

Report on

The Attraction, Support and Retention

of

Emergency Management Volunteers

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

Executive Summary

The Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management (MCPPEM) has identified that action needs to be undertaken to ensure the future viability of the vital work undertaken by emergency management volunteers in the areas of both response and recovery in dealing with disasters and emergencies in this country.

The Attorney-General's Department through Emergency Management Australia (EMA) has undertaken this task and the commissioning of this report by Dr Judy Esmond, aimed at identifying issues and options for the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers, is an important part of this process.

The research methodology in this report involved several processes: (i) the examination of relevant literature and use of the researcher's own knowledge and expertise; (ii) extensive interviews with members of the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum (AEMVF) and suggested others producing an interim report; and (iii) written feedback to the interim report from members of the AEMC and their representatives.

The findings identified five major areas of challenge that must be addressed to ensure the sustainability of and growth in emergency management volunteers. The five challenges are **time, training, cost, recognition and people**.

Challenge One: Time

With the ever increasing busyness of people's lives, a 'time strapped' population is reconsidering the amount and length of time they may commit to volunteering. Traditional long-serving volunteers are being replaced by 'time sensitive' volunteers who are 'weighing up' the amount of time required to volunteer with other competing demands in their lives. The development of different levels of volunteer involvement and therefore time commitment, as well as different types of volunteering opportunities, are now a necessity for organizations hoping to attract and retain volunteers.

Challenge Two: Training

Community, political and organisational expectations, as well as litigious considerations, have all contributed to the increasing importance and amount of volunteer time spent in extensive accredited training programs, particularly in response based organisations. Accredited training has brought with it many benefits but these must be balanced with the needs of increasingly ‘time strapped’ volunteers. The continued development of different levels of volunteer involvement and therefore training, as well as different delivery modes, must aim to ensure that training is always relevant, interesting, well-presented and time effective.

Challenge Three: Cost

Volunteering activity costs money as well as time, and volunteers and their employers have often absorbed these financial costs. But the current economic circumstances, fluctuating petrol prices and recent research into the actual costs of volunteering have all highlighted that these costs can be considerable. Action is needed to provide for the proper resourcing of volunteers and support for their employers. This involves the adoption of an equitable reimbursement option for out-of-pocket expenses for all emergency management volunteers in both response and recovery based organisations and a nationally consistent recognition scheme for their employers.

Challenge Four: Recognition

Being appreciated and not taken for granted are essential to volunteer retention. Recognition of volunteers by: state and national leaders; the organisations they serve; their own local unit; and the general public all contribute to volunteers feeling that they are valued. Traditional forms of recognition through the awarding of long service medals must now be augmented with the development of other creative ways of recognising volunteers and increasing public awareness of the significant contribution made by all emergency management volunteers in the areas of response and recovery to emergencies and disasters throughout this country.

Challenge Five: People

Crucial to the personal volunteering experience are the people with whom volunteers engage at the local level – their fellow volunteers. Integral to this experience and the development of a well-run unit or group are those in leadership roles. The need for the development and provision of effective leadership and people management skills training and coaching through

a variety of delivery modes is therefore imperative for all those undertaking such leadership roles. The long term sustainability at the local level requires effective leadership and the ability to welcome and engage others from more diverse backgrounds. Specific programs that involve creative ‘targeted’ strategies to attract a greater diversity of people such as more women in response based organisations, and those from culturally and linguistically diverse groups, are needed.

Overall, this research has identified five main areas of challenge. The following recommendations highlight some of the options for the future attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers for these five areas of challenge.

Recommendations

Project Team Recommendation

That a project team be established to develop and trial a range of innovative strategies highlighted in this report. These strategies should be undertaken as locally based initiatives across different States and in different locations. These will provide evidence-based case studies for others through ‘trial and error’ on the most effective methods to attract, support and retain emergency management volunteers.

The project team should comprise of seconded paid representatives in both the response and recovery area who work closely with volunteers and who are innovative and responsive to testing new and different methods. The project team should also include the services of outside consultants with independent expertise and knowledge in the recruitment and retention of volunteers and also internet marketing and technology based learning initiatives. The project team can be a combined initiative of both the Commonwealth and State governments overseen through EMA.

The project team would trial and implement, with selected local units or groups, initiatives across the five main areas of challenge including the development of:

- different levels of volunteer involvement and time commitment
- other types of volunteering roles and tasks

- other forms of volunteering, e.g., family and corporate volunteering
- technology based learning tools to supplement other training
- a range of locally based volunteer recognition strategies
- targeted recruitment and retention campaigns for particular groups, e.g., women

It is this project team, in association with the work undertaken by organisations themselves, which will translate much of the research in this report into action in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

Specific Recommendations

The following are specific recommendations from this report pertaining to each of the five main areas of challenge:

Time

That organisations be aware of the need to be ‘time sensitive’ in all activities, tasks and duties they ask of their emergency management volunteers.

That consideration be given to the implementation of different levels of volunteer involvement and therefore different levels of time commitment for emergency management volunteers, particularly in response based organisations.

That consideration be given to the development of different roles and a variety of different and creative ways to engage potential volunteers, e.g., families, corporations and fly in/fly out employees.

Training

That support is given to the completion of the current review of the Public Safety Training Package and therefore the re-examination of volunteer training requirements.

That consideration be given to the provision of more quality specialist trainers and to explore different types of technology based tools to supplement and enhance the training for emergency management volunteers.

Cost

That a short-term taskforce is established to build upon the work already completed by a previous taskforce, to decide on suitable options for the equitable reimbursement of response and recovery based volunteers for reasonable out-of-pocket expenses and other costs associated with their voluntary work.

That a further form of financial assistance is also made available to all emergency management volunteers when involved in more prolonged and protracted operations dealing with disasters and emergencies.

That consideration and commitment be given to the proper resourcing of all emergency management volunteers, in both response and recovery based organisations, to effectively perform their volunteering duties.

That consideration be given to the development of a nationally consistent employer recognition/incentive scheme for employers of emergency management volunteers

Recognition

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

That consideration be given to an equality for all emergency management volunteers in eligibility to receive the National Medal.

That consideration be given to development of a range of recognition strategies, beyond long service medals, at the organisational and local level to acknowledge and value the contribution made by emergency management volunteers.

People

That leadership training be developed for all volunteer leaders based on models that provide on-going training and coaching opportunities.

That organisational processes and procedures are continually monitored to support and assist the work undertaken by volunteers including the provision of administrative support as required at the local level.

That consideration be given to the development of targeted strategies to engage more members of specific groups including local indigenous groups and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups.

Research

That consideration be given to a range of research projects to examine further these five areas of challenge. For example, that research be undertaken into the unexplored area of ‘initial interest prospects’: the large numbers of prospective volunteers who show an interest in becoming volunteers and after making contact, never return to become volunteers.

Conclusion

The adoption of this report and its recommendations will contribute to addressing the five main areas of challenge and enhancing the sustainability and growth in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers into the future.

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

Full Report

Introduction

Volunteers are the lifeblood of the Australian way of life. Every day, millions of people around Australia make an enormous contribution to our communities through volunteering. Indeed, over 5.4 million people, over one-third (34%) of the Australian adult population are actively engaged in some form of volunteering (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

These volunteers play a crucial role in the Australian community. They provide enormous economic capital through the tangible services they provide; political capital by their advocacy roles and involvement in political processes and decision-making in a participative democracy; and social capital in enhancing communities by bringing people together to work in cooperation and trust. These volunteers contribute through formal volunteering over 713 million hours of their time (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2007).

Emergency Management Volunteers

Within the midst of these volunteers are thousands of dedicated people known as emergency management volunteers. These volunteers devote their time, energy and skills to respond to threats to community safety and help communities to recover from emergencies and disasters whether natural, technological or caused by humans.

Emergency management volunteers play a vital and essential role in our communities and there is no doubt that this country's ability to respond to and recover from emergencies and disasters does and will continue to rely heavily on the services provided by these volunteers. In times of disaster and emergency, these volunteers have always been there.

However, the fact these volunteers have always been there in the past is no guarantee that they will continue to be there into the future. It has never been more important to ensure that

Australia continues to be able to call upon an adequate number of emergency management volunteers in times of dramatic change. It is now recognised that there are a number of challenges facing government, organisations and volunteers themselves, to ensure the continuing viability of emergency management volunteers.

Background to this Current Report

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

As an initial response to the Ministerial Council's request, in May 2008, the Attorney-General's Department commissioned a review of existing literature regarding emergency management volunteers. The resulting review, *Issues Facing Australian Volunteer-Based Emergency Services Organisations: 2008-2010*, outlined existing published research on the changing nature of volunteering in Australia's emergency management sector together with long term threats to its viability.

As a further response, in October 2008, this report was commissioned by the Attorney-General's Department through Emergency Management Australia (EMA).

Methodology

The parameters for the methodology to be used in this current research project were outlined by the advisory panel for this project, represented by EMA and the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum (AEMVF).

The advisory panel requested that this research undertake consultation with key stakeholders through two representative groups – the AEMVF and the Australian Emergency Management Committee (AEMC). Together, these two groups represent the key stakeholders in both the response and recovery organisations responsible for emergency management volunteers.

Also, the aforementioned literature review and other consultations with relevant representatives could be considered, in so far as was possible within the limited timeframe for the completion of this research. Further, the researcher's own extensive knowledge and expertise on volunteering across all sectors was to also contribute to this report.

The consultation with key stakeholders consisted of two stages:

Stage 1 – Consultation with Members of the AEMVF

The AEMVF was established as the result of a 'key' recommendation of the Volunteer Emergency Sector Summit held in 2001 (the "2001 Summit") that:

A national peak body should be established, representative of the volunteer emergency sector, to provide advocacy for the sector and to facilitate better coordination between the organisations within it.

In response to this recommendation, the AEMVF was formed with the support of EMA in April 2002. The aim of the AEMVF was to provide a national voice for the volunteer emergency management sector.

The member organisations of the AEMVF, representing hundreds and thousands of volunteers involved in both emergency response and recovery, are:

Adventist Disaster Recovery Agency

Anglicare

Australian Council of State Emergency Services

Australasian Assembly of Volunteer Fire Brigade Associations

Australasian Fire and Emergency Service Authorities Council

Australian Institute of Emergency Services

Australian Red Cross

Australian Volunteer Coast Guard

Council of Ambulance Authorities

Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol

State Emergency Services Volunteer Association

St John Ambulance
St Vincent de Paul
Surf Life Saving Australia
The Salvation Army
Volunteer Ambulance Officers' Association
Volunteering Australia
Volunteer Rescue Association
Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (Ex Officio)
Emergency Management Australia (Ex Officio and Secretariat Services)

Numerous methodologies could have been undertaken for this research, including a written survey based methodology. It was considered by the research team that a written questionnaire/survey format, no matter how well designed, would not provide the depth and diversity of responses required for this research.

Therefore, although a more intensive process and despite the limited timeframe for the delivery of this report, a series of telephone interviews was undertaken with members of the AEMVF to allow the opportunity to explore in greater depth the themes and issues that were raised and to capture the depth of knowledge and information from the AEMVF members.

Further, interviews were also conducted with other representatives who were recommended by some AEMVF members as being able to provide further information and expand upon specific aspects under discussion, or to explain a specific concept, strategy or focus of the organisation in greater detail. Accordingly, further interviews were conducted with individual representatives from: FESA, SAFECOM, SES, CFA, RFS and Australian Red Cross.

Utilising a semi-structured interview schedule, a total of 25 interviews were conducted in a very short timeframe. In consultation with the advisory panel for this project, two main themes and associated questions formed the basis of discussion with all participants. The first asked participants to identify what they considered to be the most prominent issues that their organisation(s) were facing in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers. The second, based upon the issues identified by the participants, asked for their views on what needed to be happening (not necessarily currently being done) to ensure the long-term attraction, support and retention of volunteers for the organisation(s) they

represented.

These interviews were recorded, later transcribed and underwent content analysis. The interviews in conjunction with the relevant literature and the researcher's expertise formed the basis of the interim report.

Stage 2 – Consultation with the AEMC

After Stage 1 of this research, the interim report was prepared and distributed to the members of the Australian Emergency Management Committee (AEMC) and their representatives for input and comment.

The AEMC is Australia's peak consultative emergency management body providing advice and direction on the coordination and advancement of Australian Government and State interests in emergency management issues. The AEMC is chaired by the Secretary of the Attorney-General's Department and comprises chairpersons and executive officers of State emergency management committees and the Australian Local Government Association.

AEMC members were asked to provide written responses and identify the most prominent issues facing emergency management volunteers in their jurisdictions and actions needed to ensure their long term attraction, support and retention. Follow-up email and telephone consultations were also undertaken as needed to clarify and expand upon information provided in the written responses

The Research Report Itself

By virtue of the methodology utilized, this report is predominantly a reflection of the 'collective wisdom' of both the members of the AEMVF, the AEMC and selected others, in conjunction with the relevant literature and the researcher's own expertise.

The report does not highlight specific programs or projects undertaken by particular organisations. Organisations involving emergency management volunteers are engaged in projects that are dealing with the major challenges identified in this report, albeit to differing degrees

This report does not intend to be an audit of programs and projects being considered or currently being undertaken by the vast diversity of organisations that utilize emergency management volunteers. Highlighting particular approaches at the expense of others often produces colloquialisms, rivalry and negativity. Further, many approaches that are dealing with the challenges identified in this report have not undergone rigorous analysis. Therefore, particular organisations have rarely been mentioned in this report.

Therefore, this report aims to reflect, through the knowledge of those consulted and the author, the main challenges that should become the focal points for the current and future directions taken in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers over the longer term.

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

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

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

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

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

However, the organisational representatives in both the response and recovery areas consulted with for this research represent such a diverse range of volunteering experiences

that the challenges have varying degrees of impact on different organisations and therefore on their volunteers. What challenges are more prominent for response based organisations may differ from those in recovery based organisations and this report could not reflect the unique needs of every individual organisation. What is consistent, however, is that both response and recovery based organisations, with their very different roles, are vital for this country's effective management of emergencies and disasters. Every effort should be made to ensure an equality in the appropriate resourcing of both types of organisations and in the recognition afforded to the contributions made by both our response and recovery based volunteers.

This research has broadly identified five major areas of challenge in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

These five major areas of challenge are: **time, training, cost, recognition and people.**

CHALLENGE ONE – TIME

Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you - Carl Sandburg

Context of time-related challenges

The volunteering landscape is rapidly changing. The idea of ‘volunteering for life’ in one organisation has all but disappeared and those volunteers serving 10, 20, 30 years or more are vanishing fast.

Noble (2000:159), a leading Australian expert on volunteering, explains: “the days when volunteers continue to work long hours for one organisation as a lifetime commitment are passing, as people live increasingly busy lives, relocate and move from one interest area to another...they will choose an area and activity of interest, rather than a specific organisation”.

Along with a reduced length of service comes a reduced number of hours served, as the concept of volunteer commitment is undergoing enormous change. More than ever before, people are spoilt with a vast array of choices in volunteering opportunities.

Overwhelmingly, the issue of time is identified as the biggest challenge in volunteering across all sectors. Some understanding of the time challenge can be found from one of the largest demographic groups of emergency management volunteers – the Baby Boomers (1946 to 1963).

Hugh Mackay (1997:88), the well known social commentator, perhaps explains it best: Boomers are finding life busy and stressful because: “many of them are having their children later than their parents did (especially if it is a ‘second crop’ from a second marriage); their children are staying at home for longer (or leaving and then coming back); and their parents are living longer and therefore requiring care and support. Indeed, one of the emerging cries of Boomers is that they are caught in the middle of caring for two generations at once”. The Baby Boomers have well and truly become the generational meat in the sandwich.

Further, as Esmond (2001b:25) highlights: “added to this is the concern that the pace of life has speeded up with technology. Technology had promised increased leisure time, a more relaxed lifestyle and less stress. But the opposite has happened. Mobile phones and email have made people instantly contactable. And with both partners often working, Baby Boomers have become ‘time strapped’, feeling they have no time for their children, let alone voluntary work”.

This feeling of being ‘time strapped’ or ‘time poor’ is not limited to the Baby Boomer generation - it is a common theme throughout many different demographic groups, many countries and in volunteering across all sectors. In numerous studies, the main reason given for not volunteering or ceasing volunteer involvement was a ‘lack of time’ to volunteer.

In the United States, The Prudential Survey (1995) found that lack of time because of family and work commitments was the biggest barrier to increased volunteering and the Independent Sector (2001) found that two significant reasons given by those who do not volunteer included lack of time (39%) and the demands of most volunteer commitments (23%). The US Bureau of Labor Statistics (2003) found that the major reason given for not volunteering in the previous year was a ‘lack of time’.

In the United Kingdom, the Institute for Volunteering Research (2004) reported in their 1997 survey that ‘lack of time’ was the main reason for ceasing to volunteer or for not volunteering.

In Australia, the Australian Bureau of Statistics Voluntary Work Report (2007) when compared with previous reports, showed that whilst the number of people volunteering has increased, the number of hours volunteered appears to have decreased, with the median number of hours volunteered being just 1.1hrs per week or 56 hrs per year.

Further, Birch and McLennan (2006a) in their survey of households across the NSW “Grain Belt” region, identified some of the major barriers to volunteering with the Rural Fire Service reported by respondents: 50% said that they did not have time or had other commitments and priorities and 41% said that they could not leave their job/business/farm to fight fires.

Discussion of time-related challenges

Without exception, all participants in this research identified that the *amount* of time and *length* of time that current and potential volunteers could commit to volunteering had changed and the time commitment issue was the biggest challenge in their attraction and retention of volunteers. People's availability had reduced as they were increasingly feeling 'time strapped' and 'time poor' while attempting to deal with an ever-increasing myriad of other commitments they have in their lives.

It is the fact that today we are a 24/7 society...both partners have to work to pay their massive mortgages, costs are going up if they have teenage children - teenage children have part time jobs...when you look at the time that is available to give to anything else it's becoming shorter and shorter. It is going to get harder and harder because people's time is so precious. We as agencies have to be very aware that that time is very precious so you have to ensure the environment that you are inviting them in is somewhere where they want to spend that small amount of time. They are not going to stand around and spend the time if they do not like the environment. (Participant)

Further, participants noted that volunteers are sensitive to their time being wasted. To ask them to give more of their precious time, volunteers must be assured that their time will be well spent.

This is supported by research, for example, "...expecting that the organisation utilizing their volunteer efforts would make good use of their time was the volunteer aspect most strongly related to a willingness to increase volunteer time". (The Prudential Survey (1995) cited by the Harvard School of Public Health (2004:83).

Many participants in this research spoke of the need for their organisations to come to terms with the changing nature of volunteering and the time commitment being asked of both current and potential volunteers in such a time strapped society.

However, although participants in this study recognised the 'time sensitive' nature of volunteering today, many observed that their own organisations had not progressed as swiftly in recognizing the need to adapt their volunteering opportunities to meet this challenge. These

organisations were caught in a situation that sociologists define as ‘structural lag’ (Moen, 2003). Structural lag occurs when the organisational structures, policies and procedures have yet to ‘catch up’ with and adapt to the changing nature of societal trends.

In simple terms, as potential and current emergency management volunteers are reducing the amount of time they are willing to give in volunteering, organisations are still attempting to maintain their traditional organisational structures and processes, requiring the same or even greater commitment of time from their volunteers.

Many participants noted that their own organisations, in attempting to attract and retain emergency management volunteers in both the areas of response and recovery, were predominantly geared towards the regular, long term volunteer. Their recruitment, training, support and management structures were often aimed at attracting and retaining volunteers for the long-term, although there were some exceptions.

Our volunteers are really long-term and so are our training requirements. But it's getting harder to keep people involved for the long-term, long enough to qualify for our long service medal. (Participant)

Further, participants recognised that the process is aimed at involving volunteers in ways that most often suit the organisation and not necessarily the volunteers themselves. Foot, cited in Ferronato (1999:4) warns organisations to get ready for the ‘vigilante’ volunteer, who he describes as: “middle-aged professionals who are finished parenting, have money, and are seeking fulfilment through community contribution. However, these people are still busy with work, and are very specific about their needs and objectives, and about the time and scheduling of their volunteer commitment. You’ve got to find a way to accommodate them, and don’t waste their time or they’ll move on to the next place”.

All participants in this research were acutely aware of the need to deal with the lack of time people felt they had to commit to volunteering. However, their responses reflected a widely varied range of ways organisations were attempting to deal with these issues.

Some organisations have only just begun to focus on the issues surrounding the time strapped volunteer. Other organisations are developing strategies and beginning to take active steps to

respond to the time commitment issues of their volunteers.

Yet, as the Harvard School of Public Health (2004:31) confirms: “In visualizing the opportunities for existing organisations to play new roles in the new infrastructure, it is also important to recognise that most organisations are resistant to change to some degree. Boards of directors, executives, administrators, and work forces are accustomed to responding to the exigencies of the moment (political, cultural, or economic), through established, tried-and-true routines and behaviors”.

The time strapped volunteer can no longer be attracted and retained through adhering to traditional forms of engagement.

Recognition of the time issue is naturally the first step towards dealing with it. This does not simply mean being aware of time as an issue, but rather being time-sensitive in every aspect. Organisations will need to shift their focus towards the needs of the time strapped volunteer. This shift in thinking to increasingly accommodate their needs is vital to engage current and future emergency management volunteers.

The key to unlocking the opportunities to engage or continue to involve the time strapped volunteer is to shift away from emphasising the amount and length of time for which people are required to volunteer, towards focusing on different *levels of involvement* for volunteers and on different *ways* of volunteering.

It requires a rethink as to how to offer a range of flexible volunteering opportunities based on differing levels of involvement along the total continuum of involvement – so that the ‘one size fits all’ approach is not the only option for volunteering. This continuum can include:

- long term involvement with an extensive level of time commitment
- long term involvement but with a limited level of time commitment
- short-term time specific involvement with a definite start and finish date
- one-off volunteering experiences

Some organisations are developing options that could allow for a range of different levels and different types of volunteer involvement.

For example, the SA Country Fire Service (CFS) is currently considering opportunities that involve different categories of volunteer firefighters having different levels of involvement.

This concept reflects an interesting finding in the research of Birch and McLennan (2006a) in their survey of households in the NSW “Grain Belt” region. 40% of respondents in that survey were reluctant to join the Rural Fire Service (RFS) as an organized fire service, preferring the idea of protecting a closer circle of family, friends and neighbours.

The CFS concept is in its early stages but might conceivably evolve into groups of volunteer firefighters whose commitment, and training, is geared only towards their becoming engaged to protect a specific region close to their own homes, whilst other groups of volunteers might be engaged at a different or greater level or in different ways.

The idea is to allow people to become involved at all different levels and in all different ways. People can volunteer a short amount of time and do a certain amount of training. Then others can volunteer more time to do other activities and undertake more training for this role. It's about being more flexible for different types of volunteers. (Participant)

Offering differing levels of involvement along the continuum of volunteering involvement, has the possibility of attracting and retaining a greater number and diversity of potential volunteers, as it incorporates differing amounts of time, training and volunteer engagement.

But I certainly think that organisations are going to have to really look at the involvement levels of volunteers and the expectation of time that volunteers put in is going to be limited and more so in the future. I think we have to look at that as not being a sign of them not being interested or wanting to be involved, but as that is what they can do and we have to appreciate that. I think that we really have to see that if people cannot come up every week or be involved once a month or whatever it is - we have to be flexible and appreciate what time they can put into it. I think we really have to promote that fact across all volunteer organisations. (Participant)

However, although achievable, this approach is not without its difficulties and obstacles. It certainly is not intended to replace the traditional, regular ‘on call’ long-term emergency management volunteer but recognises the importance of presenting different options for

maintaining and enhancing future volunteer engagement.

We're going to have to really look closely at how we use our volunteers. People just haven't got the time anymore. You can't ask them to stick around forever, to volunteer for life like some of our older volunteers used to but we really value those long-term volunteers.
(Participant)

Other participants also noted that their organisations could develop or are developing more short-term, time specific volunteering assignments for those time strapped volunteers who can't take on long-term regular voluntary work, but may be interested in what is called 'episodic' or 'short-term' volunteering. This type of volunteering is certainly a worldwide trend (MacDuff, 1991; McCurley & Lynch, 1994). These short-term opportunities should in no way be identified as what some organisations call 'probationary periods', but rather as finite short-term volunteering options with definite start and end dates.

I believe the research shows that more people are volunteering, but they are volunteering to do special events or short term activities...and I suppose what we have done as an organisation is try to recognise that and go with the times and make sure that we tailor make and connect knowledge that somebody who might be able to give three hours a month is just as important in the long term as someone who might be able to give 303 hours a month.
(Participant)

Interestingly, the development of such short-term volunteering options can sometimes lead to longer term involvement for some volunteers. The idea is that if volunteers enjoy the experience, they are more likely to return again (Esmond, 2001). In this sense, organisations could regard the creation of short term finite roles as a potential 'lure' or recruitment tool for longer term volunteers.

Some participants also spoke of examples where different local units or groups had undertaken both a task and role analysis of their volunteering opportunities and are redefining and redesigning their current roles and tasks for volunteers.

We certainly need those specialist tasks and support services...we are taking steps - certainly over the next two to three years - in emphasizing that there is a role for everyone to play

under our flexible membership strategy. (Participant)

Esmond (2001:141) explains: “Ask yourself these questions: are there large jobs that can be broken down into smaller parts? Can you carry out long-term projects in discrete stages? Can new jobs be created that will suit short-term assignments? If you answer yes to any of these, you have the potential to attract even the most time strapped people”.

Although often a more localized option, this redefining of roles has also allowed volunteers to engage in different roles and also to develop new roles for specific tasks. For example, the redefining of roles has allowed some volunteers who are no longer able to engage in the extremely active aspects of their previous volunteering roles, to take on a more educational role with the public in terms of community safety education, or perhaps in a mentoring role with newer recruits.

Volunteers are leaving because they feel they can't, or would have difficulty performing the more physical task, and our strategy there is to introduce an operational support stream of volunteers. That's for those volunteers who perhaps can't climb on roofs or lift the road rescue tools or drive heavy trucks or all those sorts of things but are willing to keep their levels of experience within the service to deliver training. Perhaps even just to help with maintenance, do administrative tasks. Take part in public awareness activities or even volunteer recruitment and retention activities. (Participant)

A largely unexplored phenomenon is that of the one-off or ‘spontaneous’ volunteer. These are the people who come forward in large numbers at the time of a major disaster and want to volunteer their time to help. They provide challenges and yet great opportunities to utilize and mobilize a large number of untrained but willing volunteers. Although this type of volunteer may not be suitable for response organisations that require extensive training and certain skill sets, there is potential to explore using their assistance in areas of recovery at times of emergencies and disasters.

The Australian Red Cross and others are now looking closely at how to utilize these spontaneous volunteers, learning much from their American counterparts in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, when massive numbers of potential volunteers came forward to help. A report is being prepared for release shortly.

Spontaneous volunteers, in other words, are people who come along, who aren't traditionally volunteers with one of the normal organisations but want to get involved when a disaster happens. We are now in the business of trying to engage them effectively. (Participant)

The emergency services sector should facilitate a community education campaign at the start of an emergency season to encourage the public to affiliate with an agency prior to an emergency. This could then encourage people to move from spontaneous to also longer term volunteering. (Participant)

Another range of options to attract and retain emergency management volunteers centres around what might be termed 'time creation' or 'giving back time' to these time strapped volunteers.

In essence, it needs to be recognised that in saying 'yes' to giving time in voluntary work, a volunteer must say 'no' to giving time in some other area(s) of their life.

The two areas that are most impinged upon when time is spent volunteering are time spent with family and time spent fulfilling work commitments.

Cowlshaw, Evans, and McLennan (2008) in their review of the literature on the impacts of emergency management volunteering on families of volunteers, identified that family issues played an important role in the resignation of many volunteers and could contribute to a decline in volunteer numbers.

Organisations that can give back family time to their volunteers have the potential to both attract and retain more volunteers. Some participants spoke of the efforts being made by many local units or groups to engage family members at the local level in support services and social activities.

I think the retention of volunteers is looking after their families as well. One of the things we do is, when they have fundraising days or training days, invite families along because it is nothing that will break, you know, the retention of a volunteer than pressure from family. (Participant)

However, beyond including family members in social activities, the option of actual family volunteering is another way of giving back time to volunteers. This involves the creation of volunteering tasks and roles that actively involve all members of the family unit, from children through to parents and even grandparents.

As the Harvard School of Public Health (2004:107) explains: “Volunteering as a unit allows families to make significant contributions to their communities while also providing quality time, strengthening communication, and offering opportunities for family members to serve as role models”.

Although this is not feasible on all occasions because of the often dangerous nature of the work undertaken by many emergency management volunteers and other commitments of family members, the development of family volunteering is a further option for exploration.

Family volunteering has been a growth area in other volunteering sectors and has meant that for many volunteers, instead of having to choose between spending time with their family, or spending time volunteering, they have been able to combine both of these time needs. Within the emergency management sector itself, Surf Life Saving Australia has recognised this opportunity and has been actively involved in the promoting the engagement of whole families.

It is very much a family affair, so issues for us right now are making sure that we are safe, there is a role for everyone and an opportunity for everyone to be involved. (Participant)

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

Birch and McLennan (2006b) in their survey of employers across NSW regarding their views about employees volunteering with RFS found that only a very small minority (6%) opposed their employees volunteering with RFS. Further, only 11% were not prepared to release their employees at all. Three-quarters of employers reported that they had no concerns about

employees volunteering with the RFS. Of these, 35% were prepared to release employees for times ranging up to 100 hours per year, with a median of 25.5 hours per year, and a further 45% of respondents were prepared to release employees for ‘as much time as genuinely needed’.

Some employers, however, did identify that it was difficult for them to support employees volunteering with the RFS for reasons including: they were a small business with few employees and had no capacity to release employees to volunteer; the employees had very specialized or indispensable skills; the work itself had strict deadlines or schedules; or special obligations in caring for vulnerable clients such as children, the elderly or the sick were required.

This does not mean that individual volunteers have not experienced difficulties in being able to leave their place of employment to be involved in operations, but overall, this research provided very encouraging signs of employers being willing to consider and support employee volunteering in areas of emergency management. The introduction of Volunteer Employer Recognition Programs such as that recently developed by FESA is a positive recognition of the contribution of employers to volunteering activity and could be encouraged as a nationally consistent employer recognition scheme.

Now some employers are good and some aren't, so it depends on the relationship there. You will find the unity in country regions, where communities are very much, you know, giving back to your local community so the support is stronger and a lot better. Metropolitan areas, it is a little bit harder, in that getting the day crews together, people are at work. (Participant)

A significant development in this regard is to be found in the Federal Government document on ‘The National Employment Standards’ (2008:35) due to take effect from 2010, which states:

“An employee who engages in an eligible community service activity is entitled to be absent from his or her employment for a period if:

- (a) the period consists of one or more of the following:
 - (i) time when the employee engages in the activity;

- (ii) reasonable travelling time associated with the activity;
 - (iii) reasonable rest time immediately following the activity;
- and
- (b) unless the activity is jury service—the employee’s absence is reasonable in all the circumstances”.

The interpretation of these standards by both employers and employees in relation to ‘reasonable’ absences and the opportunity for volunteers to better negotiate absences from their workplaces will be an interesting future development.

As some participants highlighted:

This has significant implications for volunteers and employers with employers looking at their obligations to release their employees to attend emergency and disaster situations. (Participant)

Distinct from individual ad hoc arrangements between a volunteer and their employer, is the broader concept of employee volunteer programs/corporate volunteering. The development of such programs has the potential to create significant future growth in the number of emergency management volunteers.

The concept of corporate volunteering is an area of great potential growth in volunteering across all sectors. As Zappala (2001:45) explains: “traditional forms of armchair philanthropy are giving way to corporations’ more strategic involvement in the funding, design and implementation of community-based programs, often through the skills and time that their staff can volunteer through formal employee volunteer programs (EVPs)”.

This does require the development of specific strategic alliances and effective relationships between businesses and emergency management organisations and the development of ‘win-win’ scenarios for both parties.

Yes, there’s lots of opportunities...but you have to look at how you can make it work both ways, for you and for the businesses as well, it’s all about partnerships. (Participant)

Volunteers being allowed to leave their workplace to come and assist in our activities...Federally, perhaps they could be looking at strategies or lost wages or reimbursements to employees and employers. I do not know how that would work. I definitely think that it needs to be looked at in the future. (Participant)

Although this option of employee volunteering may not fit for every situation and is often not pertinent to rural locations where small businesses and the self-employed predominate, there are possibilities of connections with sufficiently large businesses to allow greater numbers of employees to become involved as emergency management volunteers.

As the Harvard School of Public Health (2004:106) points out: “Workplace volunteering has become a popular alternative for busy employees and their companies. It allows companies to better their communities while simultaneously building employee teamwork skills, building morale, improving corporate public image, and meeting strategic goals. Though many businesses focus on engaging their staff in one-time or episodic events, others have designed progressive programs that enable their staff to stay involved with local organisations and causes”.

Beyond private businesses and public corporations developing employee volunteer programs, there is a place for this option to be further promoted and expanded for public sector employees. Although many government organisations do allow public sector employee volunteering and offer special leave entitlements, this has not always been for all types of emergency management volunteering in both response and recovery organisations, and has often been left solely to the individual employee to arrange. A sustained and significant focus on fully developing this area of future volunteer activity was not highlighted by any of the participants. Yet, perhaps both State and Federal government organisations could lead the way in establishing programs that allow their own staff to be engaged in a range of different types of emergency management activities, including recovery as well as response activities.

Interestingly, this option would require exploration of how employees (both public and private) could be engaged as volunteers in different ways and would require a reworking of some ‘traditional’ practices. Just one example, is the expectation in some organisations that people need to join the local unit or group nearest to where they live. Yet, many potential volunteers recruited through employee volunteering would find it more time and cost

effective to have the opportunity to volunteer for the local unit or group closest to their place of employment.

Why can't people join up with any local unit, it might be part of being part of that community. But it would be good to fit in with what people want to do – be flexible with what makes sense to them. (Participant)

One final example of employee volunteering opportunities highlighted by a few participants was that of fly in/fly out workers employed in the mining and exploration industry. Although circumstances differ, workers often fly in and work on site for several weeks and then fly out to spend a number of weeks on leave. Engaging this type of employee would again require a different way of operating compared to the traditional methods of many response organisations (Cross & Esmond: 2008). But not to investigate ways of engaging such workers is to exclude them from the pool of potential volunteers.

We need to look at how to involve the fly in/fly out workers, they have so much to offer when they come back home they have time on their hands and want to get involved. We have to adapt and be flexible to bring them into volunteering. (Participant)

As competing interests continue to impinge on the time current and future volunteers are able to give to volunteering, it is imperative that options including a range of levels of volunteer involvement, role and task restructuring to open up possibilities for different types of volunteering; and innovative ways to engage families and employees, are further explored and developed.

Some of these options require small operational shifts at the local level, while others require an organisational restructuring at management level. What is clear, from all the participants in this research, is that the most important question asked by potential volunteers and those continuing to volunteer is “how much of my time will volunteering take?” For it is against this question, more than any other, that potential and current volunteers weigh up whether to join, or continue to be involved, as an emergency management volunteer. Organisations that do not address the challenge of time in designing and implementing their volunteer-based programs, run the risk that their current and future pool of emergency management volunteers will continue to diminish and may ultimately disappear.

CHALLENGE TWO – TRAINING

Develop a passion for learning. If you do, you will never cease to grow – Anthony J. D'Angelo

Context of training-related challenges

The second area of challenge identified by participants in the attraction, support and retention of volunteers, is that of training.

It is acknowledged at the outset that the provision of appropriate training for all volunteers, but especially for those dealing with life-threatening situations, is absolutely essential.

Participants in this research described vastly different amounts and types of training. These ranged from a basic one day induction process, through to an extensive number of training hours and modules which were required to be undertaken.

Our training is very, very an easy sort of training...we talk about what our role is and we talk about what we do...they know what their role is...they are not trying to do someone else's job. (Participant)

Because our people are very highly trained and that is different...we have a much higher demand for training because the people have to do everything...we have got 38 modules. (Participant)

On the whole, participants observed that the amount of training undertaken by volunteers, particularly in the response area, had increased significantly in recent years. Extensive training has become part of the volunteering experience for many emergency management volunteers. Many organisations in the response area and their emergency management volunteers have been at the forefront of this dramatic increase in training requirements.

These organisations have embraced national training standards adopting vocational, educational and training frameworks for both paid staff and volunteers. This training has involved the development of new skills; the assessment of this skills development; and the

maintenance and updating of these skills in practice, so as to respond efficiently and effectively to disaster and emergency situations.

Because of the high level of training that has to meet as a national competency now, it has its benefits in being transferable...and it is about safety and we have an obligation as a responsible organisation for caring for our people so they have to be trained appropriately for the risk for which they are going to be finding themselves in. (Participant)

This increased amount of training for volunteers was expressed by participants to have been fuelled by several major factors:

(i) Expectations – both community and political. These expectations have grown tremendously in recent years. The community now expects more from their public organisations and ever-improving service delivery from those charged with the responsibility of responding to emergencies and disasters.

There are expectations that we can do more as volunteers and the community and others are demanding more, not of volunteers, but of their emergency services, like response times and we're all part of that. (Participant)

(ii) The increasingly litigious nature of our society. Instances of litigation in the courts and the findings in particular cases in the Coroner's Court, have highlighted duty of care issues for organisations. This has created an increased need to focus on providing both their paid staff and volunteers with the necessary knowledge, skills and expertise to undertake their jobs as safely and effectively as possible.

I think that with all the responsibilities that go with it, the potential litigation type aspects. You know, if someone gets something wrong, probably 20 years ago, you could have said, "Oh, well, I am only a volunteer, I am trying my best". You can't do that anymore, community expectation and probably legal expectation too is that people will deliver services of a certain standard. And that is something, from an infrastructural back end point of view, we have got to make sure we have got the systems to make that happen. (Participant)

(iii) Expectations placed upon volunteers by the very organisations they serve. For example,

some organisations have asked volunteers to take on roles beyond what might be considered their ‘core’ duties and tasks, and to become increasingly involved in the areas of community safety and public awareness.

Ultimately, greater public awareness of community safety issues will certainly benefit the community, the organisation and the volunteers themselves – as less resources and volunteer time may be spent in dealing with human-caused emergencies. However, this added time commitment places an extra burden upon some units or groups struggling to maintain their volunteer numbers.

We’ve talked about how doing all the extra things are taking up a lot of time for people. There is always public awareness that you can do, but fitting it in besides the core duties can be difficult as people only have a limited amount of time. (Participant)

(iv) In some instances, volunteers themselves have placed significant expectations on themselves and have requested increased training to:

- develop their own knowledge and skills as equipment and techniques become more complex;
- provide protection for themselves personally in often very dangerous situations and having a recognised level of skills if challenged in the courts;
- obtain recognition of their training through qualifications that are also transferable to their workplaces;
- have recognition by local councils, the police and others; and
- achieve recognition and equality from their paid counterparts in terms of their knowledge and skills.

Discussion of training-related challenges

This greater emphasis on and greater amount of training comes at a cost – it requires a greater commitment by volunteers in terms of time.

The increasing amount of time involved in training links directly to the major reason given by people for not volunteering or ceasing to volunteer - the feeling that they lack the time to

become involved and to take on the training required. In addition, particularly in the rural areas, volunteers absorb significant costs, often travelling large distances to attend the training.

Overall, volunteers generally are positive about training. In Volunteering Australia's National Survey on Volunteering Issues (2008) across all sectors, 87% of volunteers surveyed felt that they had been given enough training and support to perform their volunteer roles. For some organisations, that utilised very short-term volunteers, the training was limited and the task was often matched to the volunteer. For other organisations, the tasks were often ongoing and extensive and therefore the training for these volunteers had become ongoing and extensive.

Obviously, adequate training for volunteers is crucial, since lives and property can be at risk. But a continuing increase in training requirements can seriously affect the decision for many to go or stay as volunteers.

On one hand, training is the cross that all members know they have to bear. You know there is going to be a training requirement, you know it's going to be arduous, but at the same time you recognise that it's preparing you and getting you to do what you need, so it's a double edged sword. (Participant)

Participants felt that imposing more and more training on volunteers may well be met with decreasing volunteer numbers. Volunteers will weigh up the amount of time involved not only in the actual 'doing' but the added time mostly spent in the training. It may well become 'death by training'. Participants identified that if the balance swings towards more and more training, the needs of the volunteer and the reasons why volunteers joined, may become lost in the process.

Some of this balance may be found in the current review of the Public Safety Training Package. This includes the introduction of Skill Sets as alternatives to full qualifications. These may well reduce the training time for volunteers to the essentials, thereby saving them time without reducing their skill levels. However, those wanting to obtain qualifications will still be able to do so through the use of Statements of Attainment that are awarded for individual competencies - when a subscribed number of competencies are achieved, the qualification is awarded.

We have to find a balance. It can take over your life and become a lifestyle. The more training you do and if you also become a trainer to train others then that is more time but we have to make sure that people are safe. (Participant)

AEMVF Cost of Volunteering Survey (2006) asked participants to indicate the type of training they received. 79% identified that their most significant method of training received was formal and accredited training.

Accredited training is both a blessing and a curse. By its very nature, there are administrative tasks and paperwork attached to this training. Some participants acknowledged the importance of accredited training, but also referred to the lengthy, time-consuming and complex administration and associated paperwork involved.

People talk a lot about the paperwork and there's certainly a lot and it does take time but that's part of the accreditation that you didn't used to worry about before it was there. (Participant)

Stringer (2001:32) as early as the 2001 Summit pointed out: "Then there's the introduction of Competency Based Training (CBT). We as volunteers are not saying don't have CBT because the concept of CBT has got merit. But there is a massive paper trail associated with it and even the professionals are having trouble coming to grips with it, so how on earth can they expect the volunteers to in fact provide the same background infrastructure to cope with the requirements of CBT".

If organisations embrace the ideas discussed earlier in this report regarding time-related challenges, and seek ways of offering different levels of volunteering involvement, it follows that ways could be found to then offer different levels of training. This would provide volunteers with greater choice in their levels of engagement and therefore their level of training as volunteers. Further, where the various roles undertaken by volunteers are re-examined, training could be limited to specific training for those specialized roles.

You can be involved at different levels, the more training that you do, the more specialized skills you develop and the greater your level of involvement and time commitment too. (Participant)

One of the other major concerns that some participants expressed was the necessity to ensure that training for volunteers was never a waste of time and simply ‘training for the sake of training’. Most of all, training should never be boring. Bored volunteers who feel that their time is being wasted are rarely retained as volunteers.

The worst thing that can happen is that training is boring because we do a lot of it, people will just end up leaving and that their time has been wasted. It’s really important. (Participant)

Some participants expressed concern that there was a shortage of good quality specialist trainers and about the burn-out of many trainers. The skills and expertise of the trainers themselves are critical to ensuring training never becomes boring, as their method of delivery can change even the most mundane of topics into an exciting learning experience.

When you do training, you know the quality of the trainer can make all the difference. Some people are really good at doing training and others not very good at all. (Participant)

At the 2001 Summit, Stone (2001:53) spoke of this issue: “...the theme that came through was that volunteers are leaving because they’re bored, and trainers are leaving because they’re burnt out. It links back to what I said earlier about providing professional development and support for trainers. What we need to do is help trainers make training exciting and fun so that people will come back. Nobody is going to come back to sit in a classroom. Nobody is going to come back to do the same thing over and over again”.

The provision of good quality training is also part of recognition for volunteers. If you receive highly relevant and really well presented training then you feel valued as a volunteer. If it is just the usual boring sort of training, then you feel devalued. (Participant)

Good quality trainers who can make learning fun and actively engage volunteers are vital to the success of any training and the retention of volunteers. Organisations must not lose sight of the importance of this within the entire training process and should provide on-going opportunities for the support and professional development of the trainers themselves, whether in a paid or voluntary role.

Some participants from organisations with extensive training regimes suggested the use of *mentors* within local units or groups as another training option that would supplement current training methods. This involved local units or groups matching new volunteers to older, more experienced volunteers to assist in their training and integration.

I definitely think that there is a real need for a mentoring process to be put in place. I believe there is an academic, research gap in that kind of strategy. No one seems to have done it or implemented it or people have talked about it on an ad hoc basis. I think the training is not insurmountable - it can be done - but what it needs is guidance right the way through and some people can get lost in that process...the people that may struggle with meeting the requirements on those training courses will be better served with a mentoring type program.
(Participant)

This type of mentoring has enormous potential as a very cost effective process for assisting in the training of new volunteers. However, the assumption that all older or more experienced volunteers automatically are skilled or appropriate to take on a mentoring role based on their length of service is not correct. Not everyone is suited to this role, so mentors need to be selected carefully. The movement from ‘ad hoc’ mentoring to a more formalized approach by organisations requires the provision of appropriate support for the mentors themselves.

Some participants also spoke of the opportunity for organisations to explore alternative methods of training volunteers beyond a standard ‘face-to-face’ trainer and student model.

We have to look at other ways of using technology in training, we haven’t really explored that area yet with the internet and that, but there are lots of ways we could re-work some of the training. (Participant)

In particular, technology now offers an exciting array of learning techniques and strategies that have yet to be fully explored by many organisations involved in the training of emergency management volunteers.

The use of a range of internet-based training delivery methods including video and audio training; forums and social networking sites; and email coaching and mentoring are all possibilities. Further, the use of portable devices such as the Amazon kindle for downloading

training packages, and teleconferencing and video conferencing are technology based training strategies only limited by the imagination. Although not suitable for all volunteers and for all training situations, the use of more technology-based training should be an area for further exploration.

For example, the technology is already available in many metropolitan and rural areas for teleconferencing. The respective State health services utilize teleconferencing for such activities as consultations, demonstration sessions, meetings and group training and even diagnoses. With some cooperation and planning, there could be a sharing of technological resources across sectors so that some of the components of the current training for emergency management volunteers could be delivered by these alternative methods.

Organisations involved in the training of emergency management volunteers have the opportunity to be at the forefront of trialing and developing more alternative technology based methods for both theoretical and practical training components.

These options could assist in reducing the burnout of trainers trying to service multiple groups and vast areas and also reducing time and travel costs across the board. This type of training is not designed to eliminate the more traditional training methods used in local units or groups, but could supplement these methods and provide volunteers with the most time effective quality training that they need to perform their volunteering roles.

It is certainly clear that training for emergency management volunteers varies enormously for different organisations. It is imperative that organisations constantly monitor the amount of time involved in training and keep it to a sustainable level for their increasingly time strapped volunteers. This will necessitate the continual development by organisations of more effective and efficient ways to train their emergency management volunteers.

CHALLENGE THREE – COST

I want to thank and pay tribute to all of our volunteers – those dedicated people who believe in all work and no pay - Robert Orben

Context of cost-related challenges

There is a general perception by the public that it costs nothing for organisations to involve volunteers. This is far from the truth – volunteers are certainly a cost to an organisation. However, even if members of the public are aware of this, they may be exceedingly surprised to learn that there is a cost to being a volunteer. Yet this is what millions of volunteers do – they pay for the privilege of volunteering. Volunteers are not free, nor is the activity of volunteering free.

For volunteers in general, and for those involved as emergency management volunteers – there is a financial cost for being a volunteer and in some cases a substantial one.

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

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

This was borne out by some participants in this research, who spoke of the range of costs absorbed by certain emergency management volunteers. These included: training costs; postage costs; use of their own office equipment including internet, fax and stationery and telephone; joining fees; childcare and meals while away from home, and in some cases, provision of their own safety and personal equipment such as uniforms and protective

clothing, as well as repairs/maintenance on their own vehicle and petrol costs (particularly for rural-based volunteers traveling vast distances).

I think one of the biggest issues that government should really support is the cost of volunteering to the volunteers. They do not want to be paid to volunteer but it does cost them a lot of money, particularly emergency services in rural areas, the cost of petrol, even if they could somehow be reimbursed for the cost, we are trying to, we can but we are certainly not funded to do that. (Participant)

Participants also spoke of the extra burden for employees such as taking leave without pay and annual leave. Or in the rural-based locations the loss of income for the self-employed or for those having to find casual staff to fill in at times of emergencies.

But when they get called out they are dropping their paint brushes or their tools or leaving their business for often significant periods of times and often at peak times at considerable financial loss to serve their communities. (Participant)

Volunteers in their volunteering roles have always absorbed some of the hidden and not so hidden costs of volunteering. For a long time volunteers have quietly absorbed the costs of volunteering efforts.

“In 2001 Volunteering Australia undertook a comprehensive national consultation, as did the emergency management volunteer sector; both consultations uncovered a level of dissatisfaction among volunteers about the cost of volunteering and the unrecognised impact of this by the rest of the community, in particular government” (Volunteering Australia, 2006:3).

In the 2001 Summit, it was reported that the major problems highlighted by the delegates related to insufficient funds for personal protective clothing, safety equipment, training and also the cost to individuals of being volunteers.

Volunteering Australia, in the report on the Rising Cost of Volunteering (2006:3), explains that: “Over the past six years consultation and research within the volunteering sector has consistently provided evidence that the rising cost of volunteering to the individual is

becoming an issue of some concern”.

This issue of the cost of volunteering has not gone away. Indeed, it has gained in voice and momentum in recent years and it is an issue of concern that is having an increasingly adverse impact on the recruitment and retention of volunteers in general and for emergency management volunteers.

Amongst all the costs borne by volunteers, the greatest cost identified by participants was the increasing and fluctuating cost of fuel to travel to training, incidents, etc. Record high fuel costs in recent years have catapulted this issue to the forefront of concerns for individuals involved in volunteering and have brought to the surface issues that are long overdue to be examined.

Birch and McLennan (2007) in their survey of NSW RFS volunteers found that out-of-pocket expenses including petrol, ranked 4th out of 14 negative aspects of volunteering, with 14% of volunteers considering this a major limiting factor to their participation in RFS volunteering activities. Also, Birch and McLennan (2008) in their survey of Queensland Fire and Rescue Rural Operations Volunteer Fire Wardens reinforced that the rising cost of fuel was a major issue threatening the continued work of volunteers as fire wardens.

Volunteering Australia (2008) in their latest National Survey of Volunteering Issues found the cost of fuel and telephone expenses were identified as the two major areas of expense for volunteers.

I don't think that stops people from coming through the door. But I know as a fact it's been a concern with many serving members, particularly petrol. The increasing cost of petrol, we've had a lot of volunteers who actually lived a long way away from their nearest units.
(Participant)

It is important to note that there are different issues regarding resourcing of volunteers, and reimbursing volunteers for their out-of-pocket expenses. Some organisations seem to be well resourced and funded to undertake their voluntary work, as compared to other organisations that were very poorly resourced. Many volunteers involved in response based organisations were extremely well resourced as compared to some of their counterparts in recovery based

organisations. The need for recovery based organisations to also have equality in access to funding and proper resourcing is certainly long overdue.

Some organisations are very well resourced and have very good equipment and other resources. But some don't really get much at all for their volunteers, they might need as much, but they start with very little. There are great differences and it's not an issue for some but is for others. (Participant)

Yet although better resourced, volunteers from many response based organisations often absorbed greater out-of-pocket expenses, particularly with being required to attend more extensive training commitments.

But with the growing cost it's just become a growing challenge. And so, well they remained as members however, their participation in training has become less. (Participant)

Volunteering Australia (2007:2) found that "...emergency service volunteers showed the second highest costs net of reimbursements (\$1,048) compared to the highest cost for sport and recreation volunteers (\$1,293) but the highest median cost of (\$575) compared to sport and recreation (\$475)".

The AEMVF conducted its own survey study specifically relating to emergency management volunteers and the cost of volunteering in their Cost of Volunteering Survey (2006).

This study found that the combined average cost, including both direct costs and in-kind contributions, per volunteer was \$950 per annum.

When employment costs are taken into account (e.g., taking annual leave, leave without pay, etc) then for those employed (54%) the average cost was \$1679. Employers also contributed to this cost burden with roster flexibility, special leave arrangements and more. For self-employed volunteers, when business costs were also taken into account, the average cost for volunteering was \$3282.

Further, respondents only received token reimbursements for 9.9% of direct expenses and 5.1% of in-kind contributions. 13% said that the costs of volunteering currently inhibits their

doing further volunteering.

As this AEMVF Report (2006:46) goes on to explain: "the current system is very dependent upon the goodwill of volunteers. The limits of this goodwill are unknown, which makes it all the more important that government closely assesses the kind of costs outlined here and provides suitable reimbursement to volunteers that covers basic costs (e.g. uniforms, petrol, travel, training) to enable them to continue to provide their invaluable time to serve their communities".

As participants explained, volunteers certainly have never in the past been paid nor are they now asking to be paid.

It's overwhelmingly clear that volunteers do not want to be paid for the hours they put in, but...nor do they want to be out-of-pocket. (Participant)

As the Executive Summary of the 2001 Summit explained: "while the volunteer delegates were firm in their view that they did not wish to be paid for their services, they were however, just as firm in their view that being a volunteer should not be a cost to the individuals".

Discussion of cost-related challenges

It is clear that the cost of volunteering can no longer be ignored as rising costs have become a barrier to involvement of new and current volunteers across all sectors and particularly for emergency management volunteers.

Through Volunteering Australia the 'Costs of Volunteering Taskforce' (2006) was established to consider the issue of 'the rising cost of volunteering'. This eight member taskforce involved experts on taxation and non-profit organisations and included Major General Hori Howard as Chair of the AEMVF. This taskforce produced the most useful discussion to date on the options available in the reimbursement of volunteers.

There seems little point in this research 'reinventing the wheel'. Therefore, the following are direct extracts from the options so adequately discussed and presented by the taskforce in

their report: 'The Rising Cost of Volunteering: A Report Prepared by the Costs of Volunteering Taskforce' (2006:18-20). The taskforce presented six options, three options defined as 'organisational reimbursement options' and three options termed 'personal reimbursement options'.

The Organisational Reimbursement Options

Option 1: Government grant.

This option would parallel or build upon existing grant processes. Organisations would apply for a grant on the basis that they have provided, or estimate that they will provide, reimbursement of expenses to their volunteers up to a certain amount each year. As an option this would be relatively simple for government if aligned with existing programs, but would create an additional process for organisations wishing to apply for a grant. This option is dependent on the organisation making the effort to apply for funds and is out of the control of the individual volunteer.

Option 2: Government requires a reimbursement budget in funding applications.

This option would require an additional investment of funds from government but would be a relatively easy process both for government and organisations once established. The advantage of this option is it requires some recognition from organisations of the costs that their volunteer staff incur. It would also allow for some standardisation for reimbursement amounts say for example mileage. The amount reimbursed to volunteers would also be a reportable item in any grant acquittal processes thus giving volunteers a degree of certainty that their costs would be reimbursed. This option could readily be implemented in tandem with Option 1 so that organisations already funded by government would receive an additional funding component for budgeted reimbursements under their existing funding agreements, while smaller nonfunded organisations could apply for a grant through Option 1.

Option 3: Tax Credit / GST offset

This option involves organisations receiving a tax credit for the amount of funds. They reimburse volunteers for qualifying out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the course of their volunteering. This would be provided through organisations being able to claim an offset amount for volunteer reimbursement on their Business Activity Statement (BAS) form. Whilst attractive from an organisational perspective and needing only minor change to the BAS forms it does require some change to government processes. This would appear to be a

relatively simple option for government once the process change was made.

This option does hold a couple of difficulties in that some organisations may not be registered for GST or lodge a BAS. If organisations are registered this is still no guarantee that volunteers will gain the benefit; one of the uncertainties for volunteers is that reimbursement from this source could be directed to volunteers at the discretion of the organisation.

The Personal Reimbursement Options

Option 4: Personal tax rebate/offset

Of the personal reimbursements through the taxation system this appears to be the most equitable although not universally available if there is restriction, say DGR status, on the type of organisation for which the individual volunteers. One of the recommendations for all options is that payments are capped. From an organisations point of view this probably creates extra work if expenses needed to be verified or organisations tax status needed to be demonstrated. For government the downside to this option, as with a personal tax deduction is that it requires legislative change and is not easily quantifiable in terms of anticipated take-up.

Option 5: Personal tax deduction

This option has been suggested many times but interestingly has been largely discredited by volunteers themselves who recognise that it is inequitable for a great number of volunteers who do not pay tax. It is also widely recognised that volunteers with the highest income are the greatest beneficiaries of this particular treatment of costs. As the cost of volunteering is now identified as one of the disincentives to participation this measure has little currency with the general volunteering population.

Option 6: Personal grant administered through an existing government agency

Under this option volunteers would be responsible for lodging their 'request for reimbursement' via a claims process that could be administered through an agency such as the Health Insurance Commission. Similar to Medicare rebates, this option would require the volunteer to lodge a claim for reimbursement, along with required evidence or statement of their expenditure, and the relevant amount of reimbursement (up to the capped maximum) would be paid direct to the volunteer's nominated bank account or paid by cheque. It is envisaged that this claim process would be an annual one only. The criteria for all other

options would apply here, for example the capping of the amount to be reimbursed, verified expenses, registered organisation etc. This option would naturally create some changes in procedures in the administering agency, additional funding from government would be required as would proper record keeping by volunteers and verification procedures from organisations. It meets the principles of equity, although given the restriction on organisation types like all other options does not provide universal advantage to volunteers.

Participants in this research varied in their thoughts on how volunteers should be reimbursed for the out-of-pocket expenses they incurred through volunteering. However, they were clear that there was a rising cost to being a volunteer and volunteers themselves should not be asked to continue to bear all of these increasing costs.

I mean a lot of people say, "Well, I cannot join a volunteer organisation because it is just going to cost me too much". And, so their time, they will give for nothing but they would like some help in the other resources. (Participant)

If the family has to miss out on a new pair of shoes because Dad has to put \$50 of petrol in the car to go and volunteer, you know it's not going to last long. (Participant)

Many organisations have tackled the issue of reimbursements and out-of-pocket expenses for their volunteers but there is little uniformity or consistency in the way it is being administered.

When they do join, all of their training is free. Their personal protective equipment is supplied to them for free. But everything they need at a basic level, we supply. There are out-of-pocket expenses that people would encounter but we go to great lengths to ensure that those are minimal. (Participant)

Their volunteers spend thousands of dollars on some of the equipment they use and stuff like that. We are nothing like that and we say to them, you know, we will cover your costs anyway if you want to claim that. (Participant)

The senior people (volunteers)...they will pay...to be that senior management, they don't get

paid, they pay out of their pockets the cost to do that job and they don't get reimbursed.
(Participant)

It is imperative that Commonwealth, State and local governments lead the way in tackling this issue. Volunteers are certainly not asking to be paid but can no longer continue to absorb the increasing costs particularly out-of-pocket expenses involved in volunteering. Further, the latest global economic circumstances have further heightened the need for this issue to be addressed.

However, for volunteers in the emergency management sector there is a further aspect that must also be considered. Periodically major disasters occur, which require extended commitments from the volunteers of the emergency management sector in both the areas of response and recovery. Some examples are the bush fires of 1994, 2001 and 2003, the Thredbo landslide and the 2007 floods and storms on the central coast of New South Wales. Such events place great pressure on the volunteers many of whom are forced to return to work through suffering severe financial hardship. The sector is very good at deploying very large numbers of volunteers for short periods, but with more prolonged operations on the horizon, some form of financial assistance needs to be considered and made available to allow them to extend their time commitment in these circumstances.

Rather than a continual discussion of the options, the excellent work undertaken previously by the taskforce on the six options should form the basis of decision-making to provide a uniform policy across States and organisations.

The aim should be that in the future, volunteers across all sectors experience an equity and consistency in dealing with the reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses and associated costs involved in the giving of their time as volunteers.

CHALLENGE FOUR – RECOGNITION

Only two groups of people thrive on sincere recognition and genuine appreciation – men and women - Jim Clemmer

Context of recognition-related challenges

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’.

Both the 2001 and 2005 Summits identified ‘recognition’ as a major issue for emergency management volunteers. Howard (2005:7) summarised the thoughts of many at the Summits: “Above everything else, volunteers still believe they are largely taken for granted – a situation that must be turned around. Australians must recognise that it is demanding to be a volunteer. If they don’t look after them and recognise them more effectively, they will lose them”.

Discussion of the recognition-related challenges

It must be noted that the term ‘recognition’ is extremely broad and can have different meanings in different contexts. Over the course of this research, four main recognition-related areas emerged from the observations made by participants. These four areas were:

- recognition by State and national leaders,
- recognition by the organisation,
- recognition within the local unit or group, and
- recognition by the general public and local community.

Public recognition by governments through State and national leaders, not just during emergencies, is welcomed, valued and appreciated by volunteers. However, in times of emergencies, it is crucial for this recognition to be given, and to be given to all involved.

Many participants emphasised the great importance of praise being given to all volunteers involved in both the response and recovery areas, rather than perhaps just those on the frontline that are highly visible. Thanking and recognising only some volunteer groups and not others is almost as bad as not recognising any volunteers at all. Certainly, it risked alienating these groups and their volunteers.

You have to make sure that you thank all the volunteers that assisted in that emergency. There's been some mistakes in the past, where some groups have been thanked and not others and it did real damage and hasn't really been forgotten. (Participant)

Recognition by politicians also needs to complement and enhance rather than compete with recognition programs undertaken by organisations. Further, it is important that the work volunteers do is recognised as professional and accorded an equality with their paid counterparts.

Whilst volunteers are expected to be well trained, turn out quickly and get the job done professionally, there is an undercurrent of 'amateur' status accorded them by politicians, who seem to think that they are one level below the professional emergency management responders. (Participant)

It is therefore incumbent upon leaders and politicians, and their advisers, to ensure they are aware of all those involved who have dealt with the emergency or disaster situation and to publicly acknowledge them. Put simply, recognition and real praise from both national and State leaders when emergencies occur is valued by volunteers and when it does not come, they feel unappreciated.

Further, it seems that not all emergency management volunteers are treated equally by government when it comes to qualifying for national service medals. There is certainly a need for greater equality in this sort of recognition. One option is that beginning on a national scale, those medals presently offered only to certain emergency management volunteers, should be open to all types of emergency management volunteers in both the response and recovery areas.

All emergency management volunteers should be equally able to receive national awards,

whether they are in the response or recovery areas as volunteers. (Participant)

Another recognition-related area shared by both government leaders and by the organisations themselves, pertains to the proper resourcing of volunteers, to enable them to carry out their voluntary work effectively. The payment of agreed out-of-pocket expenses, the provision of appropriate clothing, equipment and other resources and the provision of excellent training, are all tangible ways in which governments and organisations can clearly demonstrate that they truly value the contribution of those volunteers.

Part of the whole recognition process is to start by making sure that the volunteers have what they need to do the job, that's a way of saying that you value them and appreciate what they are doing. That is really important. (Participant)

Often, the least recognised organisations within the volunteer emergency management sector are the recovery based organisations and although they are not called upon as often as their response counterparts, when they do become involved the events are often big, chaotic and traumatic in nature. These organisations are essential to the system and remain involved often long after the response organisations have departed. Special attention should be paid to them and they need to be formally integrated into all State and Territory recovery arrangements and provided with the training and financial support appropriate to their significant disaster recovery roles.

The provision of adequate legal protection of volunteers was also mentioned by some participants as an important part of the recognition process. As Smith (2001:42) pointed out at the 2001 Summit: “Volunteers deserve...a Government that is prepared to build protective barriers for its volunteer workforce and their families. Sandbagging the increasing flood of litigation is not sufficient. We need a solid legislative dam that allows emergency services organisations to recruit, to train, and to deploy volunteers safe in the knowledge that their own personal lives will not needlessly suffer”.

Since the 2001 Summit, many organisations have been working hard to provide adequate legal protection for all their volunteers. Most participants in this study felt that issues relating to risks and insurance cover, although difficult at times, had on the most part been dealt with by their organisation to provide the type of protection needed by their emergency

management volunteers. And generally, the volunteers they represented felt that the organisations were looking after them in this regard.

It became a concern a few years ago but since that time we've created new legislation...to simplify and enhance provisions particularly in the case of volunteers, the legal protection and that was all done. So there has been, some significant improvements to legal protections for the volunteers which I think, covers them fairly comprehensively. (Participant)

It is noted that McLennan and Birch (2007b) in their research with those volunteers who had been with the CFA for 12 months found that there was generally a low level of knowledge about agency protection and procedures in place to minimise and mitigate these risks.

This would suggest that although many organisations have put in place procedures to mitigate risk for their volunteers, there is a need for greater education of volunteers about these issues.

Some volunteers don't really know and do need more education. I know another group has put that information in their induction handbook but you can't always guarantee that people will read it but at least it is there. (Participant)

Participants in this research reported a wide variety of the types of public recognition for their volunteers. In different organisations, these ranged from virtually non-existent through to highly structured awards, medals and public recognition processes.

For those organisations which do provide their own certificates, awards and medals, it is an opportunity to publicly recognise the contribution of their volunteers. One of the most common forms of volunteer recognition utilized by emergency management organisations, especially those in the response area, is the awarding of medals based on years of service.

On this point, participants suggested that in light of the changing nature of volunteer involvement, the presentation of long service medals after 10, 20, 30 years of service may become a thing of the past. The awarding of medals at a minimum of 5 years may well be a more realistic reflection of the length of long service of future volunteers. Some organisations had already undertaken the process of re-evaluating the length of time required to receive such medals.

It is on the table now to review our entry level for a lot of those awards are ten years whether we can reduce that to three or five given the contemporary situation of people not necessarily being able to commit their whole life to a single cause. (Participant)

In the days when the structure was different, people probably thought 12 years was long and why they jumped to 20, who knows. I think today we have to recognise the fact that we have to recognise people earlier...maybe that will instill in people that we do appreciate what they have done and maybe they will stay a bit longer. They do not have to wait so long for the next milestone to be recognised for their efforts. (Participant)

It is important to note that little research on the efficacy of recognition programs has been undertaken. As McLennan (2008:41), points out: “there is no evidence that agency recognition schemes are viewed by volunteers as a pressing issue impacting on their satisfaction or retention, but nor has the issue been specifically canvassed with volunteers or Volunteer Associations”.

As Esmond (2005:132) explains: “Few organisations conduct any research into their recognition and reward programs – it simply becomes a tradition. The same annual event, same location and same speeches year after year”.

Further, participants were very clear, that for those organisations that do provide opportunity for their volunteers to receive medals, their volunteers do not want to see even more medals awarded as the simplistic solution to all recognition needs.

Volunteers don't want any more medals. Many organisations have well and truly taken care of that side of it. (Participant)

Organisations will need to become more creative in their recognition of different types and levels of volunteer involvement. Greater acknowledgement and recognition needs to be given to the professional and personal skills volunteers bring with them to the volunteering experience. Further, it is imperative that organisations that predominantly recognise their volunteers on the basis of ‘time based’ awards begin an examination of other ways to recognise and value different types of contribution from their emergency management volunteers in the future.

Participants also spoke about the importance of recognition given to volunteers from within their own local unit or group. It is within the local unit or group and from the people with whom a volunteer has the most contact and connection, where 'relationship recognition' truly occurs.

It's very, very hard to work out what people mean when they talk about good recognition...and it's very personal. (Participant)

The feeling of being appreciated, recognised and valued, particularly by your immediate peers, significantly influences a volunteer's decision as to whether or not to continue their volunteer involvement.

As much as anything, the informal stuff...I think it is just often the way you treat people, the way they are looked after and thanked or supported in what they are doing out in the ground at the local level. It is just as important I think as the formal stuff. (Participant)

It is at this local level that volunteer leaders and others can develop very effective methods of peer recognition to make volunteers feel they are valued, and thereby enhance the prospects of retaining those volunteers.

Some participants pointed out that volunteer leaders of units and groups think that their volunteers are doing a great job but never tell them so – they simply assume that the volunteers know they are appreciated.

People do have to be told that they are valued and appreciated, if they don't hear it occasionally, they don't really know that. (Participant)

I mean, we don't go overboard, and most people just want to be thanked, so we try to do that as best we can. That is the main thing, we just want people to know that they have been seen to be doing what they have been asked to do, and we make sure to say thank you to them and they are more than happy. (Participant)

It is at the local level that the ability to customise and personalise recognition becomes not only possible but essential. The more you know about an individual, the more you can

personalise their recognition. This makes such recognition even more powerful than other types of external recognition where the approach is often more of 'one size fits all'. (Esmond, 2005)

Participants noted that volunteers did not want to be praised constantly and that there was a reward for volunteers in doing satisfying work and feeling good about helping their community. But they still spoke of the importance of providing those in leadership roles at the local level with a vast range of strategies and ways to recognise each and every volunteer's contribution, as well as encouraging them to make this a significant component of their leadership style.

It important that local leaders have lots of ways to say thanks – some do and some don't and they need ideas and strategies to do this effectively. (Participant)

I think you will find that volunteers will be the first to tell you that they don't want recognition. But I found that when you do provide recognition, they appreciate it. (Participant)

It is good volunteer management practice (in fact good leadership and management in general) to value and recognise all people. While this can be a broad strategy, 'enablers' need to be put in place to help local leaders recognise their people locally including 'Thankyou Day' after each fire season and during National SES week, (National Volunteer Week and/or International Volunteer Day)...all could be harnessed to do more locally and again, needs good leadership to be able to do this effectively. (Participant)

There has never been a volunteer who has left because they were appreciated too much. However, there have been hundreds of thousands across all sectors who have done so because they felt unappreciated.

The fourth recognition-related area about which participants spoke was that of recognition from the general public or community whom volunteers assist in times of great vulnerability. Some participants spoke of a lack of appreciation for their volunteers from the general public when assisting them in a crisis or emergency situation.

Further, participants explained that their volunteers often felt that the general public did not value the voluntary work they do. Yet recognition by the local community was very important to volunteers.

A lot of volunteers who are in more urban areas, do it from a community point of view. So they are working from those sorts of bases. But they just feel at times that no one appreciates, they get up at two and three in the middle of a cold wet night to go and look after someone in their community. (Participant)

It is often the cry of emergency management volunteers that when they are involved in emergency and disaster situations, people do not even realise they are volunteers and assume they are paid employees.

One of the biggest challenges that you have in the world with volunteerism is that they are becoming so professional today - they have some of the best equipment, the best protective equipment and when they arrive on scene they look very smart. They arrive on scene in a very timely manner because we have to - the average person in the street, they ring 000, whether it is the police, the fire, whatever - they want the service. In a lot of cases they struggle - when you point out that all these people are volunteers, they have come from somewhere - whether they have left their work or their home...I think a community struggles with how a volunteer can do that. They equate it with the ambulance and the police and they are a half an hour away and we will be there in eight minutes or sooner. (Participant)

The Australian Council of Social Services (ACOSS) (1996: 55-56) explains this situation: “While volunteers will not generally express a desire for community recognition openly, the perception amongst volunteers that their work is undervalued by society is common in addition, community members are often believed to have a poor understanding of the nature of the work carried out by volunteers and to assume they are in fact being paid by organisations. Many volunteers resent the lack of community recognition they receive and feel that the organisation in which they serve should be responsible for raising their profile”.

The most obvious reason why volunteers are mistaken by the general public as paid staff is because the uniforms worn by many emergency management volunteers in the response area are very similar to those of their paid counterparts. State Emergency Services (SES)

volunteers are a notable exception, but for many other response based volunteers, it is difficult for anyone not intimately connected with the organisation to distinguish between volunteers and paid staff based on their dress.

I think if you were to ask the public who are volunteers and who are paid it would be very hard for them to decide by just looking at their uniforms, very hard. (Participant)

On the face of it, this problem could appear to be solved in a simple and cost effective way by having the word 'volunteer' or 'trained volunteer' printed in large letters and clearly visible on their uniforms. This would clearly signify to the general public that those individuals are volunteers.

However, some participants pointed out that this approach would be met with a very negative response from some volunteer groups. The reasons for this negative response vary but generally volunteers expressed a need to look similar to their paid counterparts to reaffirm their credibility as well-trained professionals, not amateurs, particularly in the eyes of the police, local councils and others.

In some rural areas where people are well-known to each other, this may be less of an issue, as despite their dress, the community already knows them personally and therefore knows they are volunteers. However, in other rural areas, the influx of new residents moving from the city to take up the country lifestyle are unaware of the crucial role volunteers play in these communities.

It seems volunteers want the public to know they are volunteers, in order to appreciate that they are giving of their time to assist the public without monetary reward. However, they are often reluctant to consider a different distinctive style of dress that clearly 'brands' them as volunteers and not paid staff. This poses a considerable dilemma for organisations where both paid staff and volunteers are often undertaking similar roles in emergency situations.

Unlike their recovery counterparts, many response organisations do not have a nationally recognizable brand. Although they have their own distinctive State-based uniforms, the logos, names and uniforms of these organisations are different from those of their equivalent organisations in the other States. Without wanting to diminish the importance of the historical

identity of certain services highlighted in their own unique uniforms and service badges or patches, a common distinctive branding would allow the general public to identify with, and to be aware that these emergency management personnel are actually volunteers.

Participants had some suggestions of ways in which organisations might better inform the public that many of those people assisting them in emergencies were in fact volunteers.

One was for emergency management volunteers in certain situations to have 'volunteer identification' cards that were handed out to people on-site signifying that they were being assisted by volunteers. Another suggestion was to have portable signage that could be set-up when the situation was localized, identifying those assisting as volunteers.

Several participants also spoke of their volunteers wanting large and ongoing media campaigns, predominantly television based, reflecting their voluntary work. Indeed, one organisation has already embarked upon such a campaign.

But there is certainly talk about having a state wide, recognition publicity campaign run by the government that recognises ourselves - not recruiting, but a message going out about who we are. (Participant)

However, participants also noted that the cost of such TV-based campaigns can be extremely high and there are some difficulties in effectively showcasing all the wide variety of emergency management volunteers in a 30 or 60 second timeslot.

But what volunteers do you show in that ad? Who do you put in and you do you leave out? Who is the 'lead' group in the ad? They are good questions. (Participant)

Further, the cost-benefit analysis of this public awareness campaign must be carefully considered as people are constantly bombarded by advertising and are paying less and less attention to it all.

Some participants expressed the need for organisations that do have media departments to continue to find opportunities to obtain publicity for volunteers with as much effort as for their paid counterparts. However, it was also acknowledged that many volunteers are not

aware of the amount of work undertaken by their own marketing and media departments in larger organisations to attract media attention amongst many competing forces.

Perhaps as an alternative to traditional media outlets, ways can be explored to increase community awareness through the internet. This method is far less expensive and can reach an even wider, and growing, audience. Internet based publicity and marketing is about more than just the static websites of most organisations. Targeted public awareness campaigns could be considered through web marketing strategies involving free social networking sites of which many are a form of 'word of mouth' marketing and can include: blogs, article sites, podcasting and video-based sites such as YouTube. Further, their effectiveness can be measured in numerous ways, using free software beginning simply with 'page views', which tracks and records the number of people who view the page.

With young people, we are working with them, working on things that resonate with them - we have things on YouTube. (Participant)

Whatever form recognition takes, people do not become involved as emergency management volunteers only to be thanked and praised, but when they feel unappreciated and undervalued, they are unlikely to remain.

CHALLENGE FIVE – PEOPLE

Some people strengthen the society just by being the kind of people they are - John W. Gardner

Context of people-related challenges

Esmond and Dunlop (2004), in one of the largest studies undertaken on volunteer motivation involving 2,444 volunteers from across 15 organisations, reinforced what many other motivational studies had also found - that the most predominant motivation people have for volunteering is 'helping the community'.

The desire to help the community is common amongst emergency management volunteers (Lea, 2008). After all, in cases of emergencies and disasters, it is the power of people working together, in response or recovery, that is the foundation of this country's ability to deal with such events.

For many emergency management volunteers involved in on-going volunteering, the key people in their voluntary work are the other volunteers who make up their unit or group. These are people with whom they meet regularly, establish relationships and stand beside in times of crisis.

McLennan (2008:11) in discussing a range of studies with emergency management volunteers involved in response, found that the most often reported negative drawbacks of being a volunteer were associated with: "(a) perceived organisational failures to support the volunteering endeavour; and (b) poor relationships among members of the brigade or unit—usually associated with poor leadership and management of the brigade or unit. In turn, this poor leadership/management may stem from: (1) poor leadership skills of volunteers in leadership roles, and/or (2) poor management skills of career staff in roles involving supervision of volunteer brigades or units".

Discussion of people-related challenges

As many participants pointed out, local unit or group leaders play an integral role in the

culture at a local level – whether it is a welcoming, open environment or whether a closed clique has developed over time.

Participants recognise that many local groups or units are welcoming and inviting places for new and current volunteers. However, it is just the opposite in some groups or units.

There are definitely cliques out there, not many cliques but some groups are and it's been handed down to each generation and they are really closed. (Participant)

Further, since 'word of mouth' remains the number one method of volunteer recruitment people tend to ask other people similar to themselves to join. Over time, this can result in a lack of diversity in the group membership and the development of tight closed cliques.

Despite rhetoric to the contrary from the group itself, which is unable to see how insular it has become, it is far from welcoming to new volunteers. The group actively or subtly discourages the continuing involvement of certain volunteers and this insularity becomes a disincentive for future volunteers.

Research from the United States National Volunteer Fire Council (1993:26) sums up this situation: "...many volunteers who leave organisations shortly after joining report that they were not made to feel welcome. This is a problem which has been particularly noticeable among women and some ethnic minorities...volunteers who remain in the organisation do so primarily as a result of feeling that they 'were part of a family'."

It is the leadership at the local level that will ultimately determine the culture and climate of a particular group. How welcoming or unwelcoming a group can be is dependent on the attitude of those in leadership and the group members.

Further, the leader's skills, confidence and ability to handle differences in people, including differences of opinion, is critical for the diversity and therefore growth of the group.

I've seen brigades flourish under good leadership and collapse under poor leadership...good leaders are able to manage conflict, understand their people, make teams work, do succession planning, give meaningful work, value and recognise people, etc. I have

seen...brigades and units where they say “there’s no-one out there to recruit” when their numbers are low. In fact, in one particular place, we actually went out into the community and asked them (stopped people on the streets, went into the library and local shops) what they thought of their local brigade. The response was the people would join if they got rid of ‘that (expletive deleted) of a Captain’. I think that there is not actually a lack of people to recruit...overall, it’s the way (or not) recruiting is done and how new members are managed into their brigades/units. (Participant)

Participants explained that local units or groups can no longer afford poor leadership. This issue is compounded in organisations where the appointment and selection of leaders is based on tradition, nepotism and exclusion.

But I think where leadership is lacking or it’s gone astray, that definitely does affect retention. We had a few examples of that in recent years and really the onus has been on us as management in the organisation to step in and try to sort those issues as soon as we can because it became quite cancerous. (Participant)

Further, volunteers remaining in leadership roles for extended periods of time can be detrimental to the unit or group. Some participants suggested the option of an appointment term of between two to five years. After five years, it is time for the unit or group to experience a change in leadership styles, ideas and strategies to renew and refresh.

Some organisations have developed processes that allow for a fairer and more equitable selection of those to take on leadership roles at the local level. This has sometimes included other methods beyond the sometimes ‘numbers stacked’ elections and to include time specific terms of office for such leadership roles.

Participants also discussed the need for effective volunteer leadership training to be made available to those undertaking these leadership positions.

Many volunteers who have assumed leadership roles have received very little leadership training. The necessary skills have either been a natural part of their personal leadership style or simply don’t exist. Further, what leadership training they may have received is often based on leadership models that are specifically designed for dealing with paid employees.

Although there are numerous similarities, volunteers are not paid staff - they are different and the skills needed to attract, engage, encourage and retain volunteers are also different.

We are doing a lot of work in the leadership area - in enabling our future leaders - to give them the skills that are going to enable them to manage people a lot easier...you have to manage people and you have to manage it in an environment where they want to be there. (Participant)

Some participants noted that EMA Mount Macedon is developing a Leadership Training Program specifically for volunteer leaders. It is hoped that this training will be made available to volunteer leaders across all emergency management organisations.

We get key team leaders to go to EMA's training centre at Macedon to do specialist training, and we have been very grateful for EMA's initiative in rolling out some training through regional areas in what they call their extension courses. (Participant)

However, the training of volunteer leaders in a location-based program only partially addresses the issue and is limited in reaching all those in volunteer leadership roles. There is also a need for ongoing support, without which the effectiveness of a volunteer leadership training program can be severely limited. Some participants discussed this need for ongoing leadership training.

One of the most effective leadership skills and development techniques introduced into many business settings and some public sector organisations, is the use of regular on-going coaching services. This may be particularly pertinent for volunteer leaders who often operate in isolation and are scattered throughout the country.

Leaders are linked with a coach who provides coaching to them, usually over the telephone, on a fortnightly or monthly basis. The most effective models have involved independent skilled coaches, not attached to any organisations and therefore able to assist and advise their clients without any organisational pressures or prejudices. The coach and client work together on developing strategies and techniques to deal with issues involved in their ongoing leadership role.

Initial training programs, combined with on-going coaching, have proved a very successful combination for providing effective leadership training as well as support. This type of leadership development training is soon to be undertaken by Ambulance Victoria for their volunteer leaders in Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) in rural areas and may well provide a useful and cost effective model for other organisations.

Many participants also noted that the role of being a leader in a local unit or group can extract a large amount of personal time.

Just being a volunteer can take a lot of time, and then to be the leader as well, then you are talking about a lot more time – it can easily swallow up all your time. (Participant)

In essence, the leader is involved in the running of a small business or perhaps a better description may be a franchise of the main business. This requires time, effort and dedication on the part of the volunteer leader and all without payment.

Also associated with this leadership role is the requirement to deal with bureaucratic processes, administrative duties and associated paperwork. Some participants spoke of the ever increasing burdens felt by volunteer leaders of centralized policies and procedures that require a greater amount of administrative effort.

They get frustrated with bureaucracy like we all do. Bureaucracy is a beast, but it is about making them work for you, not work against you. But many volunteers do say that - “there’s just too much bloody paperwork”. (Participant)

Participants spoke of the need for ‘head office’ to be mindful and acknowledge that local units or groups have very limited administrative structures. Continually asking them to absorb more and more of an administrative role is placing increased strain on already time strapped volunteers and their volunteer leaders and becoming a disincentive to further volunteering.

That is one of the areas where we have actually also had complaints in the country, in that some of the volunteers that do the admin work are saying, Well, you know, we live 100 kilometres away from the unit, we come down for three hours of training or whatever, and

then you expect us to drive down another day for an hour or two to do the admin work and we don't have the fuel costs, we can't keep doing it. (Participant)

Some participants suggested that local units or groups may need to engage paid administrative or secretarial support, or recruit volunteers specifically interested in administrative roles, to overcome the paperwork burden.

There's a range of volunteers you can recruit for specific roles - the unit administrative officer, the unit secretary, the unit equipment officer and more. (Participant)

It must also be remembered that the organisational processes, procedures and structures should exist to support and assist the work undertaken by volunteers and their leaders. In fact, for many volunteers, it seems that the voluntary work they do has become secondary to the organisational bureaucracy with too much structure, too much control, over-regulation and bureaucratic 'red tape'.

We have tried to concentrate on our infrastructure and services, our IT systems, we have got a long way to go but we have recognised that we have got to make it as simple as possible for people to enjoy their participation, not to be bogged down with the paperwork, the bureaucracy, all those sorts of things, so people join for a number of reasons, and we are sure that it is not to do paperwork and to be overburdened with administrative expectations. (Participant)

A further people-related challenge identified by some participants involved the relationships between paid (career) and unpaid (volunteer) staff. Participants were concerned that their volunteers sometimes described examples of inequality and negativity towards them from paid staff, particularly when operating in very similar areas and roles.

If you have conflict between volunteers and career officers, it's the best way to get rid of volunteers. That is a very tricky balance and it's not something that sits comfortably with a lot of managers and it's not good. (Participant)

Stringer (2001:32) at the 2001 Summit also spoke of this issue: "It's...sometimes disappointing when we hear derision poured by professionals onto the emergency service

volunteers. We really need to have a better dialogue with those groups and organisations”.

Friction between paid staff and volunteers is not only confined to emergency management organisations. As ACOSS (1996:56) explains: “...it is not uncommon for friction to occur between volunteers and paid employees of an organisation...the importance of volunteers is disregarded or underestimated by organisations, and the level of support extended to volunteers by the organisation’s professionals is inadequate”.

Organisations that ignore tensions between paid staff and volunteers do so at their own peril. As Esmond (2001:18) explains: “Baby Boomers will take conflictual issues between paid staff and volunteers to a new level as they see themselves as equal to paid staff in any organisation. They will not ask for but demand equal treatment. Organisations that do not urgently implement strategies to get their ‘house in order’, where tensions and inequalities have not been worked through, and the contribution of both paid and volunteer staff is not equally appreciated, will find themselves without Baby Boomer volunteers - they will...vote with their feet and leave”.

Negative attitudes, adversarial relationships and inequalities between paid staff and volunteers, although not explicitly tolerated by organisations, nevertheless exist and can be extremely divisive at the local level. As some participants explained, the failure to act upon such lack of respect between paid staff and volunteers can have disastrous effects on volunteer numbers in the local units or groups.

And another thing that I think needs to be happening in some emergency areas is the fact that you have a percentage of paid staff, and you have a percentage of volunteers, paid staff have got to understand that because of the diverse backgrounds that volunteers have got, that they can have some really good ideas, and they should be respected and listened to. (Participant)

The importance of all of the people-related challenges already discussed is highlighted against the backdrop of the continuing need for organisations to attract and retain volunteers. Any factors which adversely affect their ability to do so must be addressed.

After all, “the ability of an organisation to recruit new members is one of the most critical factors in the operational efficiency of a volunteer-based organisation, because without

sufficient and appropriate people there would be no organisation” (Reinholdt and Smith, 1998:26).

Some participants noted that in some rural areas with declining populations, local response and recovery units or groups had combined to form a single entity that provided specific volunteer services to the community. Although not necessarily aimed at attracting new members, this consolidation of resources and people ensured the continued viability of some services in rural areas.

*In some of the country areas it had to be done, they just couldn't keep going, a few people belonging to and running both units, it didn't make any sense – they had to be combined.
(Participant)*

In order to increase volunteer numbers, organisations and their local units or groups, need to consider a range of recruitment options. One extremely effective strategy is to ‘target market’ specific groups of people in the community.

Esmond (2002:22) explains: “your recruiting will be even more successful if you target market. If you want to recruit a particular group based on cultural background, gender, profession, trade or life-stage, don't always use the same recruiting approach in the belief that ‘one size fits all’. What may attract Baby Boomers to volunteer may not be the same for Generation X and Generation Y. Do the research to understand your target group - how to access them, what they want from volunteering and whether your organisation is the right ‘fit’. Time spent in this planning will help you to customise your volunteering message and attract more volunteers”.

Participants in this research spoke about a range of groups that could be considered as part of a target marketing approach to increasing volunteer numbers. These included people from the indigenous communities, other culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups, and women. Participants felt their organisations had not fully explored strategies to tap into existing potential recruitment ‘pools’ such as these.

In relation to local indigenous groups or CALD groups, participants felt that their organisations had yet to effectively develop ways of understanding the needs of these groups

and therefore at the present time would find great difficulty in engaging them in any volunteering experiences.

We are looking at engaging the elders within the communities with non-English speaking backgrounds who are influential over there to the younger people within their communities. We are also looking at cultural barriers as well - different cultures do not understand what volunteering is all about - to different cultures that say how much do you get paid to volunteer? (Participant)

If organisations are to encourage diversity in their volunteer workforce and engage indigenous and CALD volunteers whose numbers have been quite small, then the need to develop cultural sensitivity and awareness will be imperative. This will involve very different methods of engagement and training. The SES in partnership with Adult Community Education (ACE) in NSW provides an example of a current training program being tried and targeted towards the indigenous community.

Organisations might need to consider being more flexible in their approach to training and look at different methods of training indigenous and CALD communities, i.e. using more visual methods, verbal assessment as opposed to written, on-line training and so forth. (Participant)

Some participants discussed gender based recruitment. Interestingly, many organisations in the response area had predominantly male volunteers and many of the organisations in the recovery area had predominantly female volunteers. Although not the entire solution, perhaps by discussion with each other both types of organisations could learn ways and strategies to attract and retain more volunteers of the opposite gender to their existing volunteer base.

Reinholdt and Smith (1998:42) in their research for EMA and CFA found that some of the disincentives that discouraged women were the “perceived nature of volunteer activities undertaken’ and ‘perceived boys club’.”

McLennan (2008:42-43) states: “McLennan, Birch, Beatson, and Cowlshaw (2007a) reviewed research conducted by the Bushfire CRC Volunteerism Project team relating to recruitment and retention of women volunteer firefighters. They concluded: Women are

deterred from volunteering because: (a) they fear not being welcomed in a male environment; (b) they believe that they are not suited to firefighting; and (c) they have child-care responsibilities”.

As some participants explained, progress is currently being made in these services to assist in the attraction of women firefighters including the Personal Protective Equipment (PPE); altering heavy and awkward equipment and more. However, issues around childcare and childcare costs often remain a barrier to volunteering for women.

For women, we're looking at the changes to clothing to make it more comfortable for them, and change rooms and other areas that make it easier for women to be involved. Also, arranging free childcare for them when they have to go out in emergencies – that is a big one too. (Participant)

Much can be learnt from other organisations such as Ambulance Victoria who have 60% women involved with their Community Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) and Surf Life Saving Australia who since the 1980s have progressively worked towards the active inclusion of both men and women in what was previously an exclusively male domain.

As an organisation, in the long past, it was very much seen as a male dominated or exclusively male activity right up until 1980, and that was when the females were allowed to become formal and active participants...the limitations in terms of opportunities for male and females that have now been negated. (Participant)

There are some encouraging signs, with the CFA increasing their female membership from 16% to 19% from 2004 to 2008 and the NSW RFS increasing their female membership from 18% to 20% from 2004 to 2007 (McLennan, 2008).

But as some participants explained, there is still a long way to go and enormous opportunities remain to develop targeted strategies to increase the number of women involved in emergency management response organisations.

I find it quite distressing that after all the talk we have had about gender imbalance and the need to involve women that this is still just tokenism. A recent advertising campaign (DVD)

uses only male interviewees with women having only passive background roles. Female role models need to be promoted and this is an opportunity lost in promoting role equity in the volunteer emergency services. (Participant)

Amongst the many people-related challenges, perhaps McLennan (2008:37-38) sums up from his recent research findings what is needed for all emergency management organisations: “Overall, the findings reinforce strongly a common-sense notion that a well-lead and well managed harmonious brigade, which has good links to its host community and cooperates with other agencies, and in which workloads are reasonable and training requirements flexible, is a brigade which will retain its members. The challenge is for volunteer fire services to facilitate more brigades having these characteristics”.

Recommendations

This report has highlighted five main areas of challenge: time, training, cost, recognition and people. The action taken by governments, organisations and volunteers themselves in response to these five areas of challenge will determine the future stability and growth in the numbers of emergency management volunteers. It is with action in mind that the following recommendations are now made for the continued attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

Project Team Recommendation

That a project team be established to develop and trial a range of innovative strategies highlighted in this report. These strategies should be undertaken as locally based initiatives across different States and in different locations. These will provide evidence-based case studies for others through ‘trial and error’ on the most effective methods to attract, support and retain emergency management volunteers.

The project team should comprise of seconded paid representatives in both the response and recovery area who work closely with volunteers and who are innovative and responsive to testing new and different methods. The project team should also include the services of outside consultants with independent expertise and knowledge in the recruitment and retention of volunteers and also internet marketing and technology based learning initiatives.

The project team can be a combined initiative of both the Commonwealth and State governments overseen through EMA.

The project team would trial and implement, with selected local units or groups, initiatives across the five main areas of challenge including the development of:

- different levels of volunteer involvement and time commitment
- other types of volunteering roles and tasks
- other forms of volunteering, e.g., family and corporate volunteering
- technology based learning tools to supplement other training
- a range of locally based volunteer recognition strategies
- targeted recruitment and retention campaigns for particular groups, e.g., women

It is this project team, in association with the work undertaken by organisations themselves, which will translate much of the research in this report into action in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers.

Specific Recommendations

The following are specific recommendations from this report pertaining to each of the five main areas of challenge:

Time

That organisations be aware of the need to be ‘time sensitive’ in all activities, tasks and duties they ask of their emergency management volunteers.

That consideration be given to the implementation of different levels of volunteer involvement and therefore different levels of time commitment for emergency management volunteers, particularly in response based organisations.

That consideration be given to the development of different roles and a variety of different and creative ways to engage potential volunteers, e.g., families, corporations and fly in/fly out employees.

Training

That support is given to the completion of the current review of the Public Safety Training Package and therefore the re-examination of volunteer training requirements.

That consideration be given to the provision of more quality specialist trainers and to explore different types of technology based tools to supplement and enhance the training for emergency management volunteers.

Cost

That a short-term taskforce is established to build upon the work already completed by a previous taskforce, to decide on suitable options for the equitable reimbursement of response and recovery based volunteers for reasonable out-of-pocket expenses and other costs associated with their voluntary work.

That a further form of financial assistance is also made available to all emergency management volunteers when involved in more prolonged and protracted operations dealing with disasters and emergencies.

That consideration and commitment be given to the proper resourcing of all emergency management volunteers, in both response and recovery based organisations, to effectively perform their volunteering duties.

That consideration be given to the development of a nationally consistent employer recognition/incentive scheme for employers of emergency management volunteers

Recognition

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

That consideration be given to an equality for all emergency management volunteers in

eligibility to receive the National Medal.

That consideration be given to development of a range of recognition strategies, beyond long service medals, at the organisational and local level to acknowledge and value the contribution made by emergency management volunteers.

People

That leadership training be developed for all volunteer leaders based on models that provide on-going training and coaching opportunities.

That organisational processes and procedures are continually monitored to support and assist the work undertaken by volunteers including the provision of administrative support as required at the local level.

That consideration be given to the development of targeted strategies to engage more members of specific groups including local indigenous groups and culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) groups.

Research

That consideration be given to a range of research projects to examine further these five areas of challenge. For example, that research be undertaken into the unexplored area of ‘initial interest prospects’: the large numbers of prospective volunteers who show an interest in becoming volunteers and after making contact, never return to become volunteers.

Conclusion

The adoption of this report and its recommendations will contribute to addressing the five main areas of challenge and enhancing the sustainability and growth in the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers into the future.

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