



Emergency Management Volunteer Leadership Training Project



Surf Life Saving participants from across Australia attend VLP training. Left to Right: Kate Bell, Brian Wilcox, Ryan Rosenbaum, Jason Argent, and Shannon Job



Leadership Program 2014

This case study is an example of action which contributes to HFA Priority for Action 3

Abstract

Volunteers are at the front line of Australia's disaster preparedness, response and recovery activities. In 2009, the Australian Emergency Management Institute (AEMI), in partnership with the Australian Emergency Management Volunteers Forum (AEMVF), developed a training program to meet the leadership needs of volunteers.

Leadership at any level requires innovation, creativity, negotiation, improvisation and strategic vision. Today's volunteer leaders must negotiate a maze of relationships, networks and expectations to effectively lead in the volunteer environment. Volunteer leadership training for senior volunteers has, historically, focused on tactical and operational responses to emergency situations and more attention to prepare volunteers for leadership roles is a significant support to their volunteer roles.

In 2009, a project under the Australian National Emergency Management Projects Grants Program was undertaken to identify and deliver appropriate training to meet the leadership needs of volunteers. The project was conducted by the AEMI in partnership with the AEMVF.

A four-day Emergency Management Volunteer Leadership Training Program (VLP) was developed to focus on volunteer leadership skills in a multi-agency cross-jurisdictional environment. A pilot program with 25 volunteers from a range of emergency response and recovery organisations highlighted that a greater emphasis on learning in the work environment and setting goals for organisational change was required. Following the pilot program two courses were delivered by AEMI in 2009-10 and three in 2010-11.

In 2011 an off-campus module was tailored to build leadership skills for emergency management volunteers in rural and remote areas. Further training package enhancements were then developed after a train-the-trainer course. One of the great successes of the off-campus courses was that all volunteers accepted the challenge of delivering unfamiliar sessions such as 'emotional intelligence', 'dealing with conflict', and 'communicating in a crisis'. As a result, several went on to deliver this type of education within their own organisations as well as assisting in regular presentations at AEMI.

Between 2011 and 2014 a total of seventeen volunteer leadership courses were conducted across Australia, at Albury, Mt Gambier, Gold Coast, Perth, Darwin, Hobart and Mt Macedon, and used the educational products developed to promote key principles and practice of effective leadership within a volunteer structure. To date 20 trainers and around 390 volunteers have participated in the program. Volunteers have come from a range of organisations representing various bodies, such as fire agencies, State Emergency Services, Red Cross, Surf Live Saving Australia, St John and Anglicare.

The VLP course is still the only one of its kind offered in Australia and addresses an important gap in the leadership development needs of volunteers. Central to the training program is the support and ongoing guidance and mentoring of the facilitators who have been trained in the delivery of the program.

Related resources:

Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum at: www.aemvf.org.au

Cherry, N 2014, The frontline: a new focus for learning about leadership. *Australian Journal of Emergency Management*. At: <https://ajem.infoservices.com.au/items/AJEM-29-02-08>

Volunteer Leadership Training Factsheet at: www.em.gov.au/Education/Courses/Professionaldevelopmentcourses/Documents/Volunteer%20Leadership%20Program%20Flyer%20NOV%202011.PDF