

## Principles that support spontaneous volunteering

### Speed read

- Australia has developed principles that support coordination of volunteer effort in the immediate post-disaster stage.
- There are nine principles.
- The principles provide guidance on what should be taken into account when considering the coordination and management of spontaneous volunteers.

### Key points

#### **Principle 1: The people affected by an emergency are the first priority**

The needs of those who have been impacted by a disaster are the primary consideration. Volunteer efforts provided at the wrong time, or that don't reflect the needs and priorities of the people affected, can exacerbate the impact of the disaster and may delay recovery.

#### **Principle 2: Spontaneous volunteering is valuable and aids community recovery and resilience**

Spontaneous volunteers provide local knowledge, skills and the surge capacity needed to meet the immediate demands of the disaster. The integration of community members and spontaneous volunteers as active contributors to recovery can result in improved relationships with emergency management agencies, and more effective, efficient and timely clean-up and recovery processes.

#### **Principle 3: Jurisdictions and agencies will take considered policy positions on whether they will engage spontaneous volunteers**

Engaging and integrating spontaneous volunteers should, wherever possible, be an objective for emergency managers, and existing policies and procedures should reflect this approach. Where a decision is made not to engage spontaneous volunteers for a range of reason, it is important to acknowledge and plan that volunteers may still seek to assist.

#### **Principle 4: Processes are needed to effectively engage spontaneous volunteers and to avoid agencies being overwhelmed with offers of support**

There should be processes in place to engage and coordinate spontaneous volunteers that are designed to be flexible and scalable in relation to a specific event. The capacity for recovery agencies to integrate volunteers in these circumstances can be quickly overwhelmed, and this can result in the escalation of non-urgent priorities, duplication of effort, and inappropriate or unsafe actions by volunteers.

#### **Principle 5: Standard volunteer management processes apply in times of emergency**

Given time pressures, the impacts of the disaster and chaotic nature of the post-disaster environment, it may not always be possible to observe all the checks and balances that exist and are applied during non-emergency situations. Workplace health and safety, insurance, effective induction, briefing and debriefing, fatigue management and psychosocial support must remain and are not negated by operating in a recovery environment.



## Principle 6: Arrangements for managing spontaneous volunteers should be embedded within existing emergency management plans and operating guidelines

The benefits of spontaneous volunteering can be maximised, and the associated risks reduced by ensuring, wherever possible, that volunteers are registered, screened and well-managed; provided with appropriate induction, briefings, equipment and supervision; and assigned suitable tasks.

## Principle 7: Everyone has a right to offer their assistance and to feel their offer has been valued

Rather than being seen as a 'problem to manage', an approach to spontaneous volunteering should be encouraged that recognises the inherent benefits for both the volunteers and the disaster-affected community.

## Principle 8: The time when spontaneous volunteers are needed may not coincide with the time when offers of help are being made

Depending on the motivations of spontaneous volunteers, offers of help are most likely to peak in the days and weeks immediately following a disaster, and will experience a significant decrease beyond that time. It is important to maximise the value of spontaneous volunteers in the short-term, but also to reframe understanding of the recovery process to emphasise the value and benefits of a much longer-term view of volunteering.

## Principle 9: Effective, timely, consistent communication is essential in the management of spontaneous volunteers

Consistent, accurate, timely messages about whether spontaneous volunteers are needed, and how offers of help are being registered and coordinated can be the difference between volunteering efforts that are beneficial or detrimental to recovery and the community. A communications plan should be developed in advance, and then tailored to the specific circumstances of the disaster.

### 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)