

Why do they volunteer? Research into reasons for becoming a volunteer firefighter.

Jim McLennan

La Trobe University, Bushfire CRC
Volunteerism Project

Charles King
CFA

Robert Jamieson
La Trobe University, Bendigo Campus

Inaugural Bushfire CRC Conference
Perth, October 2004

© Bushfire CRC Ltd. 2004



**Bushfire CRC Program D:
“Protecting people and property”**

Dramatic, ongoing developments in wildland firefighting technology:

- Sensing and imaging
- Fire modelling & prediction
- Communication
- Suppression
- Crew protection & safety



--But wildland fire fighting remains a fundamentally human activity:

- Technological resources are of little use without the requisite “human resources”!
- The major component of the human resources needed to combat wildland fires is rural fire services volunteers



Potential threats to rural fire services volunteer numbers:

- Population movements
- Ageing population
- Generational changes in values
- Changes in the economy
- Structural changes in the nature of work
- Changes in family structures

(cf Rheinholdt, 1999/2000)





Current 'headaches':

- Small, rural communities with static, or declining, and ageing populations
- New housing developments in previously rural locations
- “Busy” brigades on the urban/rural fringes, 9am-5pm weekdays.

bushfire CRC



Why do they volunteer? Reasons for becoming a fire service volunteer?

Aitken (2000) FESA-WA [N=542]

- Sense of community 50%
- Social/mateship 13%
- Novelty/new skills 9%
- Competitions/training 6%
- Duty 6%
- Interest 6%
- Protect lives and property 6%

bushfire CRC



Reasons for volunteering (2):

Palmer (2000) SAFECOM [N=376]

- Serve community 84%
- Meet community need 82%
- Interest/satisfaction 61%
- Community obligation 60%
- Learn new skills 56%
- Meet new people 38%

bushfire CRC



Reasons for volunteering (3):

Clancy & Holgate (2004) CFA [N=110]

- Serve community 39%
- Community involvement 14%
- Self-development 12%
- Gain skills/job prospects 12%
- Excitement 8%
- Friends in brigade 4%

bushfire CRC



Motivational “drivers”?

- A mix of community-oriented motives dominating and providing a context for individually-oriented motives being fulfilled.

Implication for recruitment?

- Activate a personalised sense of community responsibility in individuals and channel this into joining a local brigade.

bushfire CRC



CFA’s “If the hat fits” campaign in Victoria’s West

- Corporate support: promotional material, 30 sec video
- Regional support: (electronic and print media, admin. Assistance)
- Local brigade control and ‘ownership’ (mail drops, meetings)
- Train quickly and deploy

---Good evidence of success!

bushfire CRC



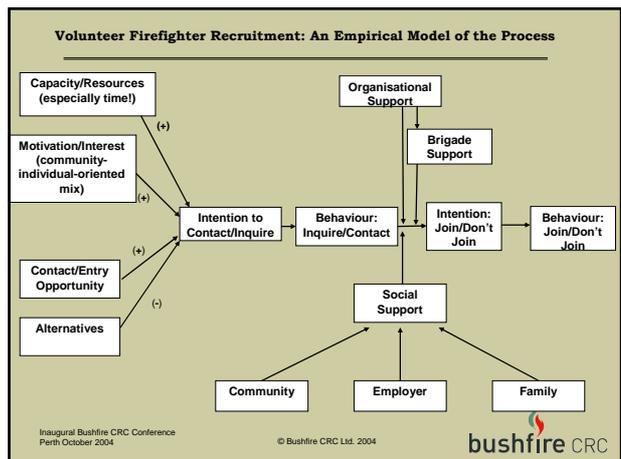
This formula implies a well-functioning community

- What if the community’s “social capital” is deficient or distorted in some ways?

[Social capital: “networks, together with shared norms, values, and understandings which facilitate cooperation within or among groups” [OECD 2001]

--Implies a need to go beyond “motives” of potential volunteers in our thinking about volunteer recruitment:

bushfire CRC





Network Linkages:

- “bonding”: with ‘like’
- “bridging”: with ‘unlike’





Fire services/brigades and:

- Generations
- Other ‘cultural communities’
- Women
- Families of volunteers
- Employers of volunteers

Plus: the way fire services/brigades “do things”





The Bushfire CRC Volunteerism (D3) Research Agenda:

---Working with rural fire services to find out more about:

- Volunteering in rural communities
- Volunteering in new ‘fringe’ communities
- Employers of volunteers
- Women volunteering
- Families of volunteers
- Volunteering from other cultural communities

