



Volunteering Tasmania

Submission to the Department of Premier and Cabinet Resilience and Recovery on the Review of Tasmania's State Recovery Plan – Issues Paper

June 2023

Overview

This submission responds to the *Review of Tasmania's State Recovery Plan – Issues Paper*.

Volunteering Tasmania welcome the opportunity to provide feedback to support the continued development of recovery arrangements that are fit-for-purpose, reflect best practice emergency volunteer management and deliver against the changing needs and expectations of communities.

This submission will highlight Volunteering Tasmania's experiences and observations working with local and state government to plan, coordinate and/ or deliver recovery activities through the COVID-19 pandemic. It will also provide feedback to the relevant questions outlined in the Issues Paper.

Volunteers make endless contributions to disaster preparedness, response to, recovery from and overall community resilience.¹ The volunteering landscape is changing. Emergency volunteerism has become increasingly augmented, with significant shifts away from traditional volunteering to spontaneous volunteering.² Spontaneous volunteers come from all walks of life and contribute a diverse range of skills, experiences, and resources to the emergency management sector. Offers of support come from those living and working in an affected area, those who have travelled from elsewhere to assist, and those who volunteer remotely.³ Some will volunteer for a few hours, and other will be engaged in recovery efforts for the weeks, months, or years that can follow the initial impact of a disaster. Contemporary emergency management must recognise and plan for spontaneous and formal volunteer involvement to most effectively shape Tasmania's disaster resilience.

¹ Dwyer, A., Campbell, D., Julian, R. & Barnes, A., Documenting the key recruitment and sustainability issues related to emergency response volunteers in Tasmania, Final Report 2020, pp. 7.

² Australian Government, Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of Volunteer Effort in the Immediate Post Disaster Stage, 2015, pp. 3, <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/2140/national-spontaneous-volunteer-strategy.pdf>.

³ Australian Government, Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of Volunteer Effort in the Immediate Post Disaster Stage, 2015, pp. 5, <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/2140/national-spontaneous-volunteer-strategy.pdf>.

Social, environmental, and public health emergencies offer opportunities for targeted learning and development. Among many things, the COVID-19 pandemic illuminated Tasmania's structural dependence on a fragile, formal volunteering workforce. Volunteering is associated with the provision of free labour, yet it is anything but free. Governments have become reliant on an assumed ever present volunteer workforce. However, without strategic intervention, volunteers will not be available in the ways governments depend on them to be.

In considering the content of this submission, it should be noted that Volunteering Tasmania have been commissioned by the Department of Premier and Cabinet – Resilience and Recovery, to develop and deliver an Options Paper that will consider the best way to contemporise Emergency Volunteering Community Response to Extreme Weather (EV CREW) to remain relevant and responsive to future emergency need.

Volunteering Tasmania welcome any opportunity to discuss this submission in greater depth.

Definitions of volunteering⁴

Volunteering is time willing given for the common good and without financial gain.

Formal/ traditional volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.

Informal volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside the context of a formal organisation or group. This includes assisting people in the community, excluding one's own family members. For example, looking after children, property or pets; providing home or personal assistance; or giving someone professional advice.

Spontaneous volunteers: People who are not affiliated with recognised volunteer agencies, and may not have relevant training, skills or experience, but seek out or are invited to contribute their assistance to various volunteering opportunities.

Spontaneous emergency volunteers: People who seek out or are invited to contribute their assistance before, during and/or after an emergency, who are not affiliated with recognised volunteer agencies, and may or may not have relevant training, skills or experience.

⁴ Volunteering Australia, Common Languages Guide, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Common-Languages-Guide-2022-FINAL.pdf>.

About Volunteering Tasmania

Volunteering Tasmania supports community preparedness, response, recovery, and resilience through a number of state government funded programs.

The EV CREW supports state emergency management planning and facilitates the deployment of surge capacity volunteers during times of need, offering critical assistance to Tasmanians when government services have reached capacity. These volunteers provide immeasurable support to a community's wellbeing as it prepares for, responds to, and recovers from extreme weather events. Through the EV CREW program, Volunteering Tasmania also provide preparedness training to local councils through Spontaneous Volunteering workshops to assist councils to develop their spontaneous volunteering management plans.

In addition to this, Volunteering Tasmania engage local councils in preparedness and resilience activities through the Safeguarding Volunteering Project which supports councils to develop community-based volunteering strategies to safeguard sustainable, local volunteering into the future.

These programs deliver place-based supports to ensure that Tasmanian communities are well supported during times of extreme disaster events and that community recovery is aided by willing, supported, and trained volunteers.

Volunteering and Tasmania's disaster resilience

Tasmania has a strong culture of volunteering. In times of crisis, Tasmanians have always rallied to respond to, and support one another through disaster, emergency, and extreme events.

Volunteer participation in emergency management is shown to improve longer-term outcomes for the wellbeing of those directly impacted; accelerate the recovery process; and increase community capacity for local disaster management⁵. "It also helps to build supportive relationships, trust and shared responsibility between communities and government agencies, and can foster greater civic engagement and social capital within a community far beyond the context of disaster management."⁶

Research indicates that spontaneous volunteers often arrive before emergency services and play critical roles in the initial response to disaster. Volunteers from affected communities, (including those who have not received training by emergency management organisations), can offer valuable time, local knowledge, resources, networks, and skills that are relevant to and required in effective local disaster management, across all phases.⁷ Yet spontaneous volunteers can also create additional complexities for traditional response teams as people arrive willing, but unprepared and without required training and screening.⁸ Like traditional volunteers, spontaneous volunteering require best

⁵ Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection, Handbook 12, pp. 4, <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5618/aidr-communities-responding-to-disasters-planning-for-spontaneous-volunteers-handbook.pdf>.

⁶ Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection, Handbook 12, pp. 4.

⁷ Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection, Handbook 12, pp. 4.

⁸ Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection, Handbook 2, pp. 70, <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5634/community-recovery-handbook.pdf>.

practice coordination and management to mitigate against safety risks, burnout and vicarious trauma.

While Tasmania's population has been increasing, this figure has been in decline over the last few years. As our population navigates significant social, economic, and geographic challenges, people are no longer able to commit to the highly structured requirements of traditional emergency management services.⁹ This is demonstrated by an increased volunteer appetite for spontaneous, informal and micro volunteering, as community members seek greater flexibility and more manageable commitments in their volunteering.

Data from the Productivity Commission¹⁰ indicates that per population, in 2021-22, Tasmania had the second highest rate of volunteer firefighters and support personnel in the country. This is not only indicative of Tasmania's changing volunteering context, but it also indicates the heavy reliance of Tasmania's emergency management sector on volunteers, particularly in rural and remote areas of the state.¹¹

As the realities of climate change become increasingly prevalent, and the risk of disaster escalates, we must consider the best ways to plan for and support increasing numbers of spontaneous volunteers in emergency management. This should include the training, management and support of surge capacity volunteers who are ready for deployment, where appropriate and as needed.

EV CREW

Volunteering Tasmania's EV CREW maintains a database of surge capacity volunteers and facilitate their deployment during times of need.

Volunteering Tasmania have been commissioned by the Department of Premier and Cabinet – Resilience and Recovery Tasmania to develop and deliver an Options Paper in June 2023 that will consider opportunities to contemporise the EV CREW, ensuring it is responsive to and meets stakeholder and community needs.

While state and territory governments vary in their utilisation of volunteerism in recovery, the Draft Propositions from the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements note that "state and territory governments should improve arrangements for the coordination of spontaneous volunteers in relief and recovery from natural disasters, for example by adopting the Emergency Volunteering CREW model used in Queensland [the ACT and Tasmania]^{12, 13}. EV CREW is also offered in alignment with Principle 4 of the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience – Principles that

⁹ Bushfire & Natural Hazards CRC, A new model for helping, 2017, <https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/news/2017/new-model-helping>.

¹⁰ Australian Government, Productivity Commission, Emergency services for fire and other events – data table 9A.4.

¹¹ Dwyer, A., Campbell, D., Julian, R. & Barnes, A., Documenting the key recruitment and sustainability issues related to emergency response volunteers in Tasmania, Final Report 2020, pp. 7.

¹² Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, Royal Commission into National Natural disaster Arrangements: Report, 2020, pp. 447, <https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/system/files/2020-11/Royal%20Commission%20into%20National%20Natural%20Disaster%20Arrangements%20-%20Report%20%20%5Baccessible%5D.pdf>.

¹³ Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, Coordinating relief and recovery, s21.81, <https://naturaldisaster.royalcommission.gov.au/publications/html-report/chapter-21>.

Support Spontaneous Volunteering, “Processes are needed to effectively engage spontaneous volunteers and to avoid agencies being overwhelmed with offers of support”.¹⁴

EV CREW was activated in 2017 when Hobart flooded, in the 2019 Huon Valley Fires, in 2020 in response to COVID-19 and was on-call for the 2022 Deloraine Floods.

In March 2020, the Tasmanian Government sought access to EV CREW surge capacity volunteers as part of the state’s emergency response to COVID-19. Given the nature of the risk and developing policy landscape, VT were unable to deploy EV CREW volunteers for the purpose sought by Government at that time. EV CREW was, however, a critical component in the delivery of community support through the community service sector and local councils as part of their COVID-19 response. Between June and November 2020, EV CREW deployed 280 EV CREW volunteers into the community throughout the state to deliver critical support in key wellbeing and recovery areas, including emergency relief and food provision, telephone outreach, wellbeing checks, and information dissemination to community members experiencing high levels of isolation.

During the COVID-19 period, EV CREW was also activated to support the Home and Community Care (HACC) sector as they navigated a significant reduction in their volunteer workforce due to increased regulation and mass mandatory volunteer stand downs.

Experiences working with local and state government to plan, coordinate and/ or deliver recovery activities through the COVID-19 pandemic.

Volunteering Tasmania was activated in the 2020 State of Emergency declaration and performed the following functions:

- Unsuccessful activation of the EV CREW by the Department of Premier and Cabinet – Office of Security Management. Airport deployment to meet arrivals into the state.
- Developed and released a matrix to support Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) to navigate and adhere to COVID-19 safe practices and public health directives, assisting VIOs to minimise risk and operate with greater clarity.
- Distribution of EV CREW information to councils through flyers and information sessions.
- Attended all TasCOSS community sector forums and disseminated relevant information to Volunteering Tasmania members.
- Attended all information sessions delivered by the Department of Health, ensuring that the volunteering sector was kept informed of public health updates.
- Commenced facilitation of the state (formally regional) Home and Community Care (HACC) forum.
- Developed and distributed resource kits designed to assist the volunteering sector including councils and VIOs, to support their existing volunteers, and to re-engage volunteers that were stood down during the height of COVID-19.
- The Safeguarding Volunteering project commenced in 2019 and was re-scoped to ensure the sustainability of a volunteer workforce throughout the COVID-19 crisis and into recovery. Three councils were involved in training to build capacity for the delivery of community

¹⁴ Australian Government, National Emergency Management Agency, Quick Guide: Principles that support spontaneous volunteering, https://www.aidr.org.au/media/7481/aidr_quickguide_principles_that_support_spon_vol_2023-3_v01.pdf.

driven solutions to the COVID-19 pandemic and in developing place-based, sustainable volunteering strategies.

The following themes emerged from Volunteering Tasmania’s work with local and state governments through the COVID-19 pandemic period, and research conducted for *The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19*¹⁵ paper.

Volunteering requires greater consideration and representation in public policy

The volunteering sector is highly complex. It intersects with every aspect of society and is governed by both general and sector specific regulations and requirements. The complexities associated with volunteering are not always readily recognised or understood. While volunteers are considered a core component of Tasmania’s workforce, they are rarely considered with the same level of attention as the paid workforce. While acknowledging the social, economic and wellbeing priorities associated with paid employment, it is important to consider the intersections between and value of Tasmania’s paid and unpaid workforce.

During the initial response to COVID-19, essential emergency services such as Tasmania Police, Tasmania’s health and hospital services and the volunteer-based State Emergency Service (SES) provided frontline support as they do during natural disasters such as fires, floods and storms.

COVID-19 revealed a new frontline in the volunteer-led delivery of emergency community services through the provision of emergency relief, food distribution, mental health and wellbeing support for people in quarantine and isolation, transport, the delivery of essential items, and in-home care.¹⁶ While some of these services were unique to the pandemic response, most are generally resourced at levels where volunteers are depended upon to fill service gaps during non-pandemic times.¹⁷ Tasmania’s reliance on volunteers to fill critical service gaps required volunteers to take on risks and adapt to complex and changing regulations and procedures, in the absence of clear government advice.

While government policy and public health guidelines came to focus strongly on responses to COVID-19 in clinical settings, it did not provide the same level of clarity to VIOs in other sectors. This led to high levels of confusion among volunteers and VIOs about appropriate practice and policy implementation, as well as uncertainty about how and where to safely engage volunteers. The circumstances surrounding volunteering at this time placed volunteers and VIOs in high levels of stress which had significant implications upon both individual and collective wellbeing.

Tasmania’s systemic reliance on volunteers is particularly concerning in regional and remote emergency and community services where Tasmania’s unique geography often sees a single volunteer

¹⁵ Volunteering Tasmania, *The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19*, https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The_Great_Reset_Paper_2022_FINAL_Web.pdf.

¹⁶ Volunteering Tasmania, *The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19*, pp.7.

¹⁷ Volunteering Tasmania, *The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19*, pp.7.

undertake multiple emergency response roles in one community.¹⁸ These circumstances demonstrate the vulnerability of the emergency response and increase risk of volunteer burnout.

To support appropriate preparedness, response and recovery activities, Tasmanian Governments must consider, recognise, and respond to the unique challenges of engaging and supporting a changing volunteer workforce with fit for purpose policy through the development of clear guidelines, regulation and funding provision.

Lack of focus on preparedness

While nothing could have readied the world for the arrival and sustained impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, it did highlight the need for increased focus on emergency preparedness, and the roles of volunteers and volunteer managers in response and recovery work.

While the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has shifted since 2020, council employees across the state continue to raise the following themes in their communication with Volunteering Tasmania.

- Emergency preparedness, health and wellbeing, and resilience work is done “off the sides of our desks”. “We can’t give it the attention it needs without adequately resourcing it”.
- Not all councils are prepared for emergency or disaster situations. Some are resourced with emergency management officer roles or equivalent, others are not. Some have spontaneous volunteer strategies and programs, while others do not.
- Emergency management is something that’s forgotten about until it’s needed.
- “We need more support to better manage our spontaneous volunteers”.
- Greater resources are required to support the health and wellbeing of volunteers. We can’t ensure sustainable volunteering in communities if volunteers are not cared for.
- Despite high interest, the lack of resourcing impacts council ability to engage with Volunteering Tasmania’s emergency preparedness and resilience programs.
- There is an appetite for cross-council collaboration on emergency management.

Increasing regulatory burden without commensurate resourcing

Volunteers and VIOs have both cited increasing regulatory burden as a barrier to volunteer engagement, recruitment, and retention, with significant impacts upon continued service delivery. The regulatory environment that surrounds volunteering has been increasing in complexity for decades, however COVID-19 escalated this phenomenon across the entire volunteering sector.¹⁹ This has exacerbated the perception that formal volunteering is filled with “too much red tape”, increasing a reluctance among passion and purpose driven volunteers to work within traditional volunteering environments. As a result, we are seeing volunteers seeking more flexible, informal, spontaneous, and self-organised opportunities and activities.²⁰

There is no denying that there is a role for volunteers in service delivery provision and while it does offset costs of service delivery for governments, the increasing reliance upon volunteers and VIOs is unsustainable. The contributions of volunteers and volunteering to Tasmania is estimated at a value

¹⁸ Dwyer, A., Campbell, D., Julian, R. & Barnes, A., Documenting the key recruitment and sustainability issues related to emergency response volunteers in Tasmania, Final Report 2020, pp. 7.

¹⁹ Volunteering Tasmania, The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19, pp.11.

²⁰ Volunteering Tasmania, The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19, pp.12.

of over \$4 billion annually²¹, but volunteering is not free. Volunteers and VIOs both incur significant costs associated with volunteering. This includes costs associated with regulatory compliance.²² A lack of appropriate government resourcing in volunteering infrastructure results in volunteers being left to navigate administrative and regulatory burden without appropriate supports. This impacts the level of satisfaction experienced by volunteers and has implications for volunteer retention.

COVID-19 shone a light on the level to which the Tasmanian government depends on the volunteer sector and the assumptions made about the sectors stability.

The organisations on the front-line during Tasmania's COVID-19 response were different than those who are traditionally called upon during a crisis or emergency. While emergency trained and prepared community organisations such as Red Cross and Salvation Army were highly responsive during the COVID-19 pandemic, small and less experienced VIOs were required to quickly and drastically adapt their service delivery mechanisms to respond in ways they were completely unfamiliar with. Some of these organisations were able to rapidly adapt and implement best practice volunteer management effectively. However, other VIOs struggled due to limited resourcing, infrastructure and internal systems.²³

While regulation is necessary to keep volunteers and others safe while volunteering, governments must ensure that VIOs are appropriately resourced in order to meet their regulatory requirements. Volunteers and VIOs must meet required recruitment, onboarding, work health and safety, training, police checks, WWVP registrations, first aid certification, COVID-19 vaccination requirements, probation period assessments, among their many other tasks while still seeking to achieve the goals of the volunteering activity. Without adequate support for volunteers and resourcing of VIOs, the investment required to engage in formal volunteering quickly becomes both onerous and discriminatory, reinforcing barriers which exclude those experiencing vulnerability and social inequity from accessing and participating in volunteering.

While volunteering is associated with the provision of free labour, it is anything but free. Very few VIOs receive appropriate funding to cover the hidden, inescapable costs of volunteering and therefore often meet increasing regulation with frustration.

Declining traditional volunteering, increasing spontaneous volunteering and the importance of engaging local volunteers in preparedness, response, and recovery work

The COVID-19 pandemic, as well as rising costs of living have led to a decrease in the number of people participating in traditional volunteering, with people seeking increased flexibility and less structure in their volunteering commitments. Member consultation has informed us of the impacts this has had upon the number of volunteers completing traditional emergency management training. We've also been informed of implications in rural and remote volunteer dependent services such as volunteer fire brigades, who can no longer depend on familial/ intergenerational volunteers as a recruitment strategy.

²¹ Volunteering Tasmania, The State of Volunteering Report Tasmania 2019 Summary, pp.2, <https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/08/State-of-Volunteering-Report-%E2%80%93-Summary.pdf>.

²² Volunteering Tasmania, The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19, pp.12.

²³ Volunteering Tasmania, Submission to the Premier's Economic and Social Recovery Advisory Council.

Consultations with Tasmanian volunteers identified a preference to engage in spontaneous volunteering that has a clear purpose for volunteers and their communities (6). Some volunteers also expressed an appreciation for the opportunity that COVID-19 provided in stepping back from their traditional volunteering roles to engage in volunteering that was place-based, community-led, and self-organised.²⁴

Examples of grassroots volunteering during COVID-19 highlights the importance of, and opportunities for, response and recovery work in partnership with local communities (6). Some Tasmanian examples include, local Facebook groups that mobilised residents to deliver wellbeing activities to young children during lockdown; online communities were established, mobilising people to support one another by delivering food, medicines, and other essential items; and local sporting clubs who were no longer able to operate, deployed their players and their families to make and deliver meals around their local communities.²⁵

The decline in formal volunteering has significant implications for Tasmania's emergency preparedness, response, and recovery.

Distinguishing appropriate volunteer positions from paid positions

The administrative, risk and governance burdens on the volunteer sector escalated through the pandemic and it became apparent that our systems were not set up to account for the essential role volunteers play in response and recovery work. There is concern in the volunteering sector about the inappropriate use of volunteers to fill workforce gaps and systems shortages in order to meet service delivery needs and funding obligations.

In particular, this raised questions for aged, care and hospice care service providers' and their volunteers about the appropriateness of volunteers delivering these services in place of paid employees. With more than a quarter of all Tasmanian volunteers engaged in the welfare and community sector, it is essential that governments reflect on what is an appropriate volunteer role, and what is an appropriate paid role.

A lady at the hospice thought I was a paid worker and said, 'I cannot believe the time and care you give us and you don't get paid for it' – research participant²⁶

Digital access and literacy

The need for volunteers to pivot to digital and remote tools exposed a lack of digital readiness in VIOs and brought new barriers to volunteer engagement and participation (9). VIOs have reported that barriers to volunteering have been exacerbated by the need for volunteers to pivot towards the use of digital tools in their organisations and roles, while digital literacy and access in Tasmania remain well below the national average²⁷.

Volunteering Tasmania's Volunteer Management Activity staff engaged councils and community organisations in consultation about digital literacy and access issues in Tasmania. This revealed that

²⁴ Volunteering Tasmania, The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19, pp.6.

²⁵ Volunteering Tasmania, The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19, pp.6.

²⁶ Volunteering Tasmania, The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19.

²⁷ Australian Digital Inclusion Index, <https://digitalinclusionindex.org.au/>.

95% of communities reported challenges around digital literacy and access. Identified challenges include:

- 29% reported significant numbers of households without internet connection, particularly in regional communities. One Council reported 25.2% of households in their local government area to have no internet connection.
- 29% of communities made a connection between disadvantage and low digital literacy and access (lower literacy levels and financial barriers).
- 19% highlighted that volunteers in their communities were a diverse group with varying digital literacy levels. It can make it difficult to provide targeted support.²⁸

The digital and remote working legacy of COVID-19 has raised ongoing issues among VIOs as they attempt to stay connected with their volunteers when many are not digitally connected.

Response to the Issues Paper questions

1. What are the current challenges with the way councils and State Government agencies work together to plan and deliver recovery programs?

Volunteering Tasmania have engaged Tasmania's local councils in our emergency preparedness, management, and resilience programs. These include the Safeguarding Volunteering Project, focused on supporting local councils to develop community-based volunteering strategies to safeguard and prepare for the future of volunteering; and the Spontaneous Volunteering workshops supporting local councils to develop their spontaneous volunteering management plans.

Through this work and through our state-wide network meetings, we have consistently heard that local councils work in isolation, with limited systems support, inhibiting collaboration across LGA's. Council employees have repeatedly informed us that they are under resourced and unable to adequately invest in their volunteering infrastructure. For many, this lack of resourcing sees preparedness activities being undertaken "off the side of desks".

Council employees have also reported that the uncertainty accompanying the Future of Local Government Review has prompted a change in priorities, impacting council's capacity to engage in and focus on volunteering preparedness and coordination.

Volunteering Tasmania also support councils through the provision of the EV CREW. Research indicates that while spontaneous volunteers provide the critical surge capacity that is essential in disaster response and clean-up, without appropriate planning, coordination and management, spontaneous volunteerism can represent significant challenges to emergency management²⁹.

Volunteering systems require significant, structural, long-term investment to support emergency management volunteering infrastructure, that professionalises and embeds volunteer management within councils and VIOs and supports systems of volunteer recruitment and

²⁸ Volunteering Tasmania, Volunteer Management Activity, Community Consultation Summary.

²⁹ Australian Government, Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of Volunteer Effort in the Immediate Post Disaster Stage, 2015, pp. 3, <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/2140/national-spontaneous-volunteer-strategy.pdf>.

retention.

4. What should the role and functions of regional recovery committees be? Please consider this in the context of preparedness, response, and recovery.

In acknowledging limited exposure to the realities of practicing regional recovery committees, Volunteering Tasmania express broad support for their continuation.

Successful preparedness, response and recovery is strongly influenced by consideration and representation of volunteering that is informed by evidence and best practice. Given that the regional recovery committees are focussed on supporting planning and preparedness activities at the regional level, it is critical that emergency and spontaneous volunteer management, recruitment, and safety across government agencies, councils and VIOs is held in focus and embedded in sustainable long-term volunteering strategies.

Stakeholder meetings such as these offer critical opportunities for shared learning and development in areas of high complexity. Placing volunteering as a standing agenda item would support thoughtful and informed preparedness, response, and recovery across the state, providing opportunities to explore key community issues pertaining to volunteering, such as: best practice in emergency volunteerism; risk assessment, management, and response; regulation compliance; health and safety; protecting volunteers from burnout and vicarious trauma; insurances; and volunteer retention.

6. What should membership of the regional recovery committees be?

Members must include those that are informed of, engaged with, and embedded within Tasmania's emergency volunteering system, including both state government, local government, volunteer involving organisations/ services/ groups/ clubs and volunteers themselves.

Membership should also be represented by those in less 'traditional' recovery sectors, such as family violence services, housing and early intervention to homelessness services, youth supports, disability organisations, cultural organisations, etc. Membership should represent and be inclusive of the diversity of Tasmania's communities.

Volunteering Tasmania were previous participants in the Social Recovery Committees. Representation ensured that volunteering related information, best practice, research and lived experience shared by Volunteering Tasmania's members was highlighted and considered.

Resourcing to assist Volunteering Tasmania to participate as a member of the regional recovery committees would ensure a voice for the volunteering sector and support Tasmania's preparedness, response and recovery planning and work into the future.

9. What do you believe is the role of communities and councils in managing recovery from slow onset events (such as drought) and catastrophic events (such as tsunamis)?

Volunteer participation is a key principle of disaster risk reduction and resilience building³⁰. As the realities of climate change become increasingly prevalent, “it is likely that ‘informal’ volunteers will provide much of the surge capacity required to respond to more frequent emergencies and disasters in the future”.³¹

Volunteering Tasmania have been advocating for state investment in a Tasmanian volunteering strategy, to identify areas of strategic priority across key policy areas to understand, represent and safeguard volunteering across the state and into the future. It is expected that without strategic intervention, Tasmania will experience a 42% gap between the demand for and supply of ‘formal’ volunteers by 2029³². It is critical that we examine and reframe the ways we think about and understand volunteering, particularly within the context of emergency and recovery volunteerism.

Level 1 arrangements must ensure that those with recovery responsibilities are “spontaneous ready”. To support this goal, Volunteering Tasmania have run emergency preparedness training through Red Cross to better prepare our EV CREW surge capacity volunteers during times of crisis.

Level 1 work should be driven by local councils, in partnership with the community and across LGA’s to engage a greater number of volunteers from the region and access additional resources to support a locally informed response.

Volunteers are frontline in a community’s response to and recovery from disaster. Their presence is inevitable, and yet high levels of uncertainty surround the capacity of their engagement. Access to volunteer resources, connections, vulnerabilities, skills, and knowledge are often unknown and unplanned for. Local councils engaging with community response should plan for and mitigate risks associated with emergency and spontaneous volunteering.

14. What type of guidance material would be useful in supporting agencies to deliver their functional responsibilities under the Recovery Plan?

Tasmanian State and Local Governments should appropriately plan for and resource support for volunteers engaged in ongoing recovery efforts to mitigate against risks of burnout and vicarious trauma. Through the 2023-24 State Budget, the Tasmanian Government announced an allocation of \$3 million across the 2025-26, and 2026-27 forward estimates for a “emergency services personnel and volunteers health and wellbeing program”. This funding is necessary and should ensure the provision of support for volunteer wellbeing post crisis and into what can be long term recovery.

Many councils currently have staff members pre-registered and trained as their own pool of emergency council responders. Staff members may receive Red Cross Evacuation Centre Management Training, psychological first aid training and/or access to the online TasEMT training on the SES website, which prepares them for deployment as soon as disaster hits.

³⁰ Australian Government, Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of Volunteer Effort in the Immediate Post Disaster Stage, 2015, pp. 6.

³¹ Australian Government, Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy: Coordination of Volunteer Effort in the Immediate Post Disaster Stage, 2015, pp. 6.

³² Volunteering Tasmania, The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19, pp. 4, https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The_Great_Reset_Paper_2022_FINAL_Web.pdf.

Five councils have completed Volunteering Tasmania's Safeguarding Program, with another two currently engaged in the development of community-based volunteer strategies. To aid their preparedness, councils have informed us through this process of a desire to develop emergency management sub-plans and to engage with the EV CREW to actively recruit local emergency response volunteers and train them to be emergency ready, alongside their paid employees.

Community service organisations involved in a wide range of response and recovery activities require strategic investment and support to recognise, professionalise and resource volunteer management, coordination, and leadership roles. Volunteer Managers have distinct tasks and responsibilities, which relate to the complex policy and legislative environment for volunteer engagement.

Volunteer management has been professionalised over the last decade, yet this profession is often overlooked and under resourced. Volunteering Tasmania recommend that preparedness policy include funding to deliver volunteer management qualifications in partnership with a suitable Registered Training Organisation. This work is being successfully modelled in other jurisdictions supporting a whole of state response to disaster and recovery³³.

Volunteering Tasmania recommend the following existing guidance materials and resources to support councils to deliver their emergency management and recovery responsibilities:

- Engagement with Volunteering Tasmania's EV CREW spontaneous volunteering program, including access to the EV CREW spontaneous volunteering resource kit.
- Templates and guidelines for volunteer management in preparedness, response, and recovery activities

Council employees who participated in the 2023 Spontaneous Volunteering Workshops, noted that the training and resource kit were invaluable. The resource kit provided clear guidance and useful, adaptable templates. The workshops were viewed as helpful to connect with other councils and hear about policies, procedures and firsthand experience managing volunteers in emergency situations.

Members of Tasmania can also access the following:

- Volunteer leadership training centred around the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. This will soon be available to all VIOs through Volunteering Tasmania's VMA program.
- Information about Volunteering Tasmania's EV CREW program and how best to utilise surge capacity volunteers.

³³ The Centre for Volunteering, Nationally Recognised Training, <https://www.volunteering.com.au/join-us/nationally-recognised-training/>.