

# Local Emergency Management Committee Exercising Toolkit – Spontaneous Volunteers

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## Acknowledgement of Country

The Premier's Department acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of the lands where we work and live. We celebrate the diversity of Aboriginal peoples and their ongoing cultures and connections to the lands and waters of NSW.

We pay our respects to Elders past, present and emerging and acknowledge the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that contributed to the development of this document.

### Local Emergency Management Committee Exercising Toolkit – Spontaneous Volunteers

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#### Acknowledgements

This Toolkit is primarily based on the Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook 3: *Managing Exercises* (2012), and *Managing Exercises: Recovery Exercising Toolkit* (2023) published by the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR). Users are encouraged to [download these resources](#) for additional information.

The NSW Government acknowledges the AIDR and members of local emergency management committees who contributed to this document.

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# 1 Introduction

The *Local Emergency Management Committee Exercise Toolkit – Spontaneous Volunteers* (the Toolkit) has been developed to complement the *Local Emergency Management Committee Planning Guideline – Spontaneous Volunteers Addendum*.

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## 1.1 Purpose

The purpose of this Toolkit is to support Local Emergency Management Committees' (LEMC) to validate their planning, and practise engaging with spontaneous volunteers.

The Toolkit recognises that different local government areas have different capacities and capabilities to manage exercises, and that each LEMC may incorporate spontaneous volunteering issues into its existing exercise program.

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## 1.2 Audience

The audience for this Toolkit is members of NSW Local Emergency Management Committees. It is designed for staff who may not have formal training in exercise management.

The Toolkit may be useful for other organisations, planners and managers who work with communities to design and deliver emergency management services and programs.

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## 1.3 Why exercises?

Exercises are an essential component of preparedness. They provide an opportunity for a dedicated focus on issues related to spontaneous volunteering, which are not commonly addressed in traditional exercise programs. Incorporating issues relevant to spontaneous volunteering will include response agencies and a broad range of recovery stakeholders as part of the LEMC's preparedness activities. Including spontaneous volunteering issues into local emergency management exercising programs supports a holistic approach to preparing for, responding to, and recovering from disasters.

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## 1.4 Using the Toolkit

The Toolkit recognises that emergency response and recovery are complex, with competing issues and demands faced by combat agencies, emergency operations centres (EOCs) and recovery committees. The wide range of stakeholders that have a role in response and recovery, and the central place of community in influencing and shaping recovery strategies, is an important theme in the Toolkit.

The Toolkit contains evidence-based guidance and resources, templates and slides that guide emergency planners to develop and facilitate exercises. The Toolkit can be used to support exercise management programs that include a spontaneous volunteering component whenever exercises are conducted.

The Toolkit is designed to walk through the exercise management process, based on the nationally recognised exercise management methodology in the Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience (AIDR) *Managing Exercises Handbook*. The appendices are designed

to be tailored to suit local circumstances. Not all tools may be necessary for the purposes of your exercise.

## 2 The exercise concept

The first step in running an exercise of any type is to be clear on why the exercise is needed and what it is trying to achieve – its purpose. These are presented in an exercise concept document for approval by the LEMC. An exercise concept template is in Appendix 1.

### 2.1 Identify the need

Spontaneous volunteering is likely to arise during and following an emergency, often at a time when the formal emergency management structures are stretched and have little capacity to engage emergent groups or individual offers of help.

A spontaneous volunteering exercise is an opportunity to **explore issues** raised by spontaneous volunteering, **validate plans**, **practise** working with volunteer groups, **engage** stakeholders and **strengthen relationships** and networks.

The exercise need will be based on where the LEMC is in incorporating spontaneous volunteering into its local emergency management or recovery plan, for example:



Figure 1 - emergency management planning cycle

**Preparing the plan:** Exploring issues of spontaneous volunteering during emergencies, reaching consensus on control and coordination arrangements, working out roles and responsibilities.

**Confirming the plan is feasible:** Validating the local emergency management plan's effectiveness in engaging spontaneous volunteers and confirming it is achievable. Identifying any gaps or improvements.

**Practise using the plan:** Developing capability to manage spontaneous volunteers in accordance with the local emergency management plan.

**Review:** Similar to confirming that the plan works, experienced LEMCs can run exercises to test procedures, processes and tools.

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## 2.2 Determine the aim and objectives

The **exercise aim** is a statement of intent based on the identified need. There should be only one aim, which leads to a series of objectives that will suggest the most appropriate style, size and complexity of the exercise. Spontaneous volunteering exercises will generally aim to explore issues of engagement and coordination in response, recovery or both. In some circumstances, the aim may be to validate a plan or practise an aspect of working with spontaneous volunteers.

**Exercise objectives** are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and task-based statements describing what individuals, groups or agencies will achieve during the exercise. While there is only ever one aim, an exercise may have many objectives.

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## 2.3 Confirm the scope

A spontaneous volunteering exercise may address response, recovery, or both. The scope should make this clear.

In-scope issues may include:

- Roles, tasks and expectations
- Control and coordination structures
- Registration, induction and supervision
- Supporting groups or individuals from out of the local area
- Managing donated goods
- Communication and messaging
- Recovery hubs and other supporting facilities or centres.

Out-of-scope issues might be:

- Strategic issues decided at state level.

The scope should also include the agencies and organisations that will be participating, based on the need, aim and objectives.

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# 3 Exercise design

The exercise style is based on the aim and objectives. The **discussion style** exercise is appropriate for most exercises exploring issues of spontaneous volunteering, validating plans, engaging with, or educating stakeholders. A **functional exercise** is useful where the need is to test, practise or demonstrate an activation or notification process.

Discussion exercises are built around telling a story – the scenario. Participants can explore issues in depth and provide verbal responses to situations. The exercise can cover different time periods, from when warnings are received, through response into recovery. Discussion exercises are useful for developing agreed approaches, assessing plan effectiveness, building relationships, and exploring novel ideas or approaches.

Discussion exercises often involve decision-makers brainstorming solutions to problems<sup>1</sup>.

Discussion exercises are an effective way to exercise spontaneous volunteering issues. They provide the opportunity to explore and build a conceptual understanding of issues, to test ideas and to build relationships.

This Toolkit provides templates for a discussion exercise and a functional activation exercise. The discussion exercise types are seminar and agency presentation<sup>2</sup>. The seminar type is normally used to refresh participants' awareness of policies, protocols and approaches; reinforce good practice and rehearse actions. It can be modified into a workshop, focussing on identifying and resolving spontaneous volunteering issues in the local context. The agency presentation is used when policy, plans and protocols are well-understood as a way of educating stakeholders and other participants on how spontaneous volunteers can contribute and how their contributions will be coordinated.

Seminar/workshop discussion exercises are best suited to delivery in-person. The agency presentation may be delivered in person or online.

The functional exercise is specifically aimed at testing, practising or demonstrating an agreed activation plan for existing community groups in real time.

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## 3.1 Exercise planning team

The exercise should be developed by an exercise planning team that includes at least one subject matter expert from the combat agency, someone familiar with the local community and community groups, and someone with a good understanding of community recovery.

It is helpful if at least one person on the planning team should have experience developing exercises, or as a trainer or facilitator.

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## 3.2 Participants

The spontaneous volunteering exercise is targeted at stakeholders that would normally be members of an LEMC and a recovery committee, plus participants from identified community organisations or volunteer groups.

The range of stakeholders to consider includes:

- Council staff with responsibility for recovery coordination as well as staff with lead responsibilities across infrastructure; economic; environment and waste; social and community wellbeing; communications and executive roles.
- Members of the local emergency management committee and regional or state functional area representatives
- The combat agency with responsibility for the hazard identified in the exercise scenario.
- Non-government/community organisations with a formal or demonstrated role in regional/local emergency management arrangements.

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<sup>1</sup> AIDR 2017, *Managing Exercises*, p9

<sup>2</sup> described in detail in *Managing Exercises*

- Peak business, industry and tourism groups e.g., Chamber of Commerce and Industry.
- Community leader representatives.

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### 3.3 The exercise day

The Toolkit suggests discussion exercises of up to half a day, with the functional exercise running for no more than two hours. The exercise day includes all the components below:

#### Briefing and introduction

- Exercise purpose
- Expectations and objectives
- Context (including outline of EM arrangements if required)

#### Scenario

- General idea (background)
- Special ideas (issues to consider)

#### Review

- Discoveries
- What went well
- What could be done differently

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### 3.4 The exercise scenario

The exercise scenario is central to the day's activity. It should be based on local context, risk factors and historical data of the LGA or region. The aim of the disaster scenario is to set the context and background for discussions that can progress from warning through to many months post-impact, depending on the need, aim and objectives.

Develop the scenario with the local combat agency. The template suggests severe storm, flood, bushfire or coastal pollution, but any plausible emergency impact can be used. The focus should be on a hazard relevant to the local area. It's useful to use a historical impact as the scenario basis. Use the technical and specialist advice of the combat agency as well your local emergency management plan and recovery plan to develop the impacts and consequences of the emergency in your scenario. The scenario should be realistic and complex enough to stretch thinking and test assumptions.

The scenario will consist of a background (or general idea) and a series of injects, challenges or problems (special ideas) that tell the unfolding story and stimulate discussion. Each inject should be discussed in the context of

- “what” (the inject)
- “so what” (what does the inject mean?)
- “now what” (what do we do about it?).

You can use a scenario that has been developed for another purpose and modify it by including special ideas that explore spontaneous volunteering issues. This has the advantage of reducing the time to prepare the exercise and introduces spontaneous volunteering as an important issue.



There are supporting tools in Appendices 1D, 4 and 5. While not prescriptive, they provide a guide to support scenario design and presentation.

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## 3.5 Planning the exercise day

The exercise needs to be carefully planned and managed, usually by a planning team. The planning team includes representatives from:

- the combat agency responsible for the hazard
- LEMC member agencies most likely to receive offers of assistance from spontaneous volunteers
- local council(s)
- identified stakeholder groups that will focus on the exercise, e.g., indigenous community group, chamber of commerce, specialist volunteer management organisation.

It's important that the planning team includes representatives of community groups that have agreed (or may be asked to agree) to work with the EOC/RCC.

The planning team develops and documents the exercise, including:

- exercise concept document
  - aim and objectives
- scenario development
  - general idea
  - special ideas
  - focus questions
- exercise logistics
  - date and time
  - location and parking
  - catering
  - invitation list and invitations
  - delivery staffing – facilitator, note-taker(s), greeters, ushers
  - equipment and other resources to deliver the exercise
  - specific participants needs (e.g., mobility considerations)
- detailed budget proposal
- exercise plan and instructions
- participant feedback.

The Appendices will help the planning team to design the exercise day.

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## 4 Exercise debrief, analysis and report

A debrief with the exercise planning team and facilitators should be held as soon as possible after the exercise to collect observations and thoughts. The exercise planning

team should convene when participant feedback is available to analyse the exercise and prepare a report that incorporates participant feedback, planning team debrief observations and any other feedback or reflections from the day.

The analysis should consider:

- Were the objectives achieved?
- Do current plans, policies and procedures support effective engagement with spontaneous volunteers?
- What areas require further planning?
- What strengths were identified?
- How might identified resource issues be resolved?
- What could be done differently?

The exercise report should provide actionable opportunities for improvement and recommendations. The *AIDR Managing Exercises Handbook* and *Lessons Management Handbook* include detailed guidance on developing an exercise report.

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## 5 Appendices – planning and facilitation resources

### Using the appendices

Each appendix is a step for building and delivering the exercise. They are provided as stand-alone documents that can be easily formatted.

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- 5.1 Appendix 1A – concept template for a discussion exercise
- 5.2 Appendix 1B – concept template for an activation exercise
- 5.3 Appendix 1C – project plan
- 5.4 Appendix 1D – scenario plan
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# Addendum to Local Emergency Planning Guidelines – Spontaneous Volunteers

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