




PROGRAM D

→ **Capability Building in Volunteers**

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PROGRAM D : Bushfire CRC Volunteers Project D3

→ **First Step - Literature Review**

- Searched the existing literature on fire service volunteering from Australia and overseas
- Established a library of over 500 items of published literature
- Developed an Endnote database to catalogue the library
- Database distributed periodically to other CRC researchers in related fields, particularly Program C

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Literature Review findings

- Historical data on numbers of volunteer firefighters is of limited reliability
- Empirical research into volunteer firefighters is sparse and largely confined to the last decade.
- Research to date has been broadly based - little in-depth research on specific areas impacting on volunteerism



Areas needing further research

Certain areas were identified as requiring more detailed research

- Female volunteers
- Employers of volunteers
- Families of volunteers
- High losses amongst new recruits
- The views of the community



Other Areas for Research

- Recruiting Indigenous Australians
- Recruiting from CALD groups
- Self-employed volunteers



Female Volunteers

Overseas research:

- Focuses mainly on females in career fire fighting
- Reports high levels of sexual harassment and discrimination





Our work on Female Volunteers

- Surveys of female volunteers in SA and ACT fire services
- We found comparatively low levels of sexual discrimination and harassment
- We found comparatively high levels of satisfaction; but
- Women have difficulties getting PPE the right size or shape
- Some women have trouble reaching equipment stored high in truck lockers
- Lack of toilet and changing facilities



Employers of Volunteers

- There is almost no literature on this subject but there is some literature in the related area of "corporate social responsibility"
- The comfort zone for corporate giving to all charities is around 1% of pre-tax profit in donations or employee time
- Corporates prefer to give employee time in an orderly fashion to minimise disruption
- It is unclear how tolerant corporates are of freeing employees randomly and spontaneously for fire calls



Our work on Employers of Volunteers

- Currently surveying employers throughout NSW for RFS looking for:
 - Attitude to employees who volunteer with fire service
 - Existing policy or provisions in EBAs etc.
 - Any problems experienced or anticipated
 - Perceived benefits of employing volunteers
 - How important is recognition of employer's support?
- Will report in the next few months



Families of Volunteers

- There is evidence that families experience negative outcomes from having a family member who is a firefighter
- However, the evidence is very limited and based mainly on career firefighters
- A recent survey of volunteer firefighters in Pennsylvania found that on average they spend 16 hours/week on the fire brigade
- Firefighting is likely to place a range of burdens on families



Our work on Families of Volunteers

PhD candidate Sean Cowlshaw is exploring the impacts of firefighting on the families of volunteers. His methodology involves:

- Conducting interviews with CFA brigade support staff (BASO's) and Operations Officers
- Surveying volunteers and their partners
- Asking volunteers and their partners to keep daily diaries over the course of a fire season



High Turnover of New Recruits

- It is common experience, here and overseas, that about 80% of recruit volunteers leave the fire brigade within about 2 years
- This "churn" rate places considerable time and cost pressures on agencies and existing volunteers

→ **Our work on the High Turnover of Recruits**

- We are conducting surveys with CFA and FESA of new recruits at 6, 12 and 24 to months after joining to track their satisfaction
- Questionnaires are being sent out to ALL new recruits every month for 2 years
- The CFA survey started a year ago
- Preliminary report submitted to CFA

→ **The Community**

- The community's knowledge and opinion of the fire services impacts on recruitment
- We conducted a large survey of communities in the NSW Grain belt last year with RFS



The Grain Belt Community Survey Barriers to Volunteering

1. Not enough spare time to volunteer (45%)
2. Can't look after own family/property if off somewhere else with the fire brigade (40%)
3. Not suited to firefighting due to age/illness/disability or temperament (40%)
4. Concerned about injury/psychological trauma/being sued (30%)
5. Employer or family wouldn't be happy about me attending fires (25%)
6. Concerned about costs like petrol (18%)



The Grain Belt Community Survey Barriers to Volunteering

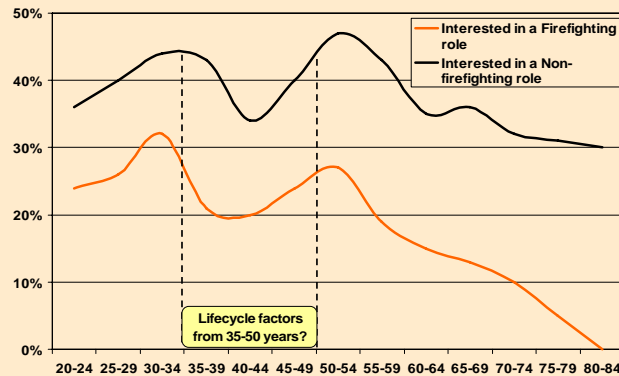
17% of the community don't see the need for a local fire brigade





The Grain Belt Community Survey Barriers to Volunteering

People aged 35-50 are 1/3 less interested in volunteering probably due to family, career or homemaking commitments



The Grain Belt Community Survey What would make it easier to volunteer?

1. Information sessions about volunteering (61%)
2. Opportunity to develop skills or qualifications useful outside the fire brigade (57%)
3. Publicise intake dates for new recruits (56%)
4. An orientation into the brigade (52%)
5. Invite me personally to join (47%)
6. Assistance with child care (31%)



Other Activities

- Have issued a number of occasional reports relating to volunteerism
- Had several articles published in peer-reviewed journals
- Presented at a range of gatherings of volunteers



Into the future:

- Research with agencies through 2006-7
- Develop new initiatives for recruitment and retention with agencies
- Evaluate these new initiatives and adjust