

VOLUNTEER EXPECTATIONS & EXPERIENCES

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A range of complex forces are converging to drive major changes in the demands on and delivery of emergency services in Australia. In the face of an increase in the frequency and severity of emergency events, various individual, organisational, social and economic forces are impacting on the capacity to quickly mobilise a skilled volunteer workforce

Individual/personal forces

- Increase in the diversity & complexity of family/work/social demands
- Increased employment & income insecurity, growing demands for occupational mobility & flexibility
- Growing emphasis on individual needs & self-development
- Episodic rather than sustained patterns of social engagement
- Growing individual expectations for interest, challenge, opportunity, choice, benefit, participation, acceptance, respect, valued, training, competent & effective leadership (satisfaction & quality of experience)

Organisational forces

- Professionalization & corporatisation
- Public accountability & transparency
- Intense public & media scrutiny
- Funding constraints & cost-benefit
- Demands for workforce planning
- Explicit service delivery standards
- Code of conduct & ethics
- Application of risk management
- Formalisation of legal & corporate governance obligations (workplace health & safety, duty of care, equal opportunity, promotion on merit)
- Competency-based training
- Decline in active volunteers & rise in annual volunteer turnover (SES)

Social & economic forces

- Demographic changes - population growth & mobility, increasing cultural diversity & heterogeneity, aging
- Generational shift from collective to reflexive modes of social participation
- Pressures to quantify the economic value of public services & demands for stringency in funding
- Competitive pressures on businesses to reduce non-profit-related activities
- Structural changes in patterns of employment – gender balance, fall in low-skilled blue collar jobs, rise in semi-skilled service roles, rise of casual & part-time work & extended hours



Research project

Undertaken under the auspices of the BNHCRC's sustainable volunteering cluster, the research will use a range of qualitative tools including self-report surveys, focus group consultations, development of multiple case studies & a number of participative action research interventions in order to explicate:

- Why do people commit to emergency service roles & what are their ongoing expectations (motives)?
- What are the workplace experiences for volunteers in emergency service roles (organisational cultures)?
- How do different motives & cultures interplay in the volunteer workplace & what are the implications for effective leadership, training, teamwork, commitment, morale & retention?

The research will apply a psychological contract framework to examine the interaction of the collective-reflexive individual motivation & traditional-professional organisational culture continuums, & explore the implications of different combinations for volunteer satisfaction, commitment & retention