Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan

GANNAWARRA
SHIRE COUNCIL

Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan

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Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan

Aim

The Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan aims to ensure appropriate coordination of volunteers, particularly spontaneous volunteers, in the preparedness, response and recovery phases of an emergency event.

Objectives

Gannawarra Shire recognises the considerable positive effect of volunteerism on individual volunteers and on the community as a whole. Volunteerism associated with emergency events has an enhanced capacity to strengthen community connections, foster individual wellbeing and hasten community recovery.

The Plan will therefore:

- enhance resources available to relief and recovery agencies and the wider community through the efficient organisation of spontaneous volunteers;
- establish a means by which existing and spontaneous volunteers can contribute their time and skills in the event of an emergency;
- promote a partnership approach to accessing, sharing and managing valuable volunteer resources during emergencies
- through strengthened partnerships for the purposes of emergency management promote the capacity of service clubs, volunteer groups and other organisations to enhance their recruitment, retention and recognition of volunteers outside emergency events

The Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan is an operational level plan that sits below the Gannawarra Shire Municipal Emergency Management Plan, prepared pursuant to the Emergency Management Act 1986.

The Plan is supported by a *Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Kit* that outlines the detailed procedures to be followed when the Plan is activated. The Kit is available in hard copy and electronic format and contains a range of instructions and templates for immediate use in the event of an emergency.

Context

The Plan has been developed with reference to the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience* (COAG 2011) that emphasises the need for both vertical and horizontal communication and coordination, as well as the importance of engaging the community before and during events to build resilience.

The Plan and associated Kit are compliant with the principles considered essential for disaster recovery as detailed in the *Community Recovery Handbook* (2011) by the Federal Attorney General's Department in alignment with the *National Strategy for Disaster Resilience*.

The Plan was developed mindful of the State Government's Green Paper: *Towards a More Disaster Resilient and Safer Victoria* (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2011), and its particular emphasis on the need for an all hazards approach. The Government's subsequent White Paper, *Victorian Emergency Management Reform* (Department of Premier and Cabinet, 2012), has been released contemporaneously and it is encouraging to note the White Paper's emphasis on "community, collaboration and capability" is consistent with the approach underpinning this Plan. The White Paper recommends further collaboration with local government to assist with the strategic management of spontaneous volunteers in emergencies and this Plan should stand Gannawarra Shire in good stead for such collaborative efforts.

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At the local level, this Plan is congruent with the aspirations identified in *Gannawarra 2025: Taking up the Challenge*, the Shire's vision and long-term strategy for future development and regional stewardship. This vision for 2025 recognises the existing potency of the Shire's strong volunteer culture and encourages actions, such as the development of this Plan, that build upon this asset.

This Plan progresses commitments detailed in the Council Plan (2009-13) to ensure appropriate disaster prevention, response and recovery plans are in place to cover a range of potentially adverse events, and to promote community connectedness through strengthening partnerships between Council, service groups and volunteer organisations within the Shire.

Council's Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan (2009-13) commits Council to annual reviews of all emergency management sub-plans and this requirement is reflected in the Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan.

Municipal endorsement

This document has been produced by the Gannawarra Shire Council as a Sub-Plan of its Municipal Emergency Management Plan and was endorsed by the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee on 5 April 2013. The Plan was endorsed by the Council on 22 June 2013.

Review

The Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan, together with the supporting Kit, will be reviewed and updated annually by the Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator under the direction of the Municipal Recovery Manager and following any activation of the Plan in the event of an emergency.

The MRM may approve minor operational amendments to the Plan.

Major amendments, namely those that affect the aim and intent of the Plan or the roles and responsibilities of key stakeholders, must be endorsed by the Municipal Emergency Management Planning Committee.

Audience

This Plan has been prepared for use by Council staff, local Service Clubs, the local chapter of the Victorian Council of Churches, the local Red Cross sub-branch, St Vincent de Paul, community health, CFA, SES and other key spontaneous volunteering stakeholders. The Plan is under the leadership of the Gannawarra Shire Council in the implementation of its responsibilities under the Emergency Management Act 1986.

Scope and Definitions

This Plan details the arrangements for responding to and coordinating spontaneous volunteers, re-deployment of existing affiliated volunteers to assist other volunteering agencies and the management of emergent volunteer groups.

Volunteers are defined as people who perform or offer to perform a service voluntarily: *an information booth staffed by volunteers; hospital volunteers.*

Spontaneous Volunteers are defined as individuals or businesses who offer or are invited to contribute their assistance during and/or after an event and who are not affiliated with any part of the existing official emergency management planning system.

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Affiliated Volunteers are defined as a team of volunteers who are already formally registered with another organisation and are willing and able to offer time and/or resources to assist.   Affiliated volunteer teams are likely to come with their own supervision and support structures in place as well as possible access to their own plant and equipment.

Emergent Volunteer Groups are defined as groups of people who come together as a result of the emergency to offer assistance in a particular area or for a particular task and are not (yet) formally affiliated with an incorporated organisation. For example, local farmers who team up to offer fencing assistance across a community after they have completed their own repairs.

This Plan does not incorporate the activities of "Good Samaritans" or "Good Neighbours". Research and experience at the international level, and confirmed locally, substantiates that attempts to coordinate the volunteer efforts of these groups is neither achievable or desirable.

Good Samaritans are defined as the people who are first on the scene of an incident and offer assistance of their own volition.

Good Neighbours are defined as people who offer assistance to friends, family and neighbours of their own volition and not under the coordinated direction of the emergency management effort.

This Plan does not address other related issues such as the recruitment, retention and coordination of volunteer emergency services personnel (such as CFA, SES, Red Cross etc) or volunteer service clubs (such as Rotary, Lions etc) as responsibility and authority for these issues is appropriately retained within those organisations.

Activation and Implementation

The Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan will be activated by the Municipal Recovery Manager where the nature and scope of the emergency event will require management and deployment of volunteers, particularly spontaneous volunteers.

This may include events where:

- the nature of the emergency or extent of media coverage makes convergence of spontaneous volunteers likely
- it is deemed likely that there will be relief and/or recovery activities beyond the scope and capacity of existing personnel (either paid or voluntary)
- it is predicted the emergency or impact of the emergency will last longer than a week

Tailoring Volunteer Coordination to the Phase of the Emergency

Gannawarra Shire recognises the strategic importance of tailoring coordination activity through all phases of an emergency, including preparedness, response and recovery.   Priorities pertaining to management of volunteers at these times are as follows:

Preparedness Phase

- Identification of potential Volunteer Centre sites
- Volunteer Coordination Team readiness, including training, exercising and role awareness
- Awareness raising, recruitment and registration of potential volunteers (unaffiliated with groups and willing to make themselves available in an emergency)
- Training of registered, unaffiliated volunteers including certification where appropriate for first aid, food handling, working with children etc
- Review and updating of *Managing Volunteers in Emergency Kit*

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Response Phase

- Clear communication messages to manage potential surges of spontaneous volunteering
- Potential redeployment of existing volunteers to assist other volunteer agencies
- Possible establishment of a Volunteer Centre separate from any Relief Centre established
- MRM and Council Emergency Management Group readiness to respond to high level / high value offers of volunteer assistance from organisations, other government sectors.

Recovery Phase

- Potential establishment of a Volunteer Centre if not established during response (this can be co-located with any Recovery Centres established)
- Clear communication messages regarding the need or otherwise for spontaneous volunteers
- Assessment and registration of spontaneous volunteers
- Matching offers of assistance with requests for assistance
- Briefing and after action review of volunteers
- Identification and where possible inclusion of any emergent volunteer groups to ensure their activities remain consistent with overall emergency planning
- Acknowledgement of volunteers and offers of assistance.

Volunteers in Emergencies Stakeholders

The following local agencies and groups have a current or potential role in the instigation of a coordinated volunteer effort in the event of an emergency:

Gannawarra Shire Council – Community Care Services, Youth Council, Tourism, Library Services, focus groups
Red Cross
Service Clubs (Rotary, Lions)
Victorian Council of Churches
Other faith-based groups, including the Baptist Church and the Brethren
SES
CFA
Cohuna Neighbourhood House
Kerang and District Community Centre
Gannawarra Shire Community Planning Groups
Sporting and Recreation Clubs
Northern District Community Health Service
Local schools
Landcare groups
Farm based groups (i.e. Dairying, CWA etc)
Bendigo Volunteer Resource Centre
Similar agencies and groups in neighbouring shires may also provide assistance and should be accessed using inter-Shire protocols outlined in the MEMP.

Up to date contact information regarding these agencies and groups is kept by the Volunteer Emergency Coordinator.

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Definition of Volunteer Assistance

Volunteers are a vital resource during the response and recovery phases of emergencies. Gannawarra Shire Council and the key stakeholders detailed in this Plan support the use of volunteers who are defined as unpaid offers of assistance from residents and community members, businesses, groups and organisations, individuals/groups from outside the Shire and other government sectors to Council.

Offers of assistance where payment or compensation for services is anticipated or expected either in part or in full are not considered voluntary offers and should be coordinated and formally authorised through the MECC.

There is no minimum age for individuals interested in volunteering. Any volunteer under the age of 18 years must be under the supervision of a parent or guardian who is aged 18 years or over. Groups of volunteers aged under 18 years must be under the supervision of people with a current Working with Children Check.

Volunteers over the age of 90 years are not covered by Council's insurance and therefore cannot be registered.

Volunteers may be drawn from within or outside the Shire depending on need.

Principles for Managing Volunteers in an Emergency

Volunteer management in emergencies is based the following principles:

Primary principle: *those affected by the disaster are always the first priority*

Secondary principles:

1. Existing and spontaneous volunteers are a valuable component of community response and recovery

2. Everybody has a right to offer their assistance and to feel their offer has been valued

3. Volunteer coordinators have a right to respectfully decline offers of assistance where they are deemed inappropriate or not needed

4. Good practice in volunteer management continues to apply in times of emergency

5. Volunteers can be effectively managed through timely, planned and informed communication

6. Volunteers have a right to the support, training and direction needed to undertake their role

7. Volunteers have a responsibility to work collaboratively with and follow the direction of the volunteer coordination bodies

8. Volunteer coordination commences as soon as an event occurs (response) and continues until there is no longer an identified need for volunteers (recovery)

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ACTIVATION OF THE PLAN

Key Roles:

MRM – Council's Municipal Recovery Manager retains delegated authority via the Municipal Emergency Management Plan and provides overall direction to the Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator and Team, including authority to activate the Plan. The MRM is a designated position (incorporated within a substantive role) within Council.

Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator - under the direction of the MRM, is responsible for the implementation of the Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan and providing direction and support to members of the Volunteer Coordination Team. The Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator is a designated position (incorporated within a substantive role) within Council.
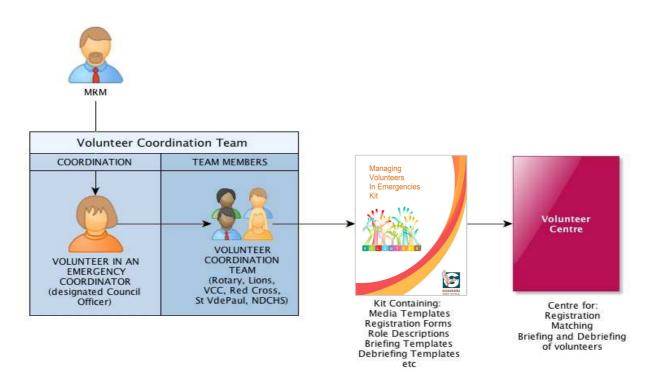
Volunteer Coordination Team Members – with the support and coordination of the Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator, team members will undertake tasks as detailed in the Plan to ensure the effective and efficient coordination of volunteers. Team Members are drawn from local groups and organisations that have expertise and/or experience in volunteer coordination, are not already responsible for undertaking significant tasks in the event of an emergency, and have expressed interest in being involved at a local coordinating level. Team members may be drawn from local service clubs, community health, Red Cross and the Victorian Council of Churches, other faith based groups, or groups with relevant interest and expertise.

Process of Activation

In the event of an emergency the MRM will liaise with the Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator who in turn will contact available representatives of the Volunteer Coordination Team.

The Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator, following consultation with the MRM, will determine the current priority tasks and allocate them to the available team members according to skill and experience. The *Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Kit* contains the operational details required for the team members to actively commence coordination of volunteer efforts (including the potential establishment of a Volunteer Centre).

Some events may result in the loss of power and/or communication to towns or sections of the Shire. Members of the Volunteer Coordination Team who are on-site and consider volunteer coordination is required are encouraged to follow the Plan and utilise their copy of the *Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Kit* until contact with the MRM or Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator can be established. (Responsibility for restoring power and communication is designated within the Municipal Emergency Management Plan.)

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Note: A more detailed flowchart is contained in Appendix A.

In ensuring appropriate coordination of volunteers, tasks are likely to centre around three main themes:

1. responding to and coordinating spontaneous volunteers;
2. re-deployment of existing volunteers to assist other volunteering agencies; and
3. the management of emergent volunteer groups.

Spontaneous Volunteers

Spontaneous volunteers are one of the most valuable and most time consuming resources to manage during an emergency event. Regardless of whether there is an actual need for spontaneous volunteers, plans must be in place to manage the potential influx of offers from within the Shire, the region and beyond.

Consistent with growing practice across Australia, coordination of spontaneous volunteers under this Plan is based on the framework for *Managing Spontaneous Volunteers in Emergencies* by the Australian Red Cross (2010).

Successful response and recovery efforts in an emergency rely on people understanding their roles, responsibilities and the structure of command/control. Spontaneous volunteers often arrive with good intention and potential resources but without the necessary experience or equipment to perform a role or to keep themselves and others safe. Poorly coordinated, they can be a distraction to agencies involved in response and recovery efforts and indeed potentially increase the negative impact of the event. Similarly, underutilised volunteers may become disappointed and angry.

Good management of spontaneous volunteers balances the need for assessment, credentialing and training with the importance of maintaining simple, streamlined and 'common-sense' approaches that engage rather than alienate volunteers.

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Spontaneous volunteers offering assistance in the Gannawarra Shire will be responded to promptly, by people trained in supporting volunteers, from the moment they register interest to when they are stood down.

Multiple avenues for registering and supporting volunteers will be made available including, but not restricted to, in person, by telephone and via internet. Volunteers offering assistance will be advised of the outcome of their offer. This may include a respectful decline if their offer is not currently required; a request for activation at a later date when the initial surge has lessened; or immediate matching with an appropriate request for assistance.

Where possible processes will be simple, straightforward and responsive to volunteer interests and intentions rather than imposing seemingly overly bureaucratic requirements. At the same time, recognising the importance of accountability and transparency, processes will allow for adequate documentation and safety requirements.

Tasks and associated templates are detailed in the *Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Kit* and address all operational aspects of spontaneous volunteer coordination including:

- Communication
- Data management
- Responding to enquiries
- Assessment and registration
- Briefing and after action review
- Risk management.

Redeployment of Existing Volunteers

Depending on the nature of the emergency, volunteers already affiliated with other organisations may have capacity to assist in other areas. These teams of volunteers, with their own supervision and support structures and access to their own plant and equipment are capable of operating with a higher level of autonomy than unaffiliated, individual volunteers.

Rather than register these volunteers as individual, spontaneous volunteers, they will be coordinated as a group, through their nominated leader/supervisor, and liaise directly with the Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator or a nominated member of the Volunteer Coordination Team. In this way these volunteers will still be acting under the direction and with the support of their affiliated organisation, while at the same time their contributions will be coordinated as part of the wider volunteer management effort.

Note: Emergency services organisations (CFA, SES etc) already have inter-agency protocols in place to allow for cross-agency volunteering. This Plan does not seek to replicate or override such arrangements, but rather seeks to secure a logical avenue for acknowledging the offers of assistance from affiliated volunteers willing to undertake general volunteer activities.

Tasks and associated templates for managing affiliated volunteers are detailed in the *Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Kit*.

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Management of Emergent Volunteer Groups

Emergent Volunteer Groups are those that form as a result of the emergency and are unlikely to have formal incorporation although they may have leadership from within the group. Common examples include a coordinated group of farmers rendering assistance across the community once repairs to their own properties are complete, or a group of tradespeople coming together to repair local houses.

Gannawarra Shire recognises these groups are formed with good intention and have the capacity to provide skilled and timely assistance to the community. It also recognises that without communication linkages to the broader response and recovery effort, emergent volunteer groups may work in isolation from the coordinated efforts of local community recovery committees, or put themselves and others at risk. Unless they affiliate with an existing group, emergent volunteer groups are also unlikely to be covered by insurance.

Gannawarra Shire will therefore offer coordination and support to emergent volunteer groups, ensuring their efforts are acknowledged and put to the best use. All members of emergent volunteer groups will be actively encouraged to register as part of the spontaneous volunteer process allowing them to access the associated benefits and requiring them to commit to the associated responsibilities.

Tasks and associated templates for managing emergent volunteer groups are detailed in the *Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Kit.*

Volunteer Resource Centre

The various tasks associated with managing volunteer resources are considerable, with significant and consistently high numbers of enquiries and offers of assistance likely to be received. The larger the event, the more beneficial it will be to separate volunteer coordination functions from the site where other relief and recovery efforts are undertaken (i.e. evacuation/relief and recovery centres). Despite its separate location, the Volunteer Centre should be an accessible distance from any relief/recovery centre with regular communication between personnel from each site.

For this reason, in the event of an emergency, the Emergency Management Group will consider the efficacy of establishing a Volunteer Resource Centre, either at a physical location, as a virtual entity or both. If the Group through the MRM determines a Centre should be established, the *Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Kit* provides information and instructions for implementation by the Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator and the Volunteer Coordination Team. A list of pre-audited potential Volunteer Centre sites will be available in the Kit and contained within the MEMP itself. (Note: in accordance with Council's identification of potential Information Points for use in the event of an emergency, volunteer information and registration opportunities may be made available through these Points instead of or in addition to a Volunteer Centre, depending on the scale of the emergency.)

Identification of Volunteers

All volunteers undertaking tasks at the direction and with the support of the Volunteer Coordination Team will wear identification tags authorised by one of the Coordination Team members.
Hard-copy examples and electronic templates of identification tags are provided in the *Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Kit.*

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Support for Volunteers

Volunteers will be adequately assessed to ensure their skills and experience are best utilised and that they are not placed in unsafe situations or required to undertake tasks beyond their scope without the appropriate training. All volunteers will be briefed prior to undertaking tasks to ensure they understand the context of the emergency, the scope of their role and the reporting structure. All volunteers will have an opportunity to participate in a daily after action review, for the purposes of gathering additional information that may assist in the relief and recovery effort; to identify any changes that may need to be made to the volunteer arrangements; and to flag any need for debriefing should the volunteer/s indicate signs of distress. (Formal debriefing will be organised through the MECC or through the MRM once the MECC has closed.)

Templates for developing briefing and after action review notes are detailed in the *Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Kit.*

Insurance of Volunteers

Volunteers up to the age of 90 years that are registered, deployed and managed by Council as per the procedures outlined in this Plan will be insured by Council.

Volunteers registered with existing agencies and groups undertaking their usual volunteering duties will be insured by their existing agency or group.

Good Samaritans who are first on the scene and Good Neighbours rendering individual assistance are not covered by Council or any other organisation's insurance, as they are not acting at the request or under the direction of any organisation. Individuals and businesses in these circumstances will need to claim on their own insurance.

Emergent volunteer groups will be un-insured unless they seek incorporation and insurance, make formal arrangements to partner with an existing organisation, or register as spontaneous volunteers willing to act under direction of Council.

Acknowledgement of Volunteers

The Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator will ensure all offers of voluntary assistance are acknowledged, regardless of whether the offer is drawn upon. Individual, group and community acknowledgement will be considered

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APPENDIX A: Flowchart for Activation

FLOWCHART for Activation of the Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan

Legend:
- MRM
- VOLUNTEER IN AN EMERGENCY COORDINATOR (designated Council position)
- VOLUNTEER COORDINATION TEAM: Rotary Reps, Lions Reps, VCC Reps, Red Cross Reps, St V de Paul Reps, CFA Reps, NDCHS Reps
- DECISION POINT
- PROCESS OR ACTION
- DOCUMENT

EMERGENCY EVENT

Large scale or impact? High media coverage? Beyond our resources? Last longer than a week? — MRM

NO → **Manage volunteers using existing resources and processes** (VOLUNTEER IN AN EMERGENCY COORDINATOR)

YES → **Contact the Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator and advise to Activate the Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Plan** (MRM)

Contact available members of the Volunteer Coordination Team and advise Plan is activated. (VOLUNTEER IN AN EMERGENCY COORDINATOR)

Retrieve Managing Volunteers in Emergencies Kit (hard copy or electronic)

Delegate tasks to Volunteer Coordination Team: – retrieval of Kit – developing draft media messages – establish link with MECC etc (VOLUNTEER IN AN EMERGENCY COORDINATOR)

influx of volunteers expected? teams of volunteers likely to be required? — MRM

NO → **Manage volunteer coordination from Council office** (VOLUNTEER IN AN EMERGENCY COORDINATOR)

YES → **Liaise with the Volunteer in an Emergency Coordinator and advise to establish a Physical Volunteer Centre (and potentially Information Points)** (MRM)

Delegate tasks to Volunteer Coordination Team: – establish a physical centre – establish a virtual presence – confirm and communicate phone line (VOLUNTEER IN AN EMERGENCY COORDINATOR)

– Recruit additional volunteers from own organisation if required – Assess and Register volunteers – Match with requests for assistance – Brief volunteers – Provide volunteer support – Debrief volunteers (VOLUNTEER COORDINATION TEAM)

EMERGENCY EVENT AND RECOVERY CONCLUDES

Acknowledge volunteers Stand down volunteers Review/Evaluate volunteer coordination (VOLUNTEER IN AN EMERGENCY COORDINATOR)