



Report on

**Volunteer Recruitment, Engagement and
Retention in
Faith Based Organisations Supporting
Communities through Disasters and
Emergencies**

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Report on Volunteer Recruitment, Engagement and Retention for Faith Based Organisations Supporting Communities through Disasters and Emergencies

Executive Summary

This research project has been funded by the New South Wales and Commonwealth Governments through the National Partnership Agreement on Natural Disaster Resilience. Three faith based organisations which operate within New South Wales collaborated for this project, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia; The Salvation Army Emergency Services and Anglicare.

Dr Judy Esmond, a leading authority on volunteering was commissioned to undertake a study and provide a report which considered the issues of volunteer recruitment, engagement and retention for faith based organisations supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

This project consisted of several components: (i) an overview and understanding of some of the existing relevant literature; (ii) intensive interviews with key paid staff and volunteers in leadership roles; (iii) survey of volunteers; and (iv) separately, the development of an introductory manual as a complementary resource for organisations involved in the recruitment and engagement of faith based volunteers supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

Recruitment

The issue of recruitment of volunteers for faith based organisations involved in disasters and emergencies is an ongoing challenge. It was found that most volunteers are recruited from their local churches by word of mouth, through family or friends or during presentations by leaders, who are often volunteers themselves.

As church attendance numbers decline and church attendees are getting older, this is reflected in a volunteer pool which is diminishing in size, lacks diversity of membership and has ageing volunteers. The vast majority of volunteers in this research were aged 56 years and over.

Although not alone with these recruitment issues, as many other emergency management organisations are facing similar challenges, faith based organisations urgently need to consider more creative and effective ways to recruit volunteers from the wider community, including from CALD groups and from the younger age group.

As potential volunteers identify that the required time commitment is one of the greatest barriers to their involvement, faith based organisations must find ways of ensuring that potential volunteers are aware that the time commitment is not excessive, that there are long periods of deactivation and that even with only being able to devote a small amount of time, they can still play a vital role as a volunteer.

The organisations may also consider the establishment of formalised short term time commitment periods for volunteers. This will allow all volunteers, and particularly younger volunteers, to commit to volunteering for defined time periods, such as yearly, with the opportunity at the end of that time period to re-commit to a further period of time or move on.

In the future, the recruitment of volunteers may well revolve around the concept of having a larger number of volunteers engaged for shorter periods of time, rather than a smaller number of volunteers engaged for long periods of time.

Training is an important aspect of the time commitment required of volunteers and volunteer leaders. It is felt that there are not enough suitably qualified trainers, and that there is a lack of funding to engage more quality trainers to provide training, which is often required at multiple different and distant locations. Although online training is seen as an area with great potential for future development, there has been limited uptake by current volunteers and despite its potential, it is considered that it should be seen as complementary to, and not a replacement for, face to face training.

The most desirable and effective form of training identified for volunteers was mock scenario based training exercises, especially when conducted in collaboration with other emergency

management organisations. Although time consuming and costly to arrange, it was considered well worth the effort to build the knowledge, confidence and engagement of all volunteers. This type of training was also seen as having potential additional benefits in generating publicity for the work of the organisations in disasters and emergencies and attracting the wider interest of members of the public to consider becoming volunteers.

On a smaller scale, opening up opportunities for community members to undertake specific small group training alongside volunteers in areas of interest, such as basic counselling skills or first aid, was also seen as another means of broadening the diversity of potential recruits from outside the traditional source of the church membership base.

Engagement and Retention

Also of significant importance is the issue of retention of volunteers through communication and ongoing engagement. This is even more important for disaster and emergency management volunteers as there are often long periods of time between activations or deployments. Numerous methods were being utilised to maintain communication with volunteers during this time including emails, newsletters, updates on activations in other locations, assisting other emergency management organisations, periodic training and also informal social events. The use of social media to enhance ongoing communication did not appear to have been fully explored and remains a potentially important means of engagement in the future, particularly for a younger volunteer age group who are very familiar with utilising these forms of communication.

Concerns about retention were identified not only in relation to volunteers generally, but also specifically in relation to those volunteers in leadership roles. Many of these leaders identified concerns about a lack of succession planning. The current process was often ad hoc with leadership transition and training being localised, including such methods as shadowing the current leader or handing out a job description. It was felt that a more formalised, coordinated process was needed. It is also suggested that allowing leaders to commit only to a defined period of time in the leadership role, as was suggested for volunteers generally, and to reconsider their ongoing volunteer leadership commitment such as on a bi-annual basis, might be a means of encouraging people to take on roles as leaders.

As a way of providing further support to those in leadership roles, it is suggested that they could benefit from the provision of a comprehensive coaching program, facilitated by trained and independent coaches through a regular group coaching online call. This would provide leaders with guidance and support to help prevent burnout in their leadership roles.

Finally, the importance of ongoing appreciation and recognition is considered vital in the engagement and retention of volunteers. Most volunteers did feel appreciated by their respective organisations, which used numerous creative and inexpensive ways internally to thank their volunteers. However, volunteers did feel that greater recognition by the media, politicians and others for their recovery work during and in the aftermath of disasters and emergencies, would be appropriate and appreciated.

Conclusion

This research confirms the great work being undertaken by the three faith based organisations to recruit, engage, retain and recognise their volunteers. However, the research also highlights a need and an opportunity for some different strategies and techniques to be developed to ensure that faith based organisations continue to have a vibrant, thriving volunteer base to support communities through disasters and emergencies into the future.

Recommendations

That faith based organisations develop strategies to recruit from outside their traditional church base to incorporate greater diversity and numbers through more community based members and a younger age group of volunteers.

That faith based organisations consider adopting shorter time defined commitment periods for volunteers, including for volunteer leaders, with the option of annual or bi-annual cycles to renew their volunteer commitment.

That ongoing government funding is made available to employ more skilled trainers to provide a range of training for faith based volunteers involved in supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

That faith based organisations consider advertising and inviting community members to undertake specific skills based training alongside their volunteers and to encourage the recruitment of these community members.

That government funding is made available twice yearly in certain locations and regions to support and stage mock scenario based training events involving all emergency management volunteers.

That faith based organisations continue to explore the potential and development of online learning strategies to supplement face to face learning for volunteers.

That faith based organisations continue to develop multiple strategies to engage and communicate with volunteers during periods of deactivation and continue to explore the use of social media to enhance communication.

That faith based organisations continue to develop clear, formalised processes to train and ensure succession planning for those volunteers in leadership roles.

That government funding is provided to establish an ongoing coaching program, outsourced to an independent coaching service, to provide leaders with regular guidance and support needed in their leadership role.

That faith based organisations continue to develop ways internally to recognise and appreciate their volunteers and seek to enhance the external and public recognition received by volunteers involved in recovery work during disasters and emergencies.

That the three faith based organisations involved in this research project continue to develop ways to undertake a collaborative approach to minimise duplication and ensure that their volunteers can effectively work together at times of both activations and deactivations.

That consideration be given by the government to funding a further follow up study conducted in three to five years to determine the changes and progress made in the recruitment, engagement and retention of faith based volunteers supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

Report on Volunteer Recruitment, Engagement and Retention in Faith Based Organisations Supporting Communities through Disasters and Emergencies

Full Report

This research consists of several components: (i) a brief overview and understanding of some of the existing relevant literature; (ii) intensive interviews with key paid staff and volunteers in leadership roles; (iii) survey of volunteers; and (iv) separately, the development of an introductory manual as a complementary resource in the recruitment, engagement and retention of volunteers for faith based organisations supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

Literature Review

Volunteers play a crucial role in our society, as millions of people volunteer every year. Statistics consistently show that over one third of the Australian adult population actively give of their time through volunteering (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2010, 2015). Volunteers are an important part of ensuring healthy communities and these community members donate their valuable time each and every day in a wide range of voluntary efforts.

Included in these volunteer numbers are a special group of people involved as emergency management volunteers. These volunteers assist people and communities to effectively respond to and recover from the devastating experience of disasters and emergencies.

As climate change continues to be the most significant threat to our planet, the size and number of disasters and emergencies will continue to increase in the future (Drupsteen & Guldenmund 2014; Howard, 2009; Yonetani, 2016) and will become more catastrophic and dramatic (De Vita, Kramer, Eyster, Hall, Kehayova & Triplett, 2008; Kelman, 2017). These natural disasters and emergencies resulting from human actions will test our resilience and it is imperative that we effectively utilise both paid staff and volunteers who are the backbone of the response, recovery and relief efforts in meeting these challenges.

Amongst these emergency management volunteers are those who are active in combating and responding to the emergency or disaster itself such as fighting fires, dealing with floods and a range of immediate responsive efforts. Generally speaking, these organisations have tended to receive significant funding, acknowledgement and recognition for their vital roles. But there is also another group of volunteers who play extremely important roles, including by being involved in making preparation for anticipated events, and by providing immediate assistance to those experiencing a disaster or emergency both at the time of the event and just as importantly, during the long term recovery of those persons and communities in the aftermath. Most often, these are volunteers from non-profit organisations such as the Australian Red Cross and from faith based organisations such as those organisations involved in this research the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) Australia, The Salvation Army Emergency Services and Anglicare.

These "...faith-based organizations provide services before, during, and after disasters" (Farrag, Loskota & Flory, 2012:5) and their work assists in helping people prepare for and respond to emergencies, disasters and catastrophes (Aten & Topping, 2010; Coppola, 2007; Owens, Forgoine & Briggs, 2005). In recent times, these organisations have broadened their involvement beyond response and recovery efforts and "...as part of its disaster response, the religious community - concerned about the values of human life, human community, and the environment – will just naturally become involved in disaster planning, prevention, and risk-reduction on mitigation. The focus reflects a paradigm shift from merely reacting and responding to disasters...but means working to make people and communities less vulnerable to disasters" (Church World Service Emergency Response Program, 2015:1).

This paradigm shift requires an even closer working relationship between faith based organisations and other emergency management organisations with very different cultures. The uniform wearing government based organisations (such as fire services) are very hierarchical in nature, based on command and control processes with management from the top down. This is usually in stark contrast to the more collaborative, flatter structure and culture of many faith based organisations (Houghton, Baber, McMaster, Stanton, Salmon, Stewart & Walker, 2006; Roussos & Fawcett, 2000). They tend to operate with much less bureaucracy and often have greater flexibility during disasters and emergencies, can also act quickly and access a willing, available and very able local group of people as volunteers.

Sometimes these organisations are seen as complementary and supplementary to the government based organisations involved in disasters and emergencies (Campbell, 2002). But some non-profit organisations and the faith based organisations and religious communities remain some of the biggest and most well organised civil institutions around the world (American Red Cross, 2002; Corkum & Hunt, 2011).

Some of the issues in working with government based organisations have included: gaining access to disaster situations without having government issued credentials; inadequate training and experience of some faith based personnel; lack of understanding and accurate knowledge by others of what faith based organisations actually are and can do in emergencies; and vice versa with confusion for faith based organisations about government organisations, and finally, a lack of trust between both parties (Farrag, Loskota & Flory, 2012).

However, in order to deal with devastating and more frequent disasters in the future and also other types of emergencies (such as increasing terrorist threats), there is a need to continue to develop an effective emergency network (Moynihan, 2005). There is also a need for greater multi-agency collaboration and this most often involves responsibility sharing with groups coordinating to work together (McLennan & Handmer, 2012). As Field (2018:1) explains “...leaders at all levels of government and non-government organisations should employ resources and work collaboratively with other stakeholders to support and enable community recovery, thereby closing community intent-to-capability gaps”.

This collaboration requires not only communication between organisations but also communication with the local community and public (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Handbook 2, 2018). Further, face to face interaction, the effective use of technology (Aten, Leavell, Gonzalez, Defee & Harrison, 2010; Ryan, 2017) and online social networking preparedness and response tools (Aten & Topping, 2010) are vital at times of disasters and emergencies. Hashemipour, Stuban & Dever (2017) highlight in their discussion on ‘community based’ concepts that the aim is about meeting the challenge of having the right task forces and responses, in the right locations and at the right time during disasters.

Despite faith based organisations broadening their role into other areas of disaster management and working in greater collaboration with government based organisations, their work still remains primarily involved in human and community recovery in disasters and emergencies

(Stajura, Glik, Eisenman, Prelip, Martel & Sammartinova, 2012). Johnstone & Winters (2018:16) defines this recovery work as the “...coordinated process of supporting affected communities in the reconstruction of the physical infrastructure, restoration of the economy and environment, and support for the emotional, social and physical wellbeing of those affected”.

The underlying foundation of their work and volunteering efforts in emergency management is that “...whenever and wherever a crisis strikes, faith communities are there to help; to lend their resources, energy and volunteers to do all they can to end suffering caused by the disaster or public health emergency and faith communities bring a deep and broad knowledge of their whole community, its strengths, its needs and its resources to the table” (Field Guide, 2014:16).

Unlike their government based counterparts, faith based organisations and their volunteers remain at the affected areas long after the immediate emergency has been dealt with and address the physical, emotional, social, spiritual and economic needs of people affected by disasters and emergencies. They are most often there for the long haul and long term involvement and engagement with the local communities (McLaughlin, 2013) and are involved in the most time consuming and often the most complex phase, that of recovery.

This is especially true with human recovery, which also involves information sharing and referral to other services and direct assistance to individuals and their families through counselling or financial support that helps families re-establish their own lives and households (Chandra & Acosta, 2010). This also involves working collaboratively with other emergency management organisations and also with professional helpers such as mental health providers to continue to improve services to people and communities dealing with such disasters and emergencies (Koenig, 2006).

Most often, these faith based volunteers are locally based and part of the community, and so have great sensitivity towards local matters and can provide very practical work and support. They have a sense of continuity and therefore have a long term commitment to follow up and assist in the recovery process.

Faith based volunteers, in general, undertake a wide range of diverse roles for their non-profit organisations (Netting, O'Connor & Thomas, 2005). Often, their volunteering work ensures

that many organisations can expand their services and stretch limited budgets. Without volunteers, many of these organisations may not even exist and certainly would not be able to effectively respond in times of disasters and emergencies. Volunteers also "...promote agency visibility and legitimacy within religious institutions and networks, help reinforce an agency's connection with its historic roots, strengthen the religious component of the organization's mission" (Unruh, 2010:3).

These volunteers display the most dominant motivation for volunteering identified by Esmond and Dunlop (2004) and supported by recent studies (Rice & Fallon, 2011) of 'helping others and the community'. But perhaps Dr Reverend Crawford (1998:33) best sums up the motivation of these faith based volunteers supporting communities through disasters and emergencies as these "...volunteers are motivated by love and by a sense of self-sacrifice and are trained to care. This is fundamental to their philosophy of life".

Although faith based volunteers play such an important role in supporting communities through disasters and emergencies, as with other emergency management organisations, they also experience the ongoing challenges of attracting, recruiting, engaging and retaining volunteers, especially in leadership roles (Jones & Berry, 2017).

Esmond (2001a, 2001b, 2004, 2005, 2009, 2016) in an extensive body of work on volunteering identified these ongoing challenges for organisations across all sectors. Further, the feeling of having a lack of time and being 'time poor' was the overwhelming reason given for ceasing to volunteer or not volunteer at all. Work and family commitments remain the main barriers to volunteering (Birch and McLennan, 2006a; Volunteering Australia, 2016). Faith based organisations, as with all organisations involved with emergency management 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" (Esmond, 2016: 26).

Related to this issue of time availability has been the emergence of one-off or spontaneous volunteers in recent times, being those who have just 'turned up' to volunteer in response to disasters and emergencies. There is now a large body of literature that has examined spontaneous volunteering. (Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience Handbook 12, 2017;

Cottrell, 2010; McLennan, Molloy, Whitaker and Handmer, 2016; Orloff, 2013; Saaroni, 2015; Sauer, Catlett, Tosatto and Kirsch, 2014; Volunteering ACT, 2015). Although yet to be effectively harnessed before, during and after a disaster, "...the continued rise of the spontaneous volunteer represents the ultimate challenge in terms of time sensitive volunteers" (Esmond, 2016:26).

For faith based organisations, recruitment of volunteers covers a range of different avenues including: "...congregations, seminaries, church related schools, religious orders, the indigenous community, former participants, colleges and universities, community professionals, retirees, civic groups, collaborators, and corporations" (Netting, O'Connor & Thomas, 2005:193).

Word of mouth continues to be the major recruitment method focused primarily on those attending church regularly. Some literature does suggest that members of a congregation with regular church attendance are much more likely to volunteer as these social bonds and spiritual commitment motivate members to become volunteers. Further, younger people with at least one parent who volunteers are nearly three times more likely to volunteer and also twice as likely to volunteer when they are attending regular religious services (Grimm, Dietz, Spring, Arey & Foster-Bey, 2005). However, despite a great deal of literature having now been written on the attraction and retention of younger volunteers in a range of organisations (Boessler & Ding, 2010; Marta & Pozzi, 2008; Moir, 2018; Wajs-Chaczko 2008; Walsh & Black, 2015) it remains a very difficult proposition to attract younger 'time poor' individuals to replace an ageing volunteer base amid declining church attendance numbers

For faith based organisations, another source of recruitment is to effectively 'tap into' and utilise the world of online or virtual volunteers (Conroy & Williams, 2014; Department of Communities, Child Safety and Disability Services Queensland, 2012; Volunteering Australia, 2016). However, opportunities for volunteers undertaking different types of tasks online still remain largely untapped by many organisations involved in emergency management.

Faith based organisations seem to have been somewhat successful in recruiting volunteers from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, as there seems to a greater religious encouragement and support for this diversity. Further exploration of this cultural diversity of

volunteers may be an important area for future growth in faith based volunteer numbers (Australian Emergency Management Institute, 2010; Centre for Multicultural Youth, 2015).

In terms of retention of volunteers, there are issues around time availability, but there are also long periods of deactivation between emergencies. For faith based volunteers, as with other emergency management volunteers, there can be a loss of enthusiasm and a resulting reduction in volunteer numbers where their involvement in volunteering is intermittent as it occurs only at times of disasters and emergencies. The ongoing engagement, connection and communication with volunteers during this downtime or 'quiet' time of deactivation is an important factor in retaining volunteers.

Besides the use of traditional communication methods such as phone and email, internet based technology can also be effective communication channels to keep in contact with volunteers during periods of deactivation. Internet technology that is increasingly being used in times of disasters and emergencies includes a range of social media and social networking sites such as Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and a plethora of other sites (Alexander, 2014; Bruns, 2012; Dufty, 2016; Keim & Noji, 2011) and these can often spread the volunteering message and keep volunteers connected and engaged.

Another means of engagement, communication and connection with faith based volunteers during periods of deactivation is in providing further training, especially in areas of recovery and other work. Relevant research discusses three main areas of training: (i) local preparedness and response plans including knowledge of mental health organisations, resources and psychosocial support and other post disaster programs (Eyre, 2017); (ii) disaster self-care training in response to burnout and the toll taken on individuals listening to and helping those affected by disaster; and (iii) disaster skills training in basic helping skills and counselling skills to assist others as well as more information about the effects of disasters on mental health (Aten, Topping, Denney & Hosey, 2011; Eyre, 2017).

Finally, a vital component in the continued engagement and retention of faith based volunteers, as with all volunteers, is the appreciation and recognition of these volunteers. Recognition reinforces a sense of fitting in and belonging that is most important for the retention of volunteers (Baxter-Tomkins & Wallace, 2009; McLennan, 2008; Rice & Fallon, 2011).

Faith based volunteers are very clear that they do not become involved in assisting communities through disasters and emergencies in order to be thanked and praised, but if they feel undervalued and unappreciated they are unlikely to remain. As Esmond (2009:49) explains “...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”. Volunteers do not leave because they are appreciated too much, however, there have been thousands across all sectors who have done so because they certainly felt unappreciated.

As the number and size of emergencies and disasters increases and require the services of response and recovery organisations including faith based organisations and their volunteers, the need to recruit, engage and retain these volunteers is vital. Although the work of faith based organisations and their volunteers is so crucial, in this country, there is still a dearth of literature and research specifically in relation to faith based volunteers and their significant role at times of disasters and emergencies and through the recovery process. The source of such literature as does exist is mostly international, much of it developed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina and the significant role faith based communities and volunteers played in that natural disaster in the United States.

Much more time, money and resources has been spent on exploring volunteer recruitment, engagement and retention in government based emergency management response organisations involved in fire, floods and other natural disasters and this has resulted in an extensive body of literature.

Therefore, this research project takes an important step towards adding to the body of knowledge by exploring the issues and challenges in the recruitment, engagement and retention of volunteers in faith based organisations supporting communities through disasters and emergencies in this country.

Part One: Interviews with Key Staff and Volunteers in Leadership Roles

Methodology

The methodology for Part One of this research project involved the three representative organisations ADRA Australia, The Salvation Army Emergency Services and Anglicare. Intensive telephone interviews were conducted with key stakeholders including both paid staff and also volunteers in leadership roles supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

The paid staff in each organisation had identified key volunteers in leadership roles that they had suggested should be interviewed. These volunteers were initially contacted by the paid staff member to seek their permission to be contacted in relation to a telephone interview. Based on their consent an email was sent by the researchers and a time made to conduct the interview. A total of 15 participants agreed to take part and each participated in an interview of approximately one hour in length.

A semi-structured interview schedule was used to provide a framework for the interviews and focused around two main themes as the basis of discussion with all the participants. The first identified what participants considered to be the issues their organisation was dealing with in the recruitment, engagement and retention of volunteers and what was currently being done. The second asked for their views on what needed to be happening in their organisation to ensure the future recruitment, engagement and retention of faith based volunteers supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

The interviews were recorded in full, later transcribed and underwent content analysis. The wealth of information provided by paid staff and the volunteers in leadership roles in the interviews later contributed to the formulation and design of some of the questions in the survey of volunteers which forms Part Two of this research project.

Interviews

These interviews allowed the opportunity to explore the themes and issues in detail and to capture the depth of knowledge and information from the participants, the results of which are now presented below.

For faith based organisations utilising volunteers to support communities through disasters and emergencies, recruitment is an absolute priority. In the interviews, participants spoke of a variety of ways that they approach recruiting volunteers. But unlike other emergency management organisations involved in recruiting volunteers, participants explained that for faith based organisations religion plays an important part in volunteer recruitment. These volunteers share similar values through their religious faith and beliefs which are consistent with the mission of the organisation.

One participant summed up the importance of religion for these faith based volunteers at times of emergencies and disasters.

If it's a faith based role, it's something we feel we need to do to help others and that goes a long way. If you get some people who come along and say I want to help our organisation at an evacuation centre because we need to be helping people, we can't just stand by and not help them, which is part of the Christian life, you help others. (Participant)

While there was general agreement amongst participants that everyone is welcome, there are some attributes that are sought after and are desirable attributes and skills for volunteers in faith based organisations. Participants spoke of such attributes as kindness, compassion, patience and also listening skills as primary values for a volunteer. Also noted was the ability to remain calm and stay focused in an emergency situation. Further, those that showed particular leadership qualities were often ear-marked to be approached to consider taking on team leadership roles.

There's a process we go through every year with a nomination committee. Church people are asked if they would like to take a role on within the church and that's where my team leaders

come from. My team leaders will then speak with people who want to join. It's got a base within the individual churches and then it grows from there. (Participant)

Another participant expressed similar sentiments about the attributes and skills that those volunteering can bring and that there is a role for everyone, as long as they are willing to participate and contribute.

We definitely look for a good attitude. It's not really a skill but I think it's more the attitude. They have a sort of servant attitude, flexible. That they actually have some people skills. People skills and are not judgemental. Whatever skills they have, we try to utilise them wherever they fit in. In an evacuation centre, you do need a creed. I ask someone who's got really good people skills and can read people and that's what impacts and shows empathy because they can see how people are feeling and might be able to clear some and prioritise certain people. You need one in the evacuation centre on registration. These different kind of skills, there's other people. There might be a runner, they escort people wherever they need to go. Some people just need to be able to make the cups of tea. Some people need to be really good at organising the team. There are lots of different skills that we need but we don't discriminate whatever skills they have. (Participant)

Many participants also suggested that members of the local church group were more receptive and more willing to volunteer their time and such service is seen as a form of 'giving back'. However, participants also wanted to clarify that there should not be a sense of obligation to volunteer.

I like people to be offered the role of coming on board because they want to, not because the church feels that they should be on something. I try to make sure that it is people who really want to do the job. (Participant)

For all participants, word of mouth is the most successful form of volunteer recruitment and the majority of volunteers are recruited from within the local church community. The recruitment of volunteers primarily from within the church community provided both an ease of communication and engagement with potential volunteers. Team leaders or area coordinators were available to visit congregations, give presentations at church services and encourage other local church members to consider volunteering.

It's mostly through presentations at churches. We have people who do presentations around the place to churches. Then of course, through word of mouth. Friend speaking to friend, saying come and join me in this ministry. In my region, I have a number of local teams. Each of those teams has one or more team leaders. It's usually the responsibility of the team leaders to go on recruitment drives. (Participant)

Participants explained that direct referrals from existing volunteers was a common form of recruitment, but success has also come from personal interaction with team leaders and area coordinators giving presentations and running training sessions. It is important for potential new recruits to have a full understanding of how volunteering will help the community and what their commitment will look like once they sign up. This has been best communicated by someone who is already volunteering with the organisation.

It's not only personal contact but usually, when someone is in a certain church we ask them if they can get a spot to actually go in and talk to the people, in services or at events. (Participant)

One participant suggested a very interesting recruitment idea which involved using the power of personal contact and word of mouth by having an 'emergency management champion'. They explained that this volunteer would not necessarily be the team leader or area coordinator visiting occasionally to speak at each church, but rather a member of each local church who would be in weekly contact with other volunteers at the church services.

Face to face, that's the best way to get people involved. Probably, one thing that comes to mind is having an emergency management champion at each church. Someone who can push the barrow, promote, agitate, enthuse others and that would be good. There is already, at most churches, an organisation representative for the organisation, generally. (Participant)

Some participants also discussed the use of training as a form of recruitment and have experienced this to be very effective in recruiting volunteers:

We trained about eight new ones, this last weekend, in the small town, I showed some pictures of my time working up in another town, recently, and told them, it could happen here and means you would have to go somewhere else. A dozen showed up for training. Some of them are

existing volunteers but most of them weren't, it shows them that it's not rocket science. If you can read and write and use a telephone, you can do it. (Participant)

Right off the top, I can't think of any other specific strategies that would work as well as I've seen that training works, in that church environment. Generally, what we used to do...is we used to go to a church, advertise before going to a church that we're going to have this talk on emergency management and disaster management and do some training, so everyone should come along. That attracted quite a lot of interest. People would come along, they'd be trained in the basic team member functions that the organisation had and then those people who had come to that training would be signed up and they'd be the new recruited volunteers. (Participant)

Most interestingly, participants did recognise that recruiting volunteers from an ever diminishing number of church attendees was not sustainable. Some participants also talked about recruiting volunteers that were connected to the community beyond their own church base or outside the church altogether. Such connections that extended beyond their own faith based community were seen to have enormous value in both broadening and adding to the diversity of the recruitment pool for the organisation.

I think one of the key things will be the perception of the area coordinator or whoever is the recruitment person, to how they engage with people outside of their faith based community, do they have a lot of friends that are not in their own faith based community? In the past, we've noted that the more friends they have out in the community as well as within the church based community, the more connections and success they have with engaging those people and recruiting them as volunteers. (Participant)

Some participants stated they had attempted to recruit from outside the church community but with limited success. They expressed that they welcome people from outside the church as long as they hold values aligned with the organisation's goals. Commonly, members of the church would recruit friends or family to the organisations and this is the main way that non-churchgoers would be engaged to volunteer.

Sometimes, new volunteers were those who had previously been assisted in emergencies.

Word of mouth is by far the best. Word of mouth and we have several volunteers who've volunteered for us now having been the recipients of our services in a disaster. This is something they'd like to get involved with and then come back and volunteer with us. (Participant)

Participants were clear that everyone can play a role as a volunteer.

Compassion. Everything else is just normal wanting to help somebody. The training and the teamwork, we always get them through. We can have people who don't have much English and can't write very well but they can all play a part. They can all play a role. (Participant)

They also spoke of diversity within the faith based organisations as being generally encouraged and these organisations seemed more able to accept greater diversity in volunteer demographics than in some of their counterparts in emergency response based organisations. However, there is also an acknowledgment that the demographics in a volunteer group did reflect the demographics of the local community.

Most of the area that I'm responsible for is fairly Anglo Saxon. We don't come across much in the way of multicultural issues but could use and consider CALD people, in that respect. (Participant)

Yet in some other locations, some participants identified refugee and immigrant communities as a potential source of future volunteers. Participants expressed the belief that there is a role for everyone, which would not exclude those from CALD communities.

Participants also suggested that in addition to bringing more cultural diversity to faith based organisations, some people from CALD communities could bring valuable insights from their own personal experiences in disasters and emergencies in other countries, if they understood the roles they could undertake as volunteers in their new communities.

Particularly, at the moment, I think if you've got a refugee community or an immigrant community that can be in the church but don't understand the role that our organisation has because they've never seen it in operation before. It would be good to be able to expand them a little bit and bring them in on it, explaining what we do. Most of the refugee community know

the organisation. They know of us because of the work we do overseas but they don't understand the role of emergency management. (Participant)

Participants also discussed volunteer recruitment strategies that were not very successful. They had used methods including flyers, information nights and expos.

We work with expos as well. That didn't really work that well because we're actually looking for a certain attribute of people. It's not always working though expos, information nights, we did that too. Having flyers in libraries, shops and that. It's mainly through word of mouth and churches. (Participant)

Over the years in various places, the locals have placed ads in the local paper saying we're coming up come join us. They're spectacularly unsuccessful. (Participant)

Another organisation is working on a visual method of attracting new volunteers that has yet to be implemented.

We have developed a video to use as a recruitment tool. Our struggle with that is for me to deploy that in a really useful way, it becomes viral and national. Organisationally, nationally, that wouldn't work where I am. It would work best to be done before we could be in a place to do that in a social media setting. We've made a DVD but we haven't really released that or used that yet. The DVD has a testimony of several of our volunteers. An 18 year old young woman, a 35 year old couple, husband and wife, a 57 year old man and a 80 year old lady. They're all active volunteers in the organisation and emergency services. We've tried to cover all age demographics because they all have a story so there's something there that hopefully anyone that saw it could identify with. We also have some ideas on how we are going to market it including: Plan A and this is still valid, is to have that played in church on a Sunday morning as an infomercial, if you like then to go from there. That's still very much of the cards, we just had to get some technical formatting and processes in place for that to be released. The second line of action, Plan B was to make the video clip transmittable through social media so it has the potential to be passed through YouTube or Facebook or whatever, from cluster to cluster of people's friends list. (Participant)

Participants also discussed the significant issue that they are facing, as with all emergency management organisations, of a rapidly ageing volunteer base and how to attract and recruit younger volunteers. This is an enormous challenge for organisations as older volunteers become less available to volunteer their time. This may be because they are retiring from the workforce and undertaking travel opportunities, looking after grand children or due to ill health.

All participants expressed a clear desire to recruit and attract a younger generation of volunteers into roles to assist in disasters and emergencies. This was a recruitment priority across all organisations and was often seen as the way forward to ensure the longevity of many locally based teams.

Some faith based organisations are attempting to address this issue more directly in the future. As one participant explained about a specific recruitment effort for engaging a younger demographic in the future.

Most probably in March next year, we're going to hold what we call a young adults forum. You and I might call it focus groups but it'll be much more than that. I've got funding to run this. We'll get 20, 30, 40, probably 30 is good number, of 18 to 35 year old, (although, those age definitions are not hard and fast but it's in that bracket) from internal local areas from around the State. We'll bring them together for a day and expose them to what the organisation does and its services. We'll set up some equipment, we'll book a lunch, we'll get some guests in from within the organisation but also from other agencies like SES, government, to talk up what we do and the benefit of it. The purpose of that day is then we'll say, so, what would be a barrier to you guys engaging with us, now that you've seen this and you know this? We'll take those words of learning on board and make the appropriate changes and take action. (Participant)

Some participants also spoke of very specific local strategies that have been utilised to engage younger volunteers in the past.

A few years back, we had a high school principal in the local area who was encouraging his senior students to become involved in the community. One boy's mother came along and did train. But then at the end of year 12 if it's a bright, lively kid who thinks about doing it, he's off to university or a gap year or you name it. (Participant)

Participants also explained that they felt that in general, the younger generation seemed unable to make a commitment to volunteer in the same way that previous generations had done for long periods of time. They felt that the general population was much more mobile and especially younger people moving away to study and work which prevented them from engaging with the faith based organisation and volunteering on a long term basis.

The older generation, who are fixed in the area they don't tend to move away but the younger ones that we'd like to get seem to go to do university or college and don't return. They are very temporary. They've got marriage later and move away and there's different religions. You can't count on the younger people to hang around long term. (Participant)

Certainly, the age of volunteers within an organisation is an ongoing challenge to consider in recruitment of volunteers. Longevity of service can translate into lesser recruitment efforts as the same people stay and volunteer for long periods of time. However, participants agree that the modern lifestyle for many younger people makes it hard to make a long term volunteering commitment. Although younger generations have strong desires to volunteer for causes they are passionate about, the model of long term service with infrequent activations may not be compatible for younger people and their more mobile lifestyles.

Moreover, the issue of potential volunteers feeling they are 'time poor' and with too many other commitments to devote time to volunteering is common across many demographic age groups and in all sectors. The time commitment required in volunteering must be worked around other commitments and this is becoming increasingly difficult for many people at different ages and life stages. There are large numbers of people who would be potential volunteers, but their availability is unsuited to many volunteer organisations and roles.

As one participant explains, volunteer or member availability is a challenge across all ages and breaks down some of the reasons that people are less willing to make the time or long term commitment.

You've got the baby boomers who have stopped work, so many of them are using the time to do work on their bucket list or go mind grandchildren. You're actually missing a whole group of people who would be excellent because they're usually still fairly fit, healthy and able to do things but they're off doing things. So many grandparents these days are involved in childcare,

particularly if they're in the city or the larger towns where the cost of housing means both parents have to work. There's a small number where the grandparents are actually parenting the grandchildren. You've got that challenge. You've also got a larger number of people who are deciding their superannuation isn't enough so they work onto into their 70's. You're missing a couple of years there. You've got more women in the workforce. Whilst a lot of them might be in the casual, part-time workforce, they're still in the workforce. There's less availability for them. The younger generation seem to want to volunteer to go and do a particular thing for a short period of time and then back out and do something else.
(Participant)

All participants recognised the issues of time and the difficulties of recruiting volunteers for the longer term especially a generation of younger volunteers. Further, as word of mouth was the main recruitment method within local churches, as church attendance numbers continued to decline, they also saw the pool of potential volunteers recruited from within the churches would also decline. These declining volunteer numbers, shorter term time commitment, an ageing volunteer base and a lack of younger volunteers combine to provide some important challenges for faith based organisations.

Training is an integral part of both the recruitment and retention of volunteers involved in supporting their communities through disasters and emergencies. Participants discussed the provision of both introductory and ongoing training by their organisations for their volunteers. Although the type of training varied with each organisation, all provided the necessary and specific skills required for volunteering roles within the organisations.

In general, participants spoke of their organisations offering training to new recruits and then following up with refresher training within an allocated period of time. Some organisations stated that training was valid for three years, while others aimed to provide refresher courses every 12 months. Providing the necessary amount of training is clearly a challenge for many organisations as they are conscious of taking up as little as possible of their volunteers' time, while still maintaining an acceptable skill level within the team. All participants identified that training is an important part of the organisational involvement with volunteers and it was important for these volunteers that quality rather than quantity of training was maintained. One participant explained how training was rolled out in their organisation.

Everybody does an introductory course which briefly outlines the structure of how things work in this State. Also, where we fit into it and then it drills into about the actual role that we have in that. That sort of introductory course is really theoretical. There's a little bit of role playing goes on but not a lot. Mostly theoretical. People go away with a document that explains how things work with a whole lot of reference stuff as well, to point at the background for it. What we do is, annually, our head office provide what we call refresher training, which usually targets some skill area that needs further development or refreshment. For instance, we took on a new role in the system last year, so the people needed to be trained in what that new role meant and how it interacted with the other community partners. We've done programs on grief and loss as part of the ongoing refresher training. How do you deal with people who are grieving and their loss? Lots of people go through that at times of emergencies and disasters. (Participant)

Providing quality training is clearly a high priority for organisations, however, many participants explained that a barrier to providing more frequent quality training is the availability of trainers. The trainers, who can be paid staff but who often are volunteers themselves, are in high demand and there is difficulty in recruiting enough trainers. This is especially true for those volunteering their time to service remote areas that have centres many hours away from each other. Participants expressed concern for the strain their current trainers are placed under and the amount of time this role required of trainers, who were often also team leaders or area coordinators. One participant explained the challenges in providing training in their area.

Definitely the time component. Now, I actually have someone to support me but I used to do all the training. That means almost every Saturday, I was doing the training. I have a team here but they live in a faraway place, away from each other and it is 200km apart from each other. So, you can't just do a random day and say that's training. That needs to be planned more in depth or they have different training. They do training every three years but we'd like to do it more often. The issue is to find a good location and get everyone together. (Participant)

Along with the challenge of providing enough trainers so individuals were not overloaded in this role, participants also discussed the most effective type of training for volunteers. Participants consistently identified mock scenario training across multiple organisations as the most valuable form of training for their volunteers. This involved running disaster and

emergency scenarios, where volunteers and others were involved as if it was a real situation. The simulation and role play elements involved provided the most comprehensive understanding for volunteers of the situations and their roles and allowed them the closest representation of an emergency situation.

Participants explained the effectiveness of mock scenario based training in numerous ways. This training allowed volunteers to get a close approximation of an activation or deployment as if it were a real emergency and therefore they had a greater knowledge and 'hands on' preparedness experience.

This scenario training was also important for building the confidence of volunteers as it helped volunteers to feel familiar with what would happen in a real world activation. Further, it allowed potential natural leaders in crisis situations to be identified for the qualities needed for leadership roles, such as a calm demeanour in a crisis.

If resources were no issue, things like more mock role playing scenario activities where they can be subjected to serious dilemmas and being involved so they can gain confidence or realise it's not for them. There's no shame at all in that. I think we need to help our people to understand that.

Although this type of training was preferred by participants, the issue of time for volunteers to be involved in this training was also discussed. Although faith based organisations tried to minimise the amount of time volunteers were required to give to training, participants felt that the effectiveness of scenario based training outweighed the time commitment.

The only thing we don't seem to have enough time for is actual mock scenarios, putting them through a role play type of thing. We've got to make it known to them that this might not be the actual situation on the day but this will give you a good idea of what could happen. They like it too, they think they're part of the team. That's something I'd like to try. In a couple of hours on one day, you don't have much time to do that. (Participant)

Conducting mock scenario based training was acknowledged to be challenging, costly and time consuming and these factors added further barriers to their frequency. But participants considered that some of the costs and other challenges could be reduced when undertaken in

collaboration with other organisations in order to make the program and training as comprehensive and cost effective as possible. Engaging multiple organisations meant more time from trainers as a group, as well as providing a larger working space that is sufficient for the scale of the training exercise. Participants spoke of examples where multiple organisations collaborated in order to provide a quality training scenario. As participants explained, if resourcing was not an issue this would be a preferred method of training.

Through disaster welfare services, we do have an inter-agency training day, where Anglicare, Salvation Army, Red Cross and Disaster Chaplains all get together and have a mock scenario sort of thing for a day, which is really good. Gets them to meet other volunteers, likeminded people. They're usually based around bigger areas, like there's one coming up soon. (Participant)

Scenario based training also cultivates relationships not only between organisations but also between volunteers from these different organisations. This can mean that volunteers are familiar with and often know each other at an actual activation or deployment for an emergency or disaster and have an understanding of the kind of support other organisations provide to the community. One participant explained that was an important part of volunteering with a community organisation.

Facilitating cross agency training is something that I've just tried to start up, working with another agency at this point in time. Just this cross pollination between the agencies, the non-government and government agencies. I think it's really important that government agencies understand...it's all about relationships in this area. Knowing the people before the event happens. Volunteers from other organisations can also be a resource available to your own organisation. We also have trained up some people from another agency because in the evacuation centre they can be called upon to assist if we can't get all our team members there. When we have a need for another body, then this organisation can now come in and fill in a role, and we work together and do the same for their organisation as well. (Participant)

Participants also felt that in the more remote locations where physical distance impacts volunteers' availability, then the encouragement of cross training with other organisations meant that more people are trained once but across multiple organisations. One participant confirmed the value of this cross agency training in rural areas.

A number of my team, one of my big teams, had actually also been trained by another organisation. They are now able to do both roles. The big call out they had last year, in fact they were working as people for the other organisation. For rural areas, it would work much better because we all struggle to have significant sized teams. You can't go, I've got a team here of 30 people just for one organisation. If we could scrounge 15 or 20 between all of us, it would make life much easier.

For faith based organisations in the future, the combining of resources and volunteers to provide more frequent and regular scenario based cross agency training may be a powerful and effective way to meet the ongoing challenges of attracting and retaining volunteers to support communities at times of disasters and emergencies.

Another form of training discussed by participants was that of online training. Participants considered online training tools and technology as valuable resources. Providing training online allowed for more frequent courses for volunteers and would also speed up the initial training process for new recruits. It was also considered especially helpful in regional areas where direct contact and face to face training could not be provided as frequently as in more urban locations.

This training varied between organisations. Some participants explained that their organisations have already implemented some level of online training, and for others it was something they wished to look at developing. One participant suggested that they would like to see it developed but that they considered cost was a big factor in creating high quality online training.

I sometimes wonder whether there's an opportunity for doing more online training. For instance, one of the advantages is it might alleviate the need for training bodies to be travelling round the country so often. We've embraced technology a bit but we find that it's expensive to get into video and things like that. We've done a little bit of video but mostly it's just overhead projections, people talking, roleplaying, that sort of thing. (Participant)

Participants talked about their organisations having an older age group of volunteers, some of whom are not highly computer literate, or are less comfortable with online training instead of face to face training. Some participants considered that online training may have also resulted

in a drop in the number of volunteers as it has replaced some face to face training which was an important recruitment tool.

Since we introduced the online learning a couple of years ago, it almost seems as though the area coordinators who are leaders and who previously used to do this training face to face and go to churches, saw the e-learning as taking the place of the face to face. This is my perception, they did not then see the need to go onto churches and do face to face. Especially if they do feel a little bit unqualified or lacking in confidence to do the face to face stuff, maybe that gave them a bigger out to do that. I think that's one area where our recruitment has probably suffered. (Participant)

Many participants suggested that online training should support, supplement and blend with onsite training and there were ways to integrate online training in more effective ways but that it required experimentation and a change in focus.

It is more of a blended learning environment. Get them onto the e-learning first and then integrating them into a team by doing face to face stuff but I don't think that concept has worked. Maybe we need to relook at how we do the online learning.

Some participants identified that technology would enable more efficient procedures during activations or deployments as well. A lot of this work is still being done manually and this means there is often a cumbersome amount of paperwork, which can be extremely off putting for volunteers.

The thing that my volunteers might need would be some types of electronics means to do business with. Be it an iPad or something like that. Stepping into that, moving away from a paper based way of doing things, more into a modern, technological age. You don't always have that available to you in evacuation centres, so you have to have the paper based one. Being able to step into the area of technology - iPads, apps and things like that. I think that is where some discussions and advances have lead in recent times. (Participant)

Overall, participants explained that online training was simply not possible to implement with some of their current volunteers. Lack of reliable internet and low computer literacy meant it was not possible to roll out online training for all volunteers. However, participants agreed that

online training should continue to be considered a valuable resource and be further developed, even though many factors impacted its effectiveness across different organisations, different locations and different age ranges of volunteers.

The challenges around developing and delivering quality training for volunteers were also dependent on the availability of funding. Any available funding is primarily used to allow for area and State coordinators to spend more training time face to face with their teams. Participants explained that when recurring funding was made available, quality training could be provided that engaged team members and up-skilled the volunteers significantly.

The actual community partners in NSW got together a few years ago and built a leadership training course, which was rolled out around the State using some grant money that we got from the government. It came to a halt when that money ran out. I think there's a bit of work going on at the moment, to resurrect the content of that and try to roll it out in a different way. I was actually involved for a while. It was during that period that we managed to get a couple of grants. One to build the course and one to deliver the course. We rolled it out to about 13 or 14 places throughout NSW. It was very well received but then the money ran out and we couldn't do it anymore. When we rolled out that leadership training course, ten years ago, it was a two day course and a sort of live in course so the money we had for the course paid for peoples' accommodation and all that sort of stuff. Their travel expenses and so on. It was a big deal to get people there. (Participant)

However, for most organisations this funding is sporadic or inconsistent, which means that while a grant can be used for a one off application, further training is not self-sustainable beyond this grant. This is a continuing issue with government grants that are most often one off sources of funds.

Looking at the structure of the organisation and looking at where we get funding from. Funding to engage appropriately skilled people to develop training...someone with a training background to develop an e-learning module or something like that. But this needs more than just a one off small government grant.

Some participants identified that there are also issues around the equitable distribution of funding across the organisation. Not all areas receive the same funding from the government and this is an area of concern and equity.

I'm a volunteer and I've been doing it for 10 years or so and I'm getting burnt out with the whole thing. I don't mind volunteering, I can afford to do it and that's fine. It is a real drag because you just think, I can do something. The places that have got paid coordinators, it's just a recognition and puts them into a different category. With volunteering, everything is fine but let's not use it as a cheap way, when in fact, the government departments need to consider what they are requiring of coordinators or stuff. Newcastle is paid, Grafton is paid, Canberra is paid. Riverina, Armadale and Bathurst are not paid. (Participant).

Participants also expressed that because of a lack of adequate funding, there are issues of work being undertaken by volunteers that should be considered paid work and undertaken by paid staff members.

One of the issues a non-government organisation faces is where is the money coming from to employ people to do these jobs or fill up with your volunteers to take on that role at volunteer capacity without abusing their rights as volunteers. Are they doing a job that paid shift workers do or could do? I think the organisation has a mentality that everything's got to be free otherwise we don't do it. I don't agree with that. (Participant)

Participants felt that their volunteers did not experience excessive personal financial costs in volunteering. There was no suggestion that out of pocket expenses was off putting to potential and current volunteers. Participants explained that their organisations reimburse volunteers for their costs. These expenses may relate to travel, phone use, meals, accommodation and fees for working with children checks and police clearances.

No because the organisation bears the cost. The Working with Children Check for volunteers is free. It's done by the State Government. The police check is done by our organisation and we foot the bill for it. (Participant)

However, participants also acknowledged that many volunteers that were eligible for reimbursement did not make claims for their expenses.

If anything, it would be time but because they can claim their expenses, I don't think costs would be involved. Mind you, saying that, a lot of them do not claim their expenses - probably, they want to make that part of their contribution. I've never really asked them that but I've always asked them if they want to be reimbursed for travelling and accommodation if they need it. (Participant)

While participants understood the concept of volunteers being generous and not claiming their expenses, they felt that this also influenced the requests by faith based organisations for funding. Having a large number of volunteers not submitting reimbursement claims for expenses for attending training and activations, meant that the government never saw or understood the true and actual costs borne by these faith based organisations and their volunteers.

The interesting thing is, we keep getting people who volunteer and we say, 'we'll pay your petrol bill and put a claim in'. You give them the form and six months later, they still haven't put a claim in. They say, 'that's our donation'. I say, 'you're actually sabotaging the whole bloody set up because this is paid for by the government. We need to get the money out of the government so they know that there's all this activity and that it actually costs. Please, charge us'. (Participant)

Overall, participants were clear that despite the rhetoric from successive governments, there is a lack of adequate and ongoing funding for providing the personnel needed to ensure consistent and regular quality training for volunteers involved in supporting communities through disasters and emergencies. In the absence of that funding, this has been left to a dedicated group of volunteers in leadership and training roles who are increasingly becoming worn out.

Having considered the challenges in recruiting and training volunteers, participants also discussed the challenges in maintaining and retaining volunteers. In general, once volunteers were engaged with the organisation they remained as volunteers for many years. For many, there was an ingrained loyalty to a faith based organisation and many saw their volunteering as a commitment to their church and community.

I experience a tremendous amount of loyalty from my volunteer team. In my experience, once I have a team member on board, they will continue to volunteer indefinitely. I have found that

family connections are an important part of recruitment and retention. Often if a father is engaged then he will recruit his son into the team as well. This shows a loyalty to the service and is a valuable strategy for maintaining the quality of the volunteer pool. (Participant)

However, as noted earlier, participants have also found that younger volunteers tended to be volunteers for a shorter amount of time. Overall, volunteers left for many reasons related to life circumstances including changes in employment, moving to a new location, family commitments and health related issues for older volunteers.

Participants are cognisant of the fact that volunteer commitments need to be manageable and fit in with people's other commitments, and expressed that this seems to be becoming more difficult. However, it may be that there is some misconception about the time involved, as the actual time commitment required from volunteers was seen by most participants and organisations as manageable for their volunteers. Additionally, it was clear that for most volunteers, it was possible for them to get time off their regular employment during activations. This indicated a general support of volunteering by employers and that work commitments are not necessarily a barrier to availability for most volunteers, at least at times of activations.

Participants noted that even with a large percentage of their volunteers being older and retired and therefore not having work commitments, this did not mean they always had time to give to their volunteering commitments. Many retired volunteers travel extensively and others dedicate much of their time to their families, especially grandchildren.

It's finding people with the available time. The major demographic who are our volunteers are mostly retired people. We're always struggling with people who are travelling. Having availability of people is always a problem. (Participant)

Participants identified that even when there is an activation for a disaster or emergency, not all volunteers are available. Participants also sometimes found it is difficult to clearly identify if a volunteer was active or inactive. With infrequent activations, volunteers could become inactive without a team leader or area coordinator knowing. Participants did express that improved database management would assist team leaders and area coordinators in having this accurate knowledge.

They don't have to be available all the time. For example, if there's an activation, they still can say I can do it or I can't. We want a commitment for them to also say no, I'm on holidays and say if they're available and respond; either they can or they can't. (Participant)

Participants specifically discussed that maintaining an active and engaged volunteer team is a challenge when activations or deployments are infrequent. Volunteers can become disengaged with the organisation if they are not required to contribute their time regularly. One participant explained just how infrequently their team was deployed.

That's a rare thing. We did have a flood once. We had a flood in 1978 but there hasn't been one since then. In the 90's, when I was involved then, we had 190 people displaced. Other than that, it's been very quiet. (Participant).

Infrequent activations or deployments can mean that volunteers also feel less confident in their role if they were to be deployed, or just lose interest, and this can result in a loss of volunteers as they drift away.

It's a good thing we're not used often, as you can imagine. But on the other hand, not going out for two or three years, people tend to lose interest. (Participant)

I think that one of the issues is just a lack of activity. They go, 'what is the point?' I think that's one of the big factors. (Participant)

The thing is, these things don't happen every day of the week. Keeping volunteers engaged because some people say, well, nothing ever happens here and you get, not lazy but laid back about things and try to keep them engaged, that's the issue. It's quite an issue I'm addressing. (Participant)

Many participants felt this issue was a reason why people stop volunteering and was one of the main challenges that needed to be addressed. Being aware that maintaining an engaged volunteer pool helped with the retention of membership, participants discussed several ways to be more frequently engaged with their teams and volunteers and they saw ongoing communication as key to volunteer retention.

Firstly, training was considered an important way to maintain the interest and engagement of volunteers. Mindful of the time commitment of volunteers, participants did identify increased opportunities for training, and felt particularly that mock scenario based training was important.

Some participants also suggested that volunteers could be trained in different areas, not just in responding to disasters and emergencies, but also in areas of preparation and preparedness for potential disasters or emergency situations. This is an area that faith based organisations in other countries are increasingly involved in and one participant explained this in further detail.

Educating themselves, educating their church people, the schoolchildren in the community, and the university community in what is preparedness. I know Red Cross do that under their banner. There's no reason we can't do it under their banner with their circle of influence. Looking at, do you live in a flood prone area or do you live in a fire prone area, which one's it going to be? Educating them how to help people prepare for these kinds of things. Business plans, business continuity planning. A lot of the church members and community members run businesses where they need business continuity for these types of things. There's a lot of avenues you could engage in but it takes training, people and staff to step into that area. You can't do it yourself. (Participant)

Secondly, participants considered different ways of maintaining communication with their volunteers between activations. Some participant described communicating by sending emails regularly to volunteers to provide them with information and relevant updates about the organisation.

Everyone wants information about what's happening, they want stuff and they want to know about what's happening. What underpins all of that is communication. (Participant)

Participants also found sending emails with information about activations in other locations was very important.

I send regular emails to teams with information about the organisation and update them when activations happen in other parts of the State. I believe that this keeps volunteers engaged, especially with teams who have sporadic activations. (Participant)

Updating volunteers when a disaster hits in another area is an effective way of reminding them how valuable they are as active team members. (Participant)

With the floods up North that was a great time for me to rally my teams and say listen, this could happen down here all via email. (Participant)

Some participants also discussed other forms of communication beyond just email as the primary form of communication for organisations. They considered such social media (e.g., Facebook) as an inexpensive and a quick point of contact for team members and to provide a sense of community. Another participant expressed enthusiasm for developing an app to use as a tool to communicate with volunteers.

This could be a place for volunteers to keep their contact details up to date as well as a direct point of communication. By requiring users to engage with the app every few months, it becomes also becomes a method of monitoring if they are active or inactive volunteers. (Participant)

However, participants also acknowledged that due to the older average age of their volunteers, many volunteers did not necessarily use email regularly and were not comfortable using social media such as Facebook as a means of communication. The use of social media as a form of communication was seen as something that could be further encouraged in the future as an important communication tool, especially if a younger generation of volunteers is engaged.

Thirdly, some participants also identified the importance of developing communication and engagement with volunteers through the effective use of informal social events, such as a dinner or barbeques together with the volunteers.

More often than not, we will have a couple more social events, just to hang out, have a barbeque and a bit of chin wag, that sort of stuff. That's the way we do things. (Participant)

Finally, another interesting way to maintain volunteer engagement between activations was developing relationships working with other emergency organisations. For one participant, this greatly increased the communication and the number of times their volunteers have been utilised.

We look and make ourselves available for other events outside large disasters. We try and stay in that emergency space. We're building a solid working relationship with NSW police. I think in this financial year, we could do eight or nine jobs, that's roughly one a month for NSW police around NSW this year. With that big sea of activity, it manages to keep our folks engaged. We say yes to everything to make sure we don't miss opportunities. There could be teams where they haven't been activated for five, six years or more and then you get that natural decay. (Participant)

Thankfully, disasters and emergencies don't happen all the time but the infrequency of them means that volunteers can become disengaged and less likely to continue to be involved with the organisation. Providing regular training, as well as placing a focus on personal and community preparedness, sending regular emails and the use of social media, as well as providing social gatherings and working with other organisations, are all ways participants have used to maintain regular communication and contact with their volunteers.

One area in which participants felt there was a need for urgent attention involved their concern around what they saw as a lack of succession planning for those in volunteer leadership roles, usually referred to by participants as team leaders or area coordinators. This was seen as impacting on both recruitment and retention aspects.

Participants noted that finding quality volunteer leaders and training them to take on more responsibility could be difficult for many reasons. One main reason was the large time commitment that is required in these leadership roles. Another reason was that leaders are often responsible for the training of other volunteers, in addition to other tasks. A lack of resources makes it difficult to provide quality face to face training to volunteers in multiple locations, and also limits the availability of training and support for team leaders.

It seems that current strategies do not appear to come from any organised leadership succession planning by the faith based organisations themselves, but rather from the informal efforts of existing leaders seeking to develop potential future leaders. In smaller and more rural areas this is a critical concern. As one participant explained finding his replacement was an immediate priority.

That's what I'd like to look at. I'm not young myself. I'm over 80. I haven't shown a lot of enthusiasm. I think I must take responsibility for the lack of people in that area. As you get older, you slow down. When they read the job description I do, they just hand it back to me and show no interest at all. It would be very beneficial if I received more support in recruitment and training from the organisation in order to find a suitable leadership candidate to replace me. (Participant)

For many participants, there was no specific formal training provided by the organisation for new leaders and this was a matter of some concern. Some organisations did not have an official procedure for this, rather, each coordinator or team leader had their own methods of selecting and training new leaders and their replacements. Some attempted to take a formal training approach and others a more informal approach. One participant described the approach of having volunteers shadow and watch them, so that more people get a general understanding of the leadership role and could step up if needed.

The only strategy I've got is when I'm doing stuff, by sharing information with other team leaders around, I actually have them looking over my shoulder. Seeing what I'm doing, understanding what's happening. They're not having to do it but they're in a position where they're seeing what I'm doing. I'm hoping that if you get out and train enough people, it then comes to the top. I've identified a couple that I think potentially could. I just had a video conference with them, doing leadership training. Some of them I've thought about doing one Monday night, doing an online sort of Skype, face to face training with a small group too. (Participant)

Another participant discussed a somewhat more formal and organised approach to succession planning of those in leadership roles.

The good team leaders do succession planning well. We've already lined up the next team leader in a team. When someone is leaving, for instance. It's a case of coaching people within the team to assume leadership roles. That's done largely by delegation of responsibility for certain activities. As you do that delegation, they take on more and more and more. Of course, you have the opportunity for people to take on more responsibility when it becomes available. If that's not happening in a team, I try to attend as many team meetings as possible. I've got a little bit of a handle on who is in which team. Together with our State Manager, we try to

highlight potential leadership from the existing people and then coach those people into accepting the responsibility. (Participant)

The need for a more organised, formal and organisation wide approach to leadership training and succession planning was reinforced by many participants.

The only way there would be training available is if I sat down and took them through it. We give them the material. It is fine for Sydney but it's bloody difficult for everywhere else. We've got them scattered everywhere. We need to get this right as no one then wants to take on the leadership role and for good reasons. (Participant)

As far as I know, they don't get any direct, specific training for their role. Which is a huge gap, I would say. They are picked for their enthusiasm and their passion and then they get trained on the job, basically, by the State person. That's probably not going to be adequate. State people are run off their feet too. We could probably do with a training person for area coordinators, specifically, mentor them, help them and support them. One staff member at the State level has been talking about some sort of training package for them and an induction package and support for them. They have got a good concept in that regard. (Participant)

Without a more formalised training, support and succession plan for those volunteering to undertake leadership roles, rather than the current ad hoc process, trying to recruit and retain volunteer leaders will continue to be a significant challenge for the organisations.

The final area of discussion by participants revolved around the importance of recognition in maintaining and retaining their volunteers. Recognition and appreciation is important for all organisations utilising volunteers. Acknowledging the service and commitment of volunteers, means they in turn feel valued and appreciated and therefore are more likely to remain engaged with the organisation for a longer term.

Participants spoke of the more traditional ways their organisations recognise the contribution of volunteers, such as through awards for long term service of many years and other acknowledgements.

We do service recognitions for instance. Five, ten, fifteen years, that sort of thing; which are very standard around the place. We typically do verbal or message recognitions of people when

they perform particular deeds of value. Our organisation is pretty good at that sort of following up in the event of certain larger disaster events with social activities, to be able to say thank you to people for participating. I think the recognition is pretty good but I think we could certainly do more. (Participant)

Many participants also said they wish they could do more. They spoke of putting their efforts and those of other team leaders and area coordinators into a more personal approach in recognising the contribution of volunteers when relevant.

I try to organise social events after activations and sometimes am able to get enough money or funding to pay for dinner or similar for every volunteer. I would like to be able to do things like this more often, as well as give gifts or vouchers as a form of recognition. (Participant)

Additionally, some participants used email not only as a way to report on recent activations in other parts of the State but also as a good way to acknowledge volunteers and highlight individual volunteers in email newsletters.

I also send out reports when they had activation of the other teams. What happened, what did we do, sometimes they get some feedback from the people who are actively involved in an evacuation. We send out regular newsletters as well. People get some information to feel like they're part of it and they are recognised and appreciated. I think those are the main things. (Participant)

However, some participants described a need to see a greater provision of resources in order to effectively appreciate team members and felt that some of the current strategies by the organisations themselves could be improved.

I don't think they've been that successful at this stage. My perception is, we're struggling to get feedback on where we can recognise, number one. Number two, actually then implement those recognition schemes. I think it boils down, largely, to information provision and also, administrative resources to actually send the stuff out. We'll have to have people go along who the volunteers see as representatives of the organisation. Say thank you very much, here's your certificate or here's your badge, great job. I think it could be improved in how it's handled, definitely. (Participant)

While participants agreed that most organisations could do more in terms of recognising their volunteers in different ways, it could be said that there is significant appreciation received internally from team leaders and area coordinators. However, participants found that outside the organisations, recognition from external sources could be improved. There is a distinct contrast between the political and public response to those volunteers involved in response organisations directly fighting fires, floods and other disasters as compared to faith based volunteers involved in the long term recovery process of restoring communities. Participants expressed a desire for there to be more acknowledgement and understanding by politicians, government officials, the media and general public of the role that faith based volunteers play in supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

We had people going to these things with people from SES or the little fire service or country fire in Victoria or whoever, saying what has your organisation got to do with emergency management. When they find out what we've got to do in emergency management it changes their tune. They don't realise that sometimes, our role goes on for months and even years afterwards. That hits home to them at times when they don't properly appreciate us. In the public media and by the public, there's always this easy recognition of the lights and sirens and the uniforms, but we get left in the background or are invisible at times. That sort of recognition is a good thing to try and grapple with - it really needs to improve. (Participant)

As many participants explained, recognition is an important part of maintaining and retaining volunteers. It is not the primary reason why people volunteer their time and make a contribution, but without recognition and genuine appreciation they are much less likely to stay.

In the end, it is not why our volunteers do the job. It's nice to get it...but without it, volunteers who do not feel valued and appreciated just slip away. (Participant)

Part Two: Survey of Volunteers

Methodology

Part Two of the research project also involved the three representative organisations ADRA Australia, The Salvation Army Emergency Services and Anglicare. Informed by the information obtained from key stakeholders, paid staff and volunteer leaders interviewed in the first research study, a survey was designed for volunteers in the three faith based organisations involved in supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

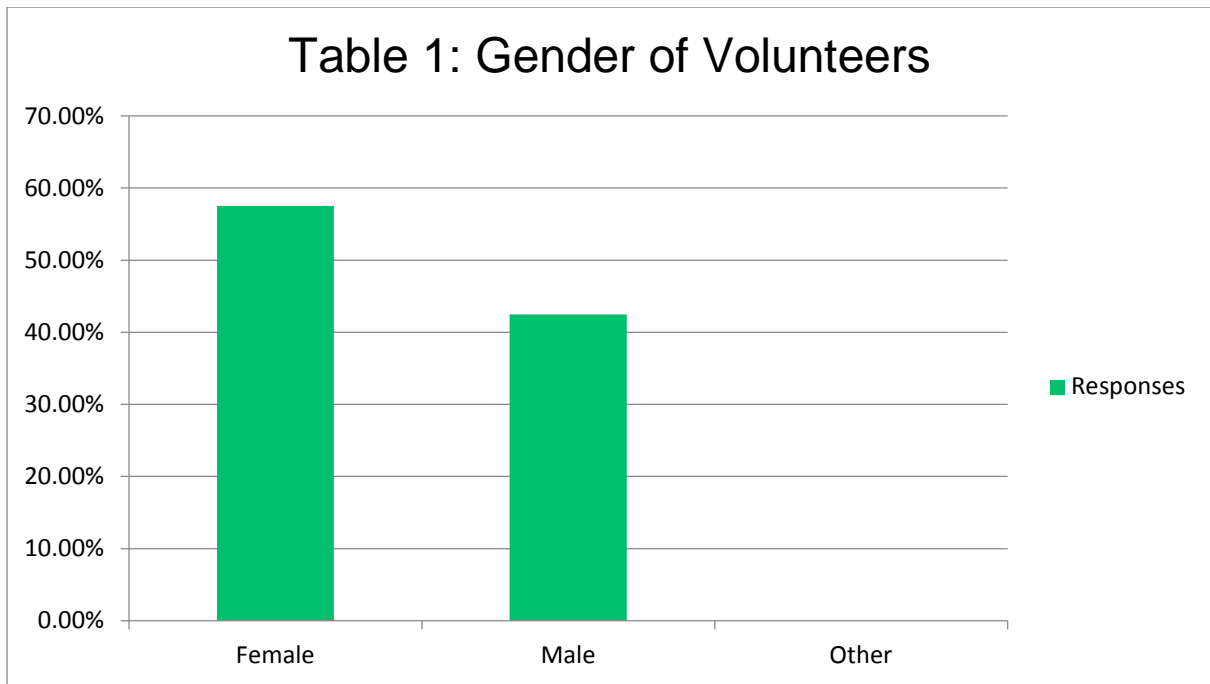
The survey was distributed to volunteers via two methods: (i) volunteers were sent an email by their respective organisation, explaining the research and were asked to go to a link on the internet (through Survey Monkey) to complete the survey online; or (ii) volunteers who could not be contacted via email were then posted a letter explaining the research and asked to complete the online survey or the printed survey and return it via an enclosed reply paid envelope to their respective organisation. These completed surveys were then forwarded to the research team for analysis along with the completed online surveys. Volunteers were able to complete the survey over a two month period and after one month, a reminder email to complete the survey online was sent to those volunteers who were contactable via email.

Survey participants were not asked for any information to identify them or their organisation and therefore remained anonymous. The survey comprised of some close ended questions but the majority were open ended questions to allow volunteers to express their thoughts, opinions and ideas. The questions focused on the central themes of volunteer recruitment, engagement and retention. A total of 350 volunteers completed the survey. The analysis and results of the survey are now presented.

Results

Question 1: Gender of volunteers

Of the volunteers surveyed, there were somewhat more females (58%) than males (42%) as shown in Table 1.



Question 2: Age range of volunteers

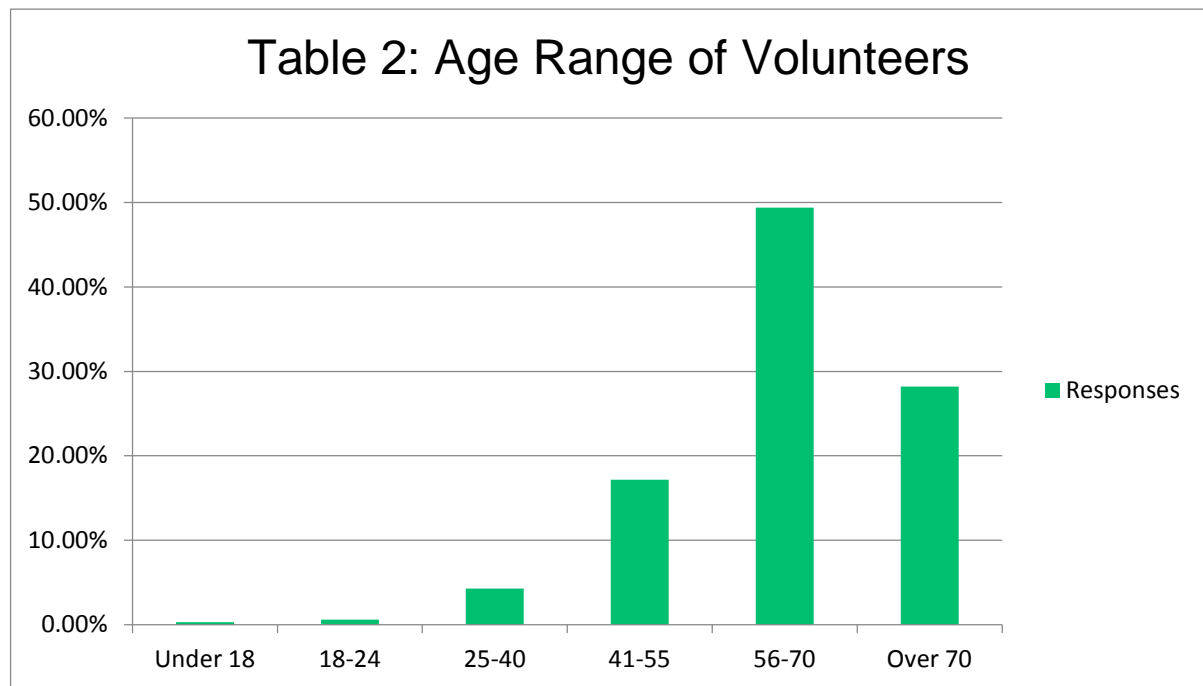
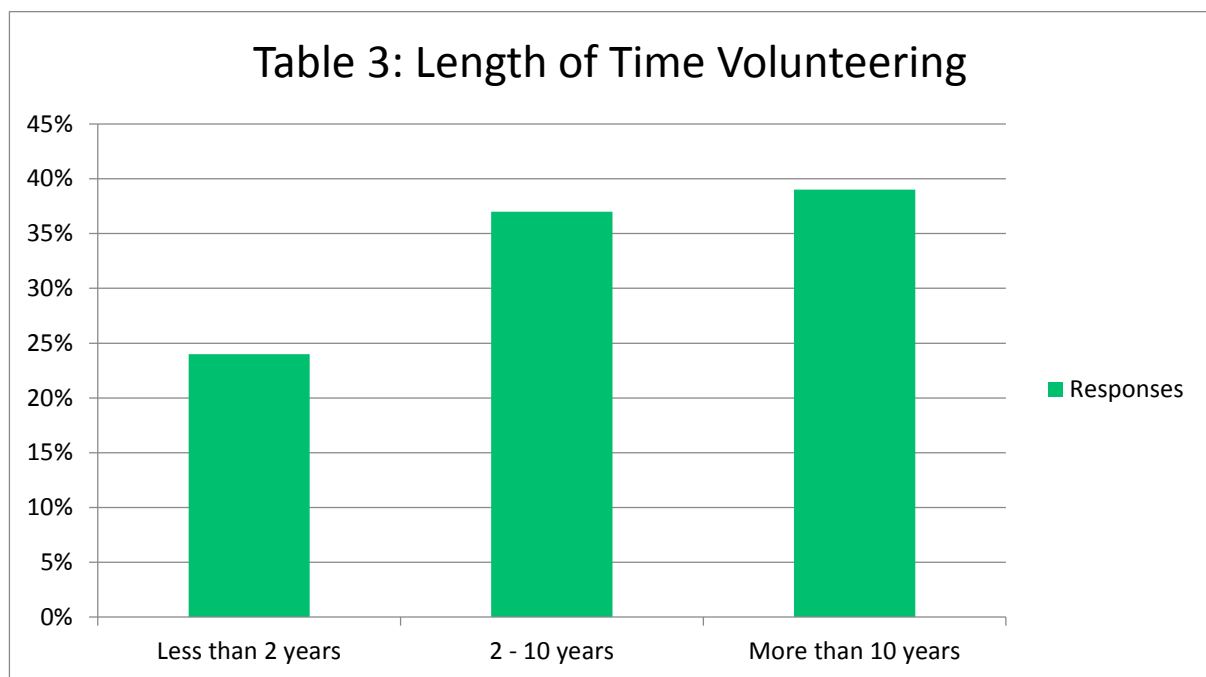


Table 2 provides a representation of the overall age range of volunteers. Almost half the volunteers were aged between 56 to 70 years of age (49%), the second largest range was volunteers over 70 years of age (28%) and the third largest group of volunteers (17%) were

between 41 to 55 years of age. There were very few volunteers (6%) 24 years of age and under. More than three quarters of volunteers (a combined 77%) were 56 years or over.

Question 3: Length of time volunteering for your organisation

Table 3 identifies that 24% of volunteers stated they were new recruits or had been volunteering for less than 2 years. Another 37% of volunteers specified that they had been volunteering between 2 and 10 years. Finally, 39% said they had volunteered for more than 10 years, with many stating multiple decades of service.



Question 4: Type of volunteering work

When volunteers were asked what type of volunteering work they undertook, they provided a wide range of responses that centred on either the periods of activation or deactivation.

(i) There was a range of roles and work volunteers had undertaken during disasters or emergencies such as sourcing accommodation for those who had their homes destroyed or providing food, clothing and support to those displaced during a disaster.

Sourcing venues and assigning displaced people to emergency accommodation. (Participant)

Feeding emergency teams and displaced members of the public in times of disasters and or emergencies. (Participant)

Assisting in providing first aid and health checks. (Participant)

(ii) There was also a range of roles and work volunteers had undertaken at times of deactivation, when they were not actually involved in current disasters or emergencies. These included paperwork, volunteer recruitment, volunteer training and support, as well as fundraising.

Supporting and developing other volunteer members in the organisation in preparation for emergencies. (Participant)

Raising funds through door knocking, car washes, fetes and more. (Participant)

Providing training and development for volunteers in local areas. (Participant)

Question 5: What would you consider are the main reasons why people volunteer for your organisation in the disaster welfare area?

On analysis, the responses of volunteers to this question fell into two main categories. Of these:

(i) Three quarters of volunteers described a strong desire to give back to the community and to help others as their overwhelming motivation.

To help provide comfort and assistance to others in time of need. (Participant)

Possibly a desire to help those in need at a stressful time. For me personally, it was because I'd personally been involved in a natural disaster as a child and assisted my parents while they were helping others at that time. (Participant)

(ii) A quarter of volunteers identified religion and being a member of their church as the main reason for volunteering for their faith based organisation.

A desire to offer care and compassion in the name of Christ to those enduring unforeseen disaster. (Participant)

Question 6: What do you see as the barriers for people to volunteer for disaster welfare work in your organisation?

On analysis, the responses of volunteers to this question fell into two main categories. Of these:

(i) Approximately two thirds explained that the issue of being unable to make the time commitment to volunteer was considered to be the major reason that people do not volunteer. Family and work commitments were described most often in relation to lack of time availability.

My thoughts are the lack of time they have, especially if they have a young family and can't give up a Saturday for training, or be called out at short notice. Much easier for retirees. (Participant)

Time. Most people who volunteer also do other volunteering work or have really busy lives and no time to give in other ways. (Participant)

Also, some volunteers also explained that there was a misconception by the public that volunteering was more time consuming than it really was, given that there are long periods of deactivation.

People think it takes a lot of time, but emergencies and disasters don't happen that often. In between times we do a bit of training on other issues but nothing that requires volunteering regularly. (Participant)

(ii) A further one third considered that people did not volunteer through a lack of knowledge of the type of work and roles they could undertake as volunteers and a lack of confidence in being able to fulfil these roles. Also, that current volunteers were getting older and thought that their associated poor health was a reason for their ceasing to volunteer.

Because people don't understand what the work would involve during disasters and emergencies, they don't think they could do it and don't feel confident, but everyone could easily take on role at these times. (Participant)

Lack of knowledge of what is involved, hence lack of confidence. (Participant)

Maybe they are of an age that they are not able to participate physically anymore. (Participant)

Our volunteers are getting older and are less able health wise to continue volunteering at all. (Participant)

Question 7: What are the most successful recruitment methods used to recruit volunteers?

Three quarters of volunteers indicated that word of mouth was the most successful form of recruitment and that the human connection through face to face contact was a powerful tool to engage with potential volunteers.

Word of mouth, I was asked then and there and became involved when my church had a 'Rescue Sunday' and we invited authorities - police, highway patrol, ambos, fire brigade, our faith based organisation and community individuals to thank them for the help they give in society. (Participant)

Word of mouth is the most effective recruitment method and belonging to a group, feeling supported by that organisation. (Participant)

Although some volunteers suggested using promotional flyers and engaging with social media, these suggestions also involved following up with face to face contact and the effective word of mouth recruitment strategies.

Asking in notice time and items in weekly pew slips have not produced interest but I'm sure there would be many offers to help if there was a crisis. People just don't want to commit it seems to me and it takes word of mouth and asking to move them forward. (Participant)

Interestingly, a few volunteers did suggest that a questionnaire could be provided to potential volunteers in order to gain a better understanding of their needs and expectations. They also suggested the use of a buddy system when they become volunteers.

Short questionnaire on what they would like to get out of their volunteer work so the organisation can assist them as well as benefit the organisation using their areas of expertise and develop these areas for the work required. (Participant)

We need to give them a buddy or buddies to keep in contact and support each other. (Participant)

Question 8: Are there other recruitment methods that have not been successful?

Almost two thirds of the volunteers surveyed identified that they were not involved in active recruitment so did not know which methods had not been successful. Of those that were involved in recruitment, their responses were extremely varied and scattered.

Some volunteers considered that recruitment needed to happen before activations or deployments, rather than at the time of activation which is how a number of volunteers were recruited.

Volunteers should be recruited before an emergency occurs so they know what they are doing and it is less chaotic, not at the time of an emergency or disaster which is what happened with us. (Participant)

A call for more volunteers needs to happen before disasters, not during (which it was for me). I think the best response would come if done soon after a disaster. (Participant)

A number of volunteers identified that written information such as flyers and notices on bulletin boards were generally unsuccessful.

Just saying we need you or reading a flyer or notice board without any follow up with a person doesn't work. (Participant)

A small number of volunteers did comment that word of mouth recruitment could be unsuccessful if it was not handled correctly, especially if the person recruiting volunteers became too pushy or forceful with potential volunteers.

Being pushy with people doesn't work at all. (Participant)

You don't want people to feel that they are being harassed to volunteer, otherwise they certainly won't end up volunteering and tell others not to as well. (Participant)

Finally, a few volunteers expressed concern that they felt that organisations seemed unwilling to reach outside the church community to the wider population and were too reliant on recruiting volunteers through a dwindling number of church attendees.

They are too reliant on their own church rather than community based, church members are ageing and numbers are getting less. This recruiting won't work for much longer, you have to get outside. (Participant)

Question 9: If you were producing a package to help recruit more volunteers, what would you include in this package and are there any other resources which would be useful?

Volunteers provided responses that were very varied to this question and identified a wide range of material and information that might be useful for those involved in recruiting volunteers. The main suggestions from volunteers included audio visual material that could show potential volunteers the importance of the volunteer work done and a comprehensive visual explanation of what was required of volunteers, and written testimonials and case studies from current volunteers.

Volunteers often commented more on what information was to be included than the mode of delivery of the material and type of package.

To me, the package would contain real time examples of major disaster events illustrating how volunteers have been employed/involved in relief situations, these would be distributed and made available through various churches and organisations. (Participant)

Include a short description of what the organisation volunteers do in a crisis, list approximate hours of training each year, and include a few stories from both volunteers and people helped by organisation. (Participant)

Visual content is a helpful tool for showing diversity, which may contribute to recruiting more and varied demographics. (Participant)

Show the variety of ages and ability of people within the organisation. (Participant)

Volunteers also provided a variety of other suggestions including contact lists, invitation letters, branded materials (e.g. pens, notepads, key rings etc.), job descriptions, training requirements and code of conduct.

Question 10: On average, how long do you think people stay as volunteers in the disaster welfare area in your organisation?

In response to this question, approximately one-third of volunteers were unsure and responded that they did not know. Another third provided a range of time periods from one year through to up to 10 years.

Some a very long time, others as long as they can carry out the work, while others may only stay 1-2 years as they are transients and move a lot, such as for work. (Participant)

The final group of a third, suggested a period of 10 years or greater and through to indefinitely as long as personal health permits.

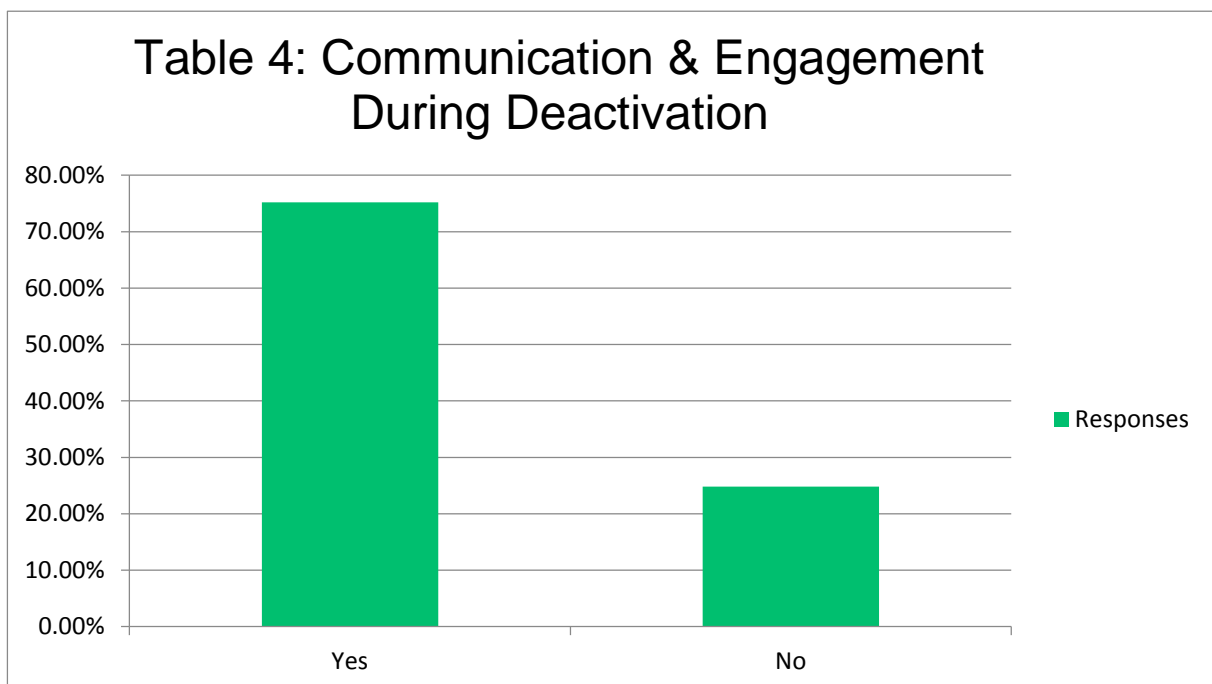
As long as they are available and feel capable of filling the role. (Participant)

15 years or more depending on age of joining. (Participant)

If people have been engaged in an event I think they tend to stay on indefinitely. When there is nothing going on they tend to lose interest. (Participant)

Question 11: When there are long periods of time between being required to volunteer, does your organisation actively communicate and keep people engaged until the next time they are needed to volunteer?

Table 4 illustrates that three quarters (75%) of volunteers responded ‘yes’ when asked whether their organisations actively communicated and engaged during periods of deactivation. A quarter (25%) of volunteers responded ‘no’, that there was very limited or no communication or engagement during these periods of deactivation.



Thankfully there is usually a lot of time between disasters but unfortunately this means time to forget what to do and without any contact! This is why I suggest regular training at say six month intervals. (Participant)

Of the majority of volunteers who responded ‘yes’, most explained a number of measures used by their organisation to maintain regular communication and engagement with volunteers. These included communication through newsletters, text messages and email, as well as refresher training and team meetings.

There are emails alerting us to meetings and training days. These are just enough to keep us updated but not make the role a burden. (Participant)

Some volunteers also commented that communication happened automatically when volunteers engaged with each other at weekly church services.

We have had regular contact with team members through weekly church attendance, so it is ongoing contact. (Participant)

There is no problem in where I live, all the disaster recovery volunteers are Anglican Church goers which we all see each other rather frequently. (Participant)

Further, some participants mentioned social events as a means of communication and engagement. However, there was a mixed reaction to informal social gatherings. For some volunteers, they were very positive and an important part of ongoing engagement. For others these events seemed somewhat time consuming and unnecessary.

Some social opportunities have been tried - I am not attending now as they seem to take time and weren't really necessary. (Participant)

Question 12: Have you any suggestions of activities that volunteer teams could engage in when not involved in disaster relief activities?

Approximately half the participants replied that they did not have any suggestions about activities to engage with volunteers during deactivation periods. Of those that did make suggestions, three quarters identified more training and especially mock emergency training scenarios. Participants saw this as building upon their desire for a clearer understanding of the roles and responsibilities of volunteers when placed in actual disasters or emergencies.

Simply put, more training opportunities. Roleplaying what to do in the event of a disaster or emergency so we know exactly what we are supposed to do in our roles and not guessing. (Participant)

Further, some volunteers also suggested that this mock scenario based training was even more effective when conducted in conjunction with other emergency management organisations.

Evacuation drill days with other organisations in their area – SES, Fire Services, Red Cross and others with role plays, going through sample paperwork for emergency centres and evacuation centres. (Participant)

The best training I believe is when all the volunteers from all the organisations involved in a disaster get together and pretend as if it was a real situation. That's the best learning and communication between everyone. (Participant)

Some volunteers suggested more informal and social events as a way of staying engaged with volunteers. This contributed to a sense of connectedness and they saw maintaining relationships with other team members as an important part of volunteering. It was also suggested that these social events could be combined with other necessary processes such as training or documentation checks.

Perhaps sharing of a meal whilst concurrently checking everyone's up to date with Working with Children Checks, Police Check, ID card, visibility vest, first aid, etc. (Participant)

Training, barbecues, days out as families, join up with other local teams, group time together. (Participant)

Of interest was that the use of any form of social media (e.g., Facebook) was rarely mentioned by volunteers and yet a whole array of social media options would be an inexpensive and effective form of ongoing communication and engagement with volunteers. This would be the case both during periods of activation or deployment and deactivation. The lack of commentary on communication through social media seems to reflect a significantly older aged volunteer base who do not use or are unfamiliar with social media.

Question 13: What training have you received in your volunteering role?

Volunteers used a wide range of training terminology in response to this question and many were non-specific about what their training had entailed. However, almost three quarters of volunteers identified having received the initial training for new recruits and some subsequent refresher training for volunteers. Some participants mentioned the provision of training that involved particular certifications (both accredited and non-accredited). Examples of this

training included food handling, first aid, mental health first aid, paperwork, child protection issues, self-care skills, aged care assistance, as well as practical training such as operation of equipment.

We have learnt different techniques and skills that would really require training if you were doing that work outside of emergencies, so it has been useful around first aid, food handling, self-care, etc. (Participant)

Procedures involving care responses, understanding different roles in the organisation and personnel, working through recording procedures. (Participant)

I have attended most of the training days provided, and have found them to be informative, well planned, and I always leave, thinking that I have learnt something. (Participant)

Consistent with what has been previously mentioned, volunteers again highlighted the importance and effectiveness of mock scenario role plays of disaster and emergency situations.

Preparation for what a disaster scene would be like, which organisations are involved in disaster relief and their roles, how to try and identify the most needy victims of a disaster when they walk through the door and how to go about finding suitable accommodation for people if called upon. (Participant)

Finally, a small number of volunteers did comment about their experiences of online training but their responses were mixed. Some found online training to be useful but others found it time consuming and more effort than it was worth.

Everyone suggests online learning is the way to go but sometimes it seems to be much slower and annoying than learning face to face. (Participant)

Question 14: Are there any changes you would like to see to improve the training you receive?

Encouragingly, half of the volunteers surveyed considered the amount of training they received to be of adequate quantity and quality.

Another quarter of volunteers reinforced a desire for more hands on training, including more mock scenario training as well as more interaction with other emergency management organisations, to gain an understanding of the organisational roles everyone plays during an activation.

The more hands on and role playing the better it is for everyone involved. (Participant)

Invite SES, Police and Fire Brigade to give talks on their work, our work and how we blend together and then train and practice together as if it was the real thing. (Participant)

A final quarter of volunteers did mention online learning as another area of improvement in training. But many expressed concern that a large number of volunteers are unable to utilise online training, or found it frustrating to complete, due to having older computers and low computer literacy.

I tried online learning but had difficulty with a computer that wasn't new. (Participant)

I found online learning very frustrating, rather than taking me 7 hours that was predicted, it actually took me to about 24 hours, I have found face to face training more useful and actually less time consuming. (Participant)

However, some participants did comment on the value and potential of online training especially as a more effective use of their time without the need to travel.

Do it online via webinar to overcome the hassle and time of having to bring everyone together at a venue (e.g., make use of join.me, zoom.us, skype.com and others). Record webinars and build a repository of training resources. (Participant)

Question 15: If you were producing a package to assist in engaging and retaining more volunteers, what would you include in this package, and are there any other resources which would be useful?

The volunteer responses to this open-ended question were varied and covered a range of materials and resources. The most common response involved the concept of some form of kit

that was a 'one stop shop' containing all the expected requirements, information and answers to frequently asked questions from volunteers. One volunteer provided a summary of what this kit could contain.

I would include the usual requirements for volunteers. That is; Working With Children card form, Police Check form, who to contact list, ID card, first aid training options, training options up to a year in advance (if possible), instructions for who to go to regarding chain of command at a disaster relief centre, list of other volunteers in one's area (if privacy issues allow), opportunity to get together once per year for a barbeque. Examples of situations that volunteers have been exposed to and how they were handled. Photos, personal stories to be shared. (Participant)

Many volunteers reinforced the suggestions made in relation to materials for recruitment about the use of audio visual content and also case studies and testimonials from current volunteers.

YouTube channel. Since it is (thankfully) not a common experience for people to be evacuated from their homes, businesses - people don't necessarily understand the situations we help with. I think some of short videos of previous disaster scenes, volunteer practice session clips, basic interviews with volunteers, paid staff, survivors and others would be helpful, but I realise this probably isn't in the budget. (Participant)

Once again, volunteers emphasised mock scenarios as being a way to assist volunteers who do not often know what to expect in an activation or deployment and also to feel confident when having to handle the real life disaster or emergency.

Just a few more specifics of actual responsibilities likely at evacuation centres and a mock demonstration or activity. Even just a list of possible tasks would be good. For those who have never been called out, it is sometimes difficult to imagine exactly what they might be expected to do. It gets covered quite well over time but for someone new, it can be a bit of a mystery if called out straight away. (Participant)

Question 16: How are you recognised and appreciated as a volunteer in your organisation?

In response to this question, three quarters of volunteers felt that they received an adequate amount of recognition and appreciation. They identified a wide range of recognition methods including verbal expressions of thanks, 'thank you' emails and texts, team debrief meetings, long-service certificates, uniforms, Christmas and thank you cards, social events such as dinners and barbecues and small gifts.

The staff do appreciate us in lots of ways including, saying thanks, cards, a dinner and other ways. (Participant)

I appreciated the tea and debrief session we have after the floods have gone. (Participant)

By our uniform. Greatly appreciated by thank you when talking and mingling with emergency personnel and certificates to volunteers. (Participant)

Another group of volunteers did not focus on the issue of receiving recognition but indicated that they did not expect or require recognition for their service. They explained that due to their religious beliefs, volunteering was part of their service to the community and no recognition was necessary.

I don't do it for praise it is part of my Christianity and Christian beliefs. (Participant)

A few volunteers expressed that they received very little or no recognition at all.

Question 17: Have you any further suggestions on how volunteers can receive recognition and be appreciated?

Volunteers provided a wide range of responses and their suggestions for further recognition and appreciation were across three main areas.

(i) Most often participants suggested providing certificates and/or badges to volunteers for their service. This included both awards for long service and also separately in recognition and gratitude after the completion of an activation. Volunteers also suggested that this type of recognition should be part of an awards based ceremony or event.

Recognition at special ceremonies. Not only recognition for a job well done but also for long service and in special cases recognition for going way beyond what is expected. (Participant)

(ii) Some volunteers expressed a desire for their certifications to be industry recognised for things such as professional development or accredited towards training modules. These volunteers felt that this would add value to the service undertaken by them and was a more useful acknowledgement and recognition of their skills and service.

The certificate could be considered to be points toward professional development within your professional body. (Participant)

Your certificate could count towards a degree in a given profession, e.g., teaching. (Participant)

(iii) Volunteers also identified the importance of greater recognition outside the organisation. They considered that political leaders, government agencies and the media should provide more recognition of the work done by faith based volunteers during times of disasters and emergencies. Some volunteers felt that the response based emergency services such as fire services received extensive recognition but those in recovery areas often received little or no acknowledgement and recognition.

News media would help. I have noticed in the past that certain organisations get a lot of credit and while ours would not be mentioned at all. Not that we should be there to be noticed, but a little credit now and then would be nice. (Participant)

Some volunteers reiterated what had been noted in previous questions on recognition that they did not volunteer to expect or receive recognition as it was part of their faith based service.

Question 18: If you were producing a package to assist in appreciating and valuing volunteers what would you include in this package, and are there any other resources which would be useful?

Again, a variety of responses were received to this question. Some volunteers highlighted the importance of the personal touch, such as thank you cards or letters, and a template for certificates.

A thank you letter or thank you card is all that is necessary. (Participant)

Other volunteers suggested a variety of gifts involving different ranges in value. These included uniforms, movie passes, dinner or shopping vouchers through to branded items such as pens, notepads, key rings and name badges.

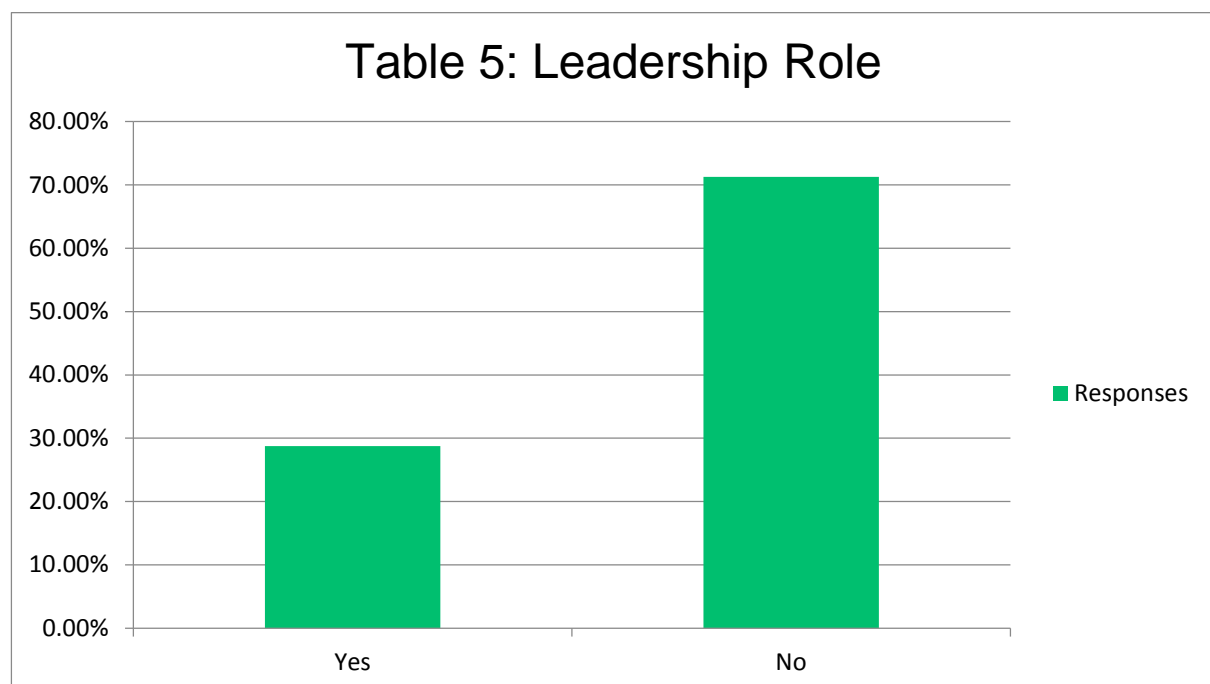
Maybe we should have some inexpensive gifts with the logo on it such as pens, key rings, coasters and other things like this. (Participant)

However, many volunteers reiterated that there was no need for further types of recognition and expressed concern over the expense of things like gifts and vouchers that they did not consider necessary.

I object to money spent on volunteers that could be spent 'in the field'. (Participant)

Question 19: Have you ever been in a leadership role within your organisation?

When volunteers were asked whether they had ever been in a leadership role within their faith based organisation, almost three quarters (71%) responded 'no'. The remaining 29% of volunteers had been in a leadership role as shown in Table 5. Volunteers defined these roles most often with the title of 'team leader' and sometimes as 'area coordinator'.



Question 20: What do you see as the barriers which might deter people from volunteering to take on a leadership role within your organisation?

Approximately half of the responses to this question identified that the biggest barrier was around being 'time poor' and having too many other time commitments. Volunteers noted that those taking on a leadership role have even greater demands on their time than other volunteers.

I am not sure people want to take on leadership roles, everyone knows that this requires so much more of your time than just being a volunteer. (Participant)

It is about time commitment as people work and time off is generally without pay. As well as people in their own businesses also can't just leave. (Participant)

A little less than half the volunteers, identified a range of other barriers to undertaking leadership roles involving a 'lack' of: training, interpersonal skills, understanding of the role, confidence, or appreciation and support for those already in these leadership roles.

Lack of confidence in themselves, it sometimes seems daunting with the responsibility and accountability and sometimes the personalities of the Committee membership. (Participant)

They might feel like they won't be supported and the job will be overwhelming. (Participant)

We have some standout leaders in our organisation, and I sense that volunteers are afraid to become leaders because they are afraid they won't reach the high bar that has been set. (Participant)

Finally, a few volunteers identified issues of poor health and increased age as reasons for either no longer or not taking on leadership roles.

People just get older and tired but sometimes they are not well too and can't volunteer or lead anymore. (Participant)

Question 21: What resources do you think might assist leaders or potential leaders in your organisation?

The majority of volunteers suggested the provision of training was needed for those in leadership roles. Additionally, mentoring by other leaders was considered important for new leaders. Individual and/or group coaching on a regular ongoing basis by Skype or phone, was also suggested by some volunteers. However, volunteers identified that most training seemed ad hoc depending on the local area and there did not seem to be formalised or consistent training across the organisation for those in leadership roles. The further development of such an ongoing training program was considered a very positive and helpful move.

There needs to be an organisation wide train the trainer package and workshops. (Participant)

There should be some consistent general leadership training for all new leaders. (Participant)

Mentoring program by retiring leaders to new ones and shadowing of a leader during an event, scholarships to do tertiary emergency management programs. Coaching opportunities for leaders too. (Participant)

Another group of some volunteers suggested that more leaders needed to have a better knowledge of their role. This was around knowledge of equipment, familiarity with their team members, procedural knowledge and the required paperwork and documentation.

To be more aware where supplies of basic material aid goods are stored and supplied at the time, how to access the items when first activated in disaster centres, if we are to supply and not rely on centre management. (Participant)

Kits for leaders with all necessary equipment and forms needed by them and the volunteers, so they knew all this information. (Participant)

Small training packages that leaders can do and anyone can give to their teams and volunteers. (Participant)

A few volunteers identified a final area in relation to technology and this was considered a resource that could be developed to assist leaders in their roles. Although volunteers were often

unclear and not specific about what types of technology, it seemed that if leaders had an understanding of certain technological tools these could be of assistance and beneficial for those in leadership and for their volunteers.

Development of apps and other electronic aids for emergency management and reporting.
(Participant)

Using social media to help in the leadership role and communication with volunteers.
(Participant)

Question 22: Are there any general comments you would like to make about volunteering in disaster welfare work in your organisation?

In this final open-ended question, volunteers who responded to this question overwhelmingly took the opportunity to make positive statements about volunteering for their organisation. Volunteers stated that overall they were positive about their contribution and participation as faith based volunteers in supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

It is important to me to help others. Maybe I might need such help one day. (Participant)

Volunteering in this area is rewarding. It is enjoyable to be with people and rewarding when you see the difference in people's lives. (Participant)

I have found the volunteering very varied, interesting and rewarding. (Participant)

I feel appreciated, supported well and have a real sense of belonging to a wonderful team.
(Participant)

Discussion and Conclusion

This research comprised two different types of research projects and two different types of methodology. Part One involved interviews with key stakeholders both paid staff and also with volunteers in leadership roles, and Part Two was the survey of volunteers.

What is most interesting from this research is the fact that those volunteers in the field who responded to the survey had very similar thoughts and opinions on the issues covered to those who were interviewed as staff and/or volunteers in leadership roles. This alignment between both the interview and survey responses provided a highly positive indicator that those involved in leading volunteers, whether paid or unpaid, are well attuned to the issues for volunteers themselves.

Based on this alignment and similarity of thought, the following issues emerged to be highlighted in this discussion on the recruitment, engagement and retention of volunteers in faith based organisations involved in supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

Recruitment

The crucial issue of recruitment for faith based organisations, as with many other emergency management organisations, is an ongoing challenge. In this research involving faith based organisations, word of mouth was overwhelmingly considered by both interview and survey participants to be the most successful method of recruitment. This finding is consistent with existing literature (Bussell & Forbes, 2006; Esmond, 2001, 2009, 2016; Manetti, Bellucci, Como & Bagnoli, 2015) that identifies word of mouth recruitment as being the most common and effective method of volunteer recruitment.

By definition, word of mouth recruitment involves someone telling someone else about the volunteering opportunity and often directly asking them whether they would be willing to volunteer. However, for faith based organisations, it is clear that word of mouth recruitment primarily takes place in the local church community amongst church attendees or during church presentations by team leaders or area coordinators, often volunteers themselves. Projecting into

the future, as church attendance numbers diminish, the number of volunteers recruited from within the church in this way will also diminish. This means that there is an urgent need for faith based organisations to begin to consider how and where to recruit volunteers who are not members of the church.

It will be necessary to look outside their traditional volunteer base and seek to connect, engage and attract a different type of volunteer, such as members of CALD communities. The objective must be to broaden the potential volunteer base into the wider community.

One way of expanding the potential of word of mouth recruitment is by exploring the 'networking circles' of existing volunteers. Using this strategy, each volunteer identifies a list of all the people they know in their networks, from family members and friends to work colleagues and even distant acquaintances. Such lists can be surprisingly extensive. Each volunteer then agrees to make contact and ask the people in their networks if they would be interested in volunteering. This strategy expands word of mouth recruitment to a wider audience and can increase the size and diversity of the volunteer pool.

Another recruitment challenge that faith based organisations involved in disasters and emergencies are experiencing is that of a rapidly ageing volunteer base. This too is found in the existing literature as being an issue for a great many organisations also dealing with the consequences of their volunteer base ageing. In this research, it is notable that more than three quarters of the volunteers were aged 56 years or over. Clearly, recruitment strategies need to be developed not only to engage people outside the church from the wider community as potential volunteers, but also to engage volunteers that may be from a younger age group.

Another issue faced by the organisations and recognised by both paid staff and volunteer leaders and the volunteers themselves, is that barriers to volunteer engagement for potential volunteers most often revolve around the issue of a lack of time. This might be because of an actual inability to carve out the time due to a multitude of other commitments. However, it might only be a perceived inability, if their feeling that they do not have enough time to volunteer is based on a misunderstanding about the actual time commitment required to become an active volunteer.

In other words, in some instances there may be a misconception about the issue of time for faith based volunteers. Objectively, the amount of time required as a volunteer involved in supporting communities through disasters and emergencies is limited when compared to the necessary time commitment in other emergency management organisations, such as fire services, which require significant ongoing training and engagement of volunteers.

There may be an opportunity for faith based organisations to provide more knowledge and clearer specific information for potential volunteers about how much time is involved and that the amount of training is not necessarily excessive as they market these volunteering opportunities. The fact that the time periods between activations can be quite substantial, whilst seen by participants as a problem in keeping existing volunteers engaged, can equally be seen as a positive in the initial recruitment process, particularly for those who feel they may not have the time to devote as a volunteer. Potential volunteers may have the impression that they would be involved in an intensive, time consuming volunteering effort and this does not seem to necessarily be the case as described by volunteers in the results.

Another approach, in recognition of people's concerns around time commitment, is to offer potential volunteers shorter term time commitments for a defined period, rather than a long term open ended commitment without any defined boundaries. This may be achieved by adopting a process of signing people up each year, that is, re-signing volunteers annually to commit for another year. The purpose of this would be to allow volunteers to continue their commitment year after year if they wished and are able to do so, but also to withdraw (perhaps only temporarily) without feeling like they had breached a never ending commitment. Such a process would also make it easier to maintain a database that provided information around which volunteers were active and which were inactive. It would also allow volunteers to opt out for a period of time, such as when they planned to be travelling and were therefore unavailable, and then to re-opt in as their circumstances changed.

This type of shorter term commitment would be attractive to many people who have other commitments but also to a younger group of people who are no longer committing for the long term, may well be moving on to University or taking up jobs elsewhere. They could be part of volunteering for a period of time with a yearly recommitment contract or process. This research shows a current broad cohort of older volunteers who have remained volunteers for long periods of time (nearly 40% had volunteered for over 10 years). But these volunteers are rapidly

ageing and for many reasons, including ill health, will no longer be able to volunteer in the future. It may be that this current volunteer cohort cannot be replaced with 'like-for-like', that is, by other older volunteers willing to remain for decades, but instead by a larger number of people of all ages engaging and volunteering for shorter periods of time or for multiple, time limited episodes.

In summary, this research shows that there are many challenges for faith based organisations involved in disasters and emergencies in terms of recruiting volunteers. These include a rapidly ageing volunteer base, a word of mouth recruitment process that principally takes place within churches where there are a diminishing number of attendees and issues around potential volunteers gaining an understanding of the actual time commitment involved in these volunteer roles. These challenges are not insurmountable but need current consideration to change how, when and where potential volunteers are recruited by faith based organisations.

Training

Both the participants who were interviewed and the volunteers who answered the survey spent considerable time discussing different aspects of the training of volunteers.

In analysing the content of the responses, it became clear that overall the participants considered that the most effective and important training for volunteers was that of mock scenario based training exercises, particularly when undertaken with other emergency management organisations.

It was noted that this form of training allowed volunteers to get to know each other, to understand the roles for different organisations and volunteers and to practice the actual techniques and strategies they would use in their role in the case of a real life emergency or disaster. It was also considered very effective in allowing volunteers to gain confidence in their ability to perform well as a volunteer at times of an activation or deployment. As such, these training exercises could also be seen as addressing the drop out or attrition of volunteers that in some instances was thought to stem from a loss of confidence arising during lengthy periods between activations.

It was recognised by the participants in this research that this type of volunteer training is costly and time consuming to organise and arrange. Nevertheless, both volunteers and staff considered it was well worth undertaking.

Given that it was the overwhelming view of the participants that this was the most effective form of training, it would be desirable for faith based organisations in association with other response and recovery based emergency management organisations, to consider how to make this type of training available to all volunteers at least on a twice yearly basis.

Apart from the likely effectiveness of the training outcomes, it is also considered that, if the mock scenario training events were effectively advertised and publicised, the exercise would likely have the additional benefit of attracting a large number of community members to either watch or participate, perhaps playing the roles of injured or other members of the public involved in the disaster. In turn, this would present a recruitment opportunity for organisations to try to capture the interest and commitment of a pool of potential new volunteers from the wider community.

This would be a very effective way to use training as a means of recruiting more volunteers from the community. The amount of publicity and interest such an event would generate in different locations would surely encourage more people to become interested in being volunteers. It would ensure that the volunteering roles were promoted to a wider, more diverse range of people, thus expanding beyond the traditional and diminishing recruitment pool of church attendees.

Such exercises also allow for trainers to combine together in one event rather than working solo going to multiple smaller locations to undertake training. This does not mean that trainers do not do other types of training such as small group refresher courses but if large scale training occurs, it could serve many of the identified needs including ongoing engagement with volunteers, communication with volunteers and the opportunity to recruit new volunteers.

Another way in which the delivery of training to existing volunteers might be combined with the possible recruitment of new volunteers is to open up small group training sessions facilitated by trainers to members of the community who are not volunteers.

Currently, small training sessions are mostly undertaken with the volunteer groups in local areas, primarily attended by volunteers from within the local church. If the training sessions are publicised and advertised within the broader community before being undertaken, some of these training sessions could attract other members of the community who may be interested in that specific skills based training.

For example, training in food handling safety or assisting people at times of crisis including basic counselling skills, may be of interest to other community members in other contexts of their lives. To invite them to attend an organisation's training in these areas might allow them to see that having acquired those skills, they too could perform a useful role within the organisation as a volunteer during an emergency or disaster. In other words, these types of up-skilling short courses or sessions could bring a different group of people to the training, who may then consider becoming volunteers in the future. The primary purpose of the training is not as a recruitment drive but the recruiting may be an additional outcome of attending specific training that is useful for people in other areas of their life or work.

Further, the methods and ways to market these training events could be provided centrally as a step-by-step process. This means that trainers can effectively arrange to advertise a training event that is useful to outside participants without a time consuming and onerous process based on their already limited time and resources. The publicity for these events including flyers, media releases and other advertising can all be done centrally as templates that individual leaders simply change for different locations, times and dates.

In the research results, many participants also identified that there was an enormous time commitment required by trainers themselves, some of whom were volunteers. It was noted that there were not enough trainers to go around, and these trainers were under pressure and may be likely not to continue to volunteer.

For faith based organisations, maintaining a fair balance between providing high quality training and respecting people's time commitments is an ongoing challenge, made more difficult by the observed lack of availability of suitably skilled and qualified paid trainers. The provision of funding to pay for more trainers would obviously ease the burden on those trainers and leaders who are volunteers. It is regrettable that currently this extra funding from the government is not available on an ongoing basis for more trainers.

Therefore it is a priority for faith based organisations to continue to consider how to effectively use their limited number of trainers, particularly if they are volunteering their time.

Where funding is scarce in relation to employing more trainers, then methods to combine the training such as by working cooperatively with other organisations to stage the mock scenario based exercises or smaller skills based sessions, may be of great assistance.

Another means to assist trainers in using the time wisely is the use of online learning for volunteers. Online learning can be beneficial for those new volunteers but also for refresher courses for ongoing volunteers.

A wide range of types of online training tools are now available and this range is expanding rapidly. It is desirable that as new online learning and training applications, tools and products become available, that these are assessed as to their suitability to be utilised by the organisation in enabling volunteers to have the chance to undertake further training without the time needed to travel to training locations.

However, at this time the research results show that the uptake of online training by current volunteers is not high. Further the development and use of online training by trainers is also somewhat limited.

There may be an assumption that the production of material, particularly audio visual material which can be very useful in online training and recruitment, is extremely time consuming and expensive to produce. As technology advances, this is becoming less true and there are a myriad of resources that could make the production of online training and also recruitment material simpler, less expensive and more cost effective. However, the key to the development and uptake of this type of training is about the user friendliness of the material rather than expensive full media production costs.

What is also clear from this research is that at this time there is a significant age group of older volunteers who are not engaged with technology or undertaking online training. Issues around computer literacy or access to reliable internet connection, as well as a reluctance on the part of volunteers to engage in a new form of learning, means that online learning is not being developed to the level that some paid staff and volunteer leaders would consider most effective.

Again, this is not solely attributable to the age of the volunteers, but is more likely to be about familiarity with the technology, being comfortable in the online space and ease of use of the particular technology or product.

Whatever online learning is developed across organisations, this must always aim to supplement and reinforce face to face training, as onsite training is also a recruitment tool and a means of communication and engagement with volunteers.

It may well be in the future that some onsite training focuses on teaching volunteers how to undertake the available online training, with the ultimate aim that both forms of training blend effectively and effortlessly together.

Engagement and Retention

Of equal importance to the recruitment and training of volunteers in faith based organisations is the challenge of retention of these volunteers, which is principally sought to be achieved through both engagement and communication.

For the staff and volunteer leaders interviewed in this research, regular communication was considered vital to engaging with volunteers on an ongoing basis.

Although volunteers leave for a myriad of reasons such as relocation for work, different life stages and health related reasons to name a few, without ongoing communication and engagement many more volunteers would leave.

The research results show that a significant number of people (nearly 40%) have been volunteers for long periods of time such as 10 years or more. This is not to say that faith based organisations should continue to expect volunteers to remain for decades. There needs to be a readjustment in this expectation as the pace of life and time commitments mean volunteers in the future, especially young volunteers, are unlikely to be dedicated volunteers for such long periods of time as has previously been the case. The existing literature (Esmond, 2009, 2016; McKiterick, 2012) identifies a trend towards the shorter lengths of time people will consider volunteering for one organisation.

What is also evident for organisations involved in emergency management is that there are significant periods of deactivation when volunteers are not actively involved in disasters or emergencies. This is in contrast to volunteers in other organisations, both faith based and non-faith based, who may be volunteering on a weekly or other consistent regular time period, on recurring community activities, projects or programs. In this regard, maintaining the engagement of volunteers during the long periods of time between activations for disasters and emergencies, represents a particular and specific challenge for the leaders and managers of emergency management organisations utilising volunteers only or principally in times of crisis.

These periods of deactivation make it even more important that volunteers continue to receive communication from their organisation and feel engaged as volunteers. It is extremely encouraging that three quarters of volunteers in this research identified that they received communication from their organisation during periods of deactivation. However, it is notable that a quarter felt that they received only limited or no communication during these times.

In this research, paid staff, volunteer leaders and also volunteers themselves discussed the main ways in which communication occurred outside of the usual connection church members had with each other at the weekly church service. These methods of communication mainly included regular emails and email newsletters from their leaders, informal social events such as a dinner or barbecue and attendance at training.

Often, volunteers received emails which told them about other activations occurring in other locations, and this was seen as useful in keeping them informed of the role of volunteers and their importance and value to the organisation.

Where these emails and newsletters are being prepared at a local level, it would be worth considering whether the development of a template regular newsletter format can occur at a central level, whilst still allowing local information to be simply slotted in. This may save time for local team leaders, by not having to prepare all the content but merely adding relevant local content, such as pictures as to what current volunteers are involved in, both during periods of activation and deactivation.

There were differing views regarding engagement through social events. Many volunteers did not see this means of engagement as being as important as staff or leaders did, possibly due to

the fact that many volunteers did see each other regularly at church services so socialised anyway.

Finally, some staff also noted that they had seen the role that volunteers could play in assisting other organisations during times of deactivation, as a way of keeping them interested and engaged as volunteers. This included activities such as working with the police or fire services, community presentations on pre-planning before disasters occur and undertaking other complementary roles that were of assistance to these organisations.

There were some interesting observations that emerged from the research about the use of social media as an effective means of communication and engagement. Some participants noted they could see the potential benefits, but felt that in practice there was not a great deal of uptake of these possibilities. This may have been for similar reasons as to why some of the older age group of volunteers did not respond enthusiastically to the concept of online training or the use of internet based technology, including unreliability of internet connections, limited computer literacy and even suspicion as to the safety and security of the technology.

The use of social media may not currently be so attractive to older volunteers but is certainly critical to engaging with a younger volunteer base in the future. As with online training, it may be that older volunteers might be more willing to embrace the technology if provided with some basic training in how to use certain types of social media to help them to become enthusiastic users of these services.

The use of social media such as Facebook and a wide range of other communication methods, including the development of communication apps, could be a very cost effective but also a very easy way to provide regular communication with volunteers. This would enhance feelings of connectedness and engagement within the group, organisation and broader community.

It is imperative that faith based organisations continue to pursue and develop simple ways to use online and social media resources to continue their engagement and ongoing communication with their volunteers.

There was considerable discussion by the participants of the particular challenges for those volunteers who are in leadership roles. There seemed to be difficulty in attracting volunteers

willing to undertake leadership roles. The time commitment for these volunteers was much greater than others and often involved visiting different churches and spreading the word about volunteering in efforts to recruit more members, maintaining ways of regularly contacting the volunteers to keep them engaged, as well as in some locations being responsible for undertaking the training of volunteers. It was considered understandable that fewer volunteers would be keen to undertake such roles with the greater workload and time commitment that was involved.

Consequences of this included problems with existing leaders burning out, and a lack of organisational continuity because of the absence of a clear succession plan for those in leadership roles.

It is vitally important that faith based organisations consider ways to support those in leadership roles and also the development of succession planning to ensure that people are still encouraged to take on these leadership roles.

It appears from comments by the participants that the training of new leaders seems to be ad hoc and localised, primarily based on the current leader trying to talk someone else into following in their footsteps and shadowing the current leader as they undertake this role. It is important that some form of more formalised, centralised and consistent leadership training is available to all potential new leaders, as well as refresher courses for those in leadership.

Besides the provision of leadership training, other forms of support are necessary for those in leadership roles. The development and widespread availability of a comprehensive coaching program for leaders could be extremely effective in assisting and supporting them in their role.

Just as ongoing communication with volunteers is important, the same is true for those in leadership roles. Often the most difficult issues faced by those in leadership are around how to manage their time, where to focus their energy and resources, how to ensure they do not burn out and dealing with people and behaviour related issues. Many of these issues could be lessened or resolved with an effective group coaching process where other leaders can contribute how they may have handled similar issues.

Although there is a tendency to consider developing these coaching programs internally, this should not be added to the role of already overloaded paid staff. Such programs can be outsourced to experienced facilitators and coaches who are not intimately connected or obligated to the organisation. This would allow an open honest discussion and suggestions from others, which often helps those in volunteer leadership to navigate some of the bureaucracy or inefficient methods that might be occurring within an organisation. The value of these coaching programs offered via the internet is that they both provide support for leaders but can be cost effective to run and regularly service numerous groups of leaders across a wide range of areas and locations.

Such outsourced coaching services would include the use of social media in these programs. Facilitated by a coach, social media can provide very effective private discussion forums for members that can be accessed by new and experienced leaders on a regular and mutually supportive basis.

The research results also suggested the provision of a kit for leaders that contained all the necessary resources including forms, materials and other requirements for performing the role. Such kits, however, can become outdated quickly and need to be regularly updated with the latest information. A regular group coaching process could ensure that the more updated material that is needed can be identified and also communicated and distributed to leaders through this means on an ongoing basis. This type of group collaboration amongst leaders can facilitate the production of very useful resources in a timely way.

Besides the importance of support methods such as coaching groups, consideration should be given by the organisation to devising and implementing other methods to reduce the time commitment of volunteers who are in leadership roles. As mentioned previously, the centralisation of certain tasks, the development of templates which can be easily customised at the local level, and the development of online learning resources for volunteers are important aspects of seeking to reduce the time commitment and retaining those in leadership roles.

In order to alleviate the pressure on team leaders to assume responsibility for all of the engagement with volunteers, one suggestion that could be of assistance to team leaders and area coordinators was to have an 'emergency management champion' based in the local church communities. This champion could undertake a specific role of supporting and keeping

volunteers engaged and aware of what was happening in their organisation between the visits and involvement of the actual leader. This may be as simple as touching base with all the volunteers at regular church services or maintaining the regular updates and discussions on the Facebook group page for those volunteers in the local area. Taking on such a role might be suitable for some older volunteers who no longer felt well enough to actively participate as a volunteer during an actual deployment, but nevertheless maintained their community engagement through church and other groups, and having knowledge of what was required and of the importance of the volunteers' role, could effectively become a champion or advocate for the organisation.

Finally, just as this research report has discussed the concept of shorter time commitments for volunteers, this should also be a consideration for the leaders of volunteers. Leaders identified having trouble attracting people to succeed them in their leadership roles. It may well be that more people would consider taking on a leadership role if they felt confident that it would be for a finite period of time such as two or three years, after which they could be assured that the organisation would have arranged a suitable successor. Leaders would not be excluded from undertaking further consecutive terms if they wished to do so, but would feel they had the option to step down periodically. Indeed, after a break they may be willing to return to the leadership role again at a later stage. Rather than having one person leading for a long period of time, it would be hoped that by defining the duration of leadership roles for shorter periods of time, more people would be willing to take on the role because there was a clear finish date.

The final area discussed by both staff and volunteer leaders was the importance of recognition in relation to retention of the volunteer base. There is no doubt that recognition and appreciation are important aspects of the retention of volunteers across all sectors, and this is consistently reflected in relevant literature (Esmond, 2005, 2016; McLennan, 2008; Rice & Fallon, 2011).

It is extremely heartening to find in this research that three quarters of volunteers identified that they felt that they received adequate recognition for their service from their faith based organisation. Although paid staff and leaders expressed that they wished they could do more in this regard, volunteers also made it clear that they were not undertaking their volunteering role in order to be recognised or rewarded.

Volunteers did talk about different types of recognition such as the traditional long service awards and also mentioned more personalised recognition such as thank you cards, emails and

often just a verbal thanks. Some expressed concern that their organisation's limited funds should not be diverted to purchasing branded items as gifts for volunteers, but others saw value in the use of such items as relatively inexpensive means of thanking volunteers. It seems that it is often a balance for organisations to provide valued but inexpensive recognition for volunteers and to find a variety of ways to continue to ensure they are made to feel appreciated and continue to volunteer.

The volunteers did discuss one particular area where they felt that recognition of their service could be improved. Volunteers involved in disasters and emergencies often felt that recognition from outside the organisation, such as from politicians, government agencies and the media was more commonly given to response based emergency services such as fire services. The recovery services, including faith based volunteers, were often left out of this recognition or were considered invisible during some activations. This remains an area for organisations to consider how to ensure attention is drawn to all volunteers involved in disaster and emergencies, not just in the immediate response but also in the often much longer recovery phase. This may mean the media branch or spokesperson for the organisations both during and after activations should not be hesitant to praise and highlight the involvement of faith based volunteers, often working behind the scenes, to ensure awareness of the vital role of these volunteers is not overlooked. Further, they should not be backward in coming forward to ensure that their volunteers are also recognised by the media coverage and also by significant government officials and politicians.

Whatever form recognition takes for faith based volunteers, it is clear that this is not the primary consideration for people choosing or continuing to volunteer. However, feeling valued and appreciated by their organisation, and feeling that their organisation promotes and recognises their service more broadly to the media and government authorities, will ensure that people are more likely to continue to look favourably upon the organisation for which they volunteer.

Finally, it is important to note that despite the issues, challenges and suggestions that they identified and contributed during this project, the volunteers who were surveyed overwhelmingly expressed many positive sentiments about their faith based organisations, the paid staff and their volunteer work. The vast majority found their volunteer roles to be interesting, challenging and very rewarding.

Recommendations

That faith based organisations develop strategies to recruit from outside their traditional church base to incorporate greater diversity and numbers through more community based members and a younger age group of volunteers.

That faith based organisations consider adopting shorter time defined commitment periods for volunteers, including for volunteer leaders, with the option of annual or bi-annual cycles to renew their volunteer commitment.

That ongoing government funding is made available to employ more skilled trainers to provide a range of training for faith based volunteers involved in supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

That faith based organisations consider advertising and inviting community members to undertake specific skills based training alongside their volunteers and to encourage the recruitment of these community members.

That government funding is made available twice yearly in certain locations and regions to support and stage mock scenario based training events involving all emergency management volunteers.

That faith based organisations continue to explore the potential and development of online learning strategies to supplement face to face learning for volunteers.

That faith based organisations continue to develop multiple strategies to engage and communicate with volunteers during periods of deactivation and continue to explore the use of social media to enhance communication.

That faith based organisations continue to develop clear, formalised processes to train and ensure succession planning for those volunteers in leadership roles.

That government funding is provided to establish an ongoing coaching program, outsourced to an independent coaching service, to provide leaders with regular guidance and support needed in their leadership role.

That faith based organisations continue to develop ways internally to recognise and appreciate their volunteers and seek to enhance the external and public recognition received by volunteers involved in recovery work during disasters and emergencies.

That the three faith based organisations involved in this research project continue to develop ways to undertake a collaborative approach to minimise duplication and ensure that their volunteers can effectively work together at times of both activations and deactivations.

That consideration be given by the government to funding a further follow up study conducted in three to five years to determine the changes and progress made in the recruitment, engagement and retention of faith based volunteers supporting communities through disasters and emergencies.

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