



The Volunteering Victoria Submission to  
THE EMV OPERATING MODEL REVIEW

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## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Volunteering Victoria acknowledges the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples, the traditional custodians of the land on which our office stands, and we pay our respects to them, their culture, and their Elders past and present.

## ABOUT VOLUNTEERING VICTORIA

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering, focusing on advocacy, sector development and the promotion of volunteering. We are a member-based organisation with over 400 individual and organisational members from all sectors and places around Victoria.

Volunteering Victoria has a singular and specialised focus on volunteering. We see our role as leading the development of a collaborative, sustainable, thriving, and inclusive volunteering community, and movement in Victoria.

Volunteering Victorian runs the *weVolunteer* program with funding from the Victorian Government.

## THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VICTORIA OPERATING MODEL

Emergency Management Victoria is leading a sector-wide response on a suite of key projects that each help to clarify the strategic priorities for Victoria's emergency management sector. These have been consolidated as the Emergency Management Reform Program (EMRP).

A key project in this Program is the Strategic Roadmap which will:

- » Articulate the sector's overarching vision and strategic priorities for the next six years
- » Set out a three-year implementation plan (the Strategic Action Plan)
- » Include outcomes that translate the sector's vision for safer and more resilient communities (which will form the start of the Sector Outcomes Framework).

## IDENTIFIED PROPOSALS FOR FEEDBACK

### **Proposal 7:**

**That EMV, on behalf of the sector, continue to target the key barriers to emergency management volunteer participation by:**

- » Championing and promoting more innovative, flexible, and inclusive approaches to participation including reforms to recruitment, training, development, and rostering, including through facilitating information sharing across volunteer organisations
- » Reducing financial barriers through greater employment protection, employer incentives, compensation for out-of-pocket expenses, including through legislative change where required
- » Reviewing well-being supports for responders across the sector to ensure adequacy, and setting guidelines for a broadened understanding of safety.

## **Proposal 8:**

**That EMV support the emergency management sector to unlock the potential of spontaneous and non-affiliated volunteers by:**

- » Developing a comprehensive strategy for coordinating spontaneous volunteers, including engagement objectives and risk mitigation strategies. Note: IGEM has recommended that EMV develop a strategy to coordinate spontaneous volunteers together with the new recovery entity proposed under Recommendation 13 of the Phase 2 2019/20 Bushfires Inquiry
- » Working with volunteer partners with strong connections in the sector to manage and promote a centralised platform for spontaneous volunteer registration, induction and training, including to minimise risk through vetting
- » Using this platform to promote connection between grassroots groups and the emergency management sector.

## **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT REFORM**

Collaboration between volunteers and government agencies play a key role for successful emergency and disaster management. In many instances, the tradition of organised volunteering in support of organised disaster management processes is a long one. New technologies, large scale disaster events, and a differently engaged population are some factors combining to bring spontaneous and emergent forms of volunteerism to official disaster management activities.

Resilient communities allow for dynamic interactions between people facing threats and their environments. Volunteerism enables individuals to work together, shaping collective opportunities for dealing with risk and connecting individuals and communities with wider systems of support. Volunteerism as a universal social behaviour is therefore a critical means to community resilience.

This submission conveys strong support for the proposals listed, provided there are the resourced means for change. That is, EMV needs to be explicit in its resource commitment to volunteering, whereby there is increased visibility and investment in volunteer-involving strategies, roles and delegations.

### **Volunteering Victoria supports this proposal and adds further ideas for exploring innovative response to the issues raised:**

Volunteering Victoria supports the needs to explore new ways to improve participation of emergency management volunteers and offers to assist EMV to reduce barriers for volunteers.

Learning from [weVolunteer](#) (a program delivered by Volunteering Victoria) may help inform new ways to recruit, train and engage with volunteers. A platform similar to weVolunteer could be developed for emergency management volunteering to improve collaboration amongst EM agencies that involve trained volunteers, providing a new model of a shared volunteer pool (eg with FRV, CFA, SES, Police, local government and marine rescue).

## Proposal 7:

**That EMV, on behalf of the sector, continue to target the key barriers to emergency management volunteer participation.**

**What is your level of support for this proposal?** Volunteering Victoria strongly supports efforts to target key barriers to emergency management volunteer participation. We add the following points to each of the three key barriers identified in the report.

### Participation

Innovative, flexible, and inclusive approaches to volunteering are essential, but require a specific strategic volunteer leadership skillset on which we feel is relatively silent in the Report.

Strategic volunteer leadership ensures the aims and values of volunteer involvement are promoted within the organisation, and that there is clear accountability for the implementation of volunteer involvement. Effective management ensures that processes and systems are in place to implement positive volunteer involvement.

For example, with the extended impact of COVID-19 on communities, we believe the social contract between volunteers and the State has increased the need for greater focus on safety, equity, diversity, and inclusion. Building leadership practices that leverage pre-existing networks of support and promote the engagement of marginalised groups is increasingly important. With volunteers' commitment to inclusion and participation, volunteerism can help build a culture of participatory and collaborative decision-making to meet EMV's future state.

### Recommendation:

Contemporary volunteer participation and its leadership is professionalising, with increasingly individualised expectations overlaid by increased management of volunteer safety, satisfaction, and sustainability. We believe people with responsibility for volunteers should be developed to meet such needs through:

- » a strong organisational and personal commitment to the [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#),
- » nationally accredited training courses in volunteer management (e.g., the Certificate IV), and
- » Volunteering Victoria's continuing professional development (CPD) framework.

### Reducing financial barriers:

Best practice in accordance with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement is that organisations have a policy and procedure for reimbursing volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses.

From our [2020 State of Volunteering Report](#), only one in three organisations indicated they reimbursed volunteers for their expenses to motivate and retain volunteers. Although it is inappropriate to infer from this data why VIOs choose (or not) to reimburse their volunteers, organisations need to be careful not to inadvertently exclude people who would be willing to volunteer but cannot afford the associated out-of-pocket costs.

The costs to volunteering should be considered and accounted for in the context of volunteer demographics. For example, one third of organisations report that they engage volunteers via

Centrelink and jobactive participation. Volunteers should not absorb organisational costs as part of volunteering.

Principles of any reduction in financial barriers should include: (a) equity, (b) universality, (c) simplicity for volunteers, organisations, and government, (d) transparency and (e) not undermining the principles of volunteering.

### **Recommendation:**

Clearly, the cost of volunteering is an issue not to be ignored. The value of volunteering to the Australian community and economy is staggering. Rising costs of volunteering however are becoming a disincentive to potential volunteers and create problems for the already committed volunteer.

### **Reviewing well-being supports for responders:**

Literature on psychological issues relating to volunteering is limited. There can be positive emotional and psychological benefits to individuals from being involved in response activities. Involvement often has a transformative effect on volunteers, stimulating feelings of self-esteem, interconnection, healing, and empowerment. However, voluntary involvement in disaster response – and thereby being a witness to death, destruction, and suffering, in addition to facing intense work pressures – can generate stress responses such as depression, difficulty sleeping, and feelings of grief, anxiety and vulnerability. Such adverse outcomes may not appear until sometime after the event.

### **Recommendation:**

We suggest that EMV give greater emphasis to the support and training needs to address volunteers' mental health needs.

### **What else needs to be considered?**

Building a truly equal and inclusive voluntary workforce requires a greater acknowledgement of the racism embedded within society's systems and institutions and perpetuated daily in the exclusion and differential treatment of people from diverse racial, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds. People from multicultural and multifaith communities, and First Nations peoples experience barriers to community participation including discrimination, bias, and stigma.

Given the broad reach and contribution of volunteers, and the reliance of not-for-profit and community service sectors on them, we encourage EMV to acknowledge the importance of addressing racism in volunteering and develop anti-racism initiatives and resources to support greater inclusion, accessibility, and diversity in these sectors

### **Proposal 8:**

**That EMV support the emergency management sector to unlock the potential of spontaneous and non-affiliated volunteers**

What is your level of support for this proposal? Volunteering Victoria strongly supports the proposal for EMV to:

1. Develop a comprehensive strategy for coordinating spontaneous volunteers,
2. work with partners to manage and promote a centralised platform for spontaneous volunteer management, and

3. use this platform to promote sector connections.

**We add the following points to each of these three proposals:**

**Spontaneous volunteer strategy:**

As noted in the Consultation Report, informal volunteer effort is increasing, and is often undervalued. A centralised strategy to manage spontaneous volunteers in Victoria should identify the people, (strengths based and/or other) approaches and resources which are required to:

- » Engage and develop relationships with departments, agencies, local/ government, volunteer organisations, communities, etc. to develop, use, promote and improve the system to benefit volunteers and communities.
- » Manage the year-round system (including before, during and after emergencies).
- » Maintain, engage and update the Pool of volunteers.
- » Continually improve the system and processes to support the registration, training and management of casual and spontaneous volunteers in the future.

Why is the current model a problem? Communities and organisations are confused about the roles and responsibilities with respect to managing spontaneous volunteers. Local Government and Bushfire Recovery Victoria are forced to adapt and 'do their best' to support communities and spontaneous volunteers before, during and after emergencies.

**Multiple issues exist including:**

- » Local Government, communities and agencies may be overwhelmed with offers of support during critical times of need.
- » Poor communication and coordination resulting in potential OH&S and legal issues for communities and volunteer/organisations.
- » A lack of support for people to effectively understanding their responsibilities and be accountable for identifying and managing key issues and risks – while solving problems with communities and supporting organisations.
- » Community may not benefit from the additional enormous volunteer effort.
- » A poor community and/or volunteer experience may also cause greater harm.
- » Negative impacts may affect the motivation for people to volunteer.

**Centralised platform for spontaneous volunteer management**

weVolunteer has been operating for almost 18 months. It has proven its technological and operational capacity to manage:

- » surge interest and registrations,
- » volunteer credentialling through a 'passport' style of information exchange,
- » online training for volunteers' safety and volunteer leadership,
- » program team support to onboard and provide helpdesk and advice and keep the communication going with volunteers who have not yet been "activated".

However, weVolunteer is only funded until 30 June 2022 and, without further government investment, will be mothballed. Without weVolunteer, the cost, administrative and time burden on emergency management organisations and other support organisations will naturally increase.

We note that while the Report refers to the MSEV pilot program, ‘which trained 21 volunteer managers who can be deployed to help coordinate and more effectively management spontaneous volunteers in times of emergency’, this program was defunded in 2018 and has subsequently not been maintained for any future emergency or deployment.

### **Promoting sector connections**

Volunteering Victoria was a spectator to the overwhelming convergence of people willing to volunteer and donate goods during the 2019/20 bushfires. Local Government and traditional support organisations often referred volunteers to Volunteering Victoria believing that we were resourced to manage this interest.

More recently (December 2021), Volunteering Victoria began leading inter-government understanding and agreement on spontaneous volunteering through the establishment of a forum. Initial attendees included EMV, BRV, LGV and DFFH. It was evident from this meeting that there is a wide gap between departments on responsibility and long-term strategy. Volunteering Victoria accordingly recommends the re-constitution of the Volunteer Consultative Forum with Volunteering Victoria added to the members and meetings conducted on a regular and on-going basis.

## **What else needs to be considered?**

### **Legal challenges**

Contrary to the proverb that necessity has no law, in fact, legal regulations generally also apply in the context of disaster. This is also true for the involvement of volunteers. Legal questions are bound to arise if volunteers cause harm to others or harmed during or as a consequence of a disaster. A study on volunteer organisation conducted in the United States found that 16% of the surveyed organisations had been sued because of actions by spontaneous volunteers and 5% were sued by a spontaneous volunteer (Sauer et al. 2014).

### **State emergency management plan (SEMP)**

The sector looks to Volunteering Victoria for advice in an emergency and has been identified as responsible for supporting EMV with spontaneous volunteering and has current funding to operate the weVolunteer program.

However, Volunteering Victoria has no formal agreement (as exists in other states) with the Victorian Government on its roles and responsibilities in a disaster.

Volunteering Victoria has been assigned the role of Recovery Support Agency in the EMV SEMP for the coordination of spontaneous volunteers. While we welcome the identification of and strategic engagement of Volunteering Victoria, without ongoing funding of weVolunteer, we are unlikely to be able to meet the expectations of partnership set out in the SEMP.

We encourage the architects of the new Operating Model to ensure partnerships provide adequate resourcing to meet shared agendas such as the management of spontaneous volunteers.