

THE WAY AHEAD
Development of effective Recruitment and
Retention Strategies for Volunteer Fire Services



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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

There are increasing difficulties for Australian fire agencies to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. Volunteer organisations throughout the country are sharing this difficulty.

The purpose of this research project was

1. To consult with Fire Service Agencies around Australia regarding current recruitment and retention issues, and to obtain information on strategies they have in place for recruiting and retaining volunteers.
2. To examine strategies used in the United States of America for recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters.
3. Develop recommendations for strategies and programs, which could be introduced by Australasian fire authorities in the recruitment and retention of volunteers.

A survey was utilized to identify volunteering statistics currently in Australia and the strategies agencies currently have adopted. The survey identified several important factors including:

1. 10-15% of volunteer brigades are below minimum crewing standards.
2. The average age of volunteer firefighters is 41.
3. 80% of the agencies surveyed are concerned about possible future problems in recruitment and retention.
4. The average length of service of a volunteer is 7.5 years.

The survey also identified a lack of research into volunteer issues by Australian fire agencies. This in turn might indicate a need to review current volunteer policies after undertaking such research.

United States strategies which were researched included a) the impact of leadership on volunteer recruitment & retention, b) brigade image, c) training, d) time demands, e) recognition of volunteers, f) incentives for volunteers, and g) the 'fun' factor.

This research resulted in 15 recommendations on selection processes, recruitment and retention networks, funding, incentive schemes, recognition strategies, training, junior programs, recruitment campaigns and social activities.

The aim of this paper is to create further discussion and foster a more detailed examination of existing volunteer recruitment & retention practices.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to identify problems within Australia in relation to Volunteer Recruitment and Retention and to study alternative methods to sustain the effectiveness of our volunteer fire service. I consulted with Fire Services from around Australia regarding current recruitment and retention issues and to obtain information on strategies they have in place for the recruitment and retention of volunteer firefighters. Strategies used in the United States for recruiting and retaining volunteer firefighters were then examined in order to formulate recommendations on the possible adoption of those US strategies and programs that could be applicable within an Australian context.

The areas, which I visited on my trip to the United States, were:

- 1) Loudoun County, Virginia
- 2) Prince William County, Virginia
- 3) Fairfax County, Virginia
- 4) Frederick County, Maryland
- 5) German Township Volunteer Fire Department, Evansville Indiana
- 6) Knight Township Volunteer Fire Department, Evansville, Indiana
- 7) Ohio State Fire Marshal,
- 8) Prince George's County, Maryland
- 9) Suffolk County, New York
- 10) Nassau County, New York
- 11) Indiana State Fire Marshal
- 12) National Fire Academy, Emmitsburg, Maryland
- 13) International Association of Fire Chiefs
- 14) Volunteer Fireman's Insurance Service

During my visit to these areas I met with Recruitment and Retention Coordinators, Chiefs, Captains, Lieutenants, Firefighters, Marshals and CEOs. I also visited the Country Fire Authority in Victoria and the Country Fire Service in South Australia.

General factors that tend to adversely impact on the recruitment of volunteers in the United States include such things as-

- a) a reduced sense of community in many towns and villages;
- b) inability of volunteers to live in the areas in which they serve
- c) ineffective marketing by fire agencies; &
- d) increased family and work commitments amongst potential volunteers.

The retention of volunteer firefighters did not appear to be as critical an issue for American Fire Agencies as volunteer recruitment. United States fire agencies have some well-funded and organized programs geared towards facilitating the retention of their volunteers. The most important factors in volunteer retention in the United States appeared to be related to issues associated with transient local populations and poor volunteer leadership.

Recognition must be given to numerous people who have assisted me in the undertaking of this research. Firstly all the people who hosted me whilst

travelling abroad and who took time out from their busy schedules to discuss volunteer issues with me and provide tours of their stations and regions. Thanks to Jim Steffens for his co-ordination and advice in regard to contacts in the United States. Special thanks to Alan Aitken, my mentor who has assisted me in this project for many months, his advice, knowledge and experience has been invaluable. Thanks also to Murray Bawden, Lyndel Hunter, Roz Long and FESA for their support.

It must also be recognized that this project would not have been possible without the funding support of Mr. Jon Bon Jovi and the work of the AFAC Volunteer Sub Group.

BACKGROUND

The United States Fire Service has a similar demographic profile to Australia. 74% of United States' fire fighters are volunteers. The volunteer fire service provides fire protection to 95% of the total landmass and 41% of the population in America. In general, volunteer fire departments are funded to higher levels than their Australian counterparts. In most cases each volunteer fire department has no affiliation with a state or federal regulatory authority. The departments are usually incorporated fire protection companies who contract their services to the County or Local Government in which they serve. Advantages that tend to flow from these types of arrangements are -

- i) increased local autonomy in the control and distribution of budgets; &
- ii) the management of local brigades and even departments, by and for volunteers which generally results in high volunteer moral and participation.

On the down side It must be noted that there is, as a consequence, little or no coordination at large scale incidents attended by more than one department or station in some areas. Further, there can also be consequent difficulties in the adoption of national or even minimum across the board standards, or in having a variety of fire departments adopt best practice with respect to operational practice, recruitment and retention.

In most cases it was standard practice for departmental officers to deliver training at a local level. It was rare to find a state training facility. This tended to lead to duplication of resources and an absence of top quality training establishments, due to the absence of large funding pools that would have made such facilities possible. Individual departments quite rightly concentrated their funding on their own facilities, but the outcome was that such facilities were generally not well equipped. Nevertheless, the training facilities at the Ohio State Fire Marshal Office, Nassau and Suffolk County were exceptions to this, both being well equipped. These two cases represented excellent examples of the benefits of regional co-ordination.

Training requirements on volunteers appeared to be generally higher than those required in Australia. In general terms, in most of the United States, volunteer fire fighters are trained to the same levels as career fire fighters. This has the advantage of creating a better relationship between career and volunteer fire fighters; but on the down side imposes training requirements, which tend to impact adversely on volunteer recruitment and retention.

The basic fire-fighter-training program in most areas that I visited, was approximately 200hrs for firefighter training, 205hrs for officer training and another 370hrs for HAZMAT and other specialist training. Most fire departments required Firefighter 1 training before a fire fighter could assume an 'active' operational role. Obviously such a level of demand imposes real barriers to the recruitment and retention of volunteers and, as a consequence, can potentially create significant problems for those departments.

It was my impression that in comparison with Australian volunteers, there seemed to be a higher level of commitment amongst their U.S counterparts. I was surprised to find that in large cities, volunteers would crew stations that received 6000+ calls per year. This would not generally be considered in an Australian context. Volunteers generally served towns with populations up to 25,000. In most cases American volunteer departments also provide a duty crew on station, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Not all volunteer fire departments were able to do this. Some volunteer departments employ career staff from 6am-6pm Monday through Friday and volunteers outside those times. In such cases career staff were usually under the control of, and operationally answerable to, a volunteer chief.

The application process to join a volunteer department was generally quite involved. It usually comprised the completion of a detailed application form, interviews and medical and physical fitness assessments. Included in this process would be state and federal police checks. This would often be followed by a presentation of the applicant to the volunteer membership for acceptance as a probationary fire fighter.

Some general observations that I would make as a result of my visit to United States fire departments are -

1. The recruitment and retention of volunteer fire fighters is a widely experienced problem in the United States and is probably more acute than that currently being experienced in Australia.
2. The time demands placed on volunteers for training, medical and physical fitness and on-going involvement with their brigades, were higher than those prevalent in Australia.
3. The United States Fire Departments appeared to be generally better funded than those in Australia. However they were not necessarily better resourced, better coordinated, or better managed as a result of this extra funding.
4. Relations between volunteer and career fire fighters in the US were generally better than those experienced in Australia. In part this may have been due to the equivalent training standards applied to both volunteers and career firefighters.
5. Retention benefit schemes were more widely available in the United States than in Australia. In some cases these schemes offered monetary benefits for volunteers; a situation not duplicated in Australia.

GENERAL FINDINGS

The work I have done indicates that in both the United States and Australian Fire Services, brigades and fire departments are experiencing, or are about to experience, problems in recruiting and retaining volunteers.

In Australia at a local level, volunteer brigades with, in most instances, little or no guidance are carrying out their own recruitment. This raises the issue of how local brigades with already stretched crewing, can successfully carry out effective recruitment campaigns. If recruitment is to be successful it needs to be planned, well coordinated, funded appropriately and resourced by people who are experienced in the field. In some cases this may need to be guided by paid employees of a state agency who specialize in this kind of work.

Can a state or even nation wide volunteer recruitment campaign work? The evidence would suggest, probably not, Communities within Australia are diverse, so broadly based [i.e. in geographic terms] recruitment advertising has to be so generalized as to be almost worthless. Often the people interested in being volunteers are in the wrong places (e.g. in heavily urbanized areas when the demand is in rural districts). Effective volunteer recruiting often depends on a personal approach by brigade members to people in their communities who they think will fit into the existing teams or groups. These problems are exacerbated by a rural population decline, which tends to denude communities of the younger and fitter people who are suitable for active operational roles.

Recruitment campaigns need to diversify to meet wider volunteer role requirements. No longer do we need only firefighters to battle the fire fronts; we also need communications operators, cleaners, caterers, baby sitters, accountants, and administrative support personnel. Hence our volunteer recruitment campaigns need to have a wider focus and cover the needs of wider brigade structures. Recognition for non-active and support roles must be built into our recruitment activities and as a result we need to be clearer on the roles and functions that such personnel will carry out before mounting recruitment campaigns. Recruitment is not something that a Fire Services organization can address once, write books or print a poster and then leave alone for another five years. Recruitment requires frequent if not constant revisiting by state based services and their regional offshoots.

In February 2003, as part of my study, I made contact with all fire agencies in Australia and requested that they complete a provided survey into the recruitment and retention of volunteer fire fighters within their services. I would like to acknowledge the Queensland Fire and Rescue Service, South Australia Emergency Services Administration Unit, Tasmania Fire Service, New South Wales Fire Brigades and the Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia for their efforts in providing the requested information. From the data received some interesting trends emerge.

1. Most agencies identified that 10-15% of their volunteer brigades were below the minimum crewing standards set by their organization. One service indicated that up to 70% of their volunteer brigades did not meet their internal requirements.

2. The brigades who did not meet these requirements were mainly found in country towns with populations of 3000 and above. Smaller agricultural communities did not appear to have the same level of problems. This was a somewhat surprising finding, given the widely reported population drifts from rural areas.

3. All respondents indicated that the number of volunteer brigades no longer meeting the organizations overall crewing requirements were on the increase and identified the following as possible causes for this;

- a) Rural depopulation/urban drift/poor farming conditions which were causing people to move to urban areas.
- b) The restructuring of mining industry hours of work.
- c) Changing volunteer attitudes to involvement in their local brigade volunteer organizations, etc.
- d) Increasing demands on volunteer time.
- e) An aging population which made suitable volunteers more difficult to locate.
- f) Higher entrance standards for new volunteer applicants.
- g) Increasing primary work demands.
- h) Increasing demand to be mobile in primary employment, which tended to reduce availability.
- i) Changing demands on probationary fire fighters.

4. When given a list of possible reasons for volunteer loss within their service the following reasons were selected most often by Agencies;

- a) Increasing Time commitments on volunteers.
- b) Urban drift of population.
- c) Aging local populations.
- d) Fall in population in the brigade's catchment area; &
- e) Poor local management of volunteers.

5. Most of the responding agencies require new volunteers to undergo physical and medical testing and also gain police clearances. It is believed that these requirements do not necessarily create barriers to recruitment. One interesting issue raised by responding agencies was the barrier created by volunteers being asked to carry out tasks for which they were not properly trained.

6. All respondents identified that the best volunteer recruitment marketing strategies are local word of mouth, displays at shows/expo's mock emergencies and community based activities. Mass media advertising and letter drops were amongst the least successful recruitment strategies listed by the responding agencies.

7. The average age of volunteers from the agencies surveyed was 41. Brigade Captains and Managers had an average age of 44-48.

8. Most of the agencies indicated that they are experiencing an aging volunteer population. However, very few were undertaking research into the problem or planning strategically for future shortages which they all expected. 80% of responding agencies indicated that the aging volunteer population would become a significant problem in the not too distant future.

9. An interesting statistic provided by the QFRS was that in 1950 the average volunteer starting age was 18. In 2001 it had risen to an average starting age of 31. It is felt that this trend would probably be similar to that

experienced by other state fire agencies in Australia over the same time period.

10. The average length of service of volunteers is approximately 7.5 years with Brigade Captains having on average 20 years service as a volunteer. It was indicated that the average age of Brigade Captains was becoming younger. It was also identified that this was probably due to a higher occurrence of volunteer 'burnout'. The administrative and operational responsibilities of the average volunteer Captain appear to have escalated rapidly over the past ten years. This is an area where timely research may have a favourable impact, if conducted and acted upon.

11. The South Australia CFS was the only organization that has indicated that it has conducted research into volunteer losses and has now implemented changed strategies based upon the outcomes of their studies. The CFS has developed Leadership and Management training programs aimed at encouraging safe work practices and safe work places. The feedback from this program has been positive, however there appear to be some problems in delivering the required training in a timely fashion to all those volunteers that require it.

RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

LEADERSHIP

A strong impression that resulted from my visit to the United States is that those brigades that possess strong leadership and active retention policies and programs normally don't have problems recruiting volunteers. According to Perkins and Benoit (1996) the following list of leadership failures directly affect recruitment of volunteers;

1. *Lack of understanding of the organization, particularly the erroneous assumption that a volunteer organization is easy to lead or will lead itself.* A reluctant leader inspires no one.
2. *Playing favourites with a few cronies.* Leaders naturally wish to surround and insulate themselves with those who agree with them. Such behaviour leads to the formation of factions.
3. *Driving into the future looking into the rear vision mirror.* This means a love affair with the past glory of the brigade while neglecting any planning for the future.
4. *Having Secrets.* This relates to a leader's yearning for power based on withholding and selectively brokering information.
5. *Not attending to the public image of the organization.* It is a sure way to instill the same attitude in the membership.
6. *Lack of community outreach.* Poor leaders see no need to spend time on this, yet building links to groups and organizations only helps the brigade. Public relations are a vital part of the life of a successful volunteer department.
7. *Poor screening of recruits in the first place.* Brigades should have objective membership requirements. A small and cohesive team can sometimes be more useful to you.
8. *Failure to demand training.* Training equals professionalism. Professionalism equals pride. Pride equals commitment. Being soft on training is to cheat members out of something that will enhance their loyalty to the brigade, not to mention their safety and effectiveness on a fireground.

9. *Ignoring the need to develop positive relations with locally elected government officials and government administrators.* Members need to see their leader as informed and politically astute, not just as a good firefighter.

It can be concluded from the above list of leadership breakdowns that factors such as these can impact heavily on a brigade's ability to recruit and retain volunteer firefighters. This tends to support the belief that there are no 'quick fix' overnight solutions to volunteer recruitment and retention. If we are to be successful in combating some of the current problems in this area, then we need to start evaluating volunteer management within our organization and rectifying problems in all areas including training, leadership, administration and general support.

Decentralization of management assists in ensuring all members of the brigade assist in decision making through the formation of mini Project Action Teams (PAT) or committees. It does not take away from the responsibility of the Captain but merely assists him/her in their tasks reducing the risk of volunteer burnout. Volunteer morale will be higher with this form of participatory management, as volunteer feedback and opinions will directly effect the direction of the brigade.

Leadership is greatly affected by internal communications. Misinformation or wrong assumptions by members may create hostile situations, which can simply be avoided. The best way I have found to increase the level of communication within a brigade is the use of a regular newsletter. The newsletter can inform member's of training courses available, dates to remember such as social events, procedure updates and other information such as a member profile or family information. This simple and inexpensive method of communication will increase participation and knowledge of brigade activities by its members.

BRIGADE IMAGE

Prospective volunteers want to join an organization with a positive reputation and a good image. Volunteers should be encouraged to take pride in the wearing of their brigades uniform as it conveys a positive image of professionalism to the public. "If volunteers look professional, and feel professional then they will act professional", (Chief Ron Cranfill, Wayne Township Fire Department). Uniforms should be issued as soon as possible after joining a brigade and volunteers should not have to purchase them.

Training in public is a way of demonstrating to the public that the brigade is working for them and that volunteer firefighters do train in very interesting and sometimes exciting subjects. This also gives some recognition to existing members. Whilst in the public's eye brigades must ensure that uniforms and appliances are kept at an excellent standard to convey professionalism, pride and commitment to their customers.

Local media should be utilized for important events such as officer elections, medal presentations, commissioning of new appliances, major incidents. It should also be used to provide community safety information. A good

relationship with local media will allow brigades to publish regular columns in the paper, informing their community of their activities and also the brigades needs for new members.

TRAINING

At many Volunteer Fire Departments in the United States there was a great deal of flexibility in training to suit the needs of a variety of members. To attract night shift workers, single parents, etc, they offered a range of training courses at unusual times such as during the weekdays to cater for these people. Time management for attending training courses can at times be a major barrier for retention of volunteer firefighters. However, in the United States, they appear to be combating this problem effectively. Training in Australia could be tailored to cater more for the volunteers who do not work the usual 9-5, Monday through Friday week. Depending upon demand, training courses may need to be conducted during the week. This would also apply to Brigade Maintenance Training; it may be necessary to appoint a training officer, who can be available at times to meet the needs of diverse volunteers, such as shift workers.

This more flexible strategy could be easily adapted to meet Australian needs and in some cases would reduce the costs of training by avoiding overtime requirements for after hours and weekend training, usually conducted by career staff. A simple approach, which only requires the scheduling of training to meet the needs of regional volunteers. At a brigade level, if there was a demand for maintenance training to be offered at other times this also could be considered. In the short term flexible training would be attractive to potential and new recruits who are undertaking heavy initial training loads and at times may find this burdensome. In the longer term this would assist the retention of volunteers, as it meet the needs and requirements of many volunteers.

Initial training should be as compact and short as practical to ensure volunteer firefighters have the minimum competencies to be on a fireground safely. The sooner new members can be experiencing incidents and out in the field the better, as this will greatly benefit in their retention as a volunteer.

Out of town training is a way of rewarding volunteers for their service whilst allowing the opportunity to network with volunteers from other brigades. Out of town training may include attending other fire stations or state training facilities. Training expenses should be covered by the state agency and should include travel, accommodation, meals and course costs.

TIME DEMANDS

It is a proven fact that the family and work commitments is the greatest factor in volunteer loss. Unfortunately with the increases in work and family commitments the workload of volunteer firefighters is also increasing with a higher number of incidents and greater administrative load. It is very important that the time demands on volunteers is managed properly in order to aid retention and avoid volunteer burnout.

The first 12 months of service as a volunteer is the time when volunteer loss appears to be most prevalent. Notices of brigade meetings, training and activities should be given well in advance to allow members to schedule these around their family and work commitments. Brigade requirements should be flexible to allow for volunteers to prioritize their time in the order of family, work and then volunteer firefighting.

The duties of a brigade should be evenly distributed amongst its members. If each volunteer were to carry some responsibility for a task this would assist in avoiding volunteer burnout, particularly in officers. By involving the families in the brigade, this allows volunteers to spend more time with their family whilst carrying out volunteer duties. Family members can be involved in everything from operational duties to fundraising and administrative tasks. By creating a family focus within brigades I have found that volunteers will help one another out whilst they are off duty as well. It allows volunteers to feel assured that they have a large network of friends whom they can rely upon to assist them.

Weekday hours are the most demanding on the volunteer. Brigades should aim to recruit members to suit their particular needs. If weekday hours were the greatest recruitment problem for a brigade then they should develop their recruitment campaigns to focus on shift workers or those people who may have time available during the week and can easily leave their workplace if necessary.

Recognition should also be given to volunteer employers who allow their employees to leave the workplace at short notice to attend incidents. A member of the brigade or agency should visit employers to ensure they are aware of the advantages of having a trained firefighter in their workplace and the importance of their work. Whilst attending incidents during business hours, brigades should endeavour to minimize the time spent on the call, in particular the time socializing after the call.

RECOGNITION

Being a volunteer firefighter is one of the hardest volunteer occupations today. Recognition of volunteer service is very important to ensure volunteers remain in the service. Some volunteers can do their job day in day out, without any recognition, knowing that the job they are doing is making a difference in their community. Other volunteers require on going appreciation to confirm the importance of their service to the brigade and the community.

Recognition can be given to volunteers through the brigade newsletter, complimenting them on length of service, commitment to a project, or special service at an incident. Local media can be used to broadcast this message to the community. "A picture can paint a thousand words", this statement is very true and most volunteers appreciate their picture in the paper when they have achieved a success. A good way of recognizing volunteer contributions whilst also fundraising is by making a calendar. Each month showcasing a different

volunteer or activity which when sold or supplied to the community is also a good marketing tool for new volunteers.

State or even National Firefighting Awards are also a good method of recognizing the service of volunteers. There is good competition for such awards, and even being nominated is an honour and one that should be well publicised for greatest impact.

The easiest and most inexpensive of all recognition strategies is often the most overlooked. The simple pat on the back by a senior officer or colleague has an astounding effect on a volunteers self esteem and motivation.

INCENTIVES

Incentive programs are a good recruitment and retention tool used commonly in the fire service. In Annex A I have listed a number of incentive programs used by United States fire agencies and described their suitability to be adapted to Australia.

Agency budgets and their restrictions directly effect many incentive programs. Benefits should not be the primary reason for a volunteer joining a brigade and is not the preferred ethos behind volunteering. However incentive programs can greatly assist in retaining members. By giving a little bit back to the volunteer by the provision of recognition is a form of reward for their commitment.

In order to maintain the importance and integrity of an incentive system there should be a qualifying period in place to prevent people joining merely to reap the benefits.

FUN FACTOR

In today's society volunteer brigades must compete with many other clubs and organizations for their membership. In the early days of fire services in Australia, brigades were the social point of the town and generally had comparatively high memberships. A key factor in retaining volunteers is to ensure that they enjoy their work.

Brigades should consider appointing a social committee or social director to organize events for the members and their families. The degree of a brigade's innovation and willingness to try new things should enhance the types of events brigades are able to hold. Such functions may include, Christmas and Easter parties, video or pizza nights, fire station open days, picnics, firefighters breakfast, and family sporting events.

Facilities such as board games, computer games, magazines and television may also be a consideration when catering for the needs of the younger volunteer.

Whilst brigades should endeavour to have fun in all of their activities, it should

be cautious in taking part in events which may cause a bad image or impair it's public reputation. If not managed correctly this could have a counter effect on volunteer recruitment.

PROJECT OVERVIEW AND ANALYSIS

According to Australian Fire Agencies, which I surveyed, Australian Fire Agencies are likely to be faced with a volunteer recruitment & retention problem. Some common trends, which emerged from the survey, were;

1. 10-15% of volunteer brigades are below their agencies minimum crewing standards.
2. The average age of a volunteer firefighter was 41 indicating an aging population of firefighters.
3. 80% of agencies surveyed admitted that there would be a significant problem with aging volunteers in the not too distant future.
4. According to the QFRS in 1950 the average starting age of a volunteer was 18 in comparison with 31 in 2001. Data was not available from other agencies on starting ages over a period of time, however it could be said that this would be a similar result across other agencies.
5. The average length of service provided by a volunteer is 7.5 years.

With the above data it can be assumed that Australian Fire Agencies need to focus more attention to volunteer management issues with a focus on recruiting and retaining volunteer personnel. Very few of the agencies surveyed indicated that they were undertaking research or implementing programs into the area of volunteer management. With the average length of service at only 7.5 years, this is a drain on agency budgets and resources with such a high turnover requiring more frequent initial training and the provision of new personal protective equipment. Not to mention the lack of experience retained within organizations effecting their efficiency and provision of quality service to the community.

The strategies and programs, which I observed in the United States, I have reviewed upon the basis of the following;

1. Effectiveness (short and long term)
2. Economic viability
3. Cultural adaptability
4. Ability to be manipulated in different environment
5. Practicality
6. Simplicity

In general I found that adaptability from the US to Australia was not a major problem, due to our similar lifestyles and brigade structures. Although brigades are generally much larger in the US they are run along the same lines as in Australia. Funding availability is one of the most significant differences in determining the suitability of many US programs to be transferred to Australia.

Volunteer fire agencies and brigades need to work together on recruitment and retention strategies. There is no point in a brigade recruiting new volunteers if the agency is not prepared for them, and vice versa.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CONSIDERATION BY AUSTRALASIAN FIRE AGENCIES.

1. Fire Agencies should consider the employment of a state co-ordinator for volunteer management, tasked to developing volunteer recruitment and retention campaigns.
2. A recruitment and retention working group should be formed similar to those used for designing appliances, volunteer training and other advisory committees.
3. Brigades should consider developing a position for volunteer recruitment and retention to co-ordinate new members, liaise with regional or state co-ordinators and have local input into state or region wide programs.
4. Funding should be set aside in brigade budgets to cater for marketing, promotional expenses, and volunteer recognition in brigades.
5. Fire agencies should consider streamlining their application processes to ensure recruits are out in the field as soon as practical after joining.
6. A state or even national recruitment hotline should be developed as a point of contact for new volunteers
7. Fire agencies should overhaul and review their volunteer incentive schemes to ensure the benefits being offered are current and applicable to a range of member age groups.
8. Fire agencies should consider implementing forums, training courses focused on improving volunteer management and leadership within brigades.
9. Junior programs should become a viable option for all brigades with appropriate levels of support and funding to manage these effectively.
10. Training should be scheduled to meet the needs of volunteers who do not work the 9am-5pm, Monday through Friday workweek. Training may need to be offered mid week or on weekends.
11. Recruitment campaigns should be developed to attract not just firefighters but also; communications operators, cleaners, caterers, baby sitters, accountants, and administrative support personnel.
12. Training should be offered to volunteer officers in media liaison in order for brigades to reap the full benefits of positive publicity.
13. Recognition strategies should be considered for employers of volunteer emergency service workers.
14. Recognition strategies should be revised to ensure their current applicability and to consider future programs to recognize volunteer service.
15. Brigades should consider appointing a social organizer to manage recreational activities of the brigade members and their families.

ANNEX A – Overview of researched US incentives and their applicability to the Australian situation.

<p>Length of Service Awards Program (LOSAP)</p>	<p>The most widely used and growing incentive is the retirement plans. LOSAP usually pays between US\$100-200.00 per month after 20 years of service in a Volunteer Department. The amount provided at retirement is dependent upon the amount of time and commitment a member gives to his/her department. LOSAP is designed at retaining members but has only proved successful in the 30+age bracket. The 18-30 year olds are not very interested in retirement plans at that stage of their lives. LOSAP can be a very expensive program, however Fire Service's needed to consider the costs of losing their members after an average of only five years. This high turnover not only loses experienced members but can be costly. In the United States it is a local department initiative so if a member is transferred with their work to another area then the LOSAP points already earned are no longer valid in the new department. This program could work in Australia however it would require adaptation to a state wide or even national program which would require a solid funding base. It is not in my belief that Volunteer Firefighters in Australia are seeking or desire direct monetary benefits such as pensions so further research would be needed in this area. This program is probably really only attractive to members in older age bracket who are planning for, or nearing retirement. It does not appear that at this stage Australian volunteers are interested in a system of direct monetary benefits, which would improve their retirement benefits.</p>
<p>Health Benefits</p>	<p>Health expenses in the United States are very high. People, especially families, cannot afford the costs of not having a private health insurance. With Australia on a similar path to the United States, health system benefits could prove to be a valid attraction for Australian volunteers at some time in the future. Volunteer Fire Departments in the United States generally subsidize the insurance but offer the benefit to the volunteer and his/her family. Health Insurance is usually purchased through the departments current insurance and is often at a discount rate. This benefit could be a cost effective one for agencies in Australia and would help to provide an indirect subsidy for volunteers who would also assist in promoting their health and fitness. However such arrangements might be complex to manage and that combined with the cost imposts, may preclude it's early introduction to Australia.</p>
<p>Study Assistance</p>	<p>Another incentive program that is beneficial to all members, particularly those in the 18-25 year old age group, is study assistance. The Troy Fire Department pays tuition expenses for studies at TAFE or University as long as the member provides at least two years service to the department. The State of Maine awards 6 scholarships per year to their volunteers and the State of North Carolina provides one 4-year scholarship and one 2-year scholarship per region in their state. These type of incentives encourage volunteers in particularly younger ones to remain in the department, whilst raising educational standards and the overall professionalism of their organizations. These types of incentives could also be viable in Australia if suitable arrangements could be entered into with suitable educational providers.</p> <p>The US programs were modeled on providing assistance to technical and tertiary level students conducting courses normally of their choice. This could be adapted to suit the Australia situation by offering study fellowships to volunteers to research subjects vital to the operation of fire agencies. Similar to the AFAC Bon Jovi Study Award's, they may include national or even international research. This would allow for the volunteer to gain experience in different fields whilst providing a rewarding benefit. This strategy should not be cost prohibitive and the short and long term benefits for volunteer retention would be high. However, it would require some management in the allocation of funds, development of selection criteria and establishment of mentoring arrangements.</p>
<p>Gym Memberships</p>	<p>US Volunteer Fire Departments often provided free gym memberships for their firefighters and their families. In normal circumstances the local gym or fitness club in turn provides sponsorship to the Department through heavily discounted fees. This may be a worthwhile approach for those brigades that do not have ready access to such facilities. The cost of funding discounted gym memberships may be cheaper than maintaining a gym facility, its equipment and on going maintenance at a fire station. This benefit has a trade off not only to the volunteer and their family but also to the agency through improved volunteer health and fitness and a potential reduction in workplace injuries and workers compensation insurance costs.</p> <p>This type of approach would require funding to provide such a service and may not be practical in</p>

	regional areas of Australia. For a variety of reasons I would not, as yet, consider this to be a viable strategy for Australian fire agencies.
Corporate Apparel	In the US, a range of products, which bore the Department's logo or recruiting slogan, were offered to members. Some were based upon length of service or the amount of training or response hours each member did per month. Members wore or displayed these products with pride, even when off duty. It was an effective form of advertising, which also created a direct link to the community. For example, when members of the public identified someone with a department T-shirt, vehicle decal, hat or other products they could direct community safety or even recruiting questions to these members. As a method of marketing their services, local brigades and also state agencies should consider the use of Corporate Apparel. Finance would be a consideration due to the costs of supplying items for agencies with large numbers of volunteers. An effective system of rewarding service and retaining volunteers and also useful in marketing the volunteer fire service to the community. The extent of this strategy could be restricted by the availability of funding, however, I believe this is a beneficial project for Fire Agencies. It is simple, practical and can be modified to suit the needs of specific regions.
Tax Exemption	In the State of Virginia volunteers are exempt from vehicle and registration expenses. This represents a US\$400 - \$1000 saving on a car per year. In the state of Maryland they allow volunteers to claim a \$3000 deduction on their taxes to compensate for service related expenses. These incentives are very effective since they are immediately realisable by volunteers. They are attractive to all age groups (as opposed to the LOSAP). This is a benefit that will require state or federal approval. I believe the Hon. Michelle Roberts; Minister for Emergency Services in Western Australia, at the Federal Emergency Services Ministers Conference raised in 2002. Such arrangements might be complex to initiate as legislation and consensus would be required at the highest level if such an initiative were to get off the ground. However, it is a very effective approach, which would assist in retaining volunteer firefighters. Definitely a valid strategy worthy of further research.
Length of Service Medals	Medals in the United States were generally awarded for 5,10,15,20 and life service. The medal presentations were often more significant than those I have experienced in Australia. The medal presentation usually occurred during a ceremony, which would be attended by officers, firefighters, distinguished guests and their families. There was usually some form of media coverage and these events were given a high local profile. By having these formal occasions it put a lot of emphasis on service to the department and the community and was an example to younger or less experienced members. In addition to the medal presentations there was often a record of awards of service on display on entrance to Fire Department buildings. This highlighting of the achievements of members to their colleagues and also to the community served as a valuable recognition tool. Many fire agencies in Australia have LOS Medals, however they need to consider the method in which these medals are presented to their volunteers and the recognition the volunteer would obtain from the medal presentation. Most agencies already have a medal system of some description. As an extension to the issuing of medals they should also consider increased media coverage for these events, as well as annual awards and presentation dinners where these medals can be received amongst their peers, thus recognising their achievements within the local community that they have served. This is an effective retention tool and would only require minor improvements to the majority of current arrangements in order to put it in place. This approach is a simple and relatively inexpensive form of recognition, which has real benefits in terms of volunteer recruitment and retention.
Community Discounts	Many local businesses supported their local Fire Departments in several ways. Some businesses, in particular restaurants and eateries would discount meals to volunteer firefighters whilst they were on duty or in training. Others would offer discounts on products. These were from hardware stores, electrical stores, utilities, plumbing and electrical maintenance, pest control firms, etc. This is similar to the Country Fire Authority's (CFA) Member Benefits Scheme in Victoria, where identification cards are issued which offer members varying discounts at sponsoring businesses. In return the business gets good exposure and some advertising through the agency. This type of program is effective, economical and can be implemented relatively easily. This is a practical and simple system of rewarding members for their service which would assist in retaining members and as an inducement to new ones joining.

Annex B - Overview of researched US strategies and their applicability to the Australian situation.

<p>Application Process</p>	<p>At the Stirling Volunteer Fire Department in Virginia their aim is to get their new recruits out on fire calls as soon as possible after joining. Volunteers are required to undertake a 20-hour induction program followed by 3 days and 6 nights of basic firefighter training. Once this has been completed they are classed as probationary firefighters and can attend fire incidents as observers. I believe that this method of induction a sound one that aims at getting the volunteer out in the field as soon as possible after joining, whilst at the same time maintaining crewing and public safety standards. Stirling VFD also encourage their volunteers to spend time at career stations and attend incidents with them to further their skills and experiences. It is very important that application processes are streamlined to ensure that volunteers can be inducted and begin training as soon as is practical. This also applies to the issuing of personal protective equipment and uniforms.</p> <p>In my experiences when a volunteer joins a brigade the sooner they get a uniform, the higher the chances are of retaining their services. Quickly providing a new volunteer with a uniform not only is a sign of acceptance but makes the volunteer feel welcome and a part of the team, thus increasing motivation and enthusiasm. The costs involved with providing a cap, polo shirt and some basic firefighter training are relatively inexpensive in comparison to the returns from lengthy future service, which that volunteer will provide in the future if he or she stays in service. An effective short-term program, which impacts strongly on retention. It would not require a large outlay of funds, but rather the better management of new recruits and streamlining induction, training and the issuing of uniforms to ensure that new members are out in the field as soon as possible after joining. It's surprising how a \$30 brigade T-shirt can impact upon the motivation of a new member.</p>
<p>Community Profile</p>	<p>Community profile played a major part in recruitment and retention in the United States. Volunteer Departments that had strong and healthy community and internal relationships were more successful in recruiting and retaining volunteers. There are similarities with career employment, in as much that employees would not want to work for a bad employer and if they did they would not generally stay very long. They would generally begin to look for better alternative opportunities.</p> <p>In South Australia's Emergency Services Administration Unit (ESAU) they have a system of undertaking "health checks" on brigades. One of the benefits of their system is that it promotes a good image of the Volunteer Brigade to the community. A similar system to that currently being used in South Australia would be beneficial to other state's.</p>
<p>Leadership and Volunteer Management</p>	<p>As I have mentioned previously leadership and management are probably the two biggest factors between a brigade "sinking or floating". Volunteer leaders are the biggest influence on brigade morale, image and status. It is important that these leaders are chosen carefully. Not only are they required to meet the needs of their members, but also it is important that they are politically astute when dealing with other agencies and the public. Leaders must be prepared to try new initiatives and experiment in creating change for the benefit of their brigades and the community. United States Fire Agencies have a selection of leadership programs, which focus on the "soft" skills of leaders. They range in education level from basic to tertiary with the Executive Fire Officer Program (EFO). Leadership programs being the highest level. These higher-level courses focus on topics such as brigade administration and personnel management would be of benefit to Australian Fire Agencies.</p> <p>Fire Agencies can provide training focusing on brigade administration and personnel management to assist volunteer leaders to move forward and try new initiatives. Training packages or perhaps even informal forums may need to be conducted to reach the target groups in these areas. Ensuring volunteer leaders are effective and encouraged to participate in decision making will benefit brigades and ensure that future change is well received and does not impact adversely on recruitment or retention.</p>
<p>Junior Programs</p>	<p>Woodward/Kallman has identified through a study in 1999 that some 50% of the volunteers in the Country Fire Authority (CFA) in Victoria have been derived from Junior related programs. With a similar high success rate occurring in the United States why are not more agencies adopting these programs in Australia? The United States Volunteer Departments aligned their junior programs with the Boy Scouts of America. A parent or member of the Volunteer Fire Department generally managed them. They were not necessarily well funded or resourced,</p>

	<p>however they had a lot of support from the Fire Departments and the families. This helped make these programs a success.</p> <p>Most states in Australia currently have some sort of cadet or junior program. An expansion of these programs with suitable funding and support would make this an attractive initiative for volunteer fire brigades. Junior programs would have to be one of the best marketing tools for recruiting long term volunteer firefighters. This has been substantiated by previous research. If community service and volunteerism can become a part of Australia's youth at a young age we will be one step closer to bridging the gap of attracting and retaining volunteers in the years to come. The short and long-term benefits of a junior program are excellent and with some co-ordination by state agencies most of the day to day management would be conducted by brigade officers. This type of program would require a commitment to funding however the benefits reaped could be very worthwhile.</p>
Volunteer Hotline	<p>A successful initiative of some Volunteer Fire Departments and also the National Volunteer Fire Council (NVFC) was the introduction of a federal volunteer recruitment hotline. The freecall number would place callers in contact with local departments in their area. Many local departments also had their own recruiting hotline, which was monitored 24 hours a day to avoid answering services. These hotlines were used in marketing the volunteer fire service in the United States and provided an easy point of contact for interested persons. This strategy has proved to be successful. Not all potential recruits like to approach Fire Departments directly and these hot lines provided a medium whereby such people could source information without feeling pressured to commit to something they could not do. A cheap and easily managed point of contact for use with local marketing campaigns.</p> <p>These hot lines are used widely in the US and would be a great benefit for fire agencies in Australia. The hotline would require an annual fee to purchase a freecall number and the provision for someone to man it 7 days a week. This is a practical strategy with proven effectiveness, already in use by some agencies in Australia.</p>

Annex C – Blank Survey Form
VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT & RETENTION QUESTIONNAIRE

NAME OF AGENCY:	
Name of Responding Officer: _____	
Contact Details for Responding Officer: Phone Number: _____ Fax No. _____ e-mail address: _____	
<i>Please answer questions in space provided. If insufficient space is available please attach additional written comments.</i>	
1. How many volunteer brigades is your Agency responsible for? _____	
2. How many volunteers does your Agency have responsibility for? _____	
3. Does your Agency have standards or criteria for determining the minimum or 'ideal' numbers of volunteers that each brigade must/should have? If so please provide details. If not please indicate how you determine when a volunteer brigade is undercrewed? _____ _____ _____ _____	
4 (a) How many of your volunteer brigades currently have crewing levels below the required crewing levels or standards listed in (3) above? _____	
4(b) Are the brigades with crewing problems listed in 4(a) above, located in –	
Location Description	Number of Brigades Involved
Urban Metropolitan Areas	
Larger Country Towns (e.g. population >3000)	
Smaller Country Towns (e.g. population < 3000)	
Rural Mixed Farming Areas	
Rural Wheatbelt / Sheep Farming Areas	
Pastoral Areas	
Rural Forested or Plantation Areas	
Mining Centres	
Other (please describe)	

4(c) Over the last 5 years period (approx) have the numbers of these brigades with crewing problems increased or decreased? _____

If they have increased what do you consider being the main cause(s) of that increase?

If they have decreased what do you believe has caused the situation to improve?

4(d) Please indicate below the priority order for the following as possible causes of volunteer crewing shortfalls (prioritize from 1 to 9) with respect to any volunteer shortfalls your Agency is experiencing. For each possible cause, please show which type of area or areas (as listed in 4(b) above) that cause is most prevalent in?

Possible Reason for Volunteer Loss	PRIORITY [i.e. as a cause of loss of volunteers in your Agency]	Where Relevant - Types of Area or Areas [as per 4(b) above] where this Cause of Volunteer Loss tends to Occur most frequently
Fall in population in the area.		
Time commitments on Volunteers		
Impact of Volunteering on Personal or Family Life.		
Responsibilities Being Placed on Volunteers (e.g. liability issues)		
Poor recruitment practices of Local Brigades		
Attraction of Other Local Entertainments.		
Transient Local Populations (e.g. mining communities)		
Poor local management of brigades (e.g. by volunteer leaders).		
Generally aging local population		
Drift of Populations [or segments of a population] to urban areas		

5(a) Are there any health, fitness or other criteria set by your Agency for people seeking to become volunteers? Please provide details.

5(b) In your view do any of the criteria listed in 5(a) above restrict your Agency's ability to recruit volunteers? If so please provide details.

6(a) Has your Agency initiated any specific recruiting strategies to deal with volunteer recruitment problems? If so please provide details.

6(b) If your Agency has introduced any specific recruitment strategies for volunteers which of those strategies have been found to be most successful?

Why do you believe that they have been successful? Please provide some justification for your answers.

Have any introduced strategies been unsuccessful? Please indicate which ones and why you believe they have been unsuccessful.

6(c) Which strategies have been most successful or unsuccessful in the following types of areas?

Type of Location	Successful / Unsuccessful Recruitment Strategies	Possible Reasons for Success or Failure
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Urban Metropolitan Areas		
Large Country Towns (population > 3000)		
Smaller Country Towns (population < 3000)		
Rural Mixed Farming Areas		
Rural Wheat & Sheep farming.		
Pastoral Areas		
Mining Centres.		
<p>8. Please list what you believe to be the top three causes of volunteer losses from all of your Agency's volunteer brigades.</p> <p>(1)</p> <p>(2)</p> <p>(3)</p>		
<p>9. What is the average overall age of operationally active firefighters in your Agency?</p>		

10. What are the average ages of volunteers carrying out the following types of functions?

Incident Controller _____

Brigade Captain _____

Brigade Lieutenant _____

Operationally Active Firefighter _____

11. Are these average ages increasing or decreasing over time? If so please provide some detail.

Is it your Agency's view that there has or has not been a noticeable trend towards the 'aging' of volunteers in brigades?

Do you anticipate that this will be a significant problem at a later date?

What plans, if any, does your Agency have to deal with any of these 'aging' problems if and when they do arise?

12. If the average age for all volunteers has been increasing over time –

(a) What has been the rate of increase over the last 5 years (approx.)

(b) When does your Agency expect the rate of increase to reach a level that will create operational problems (if at all)? Please comment.

(c) What plans does your Agency have to overcome any of these problems? Please comment.

13. Please complete the following table.

Percentage of Volunteers in Brigade(s) who are more than 45 years of age	Number of brigades that have this proportion of 'aged' volunteers.
Percentage ≥ 10%	
Percentage ≥ 15%	
Percentage ≥ 25%	
Percentage ≥ 50%	
<p>14. What is the current average length of service of your Agency's volunteers?</p> <p>What is the current length of service of all your Agency's volunteer officers?</p> <p>(a) Incident Controllers</p> <p>(b) Brigade Captains</p> <p>(c) Brigade Lieutenants.</p> <p>In your view are these length of service figures increasing or decreasing?</p> <p>If these length of service figures are decreasing what appears to be the causes for such decreases?</p>	
<p>15. To what extent has your Agency either researched or initiated action with respect to finding the causes of volunteer loss rates amongst its brigades?</p> <p>If such research has been undertaken, what have been the major findings from this work?</p>	
<p>16. What strategies if any has your Agency introduced in order to improve volunteer retention?</p> <p>How successful have these strategies been? If possible, please provide comment.</p>	

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