognised that people offer assistance in the days and weeks immediately following a disaster event, and that offers drop off significantly over time. Where pathways to offer help are not clearly available and communicated, people will seek to help any way they can. Not all people motivated to help want to do so via organised responses and management systems.

Spontaneous volunteering is supported by national frameworks, strategies and principles. National Standards for Volunteer Involvement provide a framework for supporting the volunteer sector in Australia by identifying good practice guidelines for organisations to attract, manage and retain volunteers, and by helping to ensure the experience of volunteers is safe and positive. The National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy was developed to recognise the inevitability of spontaneous volunteerism and to help harness its value and contribution to disaster resilience.

Spontaneous volunteering requires strategies for engagement, support and coordination. There is no single 'best practice' approach to supporting and coordinating spontaneous volunteers. Each organisation or group will need to develop plans that are appropriate for their specific organisation, the disaster context, and the types of volunteering that may occur. These plans need to be sufficiently flexible to provide for an agile response that embraces spontaneous volunteers.

The National Principles for Disaster Recovery are particular relevance for spontaneous volunteering. They establish the importance of assessing gaps between existing and required capability and capacity, and support the development of self-reliance. They incorporate the need to quickly identify and mobilise community skills and resources, and that additional assistance required may be provided by a range of stakeholders and may only be available for a limited period.

Take action

- Use the [Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit](http://bit.ly/SponVolResourceKit) (<http://bit.ly/SponVolResourceKit>)

More information

- [Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers Handbook](#) (AIDR 2018)
- [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) (Volunteering Australia 2015)
- [National Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of Volunteer Effort in the Immediate Post Disaster Stage](#) (Australian Government 2015)
- [National Principles for Disaster Recovery on the Knowledge Hub](#)