Report on

# The Attraction, Support and Retention of Emergency Management Volunteers 2016-2017

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# Contents

# REPORT ON THE ATTRACTION, SUPPORT AND RETENTION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS 2016

## Executive Summary

In 2009, the Attorney-General's Department through Emergency Management Australia (EMA) commissioned Dr Judy Esmond, a leading authority on volunteering, to undertake a study and provide a report aimed at identifying issues and options for the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

The original report identified five major areas of challenge which needed to be addressed to ensure the sustainability of and growth in emergency management volunteers. The five challenges were **time, training, cost, recognition and people**.

In 2016, the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum (AEMVF) through the Attorney-General's National Emergency Management Projects (NEMP) program commissioned Dr Esmond to undertake further research and provide a follow-up report with the aim of identifying what progress had been made in the intervening seven years in respect of each of the five challenges.

The same methodology was used for both studies involving intensive telephone interviews with members of the AEMVF and relevant organisations representing thousands of volunteers. This has provided one of only a few longitudinal studies undertaken into the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

This 2016 report re-examines the five challenges of time, training, cost, recognition and people identified in 2009. Seven years later, it is important to consider how organisations have sought to meet those challenges, and what progress has been made towards the goal of ensuring the continued growth and sustainability of emergency management volunteers.

**Challenge One: Time**

The issue of time remains one of the biggest challenges for the sector. The pattern of volunteers committing less overall time to volunteering, and for shorter periods, has continued. Organisations

have recognised this trend and over the last seven years have endeavoured to meet this challenge by providing opportunities for different levels of volunteer involvement from long-term to spontaneous one-off volunteers, greater flexibility in time commitment and more diversity through a range of non-operational roles. However, bureaucratic red tape resulting in more administrative processes and increasing amounts of paperwork is placing greater demands on volunteers' time and this risks becoming a disincentive for volunteer involvement if not reviewed and addressed.

**Challenge Two: Training**

Training absorbs the greatest amount of volunteer time, especially in response organisations. Organisations have made improvements in both the quality and accessibility of training over the last seven years through online training, flexible amounts and types of training for different roles and increased collaboration and sharing of resources across organisations under a nationally accredited process. However, with increased community, political and organisational expectations and without ongoing monitoring and volunteer representation in the decisions around training, the amount of training continues to expand. When volunteers have less time to devote to volunteering, it remains a significant challenge to achieve an optimum level of training. If the balance tips too far, and training requirements become excessive or disproportionate, this issue also risks becoming a disincentive to volunteer involvement.

**Challenge Three: Cost**

At the time of the last report, the direct, in-kind and employment-related costs absorbed by volunteers, were often a significant concern for volunteers and a disincentive to becoming or remaining a volunteer. Over the last seven years, much improvement has been made in this regard. Organisations have been committed to moving towards zero cost volunteering, so that as far as practicable, it does not financially cost to be a volunteer. Most organisations now provide, and encourage their volunteers to access, reimbursement for all out-of-pocket expenses. However, some of these reimbursement systems are too bureaucratic, time consuming and difficult to access; and in some organisations, a culture of not claiming available reimbursements remains. Overall, this issue seems to be of far less concern than seven years ago. It must be noted though that disparity still exists on this issue within the sector, as the recovery organisations remain less well-funded than their response counterparts.

**Challenge Four: Recognition**

Recognition from state and national leaders, their own organisations, local unit leaders and the general public is extremely important to volunteers. Consequently, recognition is an important factor in both the recruitment and retention of volunteers. Over the last seven years, improvements have been made in the areas of public recognition by politicians at times of disasters, and an expanded variety of recognition strategies are being utilised by organisations. Further, recognition techniques have become part of the training for volunteer leaders and paid staff. However, widespread recognition from the general public remains somewhat elusive. Many uniformed volunteers in response organisations have no recognisable national branding as volunteers, and are indistinguishable from their paid counterparts, making it difficult for the public to identify them as volunteers and afford them recognition and appreciation as such.

**Challenge Five: People**

People are the most important component of a vibrant volunteering sector and the culture experienced by volunteers at the local unit or group level is a crucial factor in determining whether they stay or go. The 2009 report identified the vital role played by leaders in creating a culture that was welcoming and inclusive to new members, those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and those of different age groups or gender. Over the past seven years, organisations have sought to address this challenge by finding creative ways to provide essential training for those in leadership roles. Although organisations have recognised the need for greater diversity, progress in achieving more engagement by Aboriginal and CALD groups has been somewhat limited. Similarly, progress in achieving gender diversity, particularly in respect of greater numbers of females in more traditional response organisations, has been slow. Ongoing endeavours are being made to develop programs around age diversity and how to replace an ageing volunteer base with younger volunteers.

## Recommendations

The recommendations arising out of this research are now set out below under the headings of the five main challenges in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

**Time**

That organisations commit to undertaking a regular 'process and paper' audit to refine and streamline administrative processes and reduce the amount of paperwork required of volunteers. That organisations continue to develop greater flexibility through a continuum of different levels of volunteer involvement and time commitment.

That organisations continue to develop greater diversity through a variety of volunteering options, including online volunteering, experteering and employee volunteering programs.

**Training**

That organisations undertake to review and monitor the amount and type of training required of volunteers in various roles to ensure it remains manageable and directly relevant for those volunteers.

That volunteer representatives are involved in the decision-making at the national, state and organisational levels into the training requirements for volunteers.

That organisations continue to develop flexible training methods including different training pathways for different roles and alternative modes of delivery including online training.

That organisations continue to collaborate and share resources in the ongoing development of training programs.

**Cost**

That organisations commit to a goal of zero cost volunteering to ensure that there is no financial detriment to those who make the decision to volunteer.

That organisations review their reimbursement systems to ensure that those systems are easy to access, streamlined and actively promoted.

That there be adequate and equitable distribution of funding and resourcing of all emergency management volunteers, whether in response or recovery based organisations.

That consideration be given to providing special assistance to volunteers involved in prolonged response and recovery operations dealing with disasters and emergencies, particularly self-employed volunteers.

**Recognition**

That national and state leaders continue to ensure that all emergency management volunteers

involved in both response and recovery are recognised and thanked, both at times of emergencies and also on other occasions.

That organisations continue to develop a range of volunteer recognition strategies and techniques at both the organisational and local level.

That organisations continue to explore strategies to increase public awareness of the vital roles played by emergency management volunteers.

**People**

That organisations continue to commit to developing targeted strategies to increase the diversity of their volunteer base, in terms of age, gender and cultural and linguistic diversity.

That consideration be given to enhancing the quality of leadership training courses by providing ongoing follow-up coaching and mentoring support for volunteer leaders.

That adequate government funding and support is provided to ensure the continuing strength and independence of the AEMVF as the voice of emergency management volunteers throughout Australia.

**Research**

That consideration be given to further follow-up studies of the current research being conducted every five years. This research would utilise the same methodology as the original and current research to provide a longitudinal value and comparability of outcomes over a longer term.

**Conclusion**

The adoption of this report and its recommendations will assist the sector to continue to address the five main areas of challenge and enhance the sustainability and growth in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers into the future.

# REPORT ON THE ATTRACTION, SUPPORT AND RETENTION OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEERS: 2016

## Full Report

### Introduction

Volunteers are the backbone of the Australian community. In 2014, 5.8 million people (31%) of the Australian adult population were involved in volunteering and contributing an estimated 743 million hours (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015). Amongst these numbers are thousands of people engaged as emergency management volunteers.

Emergency management volunteers are called upon to help deal with and respond to threats to community safety and help people and communities recover from emergencies and disasters. Without these emergency management volunteers our ability to respond to and recover from such events would be severely restricted with potentially devastating consequences.

With climate change now well recognised as the greatest threat to the survival of our planet, as the number and scale of disasters and emergencies is on the increase (Howard, 2009; Yonetani, 2016), so our reliance on emergency management volunteers is greater than ever before. How we maintain our ability to call upon these volunteers and ensure their continuing viability through the attraction, support and recognition of emergency management volunteers was the focus of research and a comprehensive report in 2009. Seven years later, this 2016 report investigates the progress made since 2009.

### Background to Past and this Current Report

"In March 2008, The Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management, responsible for providing national leadership and strategic direction on emergency management in Australia, agreed that firm action was required to ensure the future sustainability of Australia's emergency management volunteers. The Attorney-General's Department was given the task to develop appropriate options for the long term attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers. In October 2008, a report was commissioned by the Attorney-General's Department

through Emergency Management Australia (EMA) in consultation with the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum (AEMVF). Research was then undertaken and the report published in 2009" (Esmond, 2009:11).

Seven years later, the AEMVF assisted by Volunteering Australia for this project, received support from the National Emergency Management Projects (NEMP) program through the Attorney-General's Department to undertake follow-up research to revisit and re-examine the five main challenges identified in the original research.

This current research and report represents one of the few longitudinal research studies undertaken in relation to the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers. Both reports focus on the identified five main challenges of **time, training, cost, recognition and people**.

Where necessary, to ensure that the main challenges and issues identified in the original report are clearly understood, significant content from the 2009 report is now also included in this 2016 report. Although this adds to the length of this report, it ensures that it is easier to compare both reports without the need to refer to the original report separately.

**Methodology**

The parameters for the methodology used in this current research were kept the same as the methodology established in the original research in 2009. The utilisation of the same methodology with participants ensured a longitudinal consistency across both studies and allows direct comparison of then and now.

As was identified in the original study, there are "numerous methodologies that could have been undertaken for this research, including the commonly used questionnaire/survey based methodology distributed to large numbers of participants. It was considered by the research team that a written questionnaire/survey format, no matter how well designed, would not provide the depth and diversity of responses required for this research" (Esmond, 2009:13). Further, there is a concern about a low response rate to this type of methodology, as volunteers exclaim 'not another bloody questionnaire!'

Therefore, although very time consuming and intense, a series of telephone interviews was again

undertaken using a semi-structured interview schedule that allowed detailed discussion and exploration of issues with the participants. Interestingly, a small number of the participants in 2009 were again participants in 2016.

As was the case in the original research, interviews for this research were conducted with two groups: (i) members of the AEMVF; and (ii) members of other organisations recommended by the AEMVF and Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council (AFAC).

The AEMVF itself was formed in April 2002 with the aim to provide a national voice for the volunteer emergency management sector. The current member organisations of the AEMVF involved in these interviews and representing hundreds and thousands of volunteers across Australia in both emergency response and recovery are:

Adventist Development and Relief Agency
Anglicare
Attorney General's Department
Australasian Fire and Emergency Services Authorities Council
Australian Council of State and Territory Emergency Services
Australian Institute of Emergency Service
Australian Red Cross
Australian Volunteer Coastguard
Council of Ambulance Authorities
Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations Limited
Department of Social Services
Marine Rescue NSW
National Marine Volunteer SAR Committee
New South Wales Volunteer Rescue Association
Queensland Volunteer Committee
Salvation Army
State Emergency Service Volunteers Association
St John Ambulance Australia
Surf Lifesaving Australia
Tasmania Volunteer Committee
Victoria Volunteer Committee
Volunteer Ambulance Officers' Association
Volunteering Australia
Brian (Hori) Howard (Ex Officio Member)

Further, as was the case in the original research, interviews were also conducted with other representatives who were recommended by some AEMVF members and AFAC as being able to provide further information and expand upon aspects under discussion, or to explain a concept, strategy or focus of the organisation in further detail. Accordingly, further interviews were conducted with individual representatives from: AFAC, DFES, CFA and RFS.

Using the semi-structured interview schedule, a total of 25 interviews were conducted (the same number as in the original research). As previously mentioned, a small number of participants interviewed were still in the same roles as when they were interviewed in the original research. These individuals provided a very unique and valuable longitudinal insight seven years further on from the original research. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and content analysis was undertaken. These interviews form the basis of this final report.

Participants interviewed were given the opportunity to discuss the current situation in 2016 in relation to the five challenges identified in the original research. Participants were also asked if there were any other prominent issues not considered within these five challenges. It is noted that there were no other prominent issues mentioned by participants that could not be considered under the five challenges – time, training, cost, recognition and people.

**The Research Report Itself**

This current research report represents (as it was with the original report) the 'collective wisdom' of both the members of the AEMVF and a range of wider representative organisations involved with emergency management volunteers.

This report, as with the original report, "does not highlight specific programs or projects undertaken by particular organisations. All organisations involving emergency management volunteers are engaged in projects that are dealing with the major challenges identified in this report, albeit to differing degrees. It is not intended to be an audit of programs and projects being considered or currently being undertaken by the vast diversity of organisations that utilise emergency management volunteers. Highlighting particular approaches at the expense of others often produces colloquialisms, rivalry and negativity. Further, many approaches that are dealing with the challenges identified…have not undergone rigorous analysis. Therefore, it is not appropriate to highlight certain projects at the expense of others and particular organisations have rarely been mentioned in this report" (Esmond, 2009:14-15).

Rather, this report aims to reflect the current situation from the perspective of those consulted, and to provide an overall picture of the past, current and future directions taken in the ongoing attraction, support and retention of both response and recovery emergency management volunteers.

# Overview of Major Challenges in the Attraction, Support and Retention of Emergency Management Volunteers

In the 2009 report, the following overview outlined the identified issues and challenges in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

"Societal change brings with it both perplexing challenges and great opportunities. How we as a society have responded to such change can have a profound impact on both our futures and those of generations to come.

We must deal with such socio-economic-demographic implications as the mobile distribution of the Australian population, the continued concentration of the population in urban areas, the decline in some rural areas and the movement of a generation to certain 'sea' and 'tree' change locations. Consider also the increased participation of women in the paid workforce, those in paid employment working harder and longer hours, either delaying retirement or never retiring and continuing to work part-time, and the rise of the urban self-employed entrepreneur. Further, as our familial structures continue changing with the number of single parent families rising, our ethnic diversity increasing and our population aging, the additional anticipated consequences of rapid climate change continue to unfold before us.

Climate change scientists explain that there is higher rainfall in coastal regions, leading to more frequent and severe flooding. Their warning confirms that we are experiencing more severe weather events including higher temperatures, severe storms and cyclones, which form further south, as well as severe and prolonged droughts leading to more bushfires. It is significant that volunteer agencies have the lead for all of the increased hazards except drought, which continues to place them under significantly increased pressure in both the response and recovery areas. Ongoing steps need to be taken now to strengthen the volunteer emergency management sector so that it will be able to deal with this ever increasing workload.

Each and all of these changes has implications for organisations entrusted with the responsibility of dealing with disasters and emergencies as well as for those current and future emergency management volunteers who serve them. These changes present both difficulties and incredible opportunities and challenges" (Esmond, 2009:16).

The original research identified five major areas of challenge in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers. These five major areas of challenge were: **time, training, cost, recognition and people**. Seven years later in 2016 we now consider how have we met those challenges?

*I have read through the five issues that were raised and I think that there's work being done in all five of them and probably work being done more in some and less in others but definitely work being done in all of them. Just sort of in my mind, I went through what I've read through in the past 12, 18 months, the reports that come through. I think everybody is aware that these are issues. I think that the agencies are aware that these are the issues and governments are aware that these are the issues and I think everything we do is lining up. I think it's just different terminologies and as you know wording and all that sort of stuff changing but I think basically, it's the same issues but I think it's improving because these issues have been identified.* (Participant)

# CHALLENGE ONE – TIME

*Volunteers do not necessarily have the time; they just have the heart - Elizabeth Andrew*

## Context of time-related challenges

The issue of time is one of the biggest challenges facing organisations across all sectors and especially in the recruitment and retention of emergency management volunteers. As a societal trend, people are volunteering for shorter periods of time and for a reduced number of hours (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2015).

For the Baby Boomer generation (1946 to 1963) sandwiched between ageing parents and children who will not leave home, the feeling of being 'time strapped' is now a constant reality. Across other demographic groups in this country, the feeling of being 'time poor' and having a 'lack of time' to volunteer is the overwhelming reason for not volunteering or ceasing to volunteer (Birch and McLennan, 2006a; Esmond, 2001b). Volunteering Australia's latest State of Volunteering in Australia Report (2016) also highlights this in that work and family commitments remain the main barriers to volunteering.

## Discussion of time-related challenges

Against this backdrop, in the 2009 report, all participants identified that "the *amount* of time and *length* of time that current and potential volunteers could commit to volunteering had changed and the time commitment issue was the biggest challenge in their attraction and retention of volunteers. People's availability had reduced as they were increasingly feeling 'time strapped' and then attempting to deal with an ever-increasing myriad of other commitments they have in their lives" (Esmond, 2009:19-20).

In the 2009 report, it was clear that participants saw the "need for their organisations…to quickly come to terms with the changing nature of volunteering and the time commitment being asked of both current and potential volunteers in a time strapped society" (Esmond, 2009:20). This has meant moving away from just the concept of the 'regular and long term' volunteer and changing any recruitment, training and management strategies aimed only at long-term volunteers. Organisations have to adapt or change their methods to accommodate the needs of our increasingly 'time strapped' volunteers.

The 2009 report identified that "the key to unlocking the opportunities to engage with or continue to involve the time poor volunteer required a shift away from emphasising the amount and length of time for which people are required to volunteer, towards focusing on different *levels of involvement* for volunteers and on different *ways* of volunteering.

It requires a different way of thinking as to how to offer a range of flexible volunteering opportunities based on differing levels of involvement along the total continuum of involvement – so that the 'one size fits all' approach is not the only option for volunteering. This continuum model includes:

- long term involvement with an extensive level of time commitment
- long term involvement but with a limited level of time commitment
- short-term time specific involvement with a definite start and finish date
- one-off or spontaneous volunteering experiences" (Esmond, 2009:22).

"Offering differing levels of involvement along the continuum of involvement this model has the possibility of attracting and retaining a greater number and diversity of potential volunteers, as it incorporates differing amounts of time, training and volunteer engagement" (Esmond, 2009:23).

In 2016, many organisations in both response and recovery had adopted the principles of this volunteer continuum model. Although with varying degrees of engagement and success, all participants identified areas of improvement as their organisations are actively attempting to deal with and respond to the needs of 'time sensitive' volunteers. Importantly, participants also confirmed that it is not only the Baby Boomers, but also Generations X, Y and Z who are dealing with issues of time.

Participants described how organisations recognised that 'one size of volunteering does not fit all' and were taking up the challenge of considering different levels of involvement and time commitment for their volunteers. Organisations were developing different types of volunteering in both in the response and recovery arenas.

Even in the area of *long term involvement with an extensive level of time commitment*, changes are being made. An interesting trend has emerged of the need for 'fatigue management' for these volunteers. Although not necessarily policy throughout an organisation, those in leadership roles

at the regional and local level with an extensive knowledge of their volunteers are responding with a flexible membership approach for these volunteers. It is primarily based on the concept of allowing volunteers to have 'time out', in essence substantially similar to holiday leave or long service leave that employees are entitled to take.

Such breaks related to volunteer fatigue from their long term commitment as a volunteer. However, this is also being broadened to other breaks based around significant life changes and stages for volunteers such as changing employment, starting a family and other situations. In essence, the concept is that by providing these 'time out' volunteers with the opportunity to 'take a break', they will return refreshed and re-energised after that break and become 'time in' volunteers.

*I've come across some volunteers who've become a little burnt out because of other demands in their life. They've just had to make a choice and take a break or to leave or to do whatever. Many of them more so have significant work changes with their employment. Others have had bigger challenges with family, like starting a family or having difficulties at home with partners or other reasons. I've spoken to a number of these people in person and they've got caught up in notions of not wanting to let the team down, not wanting to let the community down but I always encourage them that if you're feeling this way, take a break. Take a break for six months and see if it's alright to come back after that. Or even longer, 12 months. We'll keep you on the books, if that's what you want. You can just come straight back whenever you feel comfortable.* (Participant)

There are concerns that once a volunteer 'times out' and takes a break that they may not return and these concerns have lead to a view that they should not be encouraged to do so. However, denying volunteers the type of leave opportunities that paid employees experience guarantees that 'burnt out' or 'changed life circumstances' volunteers will never return once they do finally leave.

*There have been many who have had a bit of a break and they have come back. You've got to look at it practically and if people are feeling burnt out, there's no point in them getting bitter and twisted, upsetting themselves and others in the role. That's a negative when it comes to volunteer recruitment and retention. I encourage them to have a break and it's good for them and I think as an organisation, it's good for us as well.* (Participant)

It seems 'time out' volunteers mostly occur on an ad hoc basis in some organisations, and primarily at the local level. In 2016, however, organisations looking at retaining their longer term volunteers

should consider embedding into the organisational culture the concept of volunteers being entitled to similar breaks, albeit unpaid, as those which paid staff receive. This would involve greater fluidity in volunteer numbers but with the possibility of the retention of highly experienced volunteers over a longer period of time.

In the 2009 report, some participants spoke of examples "where different local units or groups had undertaken both a task and role analysis of their volunteering opportunities and were redefining and redesigning their current roles and tasks for volunteers. This redefining of roles has allowed volunteers to engage in different roles and also to develop new roles for specific tasks. For example, this has allowed some volunteers who are no longer able to engage in the extremely active aspects of their previous volunteering roles, to take on a more educational role with the public in terms of community safety education, or perhaps in a mentoring role with newer recruits" (Esmond, 2009:24-25).

In 2016, these more flexible membership options for longer serving volunteers are becoming part of how some organisations operate and are gaining momentum in the development of a more formalised 'role transition' and retention plan for these volunteers. This concept has the potential to extend the life of a volunteer's engagement in the organisation.

*One has to be physically capable of some of the more physical jobs, there needs to be a transition plan for them to move off to other parts of the organisation. Or if you're someone who wants to do a different kind of role and this is just what people talk about.* (Participant)

*There was a couple of times an elderly member says, I'm thinking of quitting, boss, my back's no good anymore, I can't lift the jaws of life. I encourage them to look, you've got those skills there, do you want to just stay and help out whenever you like with training or perhaps do a bit of admin or help recruitment. It hasn't always been like that but for some of them, it is the case and has been very effective.* (Participant)

In 2009, participants also noted that their organisations were developing more *short-term, time specific volunteering* assignments. These involved those time strapped volunteers who do not want to take on long-term regular voluntary work. Interestingly, sometimes people undertaking these short-term volunteering options enjoy the experience and return again to become longer term volunteers.

In 2016, these concepts of *long term involvement but with a limited level of time commitment* and *short-term time specific involvement with a definite start and finish date* have gained much momentum, albeit to varying degrees within different organisations. For some, this has remained a largely ad hoc process but for other organisations, it has become a formalised and integral part of their recruitment plan for both maintaining the core and increasing the diversity of their volunteer base through offering a greater variety of roles for volunteers. Volunteering in response organisations no longer means only being able to undertake traditional operational volunteer roles, as a wide range of non-operational roles and other duties with greater flexibility are being offered in the recruitment of potential volunteers.

*Yes the flexibility of roles is for people who do operational stuff and really just want to go to a fire and for that role, while giving their brigade the ability to allocate people to different roles that are non-operational stuff. If someone has a particular interest in educating the community, they can actually join to just do that. Catering or communication or administration, they can join and do that and that alleviates some of the time pressures for volunteers that want to do the firefighting role within the organisation.* (Participant)

In 2016, as many response organisations are developing a range of volunteer roles, some creative recovery organisations have refined this process further especially in the development of 'targeted' recruiting of volunteers who have a specific area of expertise such as creating newsletters, website updates and more. This is often referred to as 'experteering'. These most often involve *short-term projects for a finite time or limited time commitment over a longer period of time*.

*The recovery organisations are doing this much better. There's a range of really flexible options to volunteer such as volunteering online, experteering, giving some of your expertise to develop websites and other opportunities.* (Participant)

*These roles mean that people feel more attached to that cause they feel like they can contribute without getting the fire hose out or going on the coconut boat. Membership is broadening the types of members that are recruited so there's more of an ability to share the load.* (Participant)
The final level of involvement that has grown tremendously in the last seven years is that of *spontaneous or one-off volunteers*.

In the 2009 report, it was noted that the phenomenon of the one-off or spontaneous volunteer was beginning to capture attention. The subsequent Queensland floods (2010-2011) provided a spectacular example of this type of volunteering in Australia. Since then, the concept of spontaneous volunteers has been one of the most studied and written about aspects of emergency management volunteering in this country (Cottrell, 2010; McLennan, Molloy, Whitaker & Handmer, 2016; Saaroni, 2015).

These volunteers represent the greatest example of the challenge of 'time' both in terms of the giving of their time to volunteer and the management of their time by emergency management organisations. In the last seven years, there has been a large amount of research monies allocated to this area and a plethora of studies and manuals published regarding these spontaneous volunteers who appear in large numbers at times of disasters and emergencies (Orloff, 2013; Volunteering ACT, 2015).

Spontaneous volunteers are of course not a new type of volunteer but in fact one of the oldest forms of volunteering which is now re-emerging. In considering the history of emergency management volunteering, when fire broke out in the village, all the villagers rushed to assist in any way they could to put out the fire and save the village. If a flood occurred, everyone would hurry to help in any way they could. The entire village/community was actively involved as spontaneous volunteers in dealing with any disasters or emergencies that occurred.

For participants in this 2016 research, spontaneous volunteers are no longer just seen as a trend but as an ongoing opportunity to enhance and broaden volunteer engagement. However, the response to these volunteers within emergency management organisations ranged from considering them a 'bloody nuisance' to the greatest potential pool of volunteers for the future.

*One of the more interesting things that has happened recently is that there's an enormous amount of attention being given to spontaneous volunteers. They really are a bloody nuisance, frankly. Now, as far as the usefulness of spontaneous volunteers is concerned; they have to be organised and trained, they have to be protected legally and in terms of accident, incident and death and they still don't replace the organisationally trained volunteers.* (Participant)
*There is no question, however, that if you can mobilise these folks and some states have got a good system and a couple have not, they can do a great deal of good in the immediate aftermath, the immediate recovery period. The one that I'm sure you've heard of, however, was when it was time*

*to clean up the CBD in a particular state after large flooding - this was a few years ago. So, all these folks rocked up in their thongs and they paddled through contaminated flood water and they weren't organised. Some several thousand got several infections from the flood water and it was actually quite a debacle.* (Participant)

Over the ensuing years, each state will continue to develop and refine their processes, in consultation with both the emergency management sector and State Volunteering Centres to handle, organise and effectively streamline their utilisation of these spontaneous volunteers at the time of emergencies and disasters. Some states already have had systems in place for many years to register small numbers of volunteers and call upon these volunteers in times of crisis. However, the systems to register people in very large numbers and connect them to the right agencies and volunteering opportunities in many instances continue to be developed (Volunteering Victoria, 2016).

*Yes. Untrained spontaneous volunteers can help, providing they are well organised and provided all those things with protection and first aid and all the other things are squared away and that they're working through the system. It's not as simple as it seems but I think there's been undue emphasis given to their capacity compared to those within organisations now and are trained and equipped to do the jobs. It's only a note of warning, but I think the expectation is too high. That's all.* (Participant)

However, beyond the mobilising of these volunteers for one-off disasters, there is the ongoing potential opportunity that exists for emergency management organisations to recruit these spontaneous volunteers into more regular, ongoing service. This can only be developed around a very well organised process that uses their time wisely at the time of the emergency. The challenge, however, remains to develop new and different ways to recruit these potential volunteers and establish well developed and streamlined recruiting processes in the aftermath of emergencies to truly engage with these volunteers. This would result in the conversion of a percentage of these large numbers of spontaneous or one-off volunteers into ongoing regular volunteers.

*We are seeing a lot of spontaneous, one-off and periodic volunteering models starting to emerge across the sector, certainly across the emergency management volunteering sector and agencies like us need to identify how we can utilise people in that way but our membership modeling is still quite rigid, at this point.* (Participant)

Another large area for future volunteer recruitment that was mentioned in 2009 but has seen limited progress seven years later is that of online or virtual volunteers. Although mentioned by a few participants in 2016, none identified that their organisation had actively exploited this possibility. The potential for online or virtual volunteering (Conroy & Williams, 2014; Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services Queensland, 2012; Volunteering Australia, 2016) still remains largely untapped within the emergency management sector.

As noted in the 2009 report, the area of time commitment most often impinged upon by volunteering is that of work commitments. "Different circumstances exist for those who are self-employed, but for those in paid employment, identifying ways in which volunteer time can be carved out for them (from what is currently paid employment time), may assist in increased rates of volunteer recruitment and retention" (Esmond, 2009:27).

The 2009 research noted very encouraging signs of employers being willing to consider and support employee volunteering and their staff being absent from the workplace to assist during emergencies and disasters. This was reinforced with The National Employment Standards (2008:35) stating that "an employee who engages in an eligible community service activity is entitled to be absent from his or her employment for a period".

In 2016, despite some isolated incidents to the contrary, employers overwhelmingly have supported the time taken by their employees out of work to be involved in emergency management volunteering. Many emergency management organisations have responded by developing their own awards and Volunteer Employer Recognition Programs to acknowledge the contribution of the employers.

However, progress has been somewhat slower in developing and expanding employee volunteering programs from just a few days a year to ongoing, regular volunteer engagement (Plewa, Conduit, Quester & Johnson, 2015). This remains an area of potential for future volunteer recruitment by emergency management organisations and throughout the sector (Volunteering Australia, 2016).

A very important aspect of the challenge of time relates to the enormous amounts of paperwork

that exist in emergency management organisations. In the past seven years there has been an increasing amount of bureaucratic requirements and paperwork being asked of volunteers across all organisations and across all volunteering sectors (Volunteering Australia, 2016). This is not confined to volunteers alone but it is also the experience of paid staff in a multitude of organisations. Participants overall felt that the situation continued to worsen and was instrumental in diminishing the attraction, recruitment and retention of emergency management volunteers, especially those undertaking leadership roles.

The most prevalent example of organisations recruiting for a specific task-based role is in the area of administrative assistance. At the local level, groups or units are constantly looking for help with administrative tasks that would otherwise have to be undertaken by volunteer leaders.

*We have tried a few models. We're looking at targeted recruitment. Recruiting people who are able to fill a role that is not operational and dedicate themselves to that role. Rather than choosing one of your firefighters to be a secretary, why not put an ad in the paper to find someone who is in the community who might like to be the secretary and that is their contribution to the brigade. That is being piloted and trialed. Maybe a group or maybe just a catchment of brigades that need and could use some sort of support with their administrative tasks. A lot of our career brigades require someone quite dedicated to the role. There's a lot of mail, there's a lot of forms, there's a lot of correspondence and a lot of business in brigades that keep the secretary busy.* (Participant)

Recently, with the increasing amount of paperwork and administrative tasks, some of the larger organisations have moved away from seeking volunteers to fulfill these roles to employing paid administrative staff.

*A couple of the organisations in the country have actually been looking to employ administrative staff in their bigger units. These blokes and ladies are not the bosses of the brigade they're the administrative officers.* (Participant)

Technological advances through the development of online reporting and smart forms can have some impact in reducing the amount of time spent on certain aspects of paperwork, but the rate of uptake of these innovations has not been great.

*I'll try and change something and introduce a smart form. We have these smart forms online where they can go in and they're automatically filled out for them and all they have to do is tick a few*

*boxes and then it will automatically get submitted for them but only two percent of the organisations use those for whatever reason. But then they will still complain about the amount of paperwork they've got to do. We have avenues for them to make their life easier, but it's quite often they will not use those options.* (Participant)

Seeking to recruit more people, whether volunteers or paid staff, to deal with the administrative tasks is one way of reducing this issue, but this approach should be complemented by a thorough consideration of whether the administrative tasks are in themselves absolutely necessary.

Rather than just finding more volunteers to try and deal with this increased workload, it is imperative that all response and recovery organisations undertake an internal audit to closely examine how to simplify and streamline administrative processes, to reduce the amount of ongoing paperwork and remove cumbersome bureaucratic red tape. For example, asking important questions around paperwork such as - Do we really need all these forms? What purpose are they serving? Do they make us more efficient or less efficient in reaching our organisational goals? - can be extremely effective in determining just what pieces of paper are really necessary.

Organisations which undertake an independent 'process and paper' audit often find that it results in a significant reduction and streamlining of processes and paperwork. Unless undertaken on a regular basis of at least every five years, bureaucratic processes, administrative tasks and associated paperwork 'takes on a life of its own' and just continues to grow. When considered in the light of the growing reporting and associated paperwork requirements from governments particularly as funding providers, it is imperative that organisations review their process regularly to try to keep administrative tasks at a manageable level.

Interestingly, after the publication of the 2009 report, the author undertook presentations about these challenges to emergency management conferences and organisations throughout Australia and New Zealand. The issue that resonated most with these volunteers was that there is 'too much bloody paperwork'. In 2016, there is every indication from the participants that for volunteers there is still 'too much bloody paperwork'.

*I think it's got worse. There is a tendency for permanent staff at headquarters to act as post offices. When they send the stuff down to unit level, group level, the reaction, this is the message I'm*

*getting from most of the organisations is that it is a really, really big issue. A number of other organisations are providing those at a regional level with staff but the fact is that the additional regional staff are generating more administrative work for the volunteers out in the weeds that did not used to happen when those extra regional administrative staff weren't there. The sector hasn't been particularly successful in implementing strategies to reduce the amount of time operational volunteers spend on non-operational activities, such as paperwork.* (Participant)

There will be no significant change in this issue until there is a realisation amongst the hierarchy in some emergency management organisations that their own internal processes result in more time related issues that dissuade volunteers from joining or staying with their organisations. Organisations that continue to ignore these concerns from volunteers, coupled with the absence of regular 'process and paper' audits to provide greater efficiency, run the risk that their current and future pool of emergency management volunteers will diminish and may ultimately disappear.

In summary, seven years after the original report, all organisations involved with emergency management volunteers and paid staff involved with volunteers have become increasingly more sensitive to the needs of the 'time strapped' volunteers and are seeking ways to engage volunteers along the continuum of volunteering involvement. They are also aware of demographic generational groups, with young people increasingly engaging for even less time in emergency management volunteering organisations (Boessler & Ding, 2010; Walsh & Black, 2015). The continued rise of the spontaneous volunteer represents the ultimate challenge in terms of time sensitive volunteers (McLennan, Molloy, Whitaker and Handmer, 2016; Sauer, Catlett, Tosatto and Kirsch, 2014).

Although some organisations are further down the road and far more innovative than others, all are making efforts in addressing the challenge of time in designing and implementing their volunteer-based programs. There is still a long way to go but these actions and progress across both the response and recovery organisations should be commended.

Overall, the issue of time remains a complex and complicated challenge in relation to volunteers across all sectors in the community.

*I think volunteers are telling us they have less time but organisationally we are demanding more time of them. It takes more time, more equipment. As brigades who were once rural brigades*

*become terri-urban brigades on an urban fringe, their training requirements increase, the amount of time that they spend responding to incidents increases. We're becoming a more demanding society as well, that requires us to have our people trained to a certain degree in accredited training. We're requiring more bureaucracy at a brigade level, in terms of secretarial work, administrative work, forms being filled out. With most volunteers now they're telling you we have more commitments with work commitments, family commitments, we're busier people and they don't have the time that we once perceived they had. I don't know what our answer is but I know that we conduct exit surveys here and one of the main reasons people indicate that they're leaving us is because they no longer have the capacity to participate. The time constraints for them have become greater.* (Participant)

Finally, in the discussion of the challenge of time, the largest commitment of time for volunteers, especially in the area of response, is that of training. No other activity takes more of their volunteer time than training. Training is the second challenge to be discussed in this report in the context of attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

# CHALLENGE TWO – TRAINING

*There is only one thing worse than training your volunteers and having them leave - and that's not training them, and having them stay - Anonymous*

## Context of training-related challenges

The second challenge identified by participants in 2009 in relation to the attraction, support and retention of volunteers, is that of training. "The provision of appropriate training for all volunteers, but especially for those dealing with life-threatening situations, is absolutely essential" (Esmond, 2009:32).

In 2009, participants observed that the amount of training undertaken by volunteers, especially in the response area, had increased significantly as organisations "had embraced national training standards adopting vocational, educational and training frameworks for both paid staff and volunteers" (Esmond, 2009:32). In 2016, participants again raised concerns about the amount of training and it was their perception that over the last seven years, training requirements have not decreased but have continued to rise.

In the 2009 report, "this increased amount of training for volunteers was expressed by participants to have been fuelled by several major factors" (Esmond, 2009:33) – community and political expectations, the litigious society, organisational expectations and the expectations of volunteers themselves. In 2016, these factors remain highly influential.

(i) *Community and political expectations*. The expectations of the community have not diminished over the last seven years. In many instances, the general public has no understanding that those responding and providing services to them in times of disasters and emergency situations are volunteers. Their expectations still continue to be based on impressions that these people are paid staff and their response time should be almost immediate, without any delays.

(ii) *The litigious society*. In 2016, the number of enquiries and investigations undertaken in the aftermath of disasters has risen throughout Australia. Often, recommendations in the subsequent reports, prescribe 'more training' for both paid staff and volunteers involved in these situations, with no clear understanding of just how much training volunteers have already undertaken.

(iii) Organisational expectations. Operational volunteers are being asked to take on more training in relation to their core duties but also a variety of other training such as community safety, occupational health and safety and diversity training. Although this training is important, it all takes up much of the limited time that volunteers have available for training.

(iv) Volunteers own expectations of themselves to train and develop their skills and knowledge, protect themselves adequately, obtain qualifications and receive recognition from local councils, police and especially from their paid counterparts.

**Discussion of training-related challenges**

In the 2009 report it was noted that "Obviously, adequate training for volunteers is crucial, since lives and property can be at risk. But a continuing increase in training requirements can seriously affect the decision for many to go or stay as volunteers. Volunteers will weigh up the amount of time involved not only in the actual 'doing' but the added time mostly spent in the training. It may well become 'death by training'. Participants identified that if the balance swings towards more and more training, the needs of the volunteer and the reasons why volunteers joined, may become lost in the process" (Esmond, 2009:35).

In 2016, of all the five challenges, it is training that was discussed more than any other by the participants. Although participants acknowledged that volunteers were very supportive of undertaking training, participants considered that the balance had definitely swung to more and more training. However, at the same time it was observed that there had been vast improvements in the quality of training, especially in response organisations. It is acknowledged that to achieve an optimum level of training remains a very complex issue with no easy answers.

Organisations have also adopted a range of their own individual strategies, initiatives and training models to deal with the increasing and time consuming nature of training and these include:

(i) *Use and development of online training*. Over the last seven years there have been a number of obvious improvements to training beginning with the rapid advances in technology that have resulted in a greater utilisation of online training for volunteers. All participants identified the use of some form of training now being available to their volunteers online.
*I know that a lot of the agencies have a lot of online induction type options available and some of*

*their leadership training is now online. Some have gone even to the next step in some respects and some of their training isn't just online, do it on the computer. You can do it on your mobile phone. It's improving for sure.* (Participant)

Being able to undertake online training has reduced costs for organisations. For volunteers, it has reduced time and travel costs, and allowed greater flexibility in being able to undertake training from the comfort of their own home. Looking beyond 2016, it appears likely that online training will continue to become more significant in the training and skilling of volunteers as the usage and sophistication of technology continues to advance.

*Definitely the online training. It saves volunteer time, travel and cost. I think people are mindful, I think they're aware that time is an issue and agencies and government are doing their best to address it where they can.* (Participant)

*Training has improved in the sense of access to online training at various levels and that's improved access to those who are willing to access it that way. There are lots of aged volunteers who find it difficult but there will definitely be an improvement in the future as the volunteers rotate and change over. Online training is an improvement so the volunteers who are thinking of opting out, it's probably not going to benefit them. The ones who are coming, I think it's going to be more of a benefit especially for young people.* (Participant)

However, participants sounded a warning note that online training needed to be part of a 'blended' training approach which also included attending onsite and learning to use relevant equipment. Participants felt that there would always be certain types of training that required face-to-face contact time to develop the necessary skills. They also suggested that this physical presence was an important part of teamwork and understanding and becoming part of the culture of the organisation in both response and recovery organisations.

*Mind you, I think that online training, in and of itself, isn't sufficient. I think it's an essential but not a sufficient thing. There needs to be a blended training environment where they go to a face to face team environment so they can be integrated into a team approach. If it is an island, single role, fine. Often there are team environments in which they have to function in an emergency management role and also use equipment. So I think that blended training environment is essential.* (Participant)

*The challenge I had with this is the online learning it can teach skills but it struggles at teaching*

*culture. We want to make sure that our volunteers serving in the community and the people in need, representing us, have the right culture and the way they go about that. We need to worry about more than the skills and how they are performed and need to worry about the culture of the organisation and how it represents to those communities in need. Yes, there's a space for online learning but I see it as an adjunct and another string in the bow rather than a primary method.* (Participant)

(ii) *Flexible amounts of training* and the consideration of what training volunteers actually need when undertaking similar roles but in very different locations such as rural and non-rural situations.

*People need to be trained in order to sufficiently and safely deliver the service in their brigade's risk profile but it's not reasonable that someone who is from a distant, rural brigade that might respond 20 times a year, it's not realistic that they need to be trained in how to operate an aerial appliance. We need to do a bit of work there…but we don't need issues with volunteers not being able to access a service or attain a certain skill and that may be that there's no organisational need for them to have that skill.* (Participant)

(iii) *Flexible training options* that also take into account the needs of the volunteers and not just the organisation. For example, breaking down the required training into more time effective, accessible and manageable components for volunteers to undertake.

*I think it's improved. From our perspective, we haven't necessarily added more levels to training. We've had the structured training framework for a very long time and the content evolved, it became more contemporary over time but it's more about taking that training and making it more accessible and easier for people to undertake it, if that makes sense. What our team has tried to do is break the existing training down into components so they can do that more easily. That's about people being able to do as much as possible in their own time, in a time that suits them and when they have to be assessed, perhaps they'll have to go and have some face to face component but it's breaking it down and giving that flexibility for volunteers to be able to do things in their own time or when it suits them.* (Participant)

(iv) *Developing different training pathways* for different volunteer roles such as operational and non-operational roles.

*What our learning and development area is doing at the moment is seeking to create different*

*training pathways. There is a series of compulsory training programs when someone is involved with us and safety and welfare introduction, for example, that's online. Then we have volunteer induction, which is also online so people can do it in their own time and they can stop and start it so it's fairly flexible. Then we move into what we called our bush fire awareness program, which is a really basic program about fire stuff and then from there, the ultimate thing to create different pathways for people. If someone joins and they're only interested in doing communications, for example, they can do the online safety. They can do the online volunteer induction and then they can move down the pathway where they can just do the training that's applicable to the role they're actually going to undertake. They don't have to actually complete a hierarchy of training. Building that flexibility, they only have to do the training that's about them and the role that they're going to undertake.* (Participant)

(v) Increasing *collaboration and sharing* of resources and training materials between organisations and across states.

*I think that it's got better. I think that we are a lot smarter about it. Certainly, the training package has improved. We collaborate a lot better among all the emergency services. I think that we're just a lot smarter than we ever were. Whereas, it used to be we all competed a bit too much among each other. There's still a few that would do that but I just think we're all a bit friendlier than we used to be and a bit nicer to each other, which is smart. I think that obviously benefits everyone in the long term and having accredited training makes it all work a bit more seamless anyway.* (Participant)

The nationally accredited training process (Attorney-General's Department, 2012) has assisted in greater collaboration rather than previous situations with organisations in different states often independently 'reinventing the wheel' with materials and resources.

The 2016 participants in this research broadly confirmed that nationally accredited training has encouraged much greater collaboration and sharing of training packages and materials, as well as the portability for volunteers of training skills and competencies across states.

*Some of the jurisdictions have been dealing one on one with the two larger states and how they might get hold of their existing training packages and make them specific to their own jurisdiction. Basically, buy them off the shelf and roll them out in their own jurisdictions. That's been really*

*significant, this collegiate approach to lessening the burden. People have already done the work, we don't need to re-invent the wheel, and we fundamentally do the same thing. Now, one of the things the national form brings, there is a standard legislation, nationally, that we're operating with. That makes it potentially easier for volunteers to transfer from jurisdiction to jurisdiction.* (Participant)

*I'd say it's certainly improved and again, a big one for the organisations for states and also the work of the AEMVF. There's been a big focus on nationally recognising training across the state, training competencies across the state and the nation. That is if one goes from organisation to organisation or moves to out in the country like with work or family life, those training competencies can be recognised in other organisations or other states. In terms of individual organisational training programs, I think we've come a lot further as well. There's a lot more compliance. Those organisations have to take into account now, which, it's hard on the organisation because that is constantly training but overall, I think, in terms of nationally recognised training and training systems have become a lot tidier and a lot more competency based for those members in the services.* (Participant)

However, the increasing amount of accredited training and associated requirements brings with it a range of other issues. In the 2009 report, participants identified that "accredited training is both a blessing and a curse. By its very nature, there are administrative tasks and paperwork attached to this training. Some participants acknowledged the importance of accredited training, but also referred to the lengthy, time-consuming and complex administration and associated paperwork involved" (Esmond, 2009:36).

In 2016, these bureaucratic processes have increased especially for organisations that are identified as Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). At times, it seems that the amount of administrative work and paperwork almost becomes more important than the training and the volunteers themselves. Further, this increased amount of work for both paid staff and volunteers has not been matched with an increase in resources.

*I think it's becoming increasingly difficult for a volunteer organisation to maintain accredited training and by that I mean nationally accredited registered training organisation (RTO) based training, at the level that they may have 10 years ago. The administrative overhead too of being training compliant with the requirements of a RTO is a considerable burden on both staff and*

*volunteer trainers alike. The volunteer training can just be a challenge in the amount of record keeping required. That's one of the things that we'll be looking at and certainly our service over the next 18 months is what training needs to be competency based and what doesn't need to be competency based and how we can actually train people in a way that makes the most effective use of their time but also makes the most effective use of the trainers time because most of our trainers are volunteers.* (Participant)

*Effectively, every time that the training sector reinvents part of itself, it does increase the administrative overhead but there's obviously no corresponding increase in actual resources to manage that.* (Participant)

In 2009, participants identified the need to ensure training should never be boring or a waste of precious volunteer time and were concerned about a shortage of good quality specialist training. It was considered important that trainers were provided with professional development opportunities.

In 2016, the professional development of trainers, particularly in response organisations, is well underway with trainers preparing to undertake relevant Certificate IV level training. However, participants were not sure whether the implementation of increased qualification requirements for trainers, especially volunteer trainers, would really result in better quality training and whether the perceived benefits would outweigh the associated difficulties.

*In a lot of cases, it's going to be a large shortfall of people with that qualification. It's going to make it initially tough. A lot of the services, offered their own training in certain courses but now you're going to have to have a Cert IV training and assessment on top of it, which is a bit tough because unless the services are going to pay for this or have people to come in and run them for their members, it's a costly process and it's also quite a time consuming process. With the added cost and time, on top of already time poor volunteers with families and jobs and they're giving up time to volunteer in their community, I think it's going to be quite stressful and create a bit of havoc with the services, in terms of training and assessing.* (Participant)

Further, despite volunteers feeling time poor, they are now faced not only with greater amounts of operational based training but also with the added demands of non-operational training mirroring that which paid staff are required to complete, such as 'diversity training' or 'harmonious

workplace training'.

*You get out with your equipment, you play with the mannequins, you actually do scenarios of real patients and then most of those have been taken away because there's all these managers, and then oh no, no, we've got do the diversity training there and we've got to do the harmonious workplace training here and we need to do more workplace and safety here and you can see all the reasons for it, but in the end that takes up a hell of a lot of training that most volunteers can't see the point of doing. They can see the sense in getting hold of equipment and putting it on one another, or putting it on mannequins, but the diversity training they can't quite work out and so we've got this real disconnect between government policy and organisations - all of which is good, I want diverse places, I want harmonious workplaces, but this ongoing thing. The first thing that happens, first day in induction is things about diverse workplaces and harmony. It's nice to tell them the organisation they're joining, but it's also a bit of a problem if it takes a while for them to actually get there. To get near a patient, somebody to help, one of your great rewards is you actually help somebody.* (Participant)

In the 2009 report it was clearly identified that issues around professionalisation of volunteering and increased training needed to be monitored and continually balanced in relation to the needs and time volunteers had to engage in their volunteering role.

In 2016, seven years later, participants are concerned that despite the improvements and their efforts in relation to training, this balance was being lost as it continues to 'tip' towards ever increasing time spent in training. The unchecked expansion of training requirements and the amount of time volunteers have to devote to training may in the future be the most significant factors contributing to a decline in the recruitment, engagement and retention of emergency management volunteers, especially in the response organisations.

*What I see happening is that it's a creeping problem. For most of the competencies that are required, there are now more elements than there used to be being added to them. This adds to the bill, obviously. I'm not convinced that all these elements are necessary. I know this is probably sacrilege but OH&S has gone mad, for example. For an emergency organisation it is particularly unreasonable. As an organisation I have to say their safety record is magnificent and it always has been. It's far better than the paid organisations. They really are better able to look after each other and they do so. There are fewer injuries and deaths in the volunteer ranks than there are in*

*the permanent ranks and they do the same job very often. The problem has been the gradual increase in training requirements across the board. I'm not convinced that they're all adding value to the performance in the field. You can understand this I think because as I said, a lot of the things that we do are also done by our paid counterparts. It gives better pay and conditions and better grading for permanent staff if there is training. If they're more skilled, it's reasonable to suspect that they'd get a bit more money. The volunteers, I think, are collateral damage. I think someone's got to have a look at minimising the training requirements without reducing standards because I think that they're not necessarily out of control but they're causing a problem.* (Participant)

Certainly, over the last seven years, training and the professionalisation of volunteering has become an increasingly complex challenge. Most recently, the ongoing concerns around union action and the responses of a state government are being seen to impact on the independence of the volunteers involved in fire fighting. Underlying the current dispute is the assumption that because volunteers do not have the exactly the same training and are not paid, they are therefore not as capable as their paid counterparts in undertaking the same duties at times of emergencies and disasters. This inference will undoubtedly create a significant ongoing impediment to organsations' attempts to maintain the engagement of much needed volunteers to deal with future emergencies and disasters. For those in paid positions in both organisations and government who have little understanding of what being a volunteer really means, particularly in smaller rural communities, underestimating volunteers is done at their own peril.

*My caution is that we are in industrial environment that promotes language like professional firefighters. So, the career firefighters - they're professional, safe and well trained and what we don't want is be perceivably less trained, less safe and less professional because that wouldn't instill community confidence, that they're being protected in the best possible way. It would create a perception of getting a second class service. Whereas we know our volunteers are among some of the most experienced and qualified and have professions outside the CFA that mean they're exceptional managers, exceptional leaders. They're excellent incident controllers and well trained. That's my caution. We also need to protect what we have and it's not just seen as world class but it is world class. That's a big challenge for the sector over the next few years as we look to reduce the time burden on volunteers. We also need to make sure that we keep their skills strong because otherwise we risk getting into that back territory.* (Participant)

In 2016 it is now even more imperative that organisations constantly monitor the amount of time

involved in training and keep it to a sustainable level for their volunteers. Although pressures from governments, communities, unions and paid organisational staff will continue for more training, what is notably absent from the discussion is the voices of the volunteers. Participants were clear that overall the representation by volunteers on decision-making groups as to the type and amount of training across many organisations and on the wider national stage was extremely limited. Decisions were frequently being made about training requirements by bureaucrats at a national level, then interpreted and implemented by centralised paid staff at an organisational level, with little or no input from the volunteers who were required to undertake the training.

*The whole concept of nationally accredited training was a brilliant idea corrupted. The changes in trainer qualifications over the years have also put an unfortunate burden on volunteers. The move of that training and those qualifications into government skill sets as opposed to public safety has probably facilitated the overtaking of a lot of that training by paid employees. If we could get that back again, to where the volunteers have more input into the standards and qualifications, it would be very helpful.* (Participant)

Overall, volunteers themselves are positive about their training experience both within response and recovery organisations. But without organisations such as the AEMVF representing all emergency management volunteers at the higher levels and volunteers themselves at the organisational levels having a 'voice' in relation to training, the critical balance may be lost in the future. Without concerted efforts to include volunteer representatives 'at the table', training requirements particularly in response organisations are likely to continue to grow as they have over the last seven years. Volunteers will be required to train more often, for longer periods and undertake more diverse training components all whilst having less and less time to volunteer. Ultimately, organisations especially in the response area will risk becoming very sophisticated training organisations but lacking enough emergency management volunteers to undertake critical responses in times of emergency.

*Yes we are a registered training organisation. We are one of the largest registered training organisations in this state and it was mentioned to me the other day that we provide as much, if not more training, than TAFE in this state. In fact, training is our number one activity. We do more training than we do responding. What I said the other day, we're actually a training organisation that responds sometimes.* (Participant)

# CHALLENGE THREE – COST

*Volunteers are not paid not because they are worthless, but because they are priceless -*
*Anonymous*

**Context of cost-related challenges**

In the 2009 report, it was explained that "there is a general perception by the public that it costs nothing for organisations to involve volunteers. This is far from the truth – volunteers are certainly a cost to an organisation. However, even if members of the public are aware of this, they may be exceedingly surprised to learn that there is also a cost to being a volunteer. Volunteers are not a free resource and nor is the activity of volunteering free. Yet surprisingly this is what millions of volunteers do – they pay for the privilege of volunteering. For volunteers in general, and for those involved as emergency management volunteers – there is a financial cost for being a volunteer and in some cases a substantial one" (Esmond, 2009:40).

According to the AEMVF Cost of Volunteering Survey (2006), generally these costs to volunteers involved three primary financial costs:

- Direct financial costs – out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers as part of their volunteer activities;
- In-kind contributions – where volunteers commit their own equipment or other resources at no cost to the volunteer organisation (e.g., telephone, office equipment, machinery, tools, motor vehicle and boat repairs);
- Employment costs – employees taking annual leave, unpaid leave or foregoing overtime and with the self-employed, closing their businesses, leaving their farming duties or hiring casual staff in their absence.

By 2009, a number of reports had been released noting that at a time of rising petrol prices there seemed to be spiralling costs to being a volunteer. Birch and McLennan (2007) in their survey of NSW RFS volunteers had identified that out-of-pocket expenses including petrol, ranked 4th out of 14 negative aspects of volunteering. Also, Birch and McLennan (2008) in their later survey of Queensland Fire and Rescue Rural Operations Volunteer Fire Wardens confirmed that the rising cost of fuel was a major issue threatening the continued volunteer work of fire wardens.

Volunteering Australia (2008) in their National Survey of Volunteering Issues found the cost of fuel and telephone expenses were identified as the two major areas of expense for volunteers. The Centre for Volunteering NSW (2010) further described the costs to volunteers across different sectors. Then in Volunteering Australia's latest State of Volunteering in Australia Report (2016:11), of the volunteers who stated they would not volunteer in the future, "the most common reason was other (45 per cent), followed by work commitments (27 per cent) and out-of-pocket expenses (27 per cent)".

In 2009, participants noted that there was great disparity amongst organisations in the resourcing and reimbursing of out-of-pocket expenses for volunteers. "Some organisations seem to be well resourced and funded to undertake their voluntary work, as compared to other organisations that were very poorly resourced. Many volunteers involved in response based organisations were extremely well resourced as compared to some of their counterparts in recovery based organisations but often absorbed greater out-of-pocket expenses, particularly relating to extensive training commitments. The need for recovery based organisations to also have equality in access to funding and proper resourcing is certainly long overdue" (Esmond, 2009:42). In 2016, these differences and disparities still exist to some degree between response and recovery organisations.

**Discussion of cost-related challenges**

In 2009, it was clear that the cost of volunteering could no longer be ignored as rising petrol costs had become a barrier to involvement of new and current volunteers across all sectors and particularly for emergency management volunteers. As this earlier AEMVF Report (2006:46) had foreshadowed: "the current system is very dependent upon the goodwill of volunteers. The limits of this goodwill are unknown, which makes it all the more important that government closely assesses the kind of costs outlined here and provides suitable reimbursement to volunteers that covers basic costs (e.g. uniforms, petrol, travel, training) to enable them to continue to provide their invaluable time to serve their communities".

In 2016, seven years later, many organisations have heeded the message regarding costs and reimbursements and have made extensive efforts to ensure that their volunteers do not have any out-of-pocket expenses and to minimise in-kind costs. Many organisations are now aiming for and committed to the concept of 'zero cost volunteering' with the goal of ensuring that there is no cost to those who volunteer.

*I think they are less because having been a volunteer my whole life, basically, I'm aware of those*

*costs. I have a deal of 'zero cost volunteering' for my volunteers. It is never exactly that but that's the goal. I try really hard to make sure wherever practical whether it's training or some personal equipment.* (Participant)

In 2016, of the five challenges, participants felt that the most significant progress had occurred in covering the costs to their volunteers. They considered it was no longer an area of such great concern as seven years ago.

*I would say that it's not a complaint we get often. The training is free. The equipment they get, their personal equipment and clothing doesn't cost them anything as they get what's appropriate for the role that they're undertaking. When there's major emergency activity meals are provided. If we send people away, their accommodation and their transport is arranged centrally. It's like I said, it's an issue that does not comes up a lot anymore. I know that some brigades apply for grants here and there to buy extra equipment and that sort of stuff but I think we're fairly well resourced in that regard.* (Participant)

However, although much progress has been made over the last seven years, there are still areas for improvement in some organisations around reimbursement and out-of-pocket expenses. Despite organisations offering full reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses for their volunteers, some volunteers are continuing to absorb these costs and this ultimately can become a deciding factor in their future decision to continue to volunteer or to leave.

Participants explained that there were several main reasons for this situation:

(i) In some organisations the reimbursement system exists but it is *cumbersome, time consuming and requires multi-layers of senior management approval*. For many volunteers this involves so much time and effort they simply give up.

*The really difficult problem that organisations need to keep an eye on and be held accountable for and it's not good enough is 'Oh, we've got so much money in this fund for this, but if nobody can access it because you've set the requirements too tight then it doesn't help anybody. You can just keep bragging about it. Far too many managers point to the reimbursement system but are not held accountable for the fact that as soon as you walk into a unit most of the volunteers haven't claimed because it's just too jolly hard.* (Participant)
*The problem with reimbursement is so often, organisations talk about to their reimbursement*

*system but there are too frequently, major impediments to that actually being used. The far more common one is it is an archaic, paper-driven, bureaucratic system that has to be approved by somebody who is in senior management. For gods' sakes, a $40 dollar phone bill, somebody in senior management has to approve it. For the senior manager to have to look at my form and sign it off, it's bloody 18th century and what that means is I haven't been paid for a travel thing I did in mid-November and the likelihood is I won't get paid until after Christmas and I'm supposed to expect that's normal. The only way I can get paid for the phone is to scour my phone bill and highlight the ones that I think had an organisational involvement in them. Nobody in my group has charged for phone calls for years and yet most of them text messages on our mobile phone as volunteers. We'll text one another saying we're off duty and we're back again. All of that discourages people from applying.* (Participant)

Although some organisations have introduced less complex processes such as fuel cards for the members of an entire brigade or group to use, there is no real consistency in how reimbursements are handled across the emergency management sector.

(ii) Participants also identified that in some organisations or locations there is a *lack of communication to the volunteers* about the opportunity for them to receive any reimbursements. The information is not actively promoted and volunteers are not informed about how to claim these reimbursements. They simply have no idea that they are able to claim the costs they are incurring when volunteering.

(iii) In some organisations and/or local groups there is a *culture amongst volunteers themselves* that although reimbursement is available there is an unwritten understanding that volunteers do not apply for reimbursement and claim their out-of-pocket expenses. Although on the surface, this seems very altruistic, it ultimately does not assist the organisation or the volunteers. It hides the 'true cost' of the work undertaken by volunteers and also ensures that those volunteers who have difficulty absorbing these costs are less likely to stay or to even volunteer.

*There are two problems with reimbursement. One is the horribly bureaucratic, slow system and the other that in certain units, perhaps in whole agencies and organisations, but certainly down in regional areas and units, there are people who say we don't do that – we don't claim for out-of-pocket expenses. I really know that is a bar to recruitment. If you're a single mum, you are struggling, when money matters to you, trying to work out how you live from pay cheque to pay*

*cheque, or you look at the interest on your overdraft and worry a lot. Then, the fact that if you go to join the emergency management volunteers and the senior people in the group say mate, this stuff is volunteering, you know we don't do that, you don't need money for transport, telephone, etc and then you don't claim these costs. It's generally the people who say that have retired from very well paying jobs and they've probably got the lovely super. They're sitting on nice lots of money and they don't need to claim for anything and what happens is, people who find that paying their own petrol every time, it's starting to get troubling, they just drift away. They'll never say, I can't bloody afford this. That would be a shameful thing but the facts are there isn't any money coming in for all this stuff that costs. That's a harder thing for organisations to do because it's generally not management, they're generally saying we reimburse people. But to me it's one of the great lies in these organisations that the Minister and management say, we've got a reimbursement system, and I say find me a volunteer and let's go ask them when they do it and claim and they certainly won't. It has become both cultural and structural in the organisation and then there is no way they're going to apply it.* (Participant)

There is one volunteer group in particular for whom the costs of volunteering are most significant and that is volunteers who are self-employed. The AEMVF Cost of Volunteering Survey (2006) found that when employment and business costs are included, self-employed volunteers absorbed almost twice the costs of other employees.

In the 2009 report it was noted that "the sector is very good at deploying very large numbers of volunteers for short periods, but with more prolonged operations on the horizon, some form of financial assistance needs to be considered and made available to allow them to extend their time commitment in these circumstances" (Esmond, 2009:48).

Seven years later, whilst great progress has been made regarding the reimbursement of direct out-of-pocket costs, little progress seems to have been made in the more complicated issue of reimbursing indirect costs, such as those borne by self-employed people. Of course, these costs are far more difficult to accurately quantify but with greater demand for the services of volunteers during disasters, organisations will need to develop innovative strategies for volunteers experiencing significant income loss, particularly self-employed volunteers.

*Certainly, I'm aware of one unit controller a number of years ago who was relatively young,*

*female, self-employed, running her own business and also the unit controller with a lot of members and she had to give away volunteering to essentially keep her accountancy business going. You can either be an emergency management volunteer or you can be bankrupt. The number of occasions where her business almost had to close because she was not available were so numerous.* (Participant)

It does seem that considerable progress has been made towards zero cost volunteering for volunteers in terms of reimbursing their out-of-pocket expenses and that cost factors have become less of an issue than seven years ago. However, there is still disparity between resourcing and reimbursements amongst response and recovery organisations. In simple terms, it was felt that because the response organisations tend to be better funded and resourced than recovery organisations, they are in a better position to improve the reimbursement of costs incurred by their volunteers.

In some organisations there is also a vast difference between having a reimbursement system available and actively encouraging all volunteers to use the system. Reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses needs to become part of the culture as the rule rather than the exception and this fact should be communicated to all volunteers. Further, such reimbursements must be devoid of bureaucratic red tape and become efficient and timely, encouraging volunteers to claim the reimbursements they are entitled to receive and so richly deserve.

*As an organisation we need consistent policies so that if a volunteer is out-of-pocket, they're very clear up front on what they might expect to receive back in a reimbursement. We're doing work on that now. What we usually find is that many volunteers choose the option not to exercise expenses. Whether that's because they're not aware that they're there, whether it's because there's a perception that they shouldn't, we don't know. That's part of the work we're doing now but if we're going to train people and expect volunteers to travel or use their own vehicles then we need to expect they'll be reimbursed. They shouldn't be out-of-pocket.* (Participant)

# CHALLENGE FOUR – RECOGNITION

*I can no other answer make, but, thanks, and thanks - William Shakespeare*

**Context of recognition-related challenges**

The 2009 report acknowledged that "a lack of recognition can make or break the volunteering experience. To be valued, appreciated and recognised is an underlying powerful force that can keep volunteers going at times when they feel like calling it 'quits'. If recognition is given, it becomes an extremely powerful retention mechanism. A major reason volunteers give for ceasing volunteer involvement is that they 'did not feel appreciated" (Esmond, 2009:49).

Howard (2005:7) best summarises the thoughts of volunteers at numerous Volunteer Summits: "Above everything else, volunteers still believe they are largely taken for granted – a situation that must be turned around. Australians must recognise that it is demanding to be a volunteer. If they don't look after them and recognise them more effectively, they will lose them".

In 2016, these words remain relevant for emergency management volunteers in Australia.

**Discussion of the recognition-related challenges**

In the 2009 report, participants identified that there were four main recognition areas for volunteers. The participants in 2016 reinforced that these were still the "four main recognition-related areas for volunteers:

- recognition by state and national leaders;
- recognition by the organisation;
- recognition within the local unit or group; and
- recognition by the general public and local community" (Esmond, 2009:49).

(i) *Recognition by state and national leaders*. In the 2009 report, participants described "that public recognition by governments through State and national leaders, not just during emergencies, is welcomed, valued and appreciated by volunteers. However, in times of

emergencies, it is crucial for this recognition to be given, and to be given to all involved. Participants also emphasised the great importance of praise being given to all volunteers involved in both the response and recovery areas, rather than perhaps just those on the frontline that are highly visible. Thanking and recognising only some volunteer groups and not others is almost as bad as not recognising volunteers at all.

Further, "it is important that the work volunteers do is recognised as professional and accorded an equality with their paid counterparts. It was therefore incumbent upon leaders and politicians, and their advisers to ensure they are aware of all those involved who have dealt with the emergency or disaster situation and to publicly acknowledge them" (Esmond, 2009:50).

This underlying sentiment remains true seven years later and was reinforced by participants in the 2016 research. Interestingly, in 2016, along with the greater frequency of large scale disasters requiring involvement by volunteers, participants felt that recognition of volunteers by politicians and from the higher levels in government had very much improved. Politicians and government leaders had become much more aware of the work undertaken by volunteers at these times and ensured they were thanked and recognised as much as their paid counterparts.

*I guess the evidence for that is my contact with government they're quite considerate of the fact that they're volunteers, they're aware that no one's being paid, they're aware of the contribution they make.* (Participant)

*It has developed further because we have members of parliament, premiers and so on, publicly thanking volunteers in the media when they respond to devastating situations.* (Participant)

There had also been further improvements from seven years ago, when during disasters volunteers visibly on the 'front line' from response organisations were often publicly thanked and recovery organisations mostly forgotten. In 2016, participants felt that this had improved significantly at a national and state level.

Politicians and other leaders had become increasingly aware and sensitive to thanking and recognising all emergency management volunteers from both recovery and response organisations.

*Certainly, a large area has been the disaster recovery and resilience programs, that has been implemented by the Australian federal government and that is focused on first response, but also recovery. There's still a long way to go. Traditionally, people understand in the community emergency flashing lights and sirens and the response of your emergency services by only one agency. But a lot of people do not understand that the recovery is a part of it. In many cases, it is the largest part of emergency service or a natural disaster or for anything that occurs. There's still a long way to go in that area.* (Participant)

In 2016, participants also acknowledged that the presenting of medals on a national scale was very positive and appreciated by emergency management volunteers. However, participants also warned of the need to be vigilant in ensuring that the criteria for receiving such medals remained open, transparent and obtainable for volunteers across all emergency management organisations and across roles. There is a need for such medals and awards to find ways to recognise the 'quiet work' behind the scenes as well as the obvious highly visible contributions (Coon, 2005).

*But I know of people who received that medal and their function, essentially, this is an important function, don't get me wrong. Their function was to organise volunteers to go to another state and to look after, from their office, from their air-conditioned office, and the comfort thereof, to manage logistics. And yet, oh, okay they did that for x number of days during the stated period so they got the national emergency medal.* (Participant)

Participants explained that if not handled carefully, this can result in 'negative' recognition that occurs when only certain individuals, groups or organisations are thanked and others are not and considered this to be far worse than no recognition at all.

*The strong point I'd make about this though is that of negative recognition. Which is when the politicians decide they want to have a medal for those involved in a big event or only some people involved in the event. We don't get a medal, even though about once a week we take little old ladies to hospital. Or if we go to your asthmatic kid you're pretty happy with us but we don't get a medal because we didn't go to the floods.* (Participant)

Ensuring that volunteers from both response and recovery organisations are always included as part of any selection panel for medals and awards can assist in enhancing the awareness of the different types of roles and duties undertaken by volunteers in emergencies and disasters.

*But what about the heroes who are people who do the ordinary which allows the extraordinary to happen. If you only reward and notice the extraordinary then who does the regular checks? Who goes back to the fire station the next day and winds up the hoses? Who goes to the false alarm and goes and puts out the tip fire, if all you want to do is reward them for the multi-day firefighting then forgetting all the small stuff. That upsets people.* (Participant)

In 2009, participants noted that another way in which volunteers can be recognised is by their organisations being provided with proper resourcing. They spoke about the need for government leaders through the emergency management organisations to ensure "the proper resourcing of volunteers, to enable them to carry out their voluntary work effectively. The payment of agreed out-of-pocket expenses, the provision of appropriate clothing, equipment and other resources and the provision of excellent training, are all tangible ways in which governments and organisations clearly demonstrate that they truly value the contribution of those volunteers" (Esmond, 2009:50-51).

*Volunteers wouldn't turn up in an emergency with the view of hoping to get a medal. It is a nice recognition but it's not a driving force for people do come and do what they do. For a big event, they're going to database all the information and do all of that. If government wants it worked out, it costs them to do it, but they could instead provide a nice bit of equipment and something tangible at an organisational level. Thanks for that and we appreciate your organisation's efforts, here's a new whatever. That would cost government very little. Some people want to be recognised personally for what they do but a lot of people are happy for the organisation to be recognised.* (Participant)

In 2016, there was a view that proper resourcing, particularly for response based volunteers, has improved. However, for the essential recovery organisations involved in emergencies and disasters, it was felt that financial support and resourcing was somewhat limited as compared to their response counterparts, and that this is an inequity which needs to be addressed.

*I was embarrassed when I first became involved and I complained about the lack of recognition of the volunteer emergency services until I heard the tales of woe from the recovery agencies which are basically invisible.* (Participant)

(ii) *Recognition by the organisation*. At an organisational level in 2009, participants reported a "wide variety in the types of public recognition for their volunteers. In different organisations, these ranged from virtually non-existent through to highly structured awards, medals and public recognition processes" (Esmond, 2009:52). In 2016, there still is a wide variance in relation to formal recognition across organisations in both the response and recovery areas. However, participants did describe significant improvement including a larger number of formal recognition events for volunteers.

I *think it is better. We've actually got an internal awards program for our volunteers and that's been in place for some time. The internal awards are held every year and there are Commissioner's awards so on that day, the Commissioner has a suite of awards that we present. An award of valour, commendation for service and outstanding service and dedication. They're presented annually. Members that have nominations for that are open across the service. Any volunteer or any staff member can nominate someone else. There is some rigour around it because it's quite prestigious and like I said they're awarded every year. Aside from that, there's also long service medals that our volunteers can nominate for. Those long service medals are available. There is actually quite a few awards. Volunteers are also eligible to volunteer for national medals and that's something that we promote to our volunteers. So now there are lots more types of formal recognition for our volunteers.* (Participant)

In the 2009 report, it was also acknowledged that one of the most common forms of volunteer recognition utilised by emergency management organisations is the awarding of medals based on years of service. "However, with the changing nature of volunteer involvement for shorter periods of time the presentation of long service medals after 10, 20, 30 years of service may become a thing of the past…it is imperative that organisations that predominantly recognise their volunteers on the basis of 'time based' awards begin an examination of other ways to recognise and value different types of contribution from their emergency management volunteers in the future" (Esmond, 2009:53).

In 2016, participants confirmed their organisations still maintained programs of awarding long service medals, but in some cases were now awarded for shorter periods of service such as five years, and had also instigated other forms of recognition. Organisations should be commended for their continued efforts to acknowledge the importance of recognition for their volunteers in a wide variety of ways by developing a 'suite' of recognition strategies for their volunteers.

*That's my point and I've always said it needs to be a suite of recognition. Some people like medals, some people like certificates. I have medals and certificates which I have trouble knowing where they are. I don't go to get the non-obligatory ones because they're not on my radar. I am incredibly impressed when a member of the Senior Management Team from Head Office who is in my town seeks me out to say, I just want to say, hello. To me, that's recognition. For other people it will work differently. I keep trying to say. Sure, have a reception. Sure, thank people and all that stuff, but call into their station. Call into their station, brigade or group on a usual training night, not after a big fire or whatever and thank them – that is real recognition.* (Participant)

(iii) *Recognition within the local unit or group.* Participants in the 2009 report spoke about the importance of recognition given to volunteers from their own local unit or group. "It was within the local unit or group and from the people with whom a volunteer has the most contact and connection, where 'relationship recognition' truly occurs…that the feeling of being appreciated, recognised and valued, particularly by your immediate peers, significantly influences a volunteer's decision as to whether or not to continue their volunteer involvement" (Esmond, 2009:53-54).

In 2016, the crucial importance of this informal recognition remains unchanged. There is still no substitute for the personal touch.

*There are lots of certificates and medals and that but I feel like whenever they scratch themselves they get a certificate. It is quite difficult but we usually try and reach them on a personal level.* (Participant)

Most often this informal recognition centres around relationships. As was noted in 2009, "it is at the local level that the ability to customise and personalise recognition becomes not only possible but essential. The more you know about an individual, the more you can personalise their recognition. This makes such recognition even more powerful than other types of external recognition where the approach is often more of 'one size fits all' (Esmond, 2009:54).

Central to personalised informal recognition is the role of the local leader. In 2009, it was clear that there was a need for those in local leadership roles to develop a leadership style that acknowledged the importance of appreciation and used a range of strategies to recognise each and every volunteer's contribution. In 2016, many organisations have recognised the importance of the need to provide meaningful volunteer recognition. The importance of both volunteer and staff

recognition has become part of training programs in many organisations for those in leadership roles at both the local and organisational level.

In 2016, although it does vary with localities and there is always more that can be done, the ongoing efforts and significance given to both types of recognition – formal and informal by organisations and particularly those in leadership at the local level, is to be commended and is appreciated by volunteers.

*We have that formal awards structure and then within our recruitment and retention, we talk about recognition there and less formal ways of recognising members. I guess that's really about encouraging brigade captains and local area leaders simply to say thank you and that can be verbalising something about the great work the volunteer has done. They might send a letter to thank somebody, they might put on a BBQ to say thank you at the end of a busy season. There's a range of things that we think brigades can do to recognise service at that local level, as well. That's something that we encourage. We've got the formal and informal recognition there and when I say I think it's improved, the formal structure has been there for a long time and it's quite well regarded and appreciated. What we're trying to do now is push that informal recognition at a local level.* (Participant)

(iv) *Recognition by the general public and local community*. The fourth recognition-related area was that of recognition from the general public and community at times of emergencies and disasters. In 2009, some participants spoke of a lack of appreciation for their volunteers from the general public who did not value their unpaid, voluntary work when assisting them in a crisis or emergency situation. "Yet recognition by the local community was very important to volunteers…It was often the cry of emergency management volunteers that when they are involved in emergency and disaster situations, people do not even realise they were volunteers and assumed they are paid employees" (Esmond, 2009:55-56).

The most obvious reason why volunteers were mistaken by the general public as paid staff in 2009 and is still a cause of confusion to the public seven years later, is that the uniforms worn by many emergency management volunteers in the response organisations look very similar to their paid counterparts. The State Emergency Services (SES) volunteers are the obvious exception.
*Yeah, that's right. It's such a complex environment now. Organisationally, we are no longer Dad's army out there putting out fires. We are a professional fire service and the communities, especially*

*within these growth areas, they don't even know that their brigades are volunteers in many cases. They expect a professional service. They expect that if they call 000, they'll get a fire truck there in five minutes to put out their fire, not knowing that there are volunteers who have dropped their tools and put down their pens or left their computers or left their families to go out and help them in their need. That's a challenge for us, building awareness in the community that these people are volunteers and they probably need some help but delivering a service that meets the expectations of the community.* (Participant)

The suggestion in the 2009 report that "this problem could appear to be solved in a simple and cost effective way by having the word 'volunteer' or 'trained volunteer' printed in large letters and clearly visible on their uniforms" (Esmond, 2009:56) for many caused great concern. In 2016, participants explained that this was still a double-edged sword. Although volunteers wanted to be recognised by the public for their volunteering efforts, they also wanted to look similar to their paid counterparts to reaffirm their credibility as well-trained professionals, not amateurs, in the eyes of the police, local councils and others involved in emergencies and disasters.

Interestingly, this issue does not seem to cause anywhere near the same amount of difficulty in the recovery organisations. At times of disasters and most often only wearing a simple shirt with an organisational logo such as the Australian Red Cross, they are instantly recognisable to the public as volunteers and thanked for their efforts.

In 2016, apart from the SES, most response organisations throughout Australia have no distinctive, nationally recognisable brand or uniform that allows the general public to be aware that they are being served by volunteers. However, no other topic results in more angst and controversy than the discussion around uniforms, so it seems that this issue is destined to remain at the bottom of the 'too hard basket'.

However, the 2016 research has identified three other methods that seem to have assisted in beginning to raise the profile of volunteers amongst the general public. The first involves *politicians and senior leaders in organisations publicly talking about and thanking volunteers* in the media and press conferences at times of significant disasters.
*One of the other things that we're conscious of also is that during periods of major fire activity, particularly, when it's an extended fire emergency the Commissioner and Deputy Commissioner are quite invested in thanking employers and volunteers in the media, when they get that*

*opportunity. Just raising the awareness of the work that volunteers are doing and publicly thanking them for it and thanking the employers that do release them for that amount of time.* (Participant)

The second is that a number of organisations are incorporating *media training* into their training programs for local group volunteer leaders. This assists those leaders to be more confident when interviewed by the media and provides an opportunity for them to raise the profile of volunteers through local news outlets.

*I know that we fund local leaders to do media training and we've been funding that for the last five years. They're able to self-promote now so they get more presence on television and radio. I think the community would be seeing that and hearing them more often. I think it's improved, definitely.* (Participant)

The third is the rapidly increasing use in times of disasters of the internet and a range of *social media and social networking sites* such as facebook, twitter, youtube and a plethora of other sites to inexpensively spread the volunteering message. (Alexander, 2014; Bruns, 2012; Dufty, 2016; Keim & Noji, 2011).

In 2016, the appreciation and recognition of emergency management volunteers continues to improve at a national, state, organisational and local level. This will always be an ongoing process of improvement but many organisations have progressed in their understanding of both formal and informal forms of recognition and the importance of the personalisation and customisation of volunteer recognition.

As significant as the words were in 2009, seven years later their importance remains: "Whatever form recognition takes, people do not become involved as emergency management volunteers only to be thanked and praised, but when they feel unappreciated and undervalued, they are unlikely to remain" (Esmond, 2009: 55). Remember, "there has never been a volunteer who has left because they were appreciated too much. However, there have been hundreds of thousands across all sectors who have done so because they felt unappreciated" (Esmond, 2009:59).

## CHALLENGE FIVE – PEOPLE

*A volunteer is a person who believes that people can make a difference - and is willing to prove it*
*- Anonymous*

**Context of people-related challenges**

The last of the five challenges discussed in this report, although in many ways it should be the first, is people. More than anything else, people are the most important component of a vibrant and effective volunteering sector. It would seem glaringly obvious that without people putting up their hands to get involved as volunteers, the vital community services they provide would not be viable.

The underlying motivations people have for volunteering in both emergency management and across other sectors predominantly relate to helping other people in their community.

In a large study of volunteer motivations (Esmond and Dunlop, 2004) it was found that the most predominant motivation people had for volunteering is 'helping the community'. Recent studies (Lea, 2008; Rice & Fallon, 2011) confirm this desire to help others and the community as a major motivating factor. This is especially so in cases of emergencies and disasters, where the power of people working together to respond to and recover from such situations is indispensable.

In the 2009 report, another aspect of the importance of people was also highlighted. It confirmed that for many emergency management volunteers involved in ongoing volunteer service, as well as the people they helped, the other volunteers who make up their unit or group were enormously significant. These were the people with whom they met regularly, established relationships and stood beside in times of crisis. Friendship and mateship in standing by your fellow volunteers is what retains volunteers longer than any other factor. Conversely, feeling like you do not belong or fit in with your fellow volunteers, is also a major reason for the lack of retention of new volunteers (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009; Rice & Fallon, 2011).

McLennan (2008:11), in discussing a range of studies with emergency management volunteers involved in response, found that the most often reported negative drawbacks of being a volunteer were associated with: "(a) perceived organisational failures to support the volunteering endeavour; and (b) poor relationships among members of the brigade or unit—usually associated with poor leadership and management of the brigade or unit. In turn, this poor leadership/management may

stem from: (1) poor leadership skills of volunteers in leadership roles, and/or (2) poor management skills of career staff in roles involving supervision of volunteer brigades or units".

In 2016, these relationships within the group or unit remain of critical importance at a time when emergency management volunteers are now involved in more emergencies and more disasters around the country.

**Discussion of people-related challenges**

As was highlighted in 2009, participants in 2016 also discussed the importance of the local unit or group and the role of the unit or group leader in developing the culture at the local level. At the local level the culture either is a "welcoming, open environment or whether a closed clique that has developed over time" (Esmond, 2009:60).

Over a long period of time, there have been numerous publications (Esmond, 2001a; Volunteering Australia, 2016) that confirm that 'word of mouth' remains the number one method of volunteer recruitment (Esmond, 2005). As outlined in 2009, "people ask other people they like and who are similar to themselves to join. Over time, this results in a lack of continued diversity in the group membership and the development of tight closed cliques. These cliques, despite rhetoric to the contrary from the group itself, which is unable to see how insular it has become, it is far from welcoming to new volunteers. The group actively or subtly discourages the continuing involvement of certain volunteers and diversity and this insularity becomes a disincentive for future volunteers. Without diversity and difference group numbers decline and the brigade or group ultimately has ensured their own demise" (Esmond, 2009:61).

In 2016, participants strongly espoused the need for greater diversity in volunteer membership at the local level and many were actively pursuing strategies to ensure diversity as they saw this as vital for the future of volunteer attraction and retention in their organisation.

*In terms of achieving diversity - potentially reaching out to people in the community who may not have considered volunteering with our organisation before. That's a big focus for us. The other thing is about not necessarily setting diversity targets, it's about getting the idea across that the membership within a brigade of a certain area should be reflective of the community in that area*

*and if they're not, maybe they have to have a look at how to improve that. That is the message that we are sending to our people and working with them and it's about being reflective of the community that you serve and that's how we hope to achieve the better diversity.* (Participant)

In 2009, participants spoke about increasing diversity by recruiting people from the local Aboriginal communities in certain areas and other culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups. Participants, however, also "felt their organisations had not fully explored strategies to tap into existing potential recruitment 'pools'…and had yet to effectively develop ways of understanding the needs especially of Aboriginal and CALD groups and therefore at the present time would find great difficulty in engaging them in any volunteering experiences" (Esmond, 2009:67).

In 2016, participants suggested that there were some local successes in engaging and recruiting Aboriginal and CALD groups and these should be commended. However, overall this was limited and it remains a still under explored area of volunteer engagement and possible future membership growth (Australian Emergency Management Institute, 2010; Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2015; Maddock, 2016).

Despite encouragement from the upper management in organisations, it was often a difficult process to include these more diverse groups. There is a need to develop greater cultural sensitivity and awareness. However, at the local level it is extremely difficult when bureaucratic and structural processes and micro-culture within organisations do not allow for the change and adaptability needed to really engage in different ways with such diverse groups. This will continue to hamper attempts at the local level to engage with these diverse groups.

*Some organisations are really recognising the challenges and doing a lot to move their culture within their organisations to be more inclusive and accepting of people from diverse backgrounds. Making an effort to include a range of multicultural people into what traditionally hasn't included a diverse range of people and some are not. I think that some of the marketing and dissemination is very white, it's very un-diverse and it sort of just keeps propagating that message that emergency services is a certain way. This is not so much in the recovery area but in the response area, this is the kind of mindset and certainly in some of the more traditional emergency services. If they're going to be sustainable they do need to figure out how to change the culture of their organisation to be more inclusive. That's a fact.* (Participant)

In the 2009 report, some participants also spoke about the need for greater diversity in *gender based* recruitment. It was noted then, that "many organisations in the response area had predominantly male volunteers and many of the organisations in the recovery area had predominantly female volunteers. It was also suggested that although not the entire solution, perhaps by discussion with each other both types of organisations could learn ways and strategies to attract and retain more volunteers of the opposite gender to their existing volunteer base" (Esmond, 2009:68).

In 2016, this gender imbalance still exists in both recovery and response organisations and learning from each other remains an area for future exploration. In the response area, there has been some progress in the consideration of Personal Protective Equipment (PPE) and altering heavy and awkward equipment to be more suitable for female volunteers.

It is disappointing that at a time of even greater awareness of gender inequality and diminishing volunteer numbers that many traditional response organisations are still experiencing the same issues and barriers for female volunteers that have been identified in research over the last 18 years.

Reinholtd and Smith (1998:42) in their research 18 years ago for EMA and CFA found that some of the disincentives that discouraged women were the 'perceived nature of volunteer activities undertaken' and 'perceived boys club'. Ten years later, McLennan (2008:42-43) stated that "McLennan, Birch, Beatson, and Cowlishaw (2007a) reviewed research conducted by the Bushfire CRC Volunteerism Project team relating to recruitment and retention of women volunteer firefighters. They concluded: Women are deterred from volunteering because: (a) they fear not being welcomed in a male environment; (b) they believe that they are not suited to firefighting; and (c) they have child-care responsibilities". Branch-Smith & Pooley (2010:4) also identified some situations where "women in WA volunteer bushfire services experience negative and often discriminatory behaviour, occurring most often on a fireground. Furthermore, these experiences affect women and their perceptions of themselves as firefighters by making them feel confused as to the intent of the behaviour and devalued by, and inferior to, their fellow male colleagues".

In 2016, in some response based organisations the proportion of women has increased but in other organisations there has been little progress at the local level. In some male dominated groups and

units, women are welcomed but confined only to administrative roles or 'making cups of tea and sandwiches'. This is not to say women volunteers may not be interested in undertaking these specific non-operational roles but they are actively discouraged through these gender biased role definitions from undertaking more active operational roles.

Despite localised efforts, participants in this research explained that there is still some way to go in some traditional response based organisations. Numerous opportunities exist to develop targeted strategies that meet the needs of women and increase their numbers.

*One of the tools we have is we call it health check. It's not compulsory but it's something we recommend the brigades do. It's a self-perception exercise, so, basically, it's trying to determine how welcoming they would be to new members. If someone is seeking to join a brigade and a volunteer organisation that is not welcoming, at the end of the day they are not going to stay. For us, that's part of the process; to actually look at your brigade, see if you are welcoming and are there any changes you could make and all that sort of stuff. I think that's really important, that they are welcoming, if you're seeking to recruit.* (Participant)

Another area of diversity and volunteer recruitment is centred around *age diversity*. As was the case in 2009, in 2016 the struggle continues in both response and recovery organisations to replace an ageing volunteer base and attract younger volunteers. A great deal of literature has now been written in relation to the attraction and retention of younger volunteers (Boessler & Ding, 2010; Gregor, Geale & Creyton, 2014; Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Wajs-Chaczko 2008) but it still remains a very difficult proposition. For many emergency management organisations, their volunteer engagement and training revolves around the retention of longer term volunteers. This may have limited appeal to younger volunteers, who prefer to be engaged for short term projects.

*We always have issues with finding younger volunteers. At the moment, in terms of retention, it's that our volunteers are getting older and finding other things to do like becoming grandparents and other things or health issues and stuff. I think with the attraction though, it's that younger people actually like to do short projects and quick things but I think most of them actually have things to do if they try and stay longer on board.* (Participant)

Although organisations continue to develop, trial and undertake a range of programs to recruit and keep younger volunteers, participants felt that these programs had met with somewhat limited

success in recruiting and especially retaining large numbers of younger volunteers.

*The main problems that I've experienced in volunteering organisations, specifically the one I'm involved in, have been the work with youth. Youth retention and keeping youth in the services. I think it's mainly due to some individuals or large perceptions in organisations not willing to take on and wanting to embrace the younger generation. Looking overall of all ages in organisations, I think, the way we facilitate people through our organisation is a big factor into how we retain individuals. So, that is giving them the opportunity, allowing them to have a go, facilitating them through and our training programs and system. Allow them to develop their way through the organisation. In terms of emergency management stuff, that's actually quite difficult. I'm the volunteer manager for the organisation, as well. It's easy to find short term projects for them to capture their interest but with emergency management, that's actually not happening. Lots of training is actually coming up and going and they have to be ready to do what we have according to the emergency management arrangement. It's hard to give them short term stuff and sometimes there's no activation for quite a while. That's just to keep their interest up but it is really difficult.* (Participant)

Interestingly, in 2016 participants did not only focus on recruiting a younger age group but discussed a range of age related issues in the attraction and retention of volunteers.

(i) Some participants explained that an enormous amount of time, energy and money had been spent on *attempting to recruit younger volunteers at the expense of other demographic groups* but this had met with only limited success. They suggested that organisations may be better advised to re-focus and re-direct their energy and resources to recruiting older demographic cohorts.

*One general comment, I know it's shared by a number of agencies and some other agencies are better placed to do this, is that we need to get better at recruiting and attracting and retaining people who are mid age - 30's, 40's, 50's.* (Participant)

(ii) Some other participants identified that people often *engaged in volunteering at different 'life stages'*. For example, in many of the cadet based programs aimed at attracting younger volunteers, it became increasingly difficult to retain them within the organisations as they moved through adolescence and into adulthood. Some participants involved in these programs had found that it was very important to allow younger volunteers to have a great experience then leave rather than attempt to hold on to them. They had found that they often returned later in their lives when older and at a different life stage in their adulthood.

*We did a massive campaign for it because they find that they do come back and what we're sort of thinking is, so long as that age group is leaving with good knowledge and with the skills that they need to be safe around water and they're taking that and sharing that with their friends and making sure that they are safe. They then come back at a later age with a good attitude towards the organisation, then that's great. We're not going to be able to retain everyone but we should look after the ones we can retain 30 and 40 year olds, where it has so much value to us at that age group. Whereas that sort of 13 to 21 age group, we're sort of that stage where we're thinking that perhaps, we should just let them spread their wings and go and be free for a little while because they will come back to us. The majority will come back. We give them permission and say, yes, thank you for what you've given us, we hope you come back when you've got a bit more time. We understand. It's not that we're happy for them to leave the organisation. We'd always love for them to stay but we understand why they need to go. We've just completed a review and looked at in depth at that age group, particularly around that 13 to 16 age group. We've just sort of found that, that it is not really cool anymore at that age group. When it's a bit younger it's pretty cool but at that these later age groups it's really not.* (Participant)

(iii) Some participants also felt that to truly engage younger volunteers, *organisations needed to change their traditional structures and processes dramatically*. This did not mean abandoning existing older volunteers, nor giving up on engaging these younger volunteers but it did mean acknowledging that current models of volunteer engagement no longer fitted across all demographic groups. In some organisations, younger volunteers often found themselves trying to fit into an organisational culture and structure that was predominantly geared towards the needs of older, long-term volunteers. To attract future generations, these organisations will need to reinvent themselves and how they engage with younger volunteers in the future.

No matter what methods organisations utilised to involve youth as volunteers, all participants agreed that continuing to include young people in relevant committees was extremely important. The changes needed to attract, support and recruit young people would only be successful if these same young people continued to be consulted and were an integral part of the process.

In 2016, organisations have developed more diversity in their volunteer membership by providing greater flexibility in the amount of time and type of roles volunteers undertake. Organisations were using 'target' marketing and recruitment, to recruit volunteers with specific skills and expertise, as well as developing roles that require less time and training commitment compared to operational

roles.

However, the success or failure of greater volunteer diversity in organisations is intimately intertwined with another people-related challenge identified in 2009, namely *leadership*.

In the 2009 report, participants explained that it is the leadership and members at the local level that will ultimately determine the culture of the particular group and how welcoming they are (or are not) to new members. "Further, the leader's skills, confidence and ability to handle differences in people, including differences of opinion, is critical for the diversity and therefore growth of the group and local units or groups can no longer afford poor leadership. There is the need for effective volunteer leadership training to be made available to those undertaking these leadership positions" (Esmond, 2009:62).

In 2016, many participants spoke of the previous establishment of the Mount Macedon complex and leadership training program as being very beneficial for those involved in volunteer leadership. They also expressed their great disappointment that the program and complex had been more recently been closed down by the Commonwealth Government. Although limited in numbers, the fact that such quality training was offered to volunteers and all expenses were paid provided a very tangible commitment by the government to volunteer leaders across a wide range of emergency management organisations.

*A major tragedy and a hard outcome for us in the 2014 budget was the closing of the emergency training college - Mount Macedon. As a volunteer, that place made me feel special, made me feel like I was part of the team there. They ran it really well. All the staff got what we were doing. It was a really great thing. They've lost all that, to my knowledge, they've lost pretty well all the staff. They've lost all of that and the commitment to training will be quite different. There's been a transformation into a new operation that involves collaboration across some different organisations. I'm interested to see how those things work but it won't be the same and I'm happily getting our volunteers to go on it and now I'm realising we have to pay their travel bills. We didn't have to pay them in the past. That's one of the nice little secret things that you do. Oh yeah, yeah, we've got the training, but, oh, the important costs like travel are no longer paid you will have to find the money for that.* (Participant)

In 2016, participants identified that leadership training had continued to improve through:

- Both response and recovery organisations collaborating to provide alternative programs specifically related to leadership training since the closure of Mount Macedon;
- More training programs now involving leadership modules particularly around the interpersonal skills needed to lead people; and
- The development of more online leadership training options.

*It has improved. There are more organisations than since the last research that have developed their own leadership programs. There has been a national leadership program introduced, while it's relatively modest, it's still working well. The leadership training throughout the sector has improved.* (Participant)

*There are leadership components within different levels of specialist training. When a volunteer gets to that level that they are performing a captain or a deputy role, they do have that crew leader qualification and the leadership aspect is built into the leadership programs as they progress. More and more, we're seeing dedicated leadership programs being run in the organisation so there's actually a program. It's quite a good program because it works on some of the softer membership skills, this is very much very people in personal communications focus of this leadership program. There's becoming more and more recognition of the importance of that stuff and that's being reflected in the new training and I think it's great that that side of leadership is getting that focus as well.* (Participant)

However, in 2016 most leadership training is still 'location' based training. That is, the training program is run at a particular location, participants attend usually for a number of days and then return to their leadership roles in the local group or unit, often without follow-up or support.

The 2009 report identified that "one of the most effective leadership skills and development techniques introduced into many business settings and some public sector organisations, is the use of regular on-going coaching services. This may be particularly pertinent for volunteer leaders who often operate in isolation and are scattered throughout the country. Leaders are linked with a coach who provides independent coaching or mentoring to them, usually over the telephone or internet, on a fortnightly or monthly basis. The coach and client work together on developing strategies and techniques to deal with issues involved in their ongoing leadership role. Initial

training programs, combined with ongoing coaching, have proved a very successful combination for providing effective leadership training as well as support (Esmond, 2009:63). In 2016, this effective model of leadership training has not been widely implemented in the emergency management sector.

A further people-related challenge identified by some participants in 2009 involved "the relationships between paid (career) and unpaid (volunteer) staff. Participants were concerned that their volunteers sometimes described examples of inequality and negativity towards them from paid staff, particularly when operating in very similar areas and roles…Negative attitudes, adversarial relationships and inequalities between paid staff and volunteers, although not explicitly tolerated by organisations, nevertheless exist and can be extremely divisive at the local level" (Esmond, 2009:65-66).

In 2016, participants suggested that overall, animosity between paid staff and volunteers had decreased over time. Participants also suggested that where issues did arise, they often resulted from organisational requirements and a lack of understanding of the workloads and other competing personal time demands on volunteers.

*On a day to day basis, there are still silly irritants. Look, operationally, I don't see a problem and they also work very nicely with paid staff very often doing exactly the same job. It's not been an issue in recent years and people who say it is don't understand the sector. I think that's something that's really great to see. I think this is good. It does mean good too because they see each as their friends. Honestly, it's a credit to them all, including the paid people. They work very well side by side and that increases the strength.* (Participant)

In 2016, participants reiterated that the attitude of paid staff towards volunteers ultimately emanates from the top. If those at the highest echelons in the organisation, starting with the Chief Executive Officer (CEO), do not respect and value volunteers, then this negative attitude can quickly filter down through the ranks of paid staff. Overall, participants felt that volunteers were well respected in their organisations. In a very small minority of organisations where this was not the case, it was having devastating consequences with declining volunteer numbers.

Finally, in discussing the issue of people, it has never been more important that the voices of

volunteers are represented and heard at all levels. Whenever decision-making involves and affects volunteers then volunteer representatives should be automatically included in that process. At the national level, this is most effectively achieved through the AEMVF.

However, although the AEMVF represents thousands of volunteers in both response and recovery organisations it remains under-resourced. It is crucial that the AEMVF is adequately funded and supported in its role and this requires, amongst other things, dedicated administrative staff and support.

*We work quietly away and we do achieve a reasonable amount behind the scenes but in the last 18 months, since the closure of Mount Macedon, where our secretariat from the ADG used to live, which gave us good support, the support has now been transferred to Canberra. It is quite unsatisfactory. I think we've had three changes of staff in three months and right now there's nobody looking after us at all. Look, we're obviously low on their priority list but the support we are getting is not good and the publicity that they're helping us with is non-existent.* (Participant)

Further, the AEMVF must remain as an independent voice for emergency management volunteers. Recently, there has been pressure from some other organisations to have a 'seat at the AEMVF table'. There is real concern that this may result in conflicting interests diluting the voice for volunteers currently provided by the AEMVF. The function of the AEMVF should always be to communicate what volunteers need and want, not to be a forum for organisations to dictate what they require from volunteers.

# Recommendations

The recommendations arising out of this research are now set out below under the headings of the five main challenges in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

**Time**

That organisations commit to undertaking a regular 'process and paper' audit to refine and streamline administrative processes and reduce the amount of paperwork required of volunteers.

That organisations continue to develop greater flexibility through a continuum of different levels of volunteer involvement and time commitment.

That organisations continue to develop greater diversity through a variety of volunteering options, including online volunteering, experteering and employee volunteering programs.

**Training**

That organisations undertake to review and monitor the amount and type of training required of volunteers in various roles to ensure it remains manageable and directly relevant for those volunteers.

That volunteer representatives are involved in the decision-making at the national, state and organisational levels into the training requirements for volunteers.

That organisations continue to develop flexible training methods including different training pathways for different roles and alternative modes of delivery including online training.

That organisations continue to collaborate and share resources in the ongoing development of training programs.

**Cost**

That organisations commit to a goal of zero cost volunteering to ensure that there is no financial detriment to those who make the decision to volunteer.

That organisations review their reimbursement systems to ensure that those systems are easy to

access, streamlined and actively promoted.

That there be adequate and equitable distribution of funding and resourcing of all emergency management volunteers, whether in response or recovery based organisations.

That consideration be given to providing special assistance to volunteers involved in prolonged response and recovery operations dealing with disasters and emergencies, particularly self-employed volunteers.

**Recognition**

That national and state leaders continue to ensure that all emergency management volunteers involved in both response and recovery are recognised and thanked, both at times of emergencies and also on other occasions.

That organisations continue to develop a range of volunteer recognition strategies and techniques at both the organisational and local level.

That organisations continue to explore strategies to increase public awareness of the vital roles played by emergency management volunteers.

**People**

That organisations continue to commit to developing targeted strategies to increase the diversity of their volunteer base, in terms of age, gender and cultural and linguistic diversity.

That consideration be given to enhancing the quality of leadership training courses by providing ongoing follow-up coaching and mentoring support for volunteer leaders.

That adequate government funding and support is provided to ensure the continuing strength and independence of the AEMVF as the voice of emergency management volunteers throughout Australia.

**Research**

That consideration be given to further follow-up studies of the current research being conducted every five years. This research would utilise the same methodology as the original and current research to provide a longitudinal value and comparability of outcomes over a longer term.

**Conclusion**

The adoption of this report and its recommendations will assist the sector to continue to address the five main areas of challenge and enhance sustainability and growth in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers into the future.

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