



GIVIT Submission to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee re lessons learned for response to and recovery effort following the 2019-2020 Australian bushfire season

Summary

In the absence of a national coordinated approach to the management of physical donations following the 2019-2020 Australian bushfires, donated goods quickly became a burden to front line services in affected communities - receiving large quantities of unsolicited, unwanted and often poor quality donations that required valuable resources to sort, store and ultimately dispose of.

Without a central platform to list immediate need, material donations were not getting through to the people who desperately needed them in a timely manner. There was growing cynicism among corporate and individual donors as to how their donations were being distributed.

Many Australians also wanted to offer their time or service to help communities recover but for the most part did not know what was needed, where. Some communities received too many 'hands' some received none.

GIVIT's home-grown, online donation management platform is a simple, proven solution to manage the influx of donations in times of disaster and emergency and ensure people in need get what they need when they need it most. The platform is a one stop shop to capture all offers of goods, services and volunteering online and make them available to charities, councils and community groups in affected areas if and when needed – changing donor behaviour to encourage them to pledge now and give later.

GIVIT recommends the Federal Government incorporate the GIVIT donation platform as part of its national, best practice in preparation of for future bushfire events.

Terms of reference to be addressed in GIVIT's submission

Lessons to be learned in relation to the preparation and planning for, response to and recovery efforts following the 2019-20 Australian bushfire season, with particular reference to:

- f) existing structures, measures and policies implemented by the Federal Government, charities and others to assist communities to recover from the 2019-20 bushfires, including the performance of the National Bushfire Recovery Agency;



Background

During the 2019-2020 bushfires, councils, charity organisations and response and recovery agencies in fire affected areas across Australia were severely stretched as a result of donations of goods arriving without warning and without resources to sort, store, handle and distribute. This situation was exacerbated by the fact that donated goods were often inappropriate, poor quality and did not meet the specific needs of the affected community. The result was that critical resources were required to manage large quantities of donated goods that could not be used.

Communities needing donated goods, services and volunteer resources did not have a single point to request the support they needed for both short term and long term recovery assistance.

Without an effective, coordinated approach, the management of donation offers following major disaster events has and will continue to be a heavy burden to many Australians communities and the government.

Australians are generous in nature and other examples of the influx of donations following disaster events include:

- *"I don't want to appear harsh, but we don't need any more clothes, we don't need any more food...we don't have the warehouse capacity, the people or the time to sort through it."*
Victorian Premier Daniel Andrews, 5 January 2020
- *"Our South Coast team has been overwhelmed by generous donations from the community, however we have now reached capacity for donated foods and goods."*
NSW Rural Fire Service, 5 January, 2020
- The Victorian bushfires in 2009 resulted in more than 40,000 pallets of goods from across Australia and took up more than 50,000 square metres of storage space – twice the size of the Melbourne Cricket Ground. The cost of storage, staff and transport amounted to more than \$8 million.
- In the 2010-11 Queensland floods, eight shipping containers of unsolicited goods arrived at Theodore where it was stored at the showgrounds until it could be disposed of.
- The Bundaberg floods from Cyclone Oswald (2013) resulted in donated goods occupying a 2,400 square meter building, requiring 60 volunteers to sort through the donations.



“During the devastating 2011 Queensland Floods, Lockyer Valley Regional Council was inundated with unwanted and unsolicited donations from individuals and corporates. The outpour of public generosity was overwhelming. The required coordination of these donations forced valuable resources to be utilised at crucial times and stretched the capacity of our local charities and community groups.

As a result of the sheer volumes of donations, Council was forced to build a purpose-built storage facility to hold quality donations and resort to the dumping of large quantities of poor-quality items. Five years on, Council is still managing these donations and now utilising GIVIT’s online platform to give to local charities and services requiring them.”

Dave Mazzaferri, former Lockyer Valley Regional Council Disaster Coordinator

What is GIVIT?

GIVIT’s online donation management platform is a simple, proven solution to donation management in times of disaster and emergency. It is a one stop shop to manage all offers of goods, services and volunteer time in a safe, coordinated way.

The GIVIT platform is available, free of charge, to all registered charity and community organisations; from large national organisations through to local neighbourhood and community centres and schools. Working with these organisations, the GIVIT service results in more resilient communities who can draw on the generosity of donors to provide for their immediate essential needs, not only during, but also well beyond the duration of the bushfire events.

GIVIT’s Disaster and Emergency Recovery Service

The GIVIT system provides a world leading, cost effective online solution that supports existing services and frameworks, thereby helping to significantly reduce the headache and resource drain for local authorities when it comes to the management of donated goods. GIVIT provides a powerful mechanism to ensure what is needed is getting to those who need it, when they need it.



The table below illustrates how GIVIT's approach aligns with the South Australian Attorney-General's Department Report, *National Guidelines for Managing Donated Goods*, produced in 2011.¹

How GIVIT aligns with National Guidelines	
Principle	How GIVIT addresses those principles
Firstly understand the needs	GIVIT links with all local councils, front line services, charities, schools, churches and community groups to identify and list the needs of the affected communities on its website.
Explain money is the preferred option	GIVIT's consistent message is for people not to send unsolicited donations and to consider making a monetary donation. 100% of all funds received during an emergency event are used to purchase essential items, from local providers wherever possible.
Communicate clearly	GIVIT provides clear, consistent messaging to the public, media and partners go to givit.org.au to pledge donations and to see what is actually required.
A clear and transparent communication process should be used to inform workers (government and non-government), the community and the media about how best to assist the people and communities affected by disaster	GIVIT uses all social media and media avenues to inform the wider community to go to givit.org.au to see what is actually required and to pledge items online. GIVIT encourages all agencies to utilize the same messaging.
Establish an effective donations management system	GIVIT is an effective online donation management system that captures the generosity of everyday Australians, removing the need to warehouse and manage unsolicited donations.
Donation of material goods should be managed through an equitable, efficient and coordinated system	GIVIT works with all community service providers to ensure goods are distributed fairly and to those truly in need.
Seek and consider recipients' feedback	GIVIT conducts routine evaluation and review processes after every emergency event to ensure the service meets the needs of all its stakeholders.
Plan ahead	It is essential that GIVIT builds relationships with key stakeholders prior to emergency events. GIVIT aims to be embedded in Local, District and State Emergency Management Plans.

¹ Government of South Australia (2011), *National Guidelines for Managing Donated Goods*



What problems can GIVIT solve for the Federal Government?

"GIVIT is the most innovative home-grown solution to donation management and disaster recovery we have seen in a generation".

Jim McGowan AM (ex-Director General of the Department of Community Safety Queensland)

1. Unsolicited donations become a burden to services on the ground wasting valuable resources

The unique online donation management platform developed by GIVIT removes the headache associated with donations during and after a disaster or emergency event. Well-meaning, unsolicited donations can often cause more problems than they resolve. Through the use of GIVIT's "virtual warehouse" donations are pledged online, freeing up the time and resources for councils and other frontline organisations to focus on delivering their critical services.

GIVIT also communicates to the wider public that the most effective and safest way of supporting affected individuals and communities is by NOT taking donations of goods into affected areas but to use an alternative way to donate physical items, services or volunteer time, in the form of an online platform to catalogue donation offers.

2. Individuals and communities require basic items both immediately and through their long term recovery

GIVIT can meet the genuine needs of vulnerable individuals and households impacted by the immediate and longer term economic effects of bushfires through the provision of crucial basic items – from food vouchers to education supplies, fuel to household essentials – channelled from the generosity of Australians.

The GIVIT platform is available, free of charge, to all local support organisations - from major national bodies through to local charities and emerging community groups. The service increases the capacity of local councils, charities and community groups by providing a single coordinated donation platform for recovery agencies to request and obtain exactly what their service and clients require for short and long term response.

3. Local economies need support to recover

GIVIT has provided Disaster Recovery support for more than a decade now. We are acutely aware of the importance of supporting local businesses throughout the recovery phase. GIVIT's policy is



first and foremost to ensure donation do not harm and to purchase goods locally, wherever possible. This ensures local businesses and the local economy are also supported.

For example in the 2019 North Queensland monsoonal trough and flooding event, GIVIT was entrusted with \$4.226 million in public and corporate donations. \$3.5 million of these donated funds have already been spent at local businesses purchasing essential items and services to help affected residents return to their homes – grocery, food and clothing vouchers, medical equipment, rural supplies and vouchers for animal feed, school and home essentials, whitegoods and beds.

4. People impacted by the disaster event do not know where to go to access material assistance

GIVIT's website provides a simple online search tool for affected individuals to access local charity and community organisations to obtain not only essential material items but also full wrap-around support services (eg, mental health, financial counselling).

5. Growing cynicism from donors about use of their funds or donations

GIVIT provides a transparent and reliable channel for receiving and distributing cash donations. 100% of funds received by GIVIT are used to support vulnerable Australians through the provision of the essential items they require, as requested by the local charities registered with GIVIT. GIVIT does not take a cut to cover operational costs. This is a key difference of the GIVIT model and can only be achieved with the support of Government and key corporate partners. Members of the community wishing to donate funds via GIVIT have confidence knowing all funds donated go to purchasing essential items required by vulnerable members of the community as identified by thousands of charities and support organisations across the country.

GIVIT will also provide regular good news stories to share publicly about the material support provided through the GIVIT platform thanks to the support of the Federal Government.

6. Data about real community need

GIVIT can provide regular to the minute data on needs identified by registered recovery and support organisations who are providing material assistance to those in need, as well as the number and value of donations provided.



Recommendation

GIVIT's recommendation to the Senate Finance and Public Administration References Committee is that the Federal Government financially supports GIVIT to establish and manage a national, best practice donation management platform to ensure generosity is channelled to meet genuine need in preparation for future bushfire events.

GIVIT is a successful, proven donation management platform, removing the headache of donated goods, empowering affected communities to request exactly what they require which has lasting economic benefits for the country throughout disaster response, recovery and beyond.

Further information

