

Arresting the decline in volunteer numbers: The New Member Tracking Survey

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Bushfire CRC, Project D3, Enhancing the recruitment & retention of volunteers

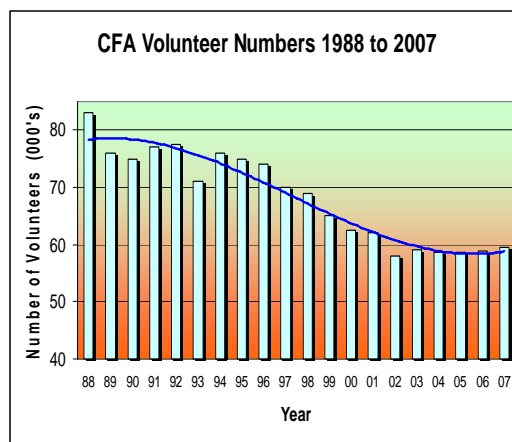
The problem: Declining volunteer numbers (25% over 16 years)

The traditional approach: Exit surveys of volunteers who have left the fire agency

Limitations: Ex-members are hard to find and may not be helpful

The Bushfire CRC approach: The volunteerism team partnered with the Victorian Country Fire Authority (CFA) to survey all new recruits over a year, at 6 and 12 months after joining. This survey focused on finding out what motivates recruits, track how they're doing and develop a profile of who stays and who leaves.

The outcome: Volunteer numbers in CFA have levelled off and are starting to rise.



CFA reports "...a continued upward trend in membership. The total number of volunteers at 30 June 2007 was 59,509 and new member trends continued to increase by 1.12% in the last 12 months." 2007 Annual Report.

Research Findings:

The main reasons people join are; personal development, to learn new skills and to support the community. Certain demographic groups relate more strongly to specific motivations and barriers.

- The CFA website could be more recruitment-oriented.

- The state-wide 1800 recruitment line was not working to the satisfaction of callers.

- About 15% of respondents were concerned about risks such as; being sued, injury or death, or loss of income from incapacitation. Self-reported knowledge of what CFA does to mitigate these risks was poor.

- The needs of employers and families are the main limiting factors for volunteers.

Agency Responses:

- ✓ Modify recruitment advertisements to target demographic groups emphasising the benefits most relevant to those age groups. This strategy was used successfully by CFA and also QF&RS Rural.

- ✓ CFA updated its website with:
 - More information about CFA
 - An on-line enquiry form (very popular).

- ✓ CFA improved procedures on its 1800 recruitment enquiry line.

- ✓ The CFA website and the Welcome to CFA induction book were updated to include information about how CFA manages these risks for the benefit of volunteers.

- ✓ An employer recognition program is being developed with involvement of the Associations.