

Strategies for engaging, supporting and coordinating spontaneous volunteers

Speed read

- Any organisation or group with emergency management responsibilities needs to develop plans and processes to engage spontaneous volunteers in the post disaster phase.
- Plans should be appropriate to the specific organisation, the disaster context, and the types of volunteering that may occur.
- There are five levels of strategy commonly used by organisations to engage, support or coordinate spontaneous volunteers.

Key points

The five levels of strategy for engagement of spontaneous volunteers are:

Recommended minimum engagement		Expanded engagement		
Public communication	Collaboration	Channelling and brokering	Support and capacity building	Active management
<p>Communicate with the public about spontaneous volunteers and other forms of aiding.</p> <p>Ensure communication is disseminated in line with local and jurisdictional arrangements and agreements.</p>	<p>Participate in networks and build relationships that facilitate coordinated and cooperative strategies for spontaneous volunteers amongst organisations and groups.</p>	<p>Recognise, respond to and direct enquiries and offers from spontaneous volunteers to appropriate and useful places.</p> <p>Where appropriate, facilitate and broker volunteer-organisation interaction, for example, through registration, matching and referral services.</p>	<p>Liase with and support self-organised volunteers in emergent groups. Where appropriate, build capacity through providing training and education, for example, about the emergency management system, and resources.</p>	<p>Actively manage spontaneous volunteers in accordance with The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement.</p>

Minimum levels of engagement: Organisations can develop plans and activities that operate across multiple strategic levels. The minimum levels recommended for all organisations and groups are public communication and collaboration. Organisations that can expand their strategies may adopt one or more of channelling and brokering; support and capacity building; and direct management.

Strategies can be procedural or enabling: Across all strategy levels, organisations may take a procedural or enabling approach to their engagement with spontaneous volunteers. This will likely be shaped by the organisation's structure and its roles and responsibilities in emergency management.

- **Procedural approach** assumes that problems are most effectively solved through command-and-control structures with the priority of bringing spontaneous volunteers into traditional management structures. The plans are detailed, rigid and focus on prescriptive procedures for all anticipated circumstances.
- **Enabling approach** assumes problems are most effectively solved through existing social structures. The priorities are to support decentralised decision making and improvisation; liaising; adapting management structures to integrate spontaneous volunteers. Plans are guidelines and adaptive, that focus on communication, relationships, and need preparation, training.

Take action

Use the following toolkits to plan your approach to engaging, supporting or coordinating spontaneous volunteers:

- [Spontaneous Volunteer Management Resource Kit](http://bit.ly/SponVolResourceKit) (Australian Government 2010)
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- [Toolkit to support good practice in building local capability to manage spontaneous disaster volunteers](#) (Volunteering Queensland 2018)

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)