# The availability of potential volunteers in communities in regional NSW

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## The Need for Volunteers

Australia currently has about 220,000 volunteer firefighters but for the past 30 years memberships have been declining. Fire agencies fear a looming shortage of volunteer firefighters that may degrade the provision of fire services.

# Objective

The Volunteerism Project Team was commissioned by NSW RFS Region West to survey the community to find out:

- •What people knew about RFS
- •What they thought of RFS
- •Their interest in volunteering
- •Their likelihood of volunteering
- •Barriers and enablers to volunteering

## Methodology

All households in 29 communities throughout Region West were surveyed by anonymous questionnaire.

1,200 questionnaires were returned. This research focuses on the 1,046 respondents who had never been members of RFS or its predecessors.



Surveyed 29 towns throughout RFS Region West (shaded in green)

## Findings

## Interest in volunteering

20% of respondents expressed interest in volunteering with RFS in a firefighting role, but 40% expressed interest in a non-firefighting role.

## Likelihood of volunteering

Only about 1/3 of those expressing interest thought it was likely that they would actually volunteer to join RFS in the next 12 months.



#### Gender

Of those <u>likely</u> to volunteer for a firefighting role, 65% were male and 35% were female.

Of those <u>likely</u> to volunteer for a non-firefighting role, 40% were male and 60% were female.

#### **Barriers**

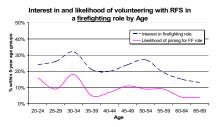
Lack of time (50%)
Other priorities (45%)
Sick / disabled / too old (35%)
Various fears & concerns (30%)
Child care (25%)
Don't need a local fire brigade (17%)

#### **Enablers**

Hold information sessions (60%)
Help volunteers get useful skills or
qualifications (55%)
Help recruits to get to know other
brigade members (45%)
Invite people in person (38%)
Recognise prior learning (16%)

#### Age

Interest in and likelihood of volunteering for a firefighting role decline with age and also dip during the parenting and career establishment years.



Interest in and likelihood of volunteering for a non-firefighting role show minimal decline with age but still dip during the parenting and career establishment years.



# Early Recommendations

- •Inform the community more about why fire services are needed and the advantages of <u>volunteer</u> fire services.
- •Minimise the time imposition on volunteer firefighters.
- •Aim for brigade membership large enough to allow adequate redundancy for turnouts.
- •Inform the community about measures to mitigate harm or financial loss to volunteers.
- •Help brigades become more female-friendly.
- •Help institute child-care arrangements for volunteers.

