bushfire&natural HAZARDSCRC

SUPPORTING NEW VOLUNTEERS: A RESOURCE KIT FOR EMERGENCY SERVICE VOLUNTEER LEADERS

An online training package providing guidance on volunteer recruitment, onboarding and leadership

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We also acknowledge the kind and generous volunteers, researchers, and organisations who helped in the creation of this resource kit. Your contribution is very much appreciated and without your support and help, this resource kit would not have been possible.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The 2019-20 Australian bushfires ('*Black Summer*') caused a spike in volunteer inquiries. The devastating impact the bushfires had on the environment, animal populations, and the homes and livelihood of many Australians prompted considerable interest in volunteering for emergency services. Absent large-scale disasters, attracting and retaining volunteers are major challenges for emergency volunteer brigades, groups, and units (BGUs). However, the aftermath of the 2019-20 bushfires left volunteer leaders and managers with little guidance as to how they can properly onboard, support, lead, and manage the sudden influx of new volunteers and ensure that they are prepared for future bushfire seasons. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic that followed the bushfires shortly after left an increased appetite for online learning as face-to-face training was sometimes not possible.

Following the work of the *Enabling Sustainable Emergency Volunteering project*[1], as well as through research conducted with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES), the *Supporting New Volunteers: A Resource Kit for Emergency Service Volunteer Leaders* was proposed and created with the intention of providing both volunteers and staff members within emergency services organisations the guidance and tools to better support volunteer recruitment, onboarding, and leadership. These are research-based resources designed to complement and reinforce existing training and support available within emergency service organisations.

There are three modules available within the resource kit:

Module 1: Recruiting
- To support the effective planning, promotion, and selection of new volunteers.

Module 2: Onboarding
- To support new volunteers with registration, induction, support, training, and engagement.

Module 3: Leading
- To guide volunteer management and improve leadership skills, such as the sharing of responsibilities, providing feedback, recognising achievements, and dealing with conflict.

These modules contain resources that drew from real-life volunteer case studies and the available research evidence. The training information includes short (2-4 minute) training videos, volunteer interviews, 'tip sheets', checklists, case studies, thinking exercises, reflection exercises, and editable templates.
It is hoped that these accessible and practical resources will empower and support volunteer leaders and emergency service staff members in their mission to attract, support, manage, and retain current and future volunteers in BGUs.

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[1] See https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/resilience-hazards/3533

END-USER PROJECT IMPACT STATEMENT

Kathyrn White, *Department of Fire and Emergency Services, WA*

As end users for the newly created Supporting Your Volunteers: A Resource Kit for Emergency Service Volunteer Leaders, the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) can only offer congratulations and thanks to the Research Team.

When encouraging Volunteer Leaders to make use of resources like these, their basis in real-world evidence is a strong selling point that can help ensure they add real value to the already complex volunteer role they undertake. Supporting volunteers in their roles is often complex, and often requires them to take advantage of knowledge and be open to skill acquisition, which they may not necessarily see as essential. Importantly the benefit of this resource package is its versatility, practical application, ease of use, and ability to be shared, lowering barriers for people who may ordinarily resist work they consider extra to their volunteering role. At DFES we plan to make it available on our internal Volunteer Hub and also promote it widely among DFES staff who work with and manage volunteers, who can take advantage of the simple ways, like short informative videos, for teams to begin important conversations about elements of the volunteer lifecycle.

The resources address real need for volunteer teams and practical ways for leaders to improve their critical practices in relation to the good functioning and sustainability of emergency services volunteering over time.

PRODUCT USER TESTIMONIAL

Paul Wallworth, *State Emergency Service, VIC*

The Supporting Your Volunteers resources have arrived at a great time for VICSES. Our organisation is already focusing on developing the capability of our volunteers across a range of skills beyond traditional rescue skills, including managing a unit and providing leadership. The content in the resources will be a great addition to our other training initiatives.

PRODUCT USER TESTIMONIAL

Paul Wallworth, *State Emergency Service, VIC*

BACKGROUND

The *Supporting New Volunteers: A Resource Kit for Emergency Service Volunteer Leaders* resource was developed from the work completed through four individual collaborations between Curtin University, the University of Western Australia, and the Department of Fire and Emergency Service (DFES), and a fifth, large-scale project funded by the BNHCRC '*Enabling sustainable emergency volunteering*'. In all projects, the research teams consulted extensively with volunteers across multiple services and with the academic literature on volunteer motivation and retention. The four DFES collaborations led to the production of a set of volunteer management resources on: recruiting new volunteers, welcoming new volunteers, leading volunteers, and volunteer succession planning. The resources were in a (digital) 'paper' form and included guidebooks, tip-sheets, short case studies, and templates. They were designed with the typical volunteer leader/manager in mind and were highly accessible and practical, and were well-received by the volunteers across the services in Western Australia. The larger BNHCRC project included elements that further extended this work, leading to the development of a resource that helps volunteer leaders craft their recruitment messaging. Altogether, the work was conducted over five years, involved eight researchers and internship students, and has involved consultation with over 700 volunteers and 450 community members.

This project is a translation of the 'paper' resources into an accessible and scalable interactive digital format that includes a series of short mini-lectures, deeper case studies from emergency service groups in Western Australia, and translations of all of the paper materials into editable templates, allowing services to customise with their branding and language. We envision that the resource set could be hosted by any of the emergency services on an online learning management system, with volunteer leaders being free to access the materials, potentially in a structured/sequential manner (i.e., one module at a time), or ad hoc (i.e., jumping in and out as needed to look at materials relating to a single topic). Ultimately, these resources are intended to support volunteer leaders across the services in their recruiting, welcoming, managing, and retention of current and future volunteers. They have been developed with the end user firmly in mind.

The three modules are:
- **Recruiting Volunteers for the Emergency Services** – A resource to support BGU volunteer recruitment,
  - (embedded) **The Emergency Services Volunteer Recruitment Messaging Toolkit** – A tool to assist in tailoring recruitment messages for emergency management volunteer recruitment campaigns,
- **Supporting New Volunteers** – A resource on how to successfully onboard and socialise new emergency service volunteers, and
- **Managing Volunteers in the Emergency Services** – A resource on how to motivate and manage emergency service volunteers effectively.

Diversity and inclusivity themes are embedded in all three areas above.

OUTCOMES AND APPLICATION

This resource kit is intended to transform the aforementioned resource packages into a self-guided online learning format that will be accessible to any aspiring or current volunteer leader in the emergency services, as well as employees within emergency services organisations who are responsible for the recruitment and retention of volunteers. These research-based resources are designed to complement, reinforce, and be used alongside existing training and support available within emergency services organisations.

In principle, additional modules could be constructed in the future. The resource kit will allow individuals to learn from a selection of the following topics: volunteer recruitment, onboarding, and leadership.

The three key aims of the resource kit are to:
- Share the latest research findings on emergency volunteer recruitment and management that resulted from five years of research with the emergency services,
- Increase awareness and familiarise the targeted audience with useful tools and resources that were created and accumulated in previous projects, and that are both research-based and tested with the help of current emergency volunteers, and
- Empower and give support to the targeted audience in understanding and applying the resources and tools to improve volunteer recruitment, retention, wellbeing, and diversity within their organisations.

INTRODUCTION TO THE RESOURCE KIT

WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF THE RESOURCE KIT?

The resource kit provides support and guidance on how to better recruit volunteers, support new volunteers, and retain current and future volunteers through effective leadership. By using this resource kit, we hope that users will be better informed and supported in how they can improve their volunteer recruitment, diversity, wellbeing, and retention practices.

WHAT IS IN THE RESOURCE KIT?

The resource kit comprises of three modules full of interactive and engaging evidence-based resources that were developed in partnership with emergency service volunteers and their leaders. Examples of resources include:

Training videos	Volunteer interviews	Tip sheets	Checklists
Case studies	Thinking exercises	Reflection exercises	Templates

The three modules are as follows:
 ➢ **Module 1: Recruiting** – to support the effective planning, promotion, and selection of new volunteers.
 ➢ **Module 2: Onboarding** – to support new volunteers with registration, induction, support, training, and engagement.
 ➢ **Module 3: Leading** – to guide volunteer management and improve leadership skills, such as the sharing of responsibilities, providing feedback, recognising achievements, and dealing with conflict.

HOW WAS THE RESOURCE KIT DEVELOPED?

The modules are the result of five years of research conducted through the *Enabling sustainable emergency volunteering* project with the Bushfire Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC), in addition to collaborative work conducted with volunteers and emergency services organisations, primarily with the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) in Western Australia.

For more information on the research conducted through the *Enabling sustainable emergency volunteering project* with BNHCRC, please refer to the final report here: https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/publications/biblio/bnh-8139

For more information on the collaborative work conducted with DFES, please refer to a webinar recording where the research team discusses the research and toolkit created that contributed to this resource kit: https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/events/2020-recruitment-and-retention-toolkit

WHO IS THE RESOURCE KIT FOR?

The resource kit has been developed with the end user in mind. The content is designed to be accessible to the typical volunteer group leader. However, personnel that are involved in the development and implementation of new policies and practices supporting emergency volunteers with regards to volunteer recruitment, onboarding, and leadership may also find the resources helpful. For example, aspiring volunteer leaders may wish to consult the resources as they develop their leadership skills. Senior personnel such as District Commissioners, Area/District Officers, and individuals working in the strategic volunteering space may also find the resources helpful for identifying developmental needs among the volunteer workforce and for meeting those needs. The resource kit is also open and applicable to volunteers in all services and volunteer managers working outside of the emergency services. Volunteer leaders from outside of the emergency services may also find many of the materials helpful.

WHAT CONTENT IS AVAILABLE IN THE RESOURCE KIT?

Below is a breakdown of the content within each module. **Please note that the titles of the folder content are labelled with the topic folder number in the resource kit.** For example, the 'Myth vs. Fact' exercise under Topic Folder 2A. in Module 1: Recruiting is labelled as '2A. Myth vs. Fact.'

MODULE 1: RECRUITING

TOPIC FOLDER	TOPIC FOLDER NAME	FOLDER CONTENT
1.	**Introduction**	• Video 1: Introduction • Reflection exercise • Meet the volunteers from Wagin VFRS
2.	**Plan**	• Video 2: Plan
2A.	Make your volunteering group an appealing place to be	• Video 3: Make your group appealing • Myth vs. Fact
2B.	Prepare volunteer role descriptions	• Video 4: Prepare volunteer role descriptions • Thinking exercise and role description templates
2C.	Identify your recruitment targets	• Video 5: Identify your recruitment targets • Process exercise • Wagin VFRS – Identifying recruitment targets
2D.	Learn from the past	• Video 6: Learn from the past • Reflection exercise
2E.	Form a promotion strategy	• Video 7: Form a promotion strategy • Checklist – Form a promotion strategy • Wagin VFRS – Promoting volunteering to newcomers
3.	**Promote**	• Video 8: Promote
3A.	Getting your messaging right	• Video 9: Getting your messaging right • Video 10: Developing a recruitment message – Volunteer stories and pictures • Emergency Services Volunteer Recruitment Messaging Toolkit
3B.	Choosing your recruitment channels	• Video 11: Choosing your recruitment channels • Tip Sheet 1: Recruitment channels • Thinking exercise • Wagin VFRS – Choosing your recruitment channels
4.	**Select**	• Video 12: Select • Tip Sheet 2: Setting Expectations • Tip Sheet 3: Selection Process
4A.	Effective interviewing techniques and questions	• Video 13: Effective interviewing techniques and questions • Tip Sheet 4: Interview volunteers
4B.	Giving feedback to applicants	• Video 14: Giving feedback to applicants • Tip Sheet 5: Giving feedback to applicants • Case studies
5.	**Conclusion**	• Video 15: Conclusion

MODULE 2: ONBOARDING

TOPIC FOLDER	TOPIC FOLDER NAME	FOLDER CONTENT
1.	**Introduction**	• Video 1: Introduction • Reflection exercise • Meet the volunteers from Marine Rescue Cockburn
2.	**Step 1 – Registering your new volunteers**	• Video 2: Step 1 – Registering your new volunteers • Case studies • Marine Rescue Cockburn – Registering
3.	**Step 2 – Inducting your new volunteers**	• Video 3: Step 2 – Inducting your new volunteers • Thinking exercise • Marine Rescue Cockburn – Inducting
4.	**Step 3 – Supporting your new volunteers**	• Video 4: Step 3 – Supporting your new volunteers • Thinking exercise • Marine Rescue Cockburn – Supporting
5.	**Step 4 – Training your new volunteers**	• Video 5: Step 4 – Training your new volunteers • Thinking exercise • Marine Rescue Cockburn – Training
6.	**Step 5 – Engaging your new volunteers**	• Video 6: Step 5 – Engaging your new volunteers • Thinking exercise • Marine Rescue Cockburn – Engaging
7.	**Probation**	• Video 7: Probation • Probation DO'S and DON'TS
8.	**Additional Resources – Onboarding templates and checklist**	• Video 8: Additional Resources – Onboarding templates and checklist • Instructions for Induction Templates • The Induction Booklet Template • The Induction PowerPoint Presentation Template • Onboarding Checklist • Template for Letter of Active Engagement
9.	**Conclusion**	• Video 9: Conclusion • Onboarding Infographic

MODULE 3: LEADING

TOPIC FOLDER	TOPIC FOLDER NAME	FOLDER CONTENT
1.	Introduction	• Video 1: Introduction • Reflection exercise • Meet the volunteers from Northshore SES
2.	Influencing volunteers	• Video 2: Influencing volunteers • Tip Sheet 1: Influencing volunteers • Case studies
3.	Sharing knowledge and information	• Video 3: Sharing knowledge and information • Tip Sheet 2: Sharing knowledge and information • Thinking exercise
4.	Sharing responsibilities	• Video 4: Sharing responsibilities • Tip Sheet 3: Sharing responsibilities • Thinking exercise • Northshore SES – Sharing responsibilities
5.	Including and involving volunteers	• Video 5: Including and involving volunteers • Case studies • Northshore SES – Including and involving volunteers/ Embracing diversity
6.	Providing feedback	• Video 6: Providing feedback • Tip Sheet 4: Providing feedback • Case studies
7.	Receiving and using feedback from volunteers	• Video 7: Receiving and using feedback from volunteers • Video 8: Using non-verbal signals • Tip Sheet 5: Receiving and using feedback from volunteers • Reflection exercise
8.	Recognising achievements and contributions	• Video 9: Recognising achievements and contributions • Tip Sheet 6: Recognising achievements and contributions • Reflection exercise • Northshore SES – Recognising achievements and contributions
9.	Dealing with conflict	• Video 10: Dealing with conflict • Tip Sheet 7: Dealing with conflict • Case studies
10.	Succession planning and developing the next generation	• Video 11: Succession planning and developing the next generation • Northshore SES – Developing the next generation/ Transitioning senior volunteers
11.	Adjusting your leadership and management style	• Video 12: Adjusting your leadership and management style • Case studies
12.	Conclusion	• Video 13: Conclusion

HOW CAN I USE THIS RESOURCE KIT IN MY EMERGENCY SERVICES ORGANISATION?

The videos and resources provided within the resource kit are free, open for access, and can be adapted by emergency services organisations to suit their own contexts and training environments.

If you have any feedback or questions about the resource kit, please do not hesitate to contact our research team at the email addresses provided in the last page of this document.

WHERE CAN I FIND THE RESOURCE KIT?

The complete resource kit can be accessed from the following link:
- https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/resources/volunteer-leader-resource-kit

To access and download specific modules, please use the links below:
- **Module 1: Recruiting** – to support the effective planning, promotion, and selection of new volunteers.
  - Link to module: https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/resources/volunteer-leader-resource-kit/module-1
- **Module 2: Onboarding** – to support new volunteers with registration, induction, support, training, and engagement.
  - Link to module: https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/resources/volunteer-leader-resource-kit/module-2
- **Module 3: Leading** – to guide volunteer management and improve leadership skills, such as the sharing of responsibilities, providing feedback, recognising achievements, and dealing with conflict.
  - Link to module: https://www.bnhcrc.com.au/resources/volunteer-leader-resource-kit/module-3

HOW SHOULD I USE THE RESOURCE KIT IN MY ORGANISATION?

To use this resource kit effectively, please take a look at the videos and resources provided in each module. Then, consider how each video and resource will add to the training and information provided within your emergency services organisation, and how it can be best utilised to enhance and add to the support you are already providing to your volunteers.

The resource kit is recommended to be integrated with existing training programs you currently have within your organisation. **The tips and strategies outlined within the videos and resources should be framed as recommended activities, rather than compulsory activities for volunteers and EM staff members.** Some volunteering groups may already have great recruitment, onboarding, or leadership practices in place – we do not want these resources to replace things that are working well! Instead, please highlight that this resource kit is provided for guidance and support, and maybe a source of new ideas, rather than as a set of mandatory practices.

WHAT IS THE RESOURCE KIT NOT INTENDED TO DO?

The information and resources provided are <u>not</u> intended to replace the existing information provided within your emergency services agencies. Rather it serves the purpose of supporting and extending the existing strategies and systems currently in place within your organisation, particularly in areas where there might be gaps or there are topics that can be improved with evidence-based resources.

All resources can be adapted and amended to fit existing policies or training programs within emergency services organisations. While the videos provided are difficult to amend, they were created to provide information and tips that could be generalised to all emergency services and organisations. However, if there is information in the videos that conflicts your practices, it is recommended that these conflicts are highlighted and the resources amended.

DO I HAVE TO INCLUDE ALL OF THE TOPICS AND MODULES?

We recommend that you include all modules and all topics within each module. While each topic and module are separate from one another, each were included based on their importance and relevance to volunteers in the emergency services.

DO VOLUNTEER LEADERS NEED TO COMPLETE ALL TOPICS IN EACH MODULE?

No – while we do recommend that users of the toolkit complete all topics in sequence, they have also been designed to allow people to jump into each topic independently.

DO VOLUNTEER LEADERS NEED TO COMPLETE ALL MODULES?

No – again, while we recommend users complete all modules in sequence, each module can be learned on its own and separately from the others.

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UTILISATION AND IMPACT

Below we outline the utilisation potential and recommendations we have for emergency services organisations.

UTILISATION POTENTIAL AND IMPACT

The resources created in collaboration with DFES have been used and workshopped with volunteers within their organisation prior to the creation of this resource kit. End-users from DFES have highlighted to the research team the success these workshops have had with regards to giving volunteers the support and guidance they need with recruiting, onboarding, and leading volunteers.

Using the resource kit, the research team is expecting that the impact and success of these resources will reach beyond a single organisation to be relevant and impactful to volunteers and EM staff members across Australia. We have designed the resources so that they can be easily integrated with learning management systems or volunteer hub-like portals.

TRACKING UTILISATION AND IMPACT

To measure the use and impact of this resource set, we recommend doing the following:
- If the training is conducted through workshops, online, or face-to-face, ask for feedback from volunteers and EM staff directly on the materials and ask for recommendations for improvement,
- If the training videos and volunteer interview videos are uploaded on a video or streaming platform, such as YouTube, track the number of views, and engagement statistics (e.g., length of time a viewer spends on each video),
- Include a completion survey at the end of each module to gain feedback on what topics or resources were most useful for volunteers and EM staff members, and what can be improved, and
- Provide feedback you have received to us about the topics or resources that were most useful, what could be improved, and what other topics volunteers and EM staff members would like to see as it would be useful for us to know for future projects or additions to the resource kit.

By tracking the use and impact of the resource kit, you can assess what topics, modules, or resources are most relevant to your volunteers and EM staff members, and can learn what improvements need to be made in how the resource kit was presented and how the training was delivered. In doing so, you can improve how the resource kit is used in your organisations to better support how you recruit, onboard, and lead volunteers.

NEXT STEPS

The next step following the completion of this project is to promote this resource kit to volunteers and emergency services organisations across the nation. With the help of the new research centre, Natural Hazards Research Australia, our research team is expecting to deliver a webinar in early 2022 that will allow end-users to walk through the resources and answer any questions they may have on the resource kit and how best to use it.

If there is interest from volunteers or from staff members in emergency services organisations, there is the potential to expand the resource kit to include other topics, such as succession planning, workforce planning, and diversity. This can be discussed at a later stage.

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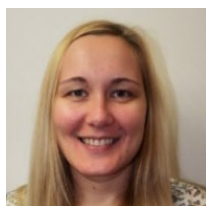
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