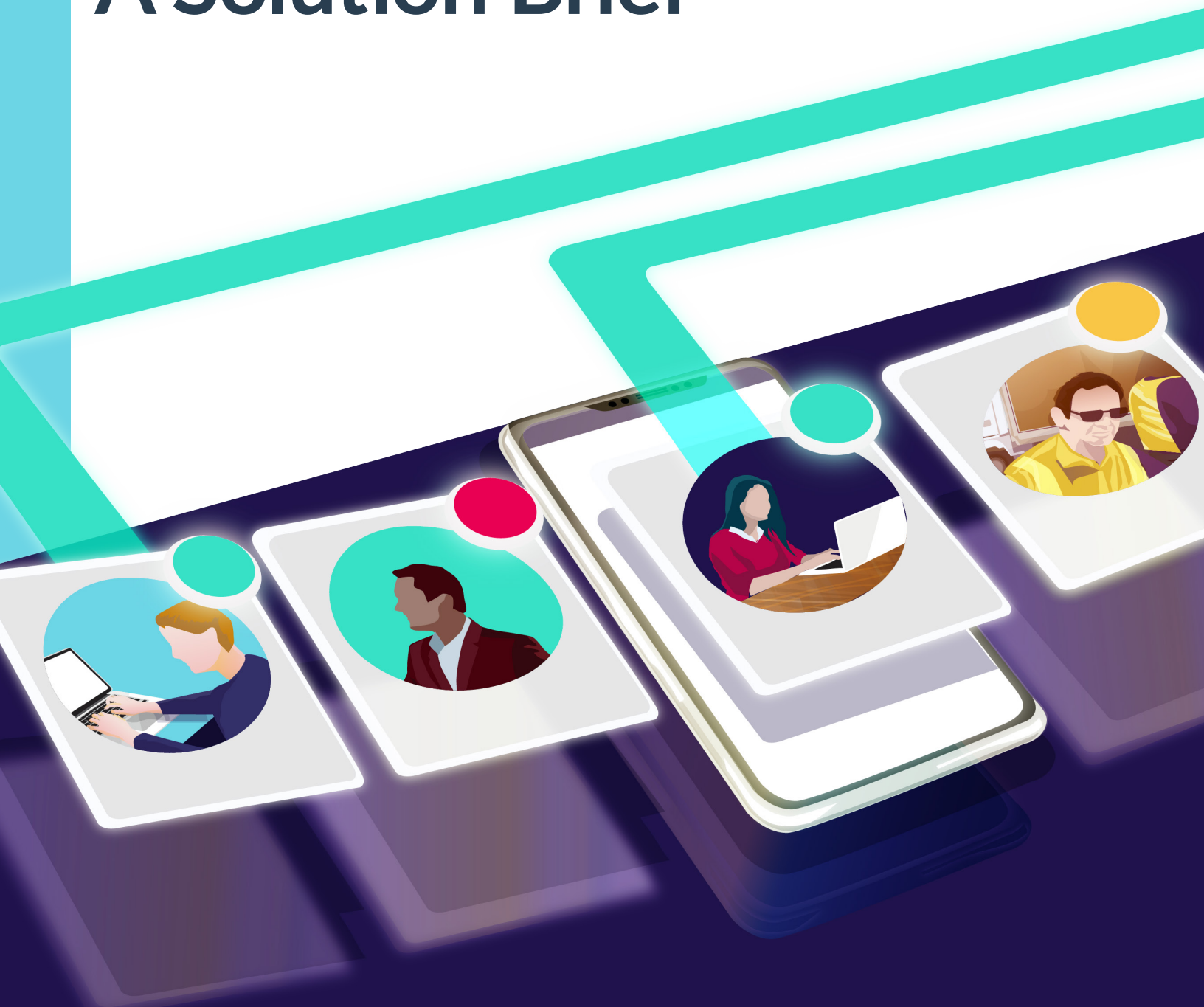


Managing Disaster Volunteer Reliability: A Solution Brief



The volunteer reliability challenge explained



For emergency response agencies reliant on volunteers, ensuring the reliable participation of those volunteers is critical to delivering services effectively. Unfortunately, it's not that easy, as many incident managers will attest.

It's indisputable that volunteers, especially informal, short-term volunteers (see table below), bring innovation, skills, and enthusiasm, but they also introduce a number of operational risks to the response effort, especially as their excitement wanes throughout the emergency management lifecycle.ⁱ

For one, these short-term volunteers tend to lack pre-established relationships with emergency managers, which makes it difficult for dispatchers to verify the trainings and credentials of their volunteers. As a result, incident managers are unable to match the skills of their volunteers to the appropriate service area; the mission suffers in consequence.

More alarming still, volunteer reliability itself is a major concern, as scholars note.ⁱⁱ We read numerous anecdotes from managers lamenting the failure of volunteers to complete explicitly agreed-upon assignments. Often, volunteers just don't show up.

Volunteer unreliability could be a function of volunteers having competing priorities. After all, volunteers have fulltime jobs (or other pressing commitments). They, therefore, tend to lend their services during rest and recovery periods. In the event of a protracted emergency, for instance, volunteer scheduling conflicts can crop up, and volunteers become unavailable for assignments.

Meanwhile, agencies have little way of gauging whether volunteers will be available and, therefore, can't plan accordingly. Irrespective of the source of the problem, the lack of volunteer dependability robs emergency agencies time, money, and manpower, all which jeopardize the response efforts.ⁱⁱⁱ What's to be done?

Types of volunteers in emergencies and their functions

Anticipated individual volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Fulfil general expectations of society on an individual basis, i.e. a doctor coming to the aid of victims
(Formal or affiliated) Anticipated organization volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Regularly associate with an organization, such as a volunteer fire brigade or the Red Cross Participation is expected and planned for
Spontaneous individual volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Provide assistance as individuals, usually in the early stages of a disaster
(Informal or unaffiliated) Spontaneous organization volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Place themselves at the service of an organization only after an emergency or disaster has occurred ■ May choose to help regular disaster organizations

Source: Whittaker, McLennan, Handmer, International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction

How robust resource management technology can help organizations manage volunteer reliability better

In and of itself, resource management technology can't make your volunteer workforce more reliable. But it can certainly help you sort out and pick the most reliable volunteers more efficiently. How exactly?

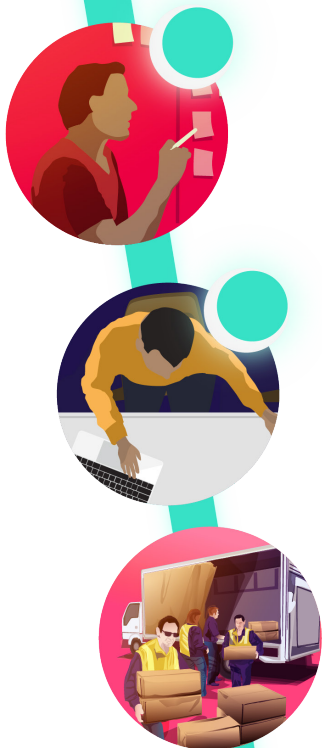
The resource assignments feature in Noggin OCA, our all-hazards incident management platform, gives emergency managers the ability to easily find and rank the best, most capable candidates, communicate with and confirm those candidates, as well as create and manage rosters. This functionality is part of a more comprehensive solution to manage the selection, assignment, dispatch, and rostering of people and assets.

What's more, Noggin OCA adds much-needed intelligence to the selection and dispatch of candidates, by letting managers factor in criteria for the role, like reliability, capability, proximity, and availability. Managers can even choose whether a given criterion is essential or optional to candidate evaluation and selection. The system then automatically ranks candidates based on those weightings.

For managers, the ranking system itself is readily understandable. When short-listing candidates for a role, your match will be represented with a clear 5-star rating, a highly intuitive way to rank your candidates from best to worst.

Of course, technology won't do everything to solve your volunteer reliability issues, but it can go a long way toward making the selection of dependable candidates easier and more efficient, all of which will improve the performance of your responders in the field. 🗨️





Citations

ⁱ Joshua Whittaker, Blythe McLennan, John Handmer, *International Journal of Disaster Risk Reduction: A review of informal volunteerism in emergencies and disasters: Definition, opportunities and challenges*. Available at <https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2212420915300388>.

ⁱⁱ Tim Vantilborgh and Stijn Van Puyvelde, *International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations: Volunteer Reliability in Nonprofit Organizations: A Theoretical Model*. Available at <https://www.deepdyve.com/lp/springer-journal/volunteer-reliability-in-nonprofit-organizations-a-theoretical-model-dOdjfNYOby?key=springer>

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

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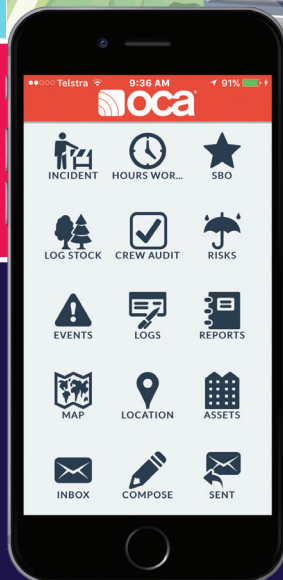
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including: incident management, investigations and resolutions, injury and claims management, contractor management, risk management, compliance management, protective security, and more.

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