



AUSTRALIAN INSTITUTE FOR THE CONSERVATION OF CULTURAL MATERIAL INC.
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Inquiry into a National Volunteer Incentive Scheme (Climate Army)

Committee Secretariat
Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee
Department of the Senate
PO Box 6100
Parliament House
Canberra ACT 2600

AICCM <https://aiccm.org.au/about/>

The Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Materials (AICCM) is the professional organisation for conservators in Australia. Conservators work to preserve Australia's cultural heritage through museums, galleries, libraries and archives and in communities across Australia.

AICCM's membership is made up of professional conservators, conservation students and cultural heritage member organisations. Our membership also includes people who work in related professions, such as archivists, architects, curators and librarians, as well as volunteers and those with a general interest in cultural heritage.

AICCM and its membership are dedicated to the conservation of Australia's cultural heritage, to ensure it survives for future generations of Australians. To this end we:

- promote the science and art of the conservation of cultural material
- support co-operation and exchange amongst those concerned with the conservation of cultural material
- support the development of scientific and technical knowledge of the profession
- advocate and inform on matters relating to the conservation of cultural material
- provide information and advice on the best way to care for cultural heritage

For over thirty years AICCM has provided advice and support to communities and cultural collecting organisations (such as libraries, archives, museums and galleries) and communities about disaster preparedness and recovery. For example:

- developing handouts and web-based information relating to floods, bushfires and mould outbreaks
 - <https://aiccm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/bushfire-protection.pdf>
 - https://aiccm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/AICCM_AfterAFire_2009.pdf
 -
 - <https://aiccm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Preparing-for-imminent-disasters.pdf>
 - <https://aiccm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/What-to-do-if-flood-water-is-in-your-building.pdf>
- attending community events to support disaster recovery

- providing small grants to support conservation specialists visiting disaster impacted locations <https://aiccm.org.au/disaster/emergency-assistance-grants/>
- developing and delivering disaster preparedness and response training <https://aiccm.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2020/01/beprepared.pdf>
- developing and dispersing a calendar to guide cultural organisations through disaster preparedness activities throughout the year <https://aiccm.org.au/disaster/disaster-preparedness-calendar/>
- providing other general resources to help manage and prepare for disasters
 - [Disaster Planning - Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material](#)
 - <https://aiccm.org.au/?s=10+agents>
 - <https://aiccm.org.au/conservation/environmental-guidelines/>
 - [Visual Glossary - Australian Institute for the Conservation of Cultural Material](#)

Whilst AICCM has been able to build knowledge and expertise in disaster preparedness and response within cultural collecting organisations, we are aware that there are great opportunities to build community wide awareness through collaboration with disaster response organisations. Our members are based across Australia which has led to us being involved in disaster recovery in every state and territory, often in regional and remote locations. This has built an understanding not only of the variety of disasters that can impact communities but also the local contexts in which disaster occur.

Of particular concern to AICCM is the loss of significant cultural material and items of personal value held by individuals impacted by disaster. Too often we hear the words “I have lost everything; it has been destroyed by flood water/smoke/mould/fire”. To quote Lucy Easthope “the item may have little or no monetary value but may mean everything to a grieving family; or to a survivor struggling to make sense of terrible events” (Easthope “The meaning of ‘things’” in *Bereavement Care* 2019 Vol 38 Nos 2-3 p 124).

With limited time and resources, it is totally understandable that the focus of volunteer groups assistance in disaster response is removing damaged material from homes to reduce the risk of mould growth and assist in the recovery process. However, we believe that there are often important items/belongings in people’s homes that, with some pre-event training, could be recovered as part of the disaster response process and that this could play an important role in people’s wellbeing following a disaster.

AICCM would be delighted to provide input into the training and preparation of a Climate Army with a specific focus on disaster preparedness and the recovery of personal items and material of cultural significance to affected communities.

A) Establishing targeted initiatives to encourage young people to participate

The focus of the 2024 International Day for Disaster Risk Reduction was titled “Empowering the next generation for a resilient future” and focused on schools and youth. We suggest that materials prepared through this initiative could be of use in developing initiatives for the Climate Army. Please refer to their website <https://iddrr.undrr.org>

Research such as the work of QUT <https://research.qut.edu.au/best/projects/generational-volunteering-exploring-generational-nuances-in-the-volunteering-sector/> shows that there are different generational motivations for volunteering. QUT’s study found that Gen Z (born 1997 to 2013) are *motivated by career skills and learning*. *Recruitment strategies that appeal are social and word-of-mouth, focus on skill development, digital-first*. Within our

own profession it is well known that meaningful work experience greatly improves the work ready skills and expertise of recent graduates.

Regional and remote communities have less opportunity to access the skills of specialist conservators. Developing the skills to care for cultural material within communities, particularly amongst young people in remote Aboriginal and regional communities could be of great benefit both as a mechanism for cultural engagement and building intergenerational and cross-cultural understanding. For example, youth in Fitzroy Crossing in WA rescued and carried the 80 square meters historic and significant Ngurrara canvas to safety through floodwaters (Wangki Yupurnanupurru Radio 2023; Yanunijarra Aboriginal Corporation 2023a, 2023b; Garvey 2023; Pickup 2023; McKnight et al. 2023; Mills 2023; Orr 2023).



Kimberley locals joined forces to save the Ngurrara Canvas (Orr 2023. Photographer Andrea Myers).

The AICCM suggest that developing a program that provides recognisable micro credentials and hands on skills development opportunities which could range through projects management, logistics coordination, HR, mould remediation, trades specialisation, materials conservation etc. would not only benefit those volunteering within the Climate Army but also the broader nation as this can build the skilled workforce Australia needs into the future.

B) Exploring strategies to enhance volunteer engagement

Previous experience with colleagues attending disaster situations in NSW has shown that all resources to undertake the disaster recovery need to be brought in from elsewhere. This ensures that an external volunteer workforce is not putting unplanned pressure onto an already stressed community. Resources could include

- A portable village (shipping containers, pods, tents) cooking, showering and toileting facilities
- Shipping container conservation workspace with materials and equipment
- Mobile phone tower or satellite phone system
- Portable off grid solar generator
- Transportation

Micro-credentials, recognition of volunteering as work experience and integrating volunteer work into university course work, for example Macquarie University's PACE program <https://students.mq.edu.au/careers/pace> would be valued by many younger volunteers. Other

programs such as "Work for the Dole" could be explored as a mechanism for providing recognition and compensation for work undertaken through the Climate Army.

C) Integrating volunteer opportunities within educational institutions

Existing university programs such as the PACE program at Macquarie University provide a mechanism for engaging with a wide range of university students.

Student conservators from Australia's two materials conservation courses (University of Melbourne and Canberra University) have previously been involved in the conservation of significant cultural material and items of personal value held by individuals and volunteer managed museums both in Australia and the Asia Pacific region. With more online delivery there are often cohorts of students in other areas of Australia available to provide skilled input. For example, in recent floods in Brisbane, students from the University of Melbourne participated in a recovery project for significant flood damaged material from a hospital museum. The project was led by a highly experienced local conservator who was able to share her expertise with a new generation of conservators.

D) Creating a nationally recognised qualification scheme

It may be more efficient to build on existing curricula rather than start a new qualification from scratch. At the VET level there are a number of modules within the Creative Arts and Culture Training package (<https://training.gov.au/training/details/CUA/uoc>) as well as the Library and Information training package that could be drawn upon to build skills in handling, monitoring and managing cultural material following a disaster.

CAVAL (Cooperative Action by Victorian Academic Libraries) has previously delivered intensive 2-day training sessions on disaster preparedness and response for people working in libraries, archives, museums and galleries sessions included emergency simulations, WHS and mental health awareness, strategies for collaboration as well as the development of hands-on skills.

Within the AICCM membership we have a range of experts with the capacity to deliver such training across Australia where resources are available to cover costs. This model would fit better within the VET rather than university framework and could possibly be built up as a series of micro-credentials.

Regional University Study Hubs Network has been established to provide "physical campus-like spaces and support for students studying university or VET courses online at any Australian Institution". There are over 60 hubs located across regional Australia. The hubs provide access

to high-speed internet and video conferencing facilities and could be a mechanism for delivering training to young people to more remote locations across Australia.

<https://regionaluniversitystudyhubsnetwork.edu.au/about>

E) Investigating laws and safeguards to protect health and safety

WHS is vital to consider in this sort of setting. Being aware of issues around mental health, contaminated water, operating in challenging environments should all be considered. A mechanism for harmonizing across Australian states and territories would be equally important.

Alongside the health and safety of people, AICCM recommends that awareness of the potential damage to affected cultural material and heritage buildings is built into the program. Similarly cultural awareness around First Nations cultural material and sites needs to be considered.

AICCM members are well placed to provide insight into this. We believe that this works best when integrated into all training and operations rather than being a standalone document/process.

F) Structure and governance

We suggest that the inquiry explores opportunities to integrate the Climate Army into existing organisations rather than being a standalone operation. For example, Habitat for Humanity was deeply involved in recovery in NSW following the 2019 bushfires. Other groups such as Brisbane's Mud Army, Disaster Relief Australia, Blaze Aid and more traditional groups such as Rotary, the Lion's Club and Sikh Volunteers Australia have all provided support following disasters.

Rather than the Climate Army being a standalone organisation, perhaps it is an entity that supports young people to be involved in volunteering following disasters and to recognize their experiences as building work ready skills.

G) Comparison with overseas models

National Heritage responders USA <https://www.culturalheritage.org/resources/emergencies/national-heritage-responders>

The National Heritage Responders were established following the 2005 Hurricane Katrina impact in New Orleans. National funding was provided to the American Institute for Conservation to provide administrative support and coordination of conservators volunteering in disaster response.

ICCROM's FAR (First Aid and Resilience for Cultural Heritage in Times of Crisis) program

<https://www.iccrom.org/what-we-do/programmes/first-aid-and-resilience-cultural-heritage-times-crisis-far/emergency>

The International Centre for the Study of the Preservation and Restoration of Cultural Property (ICCROM) is headquartered in Italy. As well as delivering training in risk management and disaster response for cultural material, they have developed the FAR program which has provided technical assistance in major disasters worldwide in locations such as Haiti, Nepal, the Philippines, Croatia and Brazil. They can tap into a network of more than 1,000 cultural workers based in 122 countries.

H) Other

Heritage Victoria has developed a range of case studies outlining the impact of climate change on Heritage sites and collections

<https://heritagecouncil.vic.gov.au/research-guidance/manage-and-maintain-heritage/heritage-and-climate-change>

Heritage Victoria have also developed technical notes and disaster preparedness and response focusing on floods and bushfires.

<https://www.heritage.vic.gov.au/protecting-our-heritage/disasters-and-heritage>

Q-DIS

<https://www.facebook.com/QDisForum/>

Q-DIS is the Queensland Culture and Heritage Disaster Forum. This is a great example of the mechanisms the cultural sector use to communicate about disasters, how communities and organisations are faring and who needs assistance.

Building resilience: disaster risk management for documentary heritage and digital archives; training toolkit

<https://www.unesco.org/en/articles/building-resilience-disaster-risk-management-documentary-heritage-and-digital-archives-training>

Following on from a meeting of experts in 2023 this training toolkit draws on the expertise of 17 specialists from across Southeast Asia and the Pacific, including Australia. It provides a range of case studies, informative resources, practical activities and checklists.

The AICCM supports the Climate Army initiative and looks forward to working with other partners to materialise the need to support communities to prepare and respond to disasters through the preservation of cultural materials.

Yours sincerely,

Samantha Hamilton
AICCM National President