



**National Bushfire CRC
Enhancing Volunteer Recruitment and Retention Project
(D3)**

**Report Number 2: 2004
Volunteer Data Base Collection and
Management for Strategic Planning and
Policy Development: A Comparison Across
Fire Services**

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Executive Summary

- All Australian rural fire services collect information about their volunteer members. However, agencies differ on the comprehensiveness of the data collected. Mostly, agencies currently collect “minimal” information necessary for administrative purposes. Few agencies collect information needed to permit detailed strategic human resources planning in relation to volunteer numbers, although some have indicated that they plan to upgrade the comprehensiveness of demographic data collected from new members.
- There appear to be substantial differences among agencies in the completeness and accuracy of information currently in their data bases.
- Fire services differ considerably in their ability to extract information from their existing volunteer data bases. Three systems demonstrated reasonable capability to generate information for a range of strategic planning and policy development purposes.

Recommendations

The following are suggestions for each rural fire service to consider, having regard to their particular needs and circumstances:

1. Review the information currently collected from volunteer members, particularly demographic information, in relation to how comprehensive the information is to support effective strategic planning and policy development concerning volunteer numbers and characteristics.
2. Review the procedures used to collect and update information on volunteer members with respect to timeliness and accuracy, particularly those procedures relating to information flow from brigades to regions/areas.
3. Review the capabilities of the existing data base information extraction and analysis system in relation to current and anticipated needs for strategic planning and policy development purposes concerning volunteer numbers and characteristics.

Introduction

Overview

This introduction describes the background and purpose of the Report, and discusses general issues concerning volunteer fire services data bases in relation to agencies' strategic planning and policy development needs.

The demographic information currently collected by agencies from their new volunteers is summarised and differences among fire services in the information collected are noted. Two agencies (TFS and FESA WA) have foreshadowed proposed changes in the information to be collected in future, and these are also summarised.

The current capabilities of the different agency systems to generate information potentially relevant to strategic planning and policy development needs are summarised.

A concluding discussion notes several important issues to be considered in determining whether or not changes to a current volunteer data collection and information generating system are necessary.

Background to the Report

The Report was compiled using information provided by the seven rural fire services participating in the Bushfire CRC Volunteerism Project (D3). Note that the NT F & RS is not a participant, because of its small volunteer force, and so is not discussed in this Report.

This Report describes the data collection and management systems used currently by agencies to administer their volunteer workforces. The purpose of the Report is to provide a basis for agencies to evaluate the adequacy of their systems to support effective strategic planning and policy development in relation to future volunteer numbers.

It is hoped that the material in the Report will stimulate discussion within and among agencies about rural fire services' volunteer data bases, particularly with respect to the usefulness of the information currently able to be extracted for purposes such as making submissions to governments, and other bodies, on policy matters and responding to submissions from other groups.

Volunteer Data Bases in Relation to Strategic Planning and Policy Development

Volunteer data bases are used, first and foremost, for administrative and support purposes: names, dates of birth, and contact details. They also serve a legal function—recording who is, and who is not, a member of a volunteer fire service at any given time. Their most recent purpose has been to record whether or not a volunteer has met specified training standards in connection with OH & S requirements. It seems that for most agencies, this last function has been the focus of their recent volunteer data base development work.

All the preceding functions of a data base are concerned, more or less, with day-to-day administration of a volunteer workforce. However, workforce data bases have the potential to provide organisations with information which can be used to (a) guide strategic planning in anticipation of future changes in the context in which an organisation operates, and (b) support the development of new policies as responses to expected changes.

Demographic information on volunteers is information about the person of the volunteer, apart from basic name and contact details. Demographic information can potentially serve three major functions for a volunteer fire service:

1. Provide indicators about the “health” of the organisation.
2. Provide evidence of compliance with legislative requirements.
3. Provide support for submissions to governments and other bodies concerning “resources” for the organisation.

Organisational “Health” Indicators

Organisations like rural fire services need to know about their volunteer recruitment/attrition balance in order to operate with a degree of certainty about human capital aspects of their response capability. Reliable data on annual attrition rates provide a good indicator of the stability of the volunteer workforce. Marked increases in annual attrition rate are likely to signify some adverse development in either or both of the organisational climate or the agency’s social and economic environment.

A second indicator of organisational health is the profile of lengths-of-service of the volunteer force. There is a widely-held “rule of thumb” in industry that, for work roles involving a reasonable level of skill and judgement, it takes about three years experience for an employee to become competent, and about 10 years for an employee to become expert. Applying this principle, a situation in which an agency profile of length-of-service indicated (a) increasing numbers of volunteers with less than three years service, and (b) decreasing numbers of volunteers with ten or more years service is likely to signal a trend of falling volunteer force knowledge and skill level.

A third health indicator is the age profile of the agency’s volunteers. Operational firefighting requires a basic minimum level of health, strength, and fitness. Sadly, all three deteriorate generally with increasing age. Indications of an ageing volunteer firefighting force would signal a need to develop and direct new recruiting initiatives targeting a younger segment of the community. The issue of age profiles of rural fire service volunteers will become extremely important in the future if developments in OH & S provisions require operational volunteer firefighters to meet fitness standards annually—note that this is already the case in the ACT ESA.

A fourth health indicator is the degree to which the volunteer workforce reflects the makeup of the wider community. If a volunteer force is very different in composition from its host community, this may be an indicator of some lack of community support for the agency. Age, gender, and ethnic or cultural background are all potentially important indicators of the degree to which brigades express the composition of their host communities.

Compliance with Requirements

States and Territories have equity/diversity policies for government instrumentalities. These involve, mostly, gender, ethnicity, Aboriginal and Torres Straits Islander support, and disability. It would seem prudent for agencies to collect information which would allow them to provide data if required to report on compliance levels.

Support for Policy Submissions

It hardly needs to be said that there is ever increasing competition among departments and instrumentalities for funds from governments. Submissions which have financial implications are expected to be backed by good supporting data in order to be effective. In the world of emergency services volunteering, there seem to be good grounds for predicting that incentives and rewards are likely to be topics of discussion in various forums concerning volunteer recruitment and retention in the future. (This was noted in Bushfire CRC Volunteerism Project [D3] Report Number 1: 2004, *Recruitment and Retention of Volunteers: Rural Fire Services' Issues and Initiatives*.) Factors relating to volunteers' employment are likely to figure in such discussions. Several kinds of "incentive" schemes to (a) reward or compensate volunteers and (b) compensate employers of volunteers have been mooted, and, in some North American emergency services agencies, implemented. There are likely to be pressures (from a range of sources) on Australian volunteer emergency services concerning such schemes. Rural fire services may be required to make submissions concerning such matters, or to respond to submissions from others. Submissions, or responses to submissions, are more likely to be effective if they incorporate good supporting data, possibly including information about topics such as: volunteers' employment statuses, industry sectors of volunteers' employers, volunteers' roles within the agency, and volunteers' levels of skill/education.

Volunteer Data Collection

Table 1 (on the following page) summarises the demographic information currently collected from new volunteers by the seven participating fire services. More detailed descriptions provided by agencies are contained in Appendix B.

All agencies collect information on gender and age, and all but one (QLD F & RS) collects information on work-related qualifications. Beyond this, however, there is considerable variation among agencies on what is and is not collected. Two agencies do not collect information on whether a volunteer has an operational or a support role (NSW RFS and FESA WA—although FESA intends to collect this in the future).

The most important feature of the summary table is probably that it shows a complete lack of information collected concerning the employment status and circumstance of volunteers: no agency collects information (in a centralised fashion, at least—local brigades may well have the information as part of their volunteers' contact details information) about a volunteer's employment status on joining (full- or part-time, self-employed, retired, etc.); only one agency collects information on volunteers' employers (ACT ESA, while TFS proposes to do so in the future).

In relation to issues of how well the composition of brigades reflects the nature of their host communities (and also issues of equity/diversity), only two agencies collect information related to ethnicity/cultural background (ACT ESA, and SA CFS, while TFS intends to do so). No agency currently collects information on whether a volunteer identifies him/herself as an Indigenous Australian (although TFS proposes to do so in the future).

**Table 1: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ON VOLUNTEERS
CURRENTLY COLLECTED BY RURAL FIRE SERVICES**

INFORMATION	ACT	CFA	NSW RFS	QLD F & RS	SA CFS	TAS FS	TAS FS PROPOSED	WA FESA	WA FESA PROPOSED
GENDER	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
DATE OF BIRTH OR AGE	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
ETHNICITY	YES	X	X	X	YES	X	YES	X	X
INDIGINOUS AUSTRALIAN	X	X	X	X	X	X	YES	X	X
OCCUPATION	YES	X	YES	X	X	X	YES	YES	YES^A
EDUCATION LEVEL	YES	X	X	X	YES	X	YES	X	X
WORK-RELATED QUALIFICATIONS	YES	YES	YES	X	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
EMPLOYMENT STATUS (FULL- TIME, SELF. Etc)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
EMPLOYER	YES	X	X	X	X	X	YES	X	X
EMPLOYMENT INDUSTRY CATEGORY (ABS CODE)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
VOLUNTEER ROLE: OPERATIONAL/SUPPORT	YES	YES	X	YES	YES	YES	YES	X	YES
OTHER VOLUNTEER AFFILIATIONS	X	X	YES	YES	X	YES	YES	X	X

X NOT REQUESTED

^A NOTE: INCLUDES ABS OCCUPATION CODE

Information Available From Agencies' Volunteer Data Bases

Collecting information on paper from volunteers does not necessarily translate into information availability from a volunteer data base. In order to form a picture of the “usability” of agency data bases to generate information potentially relevant to volunteering strategic planning and policy development issues, a list of questions about their volunteer workforce was sent to each agency, with a request that they use their data base and data management system to answer as many of the questions as possible. The list of questions was generated after inspecting a range of reports relating to policy issues concerning volunteers—the reports originated from diverse volunteer-hosting organisations including, but not limited to, emergency services volunteer organisations.

Fire services were asked to only provide information which could be generated by their data management system as a matter of “routine”—with no special programming or hand-compilation of data. The list of questions and the instructions to agencies is contained in Appendix A. A summary of the information provided by agencies about their volunteers is in Bushfire CRC Volunteerism Project (D3) Report Number 3; 2004, *A National Profile of Volunteer Firefighters*.

Table 2 (on the four pages following this Section) summarises the information provided by the seven participating rural fire services.

The situation for NSW RFS requires some explanation. The centralised records system was established only recently (late 2001). It replaced a distributed local government (municipal-based) system of volunteer record keeping. The old records taken over and converted to the new (RMS) system were very variable in accuracy and completeness. At present, local brigades keep up-to-date records on the number of volunteers available for duty (active, or effective volunteers). The numbers able to be generated by the centralised data base thus do not currently describe the actual numbers of volunteers available for duty with brigades.

WAFESA is in a somewhat similar situation. There are three kinds of volunteer firefighter organisations: the Volunteer Fire and Rescue Service (approximately 2,500 volunteers); FESA multi-function units (approximately 300 volunteers); and volunteer Bush Fire Brigades (approximately 26,500 volunteers). The volunteer Bush Fire Brigades are the responsibility of local municipalities and information about volunteers' roles (operational/support) is not provided to FESA.

Note that of the seven fire services, four use the RMS---Resource Management System---software first developed for CFA (CFA, TFS, NSW RFS, and WA FESA---there may be differences among the actual versions of RMS in use by the four agencies, of course). It is noteworthy that these four agencies evidently differ greatly in their ability to readily interrogate their RMS volunteer data base systems and extract statistical information about their volunteer work force, with TFS being able to generate the most comprehensive profiles. It seems that TFS was the only RMS-based agency able to easily “drill down” so as to be able to extract information such as age and length-of-service profiles at the joint levels of role (operational, support) and gender. In my opinion, statistical data on volunteer numbers and trends requires that level of analysis in order to be truly informative about the composition of an agency's volunteer workforce.

SA CFS and QLD F & RS were also able to extract information from their systems down to the joint levels of volunteer role and gender, QLD F & RS for both volunteers' ages and lengths-of-service, SA CFS only for age—not length of service.

No agency was able to provide information about their volunteers' levels of education, or their employment status, or the employers of their volunteers.

Five of the agencies were able to provide information on annual attrition rates, however NSW RFS indicated that their figure could only be regarded as an estimate.

The overall picture of fire services' abilities to generate information on the nature of their volunteer workforces is one of great variability. Three agencies (TFS, QLD F & RS, and SA CFS) were able to generate reasonably comprehensive profiles, the other agencies were more limited in what they could extract from their data bases.

At the present time, it appears that there is very little information able to be provided by fire services to incorporate in a national profile describing Australia's volunteer firefighter workforce.

Table 2: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION ABLE TO BE GENERATED ABOUT VOLUNTEERS BY CURRENT FIRE SERVICE DATA MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

INFORMATION	ACT	CFA^a	NSW RFS^{a b}	QLD F & RS	SA CFS	TAS FS^a	WA FESA^{a f}
TOTAL ACTIVE VOLUNTEERS ON DUTY (excluding members on leave or reserves) – BOTH OPERATIONAL AND SUPPORT ROLES	YES	YES	YES^c	YES	YES	X	YES
NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN OPERATIONAL ROLES	YES	YES	X^c	YES	YES	YES	X^f
NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN SUPPORT ROLES	YES	YES	X^c	YES	YES	YES	X^f
NUMBER OF MALE VOLUNTEERS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
NUMBER OF FEMALE VOLUNTEERS	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES	YES
NUMBER OF OPERATIONAL VOLUNTEERS: MALE	YES	YES	X^c	YES	YES	YES	X^f
NUMBER OF OPERATIONAL VOLUNTEERS: FEMALE	YES	YES	X^c	YES	YES	YES	X^f

(INFORMATION)	(ACT)	(CFA^a)	(NSW RFS^{a b})	(QLD F & RS)	(SA CFS)	(TAS FS^a)	(WA FESA^a)
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF ALL VOLUNTEERS	X	YES	YES-SEE NOTE^d	YES	YES	YES	YES
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF MALE VOLUNTEERS	X	X	X	YES	YES	YES	YES
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF FEMALE VOLUNTEERS	X	X	X	YES	YES	YES	YES
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATIONAL VOLUNTEERS: MALE	X	X	X^c	YES	YES	YES	X^f
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPORT ROLE VOLUNTEERS: MALE	X	X	X^c	YES	YES	YES	X^f
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF OPERATIONAL VOLUNTEERS: FEMALE	X	X	X^c	YES	YES	YES	X^f
AGE DISTRIBUTION OF SUPPORT ROLE VOLUNTEERS: FEMALE	X	X	X^c	YES	YES	YES	X^f
YEARS OF SERVICE: ALL	X	YES	X	YES	YES	YES	X
YEARS OF SERVICE: MALE	X	X	X	YES	YES	YES	X

(INFORMATION)	(ACT)	(CFA^a)	(NSW RFS^{a b})	(QLD F & RS)	(SA CFS)	(TAS FS^a)	(WA FESA^a)
YEARS OF SERVICE: FEMALE	X	X	X	YES	YES	YES	X
YEARS OF SERVICE OPERATIONAL VOLUNTEERS: MALE	X	X	X^c	YES	X	YES	X^f
YEARS OF SERVICE SUPPORT ROLE VOLUNTEERS: MALE	X	X	X^c	YES	X	YES	X^f
YEARS OF SERVICE OPERATIONAL VOLUNTEERS: FEMALE	X	X	X^c	YES	X	YES	X^f
YEARS OF SERVICE SUPPORT ROLE VOLUNTEERS: FEMALE	X	X	X^c	YES	X	YES	X^f
YEARS OF SERVICE ACTIVE SUPPORT ROLE FEMALE	X	X	X^c	YES	X	YES	X^f
TABLE OF VOLUNTEER NUMBERS BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION - MALE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TABLE OF VOLUNTEER NUMBERS BY LEVEL OF EDUCATION - FEMALE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TABLE OF EMPLOYER INDUSTRY TYPES BY NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN EACH - MALE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

(INFORMATION)	(ACT)	(CFA^a)	(NSW RFS^{a b})	(QLD F & RS)	(SA CFS)	(TAS FS^a)	(WA FESA^a)
TABLE OF EMPLOYER INDUSTRY TYPES BY NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS IN EACH - FEMALE	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
TOTAL NUMBER OF VOLUNTEERS LEAVING ORGANISATION (ALL REASONS) IN THE PREVIOUS TWELVE MONTHS	YES	YES	YES^e	X	YES	YES	X

NOTES:

^a Uses the RMS system

^b A single, centralised NSW RFS record keeping system only commenced in late 2001.

^c The definition of “active”/“inactive” is set at Brigade level. There is no recorded distinction between an “active operational” and an “active non-operational (=support)” volunteer.

^d There is a high number of “invalid”/unknown age cases (35%).

^e Estimate, not an exact figure.

^f Information on volunteer role (operational/support) is not passed-on to FESA by Bush Fire Brigades, which are municipally based.

Concluding Discussion

The preceding material suggests that, at face value, there is considerable scope for most rural fire services to improve the comprehensiveness of the demographic data collected on their volunteers and the power and flexibility of their data analysis systems to extract statistical information from their volunteer data bases. Obviously, this is unlikely to be a simple matter and several issues will doubtless be considered by agencies contemplating up-grading their volunteer data collection and monitoring system.

Issue #1: Privacy

All states and territories have in place legislation regulating the collection of personal data by government instrumentalities. An important privacy principle is that the collection of any item of information has to be shown to be necessary. There may be some opposition by current and future volunteers to the collection of increased amounts of personal information. Any decisions about collecting additional information will need to be (a) made carefully, with a clear sense of what the information will be used for, and (b) explained to the current membership and future volunteers in relation to the agency's privacy policy statement. New volunteer member application/registration forms will need to be carefully designed to distinguish "essential" from "desirable but optional" information requested, and the latter material worded in such a manner as to maximise the likelihood of completion.

Issue #2: Integrity of the Data Base Information

During the course of my discussions with fire service personnel involved in maintaining and using volunteer data bases it was clear that there are great differences in the trustworthiness and completeness of the information contained in the different data bases. As examples, TFS took the opportunity to review their (then approximately 5000) records manually when they converted to their present RMS data base system and their records are probably very accurate and complete. NSW RFS has inherited an older system containing approximately 70,000 records. It is known that many of the entries are incomplete and checking the records manually would involve considerable time and resources. However, all records systems degrade over time to some extent if not checked. All agencies need to look at various options available for correcting errors and rectifying omissions. Most organisations with large memberships periodically send each individual member a copy of his or her record to be checked for accuracy and completeness. Fire services who do not currently follow such a procedure may wish to consider doing so.

Issue #3: Maintaining the Data Base

Most of the personal information currently collected by agencies from their volunteers does not change (e.g., date of birth, date of commencement) and thus does not require updating. However, if agencies expanded the scope of data collection to include information such as employment status, industry sector, and educational qualifications this would require some regular updating procedure if it was to be of any use to an agency. This task would probably fall to brigade secretaries. However, concerns are already being expressed by some that the

greater formalisation of reporting requirements introduced by fire services generally over the past five years already entails considerable burden on brigade secretaries. Agencies would probably have to explore ways of providing additional support to brigades in managing their administrative workloads.

Providing such support is probably worth considering regardless of any decisions about collecting and updating additional information on members of volunteer brigades. During my visits and discussions with fire services personnel, frustration was frequently expressed over delays in information being received from some brigades. This suggests to me a need for agencies to review current brigade reporting procedures generally to see if these can be streamlined or otherwise made less onerous.

Issue #4: Cost

All the measures described above would entail financial cost to rural fire services, and in the absence of injections of additional funds from governments the money would obviously have to come at the expense of other services and programs. Fire services senior managers will doubtless make decisions about how important their volunteer data collection, management, and analysis systems are, and how much of limited funds should be spent to ensure that good quality information can be generated.

As the industry peak body with responsibility for coordinating submissions at Federal level, the Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) may also have a view on what kinds of demographic data on fire service volunteers it would regard as being desirable to support submissions addressing issues likely to impact on volunteer firefighter numbers.

Acknowledgments

Thanks to the following who provided the information compiled in the two comparison tables:

ACT ESA	Roberta Liddell, David Tunbridge
CFA VIC	Charles King
NSW RFS	Martin Surrey, Helen Carlos
QLD F & RS	Bernie Trembath, Deborah Baumann, Maureen Lessmann
SA CFS/ESAU	Adaire Palmer, Eileen Dunlop
TFS	Gerald Kutzner
WA FESA	Glenda Husk, Julie Cook

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Mary Bertoldi, La Trobe University CRC Projects Administrative Officer, assisted in preparing the Report.

The author is solely responsible for the views expressed in the Report.

Additional copies of this Report are available from Mary Bertoldi:
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Appendix A: request for statistical information on volunteers sent to rural fire services

Bushfire CRC Volunteers Project: National Profile of Volunteer Firefighters

1. One of the required tasks of the Volunteers Project is to write a Report describing the National profile of volunteer firefighters and I am seeking your assistance in this. What I need is some information on your volunteers, as generated by your data system. I do NOT want any special programming or time-consuming manual compilation—just what your present volunteer data management system can “routinely” generate on request.
2. Note that I want to try to combine as much data across agencies as I can, so I need numbers, not diagrams or charts or percentages –if your system generates diagrams or charts automatically fine, so long as the raw numbers can be extracted by me.
3. I have listed what I want. For each, if your data management system is not configured to produce it, simply indicate “not available”.
4. My preference is for end-December 2003 data, but if your system only generates end-June 2003 (financial year) data, that is fine.
5. The list of what I am requesting:
 - (a) Total number of active volunteer firefighters [active as distinct from on leave, on reserve lists etc—include both operational AND support role volunteers].
 - (b) Total number of operational volunteers and support role volunteers
 - (c) Total number of active male volunteers
 - (d) Total number of active female volunteers
 - (e) Total number of active operational Male volunteers
 - (f) Total number of active operational Female volunteers
 - (g) Age distribution of active male volunteers
 - (h) Age distribution of active female volunteers
 - (i) Age distribution of active male operational volunteers
 - (j) Age distribution of active male support role volunteers
 - (k) Age distribution of active female operational volunteers
 - (l) Age distribution of active female support role volunteers
 - (m) Years of service distribution of active male operational volunteers
 - (n) Years of service distribution of active male support volunteers
 - (o) Years of service distribution of active female operational volunteers
 - (p) Years of service distribution of active female support volunteers
 - (q) Table of volunteer numbers by level of education – males
 - (r) Table of volunteer numbers by level of education – females
 - (s) Table of employer industry types by number of volunteers in each – males
 - (t) Table of employer industry types by number of volunteers in each- females
 - (u) The number of volunteers leaving the organisation (all reasons) in the previous 12 months
6. I realise the above is lengthy—I am casting the net widely to get a clear picture of what kinds of things we can, and cannot, say about our volunteer firefighters.

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7. If you believe that additional information which I have not asked for would be useful, please let me know. If anything I have asked for is unclear, please check with me.
8. If at all possible, I would like the material by Friday, 4 June 2004.

---Thanks in anticipation,

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Appendix B: Information on volunteer data base collection and management provided by rural fire services

ACT Fire and Emergency Services Authority.

Data collection and management.

There are two separate data bases. The first uses EXCEL. This records information about individuals who express interest in joining as a volunteer. It is used to keep track of interested individuals prior to a volunteer becoming registered as a Member.

At registration, information is entered on the Training Data Base, in ACCESS. This data management system is limited in the information it is able to generate. Information can be generated for Brigades or for all volunteers.

The only distinction in status able to be compiled is Active versus Inactive. It is not possible to generate information, say, for Operational members versus Non operational (support) members.

Every 12 months volunteers undertake a fitness test in order to maintain/move to an Operational status. Information on a new Member is recorded at Registration when initial training is completed.

More information is collected in hard copy form than is entered into the electronic data base.

Demographic Information collected at Registration is:

Age

Gender

Country of Birth

Languages other than English

Occupation (full/part time)

Employer

Qualifications

Relevant training/experience

Membership Type: Junior (11-15); Brigade Member (16-17); New Member 18+

Role: operational bushfire fighter; Non-operational brigade administration or support role only.

(Information not collected: Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander)

CFA VIC

The present data base records system for volunteers was developed for CFA in the mid-90s. It is known as Resource Management System (RMS). It replaced older systems: Powerbuilder; DROVER (based on Clipper).

Demographic information currently collected from volunteers at registration is:

Brigade name
Brigade number

New member/transfer

Type of membership: Junior (11 – 15 years) Senior (16 years +)

Brigade role: Operational Non-operational

Residence: inside/outside brigade area
Place of employment: inside/outside brigade area

Contact details

Age (years)
Gender
Occupation

Medical alerts

Information on the volunteer data base can be extracted using Crystal Reports as a reporting tool

NSW Rural Fire Service

Volunteer data collection and management:

1. The Resource Management System (RMS) is used. There are some problems with the data base at present because of the history of the NSW RFS. Several years ago there was a change from records being held in regional centres to a centralised system. There were differences in the completeness of the records held by different centres.
2. The NSW RFS is currently organised in 4 Regions; 60 Zones/Areas; about 2,100 Brigades; with about 70,000 volunteers across the State.
3. A new Membership Application/Transfer Form is now in use. It records Brigade Information (Brigade; District/Zone), Start date; Membership type: Probationary, Ordinary, Junior, Honorary, Life). Personal Details: Gender, contact details, Date of Birth (NOT ethnicity or Indigenous Australian). Optional Information: Occupation, Employer, Drivers licence details, Boat licence details, Previous Rural Fire Service details. RFS training details. RFS Honours and Awards (optional). Qualifications/skills (optional). Experience in other related services (optional). Medical condition information.
4. Some older records did not include Date of Birth, so information about the age profile of NSW RFS volunteers is somewhat unreliable (if Age was not recorded, a default value of 70 is assigned).
5. There is no provision on the RMS system as used currently for recording volunteers' roles within the Service (ie, no information on operational versus non-operational/support).
6. At present, the RMS system cannot provide reliable data on annual attrition rates.
7. At present there is considerable uncertainty about an exact total figure for "available" (ie, not on leave or otherwise not available to respond to incidents). This information is held at local brigade level and is not necessarily reflected in the total figures held centrally.

QLD F & RS

The current data base system (RIMS) has been in use for about 2 years. It was developed specifically for the RFS. On the previous system birthdates were not necessarily recorded so when the old system was converted to RIMS a number of volunteers had no recorded birthdates/ages.

Volunteers currently provide the following on their Membership Application

Name and contact details

Gender

Date of birth

Membership category: Active (ie, operational); Support (Associate, assist with brigade functions but NOT active firefighting duties)

Previous positions with QFRA/RFS

Membership of other volunteer organisations

Medical alert

There is a NOTES facility within RIMS where additional material can be recorded:

Skills

Awards

Citations

Training levels achieved.

Currently, material in NOTES cannot be extracted or compiled, it serves as an individual record.

Data can be broken down into electorates to show the \$ spent in RFS support.

SA CFS: South Australian Emergency Services Administration Unit (ESAU)

Data collection and management for CFS Volunteers.

The present system was introduced in January 2002. It replaced an older Oracle/Unix system (HRM) which had to be withdrawn because it was not Y2K compliant.

The present system (TAS, Training Administration System) was developed by “Prodata”—an Adelaide based software development company. TAS is similar to a system developed for the Australian military. It sits on ACCESS. However, ESAU does not have the source code and thus cannot institute new data entry fields nor modify the types of output able to be generated. Any modification can only be made by Prodata at considerable expense to ESAU.

The demographic information collected includes:

Gender

Age

Membership category (Fire-fighter, Auxiliary, Cadet)

Cultural background/ethnicity

Languages spoken other than English

Education/Skills information

Medical alerts/medication

Stated Reason for Joining

--Influenced by: newspaper/magazine; TV/radio; Personal invitation; word of mouth; local advertising; other

--Motivated by: community spirit; witnessed damage; more members needed; to gain skills; social contact; previous CFS experience; other.

Stated reason for resignation/termination

Information NOT collected: indigenous Australian or Aboriginal/Torres Strait Islander; nature of employer/employment

Other features noted: CFS does not differentiate ROLES other than Fire-fighter, Auxiliary, Cadet (Auxiliary not required to undertake training, can be any non-operational role).

Data management requirements are being reviewed, TAS may be replaced—the Metropolitan Fire Service and the SES have similar data requirements and a common system may be implemented.

It was noted that exit of a volunteer from the CFS is often uncertain—members may “leave” gradually with a hiatus of up to 6 months before exit becomes “official”.

Tasmania Fire Service

The TFS volunteers data collection system:

TFS has recently implemented the CFA Resources Management System (RMS).

Information currently collected from volunteers is:

Brigade

Start date

Position: Firefighter (Active); Member (Inactive—support role); Cadet (15-17 years); Junior (10-14 years)

Non-operational role: Treasurer/Radio Operator/other.....

Resides inside brigade area: yes/no

Employed inside brigade area: yes/no

Previous TFS service

Other relevant previous service (SES/Ambulance/Defence Forces/Other)

Name and contact details

Medical alerts

Specialist skills

It was noted that the present system, as currently implemented did not allow data to be gathered on the following:

- (a) ethnicity (including whether Indigenous/Torres Strait Islander)
- (b) demographic data such as occupation, employer, education level.

It was noted that the most frustrating aspect of a data base for information about volunteers was that it relied on Brigade Captains providing timely and accurate updates. While many Brigades did this, some Brigades, especially in more remote rural locations were resistant to filling-in paper work of any kind.

There was general agreement that it would be helpful to have the following:

- (a) Information on why volunteers leave the TFS
- (b) “Waiting lists” of people interested in becoming volunteers in the different Districts.

The Current TFS Profile of Volunteers:

It was noted that the new system had only recently been implemented and its capacity to generate useful volunteer management information had not yet begun to be exploited. As part of the implementation process, the previous data base had been completely checked manually and corrected and updated.

The system distinguishes between Active volunteers (qualified as firefighters) and Members (who were not Active and undertook non-operational duties). RMS data indicated that the average age of volunteers at entry was 32 years and that about half of all new recruits had left

the TFS after 5 years. About 11% of the volunteer workforce left every year, involving the need to recruit about 550 new volunteers annually to maintain numbers.

It was explained that the majority of Brigades were located in small-to-medium rural communities. Volunteers were mostly “blue collar”, there was a relatively high proportion of volunteers with literacy difficulties, many were self-employed in unskilled-semi skilled capacities. Brigades on the Hobart/Launceston urban fringes were different from the typical rural Brigades.

Anecdotal evidence suggested that about one third of the rural brigades were quite resistant to the idea of female volunteer firefighters.

Fire and Emergency Services Authority of Western Australia (FESA)

Data collection for FESA volunteers

FESA currently uses the CFA Resource Management System 1.4 as detailed below, but will shortly be changing over to Resource Management System 2. The fields within the new system are also detailed below.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM 1.4

Current Version being used.

Groups (Local Government)

The Local Government area the brigade is in.

Brigades

Brigade name
Brigade number
Region number
Group number and name
Brigade physical address
Brigade postal address
Brigade secretary's address
Phone numbers
Date registered
Date deregistered
Latitude and Longitude coordinates
Municipality

Personnel

Personnel Detail

Surname
First and second names
Date of Birth
Gender
Occupation
Address
Phone numbers business/home/mobile and pager
E-mail
Brigade
Position held
State date of that position

Service History

Records every position held and/or dual membership

Medical Event

Qualification Details

Any qualification training recorded in TRAIN

Skills Details

Any competency training recorded in TRAIN
(Please note there is currently a problem with the display of this information using the TRAIN module)

Injury Details

Displays any injuries recorded via the FIRS module.

Incident Details

Displays the incident the person has attended recorded via the FIRS module.

Award Details

Displays the National Medals and FRS Service Medals.

RESOURCE MANAGEMENT SYSTEM V2

FESA is currently in the planning stage to change over to the new version of the RMS. The information that will be contained in the new version is detailed below.

BRIGADE/UNIT/GROUP DETAILS

Region
Group Number
Brigade No- Name
Brigade Type
Brigade Class
Residential Address
Postal address
Phone 1
Phone 2
Silent Phone
Fax
Mobile Ph1
Mobile Ph2
Fire Call
Silent Fire Alert

Date Registered
Deregistered
Date Deregistered
Pagers Issued Yes/No
RAR Credited Yes/No
Longitude and Latitude
Secretary Address Comes from the personal section
Municipality
Election Date
Risk Category
Email Standard Turnout
Notes

PERSONNEL SUMMARY

Region
Location
Title
Surname
Given Names x 2
Preferred Name
Occupation
ABS Code for Occupation
Position held
Start date for that position
Operational (tick box)
Gender
Date of Birth
Employee #
Volunteer #
Licence No
Category of Licence
Allows for a photo to be stored
Date photo was taken
ID card expiry date
Residential Address – silent flag
Postal Address – silent flag
Phone Business – silent flag
Phone After hours – silent flag
Pager ID No
Mobile No
Fax No
Email Will prompt if email needs to be sent when
change of details have been entered. Can email
member from that screen
Notes

Service History

Records every position held and/or dual membership

Medical Event

Qualification Details

Any qualification training recorded in TRAIN

Skills Details

Any competency training recorded in TRAIN

(Please note there is currently a problem with the display of this information use the TRAIN module)

Injury Details

Displays any injuries recorded via the FIRS module.

Incident Details

Displays the incident the person has attended recorded via the FIRS module.

Award Details

Displays the National Medals and FRS Service Medals.