

# Increasing Coordination Between Volunteer Agencies in the Victorian Emergency Management Sector



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IN PARTNERSHIP WITH:



# **INCREASING COORDINATION BETWEEN VOLUNTEER AGENCIES IN THE VICTORIAN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SECTOR**

**An Interactive Qualifying Project submitted  
to the Faculty of the WORCESTER  
POLYTECHNIC INSTITUTE in partial  
fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of Bachelor of Science**

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# ABSTRACT

This project focuses on increasing interagency coordination in the emergency management sector of Victoria by working with the Australian Red Cross and Emergency Management Victoria. Exploratory conversations and surveys were conducted to learn about the current communication opportunities between Victorian volunteer organizations. The knowledge gained from these analyses was used to devise a set of recommendations to improve coordination among these organizations. This may be implemented in future efforts to strengthen the emergency management sector of Victoria and improve experiences for all volunteers.



# AUTHORSHIP

A. Granger's role encompassed primary writing responsibilities for the executive summary, international volunteering practices, methodology overview, inclusion and exclusion characteristics, and methods one through five. Additionally, they led the analysis and recommendation sections, excluding organization dynamics and the mapping analysis. They also contributed to creating exploratory conversation and focus group questions.

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# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The past fourteen weeks spent on this project have truly been an honor, and we would like to thank the people who have made this project possible.

To our sponsor representatives – Fyowna Norton, Caitlin Zacharewicz, and Nathan Brown -- thank you so much for engaging with us and supporting us throughout this journey. It was an honor to be trusted to do such important work. We couldn't have done it without you.

To all the staff, volunteers, and members that we had the pleasure to interview and survey – thank you for taking the time to make this project possible.

To our advisors Professor Stephen McCauley, Professor Bethel Eddy, and Professor Michael Miller – thank you for joining us on this rollercoaster and supporting us through its entirety.

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# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY






Victoria has endured a series of emergencies, from the devastating Black Saturday in 2009 and Black Summer Bushfires in 2019/2020, to statewide floods, storms, collective trauma events, and heatwaves. Compounded by the effects of climate change, these emergencies have triggered evacuations, property loss, and loss of life. As temperatures soar and climate patterns grow increasingly erratic, experts predict a surge in both the frequency and intensity of emergencies. In response, Victoria's emergency management sector works to support affected people and communities. However, this sector heavily relies on volunteers, who face challenges due to declining volunteer rates and the escalating number of emergencies.

Volunteerism involves about one billion individuals globally, encompasses diverse organizations and causes, from local initiatives to global missions. Volunteerism involves about one billion individuals globally and encompasses diverse organizations and causes, from local initiatives to global missions. Structurally, organizations adhere to formal or informal frameworks, with formal structures emphasizing hierarchy and defined roles, while informal structures prioritize autonomy. Both formal and informal volunteering play vital roles, with emergency management agencies relying heavily on volunteers for emergency response. Preemptive coordination and training of volunteers ensures seamless interoperability among agencies during crises, addressing challenges posed by diverse skills and organizational approaches within the volunteer workforce.


Volunteers play a crucial role in emergencies, offering support in various areas such as search and rescue, medical aid, and psychological first aid. Communities both influence and are influenced by volunteer efforts, providing resources and shaping volunteer initiatives. Demographics like age, socio-economic background, and education significantly impact volunteer dynamics and interactions with communities. Younger volunteers bring new ideas, while older ones offer experience. Volunteering can help bridge socioeconomic gaps between groups, fostering inclusivity. Education enhances volunteers' skills and ability to address community challenges.



Volunteering often stems from personal motivations, driven by a desire to make a difference or explore one's heritage. The theory of planned behavior explains how attitudes and social norms influence volunteer decisions. While volunteering brings a sense of empowerment and improves community well-being, the high stress of emergency management volunteering poses challenges for retention and health. In Victoria, Australia, effective emergency management relies heavily on volunteers, underscoring the importance of understanding and building the strength of volunteer organizations and coordination.

Recent challenges in Australia revolve around the sustainability and future of volunteerism, driven by declining numbers of active volunteers and median volunteer hours, worsened by increased emergencies such as bushfires and floods, and volunteer burnout. Demographic shifts have reshaped the volunteer landscape, favoring shorter-term engagements and informal volunteering, posing challenges to traditional volunteer structures. In the context of these challenges, Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) is conducting a Review into Emergency Management Volunteering to identify opportunities for enhanced participation and engagement with the volunteer workforce to ensure the voices of both new and existing sector partners are heard. Our project aimed to contribute to the EMV Review by mapping nontraditional volunteer organizations and determining ways to improve consultation, as well as explore other areas of the emergency management sector in terms of coordination and engagement opportunities between non-traditional and with traditional volunteer-involving organizations. For the purposes of our project, we have defined traditional organizations as those that operate on a large-scale with a focus on community resilience in the Victorian emergency management sector, and nontraditional organizations as those that operate on a smaller scale and may not be thought of as typically contributing to emergency management but are still vital to community resilience (i.e., foodbanks, shelter, etc.).

Organizations like the Australian Red Cross and Emergency Management Victoria play critical roles in emergency management. As a humanitarian organization, Australian Red Cross aims to ensure communities are strong and resilient, and have the capacity to anticipate, respond to, and recover




from emergencies. EMV is the central body for emergency management in Victoria and is responsible for coordinating preparedness, response and recovery in collaboration with communities, government, agencies, and business.

The roles of both Emergency Management Victoria and the Australian Red Cross are outlined in the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP), which details arrangements for all contributing organizations at the State level. The SEMP, alongside Regional Emergency Management Plans (REMP), Municipal Emergency Management Plans (MEMP) (and relevant community emergency management plans), form the holistic planning framework to mitigate, plan and prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

While traditional volunteer organizations typically follow a structured hierarchy, nontraditional ones may vary in their organization and function. Understanding and leveraging these differences can enhance engagement and coordination among organizations outlined in emergency management plans, fostering effective emergency management and community resilience.

This project aims to contribute to the wider Review of Emergency Management Volunteering by identifying opportunities for improved coordination and communication between volunteer organizations. The aim was also to identify ways to improve volunteerism within Victoria's emergency management sector by fostering collaboration among external volunteer agencies, Emergency Management Victoria, and the Australian Red Cross (Red Cross). Objectives included understanding dynamics between nontraditional local organizations; mapping the emergency management sector through MEMPS; determining collaboration preferences of traditional and nontraditional organizations; and developing strategies for enhanced consultation and communication. Methods such as surveys and exploratory conversations with volunteer leaders from volunteer organizations and predominantly individuals in the social services and community sectors were employed to gather information and formulate recommendations on improved coordination and communication to inform the Review and other future initiatives aimed at enhancing volunteerism.




Organizations were identified through mapping, desktop research, and initial exploratory conversation. Further information and insight were gathered via surveys, exploratory conversations, and wider discussions. The analysis highlighted key themes, such as the need for improved communication between organizations and emphasized the valuable role of nontraditional organizations in community resilience and emergency management efforts.

However, challenges such as underrepresentation of nontraditional organizations from traditional organizations and lack of diversity within volunteer groups were noted, underlining the necessity for inclusive practices and deliberate efforts to address barriers.

Despite limitations in survey response rates, the insights garnered offer valuable perspectives for enhancing collaboration, coordination, and effectiveness within Victoria's volunteer emergency management sector. Recommendations include the establishment of a common communication platform and the sharing of information to streamline efforts and improve coordination .

# INTRODUCTION




From Black Saturday in 2009 to the 2019/2020 Black Summer Bushfires, Victoria has experienced a range of emergencies over recent years. These bushfires have ravaged vast areas, leading to evacuations, loss of property, and loss of life (Woodward & Gal, n.d.). Victoria has also experienced climate related events, floods, storms, COVID-19, and other emergencies, which further devastate communities. With rising temperatures and changes in climate, these emergencies are only projected to increase in frequency and intensity (*Victoria, Heatwaves & Climate Change - Environment Victoria, 2016*).

Emergencies demand well-coordinated and efficient response from various agencies in the emergency management sector to ensure the safety and well-being of affected communities. Many organizations play a key role in contributing to emergency response, relief, and recovery within Victoria, that are both identified in State, Regional, and Municipal emergency management plans, and that operate outside these arrangements.

Many emergency management organizations depend on volunteers to carry out their missions. An estimated 100,000 Victorians volunteer their time to support communities before, during, and after emergencies (*Our Organisation, n.d.*). Due to this, the Victorian community heavily relies on the essential role that volunteers play in emergency preparedness, response, relief, and recovery efforts. Recent trends in declining volunteer rates, decreasing volunteer hours, and rising emergencies place considerable strain on emergency management volunteering sustainability. It is said to “drop to the lowest rate of around 20% for those 26–35 years old and 56–65 years old (Kragt & Holtrop, 2019).

To ensure communities receive appropriate support and organizations can adapt to evolving volunteering dynamics, Emergency Management Victoria’s Review into emergency management volunteering is presently underway to enhance volunteer consultation and engagement approaches in the sector. To support the Review, this project's main objective was to identify opportunities to enhance connections between traditional emergency management organizations and nontraditional volunteer




organizations. For the purposes of our project, we defined traditional organizations as those that operate on a large-scale with a focus on community resilience in the Victorian emergency management sector, and nontraditional organizations as those that operate on a smaller scale and may not be thought of as typically contributing to emergency management but are still vital to community resilience (i.e., foodbanks, shelter, etc.).

By fostering stronger, coordinated volunteer efforts throughout Victoria's emergency management sector, our goal was to bolster community resilience before, during, and after emergencies by looking at existing communication and consultation practices within the sector. Outside of supporting the Review, our project also sought to identify challenges within the sector and develop strategies to fortify consultation and collaboration practices. This project was designed to support and inform the ongoing Review of volunteering within the emergency management sector, ultimately contributing to more effective and inclusive emergency response initiatives.

First, we determined the internal and external networks and communication methods of some large traditional and nontraditional volunteer organizations. Then we mapped the emergency management landscape of Victoria through Municipal Emergency Management Plans (MEMPs) to identify nontraditional local organizations and their roles before, during, and after emergencies. Following the mapping, we then conducted interviews to understand the expectations of traditional organizations regarding collaboration with nontraditional ones and vice versa. Lastly, we created recommendations to explore opportunities in the emergency management sector to enhance consultation and communication practices between nontraditional volunteer organizations and traditional agencies.

# BACKGROUND






Recognizing the challenges and changes in volunteering and the impact of more frequent and intense emergencies, EMV, with other organizations, is conducting a Review into volunteering in the emergency management sector. The Review into Emergency Management Volunteering to identify opportunities for enhanced participation and engagement with the volunteer workforce to ensure volunteer views and expertise are represented in sector policy, programs and reforms. Our project aims to contribute to this Review by investigating current volunteer coordination practices and identifying opportunities for improvement within the emergency management sector.

Understanding the state of the emergency management sector requires knowledge of the dynamics of volunteerism, including its changing landscape, community impact, and the demographics of volunteers involved. An in-depth analysis of international best practices, organizational structures, and prevalent communication challenges provides an overview of opportunities specific to each organization. This creates pathways for enhancing effectiveness and efficiency within the emergency management sector.

### **THE CHANGING NATURE OF VOLUNTEERISM IN THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SECTOR OF VICTORIA**


Both the Red Cross and EMV play crucial yet different roles in supporting and delivering emergency management efforts in Victoria. The Red Cross is just one example of a large volunteer organization in the relief and recovery space, while EMV is a multi-agency coordination lead and capacity building body. The Red Cross typically relies on a substantial volunteer workforce to support its operations. In recent years, the Red Cross has mobilized thousands of volunteers across Victoria to respond to various emergencies, including bushfires, floods, and storms (*Annual Report, 2023*). These volunteers are organized into specialized teams and units, each tasked with specific roles such as providing psychosocial support services, outreach, coordinating the Register.Find.Reunite service, and Incident Management Team functions, to support affected individuals and communities.



Victoria relies heavily on volunteers to augment its emergency management responsibilities. Volunteer firefighters, State Emergency Services, medical and search and rescue personnel, and others constitute a significant component of the sector's frontline workforce. As the lead coordinating body for emergency management in Victoria, EMV supports the Emergency Management Commissioner to lead and coordinate emergency preparedness, response, and recovery across Victoria's emergency management sector in conjunction with communities, government, agencies and business. Supporting volunteers and volunteer-organizations is a critical component of EMV's mission to maximize the ability of the emergency management sector to work together and to strengthen the capacity of communities to plan for, withstand, respond to and recover from emergencies.

The management of volunteers within these types of organizations is facilitated through structured systems and processes. Volunteers receive special training to equip them with the skills and knowledge. They are organized into teams or units based on their expertise and capabilities, and communication systems, such as digital platforms and radio networks, are employed to coordinate their activities and disseminate critical information during emergencies. Volunteers are deployed based on the needs of the situation and the specific roles they are trained to fulfill, ensuring a coordinated and efficient effort.

Recent statistics indicate a decline in traditional, long-term volunteering, particularly among elderly volunteers who have historically comprised a significant portion of the volunteer workforce (VanOverschelde, 2017). Between 2010 and 2019, the rate of volunteering in Australia has declined from 36.2% to 28.8% (Volunteering Australia, 2021). This decline is notable across various areas within the emergency management sector, reflecting broader societal trends and demographic shifts.




The changing nature of volunteerism in the Victorian emergency management sector is influenced by advancements in technology and the increasing accessibility of volunteering opportunities through social media platforms. Modern volunteers demonstrate a preference for shorter-term engagements focused on specific causes, diverging from the traditional model of long-term volunteerism (Whittaker et al., 2015). This shift poses challenges for volunteer organizations, as they grapple with aligning their practices with evolving volunteer preferences while balancing the demands of the communities they serve.

### **MUTUAL INFLUENCE: STRONGER COMMUNITIES HAVE STRONGER VOLUNTEER BASES**

Volunteers are a critical resource before, during, and after emergencies, providing essential support to affected communities. A community's influence on volunteerism is dynamic and reciprocal, significantly shaping the nature and effectiveness of volunteer efforts (Salamon et al., 2011). Communities serve as the backdrop against which volunteer initiatives unfold, providing the standards, norms, resources, and institutions that guide and influence volunteers in their endeavors. The unique characteristics of a community, including its culture, values, and social dynamics, play a crucial role in determining the types of volunteer opportunities that emerge and the issues that volunteers prioritize (Coren et al., 2022).

Communities are also active participants in the volunteering process, by responding to the energy invested by volunteers with both direct and indirect changes. For example, following the Black Saturday Bushfires of 2009, local community members started the BlazeAid organization to aid farmers impacted by the fires (BlazeAid, n.d.). This interplay underscores the role that communities play in fostering a vibrant and meaningful volunteerism experience.




Age, socioeconomic background, and education are pivotal factors that not only shape the composition of volunteers but also significantly influence the dynamics of their interactions with the communities they serve. Volunteers' age demographic plays an important role in determining their contributions. Younger volunteers may bring fresh perspectives, technological savvy, and fresh energy to their roles, contributing to innovative approaches and a dynamic volunteer landscape (VanOverschelde, 2017). However, older volunteers may bring a wealth of experience, wisdom, and a deep understanding of community history, fostering a sense of continuity and tradition within volunteer initiatives.

Socioeconomic background introduces another layer of complexity to volunteerism. Studies have shown that the largest volunteer demographic is white, middle-aged, middle-class people (Lemon et al., 1972). Given Victoria's rich diversity of peoples and cultures, current demographics should be considered alongside the communities they serve. Individuals from diverse socioeconomic backgrounds often bring different perspectives, motivations, and resources to their volunteer work. In this way, there is potential for volunteers to act as bridges between different socioeconomic groups, fostering social cohesion and inclusivity.

Education is yet another influential demographic factor that shapes the volunteer landscape. Highly educated volunteers may contribute specialized skills and knowledge to their roles, enhancing the overall impact of volunteer initiatives (Jones, 2023). Moreover, education levels can influence volunteers' ability to navigate complex community challenges, facilitating more informed and strategic contributions.

Volunteer groups are not homogenous entities; they represent a tapestry of backgrounds, experiences, and perspectives. Similarly, communities are diverse and dynamic, evolving in response to the multifaceted contributions of volunteers. To understand the importance of connecting volunteers and volunteer organizations, it is essential to grasp the reciprocal relationship between volunteers and communities. This can provide crucial context for our project and the Review.




When exploring the impact that volunteers have on community and vice versa, we can better see the interconnectedness of volunteerism and community resilience. Building relationships between organizations in the emergency management sector strengthens preparedness, response, relief, and recovery practices to better support communities in emergencies. This is because even those who may not be connected across communities, may still benefit from the work of volunteers when they work together to deliver stronger community outcomes.

### **VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS**

Going beyond a strong connection between certain demographics and the people who volunteer, individuals often have a more personal reason for volunteering. This can range from tangible benefits to their community and self to more obscure benefits, such as volunteering in a foreign country to learn about their family history. Both examples illustrate the array of benefits volunteer's experience, which aligns with their motivations for volunteering, as described by the theory of planned behavior. The theory of planned behavior explains the relationship between attitudes, social norms, and perceived behavioral control, and how they interact to influence volunteer behavior (Ajzen, 2005). The concept explains why individuals volunteer and what type of volunteering they perform.

One of the main benefits of volunteering is a feeling of empowerment and being able to create a difference in the volunteer community. Engaging with the community provides direct benefits in the health and wellbeing of the people in the community. Furthermore, there is ample evidence proving that individuals who feel powerless experience worse health and higher levels of morbidity than those who feel empowered (Bailey et al., 2003). Positive associations between volunteering and overall health and well-being can be observed across all types of volunteers.




Emergency management volunteering is often considered higher stress than many other volunteer positions, putting more strain on the health and impacting the retention of volunteers in this area of volunteering (Britton, 1991). The emergency management sector of Victoria relies on volunteers and efficient coordination between Emergency Management Victoria and agencies such as the Red Cross. (Norton & Zacharewicz, 2024). Thus, recruitment, retention, and coordination of emergency management volunteers is of the utmost importance to provide effective emergency management within and across Victoria.

Delving into why people choose to volunteer, especially in the context of emergency management volunteering, provides valuable information about common volunteer motivations. Knowing what motivates volunteers can inform potential future practices to help connect volunteers in the emergency management sector, exploring new avenues to build relationships and strengthening coordination to better support communities in emergencies.

### **EFFECTIVE VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT PRINCIPLES: INSIGHTS FROM INTERNATIONAL PRACTICES**

International volunteering models outline different approaches to strengthening organizational and individual volunteers' relationships. One key approach described by the Global Volunteering Standard includes maintaining transparent communication channels. This further facilitates collaboration among stakeholders, fostering a culture of trust and accountability. Approaches like this are important to consider in this project, as they have the potential to redefine the communication landscape of the emergency management sector.

Broadly, the Global Volunteering Standard describes a set of fundamental principles for guiding emergency management practices (*The Global Volunteering Standard*, 2022). These principles serve as a benchmark for designing and delivering projects, ensuring local projects are tailored to meet the specific needs and challenges faced by communities during



emergencies. The standard practice is to involve community members in the design process to ensure that projects are culturally sensitive and relevant. This approach can improve the effectiveness of emergency management efforts and cultivate a sense of ownership and empowerment within the affected communities.

Ethical considerations are paramount in emergency planning, and the Global Volunteering Standard underscores the importance of prioritizing them. From conducting due diligence checks on stakeholders to establishing these roles and responsibilities, ethical standards are woven into every aspect of emergency management.

Effective management of volunteers is another crucial aspect addressed by the standard. Matching volunteer skills with the specific needs of emergency response efforts maximizes their contributions and ensures efficient resource allocation. Moreover, empowering local communities by involving them in decision-making processes not only leverages their existing capacities but also strengthens community resilience in the face of emergencies.

Lastly, the standard emphasizes the importance of measuring impact and aligning emergency management efforts with broader sustainable development goals. By implementing monitoring and evaluation mechanisms, the effectiveness of emergency management projects can be assessed, and their impact on affected communities measured. Considering environmental factors in emergency management planning further promotes sustainability and resilience, ensuring a holistic approach to emergency management.

The British Red Cross is an organization that is considered internationally to be one of best practice. In particular, the British Red Cross is known for its success in the realm of volunteer management, as exemplified by its high volunteer attraction and retention rates. The British Red Cross is known to implement practices that encourage consistent collaboration between volunteers and managers, strengthening trust and cultivating relationships. For example, managers play a key role in the training that

volunteers are expected to participate in, allowing for regular contact and open channels of communication (Waikayi et al., 2012). In this way, the practices utilized by the British Red Cross align with numerous aspects of the Global Volunteering Standard, highlighting the effectiveness of the approach and its potential for fostering success in the context of emergency management.

## **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERING SECTOR IN VICTORIA**

Many volunteer organizations are involved in Victoria's emergency management sector. Organizations like the Australian Red Cross, which is a relief lead agency for psychosocial support, and Emergency Management Victoria, a recovery support organization, play critical roles. As a humanitarian organization, Red Cross aims to ensure communities are strong and resilient, and have the capacity to anticipate, respond to, and recover from emergencies. EMV is the central body for emergency management in Victoria, as outlined in the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP), which details arrangements among various contributing organizations. The SEMP, alongside Regional Emergency Management Plans (REMP), Municipal Emergency Management Plans (MEMP) (and relevant community emergency management plans), form the holistic planning framework to mitigate, plan and prepare for, respond to and recover from emergencies.

The SEMP is a document outlining the emergency arrangements among organizations within Victoria that contribute to emergency response, relief, and recovery at the state level (*Victorian State Emergency Management Plan*, 2023). It provides guidelines and lists state resources essential for effective emergency management.

Complimenting the SEMP are the eight Regional Emergency Management Plans (REMPs), which detail the emergency response and coordination of organizations at the regional level (*Functions of SCRC, the EMC, SEMPC, REMPCs and MEMPCs*, n.d.). Each plan corresponds to one of the eight emergency management regions within Victoria, which can be



seen in Figure 1. Each region is labelled with a different color to distinguish it from neighboring regions. The Metropolitan Melbourne area is split into three regions, which are represented in a larger scale on the right side of the image in black, dark gray, and light gray. The eight regions depicted include:

1. Barwon Southwest
2. Eastern Metro
3. Gippsland
4. Grampians
5. Hume
6. Loddon Mallee
7. North West Metro
8. Southern Metro

Figure 1

Map of Emergency Management Regions within Victoria



Note. This image was produced by Emergency Management Victoria, showing the regions in Victoria. From "Victorian State Emergency Management Plan," 2023, *Emergency Management Victoria*, p. 8. Copyright 2023 by State of Victoria.

Each region has their own REMP which they follow alongside the SEMP. REMPs tend to follow a similar outline in terms of structure and content, though include different organizations depending on which are active in their region (*Regional Emergency Management Plans (REMPs) Including Sub-Plans*, n.d.).

In addition, each municipality has a Municipal Emergency Management Plan (MEMP). Similarly to a REMP, the general structure of a MEMP remains the same across most municipalities, with slight differences in which organizations are included based on the organizations that serve that area. MEMPs list arrangements with organizations outlined in the SEMP or REMPs as well as local organizations. These local organizations are where most MEMPs differ, as each municipality contains their own unique organizations. The levels of emergency management plans are depicted in Figure 2.


Figure 2

*Structure and Organization of Emergency Management Plans at the State, Regional, and Municipal Levels*



When planning for emergencies and how areas, sectors and others will collectively respond, it is important to consider the organizational differences between organizations. Local, community-based organizations may use more informal structures in comparison to state-level organizations and vary how they interact with other organizations and agencies.


Considering the organizational differences among volunteer organizations is crucial, particularly when examining how they interact within the sector. While local organizations often operate with more informal structures, their approaches to engagement with other agencies may vary. Within the emergency management sector, volunteer organizations operate across formal and informal frameworks. Formal volunteering entails hierarchical structures with defined roles, ensuring streamlined communication and coordination (Brudney, 2016).

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Conversely, informal volunteering embraces flexibility with nontraditional hierarchies, granting autonomy to volunteers but posing coordination challenges. The rise of nontraditional volunteering presents opportunities and challenges. While it offers flexibility and inclusivity, it requires a reevaluation of practices to bridge the gap between traditional volunteering and newer roles, emphasizing the need for adaptation to contemporary preferences and community needs (Kragt & Holtrop, 2019).

This consideration is particularly relevant as many smaller, nontraditional local organizations outlined in Municipal Emergency Management Plans tend to follow informal structures, while traditional organizations outlined in State Emergency Management Plans, or Regional Emergency Management Plans adhere to formal structures. Recognizing these differences is necessary to ensure the Review takes into consideration the vastness of the emergency management space, so it can better understand the needs of organizations and work towards fostering effective coordination throughout the sector.

# METHODS



The goal of this project was to identify ways to enhance the connection between traditional and nontraditional volunteer organizations to facilitate stronger, coordinated volunteer efforts across the emergency management sector of Victoria. To achieve this goal, the following objectives were identified:

1. Understand the current networks between nontraditional local organizations, Red Cross, and EMV before, during, and after an emergency.
2. Map nontraditional local organizations listed in Municipal Emergency Management Plans (MEMPs) and collate the services each organization provides before, during and after an emergency.
3. Determine what the traditional organizations want to see moving forward when collaborating with nontraditional organizations.
4. Determine what the nontraditional, local organizations want to see moving forward when collaborating with traditional organizations.
5. Develop strategies to take advantage of opportunities and provide a list of recommendations to incorporate new consultation and communication practices between local nontraditional organizations and traditional volunteer organizations.

This chapter describes the methods used to gather information about opportunities in the emergency management sector and the methods used to generate recommendations to strengthen coordination. The team conducted a survey and held exploratory conversations with various traditional and nontraditional organization volunteer leaders to support our conclusions.


## **INCLUSION/EXCLUSION CHARACTERISTICS**

We used the following inclusion criteria when selecting participants for both exploratory conversations and survey: individuals had to be associated with a volunteer organization, be at least 18 years old, and hold a volunteer leadership position or have relevant volunteer coordination expertise within an organization contributing to emergency management in the Victorian emergency management sector. We specifically chose respondents based on their volunteer organization and its collaboration with existing organizations in the emergency management sector. Guidance from the Red Cross and EMV drove most of the respondent selection.

### **OBJECTIVE 1: UNDERSTANDING THE NETWORKS BETWEEN NONTRADITIONAL LOCAL ORGANIZATIONS AND TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS BEFORE, DURING, AND AFTER AN EMERGENCY**


This objective aimed to explore the interactions and networks between nontraditional local organizations, the Red Cross, and EMV throughout different phases of emergency management. A few key research questions guided this exploration:

1. How do Red Cross and EMV engage with nontraditional, local volunteer agencies before, during, and after emergency management?
2. What are the communication channels and collaboration mechanisms used by traditional organizations when interacting with nontraditional local organizations before, during, and after emergency situations?
3. How do nontraditional, local volunteer agencies maintain communication channels and coordinate their efforts with Red Cross, EMV, and among themselves before, during, and after emergency management?

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The first question sought to understand the nature and extent of existing relationships between nontraditional and traditional organizations, examining their roles, responsibilities, and interactions before, during, and after emergencies. The second question aimed to identify the various communication methods, platforms, and tools employed by traditional organization to engage with nontraditional organizations throughout different phases of emergency management. It also explored the effectiveness of these communication channels in facilitating collaboration and coordination. The last question focused on understanding the communication practices and coordination strategies employed by nontraditional local organizations to interact with Red Cross, EMV, and other community-based groups.

To address these research questions, we incorporated exploratory conversations and surveys with key stakeholders into our research. For the exploratory conversations, we engaged volunteer leaders from nontraditional community organizations. These discussions, conducted either in-person or online based on the preferences of the interviewees, aimed to reveal organizational practices, communication strategies, and collaborative initiatives. Each conversation lasted no more than sixty minutes, and audio recordings were made with the informed and written consent of interviewees to ensure accuracy and thorough documentation. We created different questions for exploratory conversations with traditional versus nontraditional organization leaders. In terms of the exploratory conversations with leaders from traditional organizations, eight standardized questions focusing on key aspects of communication and collaboration were used to guide the discussions (see Appendix B). Different types of questions were developed and used to guide the exploratory conversations with leaders from nontraditional organizations (see Appendix C). By generating more specified questions around internal and external communication practices of nontraditional organizations, we were able to gain a clear understanding of the various ways in which nontraditional organizations engage and pull more rich insights from their comments.



In terms of the survey component, we distributed a questionnaire to approximately 170 community-based volunteer organizations involved in emergency management across Victoria and received a total of 16 responses, 11 of which were from volunteer organizations. This survey comprised a mix of multiple-choice and open-ended questions, allowing for both quantitative and qualitative insights (see Appendix D). Multiple-choice questions facilitated quantitative analysis, focusing on specific coordination effectiveness metrics such as communication protocols, resource allocation, and inter-agency collaboration. Meanwhile, open-ended questions provided respondents with the opportunity to share detailed insights, experiences, and suggestions, enabling a more nuanced understanding of coordination challenges.

This approach was designed to understand communication practices within and between volunteer organizations. By using data from exploratory conversations and the survey we aimed to gain a better understanding of communication networks, challenges, and opportunities in the emergency management sector. This approach enabled us to develop recommendations for enhancing communication and collaboration among nontraditional and traditional organizations, improving volunteerism effectiveness and sustainability in emergency response efforts.

## **OBJECTIVE 2: MAPPING THE EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SECTOR THROUGH THE MUNICIPAL EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT PLANS**

This objective involved mapping the emergency management sector by identifying nontraditional organizations that were either not represented in existing Municipal Emergency Management Plans, work with organizations that are represented, or some that are listed in the Australian National Charity Registry as emergency management organizations. Due to the decentralized nature of MEMPs, there is not currently comprehensive visibility from the state level over local arrangements. This mapping process also entailed determining the services each organization offers before, during, and after emergency responses. To better understand this, we posed the following research questions:



1. How can we capture as many nontraditional organizations as possible in our mapping to ensure we obtain an accurate representation of the emergency management sector?
2. What are the key characteristics and roles of nontraditional organizations involved in emergency management efforts not represented in existing plans like the MEMP?
3. How do the services provided by nontraditional organizations complement or supplement those outlined in formal emergency management plans?

These research questions aimed to provide insights into the roles, characteristics, and services of nontraditional emergency management agencies that may be overlooked in formal planning documents. By addressing these questions, we could better understand and explore opportunities in current plans, to help contribute to the wider Review by identifying potential contact points for outreach from state-level bodies.

The team was provided a list of the 83 MEMPs in Victoria, with a link to each document. We analyzed each plan to identify the organizations listed as contributing to emergency management in each municipality. Additionally, we visited each organization's website to identify additional organizations they collaborate with and categorize the services they provide. This helped ensure that we captured a broad spectrum of entities involved in emergency management efforts, including those offering services such as food provision, psychosocial support, medical aid, clothing, and more. We were able to identify organizations in 61 out of 83 MEMPs, with the remaining 22 MEMPs redacting that information, or not listing organizations.

Transitioning from our analysis of the 83 MEMPs in Victoria, we then focused on categorizing the services provided by each entity, ensuring an understanding of emergency management resources and capabilities. First, identifying the State-wide network of local nontraditional organizations supports improved volunteer consultation, engagement- and collaboration before and outside of emergency events (i.e., Supporting trust building across the sector and ensuring diverse volunteer voices are

heard on relevant policy, projects and reforms). Secondly, increased visibility and connection between local level organizations provides a better understanding of the resources available during emergencies such as providing relief or recovery services. This allows for better coordination and utilization of resources, enhancing the effectiveness of emergency response efforts. Secondly, understanding the services provided by each organization enables emergency personnel to match resources with specific needs that may arise. For example, knowing which local organizations offer psychosocial support can help address the mental health needs of affected individuals and communities in the aftermath of an emergency in a more tailored and effective way. Mapping nontraditional organizations operating in emergency management at the local level helps to identify opportunities for services in areas where existing coverage may be lacking. By pinpointing these opportunities, stakeholders can work towards taking advantage of these opportunities and improving overall emergency preparedness, response, and recovery. To capture all these organizational aspects, a spreadsheet was created, which broke down details such as the organization's name, the municipality it is listed under, its service footprint, and the resources it provides in emergency management.

### **OBJECTIVE 3: DETERMINING COLLABORATION PREFERENCES OF TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**


Effective collaboration within Victoria's emergency management sector is essential for coordinated emergency management. This objective aimed to explore the collaboration and communication preferences of traditional organizations when working with nontraditional local agencies. By understanding their preferences and expectations, the team identified ways to enhance coordination efforts and improve emergency management outcomes for people and communities. This information, in conjunction with information gained from Objective 4, could be used in the future to inform the development of new consultation mechanisms that would provide an effective platform for organizations throughout the emergency management sector to communicate with traditional organizations. The following research questions were posed as part of this objective:

1. What are the collaboration preferences of traditional organizations when collaborating with nontraditional local agencies in Victoria's emergency management sector?
2. How do traditional organizations understand the strengths and weaknesses of existing collaboration efforts with nontraditional local agencies?
3. What future directions and improvements do traditional organizations envision for collaboration with nontraditional local agencies, and what strategies do they propose for enhancing coordination and communication?

These research questions were designed to explore the specific collaboration preferences and expectations of the traditional organizations included in the sample regarding their interactions with nontraditional agencies. By exploring their perceptions of existing collaboration efforts and their envisioned improvements, we obtained valuable insights into the dynamics of collaboration within the emergency management sector.

Exploratory conversations were conducted with volunteer coordinators or leaders from prominent organizations involved in community support, social services and/or emergency risk reduction and resilience research including: the Red Cross, The Victorian Council Of Social Services (VCOSS), and Natural Hazards Research Australia (NHRA). These discussions involved engaging directly with key personnel and decision-makers within these organizations to gather qualitative insights into their collaboration preferences and experiences. By engaging in open-ended conversations, we aimed to delve deeply into the intricacies of their collaboration dynamics, understanding not only their preferences but also the underlying motivations and challenges they encountered.

During these conversations, we explored the strengths and weaknesses of existing collaboration efforts from the perspectives of Red Cross representatives. This involved discussing specific instances of collaboration with nontraditional local agencies, identifying successful strategies and areas for improvement (see Appendix B).



Furthermore, these exploratory conversations provided an opportunity for representatives from traditional organizations to express their ideas for improving consultation with nontraditional local organizations. This approach allowed for flexibility and adaptability, enabling the exploration of multiple perspectives, and uncovering of emergent themes that may guide future collaboration initiatives. The written and audio transcripts obtained from these conversations underwent further thematic analysis to determine the overlapping themes and commonalities between each individual and organizational response. In this analysis, the transcripts were compared to each other, question by question, to identify parallels between conversations. Parts of the transcripts were highlighted in different colors based on common statements surrounding points of interest related to the goal of the project, points of interest not necessarily related to the scope of the project, and areas of improvement in the sector.

Coding the responses into meaningful themes allowed us to gain insights into communication and uncover nuances in collaboration within the emergency management sector from respondents with unique perspectives. This in-depth understanding informed efforts to develop strategies and interventions aimed at enhancing coordination and communication between traditional organizations and nontraditional local agencies, improving emergency response outcomes.

#### **OBJECTIVE 4: DETERMINING COLLABORATION PREFERENCES OF NONTRADITIONAL LOCAL AGENCIES**


Effective collaboration between organizations is vital for ensuring coordinated and efficient emergency management. This objective aimed to investigate the specific collaboration preferences and challenges faced by nontraditional and local agencies when working with traditional organizations like the Red Cross. By understanding their unique perspectives and experiences, we sought to identify opportunities for improvement in communication and develop tailored strategies to enhance consultation within the emergency management sector. The research questions below helped to guide this objective:

1. What are the primary communication channels utilized by nontraditional local agencies when collaborating with traditional organizations in Victoria's emergency management sector?
2. How do nontraditional local agencies perceive the effectiveness of existing collaboration efforts with traditional organizations, and what aspects did they identify as successful or challenging?
3. What are the key obstacles encountered by nontraditional local agencies in collaborating with traditional organizations, and what recommendations did they propose for overcoming these obstacles in future collaborations?

To address these research questions, a survey was sent out to approximately 170 nontraditional organizations in the emergency management sector, and 11 responses were received. This survey helped provide initial systematic insights into the communication channels utilized by nontraditional local agencies.

In addition to the survey, exploratory conversations were conducted with representatives from nontraditional local agencies to understand their collaboration experiences. These representatives included leaders from Australian Search and Rescue K9, Crisis Clean Up Australia, University of the 3rd Age, and the Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership. The one exclusion characteristic for selecting respondents for these nontraditional exploratory conversations was that the individual could not be strictly associated with traditional organizations already under standing arrangements. Implementing this exclusion characteristic helped to prevent duplications of previous exploratory conversations or surveys (Norton & Zacharewicz, 2024).

The research questions used in these discussions were designed to delve into the specific collaboration preferences, experiences, and challenges faced by nontraditional local agencies when engaging with traditional organizations in the emergency management sector (see Appendix C). By exploring these aspects, we aimed to gain insights that go beyond those captured in Objective 3, focusing specifically on the perspectives of nontraditional local agencies.




Understanding the collaboration preferences and challenges of nontraditional local agencies was crucial when designing recommendations to foster effective partnerships within the emergency management sector. By tailoring strategies to address their specific needs and obstacles, we aimed to improve collaboration with traditional organizations, enhancing coordination efforts and improving emergency response outcomes. This data served as a valuable resource for informing decision-making processes and guiding future collaboration initiatives, leading to more resilient and efficient emergency management practices in Victoria.

### **OBJECTIVE 5: DEVELOPING RECOMMENDATIONS TO IMPROVE COMMUNICATION AND CONSULTATION**

Data collected from exploratory conversations and surveys within the emergency management sector helped identify and understand communication opportunities. The analysis focused on recognizing patterns, themes, and key challenges associated with coordination opportunities. Utilizing both quantitative and qualitative methods, the gathered information provided valuable insights into the complexities of the current state of coordination within the emergency management sector.

We conducted exploratory conversations with key stakeholders and volunteer coordinators, ensuring a qualitative exploration of their experiences and perspectives. Key interviewees the Red Cross, , The Victorian Council Of Social Services (VCOSS), and Natural Hazards Research Australia (NHRA).


Using our findings, we formulated recommendations to support the key priority areas for further exploration for both Red Cross and EMV. This set of recommendations encompassed specific strategies, actionable steps, and other suggestions aimed at enhancing coordination. Key aspects include details in communication protocols, resource allocation, and collaboration frameworks. The intention was to provide a list of recommendations aligning with the emergency management sector's unique needs.



We then presented our recommendations to key leaders from the Red Cross and EMV teams. The presentation emphasized the importance of addressing coordination gaps and highlighted the potential impact of the proposed strategies. The team engaged in multiple rounds of discussions and revisions with the Red Cross and EMV to ensure the final set of recommendations helps address the emergency management sector's specific needs and concerns and inform the Review. This process aimed to achieve a consensus-driven, well-informed strategy that can garner support and commitment from all relevant parties involved in emergency management.

# **RESULTS & ANALYSIS**






In the results section, we present findings derived from our data collection efforts, outlining the identification of contributing organizations, categorization of services, analysis of coverage, and identification of collaboration networks. This includes a detailed overview of the methods used to collect data, such as sourcing information from Municipal Emergency Management Plans and analyzing organization websites. Our analysis encompasses the extent of coverage across MEMPs, strengths, and weaknesses of current emergency management structures, and opportunities for improvement. In the analysis section, we evaluate the comprehensiveness of organization listings, discuss implications for emergency preparedness, and provide recommendations for enhancing emergency management efforts in Victoria.

## **EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT SECTOR NETWORKS**

The emergency management sector of Victoria is a complex network of organizations, each with its own relationships and roles. All these organizations come together to provide resources and support to communities before, during, and after emergencies, the type of which aligns with their specific mission. For example, as the lead organization in psychosocial first aid, the Red Cross specializes in allocating resources to support the community from a psychosocial standpoint. Due to the immense number of organizations in the sector, coordination of resources must be carefully conducted to ensure communities receive effective support.

One reoccurring theme across the exploratory conversations was limited visibility of many of the smaller organizations that contribute to emergency management. When one source heard that our team, at the time, had identified about 200 organizations through our mapping exercise, their response was “...wow, we’ve got 200 organizations? Who are they? What do they do?” Multiple other sources had similar reactions during their conversations and expressed thoughts of not knowing how many organizations there are in Victoria. This exemplifies how vast the sector is and how limited knowledge is accessible regarding which organizations contribute to emergency management and in what capacities.



In addition to the lack of visibility in the sector, perceived internal organizational complexity stemming from differences in structure was another theme of note . When describing their experiences coordinating with other organizations , one source described the difficulties surrounding “ the complexity of some of the agencies themselves ”. This project examined some traditional and nontraditional organizations, meaning there were multiple different organizational structures at play.

The complexities within organizations can translate to external difficulties when determining how to coordinate agencies that have completely different structures. These internal organizational complexities further decrease overall visibility, adding another layer of nuance that hampers effective collaboration and resource utilization.

Additionally, organizations tend to coordinate more readily with organizations they have established relationships with. This tendency is accentuated by the hierarchal structure of the sector, wherein organizations operate at various tiers - state, regional, municipal, or community - leading to closer coordination within that tier. This pattern extends to both traditional and nontraditional organizations, as many traditional organizations connect with other traditional organizations, and vice versa. For example, many organizations that operate at the state tier are also considered traditional and adopt similar internal structures, meaning that they connect with other state-tier agencies that are similarly structured. Consequently, these state-tier traditional organizations may be perceived as less likely to be as strongly connected to organizations that operate at the municipal tier that take on a more nontraditional structure.

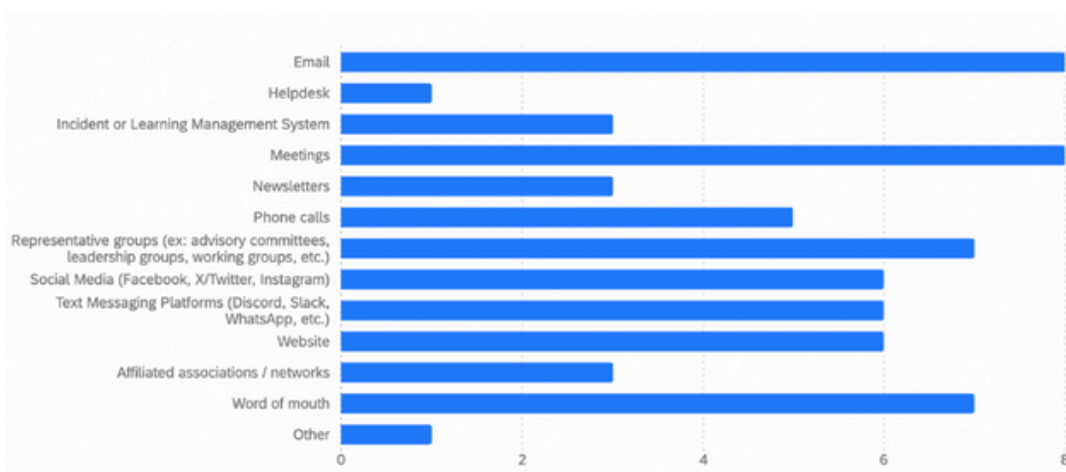
Part of the connection challenges between organizations can be attributed to circumstantial factors, such that organizations that operate in the same geographical area or resource space cross paths more often, which can mean that organizations in other areas do not have the same opportunity to form relationships. The difficulties surrounding connection are made greater by decreased visibility throughout the sector, which prevents organizations from knowing who else may be available to connect


with. In this way, the sector remains fragmented as organizations continue to work with those they already are connected to and do not have the information available to know what other organizations may be present to explore broader collaboration opportunities.

In addition to visibility, another common theme revealed through the exploratory conversations involved different types of communication practices. These conversations revealed that many organizations within the sector use different streams of communication to coordinate internally versus externally. Internally, most organizations use social media platforms and messaging services to communicate. Some of the common social media platforms included Twitter and Facebook , while messaging included emails , WhatsApp chat, and phone calls. The survey results bolstered these findings.

Of the eleven survey responses, eight of them indicated that they use email to communicate internally; however, the responses also indicated face -to-face communication practices are prevalent. Eight of the respondents indicated that they used meetings to share information, and seven respondents selected “word-of-mouth” as a main communication method within their organization. The survey results regarding how respondents communicate within their organization can be seen below in Figure 3.

Figure 3  
*Communication Methods Used by Organizations (n=11)*






The external forms of communication varied slightly from the internal. During the exploratory conversations, many sources described events and conferences as the main forms of communication their organizations used to connect with others. Additionally, some sources noted email and phone calls as other methods of communication between organizations.

In comparison to internal communication, external forms of communication used between organizations varied slightly, but were consistent in a few areas. Multiple respondents expressed that personal communication was the most effective way to connect internally and externally. One source stated, “I think the informal networks and informal communication are just as important [as the formal relationships] ... the informal is the more relationship based. That is fostered by events and meeting people”. This comment highlights the value of personal contact in connecting with people and organizations in the emergency management space to foster coordination.

Another source advocated for the effectiveness of communicating with other organizations face-to-face, using an example from the Ethnic Communities Council in Mildura, which “has a regular network meeting where they have lots of different cultural leaders and then representatives from different emergency agencies coming together once every month or two and then also holding social events with community members just so they're sort of building that trust there”. This comment highlights the importance of forming these relationships and, in turn, trust to more effectively communicate and coordinate organizations in the emergency management sector. As such, implementing more personal communication approaches when communicating both internally and externally can strengthen inter-organization relationships within the sector.

Evidence regarding the importance of forming inter-organizational relationships throughout the sector can be seen across the survey results and exploratory conversations discussed previously. Strengthening these relationships across the sector tiers can be achieved by implementing



effective communication practices, which can encourage inclusion and coordination amongst organizations that may not engage otherwise. Each organization in each tier plays a fundamental role in emergency management of their service area.

One leader from a state-tier organization spoke about local-tier organizations, noting that “Local community organizations on the ground have got a really good knowledge about their community, where the vulnerabilities are, what the strengths are”. This indicates that organizations of different service footprints recognize the importance of each other in supporting communities during emergencies. The leader went on to share that “something that works quite well I think, is when government and agencies trust [community] organizations and use them as a resource, particularly with volunteers, a lot of those local community organizations wouldn't consider themselves as emergency responders”. This comment attests to the need for communication between the tiers to take advantage of the strengths each organization has to offer. In this case, local organizations understand the community needs, and can provide useful information about where state-level organizations can partner, provide assistance, or allocate resources to deliver effective support.

The leader's mention of some community organizations not considering themselves as emergency management organizations points to the further complexity of the sector and adds to the challenge of visibility. Many community-based organizations will come together to help their community in an emergency but would not consider themselves traditional emergency management organizations because the services they typically provide are not thought of as emergency support.

These nontraditional organizations, however, are fundamental to supporting the community before, during and after emergencies, as they understand the community's needs. This raises the question of how to increase visibility in the sector to include nontraditional organizations, foster relationships between traditional and nontraditional organizations, and design effective communication practices to include all organizations in the emergency management conversation.

## **IDENTIFYING NONTRADITIONAL SECTOR MEMBERS BY ANALYZING MUNICIPAL PLANS**

Through the analysis, we were able to identify many nontraditional organizations that contribute to emergency management. These are organizations that are not listed in the State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) as core components of the Victorian emergency management sector, but are still called upon by local councils, municipalities, and SEMP-listed organizations in emergencies at the local community level. These organizations, while still making use of volunteers, are not typically included in state-level planning.

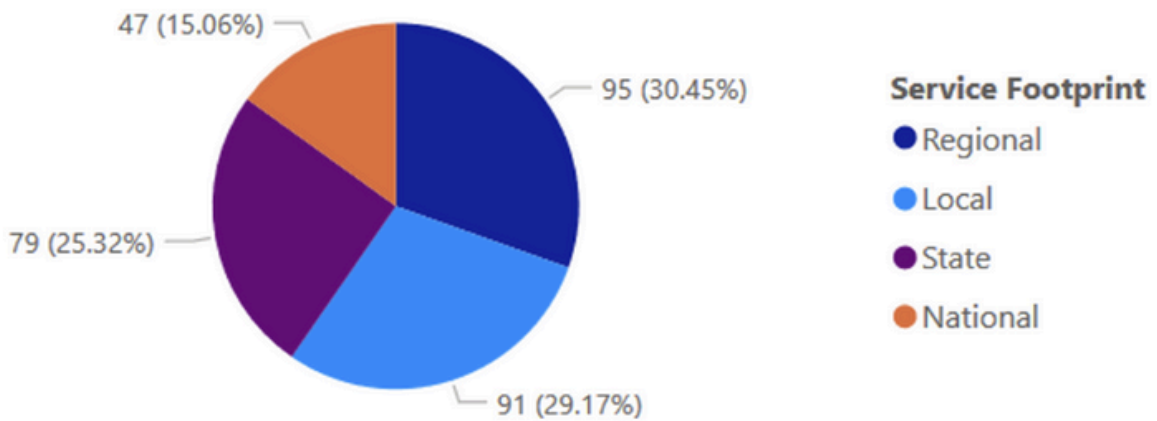
We identified 285 unique organizations that contribute to emergency management before, during, or after a response. The list of organizations obtained from MEMPs were combined with a list of agencies obtained from the Australian National Charity Register in a spreadsheet listing each organization's membership makeup (volunteers vs paid staff), service area, and services provided.

We generated visualizations of this data using Microsoft Power BI, enabling us to find meaning and patterns in nontraditional organizations. The data revealed a concentration of organizations in two categories: Medical aid (56/285, 13%) and psychosocial support (53/285, 13%). Additionally, of the organizations we identified, a plurality (87/285, 30%) of them operated at a local level, with the next largest amount operating at a regional level (84/285, 29%), as seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4

*Breakdown of Service Footprints*

**Service Footprint Overview**

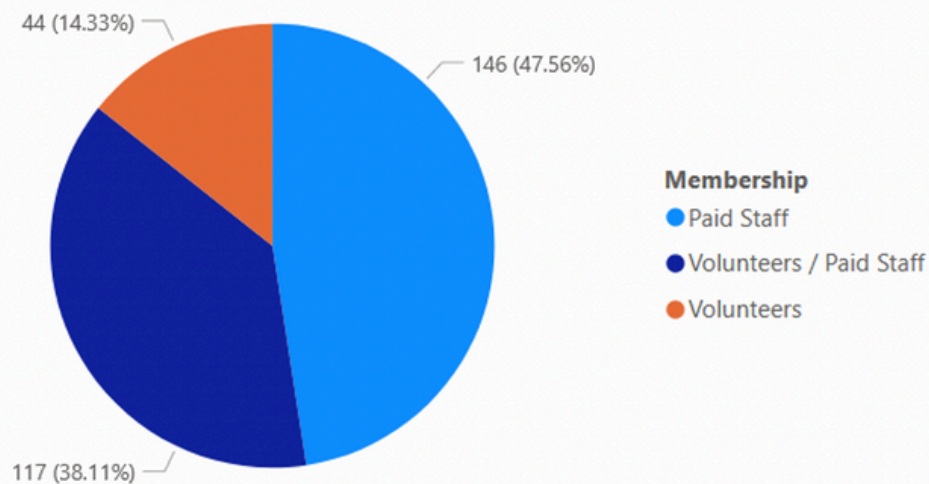


A slim majority (150/285, 53%) of organizations identified use volunteers in some way, of which 41 are entirely made up of volunteers, and 109 complement their paid staff with volunteers. Volunteer-based organizations primarily provide food, communications, and outreach to their communities, which could be because those services do not require much specialized training. Of the organizations made up of only volunteers, 11/41 (27%) provide food, and 8/41 (19%) conduct outreach to the community and provide communications support. When looking at organizations using both volunteers and paid staff, 30/109 (28%) provide medical aid, 28/109 (26%) provide psychosocial support, 22/109 (20%) provide food, and 20/109 (18%) provide shelter. For organizations made up entirely of paid staff, 24/135 (17%) provide medical aid, and 23/135 (17%) provide psychosocial support. Levels of medical and psychosocial support provided tend to increase as the concentration of paid staff increases, as these services require specialized training and licensure.

Figure 5

*Breakdown of Membership Composition*

**Breakdown of Membership**




As seen in Figure 5, most organizations made up entirely of volunteers operate at the local level (26/41, 63%), as do a plurality (32/109, 29%) of organizations combining volunteers with paid staff. A plurality (44/135, 32%) of organizations made up entirely of paid staff operate at the regional level.

This information can guide resource allocation and partnership development efforts, ensuring that essential services are adequately addressed during emergencies. For example, most organizations at the local level are made up entirely of volunteers. These local organizations primarily provide food and outreach to their fellow community members. At the regional level sits hospitals (the source of the medical and psychological first aid services), which can have volunteers in addition to their paid staff of healthcare workers doctors.

The distribution of organizations across different service areas and operational levels further underscores the importance of local and regional partnerships in emergency management. By identifying where these organizations operate, emergency planning can strategically engage them to strengthen community resilience and response capabilities.






The breakdown of organizations based on their composition of volunteers and paid staff provides insights into the interplay between community engagement and professional expertise within the emergency management sector. Understanding volunteers' role in providing essential services such as food provision, psychosocial support, and communications underscores the importance of community involvement in emergency response efforts.

Moreover, the data highlights the operational preferences of different types of organizations, with local-level engagement being predominant among volunteer-based entities and regional-level operations more common among organizations with paid staff. This information can inform capacity-building initiatives tailored to the needs and operational contexts of different organizations, ensuring a more coordinated and effective response across all levels of emergency management.

## **ANALYSIS OF TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION PRACTICES**

Through exploratory conversations with volunteer leaders, we were able to uncover valuable insights into volunteer management and emergency response practices. One positive aspect highlighted was the importance of fostering communication and collaboration between various organizations and nontraditional volunteer agencies, which contributes to proactive community resilience efforts. Additionally, these discussions emphasized the dedication and commitment of volunteers, showcasing their willingness to step up and support their communities in times of need. However, alongside these recognitions, there was also a concern regarding the lack of pre-emergency communication and collaboration practices.


One common theme was the significance of fostering communication and collaboration between various organizations and nontraditional volunteer agencies not just during emergencies but also in times of inactivation. “Nobody talks to each other before a emergency. When something happens, we’re reaching out to strangers or new organizations asking for services,” claims a volunteer coordinator.



Further conversations show that establishing and nurturing these connections before emergencies occur is vital to effectively support communities during and after emergencies. “A few years ago, I got a call from a colleague asking for [help with] a response. I knew her, and she knew how to contact me, so she was able to reach out directly,” says a source, “...because of our relationship during emergency downtime, we were able to get things rolling quickly.” Forming relationships outside of emergencies enables entities to build trust, understanding, and shared objectives, laying a solid foundation for effective coordination and resource allocation when emergencies strike. By proactively working together, these organizations can streamline their efforts, optimize resource utilization, and respond more efficiently to emergencies.


Moreover, these conversations reveal there is currently no shared form of communication between all nontraditional organizations. The organizations we spoke to use different methods of information sharing, causing difficulties when consulting between organizations. “There are just inconsistent forms of communication between councils and organizations around changing priorities,” says a volunteer coordinator. “There have been situations where we were told help was needed but by the time we got there everything was taken care of or priorities changed.”

From the exploratory conversations, we found that most information sharing is via email, word-of-mouth, Microsoft Teams, or older online communication systems. This can be useful within an organization, but these forms of communication can get lost between groups or people. Even within an organization “some groups are just so big that emails and meetings aren’t all that great,” says a volunteer leader.



With this, there is a clear consensus among stakeholders for the necessity of a centralized communication platform that aggregates information from all agencies and organizations during emergencies. A coordinator was able to share their thoughts: "If we had a system where everyone can join and be live updated that would be great. If we can see what has been happening, what's been done, where people are, and what needs to be done, that would be a complete game changer." Such a platform would serve as a hub where stakeholders can access real-time updates, track progress, identify emerging needs, and collaborate seamlessly. This unified approach to communication would mitigate confusion, reduce duplication of efforts, and ensure a more coordinated and effective response overall.


Another key aspect highlighted was the underrepresentation and insufficient recognition of organizations and agencies involved in emergency responses. As voiced by a volunteer, there is a perception that certain organizations "swoop in" during emergencies to provide immediate aid, but attention wanes once the crisis abates. This sentiment underscores the importance of sustained support, especially from smaller volunteer groups and agencies that often play crucial roles in community recovery efforts. Despite their significant contributions, these organizations may go unnoticed or receive inadequate acknowledgment for their ongoing efforts beyond the initial response phase. It's essential to recognize and support the vital work performed by all involved organizations and agencies throughout the entire emergency management cycle. Addressing this is crucial for fostering a sense of inclusivity, appreciation, and support within the volunteer community. A leader commented, "It's the nontraditional organizations that know what the community wants, when there is no recognition or funding it makes it difficult to actively provide emergency relief." Recognizing the invaluable contributions of all involved organizations and agencies not only boosts morale but also enhances overall resilience and effectiveness of emergency response efforts.



In addition to the underrepresentation of nontraditional volunteer organizations in Victoria's emergency management sector, there is a noticeable lack of diversity within volunteer organizations across the country. Pulling from a key leader, the assertion that "Australia is a very diverse country, we have people from all different backgrounds, races, and countries" encapsulates a fundamental truth about Australian society. Yet, despite this inherent diversity, there remains a noticeable incongruity within the emergency volunteer sector and other volunteering groups. "The people who volunteer just don't represent this country. We need to work with more people to better show the community." While these groups play pivotal roles in community support and resilience, their composition often fails to reflect the breadth of diversity found in the broader population. This disconnect raises questions about the inclusivity and accessibility of such organizations.

Analytically, it underscores the need for deliberate efforts to address barriers that may hinder participation from underrepresented groups. Moreover, it highlights the potential missed opportunities for these groups to leverage the wealth of perspectives and experiences that diversity brings, enhancing their effectiveness and relevance in serving the community.


Traditional volunteer organizations, despite the challenges they face, exhibit remarkable strengths in their ability to mobilize quickly and respond effectively to emergencies. As one volunteer coordinator noted, "they are very quick to respond, set up call centers, and send out volunteers in a timely manner." This rapid response capability is a testament to their readiness and preparedness to spring into action at a moment's notice. "There was an emergency and bam the next day we probably had like a hundred volunteers there and like a million call-centers." Their well-established infrastructure and experienced teams enable them to swiftly set up communication hubs, coordinate logistics, and dispatch volunteers to affected areas with efficiency and precision. This agility in response is essential for mitigating the impact of emergencies and providing timely assistance to those in need.



Furthermore, traditional volunteer organizations excel in establishing and maintaining strong partnerships with key stakeholders in the community. Through years of collaboration with government agencies, non-profit organizations, and local authorities, they have established networks that facilitate seamless coordination during emergencies. These partnerships enable them to leverage a wide range of resources, expertise, and support mechanisms, enhancing their capacity to address diverse needs and challenges in emergency-affected areas. By working closely with other entities, traditional organizations can pool together their collective strengths and resources, ensuring a more comprehensive and integrated approach to emergency management.

In addition to their rapid deployment capabilities and collaborative partnerships, traditional volunteer organizations demonstrate a high degree of adaptability and resilience in the face of adversity. They are accustomed to operating in dynamic and unpredictable environments, where conditions can change rapidly, and new challenges may arise unexpectedly. Despite these uncertainties, these organizations remain flexible and innovative, constantly evolving their strategies and tactics to meet emerging needs and overcome obstacles. Whether it is adjusting response plans last-minute, improvising solutions in resource-constrained settings, or innovating new approaches to service delivery, traditional volunteer organizations exhibit a remarkable ability to adapt and thrive in challenging circumstances.

Moreover, traditional volunteer organizations play a crucial role in providing essential services and support to vulnerable populations during emergencies. From sheltering displaced individuals to providing medical care, distributing food and water, and offering emotional support, these organizations fulfill a wide range of critical functions that are essential for community resilience and recovery. Their presence and active engagement in affected areas ensure that basic needs are met, and that individuals and families receive the assistance they require to rebuild their lives in the aftermath of an emergency. Through their dedicated efforts and unwavering commitment to service, traditional volunteer organizations serve as beacons of hope and solidarity in times of crisis, embodying the spirit of compassion, resilience, and community support.




In recognition of the strengths and areas of improvement within traditional organizations and within the research, the following needs of traditional organizations to facilitate a more coordinated sector were identified:

1. Establish communication mechanisms and build relationships with other organizations before emergencies.
2. Implement a centralized platform for communication and information sharing across the emergency management sector.
3. Develop better ways to recognize and represent organizations that are fundamental to emergency management and community support.
4. Connect with more diverse, community-based organizations who understand the needs of communities they serve.

## **ANALYSIS OF NONTRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION PRACTICES**

The analysis of the survey data provided an understanding of the engagement of nontraditional organizations within Victoria's emergency management landscape. Through this survey, data was gathered from nine different organizations revealing key themes that underscore the significant contributions of these organizations to community resilience and recovery efforts.


A notable finding from the survey data is the breadth and depth of activities undertaken by nontraditional organizations in response to emergencies. They engage in a diverse range of proactive measures, including community resilience building initiatives, clean-up operations, and the provision of psychological support services. This approach reflects their recognition of the complex challenges posed by crises and their commitment to addressing both practical and emotional needs within communities.



Of particular importance is the sustained support provided by nontraditional organizations throughout the lifecycle of emergency events. While their immediate response efforts are crucial for mitigating the initial impacts of crises, their continued involvement in post-event recovery activities demonstrates a long-term dedication to community welfare. By participating in clean-up efforts, reconstruction projects, and community rehabilitation initiatives, these organizations play a vital role in fostering resilience and restoring normalcy in affected areas.

Furthermore, the data highlights the diverse volunteer roles within nontraditional organizations, each contributing to the overall emergency management landscape. Frontline volunteers provide direct assistance, support volunteers coordinate logistical operations, and community volunteers focus on outreach and education. This approach emphasizes the importance of community involvement at every stage of emergency management and underscores the collective effort required for effective response and recovery.

The insights gathered from our discussion with one nontraditional volunteer organization offered an understanding of the challenges and solutions characterizing nontraditional organizations within Victoria's emergency management landscape. Despite their modest size (18 dedicated volunteers), the organization's operational model is a testament to resilience and adaptability in the face of adversity. Operating without government funding places significant financial strain on the team, necessitating a reliance on personal resources to sustain their work. This financial burden not only underscores the need for greater support mechanisms for nontraditional emergency management entities but also highlights the inherent resilience of volunteers who are willing to invest their own resources in serving their communities.




The partnership forged between this organization and Victoria Police serves as a compelling example of inter-agency cooperation in emergency response efforts. Beyond the practical benefits of sharing resources and expertise, this partnership also plays a crucial role in boosting morale and fostering a sense of legitimacy within the organization. When speaking to the president of this organization a key comment was “we’ve only been on one deployment and on standby for two different calls... The dogs were able to help Vic Police cancel out a large amount of land, to determine that the missing person was not there” she continued, “we got an email from the police after that deployment. It said the five handlers over three days were professional during that emergency. That recognition from that police really helped to boost morale and helped establish us as a legitimate organization”. Recognition from a respected institution like Victoria Police not only validates the organization's efforts but also enhances its credibility and standing within the broader emergency management community. This recognition can serve as a powerful motivator for volunteers, reaffirming their sense of purpose and dedication to their mission.

However, the absence of standardized protocols for canine search and rescue operations in Australia presents a significant challenge for the organization. Operating in a vast and diverse geographical landscape, the lack of uniform guidelines complicates training, coordination, and interoperability with other emergency response agencies. Addressing this gap requires efforts between stakeholders to develop comprehensive and adaptable standards that reflect the unique challenges and opportunities presented by Australia's terrain and climate.

Despite these challenges, the organization demonstrates remarkable resilience and resourcefulness in overcoming operational hurdles. Leveraging communication methods such as WhatsApp for coordination exemplifies their ability to adapt to evolving circumstances and utilize available resources effectively. Moreover, their approach to involving the police in training sessions not only enhances operational efficiency but also promotes greater transparency, collaboration, and accountability within the emergency management sector.






The data from our exploratory conversations with nontraditional organizations help to understand the complexities and opportunities inherent in emergency management Victoria. By understanding the challenges faced by nontraditional organizations and exploring solutions and collaborative partnerships, we can foster a more resilient and adaptive emergency management framework that better serves the needs of communities across the region.

The imperative of active and unbiased listening, particularly towards Culturally and Linguistically Diverse (CALD) communities, cannot be overstated. CALD communities often face unique challenges during emergencies due to language barriers, cultural differences, and varying levels of access to resources. Hence, it is an approach of open acceptability ensuring that diverse voices are not only heard but also genuinely understood and valued. This involves creating inclusive spaces for dialogue and actively seeking input from CALD communities in the development and implementation of emergency management strategies.

At the state level, an absence of representation from diverse communities persists within emergency management structures. The Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership, while a step in the right direction, remains an anomaly rather than the norm. This lack of representation perpetuates systemic inequalities and hampers the ability of diverse communities to fully participate in decision-making processes that directly affect their safety and well-being.


The pressing question emerges: how can representation at the state level be improved to better reflect the diversity of communities? A new approach is needed, where committees comprising representatives from diverse backgrounds come together to formulate recommendations for the state government. This process should prioritize inclusivity, ensuring that voices from marginalized communities are given equal weight in shaping emergency management policies and practices.



Highlighting the importance of unity, participants recognize the incremental progress facilitated by the Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership in fostering genuine engagement between state agencies and CALD communities. However, there is acknowledgment that meaningful change takes time and perseverance. As one participant from a Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership meeting stated, "For so long we've been saying these things on the ground, and we repeat ourselves." During this meeting, this statement was met with agreement, and frustration among grassroots leaders and reflects the longstanding disparities and systemic barriers faced by CALD communities in emergency management. The challenge lies in ensuring that the Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership evolves beyond a gesture towards genuine inclusion and influence in policy-making processes. Despite their efforts to advocate for their communities' needs, they often find themselves repeating the same concerns without tangible outcomes. This highlights the urgent need for a shift from rhetoric to action, where the Multicultural Emergency Management Partnership translates into concrete measures that address the specific needs and priorities of CALD communities.

Despite the significant contributions of multicultural volunteers during emergencies, their involvement tends to diminish once immediate crises subside. This underscores the importance of sustained engagement and investment in CALD communities beyond the acute phase of emergencies. Building long-term relationships based on trust and mutual respect is essential for fostering resilience and ensuring that CALD communities have a voice in decision-making processes.

A prevailing concern among participants is the sense of being overlooked or under appreciated by authorities. This highlights the need for increased visibility and recognition of the invaluable contributions made by CALD community leaders and organizations in emergency management. Building stronger partnerships and promoting dialogue between government agencies and CALD communities is essential for addressing this sense of marginalization and fostering meaningful collaboration.




Addressing the complexities of diversity and inclusion within emergency management requires an approach that goes beyond token gestures toward genuine engagement and empowerment of CALD communities. By prioritizing inclusivity, active listening, and collaborative decision-making processes, the emergency management sector can better serve the diverse needs of all community members and build more resilient and inclusive communities.

The work of nontraditional organizations in emergency management is often overlooked, despite their invaluable contributions to emergency management efforts. This oversight may come from a tendency to prioritize established, “reliable” structures outlined in official emergency plans, often at the expense of smaller, community-based organizations. One of the major drivers of this may be that nontraditional organizations are unaware of relevant standards and regulations. This can lead to resentment when offers of support and assistance are rejected for noncompliance. Nontraditional organizations often operate on limited budgets and rely heavily on volunteer efforts, yet their flexibility, responsiveness, and intimate understanding of community needs make them invaluable assets in times of crisis. This gap in resources and funding can create frustration between organizations.

While many volunteers are driven by a genuine desire to serve their communities and make a meaningful difference, larger organizations sometimes create the perception of prioritizing bureaucratic protocols or self-promotion over genuine engagement with local needs and perspectives. This has led to tensions, further marginalizing the vital work of nontraditional organizations. Building more inclusive and collaborative emergency management systems requires not only recognizing the diverse motivations behind volunteerism but also building genuine partnerships based on mutual respect, trust, and active listening.

To address longstanding challenges of fragmentation and inefficiency prevalent in traditional approaches, establishing a centralized hub for communication and coordination can be beneficial for nontraditional organizations. A platform could streamline the mobilization process by




providing a single point of contact accessible to all participating organizations. This eliminates the confusion and redundancy often associated with disparate systems, allowing for a more effective response effort.

As organizations continue to expand their reach and impact, securing training infrastructures will be essential to their long-term viability and effectiveness in emergency response efforts. Because many organizations within the sector use different platforms to communicate, it may be worthwhile to explore the various engagement mechanisms that are already in use. Making these types of platforms accessible to the rest of the sector may help streamline the flow of information to facilitate coordinated efforts that can better support communities in emergencies.

In recognition of the strengths and areas of improvement within nontraditional organizations and within the research, the following needs of nontraditional organizations to facilitate a more coordinated sector were identified:

1. Build relationships with other organizations, specifically traditional agencies, before emergencies.
2. Implement a centralized platform for communication and information sharing across the emergency management sector.
3. Be properly recognized by traditional organizations for volunteer efforts during emergencies.
4. Receive funding to carry out the organization's mission.

# RECOMMENDATIONS




Based on our analysis of data gathered from surveys and exploratory conversations, our team created a set of recommendations aimed at enhancing emergency management coordination. These recommendations are the result of bringing together data from a diverse range of stakeholders, ensuring that our strategies are tailored to meet the specific needs and challenges faced by emergency management organizations in Victoria.

### **RECOMMENDATION 1: CONDUCT FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS**

Moving forward, we strongly advocate for focus groups as a platform for emergency management coordinators to voice their perspectives. Focus groups are likely to provide invaluable insights into the daily hurdles and opportunities encountered by volunteer coordinators and other key figures within emergency management organizations. Additionally, we recommend conducting focus group discussions alongside exploratory conversations to delve deeper into the common challenges faced by these organizations, following the methodology outlined by Krueger (2014). To ensure productive discussions, we suggest limiting the number of participants in each session to between five and ten participants, allowing for effective communication without overwhelming the conversation.

Furthermore, we propose structuring future discussions around three to five carefully crafted prompts, designed to encourage volunteer coordination participants to share their thoughts and experiences on coordination practices (see Appendix E for a list of sample questions). We also emphasize the importance of maintaining consistency in the inclusion and exclusion criteria used in both exploratory conversations and focus group discussions to ensure fair representation and reliable data collection.

By convening representatives in face-to-face focus group discussions, organizations can harness the collective wisdom and expertise of their stakeholders, fostering stronger relationships, enhancing communication, and improving their effectiveness in emergency response and community resilience. This collaborative approach not only facilitates meaningful dialogue but also promotes mutual understanding and builds trust among participants, laying the groundwork for coordinated action and sustainable solutions. Face-to-face interactions provide a dynamic forum



for engagement and empowerment, enabling stakeholders to actively shape the future of emergency management efforts.


## **RECOMMENDATION 2: EXPLORE A CENTRALIZED FORM OF INFORMATION SHARING AND COMMUNICATION**

A common theme across all exploratory conversations was the need for a centralized coordination mechanism that includes local community organizations. Having a central location for sharing information would streamline coordination and increase response effectiveness by preventing duplication of effort. Instead, organizations can quickly access the information they need, facilitating more efficient decision-making and resource allocation.

One common challenge when coordinating a response is when organizations “self-deploy” themselves to a response without consulting the incident command team, and without the proper preparation. Exploring ways to include nontraditional organizations in emergency response operations and coordination will minimize the unwanted effects of self-deployment and allows those organizations to provide a more effective response. When local organizations are given the tools and structures they need to self-deploy more effectively, they can react to the local impacts of emergencies faster than larger organizations.

During crises, the situation can evolve rapidly, and new needs may arise unexpectedly. A centralized platform would allow organizations to share real-time updates on emerging needs and coordinate their response accordingly. Whether it is a sudden increase in demand for medical supplies or the need for additional volunteers in a particular area, having access to up-to-date information enables organizations to adapt quickly and effectively to changing circumstances.

By centralizing information on available resources, such as medical supplies, equipment, and personnel, the platform facilitates better resource management. Organizations can identify surplus resources in one area and redistribute them to where they are most needed. This optimization of resources maximizes the impact of emergency response efforts and ensures that scarce resources are allocated efficiently.



This platform would serve as a common space for collaboration and communication among emergency management stakeholders. It promotes transparency and information sharing, fostering a collaborative environment where organizations can work together seamlessly to address challenges and respond to crises effectively. This enhanced collaboration strengthens the overall resilience of the community and improves its ability to withstand and recover from emergencies.


### **RECOMMENDATION 3: EXPAND ON ORGANIZATION IDENTIFICATION AND MAPPING**

This recommendation advocates for the expansion of organization identification and mapping efforts, as it can be a valuable source for key stakeholders such as EMV and Red Cross. By enhancing the accessibility of visualizations and mapping data, this initiative aimed to empower local outreach volunteers and emergency response workers with the necessary insights to increase community resilience and streamline emergency response efforts. Through integration platforms like the Emergency Management Common Operational Picture (EM-COP), these resources that have the potential to update how stakeholders navigate and leverage organizational landscapes during crisis, ultimately fostering more efficient and effective emergency management practices.

While these two suggestions were determined to be out of scope of this project, future work should be conducted to further integrate this data and make it available to end users. Potential uses include creating inter-community links by making emergency planning groups aware of potentially unused resources, allowing response commanders to fill gaps in coverage, and increasing awareness of the large volunteer workforce that has gone unacknowledged in planning.

One key suggestion involves providing local outreach volunteers from organizations like the Red Cross with access to data on the various organizations operating within their communities. By empowering these volunteers with knowledge about local resources and capabilities, they can better coordinate with and support grassroots initiatives during emergency response efforts. This not only enhances the effectiveness of community-based interventions but also fosters stronger connections between formal and informal networks within the emergency management ecosystem.






Furthermore, future efforts should explore additional uses for this data, such as creating inter-community links and filling gaps in coverage within emergency planning groups. By identifying and sharing information about potentially unused resources across different regions, emergency planners can optimize resource allocation and enhance preparedness efforts. Additionally, increasing awareness of the significant volunteer workforce that often goes unacknowledged in planning can lead to a greater appreciation for the contributions of these individuals and organizations, strengthening the resilience of communities in the face of emergencies.

While these two suggestions were determined to be out of scope of this project, future work should be conducted to further integrate this data and make it available to end users. Potential uses include creating inter-community links by making emergency planning groups aware of potentially unused resources, allowing response commanders to fill gaps in coverage, and increasing awareness of the large volunteer workforce that has gone unacknowledged in planning.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 4: BUILD RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN ORGANIZATIONS BEFORE ORGANIZATIONS**

In addition to these recommendations, we stress the importance of proactive relationship-building with various organizations before emergencies. Hosting workshops, monthly meetings, and training sessions provides opportunities for emergency management stakeholders to interact and build relationships with one another. These interactions foster trust, rapport, and mutual understanding among organizations, laying the foundation for effective collaboration during crises. Establishing strong interpersonal connections enhances communication channels and promotes a sense of camaraderie and shared responsibility in the face of emergencies.

Through regular interactions and discussions, organizations gain insights into each other's roles, capabilities, and areas of expertise. They learn about the specific resources and services that each organization can provide during emergencies, as well as their respective strengths and limitations. This understanding is critical for effective coordination and resource allocation, as it enables organizations to leverage each other's



strengths and compensate for any gaps in capabilities.


Proactive relationship-building creates a culture of consultation and collaboration among emergency management stakeholders. Organizations feel more comfortable reaching out to one another for advice, support, or assistance, knowing that they have established positive relationships based on mutual respect and trust. This open exchange of ideas and information enhances problem-solving capabilities and enables more innovative and efficient approaches to emergency response and recovery.

Workshops, meetings, and training sessions serve as platforms for sharing information, experiences, and best practices in emergency management. Organizations can learn from each other's successes and failures, gaining valuable insights into what works well and can be improved. This knowledge-sharing process promotes continuous learning and improvement within the emergency management community, leading to more effective and resilient response efforts.

By investing time and effort in proactive relationship-building activities, emergency management stakeholders increase their overall preparedness and readiness to respond to emergencies. They develop a network of contacts and resources that they can rely on when emergency strikes, facilitating a coordinated and efficient response. Strong relationships built before emergencies serve as a solid foundation for effective collaboration during crises, enabling organizations to mobilize quickly and work together seamlessly to address emerging challenges.

#### **RECOMMENDATION 5: IMPROVE RECOGNITION EFFORTS OF NONTRADITIONAL ORGANIZATIONS**

Lastly, we highlight the often-overlooked contributions of nontraditional organizations in providing relief and support during and after emergencies. While they may operate on a nontraditional scale, these organizations possess localized knowledge, flexibility, and agility that can significantly bolster overall response efforts. Recognizing and acknowledging the invaluable role of these nontraditional entities allows the broader emergency management community to leverage their expertise and resources, enhancing the resilience of communities in times of crisis.




Highlighting the often-overlooked contributions of nontraditional organizations in emergency relief and support is crucial for maximizing the effectiveness of emergency response efforts. Here is a more detailed exploration of why these contributions are significant and how they can be leveraged to enhance community resilience.

Nontraditional organizations often have deep-rooted connections within the communities they serve, which provides them with invaluable localized knowledge. They understand the unique needs, challenges, and vulnerabilities of their communities in ways that traditional, more centralized organizations may not. This localized knowledge enables nontraditional organizations to tailor their response efforts to meet the specific needs of the community, leading to more targeted and effective assistance during emergencies.

Nontraditional organizations are typically more agile and flexible in their operations compared to traditional bureaucracies. They can adapt quickly to changing circumstances and mobilize resources rapidly in response to emergencies. This agility allows nontraditional organizations to fill gaps in the response effort that traditional organizations may struggle to address promptly. Their ability to pivot and innovate in the face of challenges enhances the overall resilience of communities by ensuring that needs are met promptly and efficiently.

Nontraditional organizations often have strong ties to the communities they serve, built on trust and shared experiences. This community engagement enables them to mobilize volunteers, resources, and support more effectively during emergencies. Communities are more likely to trust and collaborate with local organizations they know and have a relationship with, leading to greater cooperation and coordination in the response and recovery process.

While traditional organizations play a vital role in emergency response and recovery, they may not always have the capacity or resources to address every need at the local level. Nontraditional organizations can complement the efforts of traditional entities by providing targeted support in specific geographic areas or addressing niche needs that may




otherwise be overlooked. Recognizing and leveraging the strengths of nontraditional organizations allows for a more inclusive approach to emergency management.

By recognizing and acknowledging the contributions of nontraditional organizations, the broader emergency management community can tap into a wealth of localized expertise and resources. This collaboration enhances the resilience of communities by ensuring that response efforts are comprehensive, adaptable, and reflective of the diverse needs of the population. By working together with nontraditional organizations, traditional entities can build stronger, more resilient communities capable of weathering future emergencies and emergencies.

Post-implementation, continuous monitoring and evaluation mechanisms could be used to assess the plan's ongoing effectiveness. Periodic reviews, feedback sessions, and adjustments could be incorporated into the strategy to facilitate a dynamic and adaptive approach to coordination improvement.

In summary, recognizing the contributions of nontraditional organizations in emergency relief and support is essential for maximizing the effectiveness of emergency response efforts. Leveraging their localized knowledge, flexibility, and community engagement can enhance the overall resilience of communities and ensure that response efforts are tailored to meet the specific needs of those affected by emergencies. By embracing a collaborative approach that values the contributions of all stakeholders, the emergency management community can build stronger, more resilient communities capable of withstanding and recovering from crises.

# LIMITATIONS




The response rate of approximately 6% among the nontraditional organizations surveyed presents a notable challenge in interpreting the findings. This low level of participation raises concerns about the representativeness of the sample and the potential for sampling bias to influence the results. It is essential to recognize that the organizations that chose to respond may not fully reflect the diversity of perspectives and practices within the broader population of nontraditional organizations involved in emergency management activities in Victoria.

In addition to the already challenging task of collecting data from nontraditional organizations involved in emergency management, the project faced significant time limitations. A two-week school break coinciding with the survey period resulted in a substantial portion of potential respondents being out of the office. Moreover, the entire project spanned only seven weeks, with the survey itself available for a mere two weeks. This timeframe undoubtedly contributed to the low response rate, limiting the opportunity for organizations to participate and share their insights adequately.

Another critical aspect influencing the survey results is the potential for bias in data collection, particularly in exploratory conversations with both traditional and nontraditional organizations. Given that these entities collaborate with EMV and Red Cross, there is a possibility of inherent bias in the perspectives shared. Organizations may be inclined to align their responses with the priorities or agendas of the overseeing agency, consciously or unconsciously shaping the data collected. Additionally, the nature of interactions with government entities may inadvertently influence the perceptions and experiences conveyed by respondents, further complicating the interpretation of survey findings. As such, it is essential to assess the extent of any biases present and consider how they may impact the validity and reliability of the survey results.

The implications of this low response rate extend beyond the immediate analysis, as they call into question the ability of the findings and of any conclusions drawn to be generalized. Without more representation of the nontraditional organizations engaged in emergency management, there is a risk of overlooking important nuances and variations in practices and experiences. As such, any interpretations of the




data must be approached with caution, and efforts should be made to contextualize the findings within the broader landscape of emergency management in Victoria.

Despite these limitations, the data from the survey still offers valuable perspectives on the proactive engagement and contributions of nontraditional organizations to emergency management efforts. By carefully examining the responses provided and considering them in conjunction with existing knowledge and best practices, stakeholders can identify potential areas for improvement and develop targeted strategies to enhance collaboration, coordination, and effectiveness within the emergency management sector. Additionally, the survey response rate's limitations underscore the need for more research and outreach efforts to ensure a more holistic understanding of the roles and experiences of nontraditional organizations in emergency management.

# CONCLUSIONS






Volunteer organizations, both traditional and nontraditional, are the lifeblood of communities worldwide, offering invaluable contributions that bolster the effectiveness of various endeavors, particularly in emergency management and emergency response. At the heart of these organizations lies a spirit of altruism and a commitment to serving others, driving volunteers to dedicate their time, skills, and resources to the betterment of society. The value they bring transcends mere labor; it encompasses a diverse array of assets that enrich communities and enhance their resilience in the face of adversity.

Traditional volunteer organizations often possess extensive infrastructure, resources, and established networks, enabling them to mount swift and coordinated responses to crises. These organizations, such as the Australian Red Cross Victorian Emergency Services play pivotal roles in emergency response, providing essential services including medical aid, psychological support, shelter, and food. Their ability to deploy trained personnel and deploy resources efficiently contributes significantly to mitigating the impact of emergencies and aiding in recovery efforts.

Conversely, nontraditional volunteer organizations offer unique advantages that complement the efforts of their traditional counterparts. Their close-knit structures foster strong bonds within communities, enabling responses tailored to local needs. Nontraditional organizations often operate with greater flexibility and adaptability, swiftly pivoting to address emerging challenges and fill gaps in service delivery. Moreover, their intimate knowledge of community dynamics enables them to engage directly with residents, building trust and facilitating grassroots initiatives that promote resilience and self-reliance. In times of crisis, these organizations serve as vital sources of information dissemination, resource distribution, and social support, amplifying the overall effectiveness of emergency response efforts.

The value of volunteer organizations extends beyond their immediate contributions to emergency response; it lies in their capacity to cultivate a culture of civic engagement and solidarity. By empowering individuals to actively participate in community affairs, volunteerism fosters social




cohesion and strengthens the fabric of society. Volunteers serve as ambassadors of goodwill, inspiring others to join their ranks and perpetuate a cycle of altruism and service. Furthermore, volunteer organizations serve as catalysts for innovation and collaboration, fostering partnerships between diverse stakeholders and driving collective action towards shared goals.

Moreover, volunteer organizations serve as bridges that connect individuals from diverse backgrounds, fostering understanding, empathy, and mutual respect. By bringing together volunteers with a shared commitment to service, these organizations create opportunities for meaningful interaction and collaboration across social, cultural, and demographic divides.

Through joint endeavors aimed at addressing community needs, volunteers forge bonds of friendship and camaraderie, transcending differences and building a sense of belonging. These connections not only strengthen the community but also imbue volunteerism with deeper meaning and purpose, reinforcing the notion that we are all interconnected and responsible for each other's well-being. In this way, volunteer organizations not only provide value through their tangible contributions but also serve as catalysts for building lasting connections that enrich lives and foster a sense of unity within communities.

Furthermore, volunteer organizations serve as advocates for the recognition and appreciation of their value and effectiveness in community development and emergency response. They play a crucial role in promoting the importance of volunteerism and its positive impact on society, advocating for policies and resources that support their mission. Additionally, these organizations contribute to the accumulation of social capital within communities, which encompasses the networks, norms, and trust that facilitate cooperation and collective action.

Measuring social capital provides insight into the strength and resilience of communities, offering a quantitative and qualitative assessment of the connections forged through volunteerism and their tangible outcomes. By evaluating indicators such as levels of trust, civic engagement, and social



cohesion, stakeholders can gauge the effectiveness of volunteer organizations in building social capital and fostering community resilience. This holistic assessment approach highlights the value of volunteerism and informs strategies for enhancing its impact and sustainability in the face of evolving challenges.

The value of volunteer organizations lies not only in their tangible outputs but also in their intangible contributions to community resilience and well-being. By harnessing the collective power of individuals united by a common purpose, these organizations forge bonds of solidarity that transcend boundaries and adversities. Their continued support and commitment are indispensable in navigating the complex challenges of the modern world, ensuring that communities remain steadfast in the face of uncertainty and emerge stronger from adversity.

By understanding the current opportunities in communication and consultation, this project sought to devise a plan that can help enhance collaboration efforts among various volunteer agencies. This plan, when implemented, could not only strengthen the emergency management sector in Victoria but also serve as a model for future emergency response, making a significant difference in mitigating the impact of emergencies and aiding the affected communities in their journey towards recovery.

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# APPENDICES

## APPENDIX A: DEFINITION REFERENCE TABLE

Word or Acronym	Definition
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
Collaboration	People and organizations working together before, during, and after and emergency
Communication	Sharing thoughts, ideas, and information among people and organizations before, during, and after and emergency
Consultation	Discussions between organizations before emergencies
Coordination	Discussions between organizations during an emergency
EM	Emergency Management
EMV	Emergency Management Victoria
Grassroot	Community based nontraditional organizations
MEMP	Municipal Emergency Management Plan



**APPENDIX A: DEFINITION REFERENCE TABLE CONTINUED**

Word or Acronym	Definition
MEMPs	Municipal Emergency Management Plans
NHRA	Natural Hazards Research Australia
Nontraditional Organizations	Organizations not listed in the SEMP, as well as smaller scale organizations that may not be typically thought of as contributing to emergency management but are still vital to community resilience and support
REMPs	Regional Emergency Management Plans
Review	Emergency Management Victoria’s larger project aimed to assess interorganizational communication and consultation practices within the emergency management sector.
SEMP	State Emergency Management Plan

**APPENDIX A: DEFINITION REFERENCE TABLE CONTINUED**

<b>Word or Acronym</b>	<b>Definition</b>
Traditional Organizations	Organizations listed in the SEMP, as well as large-scale organizations with a focus on community resilience in the Victorian emergency management sector
VCOSS	Victorian Council of Social Services



## **APPENDIX B: SAMPLE EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION LEADERS**

- What is your role in [insert organization] and what are your responsibilities?
- Who is involved with emergency events in your organization?
- What are the communication channels employed in your organization?
- What organizations do you typically collaborate or communicate with in relation to your work in emergency events?
- How does your organization coordinate emergency responses with other organizations?
- What challenges have you personally experienced when coordinating emergency volunteer responses?
- Can you describe a specific incident when coordination challenges were particularly evident? What were the main issues encountered?
- From your perspective, which factors contribute to successful coordination in emergency response situations?

## **APPENDIX C: SAMPLE EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH NON-TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION LEADERS**

- What services does your organisation provide and how many volunteers are within your organisation?
- During the mobilization process of an emergency response, how is the response coordinated throughout the organisation? What methods of communication are employed?
- How do you assess and address the training needs of your volunteers to ensure they are adequately prepared for emergency response situations?
- What mechanisms are in place for volunteers to provide feedback on their experiences during and/or after an emergency response, and how is this feedback utilized to improve future operations?
- Do you have any relationships with other organisations within your community? If so, how do you build and maintain these relationships?
- How do you collaborate with government agencies and authorities in emergency preparedness and response efforts?
- In what ways do you engage with marginalized or vulnerable communities within your area of operation to ensure their specific needs are addressed during emergencies?
- What is your relationship with the Australian Red Cross and Emergency Management Victoria? What methods of coordination and communication are working, and what areas could use improvement?
- Do you feel like you are represented and recognized by larger organisations, such as the Australian Red Cross and Emergency Management Victoria?
- Would you be willing to work directly with the Australian Red Cross and Emergency Management Victoria? If so, what resources and support would you desire?
- Are there any specific challenges or barriers you face in collaborating with larger organizations like the ARC and EMV, and how do you propose overcoming them?
- Can you give an example of when coordination with other agencies during an emergency response encountered issues. What were these issues and how did they affect the response? What steps were taken improve these issues to prevent them from happening in the future?

## **APPENDIX C: SAMPLE EXPLORATORY INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH NON-TRADITIONAL ORGANIZATION LEADERS CONTINUED**

- Do you have any experience working with the Australian Red Cross or Emergency Management Victoria? What was the experience like, and do you have any feedback?
- Can you share a success story where effective coordination and communication with other agencies during an emergency response led to positive outcomes? What were the key factors contributing to this success?
- What is your opinion of a centralised volunteer database? The intention would be for communities and volunteer organisations to put out a need and other organisations can sign up to fill this need.
- What is your opinion of recurring meetings with other smaller organisations in your community to build relationships before emergencies?
- What are your thoughts on creating centralised trainings across the state? The intention is to ensure that all volunteers throughout different organisations have the same training to increase coordination during emergency response.
- What role do you see community education and awareness playing in improving overall emergency preparedness and response capabilities? How can volunteer organizations contribute to this effort?

## APPENDIX D: SAMPLE SURVEY QUESTIONS

- What organization are you part of?
- What is your role in this organization?
- What is your organization's primary purpose?
- Does your organization undertake any activities to support Victorian community members or Emergency Services personnel before, during, or after an emergency event?
- What types of activities does your organization undertake in relation to emergency events?
- What other activities does your organization undertake in relation to emergency events?
- When do you perform these activities in relation to an emergency event?
- How many active volunteers or members belong to your organization?
- What types of volunteer roles are present in your organization?
- What other types of volunteer roles are present in your organization?
- What is the approximate service area of your organization?
- What towns or councils does your organization serve?
- Which of the following best describes the flow of information within your organization?
- Which of the following methods does your organization use to communicate with volunteers or members?
- What other methods of communication does your organization use with volunteers or members?
- What social media platforms does your organization use to communicate with volunteers or members?
- What text messaging platforms does your organization use to communicate with volunteers or members?
- Do you capture any metrics for the communication methods selected? If yes, please provide more detail.
- Are certain communication methods more effective at reaching volunteers or members within your organization?

## **APPENDIX E: SAMPLE FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION PROMPTS**

- How do you communicate with other volunteers and volunteer coordinators in your organization?
- What suggestions do you have to improve coordination between your organization and others?
- What do you think are the most effective communication strategies during emergency response?
- What are your thoughts on coordinating with other organizations in the emergency management sector?
- Where are the current communication gaps you experience in the emergency management sector of Victoria?
- What resources could help bridge these communication gaps?
- What do you want to see changed regarding the communication methods currently employed in the emergency management sector of Victoria?
- Do you feel that there are any specific barriers present that prevent you from being as connected to the state as you could be?
- How do you think the needs of volunteers should be represented at the state level (in the context of emergency management)?
- How does communication work currently before, during, and after an emergency? What could improve the current practice?

## **APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT**

Informed Consent Agreement for Participation in a Research Study  
Investigators: Evan Dugas, A. Granger, Cara Salter, Sarah Sponenberg  
Contact Information: vicesstateoperations@redcross.org.au  
Title of Research Study: Increasing Volunteer Agency Coordination in the  
Emergency Management Sector of Victoria, Australia  
Sponsor: Australian Red Cross

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Before you agree, however, you must be fully informed about the purpose of the study, the procedures to be followed, and any benefits, risks or discomfort that you may experience as a result of your participation. This form presents information about the study so that you may make a fully informed decision regarding your participation. Please do not include any personal or identifying information in your responses.

**Purpose of the study:** This study is being performed to identify opportunities in communication and coordination between volunteer agencies within the emergency management sector in Victoria.

**Procedures to be followed:** This study consists of surveys, interviews, and focus groups conducted with volunteers and volunteer coordinators within the state of Victoria. This particular method employs a survey.

**Risks to study participants:** There are no anticipated risks to study participants.

**Benefits to research participants and others:** This study is expected to generate improved communication and coordination practices for volunteer management, which may improve volunteer conditions and enjoyment.

**Record keeping and confidentiality:** Records of your participation in this study will be held confidential. The study investigators, the sponsor or its designee and, under certain circumstances, the Worcester Polytechnic Institute Institutional Review Board (WPI IRB) will be able to inspect and have access to confidential data. Any publication or presentation of the data will not identify you.



## **APPENDIX F: INFORMED CONSENT AGREEMENT CONTINUED**

Confidentiality Disclaimer: Details about this survey will be shared with Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) as well as any data obtained from this survey. The de-identified data will be published on the Engage Victoria Platform along with other previous survey results.

Compensation or treatment in the event of injury: This research involves minimal risk of injury or harm. You do not give up any of your legal rights by signing this statement.

For more information about this research or about the rights of research participants, or in case of research-related injury, contact: The study investigators at the email address above. Participants may also contact the WPI Institutional Review Board at +1 (508) 831-6699, or [irb@wpi.edu](mailto:irb@wpi.edu). Participants may contact the Human Protection Administrator, Gabriel Johnson, at +1 (508) 831-4989, or [gjohnson@wpi.edu](mailto:gjohnson@wpi.edu).

Your participation in this research is voluntary. If you do not wish to participate in this survey, this will not result in any penalty to you, your organisation or any loss of benefits to which you may otherwise be entitled. You may decide to stop participating in the research at any time without penalty or loss of other benefits. The project investigators retain the right to cancel or postpone the experimental procedures at any time they see fit.

By signing this document, you acknowledge that you have been informed about and consent to be a participant in the study described above. Please make sure that your questions are answered to your satisfaction before continuing. You are entitled to retain a copy of this consent agreement.