

AFAC26

Leading Behaviour Change Together:

How VICSES used Do 1 Thing
to lead measurable
behaviour change together



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Safer Communities - Together

Emergency preparedness is one of the most familiar challenges for emergency service organisations: communities are often aware that emergencies can happen, but awareness does not always translate into action. People may know they live with storm, flood, fire or other emergency risk, yet still delay the practical steps that could protect their household, property, pets, documents, neighbours or personal safety. The reasons are rarely simple. Preparedness can feel overwhelming. Advice can feel too broad. Risk can feel distant until it becomes immediate. For many people, the question is not whether preparedness matters, but where to begin.

This presentation explores how Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) used the 2025 Royal Melbourne Show to test, deliver and measure a practical behaviour-change model designed around that exact question. Rather than asking community members to absorb a long list of emergency preparedness messages, VICSES invited them to do one thing: choose a single, achievable preparedness action relevant to their circumstances, commit to it, and opt in to a follow-up process that supported and measured action after the event.

The result was 'Do 1 Thing', an inclusive, volunteer-designed engagement approach that shifted the focus from passive awareness to participant-led action. Delivered across the 11-day Royal Melbourne Show activation, the program brought together VICSES volunteers, staff, community engagement specialists, partners and the public in a deliberately designed environment that made preparedness accessible, interactive and measurable. Following Silver Ribbon recognition in 2023 and 2024, the 2025 activation earned the Gold Ribbon for Community Connection, reflecting not only the scale of community engagement achieved, but the strength of the model behind it.

At its heart, Do 1 Thing is based on a simple behavioural insight: people are more likely to act when the task feels achievable, personally relevant and self-selected. Preparedness messages often fail when they ask too much, too quickly. A household may be told to prepare an emergency kit, clean gutters, understand local flood risk, secure outdoor items, protect important documents, plan for pets, know evacuation routes, download warnings apps, check on neighbours and talk to family members, all of which are valuable, but collectively can feel paralysing. Do 1 Thing breaks that barrier by asking people to choose one action they are ready, willing and able to complete.

The strength of this approach is that it respects the participant as the decision-maker. A renter in an apartment, a young family in a growth corridor, an older person living alone, a newly arrived community member, a regional household, and a child speaking on behalf of their family may all experience risk differently. A single prescribed message will not land equally with each of them. Do 1 Thing creates a structured conversation in which the community member can select an action that makes sense in their own context. For one person, that might be moving important documents into a waterproof folder. For another, it might be cleaning gutters, checking insurance, preparing medication, talking to children about what to do in an emergency, or making sure pets are included in the household plan.

The Royal Melbourne Show provided a unique setting to test this model at scale. The Show attracts a broad cross-section of the Victorian community, including families, children, young people, older adults, regional visitors, culturally diverse communities, people with disability, and those who may not otherwise seek out emergency preparedness information. It is also a busy, noisy and highly competitive engagement environment. Visitors are surrounded by entertainment, food, animals, exhibits and commercial activity. To succeed in this environment, the VICSES activation needed to do more than

provide information. It needed to draw people in, create a meaningful interaction quickly, and leave them with something practical enough to continue after they walked away.

The activation was therefore designed as a multi-layered community engagement environment, not a single information stand. Do 1 Thing formed the behavioural centrepiece, but it was supported by interactive elements that created entry points for different ages and learning styles. VICSES introduced its first dedicated Inflatable Rescue Boat for community engagement, creating an immersive and highly visible experience for children and families. The boat gave children a tactile way to connect with VICSES flood rescue capability while giving adults time and space to engage in preparedness conversations. A large-scale “Floods and Ladders” floor game reinforced flood and storm safety messages through play, movement and decision-making. These elements were not separate attractions; they were part of a deliberate engagement pathway that used curiosity, interaction and family participation to open the door to deeper conversations.

The role of volunteers was central. Operational volunteers bring credibility that cannot be replicated by brochures, signage or corporate messaging. They speak from lived experience. They understand what happens when storms hit, when floodwater rises, when trees come down, when Requests for Assistance escalate, and when households realise too late that small actions could have reduced harm. At the Show, volunteers were not simply staffing a display. They were translating operational knowledge into practical household-level advice. They were listening to what community members already knew, identifying barriers, and helping people choose actions that felt realistic.

This volunteer-led dimension is important because behaviour change is relational. People are more likely to act when the message comes through a trusted, human conversation rather than a one-way campaign. The Do 1 Thing model gave volunteers a clear structure while still allowing conversations to feel natural and personal. It also created benefits for volunteers themselves, who gained direct insight into community perceptions, common misunderstandings, barriers to preparedness and the kinds of messages that resonate with different audiences. In that sense, the program strengthened both community preparedness and organisational learning.

The partner role was also significant. The activation demonstrated how a long-term partnership can support more than brand visibility. Through the support of AAMI, VICSES was able to invest in engagement infrastructure, materials and interactive tools that increased the quality and reach of the public experience. The partnership helped create a professional, accessible and attractive activation environment, but the focus remained firmly on community benefit. This is a key lesson for emergency service organisations working with partners: the strongest partnerships are those that build organisational capacity, enable better public outcomes, and support measurable resilience activity rather than simply adding logos to a stand.

Measurement was a defining feature of the 2025 activation. Community engagement is often assessed through attendance, impressions, giveaways, conversations or general sentiment. While those indicators can be useful, they do not necessarily show whether anything changed for the person after the interaction. VICSES wanted to move closer to measuring behaviour, not just reach. Across the 11-day activation, 591 preparedness commitments were made through Do 1 Thing. Of those participants, 77 per cent consented to receive follow-up contact. Through the follow-up mechanism, 27.2 per cent later reported completion of their chosen preparedness action.

These figures matter because they demonstrate a measurable pathway from conversation to commitment to reported action. They also show the value of a consent-based, transparent evaluation method. Participants were not unknowingly tracked or passively counted. They were invited to take part, asked to choose their own action, and given the option to receive a follow-up message. This created a simple but powerful feedback loop: the community member made a commitment, VICSES supported the next step, and the organisation gained evidence about whether the engagement had influenced behaviour.

The results should not be interpreted as a perfect or complete measure of all behaviour change generated by the activation. Some people may have completed their action without responding to the follow-up. Others may have had preparedness conversations that influenced later decisions but were not recorded as formal commitments. However, the data provides something more meaningful than anecdote alone. It shows that a low-barrier, participant-led model can move a proportion of people from intention to reported action. It also provides a baseline for future improvement: different action prompts, follow-up timing, language, volunteer training, event design and audience segments can now be tested and refined.

Several key lessons emerged from the activation.

First, the ask must be achievable. Emergency preparedness can be complex, but the first step should not feel complex. By reducing the immediate ask to one action, Do 1 Thing lowered the barrier to participation and made preparedness feel possible.

Second, choice matters. When people choose the action themselves, the commitment is more personal. The model avoids assuming that every household needs the same message at the same time. It allows preparedness to be shaped around lived reality.

Third, interactive engagement can create the conditions for deeper behaviour change. The Inflatable Rescue Boat and Floods and Ladders game helped attract attention, but their real value was in creating moments where preparedness conversations could happen naturally. Children's activities were not a distraction from adult engagement; they were often the bridge to it.

Fourth, volunteers are powerful behaviour-change messengers when supported by a clear framework. The structure of Do 1 Thing gave volunteers confidence and consistency, while their operational experience gave the message authenticity.

Fifth, evaluation needs to be built in from the beginning. Measuring behaviour change after an event cannot be an afterthought. The commitment mechanism, consent process and SMS follow-up were designed as part of the engagement model from the start, which allowed VICSES to measure impact in a practical and ethical way.

The broader significance of Do 1 Thing extends beyond the Royal Melbourne Show. The model is now being embedded within the VICSES Community Preparedness Action Plan, providing a scalable approach that can be adapted for state, regional and local engagement. It can be used at large public events, local unit open days, community festivals, school visits, partner activations, preparedness campaigns and targeted engagement with at-risk communities. Its simplicity is part of its strength. A local unit does not need a major event footprint to use the model. A volunteer can have a conversation, help a person choose one action, and record or support that commitment in a way that suits the setting.

For the emergency management sector, the presentation offers a practical case study in leading behaviour change together. It shows how operational volunteers, engagement practitioners and partners can work together to create inclusive environments that support action, not just awareness. It demonstrates integrity through transparent and consent-based measurement; inclusion through accessible, family-friendly and participant-led design; and impact through evidence of preparedness actions completed after the initial engagement.

The central message is that community engagement should not end when someone walks away from a stand. The more important question is what happens next. Did the person understand the risk more clearly? Did they identify an action that matters to them? Did they feel capable of doing it? Did the organisation provide a prompt, pathway or support mechanism that made follow-through more likely? Did the engagement generate learning that can improve future practice?

Do 1 Thing does not claim to solve the whole challenge of community preparedness. Instead, it offers a disciplined and scalable way to begin. It recognises that behaviour change is often built through small, repeated, achievable actions. It values the role of volunteers as trusted messengers. It uses partnerships to strengthen delivery. It designs for inclusion rather than assuming a single audience. Most importantly, it measures what happens beyond the conversation.

This presentation will take participants through the design, delivery, results and lessons of the 2025 VICSES Royal Melbourne Show activation, with a focus on how the Do 1 Thing model can be adapted by other emergency service organisations, community engagement teams and partner-supported programs. It will challenge the sector to move beyond counting interactions and towards designing engagement that makes action easier, more personal and more measurable.

The call to action is simple: when we ask communities to prepare, we should give them a clear place to start. Not everything. Not someday. One thing they can do now.