Recruitment and Retention Toolkit for Emergency Volunteer Leaders

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Collaborators and Sponsors
What makes emergency services volunteers happy?

What keeps emergency services volunteers coming back for more?

How do we encourage more people to volunteer for emergency services?

Mission 1 - **Find** answers to these questions:

- Organisational psychology:
  - Psychology applied to work (and volunteer) settings
- Inform management practice at the ‘coal-face’
- “What makes people ‘tick’?”
- “What makes volunteers tick?”
Mission 2 - Translate those answers into resources

Target Audiences

1. BGU Volunteer leaders – all services (change practices)
2. BGU Volunteers (learning and development)
3. District Officers (distribution)

Features

- User-friendly
- Relevant to emergency services volunteering
  - Case studies

Real-World Case Studies

Here are some examples of how BGUs have provided training support to their new volunteers:

- **Fremantle VMR**
  - Practices theoretical, observational and hands-on training. They assess volunteers multiple times before they are given the chance to do a supervised solo task.

- **Mundaring Shire BFB**
  - Ensures training is representative of what the volunteers will actually encounter. In addition to theoretical training, this brigade stresses the importance of observational learning, with new volunteers learning from senior volunteers whilst out on call-outs.

- **Walpole SES**
  - Facilitates learning opportunities within their BGU early on, which consolidates with formal DFES training in the following weeks.
Mission 2 - Translate those answers into resources

Target Audiences

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Features

- User-friendly
- Relevant to emergency services volunteering
  - Case studies
- Practical
  - Step-by-step guides
  - Tipsheets
  - Guidelines
  - Editable templates

Step-By-Step

What is involved in onboarding volunteers?

1. Registering your new volunteers.
2. Inducting your new volunteers.
3. Supporting your new volunteers.
4. Training your new volunteers.
5. Engaging your new volunteers.

Here is a good example of how to register a new volunteer

Sarah was very interested in volunteering as a firefighter so she went to her nearest brigade to register.

When Sarah showed up, the leader showed her around the unit and told her what it means to be a firefighter.

Sarah was given a registration form to fill out, which was processed within 30 days after she handed it in.

Because of this, Sarah felt very welcomed and that she was taken seriously by the brigade.

After she was registered, she received a Confirmation of Registration (COR).

By receiving her COR, Sarah felt confident and informed on what she needed to do next.

Here is an example of how NOT to register a volunteer

John has always been very interested in volunteering.

When John visited his nearest BDU, they told him a bit about the role, but did not tell him how to join.

John did not feel very wanted, but he asked for the registration forms and proceeded to fill them out.

When John handed in his paperwork to the BDU, his registration papers were not processed for 3 months.

In the end, John left the BDU because he did not feel valued as a new volunteer.
**Practical Tip Sheets**

**Tip Sheet 4: Interviewing Volunteers**

Structuring the interview
1. Start by introducing yourself and your position.
   a. Thank the prospective volunteer for their interest and making the time.
   b. Tell the applicant the purpose of the interview and how long it is expected to take.
   c. Let them know there will be a chance to ask questions at the end.
2. Start with an easy, open question as an ice-breaker
   a. E.g. "How did you hear about this opportunity?"
3. Move onto the main interview questions. These should cover 3-5 topics (e.g. teamwork, coping under pressure), with one or two questions per topic.
4. Finish by letting them know what the next steps in the process are for them and give them an opportunity to ask questions.

**Preventing conflict from impacting BGU functioning**

- Be aware of the common causes of conflict and address any that may be an issue at your BGU. Discuss these with your volunteers as they arise.
- Foster open and safe communication between all volunteers
- Try to keep BGU and personal lives as separate possible.
- Step in early to de-escalate potential interpersonal conflicts.

**Appeal to a common goal**

When volunteer personalities are clashing or conflicting goals seem to be causing trouble, it may be useful to remind volunteers why they are volunteering in the first place. Remind them why they are there and why they joined to start with, whether that was to help the community, learn new skills, or to protect their local area. Find something that resonates with both people and help them to see that they have a common goal to work towards.

**Make more resources available**

When conflict is caused by competition for resources, it can help to make more resources available or to redistribute resources if at all possible. This may mean getting creative in finding alternative resources or prioritizing resource allocation.

**Adjusting Your Leadership and Management Style**

*In an emergency...*
- Critical decisions need to be made quickly by knowledgeable and experienced people
- The outcomes can mean life or death

*Around your BGU on a typical night...*
- Decisions are less critical or time sensitive
- Receiving additional input from volunteers may be beneficial (see including and involving Volunteers)

**Restructure teams**

**Alter the physical environment**

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**Practical Guidelines**

**Telling/directing**

*What it looks like*
- Decisions made by the leader
- Roles and tasks defined and clearly supervised by the leader
- Mainly one-way communication
- Quick decision-making
- Less creativity

*When to use it*
- When the leader is the expert
- Team is inexperienced
- No margin for error
- Time is short

**Participating/supporting**

*What it looks like*
- Team is involved in routine decision-making
- Leader facilitates decisions (but still has the final say)
- More two-way communication
- Slower decision-making
- More creativity

*When to use it*
- When an issue is complex and you could benefit from additional knowledge and ideas
- Decisions are task-focused and not critical
- There is no time pressure

**Guidelines for providing constructive feedback:**

- **Focus on specific behaviours that can be changed**
  - Keep feedback impersonal (don’t target individuals)
  - Focus on what to improve and how to improve it
  - Turn feedback into a conversation, rather than imposing it on someone

**Focus on specific behaviours that can be changed**

- "I noticed that some corners were being cut at this point in the exercise. Make sure that when we do X, we are following this procedure: xyz"
- "The whole exercise was really messy. You need to make sure you’re doing things the right way"

**Keep feedback impersonal**

- "X was an issue in the team today" - "We need to work on x"
- "The whole exercise was really messy. You need to make sure you’re doing things the right way"
Practical Guidelines

Volunteer Selection and Onboarding

Expectations

Use this section to lay out the expectations that the BGV has for their volunteers. This includes (and is not limited to):

- Expected number of hours to commit for training
- Expected number of shifts to respond to, etc.

Roster Information

(if applicable)

Include information on:

- How the roster system works
  - How they can enter their time preferences
- How often they can expect to be on duty once they have completed their induction
- Also include team allocation information (if necessary here)
Provide support, not Directives!

Our Approach

- Step 1 – Understand the basics (psychological theory)
- Step 2 – Review literature
- Step 3 – Agree on a definition and boundaries
Our Approach

- Step 4 – Stakeholder consultation
  - Volunteers
  - BGU Leaders
  - District Officers
  - Associations

- Step 5 – Synthesis
- Step 6 – First Draft
- Step 7 – Consultation
Our Approach

- Step 8 – Production

- Step 9 – Distribution, communication, and training

Resources Available
Manage volunteer expectations when recruiting

“I really appreciate the great mateship that I have formed here.”

Resources in the Works – Volunteer Succession Management

**Evaluate:** Consider the current state of your volunteer workforce.

**Plan:** Identify the future needs of your BGU, and the volunteer roles/positions required to meet them.

**List:** List the necessary skills and capabilities for each role that are required.

**Assess:** Assess your volunteers based on their current status, interests, potential, strengths, and life situation.

1. **Introducing Future Leaders**
   - **Identify:** Identify a specific pool of potential talent to progress into leadership roles, and/or identify suitable alternatives.

2. **Transitioning Current Leaders**
   - **Transition:** Create arrangements to help existing leaders transition out of their current roles in progressive stages.

- **Retain:** Retain the knowledge and experiences of current leaders by creating systems in which their expertise is documented, and shared with future leaders.

- **Develop:** Actively develop volunteers, using progressions of experiences, to ready them for their next role.

- **Support:** Implement support systems to help volunteers with their role changes.