

**Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria  
2016 Volunteer Welfare and  
Efficiency Survey**



**VFBV**

VOLUNTEER FIRE  
BRIGADES VICTORIA

**Prepared and published by  
Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria**

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Since the commencement of the VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey five years ago, there has been increasing engagement, and 2016 again had a growth in participation of 20% from 2015. The total number of responses in 2016 is 3,066, which continues to reinforce that the survey is an important and reliable method to capture the views of volunteers and to track progress on what has been achieved and is improving, as well as addressing areas that are the cause of dissatisfaction for volunteers.

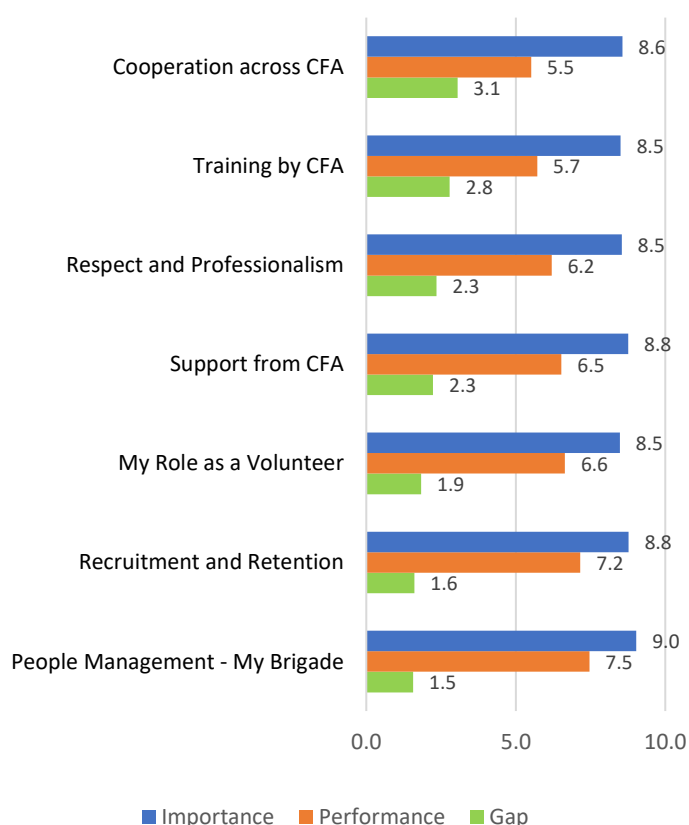
**3,066**  
survey participants

The VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey asked volunteers to rate the importance and performance of 33 statements which then form seven themes – *see table, right*.

In 2016, five of the seven themes show a decline in satisfaction, with the exceptions being those related to **Recruitment and Retention** and **People Management – My Brigade**, which remained the same, or showed a slight improvement.

The themes with declining satisfaction results relate to matters of organisational support or management. This was particularly evident in the areas of consultation and training.

### Scores across each Survey Theme - 2016



## 1. Volunteer Satisfaction and Support Expectations

The survey contains four specific statements asking directly how satisfied volunteers are.

The survey results show a significant drop in satisfaction compared to the previous four years. Comments from volunteers indicate this drop is substantially linked to their dissatisfaction with the Victorian State Government's attitude to CFA volunteer concerns about the lack of consultation on matters that may affect them, such as the proposed CFA-UFU Operational Enterprise Agreement for paid firefighters.

It is evident volunteers are more satisfied with their volunteer role than with the support from CFA.

As in previous years, volunteers rated the performance on matters relating to their local brigade much higher than matters relating to organisational cooperation, training, support and management from CFA.

## 2. Consultation between CFA and volunteers

The survey results show volunteers are quite satisfied with consultation at their local brigade but are highly dissatisfied with the consultation they receive at regional and state level.

Volunteers clearly expect more involvement and consultation on matters and decisions that may impact them with only 23% of volunteers indicating they are satisfied with consultation at a corporate level.

Poor scoring was also attributed to workforce arrangements, policies and leadership in relation to supporting paid staff and volunteers working as an integrated team.

## 3. Training needs and expectations.

Survey results on statements relating to training matters indicate that CFA are not meeting volunteer needs related to training, with only 42% indicating they are satisfied with the overall theme of **Training by CFA**.

There is a marked difference between the expectations volunteers have in relation to CFA meeting their training needs, and the delivery of the training. The provision of enough training opportunities, in formats and at flexible times and locations that facilitate participation was scored poorly by survey respondents. The results for the statement *"most training is available and provided within a reasonable distance from my brigade"*, demonstrate that training is not conducted at convenient locations.

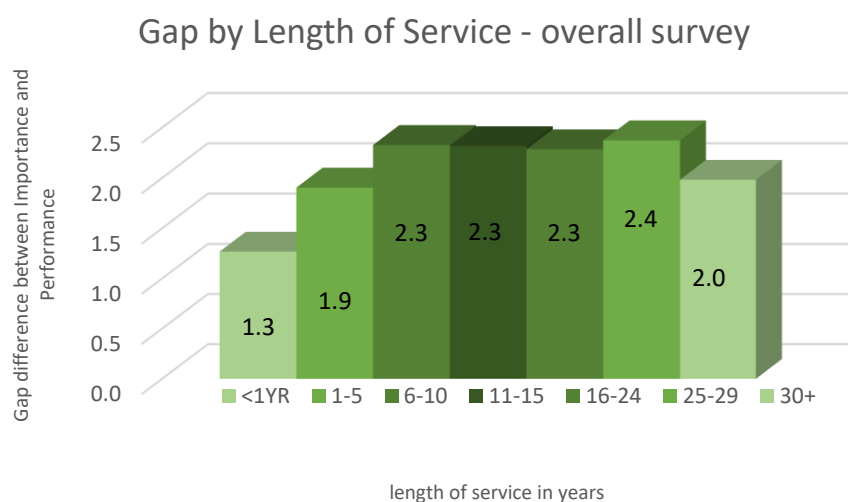
## 4. Equity, diversity and workplace behaviour.

Results in 2016 continue to show that equity and diversity are extremely important, and an area in which brigades perform well. There was evidence of poor workplace behaviour identified through individual comments, predominantly relating to the relationship between volunteers and paid staff, rather than being related to gender or cultural differences. There was a small number of comments relating to poor treatment of women, indicating that discrimination and bullying may be present in some brigades.

Overall, there was not much differentiation between responses by gender. However, males were more critical of the effort made by CFA to support them as a volunteer, and females were less satisfied in the areas of workplace bullying and there being no barriers to the roles women can occupy within a brigade.

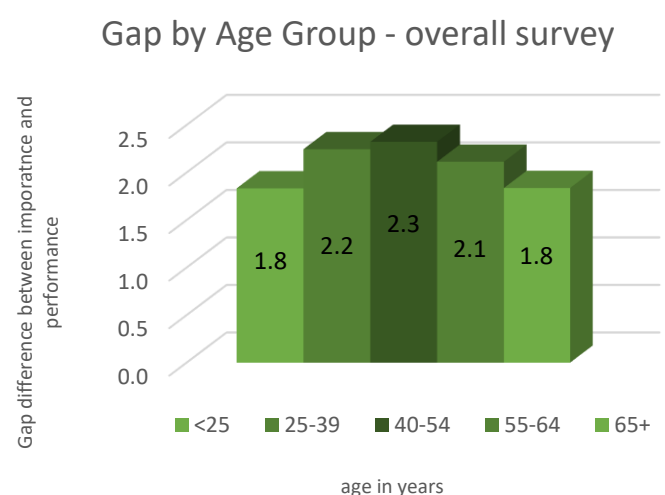
## 5. Variations across Length of Service and Age.

The survey results show there is a marked drop in volunteer expectations being met after one year of service. This has also been the trend in all previous surveys. Commonly, results show satisfaction continues to decline until 6 years of service, where satisfaction varies until it 25 years of service, after which there is slight improvement.



nb: a higher gap indicates a poorer result

A similar trend occurs across the different age categories, possibly due to those with less years of service corresponding with younger volunteers. An exception when viewing responses by age group is that those over 65 years of age were more satisfied for the themes **Recruitment and Retention** and **People Management – My Brigade**



nb: a higher gap indicates a poorer result

## 6. Variations between brigades.

Rural brigade members indicated they are more satisfied than their peers from urban or integrated brigades. Members of CFA Coast Guard brigades had results which were often higher than the members of fire brigades, however, have shown some worsening of results since the previous year.

Integrated brigade members gave the lowest performance scores for 75% of the survey statements. These members also had poor results for **People Management – My Brigade** which was not reflected by any other group.

## 7. Comparison with other agencies

In addition to the VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey of CFA volunteers, the survey was adapted and offered to other emergency management volunteer agencies in Victoria and also expanded for the first time to fire service volunteers in Tasmania, South Australia, Western Australia, Queensland and New South Wales. In all, sixteen emergency management agencies across Australia participated in the survey. Results for CFA, when compared with the other emergency management agencies in Victoria and fire services nationally, show that the opinion of CFA volunteers of their organisation is much lower than their peers across the emergency management sector.

Consistently, results of all the surveys conducted show that volunteers are much more satisfied with the performance of matters important to them at the local team level, and less satisfied with organisation support and management, particularly in the areas of consultation and training.

## 8. Overall

The results for the themes **Respect and Professionalism, My Role as a Volunteer, Cooperation across CFA, Support from CFA, and Training by CFA**, all experienced a decline in satisfaction since 2015. Over the five years the survey has been conducted within CFA, the only year with lower satisfaction results was in the first year of the survey, 2012. However, it is important to note that due to a lower number of respondents in that first year, the results had lower statistical significance than subsequent years.

During the period of the survey, there was widespread concern about the Victorian Government Fire Services Review; significant disruption generated by the proposed introduction of an Enterprise Agreement for paid CFA operational personnel; the sacking of the CFA Board, resignations of the Honourable Minister for Emergency Services, Ms Jane Garrett, the CFA Chief Executive Officer and the CFA Chief Officer as a result of their refusal of the Government's push to accept the proposed Enterprise Agreement.

Feedback received as part of the Victorian Fire Services Review, plus the active voicing of volunteer concerns more generally, indicates these issues did impact some of the declining performance results shown in the survey.

Furthermore, feedback associated with the survey responses suggested that volunteers were reserving further judgement pending the outcome of the Government and CFA handling of the industrial dispute associated with the proposed CFA-UFU Operational Staff Enterprise Agreement 2016. At the time of the 2016 survey, discussions were underway at a Federal level to consider changes to the Fair Work Act aimed at respecting and protecting the rights of volunteers. It is important to note that the survey period closed before the change to the Fair Work Act (Federal Legislation, Respect for Emergency Service Volunteers) was passed.

## INTRODUCTION

Volunteers are fundamental to Victoria's emergency management capability, fundamental to community resilience and at the core of communities sharing responsibility for their own safety. It is therefore vitally important to measure and deeply understand how satisfied volunteers are with arrangements in place to support, encourage and enable them to do their work.

The purpose of the VFBV Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey is to ensure that volunteers' needs and expectations are sought, analysed and available to Government and CFA so the very foundation of this volunteer-based emergency service continues to be recognised and supported to meet the future emergency services needs of the Victorian community.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria (VFBV) is the body established under Victorian law, the Country Fire Authority Act, to represent CFA volunteers on all matters that affect their welfare and efficiency. VFBV is an independent Association operating autonomously from CFA but at the same time working closely with CFA and other key stakeholders to engage volunteers in CFA and other deliberations and provide advice on all matters affecting CFA volunteers.

VFBV also represents CFA Coast Guard brigades in Victoria and has close working relationships with other emergency service volunteer associations and organisations across Victoria and Australia. VFBV and volunteer fire brigade associations in all states of Australia work together on issues of common interest and/or national relevance through the Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA).

VFBV's values, direction and effort is driven by a vision of creating ***'strong volunteerism, embraced to build resilient communities for a safer Victoria'***.

VFBV actively partners with Government and emergency management agencies to ensure that volunteers and their communities remain actively involved in emergency management decision making at every level; through day to day practical work in VFBV/CFA Joint Committees, through the Ministerial Volunteer Consultative Forum, and in working to ensure positive, practical results flow from various reviews impacting on volunteers, volunteerism, emergency management and community safety.

In addition to other consultative mechanisms, the VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey is an important forum which CFA volunteers can use to provide formal, evidence based results pertaining to what are the important matters to them, and the performance of CFA in relation to these matters. Established with the first survey in 2012, VFBV have been conducting the survey annually to enable a review on the year's results and track trends over multiple years.



If the CFA and State Government wish to retain what is a highly valuable volunteer fire service, the expectations of volunteers, identified by them through this survey, need to be understood and acted upon. A commitment must be made by CFA, VFBV and State Government to meet or exceed the expectations of volunteers. This is fundamental to ensuring the welfare and efficiency of volunteers and their continuing availability as an unpaid emergency service.

In 2015, the VFBV Welfare and Efficiency survey was expanded to include volunteers of the Victoria State Emergency Service, through their volunteer association, Victoria State Emergency Service Volunteer Association (VicSESVA). In 2016, the survey was further endorsed as an important and valid tool in which to gauge volunteer opinion more broadly across the Victorian Emergency Management Sector and nationally across other volunteer fire agencies.

Members of the Victorian Volunteer Consultative Forum in Victoria supported the expansion of the survey to all emergency management volunteers in Victoria in 2016.

The Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA) recommended the expansion of the survey to all fire agencies across Australia.

As a result, 7,255 emergency management volunteers across Australia took part in the survey throughout July and August 2016.

This expansion also enables CFA to compare and benchmark how satisfied CFA volunteers are in comparison to other fire services and emergency management volunteers.

As with previous years, the survey data is collated and analysed for trends, outliers and exceptions that guide VFBV, and therefore CFA, to particular issues warranting further analysis. The survey results are grouped into themes and are compared against demographic profiles that include gender, age, length of time as a volunteer brigade type and region.

# **VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey**

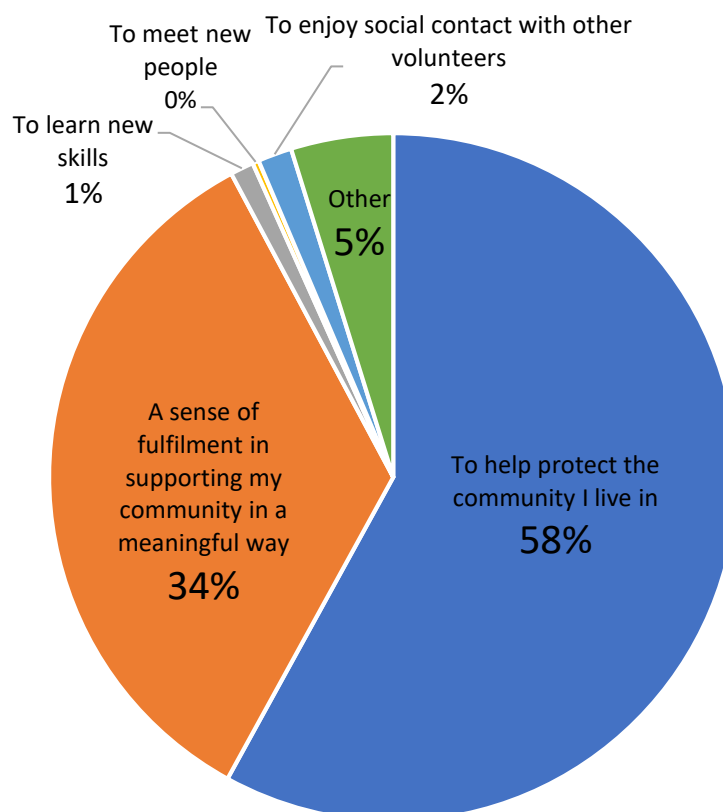
## **RESULTS**

## REASON FOR VOLUNTEERING

There has been a distinct shift in the reasons for volunteering since 2015. 'A sense of fulfilment in supporting my community in a meaningful way', cited as one of the predominant responses, has decreased from 41% to 34%.

'To help protect the community I live in' has increased as the main reason for volunteering for 58% of the respondents, up from 51% in 2015.

Over the five years of the survey, this movement in the reason for volunteering has been evident, however in previous surveys has only changed between 1 and 2%. The 7% shift away from volunteering for a sense of fulfilment towards protecting the community they live in, in conjunction with a decline in overall satisfaction with volunteering could mean that volunteers remain motivated to protect their communities, and for this reason continue to volunteer despite frustrations about how satisfied they are with the way they are treated by CFA.



## SATISFACTION WITH VOLUNTEERING

Participants in the survey are given the opportunity to rate their satisfaction with their volunteering experience, the way volunteers are treated, whether they intend continuing as a volunteer, and whether they would recommend being a CFA volunteer to others.

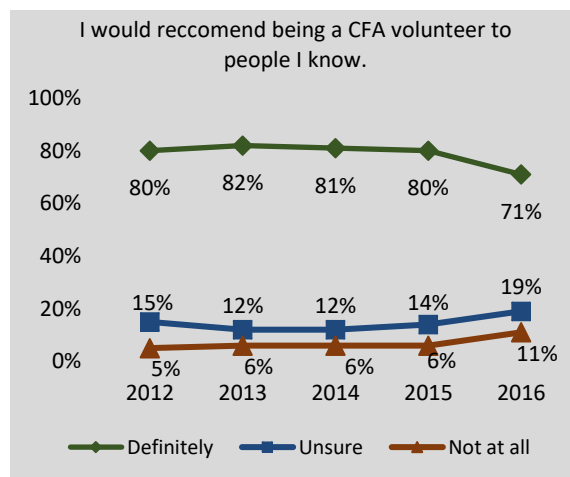
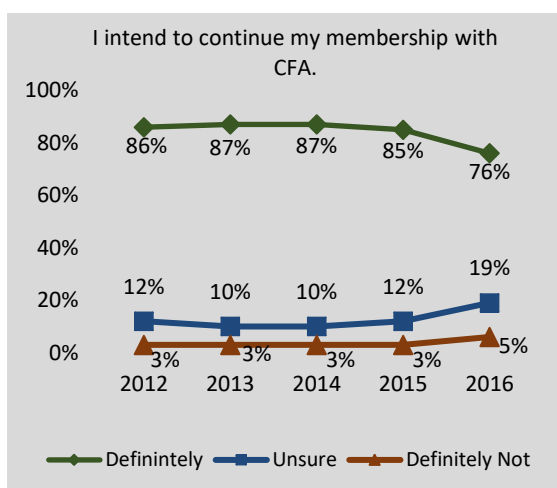
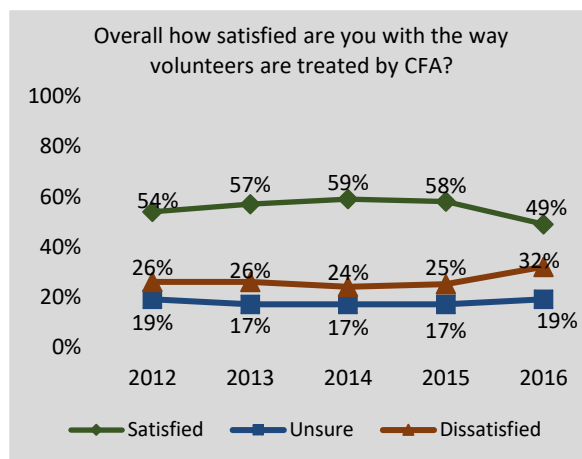
In 2016, the results of the survey show that overall satisfaction with volunteering as declined markedly from previous years. Satisfaction ratings for statements within the main survey also align with these results, particularly in relation to statements about involvement with CFA as an organisation, rather than brigade level activities. That is, the local brigade related statements rated much higher in performance than those relating to corporate support, policies and actions.

These results continue to reinforce the ongoing need for improved action and effort by CFA to support the organisation as a fully integrated volunteer and career staff service model.

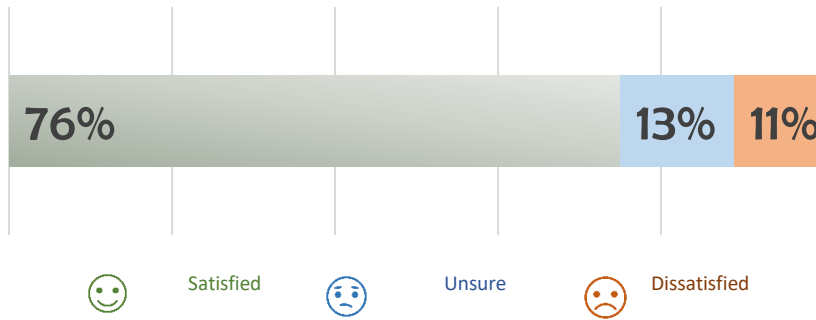
As stated in previous survey results, the extremely low satisfaction score with the way volunteers feel they are treated by CFA suggests that the greatest potential impact on future volunteer welfare and efficiency sits with CFA in the success or otherwise, of their partnerships with volunteer brigades.

Recognition of the contribution volunteers make to CFA, and respectfully including them in discussions on matters important to them will be critical to improving volunteer engagement and satisfaction.

### Satisfaction over the 5 survey years



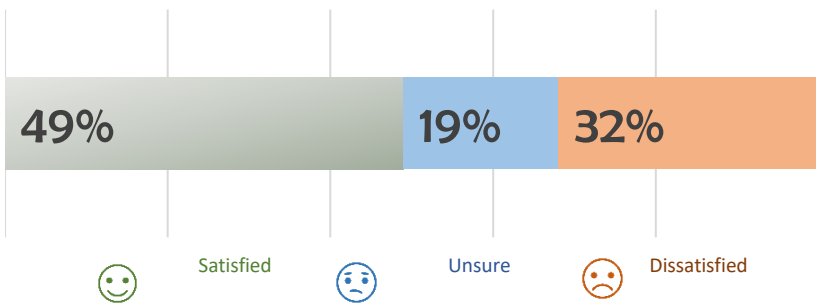
**Overall how satisfied are you with your role as a CFA Volunteer?**



This question was rated on a 10-point scale: from 1-4 indicating “not at all” to 7-10 “very” (with 5-6 indicating “unsure”)

In 2015, 80% indicated they were satisfied

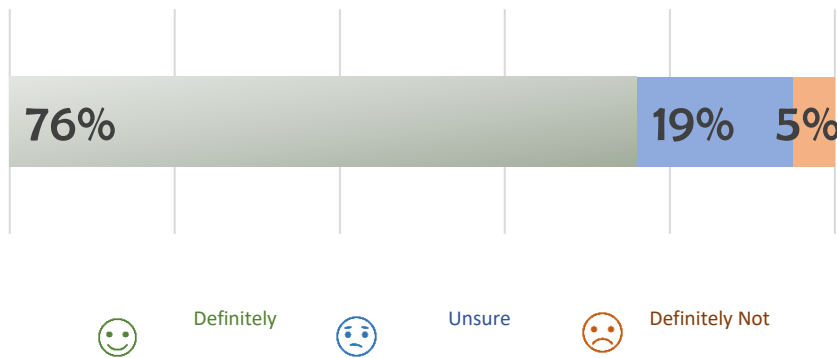
**Overall how satisfied are you with the way volunteers are treated by CFA?**



This question was rated on a 10-point scale: from 1-4 indicating “not at all” to 7-10 “very” (with 5-6 indicating “unsure”)

In 2015, 59% indicated they were satisfied

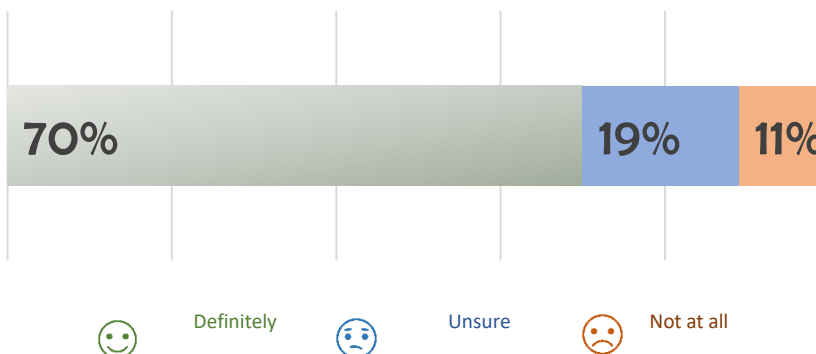
**I intend to continue in my role with CFA.**



This question was rated on a 10-point scale: from 1-4 indicating “definitely not” to 7-10 “definitely” (with 5-6 indicating “unsure”)

In 2015, 85% indicated they were definitely going to continue in their role.

**I would recommend being a CFA volunteer to people I know.**



This question was rated on a 10-point scale: from 1-4 indicating “not at all” to 7-10 “definitely” (with 5-6 indicating “unsure”)

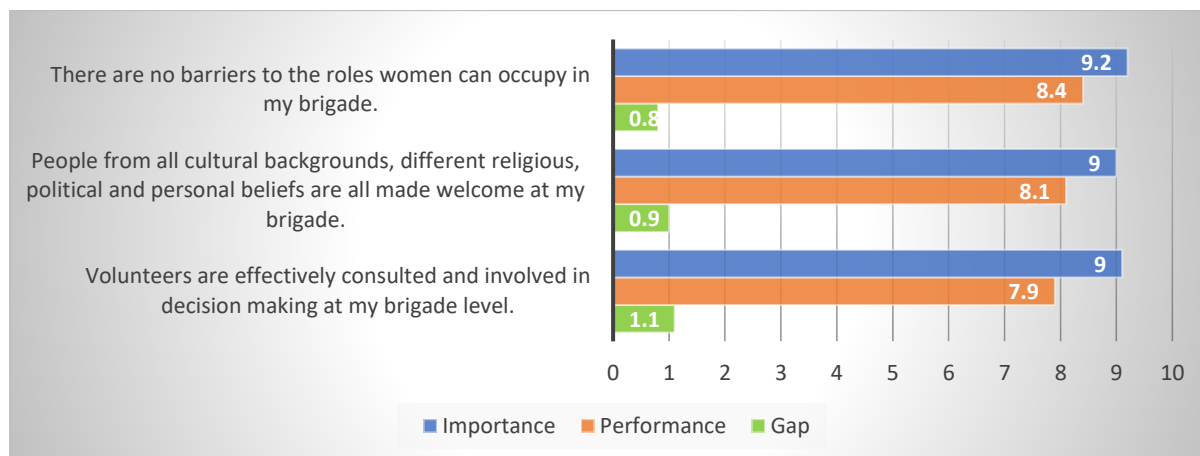
In 2015, 80% indicated they were definitely going to recommend being a CFA volunteer to others.

## OBSERVATIONS

### Strengths

Volunteers rated the performance of issues managed at their local brigade level much better than those relating to their interaction with corporate CFA, consultation and decision making at corporate level, CFA training and CFA workforce arrangements regarding paid staff support to volunteers.

Smallest gaps indicate the areas where expectations are closest to being met. In 2016 these were:



In addition to the statements with the smallest gaps, the following are notable positive outcomes from the 2016 VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey:

- All statements rated at 8 out of 10 or higher for Importance, indicating that they continue to be as relevant in 2016 as they were when the survey launched in 2012.
- Almost 80% indicated that the environment at their brigade is volunteer friendly, welcoming to new members and creates good morale.
- 75% agreed workplace bullying is not tolerated in brigades in which they are members.
- 75% were positive that the time they devote to CFA is productive and worthwhile.
- Overall survey results show CFA Coast Guard and Rural Brigade members are more satisfied than Urban and Integrated brigade members.
- West Region members are more satisfied than members from other regions.

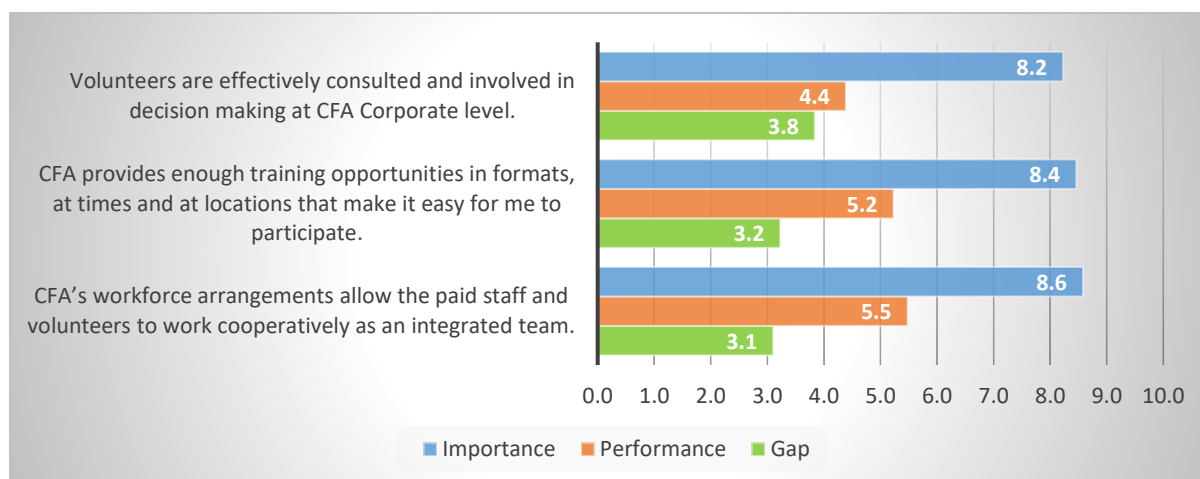
#### What do CFA volunteers consider to be the best performing areas in CFA?

- **Equity and Diversity – no barriers to involvement.**
- **Consultation within brigades.**
- **The time devoted to CFA is productive and worthwhile.**

## Weaknesses

Volunteers rated the performance of matters which related the corporate CFA much worse than those relating to their brigades. Areas such as consultation at CFA corporate level and training were notable for their poor satisfaction levels.

Largest gaps indicate the areas where expectations are furthest from being met. In 2016 these were:



*“CFA’s workforce arrangements allow the paid staff and volunteers to work cooperatively as an integrated team”* has moved into the bottom three results from fourth position in 2015. *“CFA corporate policies and leadership supports an effective volunteer based and fully integrated organisation”* also had a gap of 3.1, but ranked 4th.

In addition to the statements with the largest gaps, the following are also notable areas for improvement identified from the 2016 VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey:

### What do CFA volunteers consider to be the poorest performing areas in CFA?

**CFA management not consulting with volunteers.**

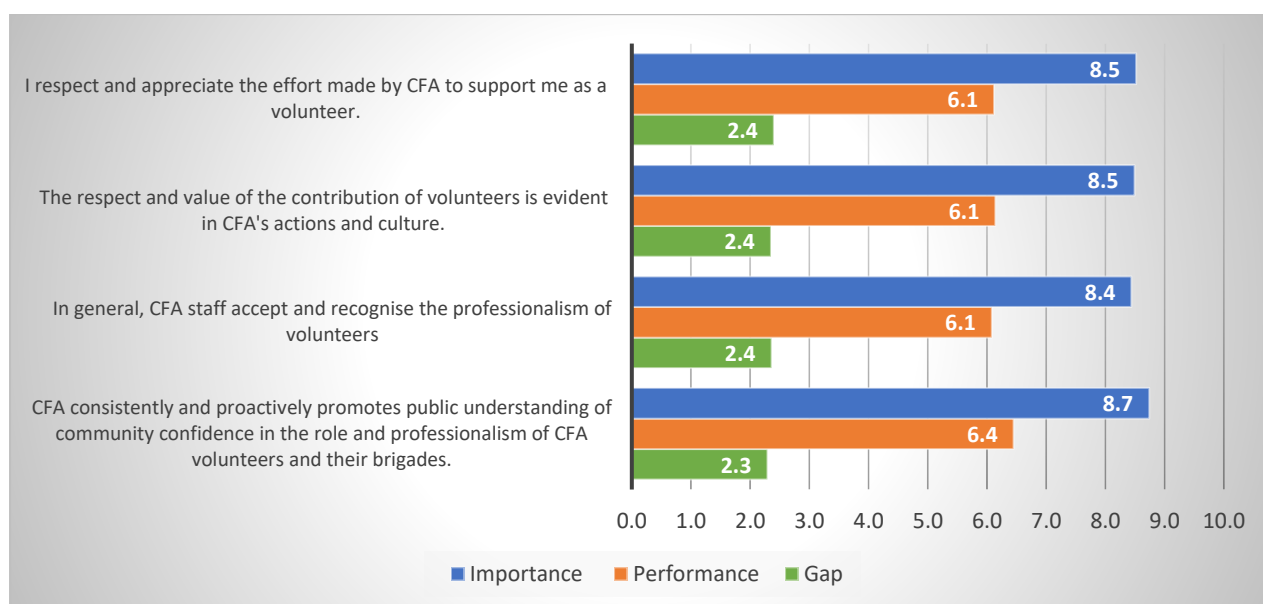
**CFA failing to provide training in a format that meets volunteer needs and availability**

**Workforce arrangements which don't allow volunteers and paid staff to work cooperatively as an integrated team.**

- Only 34% of volunteers indicated are satisfied CFA provides enough training opportunities in formats, at times and at locations that make it easy to participate.
- Results show satisfaction drops significantly after one year of service and again after 5 years of service. Any significant improvement in satisfaction does not occur until 30+ years' service.
- More than half the statements in the survey had a gap of over 2.
- The only statements with gaps over 2 relating to brigade level activities concerned recruitment and retention of younger volunteers. All other statements with the larger gaps related to actions involving corporate CFA or management.

## ANALYSIS BY THEME

### Respect and Professionalism



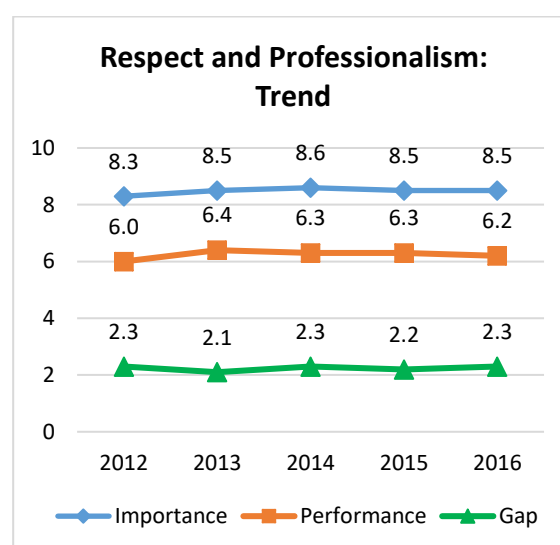
There has been a slight drop in the view of the performance of the CFA in relation to the public recognition and promotion of the professionalism of CFA volunteers, and it is evident that there is much room for improvement. Only 50% of respondents indicated their satisfaction with performance across the statements in this theme.

Of the 4 statements within this theme, 'CFA consistently and proactively promotes public understanding of community confidence in the role of professionalism of CFA and brigades' was ranked both most important and had the best performance score. However, compared with 2015, volunteers have increased the importance rating and the performance score has declined indicating that volunteers are less satisfied than they were last year. The gap for this statement has risen from 1.9 to 2.3.

With all questions in this group having a relatively large gap between Importance and Performance (greater than 2), **Respect and Professionalism**, particularly as it relates to that shown by CFA to volunteers, is an area that needs attention. When reviewing overall scores, this theme ranked in the bottom three, with only **Cooperation across CFA** and **Training by CFA** scoring lower.

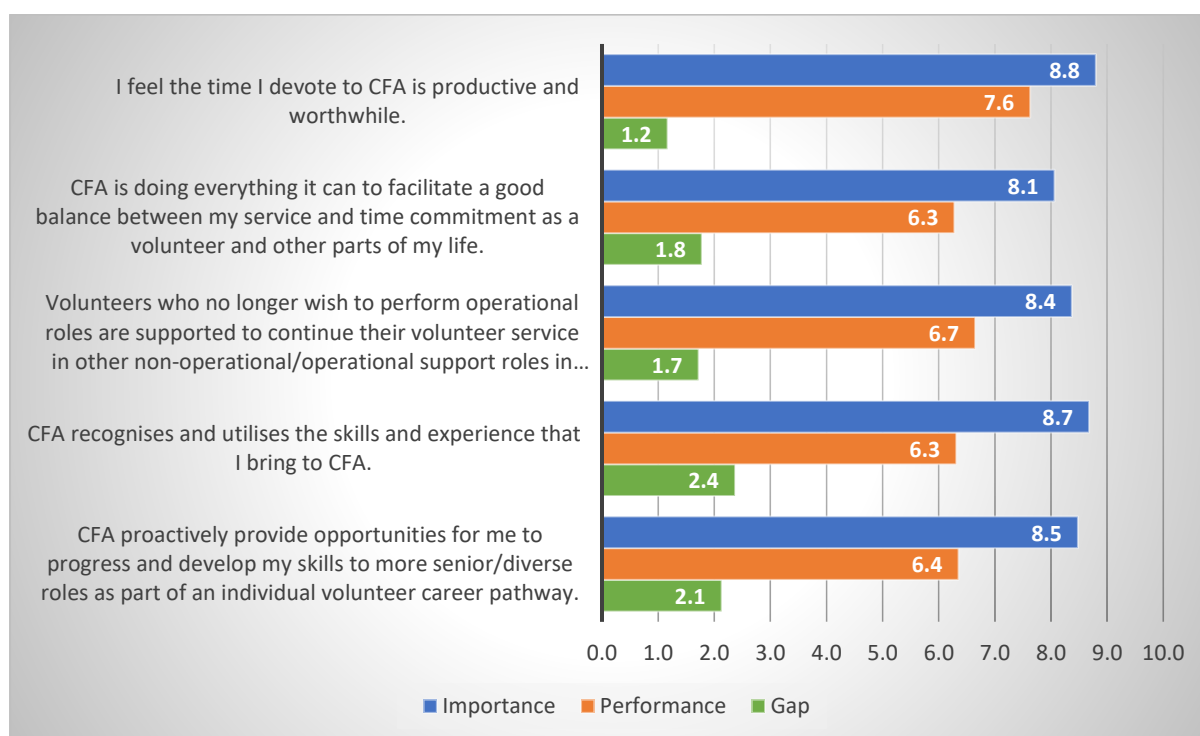
Whilst there was an increased number of comments specifically referring to the lack of respect paid to volunteers by paid staff, the actual performance scores of 'In general, CFA staff accept and recognise the professionalism of volunteers' has risen slightly (by 0.02).

After an initial increase in satisfaction in 2013 compared with 2012 results, the view of volunteers in relation to **Respect and Professionalism** matters has slipped back and remained steady since then.





## My Role as a Volunteer



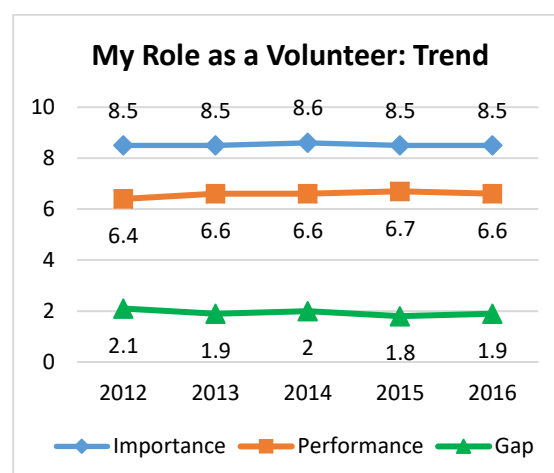
This theme rated slightly better than the previous theme of **Respect and Professionalism**, but only slightly with 58% of respondents indicating they are satisfied with this theme overall.

With the challenges presented to volunteers in 2016, it is a pleasing result that 75% of volunteers rate they are satisfied in relation to the statement 'I feel the time I devote to CFA is productive and worthwhile', albeit with an increased gap of 0.1 since 2015.

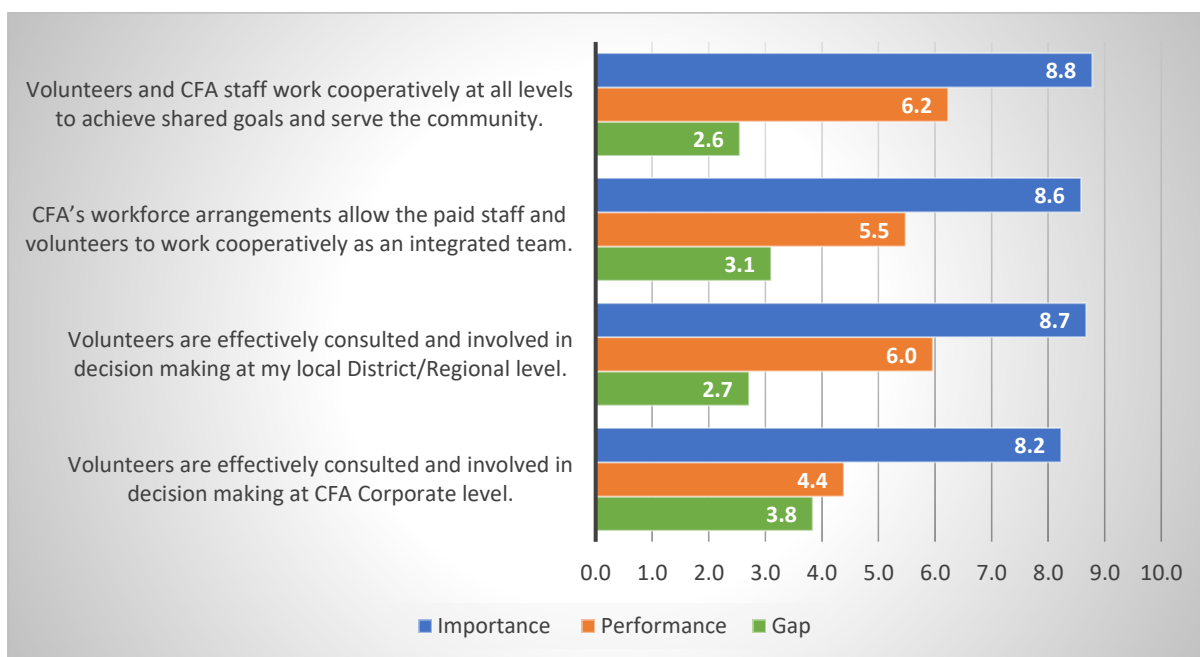
The statement "CFA is doing everything it can to facilitate a good balance between my service and time commitment as a volunteer and other parts of my life" was rated as one of the least important statements in the survey overall. Whilst the survey responses identify importance is still reasonably high at 8.1/10, it does indicate that volunteers' expectations that CFA be responsible for balancing time commitments is not as important as other areas.

The high importance rating and low performance ratings for the statement "CFA recognises and utilises the skills and experience that I bring to CFA" results in it having the largest gap within this theme.

This theme was showing some slight improvements in satisfaction up until 2015, however unfortunately this has declined in the 2016 results.



### Cooperation across CFA



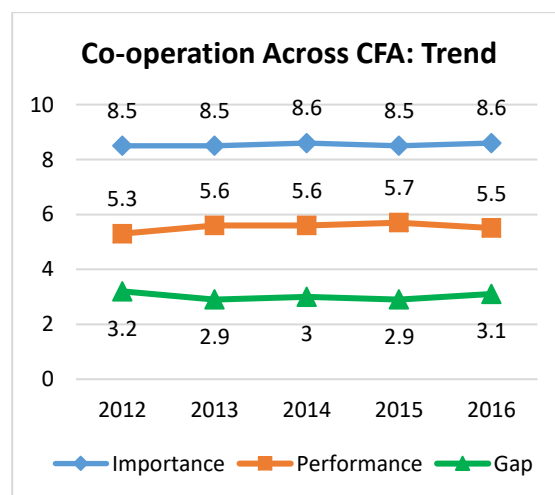
**Cooperation Across CFA** was the poorest performing theme of the survey with only 40% of respondents indicating they were satisfied. Of particular concern is that within this group of statements, only 23% indicated they were satisfied with the statement “Volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at CFA Corporate level”. The difference between the importance and performance scores for this statement is so acute, it has the largest gap, and therefore is the worst performing of all statements across the entire survey.

The worsening of results in this theme is indicative that volunteers are even less satisfied than in previous years. This is a concern given the importance placed on these issues and the fact that performance was assessed to be poor to start with.

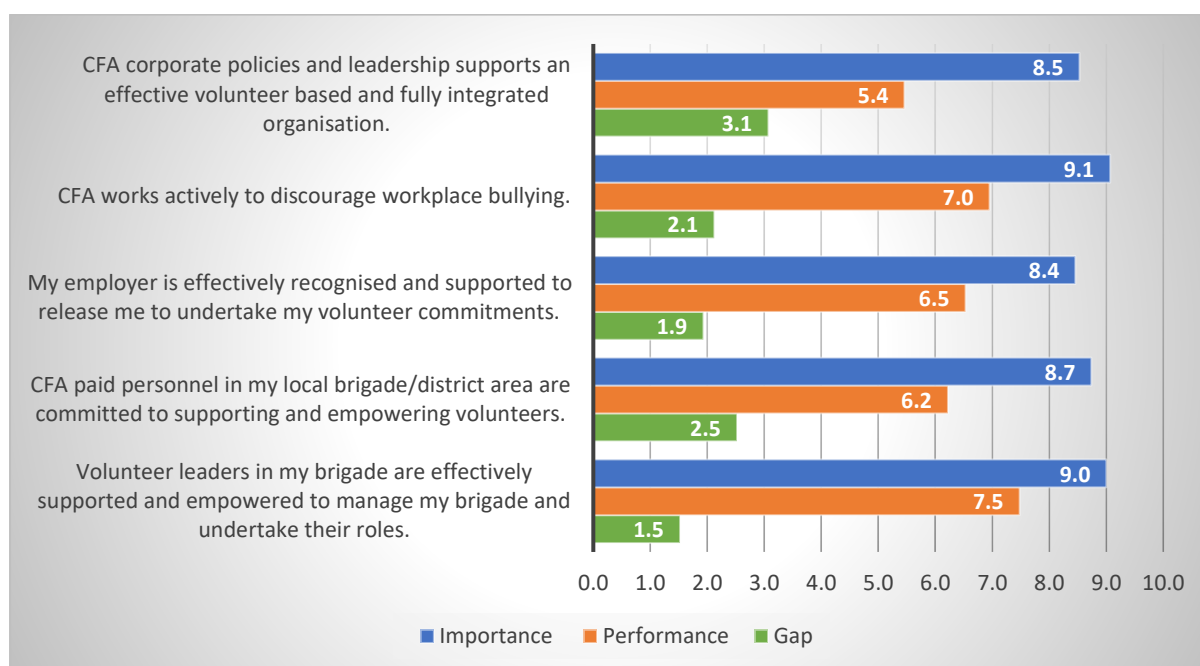
During 2016, this theme could potentially have been significantly affected by the impact of the acceptance by the State Government and CFA of the proposed CFA-UFU Operational Staff Enterprise Agreement 2016, and the flow on repercussions to the volunteer and paid workforce cooperation, consultation and workforce arrangements as to how staff and volunteers work as an integrated team.

Of note, within this theme, the statement “CFA's workforce arrangements allow the paid staff and volunteers to work cooperatively as an integrated team” had a gap increase from 2.8 to 3.1. In addition, the statement “Volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at CFA corporate level” has the largest gap of all questions at 3.8, an increase from 3.6 in 2015.

After showing some improvement over the first 4 years of surveys, in 2016 the decline in the view of performance for this theme is significant, particularly when compared with relative smaller changes across other themes.



## Support from CFA



Only 56% of respondents have indicated they are satisfied with the performance of the support they receive from CFA. However, when reviewing the statements within the theme, there is a significant variation in the levels of satisfaction. 74% of volunteers are satisfied with the performance of "Volunteer leaders in my brigade are effectively supported and empowered to manage my brigade and undertake their roles" compared to only 38% indicating they are satisfied with the performance of CFA in relation to "CFA corporate policies and leadership supports an effective volunteer based and fully integrated organisation".

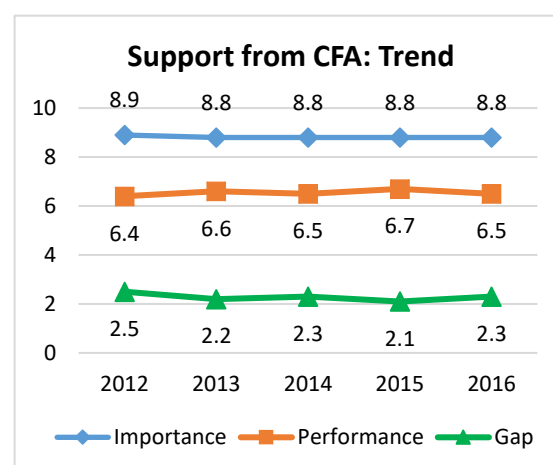
It is likely, that statements having a reference to the integrated workforce of the CFA, similar to those in the theme **Cooperation across CFA**, have been affected by concerns regarding the industrial dispute between the CFA and the UFU and the stance taken by the Government regarding the CFA-UFU Operational Staff Enterprise Agreement 2016.

The statements "CFA corporate policies and leadership supports an effective volunteer based and fully integrated organisation" and "CFA works actively to discourage bullying"

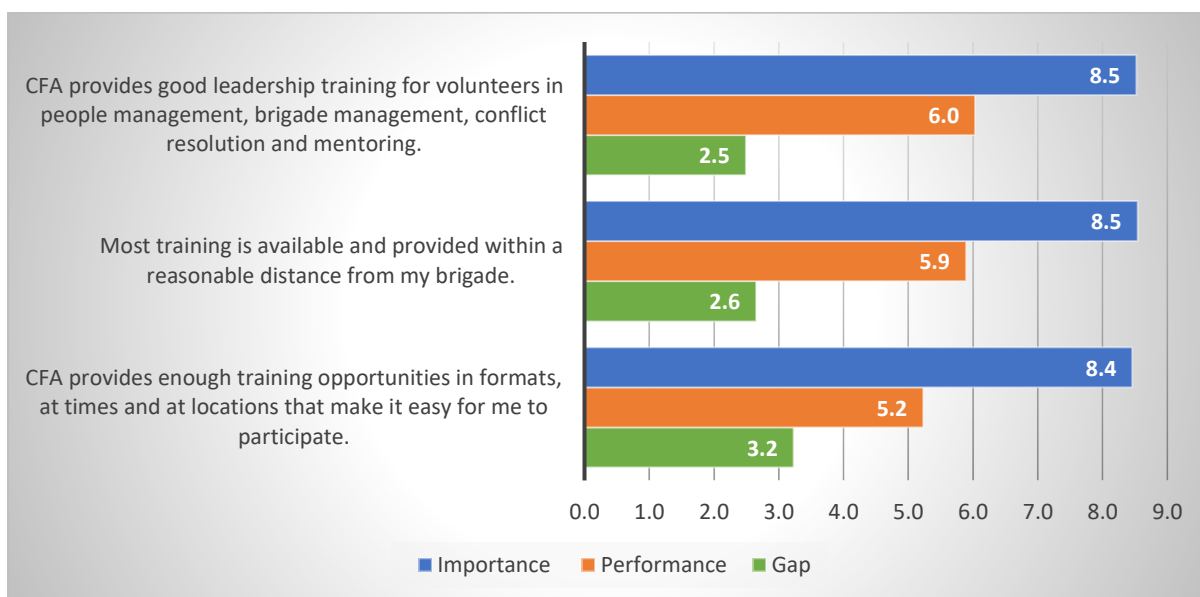
had a significant increase in gap – 2.6 to 3.1 and 1.7 to 2.1 respectively from 2015 results.

The statement "CFA paid personnel in my local brigade/district are committed to supporting and empowering volunteers" may have also been impacted from the last year's activities as the gap also increased for this statement, when compared with 2015.

Following a better result in 2015, this theme is also showing a worrying drop in the ratings from the volunteers about the support they receive from CFA.



### Training by CFA

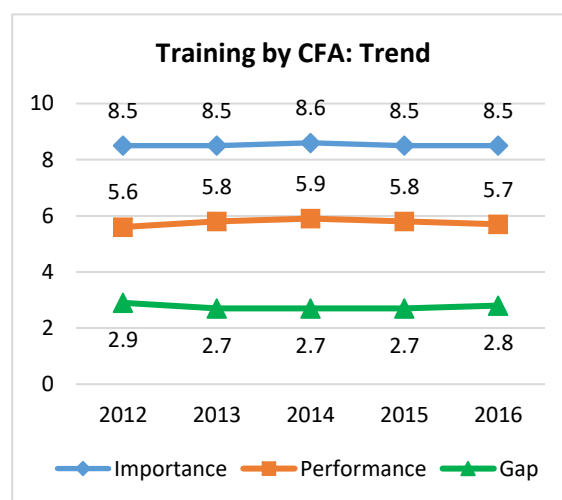


Only 42% of respondents indicated being satisfied with the overall theme of Training. This satisfaction level dropped to 34% in relation to the statement “CFA provides training opportunities in formats, at times and at locations that make it easy for me to participate”. The statement with the highest satisfaction rating in this theme, “CFA provides good leadership training for volunteers in people management, brigade management, conflict resolution and mentoring” was still poor with only 48% of volunteers indicating they were satisfied.

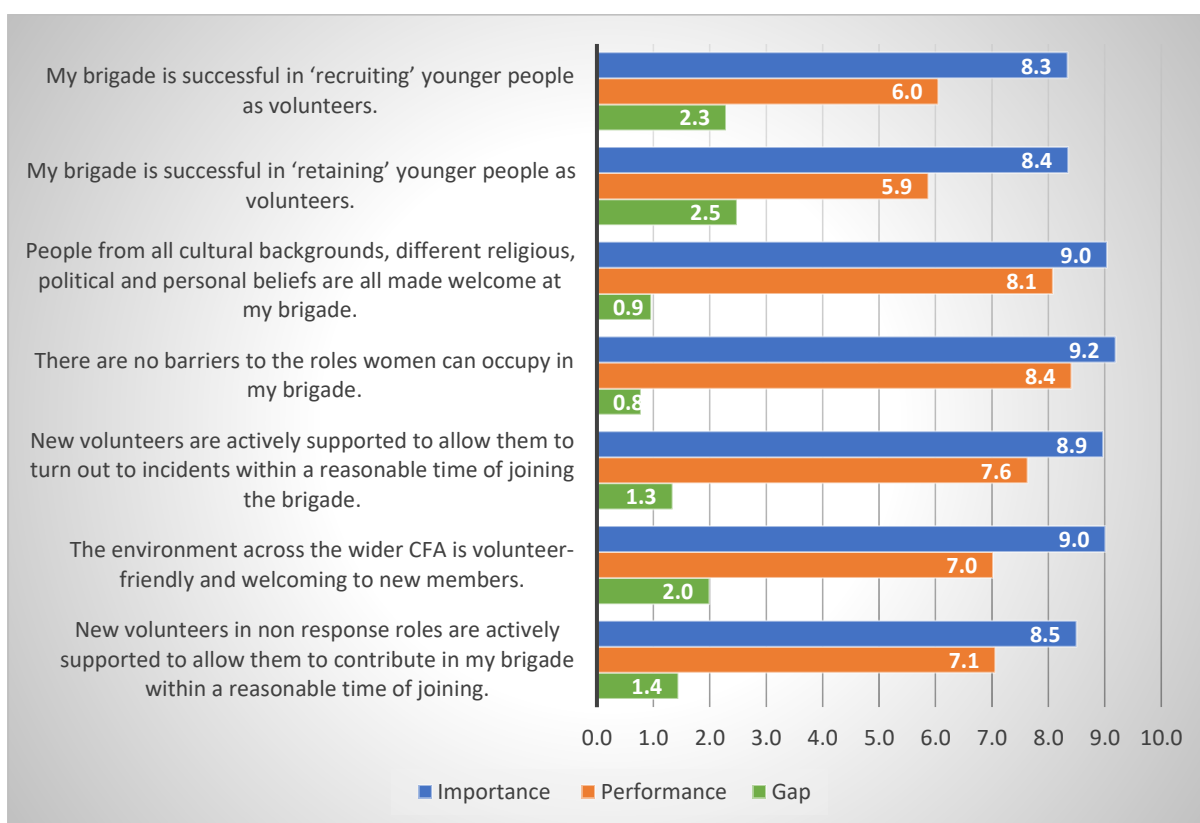
Whilst there was only a marginal decrease of 0.1 in the scoring of performance for all three statements within this theme since the previous survey, year on year training continues to be one of the worst performing areas for CFA volunteers, with what appears to be declining satisfaction over last three years.

A review of comments relating to training show the issue of cancelling courses at late notice and having to travel too far, arose often. More online resources and better use of volunteer trainers were suggested as improvements which could be made.

Training is core to the volunteers’ role and the ability to respond to emergency incidents. The theme of training, however, has scored the worst results, only surpassed by the **Cooperation across CFA** theme every year since the survey commenced in 2012.



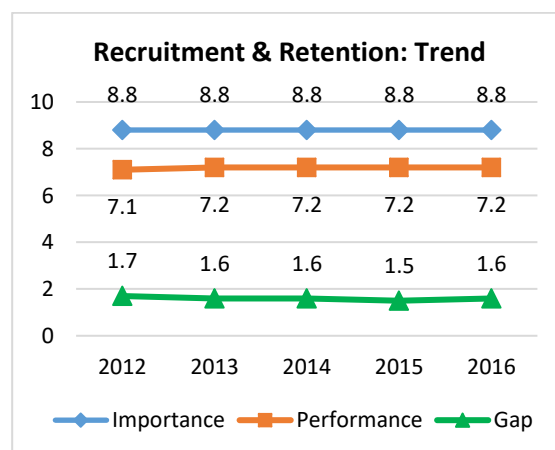
### Recruitment and Retention



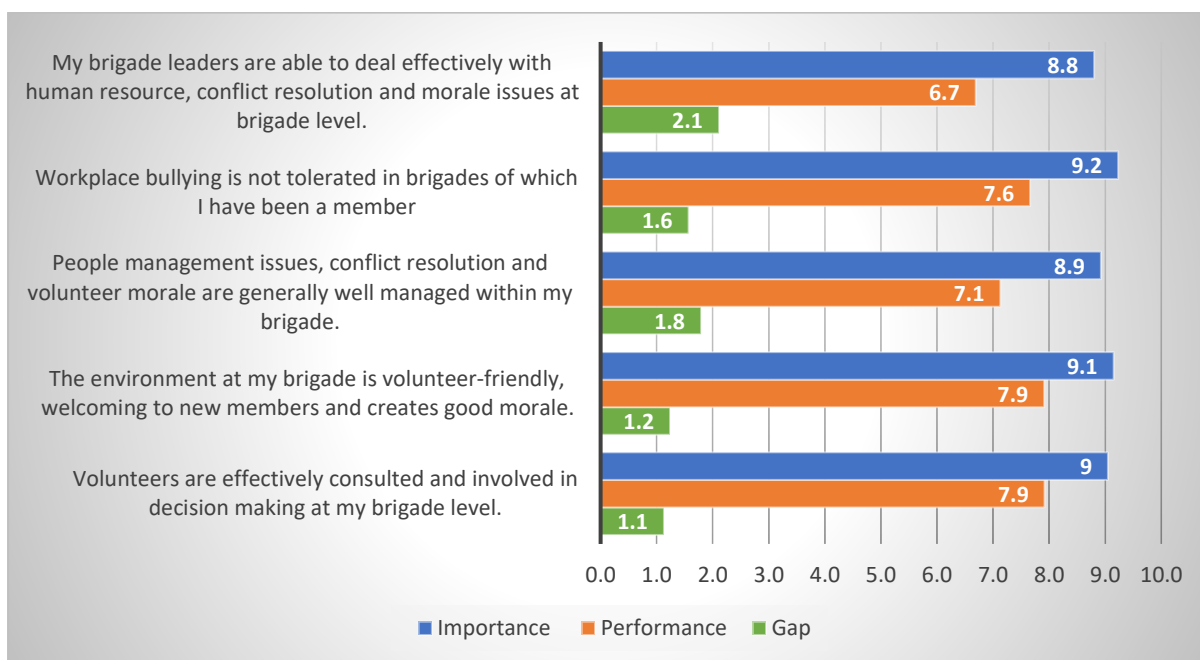
With 66% of volunteers indicating they are satisfied with this theme, **Recruitment and Retention** activities are rated as being done well.

The two statements *“There are no barriers to the roles women can occupy in my brigade”* and *“People from all cultural backgrounds, different religions, political and personal beliefs are all made welcome at my brigade”* had highest performance scores of all statements across the survey resulting in over 80% being satisfied with equity and diversity. Respondents also gave these two relevant statements very high importance scores, indicating that volunteers have high expectations on behaviour around gender equality and diversity. There has been a marginal increase in the gap since last year, which is a result that is disappointing.

Statements relating to the recruitment and retention of younger volunteers, however, had results indicating under 50% are satisfied with the brigade’s performance. Recruiting and retaining younger volunteers continues to be the area in this theme which performs poorly, and there has been no evidence of improvement over the years the survey has been conducted. In the view of respondents, the recruitment of young volunteers is done slightly better the retention of younger volunteers.



### People Management – My Brigade



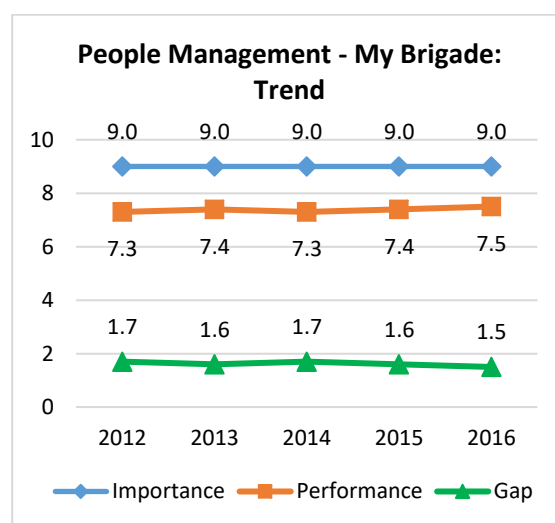
As has been the case in previous years, **People Management – My Brigade** is the theme with the highest overall performance score and smallest gap.

73% of survey respondents indicated satisfaction with matters relating to People Management at brigade level. In addition, all statements within this theme performed well comparative to other themes in the survey, with the lowest satisfaction rating being 62% for the statement “My brigade leaders are able to deal effectively with human resource, conflict resolution and morale issues at brigade level”.

The lowest satisfaction rating, at 62%, for “My brigade leaders are able to deal effectively with human resource, conflict resolution and morale issues at brigade level” could link with the statement in the **Training** theme “CFA provides good leadership training for volunteers in people management, brigade management, conflict resolution and mentoring”. 80% of respondents are satisfied that “volunteers are effectively consulting and involved in decision making at [my] brigade level” and that “the environment at [my] brigade is volunteer friendly, welcoming to new members and creates good morale”.

This theme is somewhat against the trend of results for the previous themes in that the overall performance rating in 2016 is the highest of all surveys conducted over the last five years.

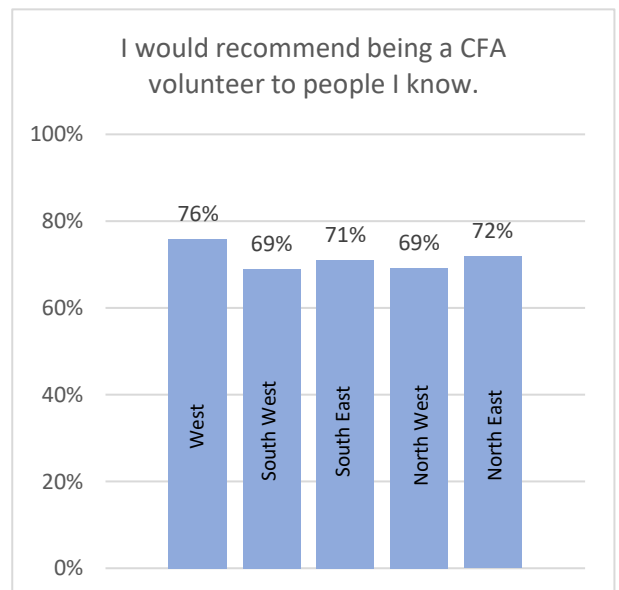
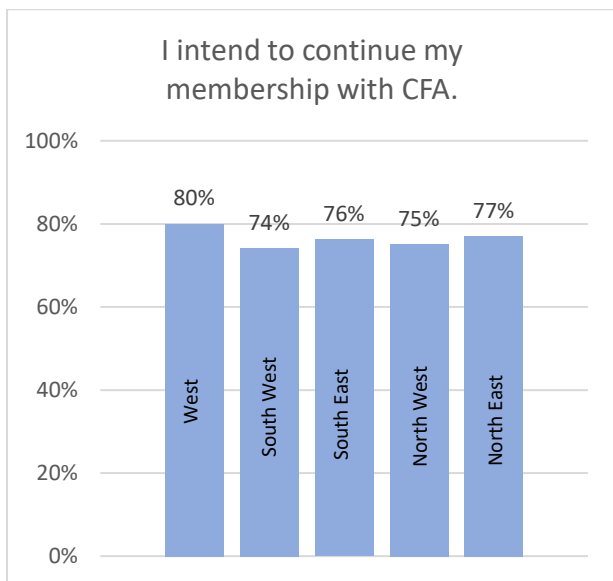
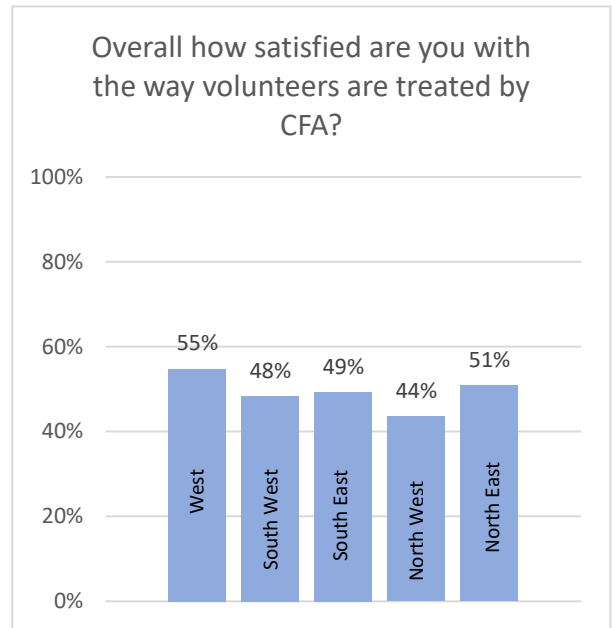
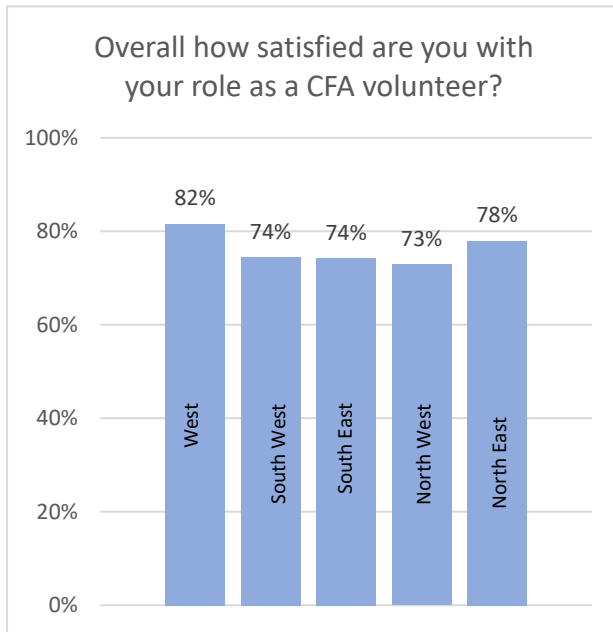
It is feasible that as results worsen on the performance of the ‘corporate’ side of CFA, the volunteers are more united at a local level. Whilst on the surface this may be a positive outcome, it is however showing an increasing divide between the satisfaction within the brigade and satisfaction with the organisation.



# **VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey**

## **REGION RESULTS**

## Satisfaction by Region





## West Region

West Region showed the best results of all the regions, by gap, for all themes except **Training by CFA** which was scored better by South West Region. West Region also shared the lowest gap for **People Management – My Brigade** with South West Region.

## South West Region

Of the regions, South West had the smallest gap along with West Region for **People Management – My Brigade**, and the best (performance and gap) results out of all regions for **Training by CFA**.

South West had the biggest gaps for:

- *I feel the time I devote to CFA is productive and worthwhile.*
- *CFA paid personnel in my local brigade/district area are committed to supporting and empowering volunteers.*

As well as the **Training by CFA** theme, South West Region had the smallest gap for:

- *Workplace bullying is not tolerated in brigades of which I have been a member.*

## South East Region

South East Region's results were around the median, when compared to other regions. However, by statement, did have the largest gaps for:

- *Volunteer leaders in my brigade are effectively supported and empowered to manage my brigade and undertake their roles.*
- *CFA provides good leadership training for volunteers in people management, brigade management, conflict resolution and mentoring.*
- *My brigade is successful in 'retaining' younger people as volunteers.*

- *There are no barriers to the roles women can occupy in my brigade.*
- *New volunteers are actively supported to allow them to turn out to incidents within a reasonable time of joining the brigade.*

## North West Region

The results for North West Region indicate the volunteers in this region are the least satisfied, with the largest gaps of all regions, by theme. They do however, share the results for **Training by CFA** with South East Region and **Recruitment and Retention** with both South East and North East Region.

## North East Region

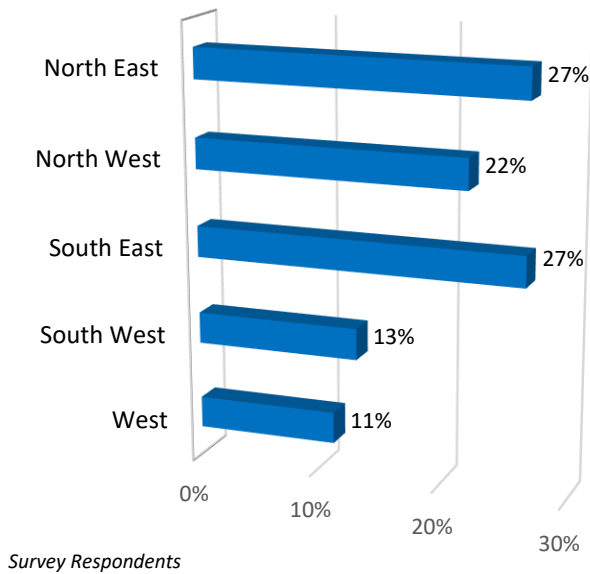
This region had the smallest gap compared to other regions for:

- *CFA provides good leadership training for volunteers in people management, brigade management, conflict resolution and mentoring.*

However, they did have bigger gaps than the other regions for:

- *The respect and value of the contribution of volunteers is evident in CFA's actions and culture.*
- *Volunteers who no longer wish to perform operational roles are supported to continue their volunteer service in other non-operational/operational support roles in a positive and supportive way.*
- *Volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at CFA corporate level.*
- *CFA corporate policies and leadership supports an effective volunteer based and fully integrated organisation.*
- *There are no barriers to roles women can occupy in my brigade.*
- *Volunteers are effectively consulted and involved in decision making at my brigade level.*

## Response Numbers by Region

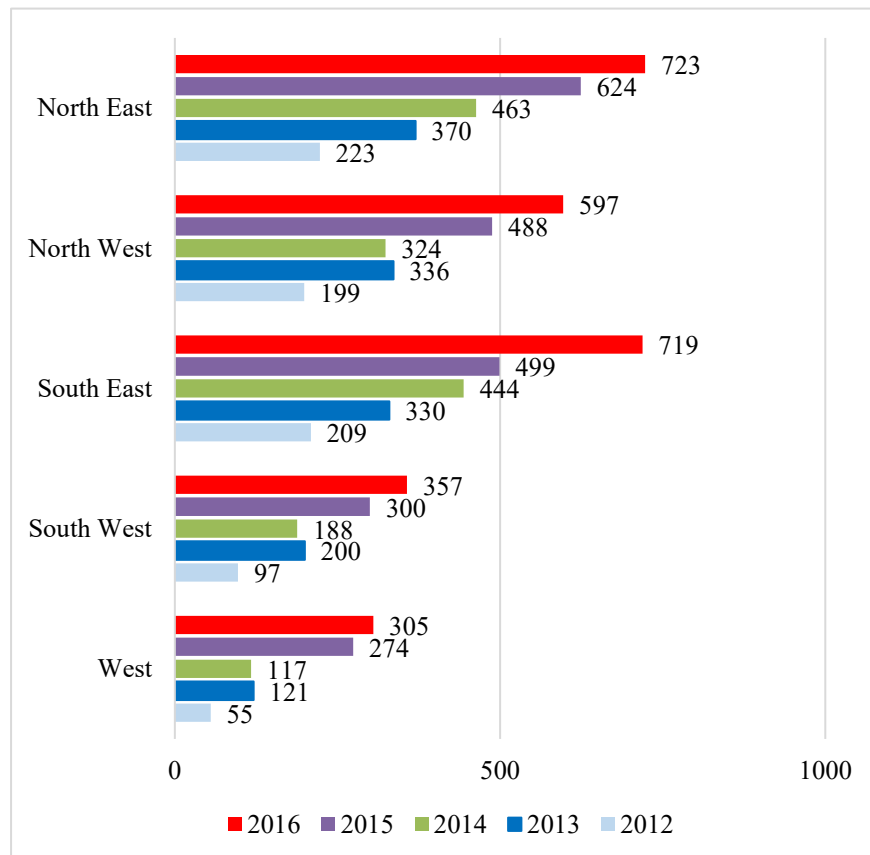


South East experienced the biggest change with an increase of 4% of the total respondents when compared to 2015.

After a large increase in 2015, the number from the West only increased slightly, and thus had a 2% reduction in the percentage of respondents in 2016.

North East continue to have the highest number of responses to the survey, although the percentage of respondents is now the same as the South East following their increase this year.

With the exception of North West, South West and West Regions in 2014, all regions are experiencing an increasing number of participants to the survey year on year.



# **VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey**

## **DEMOGRAPHICS**



Noble Park Fire Brigade

## DEMOGRAPHICS

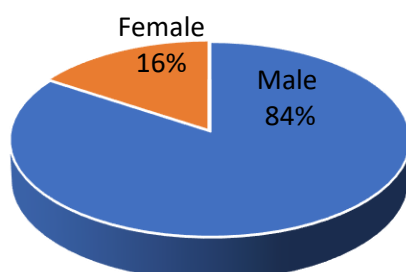
90% of respondents completed the demographic information, thereby ensuring the ability to review results by demographic has remained statistically valid. Each demographic is reviewed as its own cohort, rather than comparing individuals with matching criteria across a number of demographics.

Results were analysed both by theme and statement for each demographic.

In most cases, results within the different demographic groups aligned to the overall results of the survey.

The breakdown in this section relates to the views between the cohorts, but results as to the overall performance of the themes remains unchanged.

### Gender



Survey Respondents

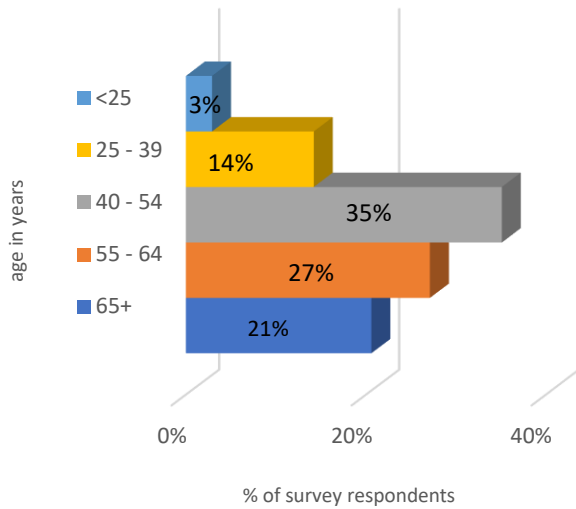
The percentage of male to female respondents remains unchanged from the previous year, and is similar to the demographic profile of CFA volunteers.

Females rated every statement with a higher importance score than their male counterparts.

Performance was also usually rated higher by females, with the exception of those statements in the **People Management** theme which were all rated lower by females than males. *There are no barriers to the roles women can occupy in my brigade* and *CFA works actively to discourage workplace bullying* were also rated lower by females.

Females reported that overall they are more satisfied with the way they are treated by the CFA than males, but results for intention to stay and recommending CFA volunteering to others were consistent between the two groups.

## Age



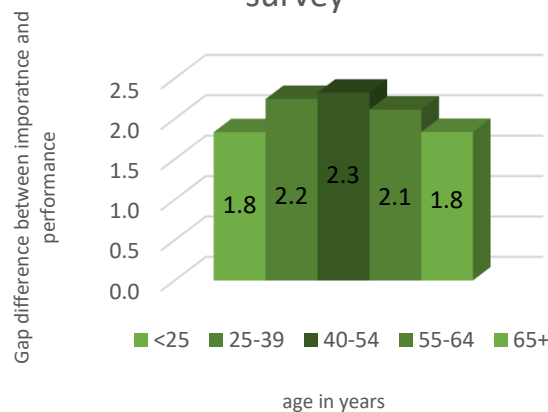
The increase in respondents resulted in little change across the different age groups, the main difference being an increase of 4% of respondents in the over 65 age group in 2016, compared to 2015.

For most statements, those under 25 were more satisfied than their older cohorts. Those over 65, however, recorded better results for **Recruitment and Retention** and **People Management – My Brigade**.

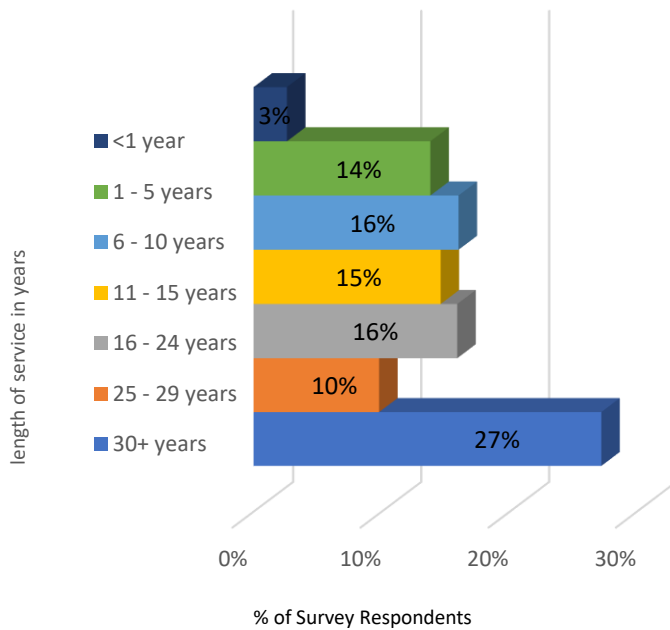
Those between 40 and 54 years of age were the least satisfied for **Respect and Professionalism, My Role as a Volunteer, Cooperation across CFA** and **Support from CFA**. Those aged between 25-39 years recorded the worst results for **Training by CFA, Recruitment and Retention** and **People Management – My Brigade**.

In most cases, when reviewed by gap, the trend is for satisfaction to be at its highest at the youngest and oldest cohorts, and lowest between the ages of 25 to 54.

Gap by Age Group - overall survey



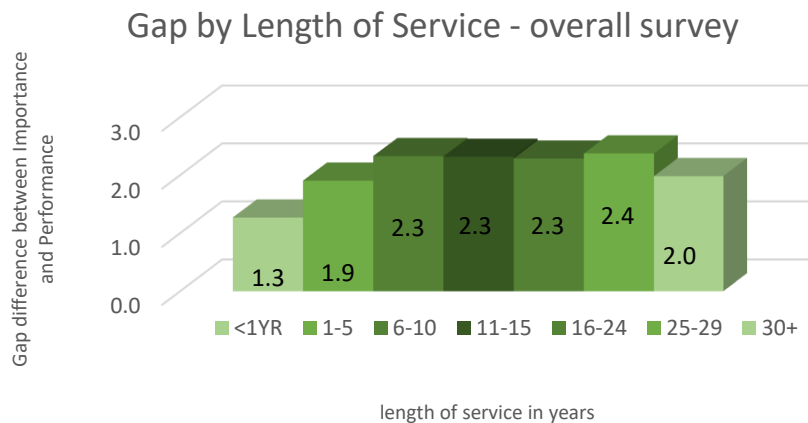
## Length of Service



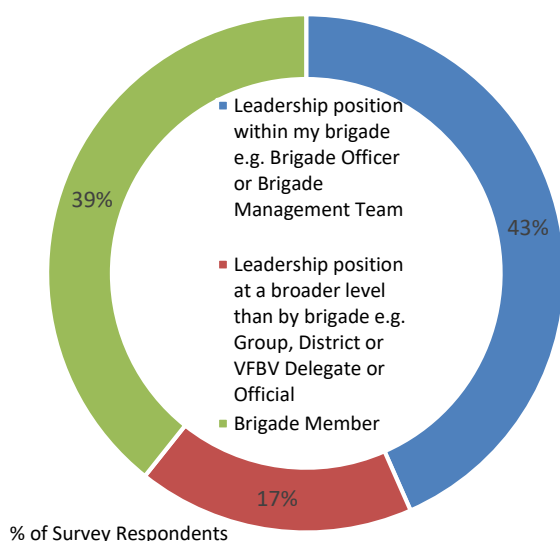
The breakdown of respondents by their length of service is similar to previous years, however those who have been with CFA less than one year increased from 2 to 3%. There was also a 2% increase in the number of respondents with service over 30 years.

Similar to the results for the age groups, but much more marked, was the drop in satisfaction after one year of service. Those with less than 1 year of service recorded the best results for every statement. Satisfaction declined over the progressing age groups, usually improving at 30+ years' service.

Results improved for those in the 30+ service years' cohort for all statements except *Volunteers who no longer wish to perform operational roles are supported to continue their volunteer service in other non-operational/operational support roles in a positive and supportive way*. This may be due to this group being most affected by this statement.



## Membership Type



The ratio of responses from Brigade Members increased from 35 to 39%. The shift came from both leadership positions, who went down 3% and 3% respectively in the percentage of respondents. This is positive as it shows the increasing value in the survey representing all CFA volunteers.

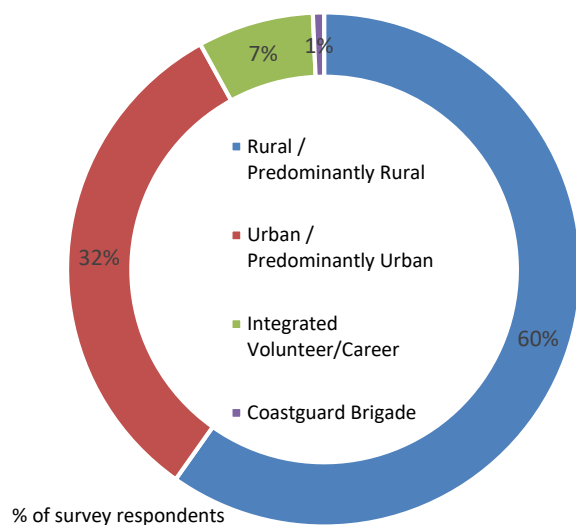
Results by gap show that those in broader leadership roles are least satisfied. This is particularly evident for the themes relating to corporate CFA and less so for **Recruitment and Retention** and **People Management – My Brigade**. However, brigade members indicated they are less satisfied in the statement *Overall how satisfied are you with your role as a CFA volunteer*. Only 70% of those in the brigade members group indicated they are satisfied, compared with 79% in the two leadership groups. Brigade members also only had 72% indicating they intend to continue in their volunteering role compared to 78% for leaders within brigades and 79% for those in broader leadership roles.

Those who identified as having leadership roles within their brigade were most satisfied, when compared with the other two groups, in the areas **My Role as a Volunteer**, **Support from CFA**, **Recruitment and Retention** and **People Management – My Brigade**. Brigade Members had better results for **Respect and Professionalism**, **Cooperation across CFA** and **Training by CFA**.

Consistent with overall results, all groups had **Cooperation across CFA** and **Training by CFA** as the lowest performing areas.



## Brigade Type



Distribution of responses amongst the different brigade types remain similar to 2015, with a slight decrease in percentage of respondents from Integrated and Urban brigades (1% each respectively) and an increase of 2% of respondents who identified as being with Rural brigades. Results from CFA Coast Guard brigade members should be reviewed as indicative only, given the small number of responses.

CFA Coast Guard brigade members had better theme results, that is the smallest gaps, than the other brigade types. Rural Brigade members, however, had higher performance scores for **Recruitment and Retention** and **People Management – My Brigade**. Important to note for CFA Coast Guard brigades is that the gap, whilst mostly still smaller than for other brigade types, has increased for all themes except **Recruitment and Retention** when compared with 2015 results. Members of CFA Coast Guard brigades, along with integrated brigade members also had much lower overall satisfaction results with only 55% of CFA Coast Guard and 58% of integrated members indicating satisfaction in relation to *Overall how satisfied are you with your role as a CFA volunteer*. This compares with 77% of both urban and rural brigade members indicating they are satisfied.

Aside from CFA Coast Guard brigade members, Rural brigade members had the smallest gaps for all themes.

Integrated brigade members had larger gaps for all themes except **Cooperation across CFA** and **Training by CFA**, which were scored more poorly by Urban brigade members. Of note is the low scoring for performance, resulting in the 2<sup>nd</sup> highest gap, for integrated brigade members in relation to **People Management – My Brigade**. This is against the trend of all other demographic groups.

## QUALITATIVE RESPONSES

996 out of 3,066 survey respondents took the time to provide additional comments. Volunteers took the opportunity to explain their responses related to the statements, and often made reference that their comments given are in support of the scoring of statements in a certain way.

The demographics of those responding reflected similarly to the total of those who responded to the survey.

In past years there has been an easy alignment between the comments received and the themes reviewed in the survey. In 2016, however, the dominating theme within the comments related to the attitude towards the treatment of volunteers shown by the State Government and the newly appointed (at the time of the survey) CFA Board. The endorsement by the Government and CFA Board of the proposed CFA-UFU Operational Staff Enterprise Agreement 2016 has “treated volunteers with sheer contempt”.

On the whole, overwhelmingly, and often emotionally, the comments volunteers made expressed everything from disappointment to despair (“volunteers feel undervalued and irrelevant”) at the approach by the State Government and the CFA Board to the treatment of CFA volunteers.

Phrases such as feeling “let down and unsupported”, “I am deeply dismayed..”, “every action by the Government has screamed corruption and deceit” and CFA “suddenly feels empty and without soul” show the depth of feeling that this last 12 months has evoked.

In addition to feedback relating to the industrial environment, the most prevalent

topic for comment related to training. Whilst one respondent did “appreciate the more formalised training that has been rolled out recently” most of the commentary was critical of CFA for cancelling courses at the last minute, not providing training for support roles and a lack of support for training by paid staff. Suggestions for improvement included providing an increase in opportunities and access to training, more online resources and better utilisation of volunteer trainers.

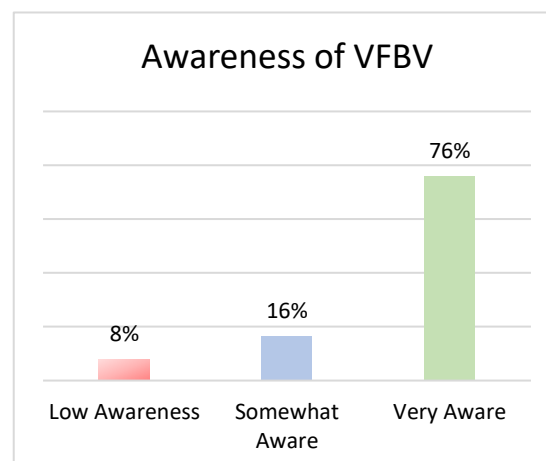
There were expressions of gratitude to the previously appointed Minister for Emergency Services, Jane Garrett, the previous CEO, Lucinda Nolan, and the Board which was sacked by the State Government. There were many more comments, however, directed at the new appointees to these positions, citing lack of trust and scepticism over the support they will provide for volunteers.

Both in addition to or within the comments mentioned already, there was expression of concern over the influence of the United Firefighters Union on the Government and CFA decision making.

On a positive note, there were comments about equality, providing support to communities and the pride associated with being a CFA volunteer. There were also some positive comments about local level relationships and interactions between paid staff and volunteers. Conversely, some expressed being disheartened at the attitude of staff towards volunteers, the lack of respect shown to volunteers and felt that the relationship between staff and volunteers was at an all-time low.

## THE ROLE OF VOLUNTEER FIRE BRIGADES VICTORIA

The number of respondents “very aware” or “somewhat aware” of VFBV, at 92%, indicates that the majority of volunteers are aware of the role of VFBV.



Volunteer Fire Brigades have designed, developed and maintained full administration and management of the welfare and efficiency survey to ensure that volunteers have no concerns regarding influence and individual repercussions and to guarantee anonymity and transparency in the release of data.

Specific comments regarding VFBV featured more heavily in this year’s survey. Most were positive, reflecting on the work of VFBV in supporting volunteers through 2016 and thanking and encouraging the continuation of fighting for the respect and rights of volunteers in CFA.

VFBV was not without criticism however, with some expressing a desire that VFBV spend less time on issues associated with the industrial dispute and political debate, particularly regarding the proposed CFA-UFU EBA unrest during much of 2016, and more time engaging with volunteers at brigade level, fixing CFA training issues and improving matters relating to their welfare and efficiency.

For every comment suggesting VFBV had taken too strong a stance on the industrial dispute, there were many more suggesting VFBV needed to be even more forthright and take more action in support of volunteers on this matter.

Some related that VFBV need to have better consultation between their delegates and brigades, including individual volunteers.

## COMPARISON WITH VICTORIAN AND NATIONAL RESULTS

2016 saw the adaptation and expansion of the VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey to other emergency management volunteers in Victoria. In addition, with the support of the Council of Australian Volunteer Fire Associations (CAVFA), the survey was also offered to fire services volunteers around the country, through their volunteer association.

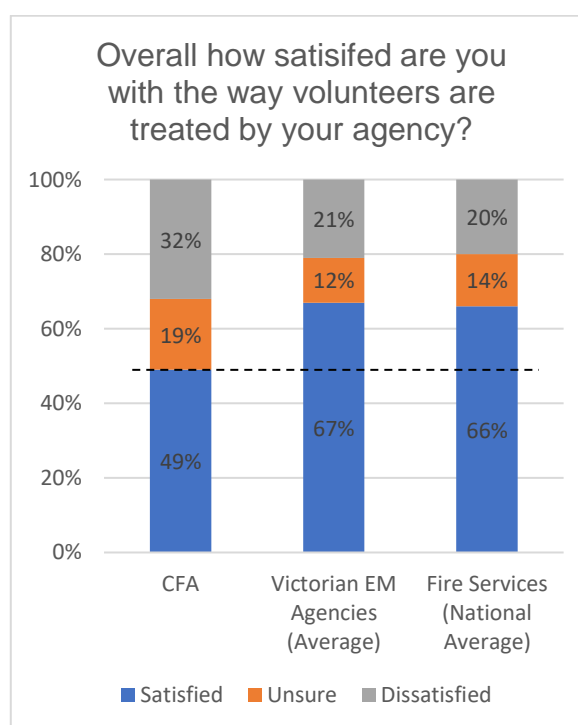
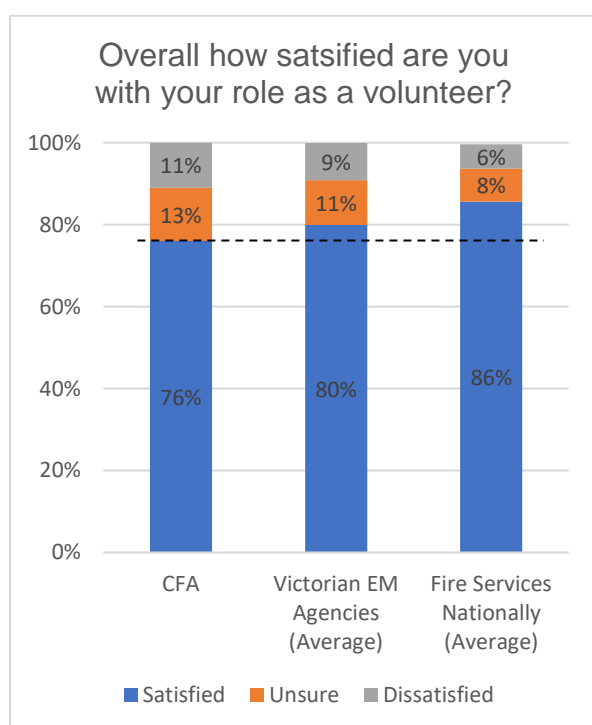
As this was the first time offered to other services, the participation in the survey varied, with CFA volunteers making up the majority of the total respondents.

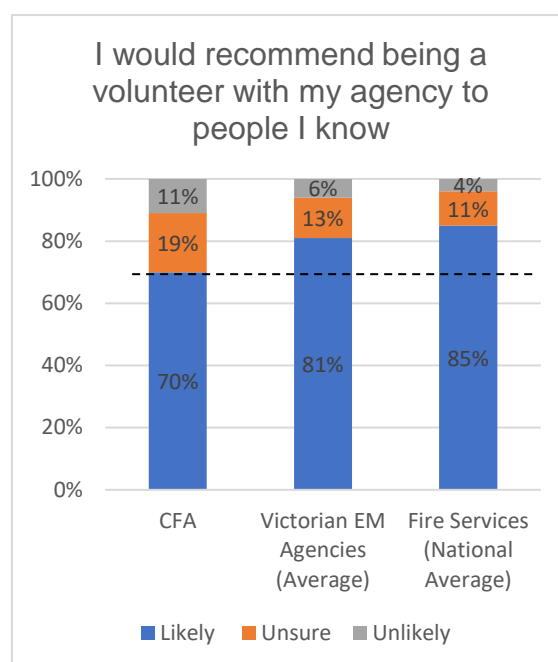
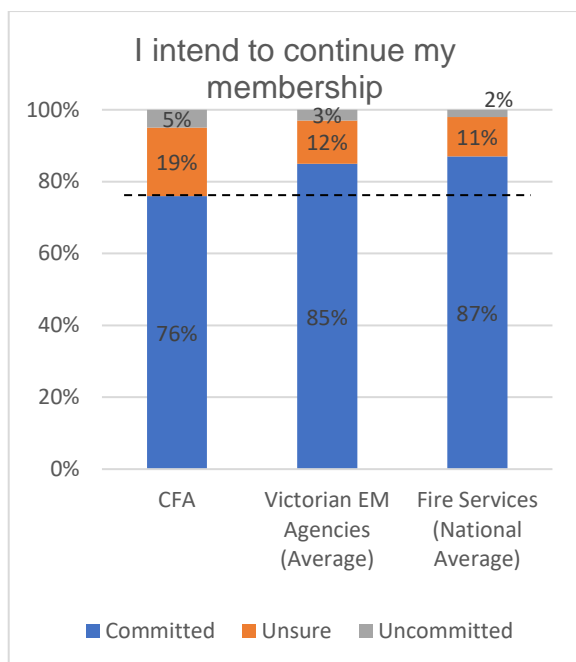
In 2016, 7255 volunteers from across the country took part, just under half of these from CFA.

Comparison with other services is based on the overall results of each participating agency, and the average determined. Note that for these results, CFA results are also included in the averages.

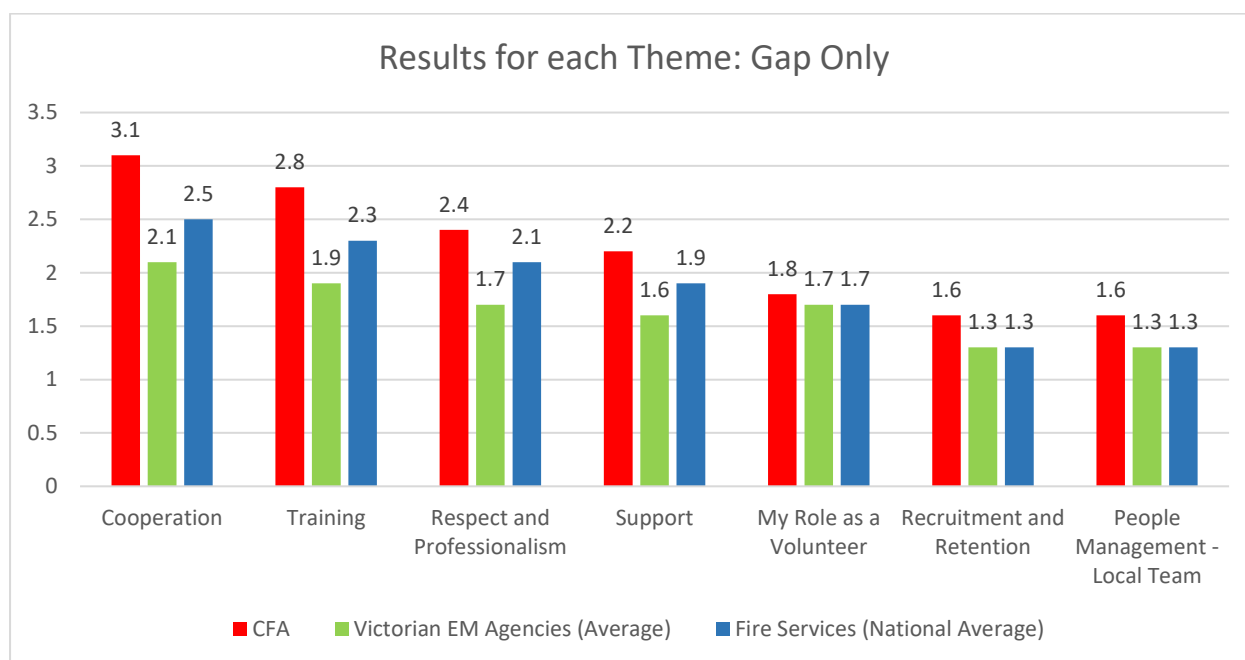
### Satisfaction Results

In all areas of satisfaction surveyed, CFA results were below the averages of the different groups. Some of these results can be attributed to more robust sample size, and some to the the specific issues facing Victoria volunteers, which are not impacting volunteers in other jurisdiction both within and outside the state. However, it is concerning that even taking these differences into account, the results for CFA are markedly worse.





## Comparison by Theme



Whilst CFA results show a bigger gap for all themes than the comparative cohorts, what is interesting to note is that the themes which show the poorest results (ie: biggest gap) show the same trends for all cohorts.

**Cooperation** and **Training** were the worst performing areas for the overall results for the fire services and for the Victoria emergency management agencies. **Recruitment and Retention** and **People Management – My Brigade** were the best for all of the different cohorts.

## SURVEY DESIGN & DATA COLLECTION

In 2012, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria worked with a professional consultancy firm to support the development of a survey which had the intent to “allow VFBV to regularly sample the perceptions of its members on matters affecting the welfare and efficiency of CFA volunteers”.

Through focus groups and consultation with VFBV forums, a series of questions, clustered into themes was developed. This survey was from the outset, designed and detailed by CFA volunteers.

The seven survey analysis themes are:

- Respect and professionalism
- My role as a volunteer
- Cooperation across CFA
- Support from CFA
- Training by CFA
- Recruitment and retention
- People management – my brigade

Via a series of statements addressing matters of welfare and efficiency, volunteers provide their view (via a 1 – 10 numerical scale) on the **Importance** and **Performance** of CFA against each of the 33 statements.

**Importance** provides an indication of the expectation of the volunteer on a scale of 1-10. **Performance** is how close that expectation is to being met.

To understand how close or far the expectations of volunteers are to being met, the difference between the **Importance** and **Performance** is calculated, and is known as the **Gap**.

The chart in the next column indicates a typical survey response against a given statement, where the total number of responses to the statement produce an average gap between **Importance** and **Performance** (in this case ‘2’).

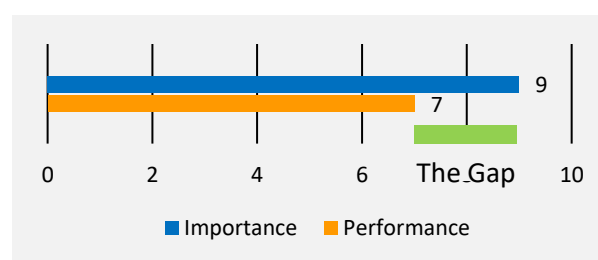


Figure above demonstrates the gap from survey results.

The survey is advertised to all volunteers with CFA through various mediums, including newsletters, CFA publications, the VFBV website, as well as through meetings and discussions at brigade level. Volunteers can participate in a number of ways, but the most common is through registering to receive a survey link. Individuals receive an email with a link to the survey. The survey is administered through survey monkey and allows for anonymous completion. VFBV receive the completed surveys through the survey monkey program which do not identify the individual

Information is also collected on gender, brigade type, membership, age, length of service and region to allow for understanding of the views of different volunteer groups.

To understand issues in relation to different demographic groups, results have been analysed by question, theme, and responses within a particular demographic cohort. Scores have been totalled and averaged to provide a rating for each of these analyses. (note: as analytical data is more than two decimal places, on occasion the difference between the importance and performance score is not consistent with the gap. This is the result of ‘rounding’ to one decimal place).

With survey results from the past five years, VFBV is now able to observe trends over time.

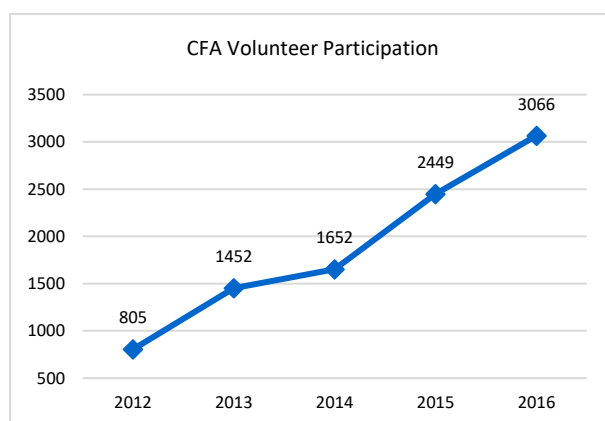
Each year, the importance scores are reviewed to ensure that the issues/statements continue to be of relevance to volunteers. There has been little change since the first survey of 2012, and all statements continue to receive an importance score over 8. This indicates that all issues are still critical areas on which to seek feedback.

In 2015, volunteers with the Victorian State Emergency Service were invited to participate in the survey. The language used in the survey was modified to be appropriate for SES volunteers. In 2016, the survey has been expanded further and offered to volunteers with other emergency management organisations in Victoria. The survey has also been offered to volunteers with fire services around the country. VFBV have again managed the survey in-house, and the questions remain consistent with those developed through volunteer workshops in 2012.

Suggestions for improvement on survey construct and design are reviewed each year. VFBV has intentionally made no changes to date, to ensure that responses can be viewed over time to identify trends. It is possible there will be some re-design in the future and comments received to date will be considered at that time.

## DATA RELIABILITY AND INTEGRITY

The first survey in 2012 attracted responses from 805 CFA volunteers. Subsequent surveys using the same format have seen the survey result increase to 3,066 volunteer responses in 2016, a 360% increase on the responses from five years ago.



The high number of survey responses against the number CFA volunteers represents a very robust sample of the views of CFA volunteers and can be treated as a 'statistically significant' response.

Survey	Population	Sample	%
<i>The Australian Survey of Social Attitudes</i>	22,785,500	6,250	0.0003
<i>Lowy Institute Poll</i>	22,785,500	1,005	0.0004
<i>Grey's Eye on Australia</i>	22,785,500	1,000	0.0004
<i>VFBV 2016 Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency Survey</i>	55,000	3,066	5.57

Confidence interval comparison table -  
VFBV 2016 Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency report.

Survey respondents were able to respond anonymously. This ensured that the survey respondents could provide their honest and open opinions in their written responses to the survey statements. Responding was limited to one response per computer IP address to ensure that respondents did not fill in the survey multiple times.

For security purposes, all online survey responses are entered into a securely encrypted electronic survey record system. All physical survey responses are also entered into the online system and destroyed once the data is recorded.

Based on the number of responses the survey now attracts, there is a significant number of representatives from each demographic group to ensure that the responses are representative.

The number of responses to the VFBV Welfare and Efficiency Survey 2016 is statistically significant, with the confidence level in the results exceeding many other national surveys.

The survey results are considered to be representative of the opinion of 95% of CFA volunteers, within less than 2% variance.



## Survey Results across all statements by gap



## CONCLUSION

When the first CFA Volunteer Welfare and Efficiency survey was introduced by VFBV in 2012, the intent was to provide a legitimate and evidence based forum to inform CFA on matters important to volunteers, through an avenue separate to that of the VFBV consultative committee structure. The purpose of conducting the survey annually is to allow VFBV to work with CFA on addressing matters that are evidently of concern to volunteers. The increasing number of respondents highlights the importance of the survey as a useful and meaningful way for volunteers to communicate with CFA.

### Satisfaction with Volunteering

2016 saw some of the worst results in relation to how CFA volunteers feel about their volunteering. There was a significant decline in results compared to previous years. It is evident through both the quantitative results and the qualitative comments this was due to the fracturing of trust and apparent disregard for the value of the contribution of volunteers to the CFA.

It is perhaps fortunate that CFA volunteers primarily volunteer to protect the local community they live in, as they may remain motivated to continue to volunteer despite being disillusioned with the establishment that is CFA. There is evidence, in the survey results, however, that volunteers indicating their intention to continue has dropped by almost 10% since the previous year. For some, a decline in satisfaction may not lead to an immediate resignation from CFA, however it will likely impact on the motivation to engage in activities which support the areas outside their local community, such as participation in Strike Teams to larger incidents. This could be detrimental to the ability to protect communities when large disasters occur.

Further evidence of the dissatisfaction of volunteers with CFA is the poor results attributed to consultation at CFA corporate level. With only 23% of volunteers indicating they are satisfied with the performance of CFA in relation to consultation from the organisation, this should be seen as a priority to remedy.

### Training Needs and Expectations

A recurring and concerning trend over the years of the survey is that in 2016 again the issue of training is highlighted as being nowhere near meeting volunteer expectations. This is particularly evident in relation to format, opportunity, timing and location of training which are indicated as not suitable for meeting the needs of volunteers.

In order to ensure that volunteers continue to be able to meet the needs of the community, which is one of the primary motivations for volunteering, addressing the issues of accessibility and flexibility of training options is going to have a positive impact on the volunteering experience.

### **Equity, Diversity and Workplace Behaviour**

Some positive results are seen in the results in relation to equity and diversity, with volunteers valuing the importance of equal opportunity as well as indicating it is something being done well. It is concerning that females, the only cohort relating to this topic that can be identified in the results, do judge performance in this area slightly worse than their male peers.

Despite positive overall survey quantitative results, the qualitative comments indicate that there are still incidents of bullying and unacceptable behaviour which do occur, and for those experiencing these, the overall performance trend will offer little comfort. Workplace behaviour is an issue critical to volunteer engagement and CFA must ensure that standards improve, particularly in relation to the integration between volunteers and career firefighters.

Relevant comments on workplace behaviour, more often than not, related to the poor relations between paid staff and volunteers, identified through the comments which can be summarised as a lack of respect for volunteers. Comments which evidenced this lack of respect referred to either direct verbal put downs, the allocation of mundane tasks and not making appropriate and effective use of volunteer time. The events of 2016 appear to have worsened these relationships.

CFA Board, Executive and Management must lead by example and ensure that the modelling of appropriate behaviour in relation to volunteer respect occurs at all times.

### **Length of Service**

The trend of significant decline in satisfaction after one year of service seen in previous surveys, continues in 2016. Often there is a further drop at five years. The fact that volunteers' satisfaction declines so significantly based on years of service needs to be addressed considering the cost, time and effort that is required for training professional volunteer firefighters.

### **Engaging Younger Volunteers**

Recruitment of younger volunteers is seen to be done better than retention, and a continued focus on engagement and involvement of younger volunteers is required. Investigation of the decline in satisfaction in the age groups over 25 years of age by comparison to those under 25 may be worth exploring.

There are initiatives being implemented to better engage with younger volunteers, such as the establishment of the VFBV multi-agency youth network, however, it appears this is yet to translate through to satisfaction at brigade level.

### **Welfare and Efficiency Survey**

The survey is now a well established, evidence based tool which provides feedback directly from volunteers to CFA. With ongoing commitment to the survey both across the Victorian emergency management volunteer sector and fire services across the country already established, the VFBV developed Welfare and Efficiency survey engages more volunteers than any other survey.

CFA should utilise this valuable information to assist and support decision making and strategic directions for the future.

Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria would like to thank the CFA volunteers who took the time to participate in the 2016 VFBV Welfare and Efficiency. We also take this opportunity to recognise our volunteers who freely give their time to protect their local communities and communities right across Victoria.



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