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# IMPROVING VOLUNTEER RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION

Annual project report 2015-2016

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Cover: Cleaning up storm damage. Photo by Sharon Quandt, NSW Rural Fire Service.



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This financial year, 2015-2016, has been a busy time for our team. Great progress was made across all three themes of the research project.

The Valuing Volunteers theme has concluded a very difficult and important component of the overall aims of this project by collecting data through the distribution of surveys to volunteers in the NSW SES and SAFECOM. A good response rate was received with the NSW SES through the strong efforts of Bill Calcutt who tirelessly marketed the research to all stakeholders. This research theme is just about to enter its final stage which will explore the issue of 'values' more deeply using Participatory Action Research.

The IRE program is undergoing final testing and evaluation, in total we have had six end-users directly participating in the program – including: EMV, NSW SES, QLD SES, RFS NSW, RFS QLD, VIC SES. The research phase will conclude later this year, and the team will transition to an utilisation mode in cooperation with the CRC and end-users. The program has been consistently well-received by participants and end-users.

The third theme looks at the important issue of diversity and inclusion in emergency services, which are notoriously deficient in creating and maintaining inclusive cultures. The research will utilise an intervention approach to create and evaluate a process for diversity inclusion that is optimum for the emergency services environment, particularly with volunteers.

All three themes have designed pathways towards utilisation. All themes also benefit from very enthusiastic and create doctoral students who are basing their theses on elements of the work being carried out.

### **Dr Michael Jones**

Project Leader

BNHCRC Sustainable Volunteering cluster

Project: Improving the retention and engagement of volunteers in emergency service agencies



## **END USERS STATEMENT**

The NSW SES is strongly committed to the development of strategies to improve the quality of the volunteer experience and increase retention rates. We are pleased to be involved in the Valuing Volunteers project which supports our understanding of the primary motives for volunteering in the NSW SES. The results of the study will enable us to evaluate the importance of individual, group and organisational values alignment for volunteer commitment and retention, in the context of the diverse volunteering roles of the future.

**Kathleen Iacurto**  
**New South Wales State Emergency Service**

The implementation, sustainment and expansion of leadership understanding are essential to meeting the competing and complex demands confronting volunteer emergency services. The Inspire Retain Engage program is providing a sound foundation for understanding volunteer emergency service leadership.

**Peter Jeffrey**  
**Queensland Fire and Emergency Services**



## INTRODUCTION

In today's society, fewer people are making long term commitments towards volunteering. This decline in volunteer availability will gradually reduce the capacity of the volunteer based fire and emergency services to fulfill their charter to deliver essential services to the communities they serve around Australia. It is unfortunate that in many Emergency Service Agencies, the number of trained volunteers who choose to stay and engage barely covers the number of volunteers that leave the organisation. Our research focuses on the retention of volunteers beyond the training period to improve the overall capacity and capabilities of these agencies in their ability to support their sometimes fragile communities.

Acting on previous research and discussions with Cluster End Users, our team has developed three research directions that will provide a practical set of applications for volunteer management when completed. In addition, the research will contribute to academic discourse by publication in peer reviewed journals.

In the previous annual report (2014-15) we wrote about the research questions and methodology. Here we will summarise the progress of the three projects (themes) that are being undertaken:

Theme 1: Valuing volunteers – Reconciling volunteer expectation and experiences in the emergency services

Theme 2: Redesigning leadership – Self-determination theory

Theme 3: Gender diversity – Understanding the causal factors

## **THEME 1: VALUING VOLUNTEERS—RECONCILING VOLUNTEER EXPECTATION AND EXPERIENCES IN EMERGENCY SERVICES**

This project includes the doctoral work of Bill Calcutt. He is the recipient of a BNHCRC scholarship and is supervised by Associate Professor Andrew Sense and Dr Michael Jones of the Faculty of Business, University of Wollongong.



**Photo:** BNHCRC PhD students with the Aurora Australis in Hobart at the RAF meeting, 2016. Bill Calcutt stands on the far right (photo courtesy BNHCRC)

The research aims to provide a better understanding of the primary motivation for volunteering in the volunteer based fire and emergency services. It is utilising a well-established values evaluation framework called the Schwartz theory of basic human values and a modified version of the associated Portrait Values Questionnaire to identify the dominant and shared values of emergency service workforces.

### **RESEARCH PROGRESS SINCE JULY 2015**

The survey of the preferred values of New South Wales State Emergency Services (NSW SES) volunteers proceeded in late 2015 and subsequently elicited 522 responses, representing a 6.5% sample of the NSW SES volunteer workforce.



Unsurprisingly the strongest values preferences revealed in the NSW SES survey responses were “benevolence” and “universalism”, components of the values cluster of self-transcendence that emphasises concern for the interest and welfare of others. These findings are consistent with a proposition that emergency services’ volunteering is fundamentally motivated by altruism.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> strongest values preference was “self-direction”, representing individual creativity and freedom and possibly reflecting the high level of personal initiative required to undertake such potentially demanding roles.

Preliminary analysis suggests there are statistically significant (and thus potentially important) differences in values and cluster preferences between male and female volunteers and between generations (in particular between Gen Y and Baby Boomer volunteers).

In the impending second stage of this research (subject to Human Research Ethics Committee approval) it is proposed to work intensively with selected NSW SES units to explore how the values preferences revealed by the anonymous survey are manifest in the day-to-day work of emergency services volunteers and their degree of alignment with core organisational values.

The initial University of Wollongong’s Human Research Ethics Committee approval was extended to include a preferred values survey of volunteers at the Department of Fire and Emergency Services (DFES) in Western Australia (WA) (yet to be commenced), and a survey of SES volunteers in South Australia (SA) in January 2016. (This was completed and is awaiting analysis).

This project team maintains regular contact with End Users, particularly those who have a direct involvement, to communicate research progress and findings.

## **ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES**

The research anticipates gaining a better understanding of:

- The motivation of the NSW SES volunteer workforce, including differences in values preferences by gender and generation.
- The central role of values in motivating emergency services volunteering generally.
- The role of values misalignment in emergency service volunteer dissatisfaction and turnover.

The findings will have implications for all facets of fire and emergency services volunteer engagement, including targeted recruitment, tailored training, differentiated management strategies, new models of engagement, and the alignment of organisational and personal values.

A comprehensive volunteer workforce values audit framework and toolkit will be made available for use by other emergency services at the completion of the research.





## CHANGES SINCE THE ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

A series of focus group meetings with specific NSW SES units to accompany the organisation-wide survey, proposed in the original research proposal, were not undertaken. The proposed focus group meetings with specific NSW SES units were delayed due to unexpected organisational changes in the NSW SES, but will be subsumed in the stage 2 consultations.

## CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS (BILL CALCUTT)

- Presentation to the Emergency Services volunteer engagement workshop. DFES WA, in Perth on 15 August 2015.
- Poster presentation to the AFAC 2015 conference in Adelaide, 1-3 September.
- Presented the study outline (W. Calcutt) to the Board of the NSW Volunteers Association in Sydney on 11 September 2015.
- Participated as an invited researcher in the Fire and Emergency Services Conference (WAFAS) in Perth on 19 September 2015.
- Presented and participated in the BNHCRC Sustainable Volunteering Cluster workshop on 10 and 11 November 2015 at RMIT University, Melbourne.
- Participant in NSW SES strategic planning workshop in Wollongong on 18 February 2016.
- Poster presentation to the BNHCRC Research Advisory Forum in Hobart, 11-12 May 2016.

## THEME 2: REDESIGNING LEADERSHIP-SELF-DETERMINATION THEORY

This project includes the doctoral work of Vivien Forner. She is supervised by Professor Nina Reynolds and Dr Michael Jones of the Faculty of Business, University of Wollongong.



**Photo:** Vivien Forner (left) in discussion with Lorna O’Dwyer of the Australasian Fire & Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) at the BNHCRC Sustainable Volunteering cluster meeting, November 2015

The research aims to address volunteer turnover due to poor and ineffective leadership. Following on from the pilot Leadership Development Program (LDP) completed in 2014, the current intervention program entitled Inspire Retain Engage (IRE) was refined and developed over the last financial year.



**Figure 1:** The 9 week delivery of the IRE program



The project has a practical component (training program) and a research component that consists of collecting data from program participants and the members/volunteers they supervise.

## RESEARCH PROGRESS SINCE JULY 2015

This year saw significant progress made on the project with three primary achievements:

### 1. Engaged 3 agencies to join the research

The project team invested a great deal of effort towards End User communication and engagement. A cluster-wide strategy included face to face and phone meetings with End Users, presentations held on site at a number of agencies and presenting the project at BNHCRC events. A 12 page "Research Information Pack" was developed to communicate with End Users detailing IRE and the program's logistics. It was distributed by email, along with a formal invitation to take part in the research to all stakeholders in November 2015 and followed up with telephone calls. As an outcome of this process we successfully engaged three agencies to join the research project in 2016. These were Victoria SES (VICSES), NSW Rural Fire Service (NSW RFS) and Queensland Fire and Emergency Services (QFES).

### 2. Completed phase 1 data collection

The University of Wollongong's Human Research Ethics Committee approved the application for research in March 2016. Data for this project is collected via online surveys in the period before (phase 1) and after the IRE program is delivered (phase 2). Leaders in the agencies (e.g. unit controllers, regional managers etc.) and the members/volunteers they supervise are invited to take part in the study. At the time of reporting, data collection for phase 1 (pre-program period) has been completed with 350 surveys received.

### 3. Commenced Inspire Retain Engage program

A total of 61 leaders attended the first day of training and commenced the 9 week program (Figure 1):

- VICSES career staff – commenced Friday 13th May
- VICSES volunteer leaders – commenced Saturday 14th May
- QFES career staff and volunteer leaders combined – commenced Saturday 18th June.

The NSW RFS withdrew from the training due to low numbers. We are currently working with NSW RFS to identify alternate ways for participation in the research.



## ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES

The research anticipates impacting retention, satisfaction and motivation among volunteers in the fire and emergency services by providing leaders with the skills to:

- Understand the role leaders play in building a positive work environment and retaining volunteers.
- Understand how to motivate and engage people.
- Develop and implement practical ways for improving volunteer motivation and commitment.

The project's research is statistically underpinned by solid experimental design and uses data collected from validated surveys. The results of the analysis will be available after the completion of the study.

In addition, it is our intention to present BNHCRC stakeholders with a toolkit that contains the workshop books, notes and presentations related to the IRE program.

## CHANGES SINCE THE ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15

- The name of the program was changed from Leadership Development Program (LDP) to Inspire Retain Engage (IRE).
- Nick Popov withdrew from the project and is concentrating on organisational behaviour and social capital for his Doctorate within a private company unrelated to the BNHCRC.
- The variables of the study have been expanded to include Job Satisfaction, Commitment and Project Management.

## CONFERENCES AND PRESENTATIONS

- Presented and participated in the BNHCRC Sustainable Volunteering Cluster workshop on 10 and 11 November 2015 at RMIT University, Melbourne.
- The suitability of using SDT to build engagement and retention in volunteers was presented at the 2015 International Business Conference in New York City (2-6 August). The presentation won the best paper award.

## THEME 3: WORKFORCE DIVERSITY—UNDERSTANDING THE CAUSAL FACTORS

This project includes the doctoral work of Valerie He. She is supervised by Dr Michael Jones, Faculty of Business and Associate Professor Michael Flood, Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts, University of Wollongong.



**Photo:** Valerie He (right) with Lucas van Rijswijk (Tasmania Fire Service) and Nicole Emmerson (QFES) at the BNHCRC Sustainable Volunteering cluster meeting, November 2015

### RESEARCH PROGRESS SINCE JULY 2015

Building on from a study completed last year with the NSW SES that examined gender-based glass ceilings in emergency services, the current research seeks to understand the barriers and impediments that impact on diversity acceptance within the volunteer cohorts of emergency service agencies. The research design includes a training-based intervention that seeks to improve organisational inclusive behaviour leading to functional diversity, and better integration of minority groups in units and brigades. Analysis is based on a quasi-experimental design to determine the effectiveness of the intervention.



## **ANTICIPATED OUTCOMES**

The program seeks to create solutions to the ongoing issue of poor diversity integration within the emergency services. A proven training program will be designed with research-validated instruments for diversity evaluation.

## **CHANGES SINCE THE ANNUAL REPORT 2014-15**

- Pilot work is currently underway with the NSW SES to understand the social process of diversity acceptance in various units around NSW.
- The name of the theme was changed from “Gender diversity- understanding the casual factors” to “Workforce diversity- understanding that casual factors”.



## PUBLICATIONS LIST

- Jones, M. *et al* (2015) Improving the retention and engagement of volunteers in emergency service agencies. BNHCRC Hazard Note 006, July.
- Jones, M. *et al* (2015) Improving the retention of volunteers through the satisfaction of basic psychological needs. International Business Conference, New York City, USA, August 2-6.
- Calcutt, W (2015). Poster, Volunteering challenges for emergency services. AFAC Conference, Adelaide, 1-3 September.
- Popov, N, Jones, M & Parrish D. (2015). Poster, Redesigning Leadership by addressing basic volunteer needs. AFAC Conference, Adelaide, 1-3 September.
- Calcutt, W (2015), Valuing Volunteers study. The Volunteer (SESVA), issue 33
- Calcutt, W (2015), Valuing Volunteers study. Compass (NSW SES), edition 7
- Jones, M (2015), Pilot. Leadership Development Program 2014. Preliminary findings, BNHCRC report
- Calcutt, W (2015). Emergency services volunteering: better understanding the dynamics of discretionary participation in an essential public service. (Revised and Resubmitted)
- Jones M., Berry Y. (2016), Self Determination Theory principles are an effective tool for volunteer leaders. BNHCRC report
- Calcutt, W (2016). Poster, Valuing Volunteers. BNHCRC Research Advisory Forum meeting, Hobart, 11-12 May
- Jones, M & He, V (2016). Cycles of diversity-An approach towards building acceptance in volunteer organisations. Proceedings of Informing Science & IT Education Conference (InSITE) 2016, 53-57.



## ADDITIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

### WEBSITE

Our website <http://www.uowblogs.com/evp> has been regularly updated since the launch in 2014. During 2015-16 it provided an entry point for past participants of the LDP program (workshop materials) and participants in the Valuing Volunteers study (participant information sheet and electronic survey). The website was visited close to 800 times.

### CLUSTER ENGAGEMENT

Communication with our End Users was much improved over the last year. Michael Jones and Lead End User Robert Dugdale (VIC Country Fire Authority) discussed ideas and progress in fortnightly telephone meetings.

In August 2015, Michael Jones traveled to Melbourne and held meetings, arranged by Robert Dugdale with several Victorian stakeholders.

Following the Australasian Fire & Emergency Service Authorities Council (AFAC) conference in Adelaide in September 2015, he met with South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM) associates, SA SES and the Country Fire Service (CFS).

From 17-20 October he was engaged in discussions in Queensland with Mike Wassing, Deputy Commissioner, Emergency Service Volunteers (QFES), Tom Dawson, Assistant Commissioner, Rural Fire Service, Peter Jeffrey, Assistant Commissioner SES and a number of volunteers.

In January 2016 Michael Jones and Vivien Forner met with the NSW RFS Manager Volunteer Relations and Workforce, Narelle Kotoff and the Learning and Development Officer Kevin White.

As a result of the above meetings, interest in our research was sparked, with a resurgence of interest and support.

Our research team presented at and attended the Sustainable Volunteering Workshop, co-hosted by RMIT University (John Handmer's research group) and the University of Wollongong (Michael Jones's research group) on 10 and 11 November 2015 in Melbourne. The workshop provided ample opportunities for our researchers to engage in discussions with End Users and to appreciate the research undertaken by others in the cluster.



## CURRENT BNHCRC TEAM MEMBERS

- Dr Michael Jones                      Project Leader
- A/Prof Andrew Sense                Chief Investigator
- Bill Calcutt                             PhD Candidate
- Valerie He                                PhD Candidate
- Vivien Forner                          PhD Candidate
- Dr Yoke Berry                          Project Manager



**Photo:** The current research team from left to right: Yoke Berry, Michael Jones, Vivien Forner, Valerie He and Bill Calcutt. Andrew Sense was not available when the picture was taken.

## IRE PROGRAM FACILITATORS

- Vivien Forner, PhD candidate Faculty of Business
- Dr Joakim Eidenfalk, Faculty of Law, Humanities and the Arts
- Dr Michael Jones (Project Leader), Faculty of Business
- Dr Senevi Kiridena, Faculty of Engineering and Information Sciences
- Dr Dominique Parrish, Faculty of Science, Medicine and Health

With assistance from:

- Nick Popov, Doctoral candidate Faculty of Business (Pre 2016)
- David Rae, former Assistant Commissioner and Director Human Services NSW SES (Pre 2015)
- Dr Yoke Berry, Faculty of Business (Project Manager)