

VOLUNTEERING CHALLENGES FOR EMERGENCY SERVICES



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

Volunteers are the **lifeblood** of Australian emergency services & play a vital role in mitigating the human, financial & environmental losses from a range of natural hazards

Emergency services volunteers constitute **a highly unique workforce** that may be negatively impacted by changing social norms

Contemporary challenges for Australian emergency services volunteering

- Growing pressures to balance family/work/social responsibilities & increasing competition for volunteers' time & commitment
- Increasing employment & income insecurity & rising demands for occupational mobility & flexibility
- Increasing demographic heterogeneity & an aging population
- Technology-enabled changes in patterns of social networking
- Growing pressures on traditional member-based bodies to modernise & associated changes in governance
- A generational shift in the patterns of social participation from altruistic & collective to egoistic & reflexive motives, with potential implications for sustained volunteer commitment

Unique dimensions of Australian emergency services volunteering

- Emergency services volunteers provide an essential & vitally important public service
- Arduous & potentially hazardous emergency tasks can be physically & emotionally demanding
- A broad range of competency-based skills are required to undertake emergency tasks safely & effectively
- High levels of personal discipline & commitment are required to respond at short notice to demanding emergency situations
- In contrast to paid staff, volunteers retain the choice whether or not to commit to emergency call-outs at any hour
- Volunteer commitment & goodwill is constantly qualified & conditional on feeling satisfied & valued

Valuing Volunteers Study - understanding the primary motives for volunteering

- The study will utilize a well-established values evaluation framework to identify the distinctive & dominant personal & shared values that motivate emergency services volunteering
- Emergency services volunteers will be asked to complete an anonymous survey that measures values preferences

The primary research questions are:

- What are the distinctive shared values of Australian emergency services volunteers?
- To what extent & in what ways do these shared values impact on volunteer expectations of & commitment to emergency services organisations?
- In what ways can the formal values of emergency services organisations be better aligned with volunteer values in order to maximise workforce satisfaction, commitment & retention?

The ABS 2014 General Social Survey has estimated a decline in emergency services volunteers from 421,000 in 2010 to 217,100 in 2014

Basing an essential & highly demanding emergency response capability on a discretionary volunteer-based workforce is exceptional in a developed market economy

A better understanding of volunteers' motives could have implications for training, recruitment, teamwork, management & ultimately volunteer retention

