



**STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN**

# **GUIDELINES FOR MANAGING SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS IN SOUTH AUSTRALIA**

**PART 2 STRATEGIES, GUIDELINES AND FRAMEWORKS**



**Government  
of South Australia**

STATE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLAN (SEMP)		
Part 1 Arrangements	Part 2 Strategies, Guidelines and Frameworks	Part 3 Supporting Plans
Governance arrangements, roles and responsibilities, and structures in place to reduce risk from hazards, and to plan and prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.	Various strategies, guidelines and frameworks that support the state's emergency management arrangements.	Required plans that support the state's emergency management arrangements (including hazard risk reduction plans, capability plans, control agency plans, functional support group plans, zone emergency management plans and operations manuals).

*Figure 1: The SEMP is a series of documents split over 3 parts with accompanying annexes. These guidelines sit under Part 2 of the SEMP.*

The Guidelines for Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in South Australia can be found at <https://www.dpc.sa.gov.au/responsibilities/security-emergency-and-recovery-management/state-emergency-management-plan>.

The Guidelines for Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in South Australia is reviewed every year.

The custodian of the Guidelines for Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in South Australia is the State Emergency Management Committee (SEMC) who may delegate this responsibility to a sub-committee of SEMC. At the time of publication, Security, Emergency and Recovery Management (SERM) has been delegated this responsibility.

## AUTHORISATION

All emergency management arrangements in South Australia are governed by the Emergency Management Act 2004 (the Act).

The State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) is prepared under Section 9(1)(b) of the Act to guide the management of all emergencies. It is a function of SEMC to prepare and keep the SEMP under review, and to ensure arrangements reflect best practice.

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## INTRODUCTION

The Australian Disaster Resilience handbook *“Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers”* (2018) states that spontaneous volunteering is an important area of community response to disasters.

Much of the literature supports the notion that people will come forward after a disaster to assist and that their generosity is applauded as part of the ‘Australian spirit’.

“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.”.

*(The Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers handbook 2018 pg. 19)*

Following emergency events, especially large-scale events, the desire to assist those affected leads to a mobilisation of community support through spontaneous volunteering. Spontaneous volunteers are individuals or groups of people who offer assistance during and/or after an event and who are generally unaffiliated with any part of the existing official emergency management response and recovery system.

Offers of help from the community and individuals need to be managed so they do not negatively impact on the recovery effort, regardless of whether spontaneous volunteers are required or not. If not managed efficiently, spontaneous volunteers have the potential to overwhelm agencies carrying out recovery activities.

Spontaneous volunteers often see themselves as part of ‘first responders’, whereas those in recovery generally need them **not** in the first 48 hours, but in the weeks and months to come. However, it is accepted reality that community members will self-activate, regardless of whether their actions are supported or endorsed by those officially coordinating the response. The information on emergent groups in this document seeks to communicate the principle of harnessing and channelling the energy and expertise that community members can bring to recovery efforts.

## PURPOSE

After an event volunteers play a critical part in helping to deliver recovery activities, within government, non-government and emergent groups. Engaging with and harnessing this goodwill can facilitate meaningful and useful assistance to communities if, and when, needs exist.

These guidelines are an internal document designed to be a guide for the management of volunteers by SERM staff in an emergency event in South Australia.

This document summarises:

- ♦ Principles to implement a successful volunteer program
- ♦ Arrangements between SERM and non-government organisations (NGOs)
- ♦ Brief technical information about the systems used to manage spontaneous volunteers
- ♦ Possible scenarios for catastrophic conditions.

## DEFINITION OF SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS

**Spontaneous volunteers** are those members of the general public that are not affiliated or recruited directly by a recovery organisation, but who simply offer their services to assist in some way.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR WORKING WITH SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS

The Australian Disaster Resilience handbook “*Communities Responding to Disasters: Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers*” (2018) outlines 9 principles for working with spontaneous volunteers:

- 1) The people affected by an emergency are the first priority
- 2) Spontaneous volunteering is valuable and aids community recovery and resilience
- 3) Jurisdictions and agencies will take considered policy positions on whether they will engage spontaneous volunteers
- 4) Processes are needed to effectively engage spontaneous volunteers and to avoid agencies being overwhelmed with offers of support
- 5) Standard volunteer management processes apply in times of emergency
- 6) Arrangements for managing spontaneous volunteers should be embedded within existing emergency management plans and operating guidelines
- 7) Everyone has a right to offer their assistance and to feel their offer has been valued
- 8) The time when spontaneous volunteers are needed may not coincide with the time when offers of help are being made
- 9) Effective, timely, consistent communication is essential in the management of spontaneous volunteers

Volunteers will be managed to ensure they will:

- ♦ Always show respect
- ♦ Follow instructions of their leader and/or owner occupier (do what the affected person **needs**, not what **the volunteer thinks they need**)
- ♦ Be aware of the responsibilities and rights they have in relation to self-care, insurance, roles, training, shifts, communication, feedback and complaints
- ♦ Understand that they are never to work alone on a task; there must be a minimum of two volunteers and a site supervisor.

## ROLE OF SECURITY, EMERGENCY AND RECOVERY MANAGEMENT (SERM)

The Manager, Recovery of SERM, will have knowledge of any volunteer deployment by an NGO in affected communities. SERM will maintain communication with lead supervisors, or equivalent, in the organisation. This will include receiving regular reporting on activities.

SERM will determine parameters for applying for Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements (DRFA) funding relevant to the event. Grants to assist with deployment expenses incurred by NGOs may be available.

SERM will ensure organisations are aware of the responsibility to report any serious incidents, accidents or issues as soon as practicable.

Prior to deployment, SERM will consult NGOs to ensure they are aware of their communications, reporting, funding and other requirements.

SERM has delegated the responsibility for registration and coordination of spontaneous volunteers to the peak volunteering body in SA – Volunteering SA&NT (VSA&NT). The Director, SERM has

responsibility for authorising activation of the Management of Spontaneous Volunteers in SA Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with VSA&NT. This MoU can be found in Objective IQ under Security, Emergency and Recovery Management // Emergency Management Strategic Governance // Recovery // Contracts // Consultancies / Agreements / MoU's // Agreements and MoU's.

The MoU is activated if:

- ♦ Recovery agencies, local councils or other organisations are receiving offers of help from spontaneous volunteers, or
- ♦ Spontaneous volunteers are presenting at the location of the disaster, or
- ♦ The Director, SERM (or delegate) anticipates the need for the service.

## ROLE OF VOLUNTEERING SA&NT (VSA&NT)

VSA&NT is a key partner with SERM in managing spontaneous volunteers during recovery.

VSA&NT implement a **broker service**, providing a list of registered members of the general public (spontaneous volunteers) to recovery agencies managing tasks on the ground who may require extra volunteers to boost their existing numbers (surge capacity). They will ensure adequate staffing to manage this service, deal with any media enquiries, and manage volunteer expectations through various channels of communication.

VSA&NT also work with recovery agencies to enhance their volunteer management processes, including the development of screening resources, to help ensure agencies utilise volunteer resources appropriately.

VSA&NT may have an additional role: to manage a volunteer deployment in their own right (to be discussed on a case-by-case basis). This may occur in a smaller scale event. In this instance VSA&NT will ensure adequate supervision, ongoing communication, completion of all required paperwork, following correct procedures, and briefing volunteers.

## ROLE OF OTHER VOLUNTEER SERVICES

### NON-GOVERNMENT SECTOR

Organisations can begin operations at the same time as response and if working in the Relief space are overseen by South Australian Housing Authority (SAHA) through the functional support group mechanism. The Emergency Relief Functional Support Group (ERFSG) has their own agreements and arrangements in place with their participating organisations, such as Australian Red Cross.

Many non-government and community organisations are on the frontline when it comes to emergency management and support the emergency management arrangements in SA. Australians turn to these organisations and agencies in times of trouble, and it is their work that helps communities deal with an emergency situation. The South Australian Government will continue to partner with these agencies and organisations to strengthen the state's emergency management arrangements.

Pre-existing arrangements have been made with some organisations who are willing to be of assistance in managing spontaneous volunteers. As mentioned, an agreement exists with VSA&NT, and the other main agreement is with St Vincent De Paul for the management of donated goods. SERM will consider on an ongoing basis if these arrangements are required for other organisations.

There are no formal arrangements between DPC and NGOs; however, in 2019 'Letters of intent' were distributed to nine key stakeholders. This letter recognised their contribution to recovery in SA,

acknowledged the understanding of their willingness to be contacted after a disaster, and provided the risk statement regarding insurance requirements. These letters can be found in Objective IQ under Security, Emergency and Recovery Management // Emergency Management Strategic Governance // Recovery // Contracts // Consultancies / Agreements // MoU's // Agreements and MoU's. It is intended in 2024 to distribute updated letters to existing and newly identified recovery partners.

## EMERGENT VOLUNTEER GROUPS (VIA SOCIAL MEDIA)

Spontaneous volunteer groups may convene through different forms of social media, such as Facebook. These groups could be comprised of university students, religious or sporting groups that come together to initiate their own volunteer program. It is advised that these groups be engaged and discussions take place as soon as possible to ascertain their aims, who, what and where their focus is, and ensure any assistance is of benefit to the affected community.

A Recovery Incident Management Team (IMT) may be activated within SERM if sustained co-ordination and delivery of whole of government recovery interventions across a disaster event is required. The Communications Officer within SERM's Recovery IMT will be tasked with periodically monitoring social media sites to help gauge community sentiment and needs on the ground. If emergent volunteer groups are identified, SERM will engage with these groups to provide guidance and assistance. SERM will also notify VSA&NT, who will also engage these groups.

A guideline for working with emergent groups is found in Appendix C.

## LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Councils may activate programs to coordinate and manage volunteers. SERM will encourage relevant local government/s to work collaboratively with VSA&NT to manage spontaneous volunteers.

## OTHER SOURCES OF VOLUNTEERS

Youth Justice can be approached as a source of volunteers for specific low risk tasks including but not limited to picking damaged fruit and assisting the clean-up of impacted farms and properties. An NGO, assigned by Youth Justice, will deliver the Youth Justice Community Service Program. Youth Justice will coordinate the implementation of the program. Contact Community Youth Justice on 08 8463 6488.

## SERM PROCESS TO MANAGE SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS

### Step 1

In the early stage of an impending disaster, **notify** primary recovery partners to standby for **possible activation**.

Some organisations may choose to do their own reconnaissance with a view to self-deploying.

Primary Recovery Partners are those non-government organisations who have helped in past recovery projects, have good capacity, attend annual stakeholder forums, and generally maintain a good current relationship with SERM. See Appendix A.

A volunteer strategy tailored to the size, scope and nature of the particular event, or events, will be considered by the Recovery team.

## Step 2

Be guided by the following questions to deciding whether to engage with spontaneous volunteers, or ask for volunteers:

- ♦ Are spontaneous volunteers arriving at the scene?
- ♦ Are volunteers required or likely to be required?
- ♦ What tasks are suited to/relevant and would benefit from volunteer deployment?
- ♦ Have you been requested to start managing spontaneous volunteers?
- ♦ What is the best strategy to recruit, register and deploy spontaneous volunteers?

## Step 3

Activate VSA&NT to ensure effective and consistent public communication regarding the registration, management and deployment of volunteers.

Communicate to external partner organisations that the general public should be directed to register their interest with VSA&NT and listen to further public announcements about volunteering opportunities.

## Step 4

Requests for volunteer assistance may come through the Relief or Recovery Centre, or the State Relief and Recovery Infoline. These requests will be referred to VSA&NT to manage volunteer registrations.

Volunteer assistance to those affected is delivered through NGOs, who use their own volunteer base, and source additional assistance from VSA&NT if required.

It may take some weeks or months for the community to identify their needs or to request assistance. In the medium to long term, Case Managers based in the Recovery Centre may liaise between NGOs and affected residents directly.

## Step 5

The strategy may be a combination of approaches, depending on the community or communities affected, resources available, and the size and impact of the incident.

- ♦ What information is coming in, for example from the State Emergency Centre (SEC)? e.g. Are the SES / CFS / other agencies still on the ground completing task/s?
- ♦ Is it safe for spontaneous volunteers to go in / to send in un-skilled labour? (Information may need to be gathered from the hazard leader or site assessors)
- ♦ What are the risks for a volunteer workforce?
- ♦ Does the benefit to the community outweigh the risks?
- ♦ Is the infrastructure available to manage the effort? (e.g., venues, transport, planned routes, catering)
- ♦ If the Local Recovery Committee has been established – what are they saying about volunteer needs / issues?
- ♦ Has a Local Recovery Coordinator been identified? If so, discuss issue/s with them, and any other relevant parties (e.g., council staff, local government and community representatives.)

### **Step 6**

SERM will continue ongoing liaison with organisations on the ground and request data and information to include in regular reporting.

### **Step 7**

SERM will provide regular reporting on volunteer activities to the State Recovery Operations Group (SROG), and/or the State Recovery Coordinator (or delegate).

Suggested timing of deployment of volunteer organisations	
Initial-short term (includes interstate strike teams and faith-based organisations)	Medium-long term (more focused on South Australian organisations)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Disaster Relief Australia</li> <li>♦ Samaritans Purse</li> <li>♦ Service Clubs – Lions</li> <li>♦ Primary Producers SA</li> <li>♦ St Vincent De Paul – donated goods</li> <li>♦ SAVEM (animal management)</li> <li>♦ Shoeboxes of Love</li> <li>♦ Volunteering SA&amp;NT - spontaneous volunteers</li> <li>♦ Tzu Chi Foundation</li> <li>♦ Foodbank / Amazon</li> <li>♦ Emergent groups</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>♦ Disaster Relief Australia</li> <li>♦ Habitat for Humanity</li> <li>♦ Conservation Volunteers Australia</li> <li>♦ Blaze Aid</li> <li>♦ Rural Aid</li> <li>♦ Culturally and Linguistically Diverse group partners (Muslim Women’s Association, Vietnamese community of SA, Chinese Welfare Association, Com.It,Es (Committee for Italians Abroad SA)</li> <li>♦ Emergent Groups</li> </ul>

**Example of NGOs involved  
in various stages of an event**

<b>Relief Centre</b>	<b>Recovery Centre</b>	<b>Field deployment</b>
Disaster Recovery Ministries	Disaster Recovery Ministries	Disaster Recovery Ministries – Outreach role
Australian Red Cross – Meet and greet and registration role	Australian Red Cross – Outreach role	Australian Red Cross – Outreach role
Lions	Lions	-
Foodbank	Foodbank – Mobile food truck	-
Save the Children	-	-
-	-	Habitat for Humanity
-	Disaster Relief Australia	Disaster Relief Australia
-	Rural Aid	Rural Aid
-	-	Conservation Volunteers Australia
-	-	BlazeAid (multiple camps if required)
-	Emergent groups may have a presence in a Recovery Centre if it is deemed appropriate	Emergent groups

## COMMUNITY

Community is engaged through zone committees, training exercises, pre-season preparedness courses, community consultations on various emergency management topics, and through community development officers in local councils.

Recovery requires the active involvement of the affected community. All agencies involved in recovery operations should seek to engage with the affected community during the development of plans, and must involve the community in the development of recovery activities following an emergency.

Recovery needs to be adaptable and flexible. Recovery activities therefore need to be directed by ongoing needs assessments, monitoring and evaluation.

Recovery is a whole of government effort. However, SERM provides leadership, advice and guidance for the State's national security and emergency management governance and policy arrangements.

SERM guides the co-ordination and delivery of whole of government recovery interventions across a disaster event. It supports both the immediate operational and the longer-term considerations and consequences of the disaster event through recovery program planning.

### **Step 1: Ensure collaboration and connection across groups**

An annual forum is conducted promoting information sharing, broad capability and capacity discussions, and pre-season bushfire preparedness.

SERM host a joint forum annually for all **primary** NGOs in both the Relief and Recovery phases. The membership and invitees can change according to movements in the sector and recent event involvement.

### **Step 2: Maintain agreements**

VSA&NT and St Vincent De Paul agreements are maintained and reviewed in accordance with the stated timelines.

### **Step 3: Emergent groups and individuals will be engaged and potential risk managed where possible**

As previously outlined, The Communications Officer within the Recovery IMT of SERM will engage organised and active spontaneous volunteer groups to offer support and guidance to ensure their efforts are best utilised in a safe and efficient manner.

The State Government will not enter into any agreement that causes liability or risk, and will work to ensure reduced risk such as validating adequate insurance and WHS has been undertaken. NGOs must prove they hold public liability insurance commensurate to the scale of the group or individual. If an emergent group or individual cannot prove this requirement, SERM will not enter into an agreement and will ask them to withdraw. Known Recovery partners are listed in Appendix A.

## REPORTING

A representative unanimously nominated from the NGO stakeholder forum is a member of SROG. This person is the liaison to report issues and information up to SRCPG and to refer the same back to NGO groups.

Some NGO groups may choose to provide an end of season/event report to Recovery within DPC, and may provide cases studies and information back to their peers via the stakeholder forum.

## CAPABILITY FOR CATASTROPHIC CONDITIONS

Catastrophic events are by their very nature overwhelming and outside of the normal experiences of individuals. They are not simply an extension of a smaller disaster and are likely to be for sustained periods over a geographically dispersed area.

Innovative solutions to events of an extreme scale will require adaptive and creative thinking with the volunteer demand and corresponding capability needing to be assessed at the time.

Anticipated scenarios for SERM to consider:

- ♦ It is most likely that volunteers will be locally based, highly organic and will self-deploy. Natural leaders will emerge.
- ♦ SERM's main role will be to provide public messaging on the strategies and agencies activated to manage volunteer deployment.

NGOs who are deploying volunteers for catastrophic conditions will need to consider the following:

- ♦ **Personal safety:** There may be additional or extreme risks, therefore risk assessments will need to be more rigorous and included in safety briefings. Briefings should include strong safety messages, ways to minimise risk, correct procedures, and an emphasis on not working alone. Unexpected risks could include asbestos, disease and/or aftershocks.
- ♦ **Personal support:** Volunteers, their family and/or friends may be exposed to traumatic scenes. Altruism or "survival guilt" may lead to overcompensation to assist, but this needs to be managed with the 'community-led recovery' principle in mind, and matched with what the community needs and wants. Briefings and debriefings will be especially important.
- ♦ **Resource management:** Volunteers should be self-sufficient providing their own equipment, food, water and accommodation. NGOs need to consider sharing resources as appropriate and managing with less direction may be necessary.
- ♦ **Supervision:** It may be necessary for emerging leaders, those with previous experience or the right skills to step up and lead a small team, organise rosters etc to ensure volunteer assistance can be delivered.
- ♦ **Planning and forecasting:** Being agile and innovative with medium-and long-term business planning in response to an event.
- ♦ **Assistance / Tasks:** A catastrophic event will raise different tasks to those from smaller/medium events, therefore increased flexibility will be important. For example, working to meet funeral / burial demands, dealing with mass animal casualties and deaths.

## BUSINESS CONTINUITY

VSA&NT are responsible for the registration of volunteers, and a business continuity strategy to maintain back up should systems fail. Potential volunteers will be encouraged to register via the VSA&NT website in the first instance, but can also phone VSA&NT directly. A recorded message will direct potential volunteers to the website, and the ability to leave a message requesting a call back. If these options are both unavailable, VSA&NT will make available a face-to-face registration option at their office or at another location deemed appropriate, dependent on the nature of the recovery effort, the location of the recovery centre/s, and the resources available at the time.

All NGOs deploying in the recovery space are strongly encouraged to consider and mitigate for business continuity risks.

## ALTERNATIVES TO TASKING SPONTANEOUS VOLUNTEERS

Some organisations may decide that they do not have the capability to task spontaneous volunteers and yet there is political pressure to use the volunteers. SERM needs to advise VSA&NT of their responsibility to communicate with those registered organisations, clarify that they will be contacted only if needed, and tell them not to self-deploy.

VSA&NT can work with SERM to:

- ◆ Let people know how they can help the response or recovery effort under their own direction (i.e., doorknocking in their neighbourhood to check on others)
- ◆ Advise people how they can stay in touch with VSA&NT, as circumstances may change during the event or in future, and
- ◆ advise if other groups, either spontaneous volunteer groups or established organisations, might be able to task them (gain permission to refer the public to them first).

## ACRONYMS

Term	Definition
ADRA	Adventist Development and Relief Agency
CBS	Consumer and Business Services
CFS	Country Fire Service
CVA	Conservation Volunteers Australia
DIT	Department for Infrastructure and Transport
DPC	The Department of the Premier and Cabinet
DRA	Disaster Relief Australia
DRFA	Disaster Recovery Funding Arrangements
DRT	Disaster Relief Team
DRU	Disaster Relief Unit
ECIS	Emergency Client Information System
ERFSG	Emergency Relief Functional Service Group
IMT	Incident Management Team
ITC	Interpreting and Translating Centre
LFSG	Logistics Functional Support Group
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAATI	National Accreditation Authority for Translators and Interpreters
NDIS	National Disability Insurance Scheme
NGOs	Non-government organisations
PIRSA	Department of Primary Industries and Regions
PPSA	Primary Producers SA
SAHA	SA Housing Authority
SAVEM	South Australian Veterinary Emergency Management
SEC	State Emergency Centre
SEMC	State Emergency Management Committee
SEMP	State Emergency Management Plan

SERF	State Emergency Relief Fund
SERM	Security, Emergency and Recovery Management
SES	State Emergency Service
SRCPG	State Recovery Coordination and Planning Group
SROG	State Recovery Operations Group
SV	Spontaneous volunteer
SVDP	St Vincent De Paul
TIS	Translating and Interpreting Service
VSA&NT	Volunteering South Australia & Northern Territory
WHS	Workplace health and safety

## DOCUMENT CONTROL

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Version	Date	Summary of change
1	June 2018	Version 1
2	June 2019	Version 2
3	February 2024	Version 3 updates the existing capacity of NGOs to help manage spontaneous volunteers in an event, and includes new recovery partners in SA



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