

Checklist for engaging spontaneous volunteers



Checklist for not-for-profit organisations

During disasters, organisations are often overwhelmed by offers of help from the community and receive an influx of spontaneous volunteers.

A spontaneous volunteer is someone who offers help in this informal way in response to a disaster event and is not formally recognised as a volunteer of the organisation.



For more information, see our webpage [‘Managing spontaneous volunteers during a disaster’](#).

If your organisation decides to engage spontaneous volunteers, use the following checklist to develop a policy to minimise risks and ensure the safety and effectiveness of your spontaneous volunteers.

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Before there is a disaster

- set up a process for screening and registering spontaneous volunteers
- create role descriptions and prepare a simple volunteer agreement template that’s easy to access, understand and agree to, and consider online alternatives that a volunteer can ‘click’ to accept
 A volunteer agreement is a generally non legal binding document that sets out the arrangements between the organisation and the volunteer. It is often used with a volunteer role description that outlines the authorised duties of the volunteer.
- consider how you could adapt your existing process and policies for formal volunteers to cater for spontaneous volunteers – for example, how could you modify your existing induction program

Screening spontaneous volunteers

- conduct appropriate background screening
 Even in a disaster, organisations are required to conduct certain screening, especially for roles involving vulnerable people, such as children (for more information, see [our webpage on background checks](#)). While full background checks might not be feasible



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under time constraints, organisations can implement basic screening processes. This might include checking IDs, obtaining basic references, or asking volunteers to sign declarations regarding their suitability for certain roles.

- ensure each volunteer has the necessary skills, training or experience to perform the clearly defined role safely and effectively

Engaging spontaneous volunteers

- have an induction process
Give a brief induction so volunteers understand the role and key details such as, who their supervisor is and communication streams. Explain what may be encountered and supports available.
- provide training
Given the spontaneous nature of these volunteers, creating short, role-specific training modules, simplified safety guides or 'cheat sheets' that can be quickly disseminated is recommended.
- ensure volunteers are appropriately supervised
Regular check-ins or briefings throughout the day can also help keep volunteers informed and safe. Pairing less experienced volunteers with seasoned staff or volunteers can help bridge a skill gap.
- ensure the number of volunteers on-site at any given time is manageable
To manage the number of volunteers onsite, organisations can set up a central coordination point where volunteers are assigned specific roles based on immediate needs and their skills.
- evaluate and update your process and policies
Continually monitor your processes and policies, making sure the agreed controls have been put in place, and assessing whether improvements can be made.



Tip

If you anticipate that you may need to upscale your volunteer workforce during a disaster quickly, consider preparing a roster of volunteers who have already signed an agreement during calmer times.



Note – insurance

Review your organisation's insurance policies to ensure that coverage extends to its spontaneous volunteers. For more information, see our webpage 'Insurance challenges that not-for-profit organisations face due to disasters'