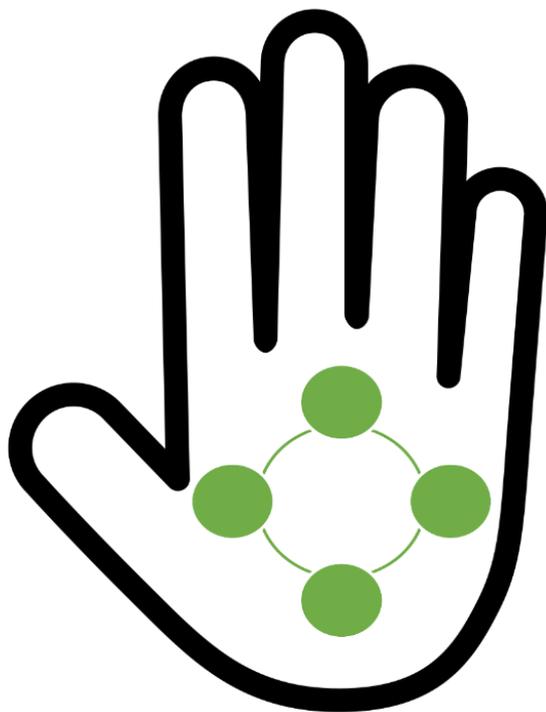# EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING SHARED LEARNING NETWORK

Report on pilot

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Emergency Volunteering Shared Learning Network (EVN)

Version	Release history	Date
1.0	Initial release of document	06/06/2019

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

The Emergency Volunteering Shared Learning Network (EVN) was established in September 2018 to:

- Enable and enhance the value of volunteering to Australian communities before, during and after emergencies now and into the future; and
- Do this by promoting the exchange of knowledge and experience amongst people who share this goal.

The EVN was initially set up as a 6-month pilot project. This report documents the activities of the EVN during the pilot, evaluates their impact and shares learnings from the pilot.

WHAT DID THE EVN DO?

The three core learning activities undertaken in the pilot period were: 1) circulating monthly e-newsletters, 2) conducting two live webinars, and 3) setting up and maintaining an online resource sharing space. In addition, an EVN home page was set up to give members a single location to access the learning resources produced by these activities. Two surveys were also conducted: A New Member Survey, and a Member Feedback Survey at the end of the pilot period.

WHO JOINED THE EVN?

By the end of March 2019, the network had 201 members. 37% of members identified as a volunteer, 35% as a volunteer manager/coordinator, and 30% as someone who worked with volunteers. Other, less prevalent, roles amongst members were researchers, supporters/advocates of volunteers, and other/unspecified. 30% of members identified more than one type of role.

65% of EVN members worked or volunteered with an emergency service agency, and 23% with a not-for-profit. Around 20% of members indicated that they worked or volunteered with more than one type of organisation.

Over 40% of EVN members lived in Victoria, 20% in NSW, and 18% in Queensland. 5% were from outside of Australia.

HOW DID MEMBERS ENGAGE WITH THE EVN?

Overall, the average member open rate (% of members opening newsletters at least once) for all EVN newsletters was 44.6% as at 9th April 2019. Average member click rate (% of members that clicked links in newsletters at least once) was 15.7%. As expected, according to the EVN Member Feedback Survey distributed at the end of the pilot period, newsletters were by far the most common resource accessed by survey respondents (91% of respondents).

37% of members engaged with newsletters 'often', 25% 'sometimes', and 36% 'rarely'. Overall, members identifying as volunteers have been most engaged

with the EVN. Of those members who engaged 'often', 46% identified as volunteers.

Engagement with the EVN Resource Collection can only be approximately gauged, as less data was collected on access. From the snapshots of data available, engagement with the Resource Collection was moderate to low. For example, in the Member Feedback Survey, only 25% of respondents (8 people) had accessed it.

Engagement with webinars was quite high, with over 20 people attending each of the two live webinars completed by the end of March, from across a range of organisational types and jurisdictions. Both webinars were rated highly on all aspects in participant feedback surveys. Webinars were recorded and shared via the BNHCRC Youtube channel and both continue to be accessed.

DID THE EVN MEET MEMBER EXPECTATIONS?

According to the New Member Survey, most new members joined either to learn and improve practice (67%), or to connect and keep up to date (31%), or both reasons. Other reasons were to help them respond to change, to help them promote aspects of volunteering, and to share and contribute.

The most common topics that New Members most wanted to learn more about involved recruitment and retention (including volunteer sustainability) (40%), or innovation, knowledge, research and best practice (34%). When provided with a list of possible topics to select from, the top three chosen were: the future of emergency volunteering (84%), new approaches to volunteer management (71%), and volunteering in changing rural communities.

The two key measures of member satisfaction with the EVN at the end of the pilot period were: 1) the degree of ongoing engagement with EVN resources, and 2) responses to the Member Feedback Survey. Overall, these measures suggest that a significant number of members have been satisfied with the EVN during its pilot period. In the Member Feedback Survey, newsletters were clearly rated the highest. When asked to rate the EVN against their main reasons for joining, respondents rated it higher in relation to informational and learning oriented reasons for joining, and lower for sharing and networking-oriented reasons.

90% of respondents (26 people) to the Member Feedback Survey answered 'yes' when asked inf they wanted the EVN to continue. 10% (3 people) said 'maybe'. No respondents answered 'no'. When asked what they wanted to see happen with the EVN in the future, the most dominant theme in responses was for the current approach to continue or be expanded.

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

- The EVN did well in providing valued content in an accessible way to members.
- Live webinars were well-attended and appreciated by participants. They appear to be quite effective as a way of communicating research and sharing experience with interested people who are not able to access research and learning forums.
- there is broad interest and support for the idea and concept of a shared learning network, and for engaging more directly with research and innovation/new ideas in the emergency volunteering space.
- More effort could be made in future to encourage and enable more two-way exchange and interaction with members.
- All three main network resources/activities – newsletters, webinars and the resource collection, relied heavily on contributions by a single key person, which is not sustainable.
- In response, EVN members will be invited to an online 'meeting' to discuss the future of the EVN and to establish a team of conveners/key contributors to share workload more sustainably over time.
- Future directions for improvement would include seeking opportunities for face-to-face interactions amongst members were possible and seeking out a resource-sharing platform that allows members to more directly contribute to and comment on content.
- Key areas of reflection from the conveners concerned the high time investment required to set up and establish a network of this kind, the utility of webinars to foster wider and deeper research communication, and the positive personal learning and development opportunities that convening this type of network provides for researchers in the area of communication and better understanding stakeholder sentiments and interests.
- Overall, members appeared to appreciate the greater and more direct access to research, researchers, and broader sector knowledge and experience that networks of this kind enable.

INTRODUCTION

The Emergency Volunteering Shared Learning Network (EVN) was established in September 2018, with the following goals:

- To enable and enhance the value of volunteering to Australian communities before, during and after emergencies now and into the future; and
- To do this by promoting the exchange of knowledge and experience amongst people who share this goal.

The EVN was initially set up as a 6-month pilot project, sponsored by the Bushfire and Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre (BNHCRC) in conjunction with the *Enabling sustainable emergency volunteering* research project.[1] The EVN is convened by Blythe McLennan and Tarn Kruger from RMIT University.

The purpose of this report is to document the activities of the EVN during the pilot period, evaluate their impact and share learnings with the network's members as well as other BNHCRC researchers and end users. The report will also help to inform decisions about the next steps for the EVN.

ABOUT THE EVN

The ultimate aim of the EVN is to enable and deepen co-learning between researchers and practitioners by facilitating faster and more impactful diffusion of research, best practice, experience and knowledge across the emergency management sector at a pace that is able to keep up with the very dynamic and fast-moving area of emergency volunteering (see Box 1). It is an example of a knowledge network, as described in the following quote:

> ""Knowledge networks" are collections of individuals and teams who come together across organizational, spatial and disciplinary boundaries to invent and share a body of knowledge. The focus of such networks is usually on developing, distributing and applying knowledge."[2]

As a knowledge network, the EVN enables researchers to engage with practitioners in a more active and ongoing way to better inform and support the redesign of volunteer management and engagement models and programs in response to societal change. It provides a venue for the co-production of emergency volunteering knowledge through an exchange between tacit knowledge (i.e. 'know-how', expertise and personal understanding) and explicit knowledge (i.e. formal, codified, and documented). This approach is in line with more recent directions in knowledge translation research towards interactional approaches:

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[1] http://www.bnhcrc.com.au/research/resilience-hazards/3533

[2] https://sloanreview.mit.edu/article/designing-effective-knowledge-networks/

The bulk of KT [knowledge translation] research has focused on acquiring, assessing and applying research evidence in practice and policies. This lack of attention to a broader conceptualization of knowledge that goes beyond research findings has consequently led to the development of KT strategies targeting only the use of research evidence. […] In contrast, some researchers are beginning to turn to an interaction-based view of KT, […] A social interaction perspective implies that users of research come together to discuss research findings and potential applications. During this conversation, they contextualize the research findings using their understanding of the communities and clients they serve, and the environment in which service delivery takes place [6]. In other words, **research becomes integrated with previously held knowledge, and humans build on and create knowledge through their interactions with each other**.[3]

To foster this interaction between research knowledge and previously held (often tacit) knowledge, EVN membership is open to anyone who shares the network's goals. It welcomes volunteers, volunteer managers, volunteer supporters and advocates, staff working with volunteers, and researchers to join. It particularly welcomes people actively working towards the network's primary goal on the ground through paid or voluntary activities, no matter how small or large their roles.

This open membership fosters a wider and deeper exchange of different forms of knowledge beyond current institutional and organisational boundaries and layers, including with grassroots volunteers and volunteer managers in established emergency service agencies, practitioners from outside of the EM sector, and leaders of emerging, new volunteer groups.

Box 1: What is emergency volunteering?

Volunteering is "time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain".[a]

Emergency volunteering is any and all volunteering that supports communities before, during and after a disaster or emergency; regardless of its duration and its particular organisational affiliation, or lack thereof.[b]

Emergency volunteering includes formal volunteering with emergency service organisations and with non-profit organisations that support communities in emergency relief and recovery. It also includes a wide range of other, less recognised volunteering that also supports communities before during or after an emergency. Examples are volunteering associated with community sector organisations not traditionally involved with emergency management, as well as spontaneous, community-led, employer-supported, digitally-enabled, or informal types of volunteering.

[a] Volunteering Australia (2015) Definition of Volunteering, https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/definition-of-volunteering/#/

[b] McLennan, B & Kruger T. (2019) Emergency volunteering 2030 – views from managers in volunteerism. RMIT University & Bushfire and Natural Hazards CRC, Melbourne, Victoria.

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[3] Kothari, A. R., J. J. Bickford, N. Edwards, M. J. Dobbins and M. Meyer (2011). "Uncovering tacit knowledge: a pilot study to broaden the concept of knowledge in knowledge translation." *BMC health services research* 11(1), p.2. (Emphasis added)

WHAT DID THE EVN DO?

Figure 1 shows a timeline of key EVN activities up to the end of March 2019. The three core learning activities were: 1) circulating monthly e-newsletters, 2) conducting two live webinars, and 3) setting up and maintaining an online resource sharing space.

Sept 2018
- Landing page & sign-up form set up
- Membership drive
- New member survey activated

Oct 2018
- Email set up
- 1st newsletter sent
- Resource collection set up

Nov 2018
- Resource collection expanded

Dec 2018
- 2nd newsletter sent

Jan 2019
- Resource collection expanded
- Webinar platform set up

Feb 2019
- 2 live webinars held
- 3rd newsletter sent
- EVN home page set up

March 2019
- Member feedback survey conducted
- 4th newsletter sent
- April/May webinars set up
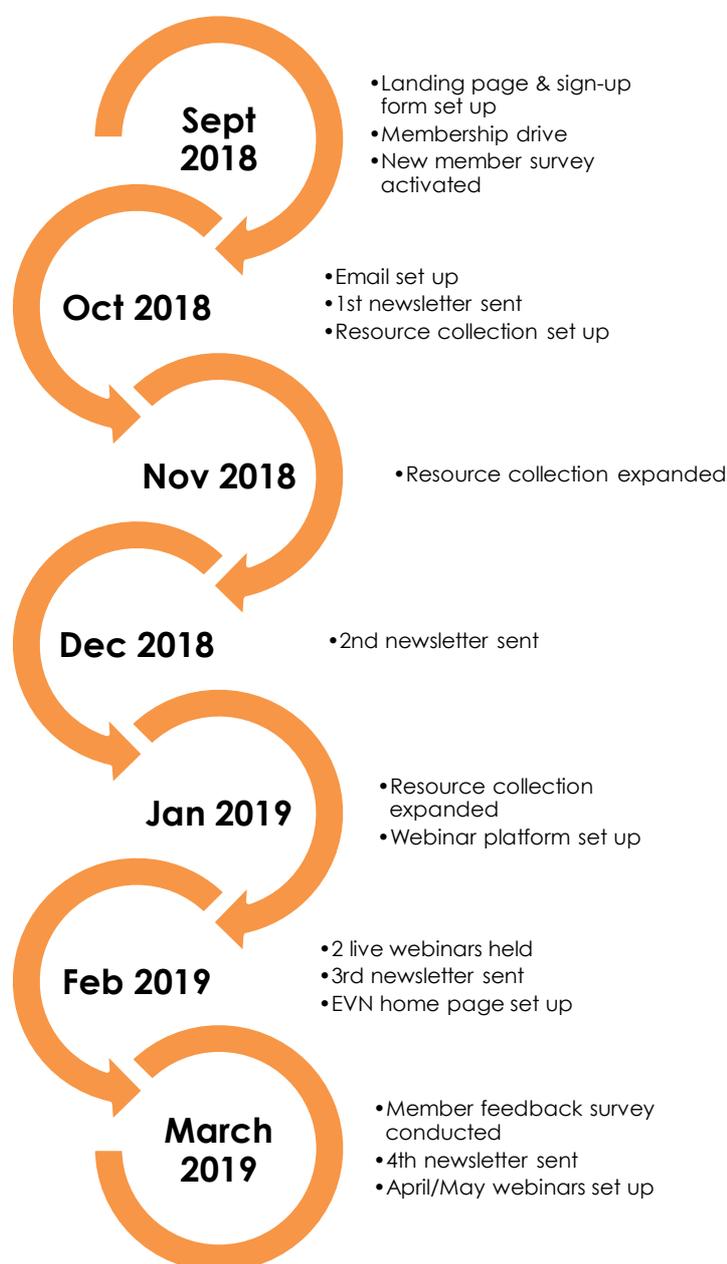
FIGURE 1: EVN PILOT TIMELINE

In addition, an EVN home page was set up to give members a single location to access the learning resources produced by these activities (see Figure 2).

Two surveys were also conducted:

- an ongoing New Member Survey that was automatically sent to each member when they joined (66 responses as at 30 March), and
- a Member Feedback Survey that was circulated to members at the end of the pilot period in late May 2019 (29 responses as at 30 March).
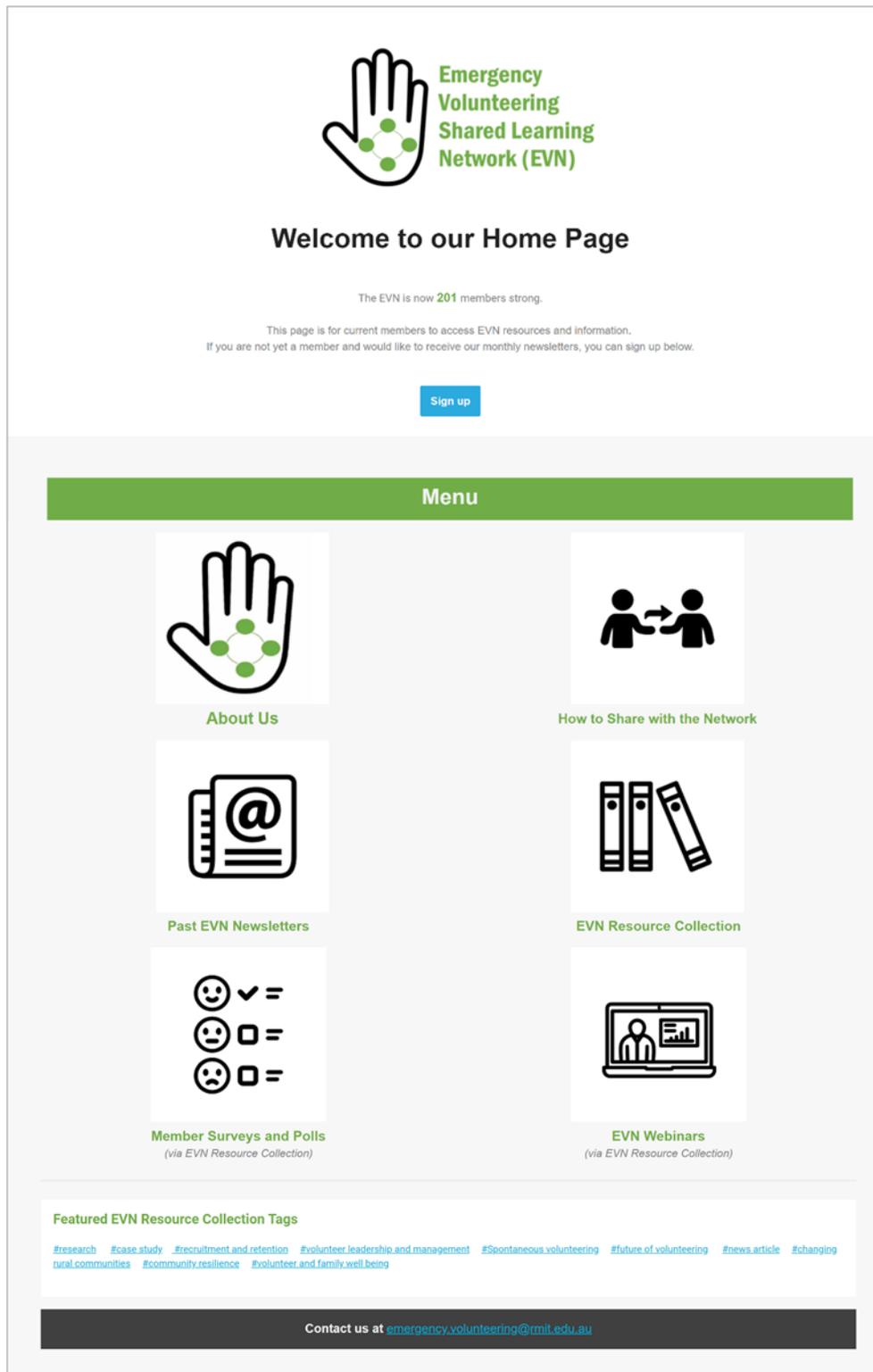
FIGURE 2: EVN HOME PAGE, AS AT 30 MARCH 2019.

NEWSLETTERS

Four newsletters were compiled and circulated using the Mailchimp platform, which was also used to manage subscriptions/membership (e.g. see Figure 3). The majority of newsletter articles/items were prepared and written by the conveners (35 of 46 articles), 14 of these with input of some kind from EVN members. Five articles were written by EVN members (see Table 1).
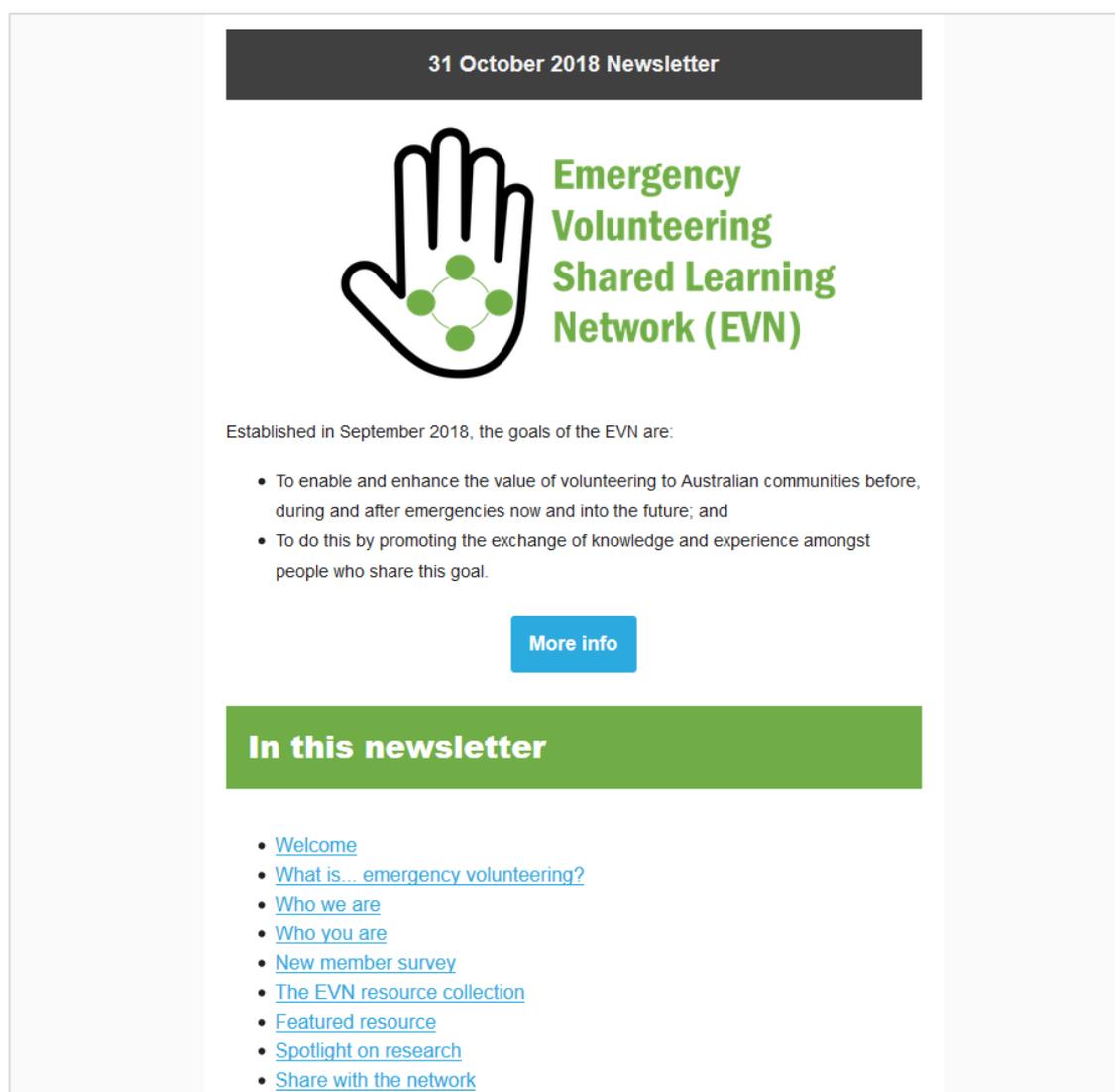
FIGURE 3: EXTRACT OF OCTOBER 2018 NEWSLETTER

Newsletters	No. articles	No. with member input *(written by)*
October 2018	9	2
December 2018	9	2 (1)
February 2019	10	4 (1)
March 2019	18	6 (3)
TOTAL	**46**	**14 (5)**

TABLE 1: EVN NEWSLETTERS, OVERVIEW AS AT 30 MARCH 2019

RESOURCE COLLECTION

An on-line Resource Collection was set up and maintained using the Dropmark platform (see Figure 4). As at 30th March, there were 206 resources available in the collection. These included research reports and journal articles, slides of research presentations, volunteering resources including toolkits and guidelines, case studies, news items, web pages, and recorded webinars. Resources were tagged by volunteering topic, jurisdiction, resource type, research projects, and accessibility (e.g. #downloadable or #paywall in the case of journal articles). One of the conveners was responsible for identifying and uploading relevant resources.
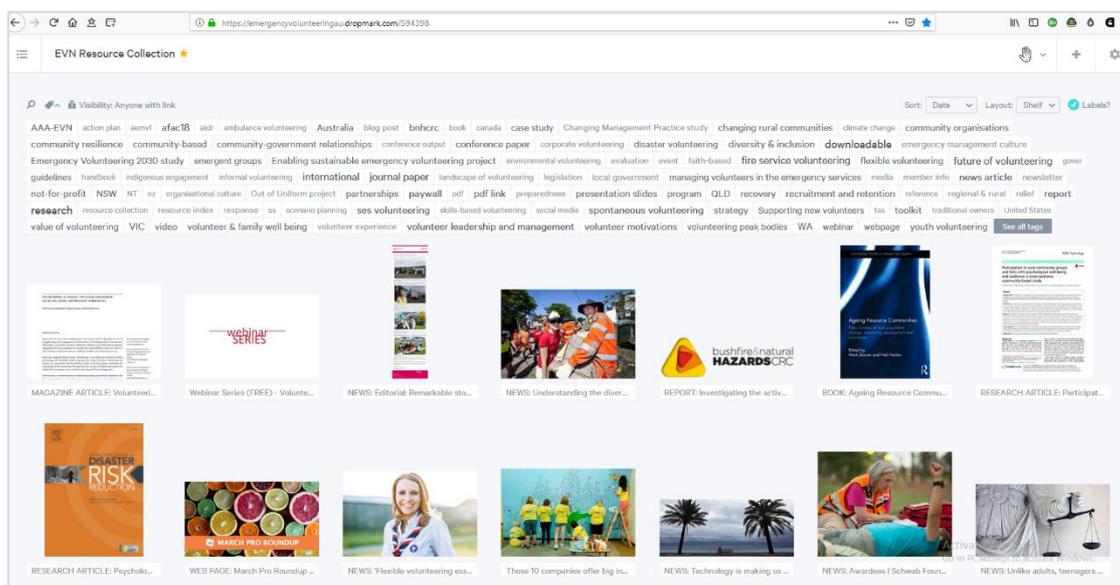
FIGURE 4: EVN RESOURCE COLLECTION ON DROPMARK AS AT 28TH MARCH 2019.

WEBINARS

Two live webinars were held for EVN members in February 2019, using the Redback webinar platform (see Boxes below for details). Both were also recorded and shared with EVN and BNHCRC members via the BNHCRC Youtube channel and the Resource Collection. In addition, two further webinars featuring guest presenters were also scheduled for April/May:

- '*Mobilising spontaneous volunteers - recent experiences*', 29th April 2019
  Presenters: Andrew McCullough, NSW SES and Lisa Schimanski, CEO Volunteering Tasmania
  Moderator: Blythe McLennan, RMIT University.

- '*Planning for the use of spontaneous disaster volunteers*', 22nd May
  Presenters: Amanda Nixon and Katherine Green, Volunteering Queensland
  Moderator: Blythe McLennan, RMIT University.

Webinar 1: Emergency volunteering 2030 - views from volunteerism managers

Session time: 2pm-2:45pm (AEDT), Tuesday 5th February 2019

Presenter: Blythe McLennan, RMIT University

Moderator: Blythe McLennan, RMIT University

Description: How do managers that have responsibilities for volunteerism in Australian emergency management organisations (EMOs) see the future of emergency volunteering?

This webinar is based on interviews with 34 managers from volunteer-based response and recovery EMOs, and with organisations that support or coordinate formal emergency management volunteering. It will explore how these managers currently understand the key challenges and opportunities for volunteer sustainability across the emergency management sector, and what change they feel is most needed to enable a vibrant, sustainable emergency volunteer capacity into the future.

A full report of these interview findings is due for release in February. The report is just the first in a series of reports that is exploring different perspectives on the future of emergency volunteering in Australia.

This webinar will include a 20-minute presentation, followed by an opportunity for attendees to comment and ask questions.

Recorded webinar: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TBOq8RcDFkI

Webinar 2: Effective on-boarding of new recruits

Session time: 11am-12pm AWST (2pm-3pm AEDT), Tuesday 12th February 2019

Presenters: Dr Darja Kragt and Ms Hawa Muhammad Farid, University of Western Australia

Moderator: Blythe McLennan, RMIT University

Description: What do you do to support new volunteers in their first year?

On-boarding is a critical first step in ensuring a successful and meaningful volunteering experience. Our research demonstrates that volunteer experiences in the first year are a good predictor of their subsequent turnover. On-boarding is the process where a new volunteer learns everything they need to know when they first enter a volunteering organisation. On-boarding involves registering, inducting, supporting, training, and engaging new recruits in the first year of volunteering.

But what is effective on-boarding and what does it look like? In this workshop you will learn about effective volunteer on-boarding strategies from different emergency services organisations along with latest research findings and volunteer stories about their experiences. We will provide you with knowledge about effective on-boarding and useful resources that you can use to improve on-boarding practices in your organisations.

The workshop is offered by researchers from the University of Western Australia.

Recorded webinar: https://youtu.be/sOJ-L-c0SXQ

WHO JOINED THE EVN?

Members were first invited to join the EVN via an email sent by the conveners to their existing networks in September 2018. By the end of March 2019, the network had 201 members (see Figure 5).
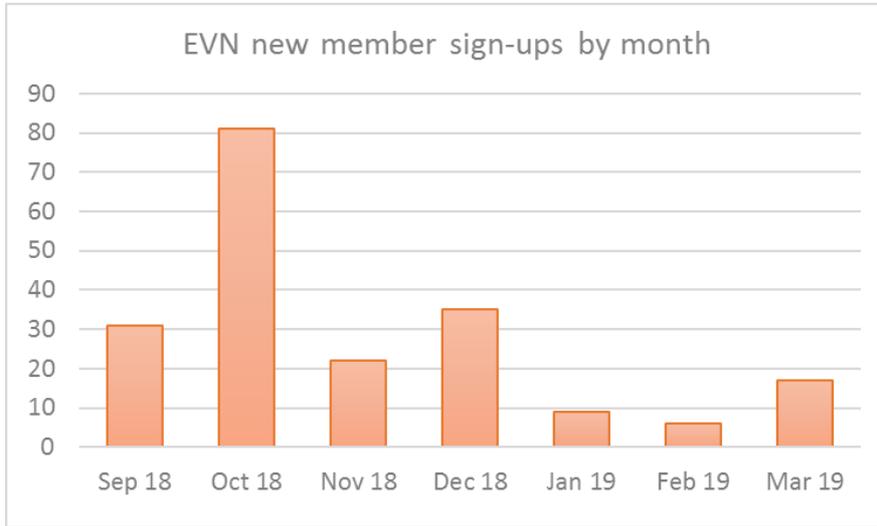
FIGURE 5: EVN NEW MEMBER SIGN-UPS BY MONTH, SEP 2018-MARCH 2019

Of the 66 members that had completed the New Member Survey at this time, almost 80% heard about the network through an email from the conveners (44%) or an email from someone else in their network (35%).

A breakdown of the roles EVN members had in emergency volunteering (indicated on the sign-up form) as at 30 March is shown in Figure 6. Around 30% of members indicated they had more than one role, or that their role fell into more than one of the categories offered (e.g. a volunteer who is a volunteer manager/coordinator for their team).
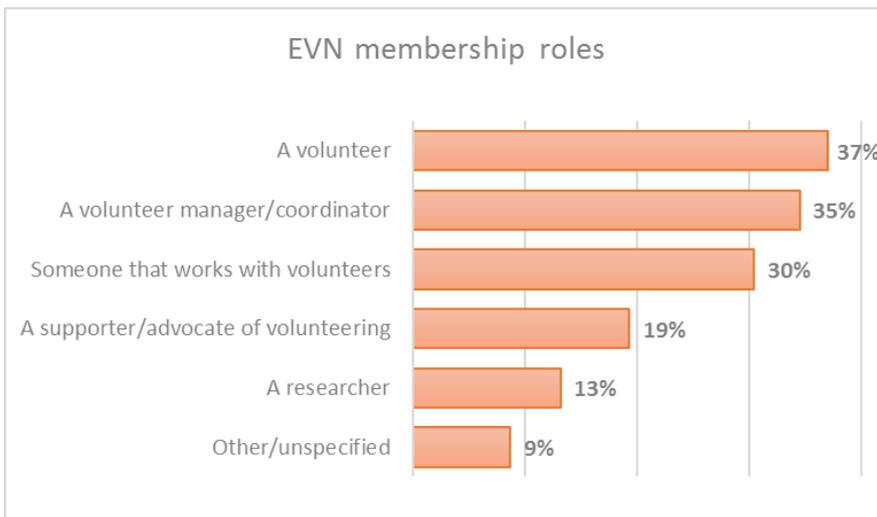
FIGURE 6: EVN MEMBERSHIP ROLES IN EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING (% MEMBERS, N=201)

65% of EVN members worked or volunteered with an emergency service agency (see Figure 7), and 23% with a not-for-profit. Around 20% of members indicated that they worked or volunteered with more than one type of organisation, with some likely referring to a single organisation that fell into multiple categories (e.g. an emergency service agency that is a not-for-profit organisation).
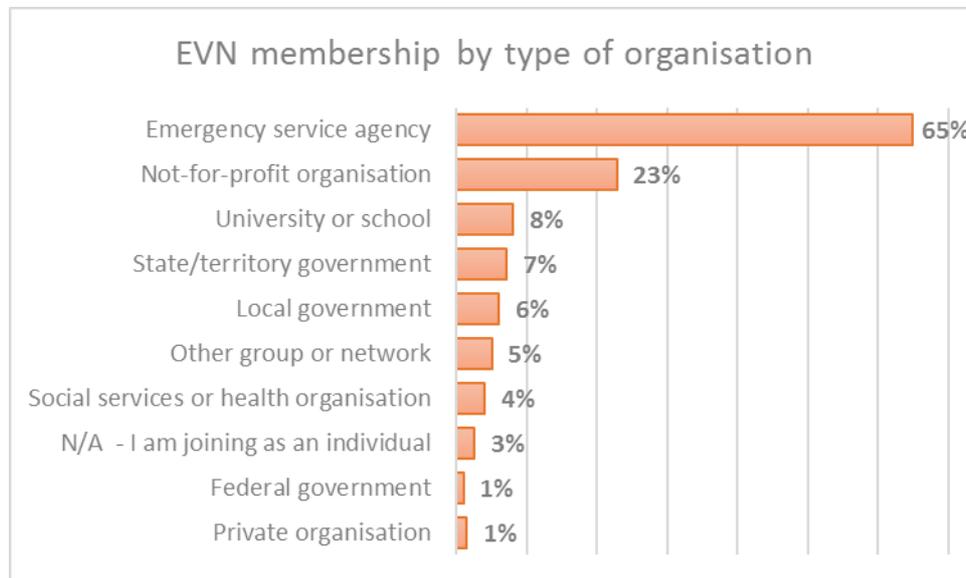
FIGURE 7: EVN MEMBERSHIP BY TYPE OF ORGANISATION (% MEMBERS, N=201)

Over 40% of EVN members lived in Victoria (see Figure 8). This likely reflects the conveners' stronger networks in this state. Of the 5% (10 people) who lived outside of Australia, nine lived in New Zealand (all with Fire and Emergency NZ) and one in the United States.
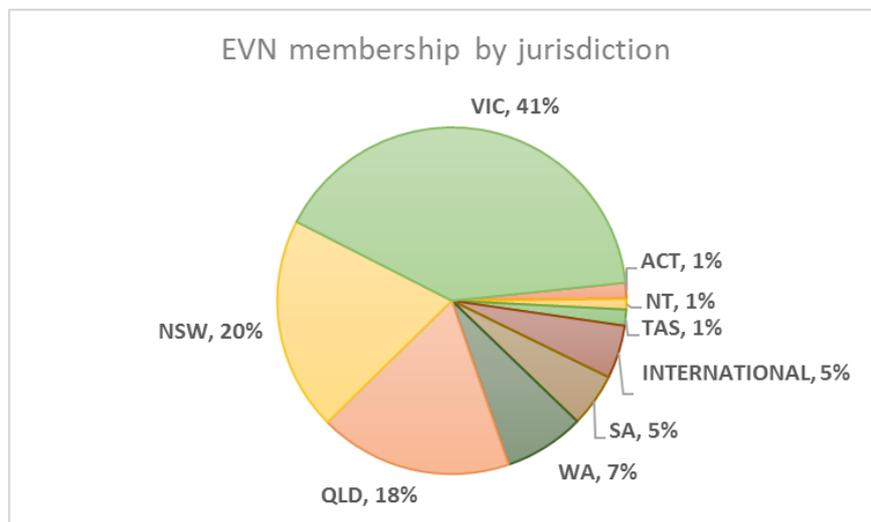
FIGURE 8: EVN MEMBERSHIP BY JURISDICTION (% MEMBERS, N=201)

HOW DID MEMBERS ENGAGE WITH THE EVN?

NEWSLETTERS

Overall, the average member open rate (% of members opening newsletters at least once) for all EVN newsletters was 44.6% as at 9th April 2019. The industry average for education and training is 14.5%, according to MailChimp. Average member click rate (% of members that clicked links in newsletters at least once) was 15.7%, compared to an industry average of 1.3%.

According to MailChimp's member engagement rating (based on the frequency that members open and click links in emails), 37% of members engage with newsletters 'often', 25% 'sometimes', and 36% 'rarely'. Of those members who engaged 'often', 46% identified as volunteers and 36% as volunteer managers/coordinators. Of those who engaged 'rarely', 86% identified as a volunteer manager/coordinator or someone who works with volunteers, and 23% were volunteers. This indicates that, overall, members identifying as volunteers have been most engaged with the EVN.

Details of newsletter performance is shown in the below figures. Figure 9 shows that the number of members receiving newsletters (blue bars) has increased over time, while the number of members opening newsletter emails (orange line) and clicking on at least one link (grey line) has only slightly increased.

Newsletter performance (members, no.)

|	31 Oct 2018 (newsletter)	4 Dec 2018 (newsletter)	22 Jan 2019 (webinar invitation)	28 Feb 2019 (newsletter)	28 Mar 2019 (newsletter)
Members receiving	113	139	175	185	198
Members opening email	73	84	110	91	95
Members clicking links	22	27	35	26	26
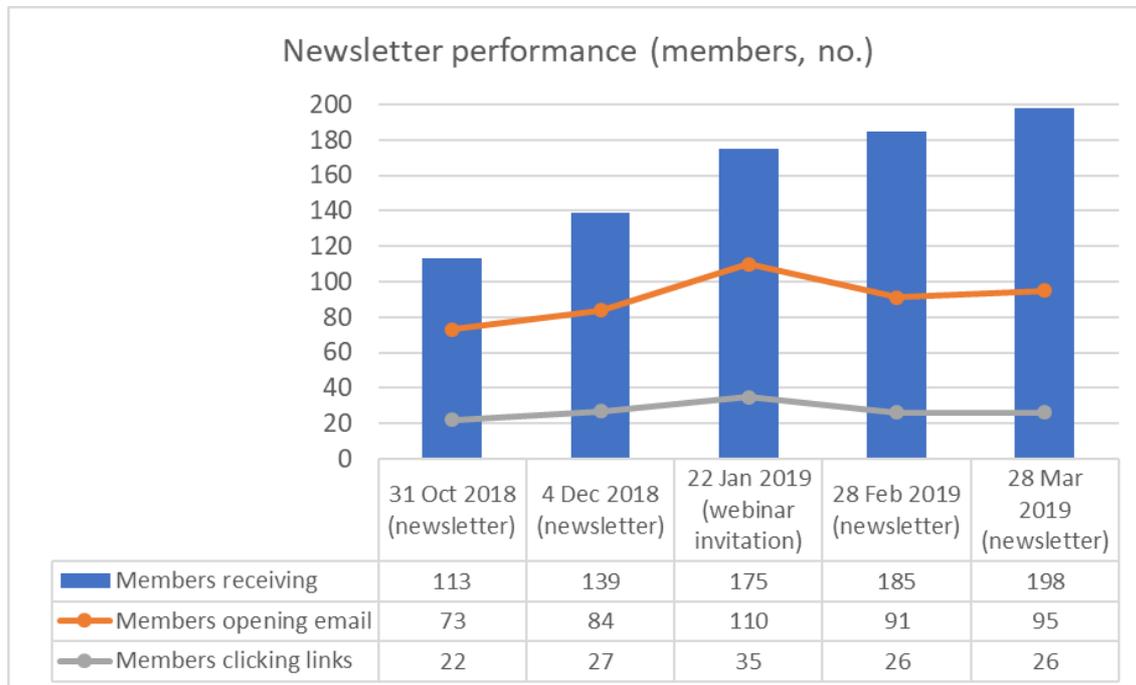
FIGURE 9: NEWSLETTER PERFORMANCE AS AT 9TH APRIL 2019 (NUMBER OF SUBSCRIBED MEMBERS)

Showing this data as a percentage of members at the time each newsletter was released shows a slightly declining trend (Figure 10). This may be due to the decreasing amount of time that subsequent newsletters have been available, as

newsletters are still accessed by members some time after their release (possibly due to activity of new members familiarizing themselves with past newsletters).

Newsletter performance (members, %)

	31 Oct 2018 (newsletter)	4 Dec 2018 (newsletter)	22 Jan 2019 (webinar invitation)	28 Feb 2019 (newsletter)	28 Mar 2019 (newsletter)
Member open rate	65%	60%	63%	49%	48%
Member click rate	20%	19%	20%	14%	13%
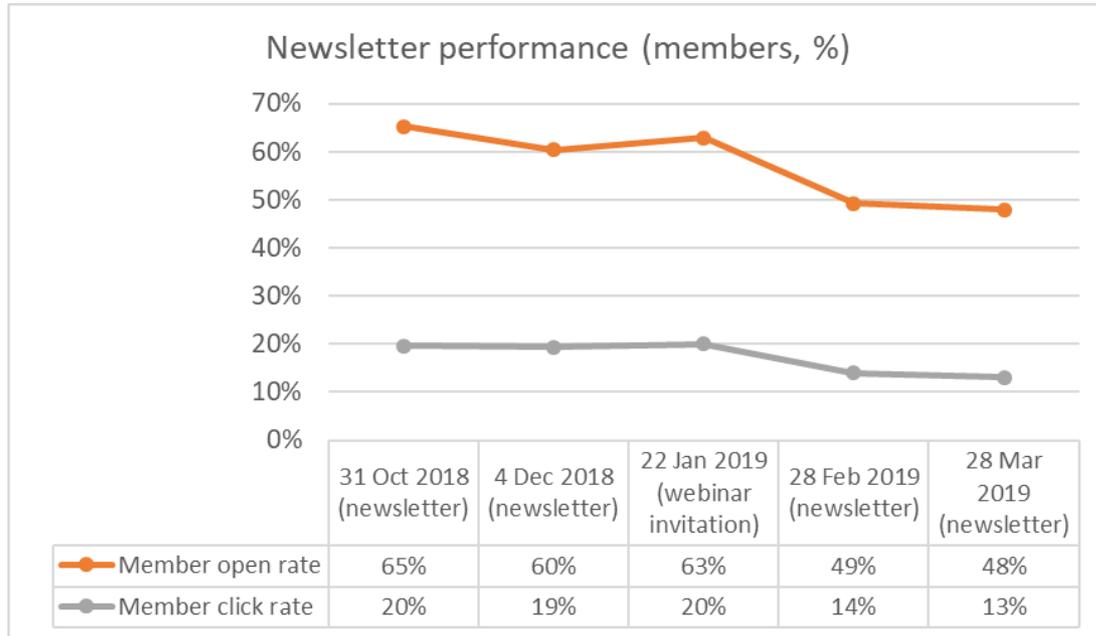
FIGURE 10: NEWSLETTER PERFORMANCE AS AT 9TH APRIL 2019 (% OF SUBSCRIBED MEMBERS)

The total number of times newsletters are opened is considerably higher, however (see Figure 11). This indicates that members (and conveners) are accessing newsletters multiple times and/or forwarding newsletters to others in their networks.

Newsletter performance (no. opens)
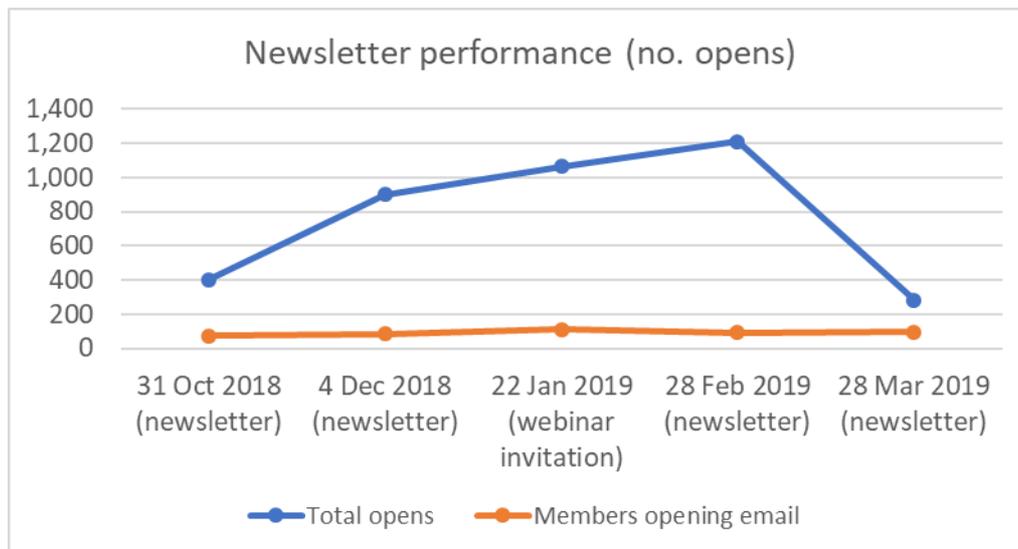
FIGURE 11: NEWSLETTER PERFORMANCE, TOTAL OPENS COMPARED TO NUMBER OF MEMBERS THAT HAVE OPENED NEWSLETTERS AT LEAST ONCE

As expected, according to the EVN Member Feedback Survey distributed at the end of the pilot period, newsletters were by far the most common resource accessed by survey respondents (see Figure 12).
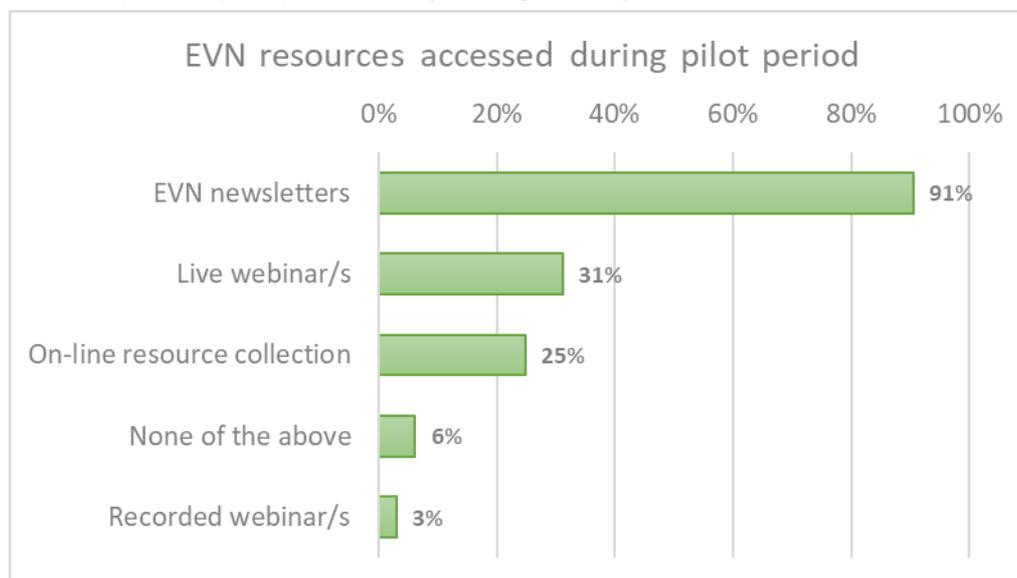
FIGURE 12: EVN RESOURCES ACCESSED DURING PILOT PERIOD (MEMBER FEEDBACK SURVEY, N=32)

RESOURCE COLLECTION

Less data is available on member engagement with the EVN Resource Collection. Google Analytics was not activated to track site usage until the end of the pilot period, on 29th March 2019. This was due to the convener's unfamiliarity with this resource.

Engagement with the EVN Resource Collection can therefore only be approximately gauged through the following snapshots:

- According to Google Analytics, between 29th March and 9th April, the Resource Collection had 17 users, across 26 sessions. Average session time was just over 4 minutes, and half accessed a single page, likely due to following direct links to specific resources featured in newsletters.
- Few EVN members provided content to share on the Resource Collection during the pilot period, and only when directly asked by the convener.
- In the Member Feedback Survey, only 25% of respondents, or 8 people, indicated that they accessed the resource collection. Of those, 5 people rated it as "excellent" and 3 people as "good".

WEBINARS

Engagement with webinars was quite high, with over 20 people attending each of the two completed live webinars from across a range of organisational types and jurisdictions (see Table 2.) Recordings of both webinars continue to be accessed also, and conveners received a number of queries about accessing recordings and other webinar resources (slides, tip sheets etc).

	1) Emergency volunteering 2030	2) Effective on-boarding of new recruits
Registrations	39	45
Live attendees	22	23
Attendee affiliations	Emergency services, 10 Universities/research, 6 Community/voluntary orgs, 3 Other EMOs, 2 State govt, 1 Local govt, 0 Private sector, 0	Emergency services, 11 Universities/research, 4 Community/voluntary orgs, 5 Other EMOs, 1 State govt, 0 Local govt, 1 Private sector, 1
Attendee jurisdictions	Vic, 11 NSW, 3 Qld, 1 WA, 4 SA, 1 ACT, 1 Tas, 0 NT, 1	Vic, 10 NSW, 2 Qld, 2 WA, 6 SA, 2 ACT, 0 Tas, 0 NT, 1

TABLE 2: WEBINAR REGISTRATIONS AND ATTENDANCE

The results of the participant feedback surveys for each webinar are included over page in Figure 13 and Figure 14, with both rated highly on all aspects.

How informative was this webinar? (n=12)

How would you rate the quality of the presenter/s? (n=12)

How responsive were presenters to questions? (n=9)

How would you rate the webinar platform? (n=12)

Would you recommend others attend an EVN webinar? (n=12)

Suggestions for improvements:

❑ Designated Q&A time

❑ Please run more! Provide a 'prize' or recognition for groups who participate together?

❑ Rather than theory of volunteering, concrete application

Future topics for webinars:

❑ A drilling down of each of the areas you have touched on.

❑ Spontaneous volunteers

❑ Case studies of organisations that are responding well

❑ Increasing participation of CALD and other diverse background groups

❑ Challenges for rural areas

❑ How nature of volunteering is changing

❑ Success stories using new approaches

FIGURE 13: WEBINAR ATTENDEE EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK,
"EMERGENCY VOLUNTEERING 2030 - VIEWS FROM VOLUNTEERISM MANAGERS", 5TH FEB 2019

How engaging was this webinar? (n=12)

Highly engaging
Engaging
Neither
Disengaging
Highly disengaging

No. Respondents (0 2 4 6 8 10)

How informative was this webinar? (n=12)

No. Respondents

Rating (1=lowest, 5=highest)

How would you rate the quality of the presenter/s? (n=12)

No. Respondents

Rating (1=lowest, 5=highest)

How would you rate the webinar platform? (n=12)

No. Respondents

Rating (1=lowest, 5=highest)

Would you recommend others attend an EVN webinar? (n=12)

No. Respondents

Rating (1=lowest, 5=highest)

Suggestions for improvements:

❑ Improve sound quality
❑ Move more slowly through slides/topics to allow note-taking

Future topics for webinars:

❑ No suggestions received

FIGURE 14: WEBINAR ATTENDEE EVALUATION AND FEEDBACK, "EFFECTIVE ON-BOARDING OF NEW RECRUITS", 12TH FEB 2019

DID THE EVN MEET MEMBER EXPECTATIONS?

WHAT DID NEW MEMBERS WANT?

The New Member Survey asked several questions to ascertain what new members expected and wanted from the network.

Thematic analysis of the respondents' stated reasons for joining showed that most new members joined either to learn and improve practice (67%), or to connect and keep up-to-date (31%), or both reasons (see Figure 15 and Provided Reasons over page).

FIGURE 15: REASONS FOR JOINING EVN (NEW MEMBER SURVEY (FROM QUALITATIVE DATA, N=52)

Provided reasons for joining (example quotes)

Learn and improve practice

"Involved in management of volunteers (in both a volunteer and paid capacity) and interested in being more effective in those roles."

"…am keen to ensure any research is considered in the way we operate and improve capabilities across services."

"I have joined to learn more about volunteers and emergencies, in particular responding to spontaneous volunteers who want to assist…"

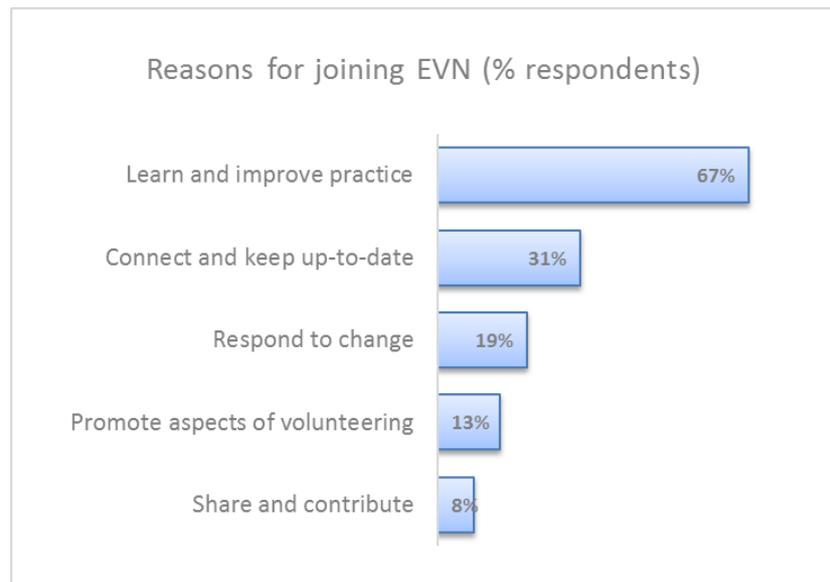"I have joined to learn more about volunteers and emergencies, in particular responding to spontaneous volunteers who want to assist…"

Connect and keep up-to-date

"It is always helpful to connect with wider networks of people for the purposes of resourcing, support, encouragement etc."

"I am interested in staying up-to-date with contemporary issues in volunteering."

"love the idea of sharing information across the country."

"I have joined the network to see if there is a way that we can work together and stop reinventing the wheel each time someone has an idea."

Respond to change

"I think [my organisation] needs to evolve if we are going to remain a volunteer-based emergency services organisation."

"supporting volunteers and volunteer brigades to address challenges impacting on volunteers/ volunteerism."

"Would like to know how volunteering has changed and how can we make it attractive again."

"I have joined the network in order to learn from and exchange knowledge/experiences with those who have an interest in the emergency volunteering space - especially as the sector responds and transforms as a result of emerging challenges and opportunities."

Promote aspects of emergency volunteering

"very interested in promoting volunteer participation in our organisation among Aboriginal communities."

"I am passionate about community recovery after disasters and working with the volunteer and non-government organisations that assist in times of crisis."

"to raise the role of local government volunteers in emergency planning, preparedness and recovery."

"Am really interested in promoting non-traditional volunteering in emergency services."

Respondents were also asked how the aims of the EVN could best be achieved. Table 3 shows their responses arranged from most to least frequent mentions.

THEME	EXAMPLES
Be focused and listen to members	Just need to amend if it isn't working. / Don't lose focus. / This is a start...check out what it is we are interested in. / Flexible approach to knowledge sharing.
Fostering collaboration & encouraging active engagement & sharing	Collaboration and transparency / Encouraging member participation / By fostering and promoting a network culture that is inclusive and encourages contribution and enquiry from all members. / All together. / Hold initial kick-start online national forums that will involve as many individuals as possible. / Opportunity to chat in an online space - blogs and conversation streams.
Build a wide & diverse network	By widening the discussion base on issues relevant to volunteers. / Through communication and discussion with a wide range of people both volunteers and others. / A wide and diverse network. / By having as many volunteers as possible subscribe and contribute.
Sharing content that is relevant & thought-provoking	Ensuring the consistency, relevancy and currency of information provision. / Relevant and easily implemented ideas shared. / Regular insightful and thought-provoking news and information shared. / Being broad in approach - not just about the traditional emergency response volunteers. Spontaneous volunteers, culturally & linguistically diverse, corporate, recovery groups to also be discussed and researched.
Directly connecting with and supporting good 'on-the-ground' practice	Active engagement with on-the-ground programs, coupled with research to ensure best practice is captured with relevant real live events. / Listening to those that have the experience. / Talk and show how. / Sharing the wins. / Consult with the volunteers at grass roots level. / More direct engagement with the emergency management volunteer community, not necessarily funneled through their advocacy bodies
Making research & knowledge more accessible	Having an on-line resource that is available at any time. / Publishing research results in internal volunteer newsletters, magazine or newspapers. / Media stories. / Exactly this - getting people involved to share knowledge and experiences and having other resources to go to. / Publish as much as feasible in sources like the Australian Journal of Emergency Management -- both refereed and non-refereed.
Use multiple engagement methods & platforms	Continued communication across a number of platforms at the very least. / Provide for a range of engagement opportunities.
Advocate for/ support change	Advocating for people helping others in a volunteering context - making it the normal thing. / Assisting with the development of arrangements for planning and management of spontaneous volunteers.

TABLE 3: HOW BEST TO ACHIEVE EVN AIMS (NEW MEMBER SURVEY, FROM QUALITATIVE DATA, N=44)

Respondents also provided the top three volunteering topics about which they most wanted to exchange knowledge and experience through the network (see Figure 16). The most common topics indicated involved recruitment and retention (including volunteer sustainability) (40%), and topics concerning innovation, knowledge, research and best practice (34%).

Top 3 volunteering topics (% respondents)

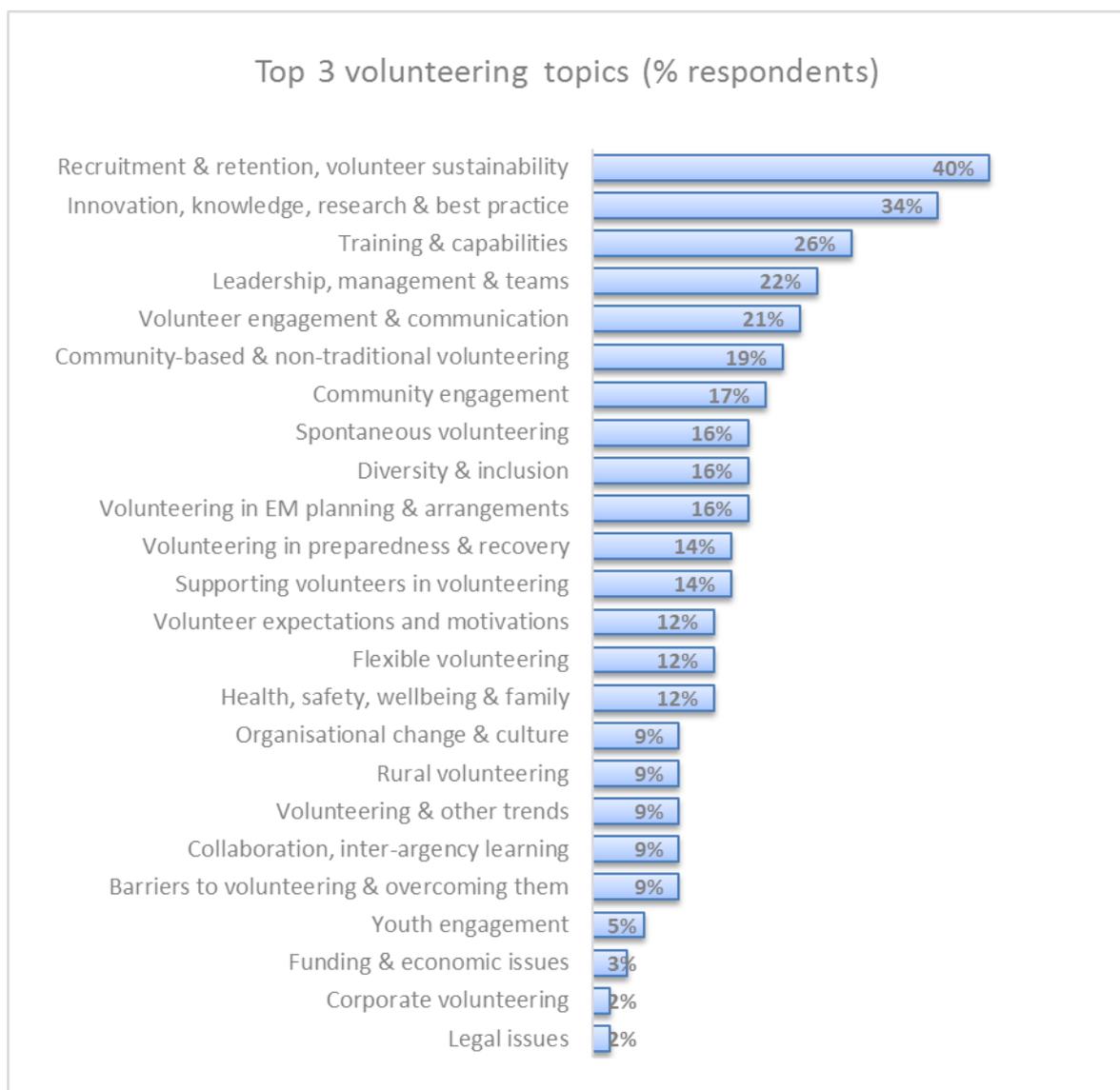| Topic	%
Recruitment & retention, volunteer sustainability	40%
Innovation, knowledge, research & best practice	34%
Training & capabilities	26%
Leadership, management & teams	22%
Volunteer engagement & communication	21%
Community-based & non-traditional volunteering	19%
Community engagement	17%
Spontaneous volunteering	16%
Diversity & inclusion	16%
Volunteering in EM planning & arrangements	16%
Volunteering in preparedness & recovery	14%
Supporting volunteers in volunteering	14%
Volunteer expectations and motivations	12%
Flexible volunteering	12%
Health, safety, wellbeing & family	12%
Organisational change & culture	9%
Rural volunteering	9%
Volunteering & other trends	9%
Collaboration, inter-argency learning	9%
Barriers to volunteering & overcoming them	9%
Youth engagement	5%
Funding & economic issues	3%
Corporate volunteering	2%
Legal issues	2%

FIGURE 16: TOP 3 VOLUNTEERING TOPICS PROVIDED BY RESPONDENTS (FROM QUALITATIVE DATA) (N=59)

Interestingly, when respondents were later asked to select topics of interest from a multiple choice list (see Figure 17, over page), the most commonly selected topics differed somewhat compared to the topics indicated via qualitative data (text boxes), as shown in Figure 16. The future of emergency volunteering (84%), new approaches to volunteer management (71%), and volunteering in changing rural communities (69%) were the most commonly selected options, ahead of recruitment and retention (64%), which topped the previous list.

Which of the following would you like to learn more about? (% respondents)

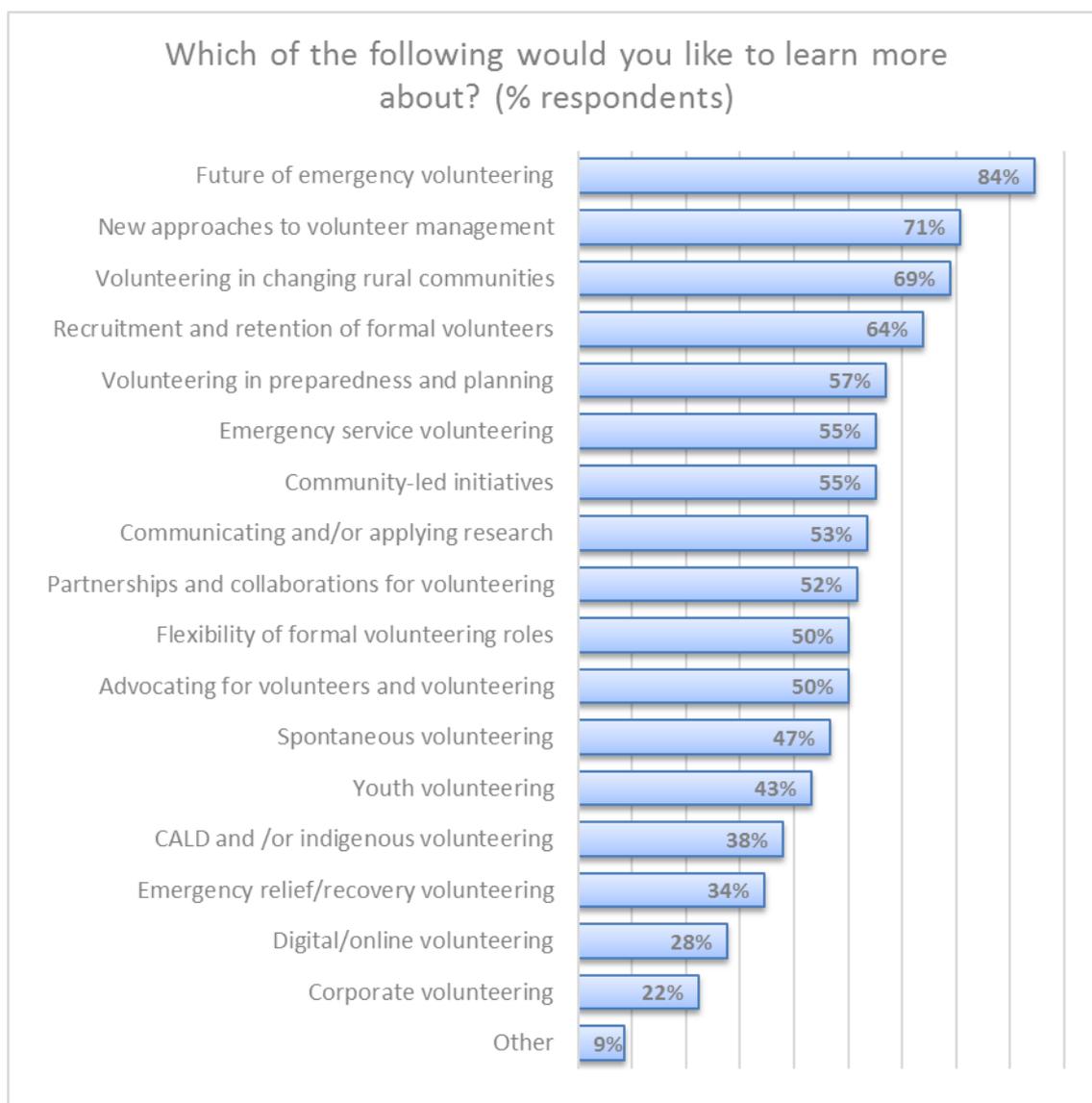| Topic	%
Future of emergency volunteering	84%
New approaches to volunteer management	71%
Volunteering in changing rural communities	69%
Recruitment and retention of formal volunteers	64%
Volunteering in preparedness and planning	57%
Emergency service volunteering	55%
Community-led initiatives	55%
Communicating and/or applying research	53%
Partnerships and collaborations for volunteering	52%
Flexibility of formal volunteering roles	50%
Advocating for volunteers and volunteering	50%
Spontaneous volunteering	47%
Youth volunteering	43%
CALD and /or indigenous volunteering	38%
Emergency relief/recovery volunteering	34%
Digital/online volunteering	28%
Corporate volunteering	22%
Other	9%

FIGURE 17: VOLUNTEERING TOPICS RESPONDENTS MOST WANT TO LEARN MORE ABOUT (FROM MULTIPLE CHOICE LIST) (N=58)

There was wide interest from most survey respondents in the full range of learning activities and resources planned for the network (see Figure 18, over page). The highest rated options were accessing or receiving the three main network resources (resource sharing space, newsletters and recorded webinars). Over 90% of respondents indicated they were 'very' or 'somewhat' interested in each of these. Alternatively, the options involving contributing to resources or attending face-to-face events were rated lower. Despite this, over 75% of respondents were still 'very' or 'somewhat' interested in these options.
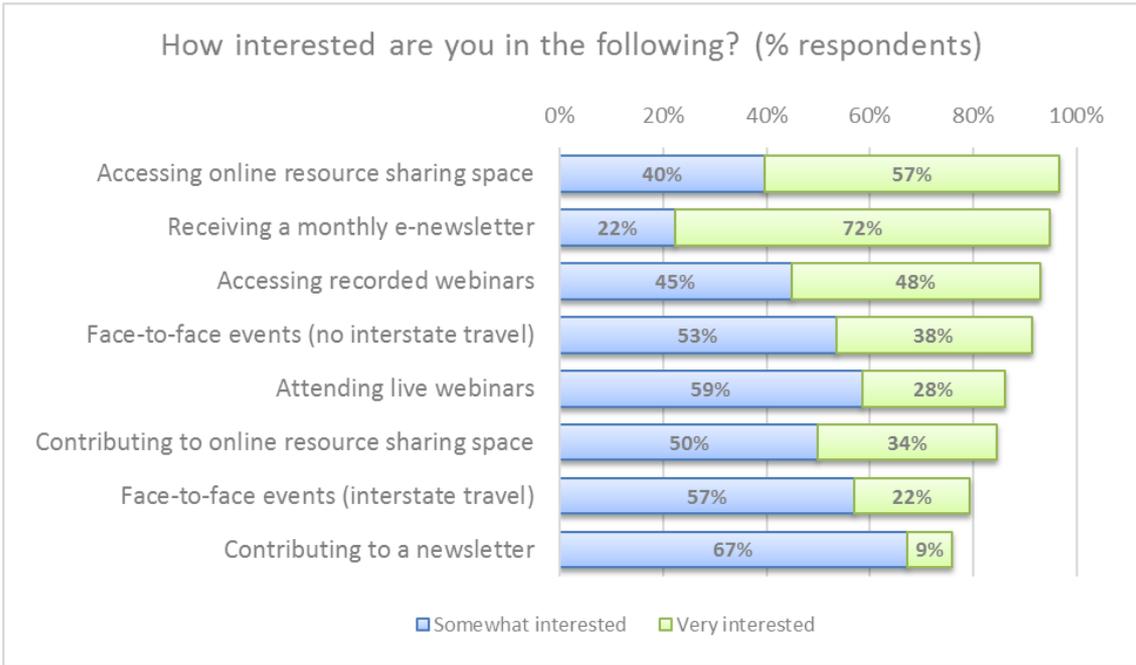
FIGURE 18: PREFERRED LEARNING ACTIVITIES AND RESOURCES (FROM MULTIPLE CHOICE LIST, N=58)

Respondents were also asked who they most wanted to exchange knowledge and experience with (see Figure 19). Responses indicated wide interest in sharing with people in a range of roles across emergency management and the wider voluntary sector in Australia, and, to a lesser degree, internationally.
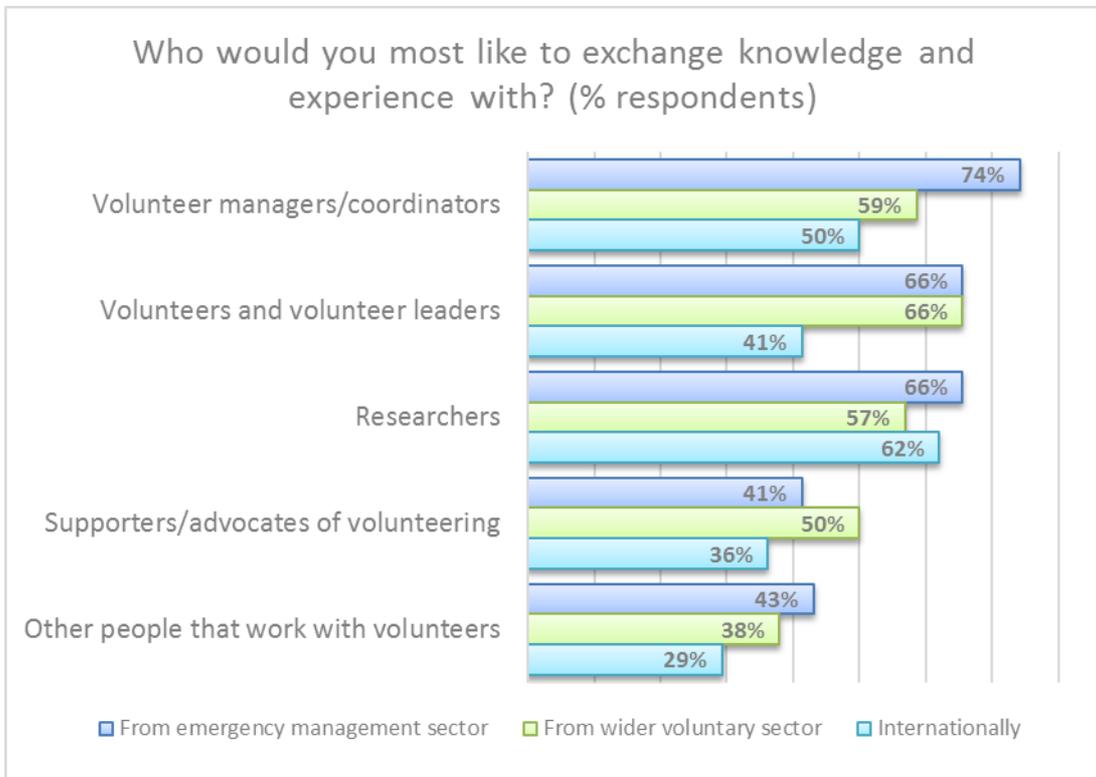

FIGURE 19: WHO RESPONDENTS WANT TO EXCHANGE KNOWLEDGE/EXPERIENCE WITH (FROM MULTIPLE CHOICE MATRIX, N=58)

WERE MEMBERS SATISIFED WITH THE EVN?

The two key measures of member satisfaction with the EVN at the end of the pilot period were: 1) the degree of ongoing engagement with EVN resources, and 2) responses to the Member Feedback Survey. Overall, these measures suggest that a significant number of members have been satisfied with the EVN during its pilot period.

The degree of ongoing member engagement indicated that a significant proportion of EVN members found the network resources valuable, particularly the newsletters. For example:

- Membership steadily increased across the pilot period, and no members unsubscribed from the network member list (as at 30 March).
- The open rates for newsletters were above industry averages, and over a third of members engaged with newsletters "often".
- Newsletters continued to be accessed well beyond their circulation date.
- About 10% of members attended live webinars, with approximately 20% registering interest in the webinar topics.

The Member Feedback Survey directly asked respondents to rate the three key EVN resources – newsletters, the online resource collection and webinars (live and recorded) (see Figure 20). Newsletters were clearly rated highly. Numbers of respondents for the other resources were too low to be representative, however live webinars and the on-line resource collection were also rated as excellent or good. Survey respondents are likely to be from amongst the most engaged EVN members, and survey results should be interpreted with this in mind.
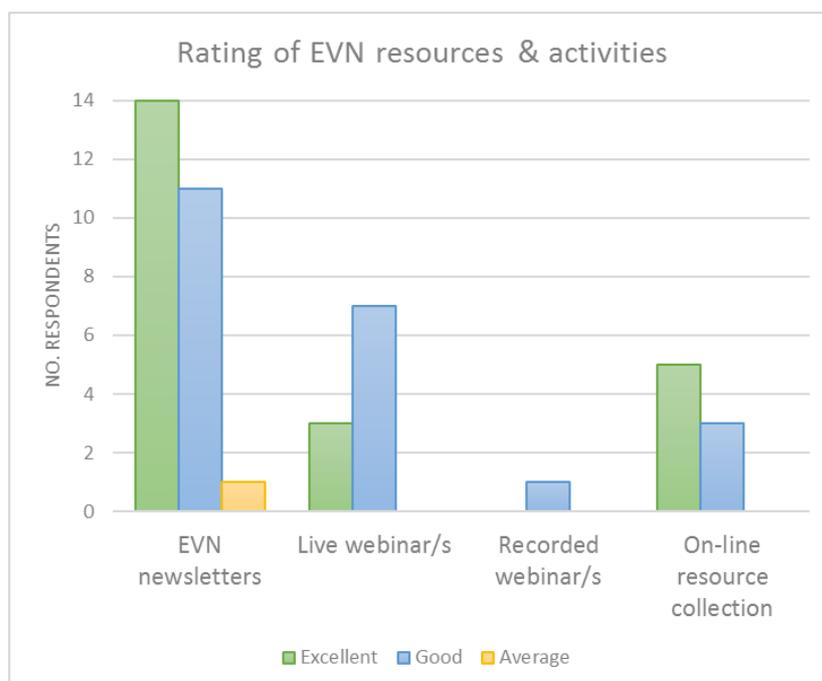

FIGURE 20: MEMBER RATING OF EVN RESOURCES AND ACTIVITIES DURING PILOT PERIOD (MEMBER FEEDBACK SURVEY, N=26)

(**NB**: NO SELECTIONS OF "BAD" OR "TERRIBLE" OPTIONS MADE).

Reasons for 'excellent'/'good' ratings (example quotes)

"Good content with questions that make you think about volunteering in general." (Volunteer, emergency service agency)

"Really interesting information, some issues accessing webinars. Good platform to keep up to date with what other researchers in the area are working on." (Researcher)

"Good informational quality, and relevant." (Volunteer, Emergency service agency)

"Still early days - growing content and skills with presenting the information through these mediums." (Volunteer & someone that works with volunteers, emergency service agency)

"Regardless of the content provided it is important to have a way of expressing and reading other's comments across agency and state barriers." (Volunteer, emergency service agency)

"Engagement with key stakeholders is critical for success in the emergency volunteering sector. Sharing the research gives us a platform to try new strategies and techniques." (Someone that works with volunteers, emergency service agency)

"Access to ideas to assist build our brigade." (Volunteer manager/ coordinator, emergency service agency)

"Readily available and well presented." (Volunteer manager/ coordinator, emergency service agency)

"It keeps me up to date with other people having the same issues as my group and looking at what others are trying as a solution." (Someone that works with volunteers, Emergency service agency)

"Content has been really useful across all of my roles both in being a volunteer and in being responsible for other volunteer groups as part of my work role." (Volunteer, Emergency service agency)

"Readily available and well presented." (Volunteer manager/ coordinator, emergency service agency)

Reasons for 'average' rating or not accessing EVN resources

"Found hardly any time to make use or get to know your resources." (Someone that works with volunteers, Emergency service agency)

"Time poor to read newsletters. Wanting email grabs for better and more effective communication." (Volunteer manager/coordinator, not-for-profit organisation)

"Was not aware of the opportunity." (Other manager, emergency service agency)

Survey respondents also rated the EVN performance overall against their reasons for joining (see Figure 21). Overall, performance was rated more highly for informational and learning oriented reasons for joining, and lower for sharing and networking-oriented reasons.
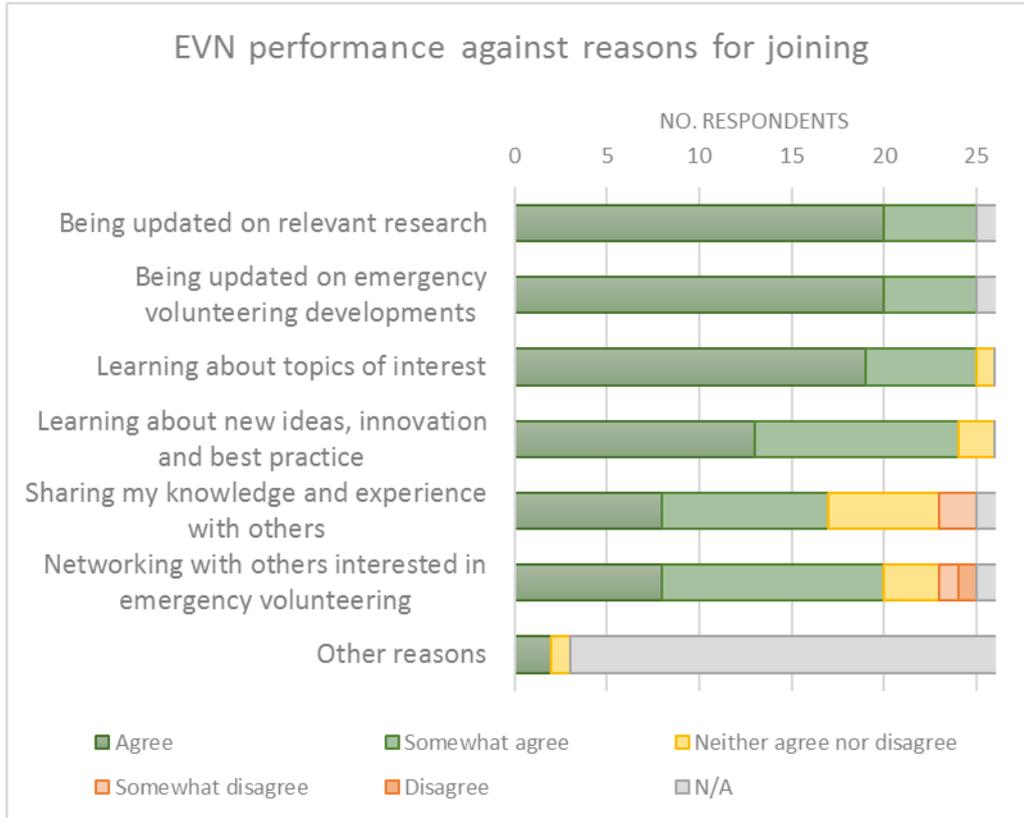

FIGURE 21: EVN PERFORMANCE AGAINST MEMBERS' REASONS FOR JOINING (MEMBER FEEDBACK SURVEY, N=27)

WHAT DO MEMBERS WANT TO SEE HAPPEN WITH THE EVN?

The Member Feedback Survey also asked respondents if they would like to see the EVN continue. 90% of respondents (26 people) said 'yes' and 10% (3 people) said 'maybe' (see Figure 22). No respondents answered 'no' to this question.
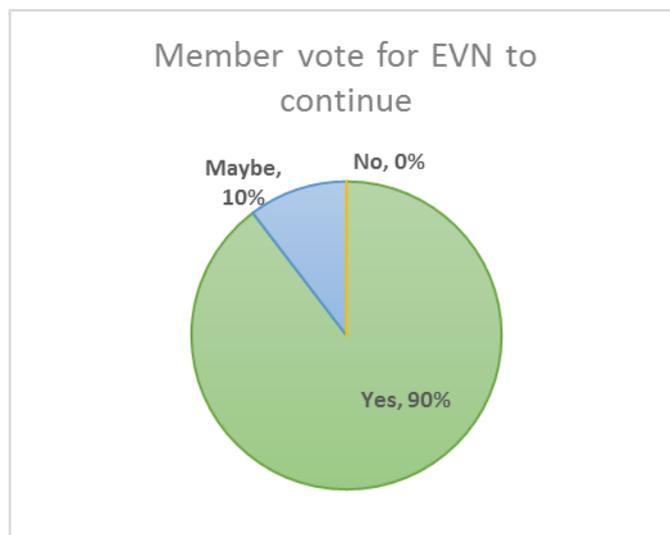

FIGURE 22: MEMBER VOTE FOR EVN TO CONTINUE (MEMBER FEEDBACK SURVEY, N=29)

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Finally, the survey asked respondents what they would most like to see happen with the EVN in future. The dominant theme in responses was to continue or expand on the current approach of the EVN (see Table 4).

Continue/expand current approach (14 mentions)

- *"Continue with emails and newsletters as well as access to the resources."*
- *"Continue to provide well researched ideas from all over Australia"*
- *"Just keen for it to continue and keep sharing and improving coordination across the sector"*
- *"Continue exactly as you have set it up. It's perfect."*
- *"More webinars and links to research and articles on emergency volunteering."*

Increase opportunity for member interaction (4 mentions)

- *"…maybe some online events to allow members to interact."*
- *"More volunteer face to face engagement."*

Priority areas for future learning activities (3 mentions)

- *"Perhaps stimulate/coordinate applications to fund research into emerging/ongoing problematic issues for EM volunteering?"*
- *"Highlight the good things emergency volunteers do...not just during response"*
- *"Send information on volunteer issues."*

Inform change (2 mentions)

- *"Perhaps stimulate/coordinate applications to fund research into emerging/ongoing problematic issues for EM volunteering?"*
- *"Connect back to emergency services managers so they can reflect on findings & implement change strategies."*

Consult members (2 mentions)

- *"Put into practice its findings so we all can see what we have asked to be done."*
- *"More one on one consultation so we can have our say in its improvement."*

Expand membership (2 mentions)

- *"Greater dissemination of information. I see value in sharing with regional teams"*
- *"Widely advertised."*

TABLE 4: FUTURE DIRECTIONS/ACTIVITIES FOR THE EVN (MEMBER FEEDBACK SURVEY, N=24)

One respondent to the Member Feedback Survey described the unique role that RMIT, as an established research institution in the field of disaster and emergency management, can play in convening the network to link grassroots volunteers with research, experience and knowledge across the emergency volunteering spectrum:

I think there is an important role the EVN can fill in providing a "broad church" as such, which communities and the EM sector can tap into, that provides access to latest learning, contacts for specialists in areas of interest etc. In particular I think that RMIT's longevity in the studies and information-sharing of disaster/emergency related knowledge places it as an institution in a unique position of authenticity to continue this work in ways in which grassroot volunteers feel they can engage.

By maintaining the current approach of a "network" this sharing of knowledge will grow in its ability to be a two-way conduit for learning. As such, grassroots volunteer endeavours and experiences will be available to the research world without the need to activate selective research projects to seek out that insight, while volunteers and those who work with them will have access to insights on best practice which may be outside of their normal sources of internal updates.

(Volunteer, emergency service agency)

WHAT DID WE LEARN?

WHAT WORKED WELL?

- The content and accessibility, including the regularity, of newsletters was appreciated by members. "Accessibility" was a repeated theme in positive comments about the network, particularly more direct access to research and to researchers. Further, there was minimal drop-off in newsletter engagement amongst members, suggesting that people remained interested in the content over time.
- Live webinars were well-attended and appreciated by participants. They appear to be quite effective as a way of communicating research and sharing experience with interested people who are not able to access research and learning forums such as BNHCRC Research Advisory Forums, AFAC group meetings and the AFAC/BNHCRC Annual Conference. The ability to record and share webinars more widely further increases this advantage.
- Relatively high membership with quite minimal effort in recruitment shows there is broad interest and support for the idea and concept of a shared learning network, and for engaging more directly with research and innovation/new ideas in the emergency volunteering space.
- Membership in the network was quite wide-ranging, involving people in a range of volunteering-related roles. Engagement in the network was particularly high amongst volunteers, suggesting a quite strong appetite amongst volunteers to engage more directly with research and learning.

WHAT DIDN'T WORK WELL/COULD BE IMPROVED?

More effort could be made to encourage and enable more two-way exchanges. To date, the network has predominantly involved one-way communication (from conveners to members). All three main network resources/activities – newsletters, webinars and the resource collection, have relied heavily on contributions by a single key person (the author). This is not sustainable, as this time investment by a single person cannot continue indefinitely. There was also a steep learning curve with communications technology which required an additional time investment by the author.

In response, EVN members will be invited to an online 'meeting' to discuss the future of the EVN and to establish a team of conveners/key contributors to share workload more sustainably over time. Furthermore, a future direction for improvement could be to seek opportunities for face-to-face interactions amongst members were possible (e.g. breakout sessions at other large events), and to seek out a resource-sharing platform that allows members to more directly contribute to and comment on content. (The current platform, Dropmark, requires a per person member fee to allow this functionality.)

CONVENER REFLECTIONS

- **Time** - Networks like this one build very slowly, and thus take a long time to become established. There is quite an investment required by conveners to build momentum. As much as possible, this responsibility should be shared amongst a group of people. If production of newsletters rests on a small pool of people, then two-monthly instead of monthly newsletters may be more realistic. Whatever time you expect it to take to convene a shared learning network, it will take much more, particularly so in the first few months. Preparation of newsletters and webinars in particular required intense periods of time. A key goal for conveners of a learning network from the beginning needs to be spreading ownership and contribution as widely as possible amongst members. Investing some time in setting up a steering group from the beginning may help facilitate this.

- **Webinars** - Access to webinar software is a benefit for research communication and engagement. Recording webinars is a great way to 'capture' research presentations in a format that is very accessible to a range of people. Using webinars was also a surprisingly fun and engaging way to communicate research, and if kept simple in format, are relatively uncomplicated to organise and moderate. Attendees engaged well with chat facilities to engage in Q&A sessions and were generally very supportive of this way of communicating. However, webinar platforms are costly to maintain for a single network or project that is using the platform only once or twice a month.

- **Researcher learning and development opportunity** – convening the network was a valuable learning and development opportunity for the researchers involved. It enabled us to 'practice' writing about research in a less academic and more accessible style, gain skills in using communications technology, and get a better sense of general sentiment and interests amongst end users and supporters of our substantive area of research. In general, people appreciated us making ourselves, our research knowledge, and our substantive knowledge of what is happening in the sector with regard to volunteering, more directly accessible to them than it would otherwise have been.

EVN LINKS

- EVN home page:
  https://mailchi.mp/61500218323d/evnhome

- EVN information and sign-up page:
  https://mailchi.mp/817ffb39348b/emergencyvolunteeringsharedlearningnetwork

- EVN newsletter archive:
  https://us19.campaign-archive.com/home/?u=9dd21be7ea0ad3b65918179d5&id=44cd145fd9

- EVN resource collection:
  https://emergencyvolunteeringau.dropmark.com/594398

- EVN recorded webinars and webinar resources:
  https://emergencyvolunteeringau.dropmark.com/594398?q=%23AAA-EVN%20%23webinar