

VALUING VOLUNTEERS



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Australian emergency services face a range of **contemporary challenges**, including the **ongoing availability and effective utilization** of a skilled volunteer workforce

Volunteers are the **lifeblood** of Australian emergency services and constitute a **highly unique workforce** that provides an **essential public service**

Contemporary trends impacting on emergency services volunteering

- Growing pressures to balance family/work/social responsibilities and increasing competition for volunteers' time and commitment
- Increasing employment and income insecurity and rising demands for occupational mobility and flexibility
- Increasing demographic heterogeneity and an aging population
- Growing pressures on traditional member-based bodies to modernise and associated changes in governance, with potential implications for members' autonomy and sense of identity
- A generational shift in the patterns of social participation from altruistic/collective to egoistic/reflexive motives, with potential implications for sustained volunteer commitment
- The ABS 2014 General Social Survey has reported a marked decline in emergency services volunteering
- Some agencies have experienced an unsustainable level of volunteer turnover with major financial and capability implications

Valuing Volunteers Study – better understanding the primary motives for emergency services volunteering

- The research aims to identify the dominant and shared values of the volunteer workforce
- Values are enduring principles and beliefs that guide and motivate individual and group attitudes and actions
- Central premises of the research are that values play a pivotal role in the decision to commit to and sustain emergency services volunteering, and that volunteer commitment is conditional on feeling satisfied and valued
- The study will seek to determine the importance of individual, group and organisational values alignment for volunteer commitment and satisfaction
- In stage 1 of the study SES volunteers across NSW were invited to complete an anonymous survey that measures individual preferences for 10 basic human values and 4 higher-value clusters
- Stage 2 will explore how the values preferences revealed by the survey are manifest in the day-to-day work of emergency services volunteers and their degree of alignment with core organisational values

Research progress and preliminary observations

- A survey of NSW SES volunteers in late 2015 elicited 522 responses (representing a response rate of 6.5% of an estimated 8000 volunteers)
- The strongest values preferences were **benevolence** and **universalism**, components of the cluster of self-transcendence that emphasizes concern for the interests and welfare of others
- The 3rd strongest values preference was **self-direction** that represents individual creativity and freedom, possibly reflecting the high level of personal initiative required for such potentially demanding roles
- Preliminary analysis suggests there are statistically significant (and thus potentially important) differences in values and cluster preferences between males and females and between generations (but not between urban and rural)
- A better understanding of the dynamics and distinct needs of a highly motivated and skilled volunteer workforce should assist emergency services leaders to better align organisational and workforce values, with implications for recruitment, training, management and volunteer commitment

