



Volunteers and their supporters want more direct, regular access to research; shared learning networks can fill the gap – with time.

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‘Stuck in the middle with you’: Lessons learned from convening a shared learning network as an academic

INTRODUCTION

The Emergency Volunteering Shared Learning Network (EVN) was set up by researchers in September 2018 to:

- Enable and enhance the value of volunteering to Australian communities before, during and after emergencies;
- Promote the exchange of knowledge and experience amongst people who share this goal.

Key EVN resources were an e-newsletter, live webinars, and an on-line resource collection.

A recent report on the first seven months of the EVN shows who joined the network, what research they most want to access, and how they want to access it.

METHODS

The report uses data from: member sign-up forms, a new member survey (n=52), analysis of member engagement with EVN resources, webinar evaluation forms, and a member feedback survey (n=29).

RESULTS

By 31 March 2019, the network had 201 members. 37% were volunteers and 65% worked or volunteered with an emergency service agency (see Figs.1&2). 67% joined to learn and improve practice.

Members wanted to learn more about a wide range of topics (Fig. 3). On average, volunteers were the most engaged EVN members. E-newsletters and live on-line webinars were highly valued for accessing research:

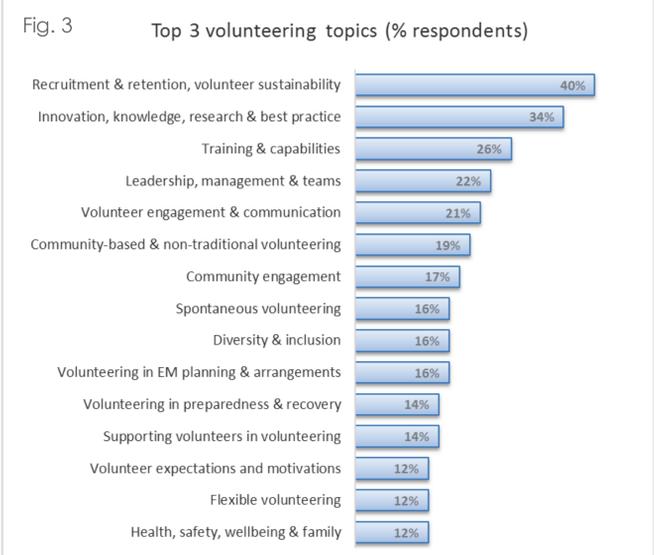
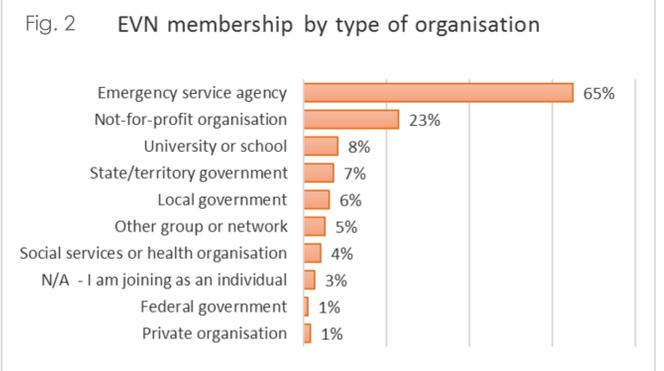
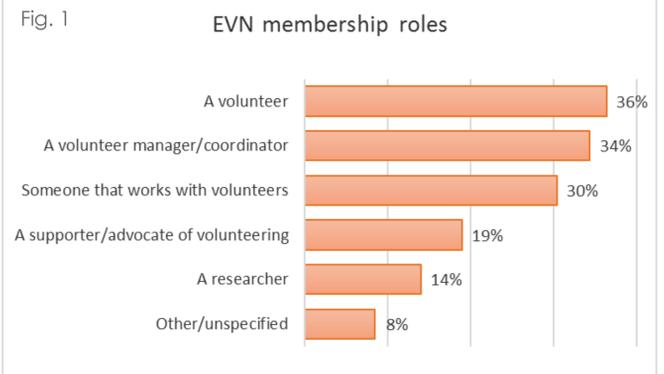
“Content has been really useful across all of my roles both in being a volunteer and in being responsible for other volunteer groups as part of my work.”

“Great to ... not have to travel 4hrs to get to a 1hr session. Was so good to not miss out on the opportunity to attend.”

However, few members contributed material to share unless directly prompted.

CONCLUSION

Volunteers and their supporters clearly want more direct, regular access to research than is provided by traditional research communication methods. Two-way exchange is difficult to foster virtually and there can be a high time commitment for conveners to grow a learning network. Despite this, CRCs and researchers should consider using virtual learning networks to improve research impact and industry engagement in fast-moving fields.



“I think there is an important role the EVN can fill ... By maintaining the current approach of a ‘network’ this sharing of knowledge will grow in its ability to be a two-way conduit for learning. As such, grassroots volunteer endeavours and experiences will be available to the research world without the need to activate selective research projects to seek out that insight, while volunteers and those who work with them will have access to insights on best practice which may be outside of their normal sources of internal updates.”
- Volunteer, emergency service agency



Sign-up: <http://bit.ly/2Wd9ji2>

