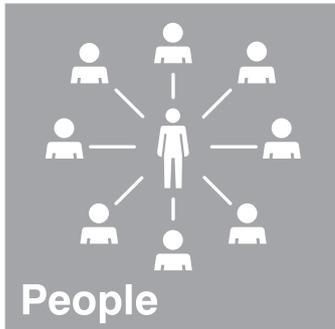


Volunteerism Strategy

2015-2020

CFA Strategy: Towards Resilience





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Volunteerism

Foreword



Claire Higgins
Chair CFA Board

At CFA, our volunteers represent every community we serve.

The connection between our volunteers and communities is vital. It illustrates what volunteerism means for us – connected communities who contribute to and take responsibility for their resilience and safety.



Michael Wootten
Chief Executive Officer

We need to acknowledge the complexities and trends emerging in our communities, and enhance our volunteer-based service for decades to come.

This Volunteerism Strategy is not only a recognition of the opportunities and challenges ahead, but our commitment to long-term success.



Euan Ferguson
AFSM
Chief Officer

Together with our emergency services partners, we must act strategically to build programs, capability and arrangements which will see volunteerism thrive as a model for emergency services in Victoria.

Strengthening volunteerism ensures that we will continue to deliver on our mission to protect lives and property.



Strategy at CFA

The environment in which CFA operates presents enormous challenges and opportunities for the future. What is clear is that change is necessary if we are to sustain ourselves as a service delivery organisation.

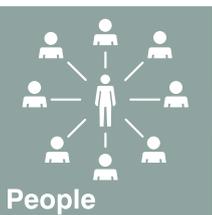
The **CFA Strategy 2013-18: *Towards Resilience*** is our blueprint for the future. It outlines the long-term objectives that will allow our people to plan for the future with confidence. The Strategy commits CFA to a network of five strategic priorities that will sustain our frontline service delivery while building a new approach to community resilience, and to fire and emergencies. The priorities strike a balance between meeting essential service delivery requirements and advancing the organisation to better meet future challenges. *Towards Resilience* signals a clear shift in how we understand and enact our role.



Service Delivery is at the centre of our network of strategies. Service Delivery will drive CFA as we make changes to support local people in solving local problems, all the time keeping the focus on public safety at CFA's core. Every CFA member plays a role in Service Delivery, whether delivering services directly to the community or providing support services to frontline members.



The **Volunteerism Strategy** aims to ensure the future capability of community-based volunteer emergency services and recognises the value that our volunteers bring to Victorian communities. The strategy affirms our commitment to ensuring CFA's volunteer-based service is able to embrace and shape the future so that volunteerism will thrive for decades to come.



The **People Strategy** outlines key initiatives and programs aimed at enhancing our people capability, safety, engagement and sense of direction. Through this strategy, we will position ourselves to meet our service delivery objectives by ensuring we have people with the right capability, skills, knowledge and abilities into the future.



The **Asset Strategy** sets clear priorities to meet CFA's service delivery objectives based on a more interoperable approach to emergency management in Victoria. Achieving this will ensure that CFA brigades have the assets and infrastructure needed to protect Victorians from the risk of fire and emergencies.



The **Finance Strategy** outlines key priorities to ensure the long-term sustainability of CFA in fulfilling our legal charter and implementing government policy. Achieving this will see CFA well positioned to deliver public safety outcomes at a price the community can afford.



CFA MISSION
Protecting lives and property

CFA VALUES

- We put **safety** first
- We **respect** each other
- We act with **integrity**
- We work **together** as one
- We are **adaptive** and agile

CFA LONG-TERM OUTCOMES

- Reduce the incidence and impact of fire emergencies on the community of Victoria
- Reduce the impact of non-fire emergencies on the community of Victoria
- Be a highly trusted and respected fire and emergency service
- Increase community resilience to fire and non-fire emergencies in Victoria

CFA STRATEGIC PRIORITIES 2013-2018

- Our frontline**
Effective, efficient and sustainable frontline service delivery
- Community resilience**
Shared emergency risk management with the community of Victoria
- Community risk**
Enhanced performance of the built and natural environment
- Delivery of our services**
Improved and flexible delivery of services
- Our people**
Our people are safe, respected, capable, engaged and share a common purpose

NETWORKED STRATEGIES



CFA ANNUAL PLANS

The importance of volunteers

Victoria has long been served by volunteer fire brigades, the first of which were established in the 1850s.

The establishment of CFA in 1945 recognised a need to better support and sustain these brigades and their volunteers.

Today, CFA is one of the world's largest volunteer-based emergency services organisations, with over 1,200 brigades and close to 60,000 members.

The dedication, hard work and community spirit of our volunteers are a significant contribution to the shared responsibility that government and communities have for creating a safe community. Without volunteers, many communities across Victoria would be left without a local fire service. Put simply, volunteers are the lifeblood and heart of our organisation.

While keeping Victorians safe will always be our focus, the benefits of our volunteer culture extend well beyond CFA and the emergency services sector. Volunteering contributes to a healthy, inclusive society in which people have the opportunity to participate meaningfully in their community. Volunteering connects us, strengthens our sense of belonging and builds stronger communities.¹

We are rightly proud of our volunteers and our long history of volunteer-based emergency service to Victoria.

CFA volunteers:

- ▶ are highly skilled, team-oriented and essential to community safety
- ▶ build community resilience through leadership and local service
- ▶ are central to Victoria's aim of fostering shared responsibility for reducing the impact of emergencies.

Purpose of a Volunteerism Strategy

Supporting volunteers is *everyone's* responsibility at CFA. This Strategy focuses not only on supporting volunteers but also on *volunteerism*.

Thriving volunteerism requires more than supporting our people. It is about ensuring the future capability of community-based volunteer emergency services and recognising the value that our volunteers bring to Victorian communities.

To deliver our services, we must:

- ▶ encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers
- ▶ address the challenges of and embrace opportunities for societal, environmental and technical change which impact on our traditional volunteering models
- ▶ better understand and promote the social and economic value of volunteerism to Victoria.

Victoria's Emergency Management Act, CFA's Act and Volunteer Charter² all provide a mandate for action to value, encourage, maintain and strengthen the capacity of volunteers to deliver CFA services.

This Strategy affirms our commitment to ensuring CFA's volunteer-based service is able to embrace and shape the future so that volunteerism will thrive for decades to come.

It also responds to our legislative responsibilities and illustrates our contribution to ongoing emergency services sector development.

Principles

Three principles guide our approach to volunteerism and this Strategy.

1. We are committed to community-based, sustainable volunteerism
2. We recognise, value and respect all members equally
3. We will actively engage and involve volunteers in decision-making.

Expected outcomes

The success of this Strategy will be measured in terms of its benefit for Victorian communities, CFA and volunteers. Outcomes expected are:

1. A strong and healthy volunteering model which is adaptive, sustainable and effective
2. A volunteer membership which has capacity to meet service delivery needs with volunteers who are suitably trained and equipped
3. Volunteers feel that their contribution is personally worthwhile, and are respected and valued.



Context: A changing landscape for CFA and volunteerism

Volunteerism at CFA faces broad challenges. Declining rural communities, increasing demand in growth corridors, changing community expectations and demographics, and economic pressures are just some of the factors that impact our volunteer capacity.³

Extreme weather events are also having a significant impact, with increased frequency and intensity of bushfire, heatwaves, severe storms and flash floods placing greater demands on our volunteers.⁴

Our integrated service model, which sees paid staff supporting our volunteers, can also challenge traditional approaches and cultures. The continued role of volunteers within an integrated model is essential. The success of our integrated approach – designed to sustain volunteer-based service delivery – is critical.

In 2012, the (then) Fire Services Commissioner and Victoria's emergency services organisation leaders identified four key challenges facing volunteerism:

1. Lack of an integrated strategic approach to encourage, maintain and strengthen volunteer capacity and capability
2. The importance of volunteerism is not embedded within and across fire and emergency services
3. Society does not understand or value community-based volunteers and their importance to shared responsibility and resilience
4. Competing pressures and complexity are a barrier to volunteer participation.⁵

Emergency Management Victoria's '2021 research' has identified key demographic changes that will impact volunteerism.⁶ We will see, for example:

- ▶ **100 new suburbs and 1 million new people in outer metropolitan Melbourne over the next 30 years**

This urban development will occur almost exclusively in CFA areas and will increase service delivery requirements for local brigades. There may also be increased risk to life and property in development areas on the peri-urban fringe where bushfire and grassfire risk remains. Attracting and retaining volunteers in newer or rapidly changing communities can be challenging and targeted action is needed.

- ▶ **Increasing population in provincial towns across Victoria with declining population in rural areas due (in part) to the loss of small family farms and the growth of larger individual landholdings**

This shift presents both opportunities and challenges. In provincial towns, increasing populations will likely result in increased service delivery requirements, while at the same time an influx of new residents presents opportunities for CFA to recruit and develop new volunteers. In areas experiencing rural decline, however, our ability to sustain viable brigades requires significant attention. New support and service delivery models are expected to be required in order to sustain service delivery over the long term in many of these areas.

► An ageing population

Victoria's population base continues to increase in average age. As our baby boomer generation moves into retirement there are opportunities for CFA to harness this group to take up volunteering opportunities. Of caution, however, is the corresponding increase in service delivery and community support, with a projected 271% increase in the number of people aged 85+ (from 126,143 to 342,877) by 2041.⁷

This shift impacts not only the communities we serve but our own membership and workforce – strategies to attract and develop younger volunteers are critical to CFA's long-term success.

► Increasing cultural and ethnic diversity, particularly in outer metropolitan growth areas

CFA's current membership diversity is a recognised challenge. As diverse cultural and ethnic communities continue to be established in metropolitan growth areas, our ability to connect with, attract and retain a corresponding diversity of members must be addressed with innovative leadership.

► Increasing interest in casual volunteering, and volunteering to build skills rather than long-term or time-intensive commitments

At CFA, our volunteering model calls for a sustained commitment to train for and respond to emergencies. Our current members typically provide their time and skills over many years of service. This long-term commitment to volunteering is increasingly challenged by alternative models for volunteering which offer shorter-term commitments tailored to fit in with busy lives.

CFA must consider the impact of competing with attractive opportunities for those wanting to volunteer, and ensure that we provide flexible and sustainable models for volunteering.

► Social disconnection due to limited free time to engage within the community (e.g. due to longer commute times or dual income stressors)

Community resilience relies upon community connectedness. Research tells us that many people are now less connected to 'place-based' communities, upon which CFA's brigade model is largely based. New opportunities are needed to help people to engage with their community through volunteering.

Our ability to connect with and attract community members to volunteer their limited time will be an increasing challenge.

Each of these factors presents opportunities and pressures on our traditional volunteering model and on our volunteers. CFA must respond to this changing landscape.

"We must consider how well our current and future arrangements work to attract and retain the right number and type of volunteers to address community risk; how to better understand the needs of our volunteers; how CFA will be viewed by those interested in volunteering; and how we will improve support to volunteers so that they can continue to provide services."



Strategy overview: Responding to new challenges and opportunities

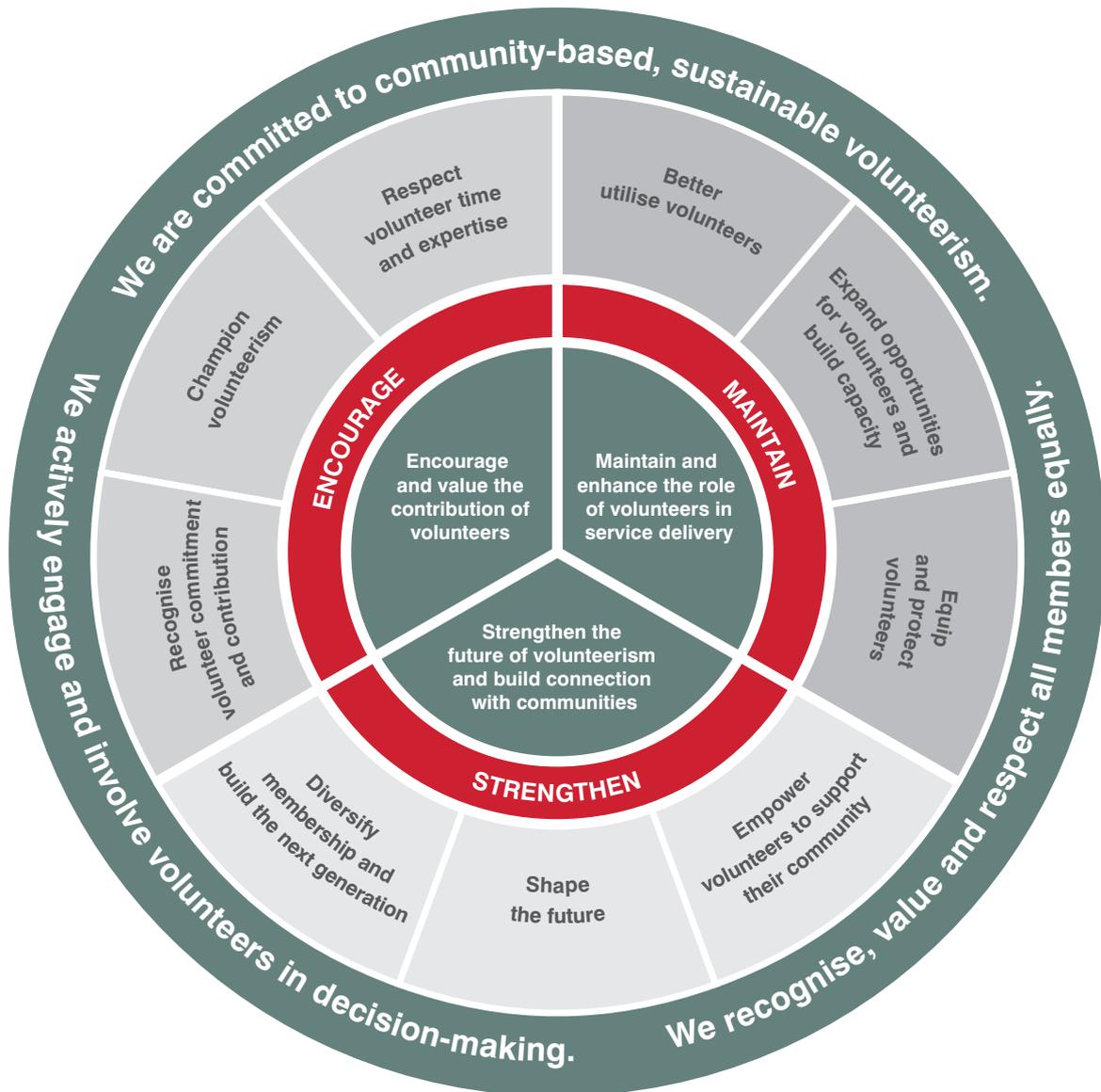
This Strategy outlines CFA’s commitment to volunteerism and will guide all decisions and actions that affect volunteers and volunteering. The CFA Act 1958 (s6I) sets out CFA’s responsibility to develop policy and organisational arrangements that **encourage, maintain** and **strengthen** the capacity of volunteers. These three priorities provide the basis of this strategy.

For each of the priorities, strategic actions have been identified and are outlined below and on the following pages. The strategic priorities are underpinned by the principles previously outlined.

Finally, this strategy has far-reaching impacts. Achievement of the three priorities has implications for:

- Encourage** ▶ Encourage and value the contribution of volunteers
- Maintain** ▶ Maintain and enhance the role of volunteers in service delivery
- Strengthen** ▶ Strengthen the future of volunteerism and build connection with communities.

- ▶ all brigades and CFA members
- ▶ state, regional and district teams across CFA
- ▶ the emergency services sector
- ▶ government, business and communities.





Strategic priorities



Volunteerism



01

Strategic priority

Encourage and value the contribution of volunteers

Champion volunteerism

As one of the largest community-based volunteering organisations in Victoria, CFA has a shared responsibility to nurture, develop and promote volunteering.

We need to better understand and communicate the valued contribution of volunteers, and see that the broader socio-economic value of volunteering is recognised across government and within the community.⁸

We also need to learn more about the values and different motivations of current and future volunteers. We know that volunteering can provide a deep sense of belonging for volunteers and can bring meaning, purpose and satisfaction to people's lives.⁹ However, there are many reasons that people volunteer with CFA. We must seize upon this and ensure that CFA offers an outstanding volunteering experience.

"Really understanding 'why' we all volunteer is important."

"For the vast majority of communities, this is a volunteer service. We need governments, employers and communities to better understand this."

"There is so much to being a part of CFA. We need to do more to tell people who we are, what we do and how to get involved."

Respect volunteer time and expertise

Just as the efficient and effective use of time on the fireground is important to operational success, so it should be in everything that we do. We need to better respect and place a higher value on the time that volunteers can offer to CFA. This means treating volunteers in the same respectful way that we would treat anyone else, regardless of whether they are staff or volunteer.

We can also do more to respect and utilise the diverse expertise of our volunteers. Our people have extensive skills and experience which they want to share – our systems, policies and arrangements need to support us to achieve this goal, and to sustain us into the future.

"To me, demonstrating respect is the most important thing – it underpins everything else."

"This is about the culture and attitude of everyone at CFA."

"We are not 'just volunteers'. I hate hearing that."

"The experience of our senior members is so valuable. As a new Captain, I had a cup of tea with my senior members and told them 'Don't you dare leave, I need you.'"

Quotes used throughout have been gathered through consultation with CFA members and may be paraphrased.

Recognise volunteer commitment and contribution

Volunteers want to be recognised for the work they do. In a 2011 Volunteer Australia survey, 43% of respondents identified 'being accepted as a valuable team member' as the form of recognition most important to them.¹⁰

While formal recognition and awards are important for some, others see recognition as being provided with new opportunities, constructive feedback, a pat on the back, being well-utilised, and feeling that their contribution – large or small – is valued.

Achieving our desired organisational culture and ensuring that our people have the right leadership skills are essential factors in ensuring that volunteers feel valued as team members.

“A simple and honest ‘thank you’ is about the best recognition that there is to get.”

“Being selected for training or utilised in a key role is a great way to feel recognised.”

“Tokenistic recognition is not what we want.”

HOW WE WILL MONITOR AND MEASURE PROGRESS

What success looks like in 2020

We've started to experience a real shift in the culture at CFA, and in fact, across the emergency services sector in Victoria.

Our people uphold our values and work together. Decisions are made at the lowest competent level and enable continuous improvement.

Our people see a strong link between grass roots initiatives and strategic direction.

The profile and importance of volunteerism is supported by government, employers, communities and our partner agencies.

We have improved involvement of volunteers in multi-agency decision making and response.

Our volunteers believe that their work is worthwhile and valued by others.

We will measure

- ▶ Amount of resources committed to grass roots initiatives (increase and quality)
- ▶ Amount of resources committed to improving membership engagement (increase and quality)
- ▶ Increase in the percentage of volunteer satisfaction*
- ▶ Increase in stakeholder-perceived benefit of volunteerism.

* Based on CFA's 2014 *Volunteer Culture Survey* results.



02

Strategic priority

Maintain and enhance the role of volunteers in service delivery

Better utilise volunteers

The Victorian Auditor-General has recently concluded that CFA '[does] not adequately plan for a sustainable and capable volunteer workforce'.¹¹

At its core, CFA is a volunteer-based fire and emergency services organisation and we must ensure that we not only plan for a sustainable volunteer workforce, but also utilise our volunteers to their best potential.

Volunteers bring a great diversity of skills and experience to CFA and also receive accredited training. It is critical that we understand and really utilise these skills to meet increasingly diverse community service needs.

To succeed, we need to work on establishing an organisational culture and performance model that reinforces the importance of volunteerism, supports services that assist volunteers to contribute, and enhances workforce planning to better utilise volunteers to deliver our services.

"We might get to do the training for specialised roles, but then we don't get to put it into action."

"I bring with me substantial and relevant experience but there is no way of flagging this."

Expand opportunities for volunteers and build capability

CFA's service delivery has diversified a long way from bushfire fighting. Our ability to attract and develop volunteers who want to deliver these broader services is essential to ongoing success.

Modern volunteering organisations are adopting new models to better attract, develop and utilise people based on their specific skills and interests. So must CFA.

We need to address both perceived and real barriers that inhibit volunteers taking up new opportunities. To do so, our policies, workforce management tools, training and approaches to resourcing for service delivery roles must all be improved.

Importantly, our thinking on capability needs to include increased focus and investment in development of our local leaders and on building better 'people skills' within brigades.

"You can't just assume that volunteers who joined to fight fires also want to deliver community education or train junior members. We need to recruit and train people for these roles."

"You know, a really important part of this is about leadership skills within the brigade. We don't develop our leaders well and a good or bad leader can make or break a brigade."

"Some people want more training because that's what keeps them interested. I don't. I just want to do what I need to be safe."

"We've got an enthusiastic young guy who wants to train quite a bit but we're a quiet brigade. He heads down the road to the brigade that trains regularly and joins in there – he loves it, and it works well."

Equip and protect volunteers

The physical and mental health and safety of our people is paramount. In the previous decade, CFA has made strong advances in the way that we train, equip, protect and support all of our people, and we will continue to make improvements to maintain a safe and capable workforce.

If the safety and protection of CFA's people is in any way threatened, so too is our ability to attract and retain a volunteer workforce.

Importantly, CFA's legislative protections for all volunteers must also remain highly valued.

"No questions here. This is an important one."

"I think what CFA has done over the years on critical incident stress and caring about our mental health is great."

"Some of the equipment is getting really complex – can't we keep it simple? It shouldn't take 20 hours of training to learn how to use a new truck."

HOW WE WILL MONITOR AND MEASURE PROGRESS

What success looks like in 2020

With investment and effort we've made good inroads on better developing and utilising our members.

Our frontline leaders are supported to solve local problems and are confident, respected decision makers.

We understand the health, safety and wellbeing of our people. We analyse requirements, information and trends to ensure we protect our people.

We have advanced our leadership and management development programs and we have better systems in place to understand and utilise the diverse skills and experience of our members. As a result, we have a greater mix of people involved in service delivery at CFA.

We will measure

- ▶ A capability baseline (skills, experience, accreditation)
- ▶ Percentage of volunteers trained and accredited to address capability gaps
- ▶ Ratio of volunteer leadership development versus total amount spent on operational training
- ▶ Increased number of volunteers on Incident Management Teams.



03

Strategic priority

Strengthen the future of volunteerism and build connection with communities

Shape the future

CFA is committed to strengthening Victoria's culture of volunteering and community service.¹²

Our approach to volunteering must be responsive to the changing needs and demographics of local communities. With shifts in urban, regional and rural population, and changing community priorities and challenges, we are witnessing a change to traditional community structures.¹³ CFA must respond.

Attracting and retaining volunteers in rapidly changing or growing regions will be an enormous challenge for the future. Our current model for volunteering that has served us well for many decades is unlikely to sustain us into the long term.

Newer volunteering models are responding to an increasing trend of people looking for casual, short-term or specific volunteering roles. This approach presents challenges for CFA where we have traditionally depended on our volunteers to provide reliable and ongoing service, and on them having undertaken suitable training and accreditation to do so.

We must explore and define alternative models for volunteering at CFA that are more flexible, responding to differing service and community needs, demographics and risks across Victoria.

"The idea that you need to be a member of just one brigade, when so many of us don't live, work and play in any one community these days, is out of date."

"Don't throw the baby out with the bathwater. But yes, let's think about different types of membership and volunteering roles."

"Without strong leadership at all levels of the organisation we'll struggle to make the changes needed."

Diversify volunteer membership¹⁴ and build the next generation

As a community-based organisation, CFA should reflect the communities we serve. While we have made good progress over recent years to diversify our membership, we continue to be represented by the stereotyped image of an older, male, Anglo-Saxon firefighter.

Many brigades are concerned about how to diversify membership and, in particular, how to build the next generation of members. We must develop new approaches to attract, welcome and utilise broader membership, and learn from those who are already succeeding, both within CFA and beyond.

On a practical front, improving the administration process and initial training for new members is something that will help in achieving this goal.

"We need more young people, male and female, but they move away for education and jobs. It might help if volunteers knew they could access training or join strike teams in areas other than their own brigade."

"We need a more modern approach to attract younger generations."

"We have really promoted and empowered young members here and it is working."

Empower volunteers to support their community

While our priority will always be protecting lives and property from fire and emergencies, we know that a strong and resilient brigade is a reflection of the community it serves. It follows then that if we want strong and resilient volunteerism, then we need to support our communities.

What does this support look like? Just like every community, each CFA brigade is unique and so action takes many forms. Perhaps it is a brigade's ability to offer a place to gather, to fundraise for community initiatives, attend a local country fair, provide a BBQ at a local event, or extend support to community members who need help.

Empowering volunteers to support their communities acknowledges the important connection between CFA and communities to ensure that our community-based model of volunteerism continues to thrive.

“Every week we have a local disability group come in and help to look after the station and trucks. They love it, and I think it is a great example of CFA connecting with the local community.”

“I think this is definitely true, but we need to keep it real too. We're there to provide a service, not to be a 'nice' thing to have in the community.”

HOW WE WILL MONITOR AND MEASURE PROGRESS

What success looks like in 2020

We're building a strong pipeline of new members and future leaders.

We empower members to innovate and do things better. We also have more flexible membership options and we've improved the process to join CFA.

There are increased opportunities and support for volunteers delivering community education programs and initiatives.

Along the way, we've worked hard to support brigades to 'think local' while also working with Emergency Management Victoria and government to progress the development of a modern CFA.

We will measure

- ▶ Increase in amount spent on brigade innovation
- ▶ Amount spent on innovation versus improvement in service delivery performance
- ▶ Increase in representation of members aged under 40 (recruitment, retention, engagement)
- ▶ Membership profile versus service delivery performance.



Implementing the Strategy

This Volunteerism Strategy is one of CFA's five networked strategies spanning Service Delivery, Volunteerism, People, Asset and Finance. Each of these strategies supports the achievement of CFA's long-term outcomes as outlined in *Towards Resilience*.

At CFA, work is underway to develop a networked view of success factors, key initiatives and measures – we must work as one team to achieve the greatest success.

Importantly, many initiatives which support implementation of this Strategy are also integral to other strategies. Improving our culture and leadership for example, or better utilising volunteers to meet service delivery needs.

The success of the five networked strategies is reliant on an integrated approach to the implementation of each strategy. This will ensure that each supports the other to achieve desired outcomes.

Outlined below are the key initiatives that will drive implementation of the Volunteerism Strategy. These will contribute to the final plan of the five networked Strategies.

KEY INITIATIVES

Encourage

- ▶ Commission and support research into sustainable volunteerism
- ▶ Design and implement a volunteer ethos program which engages and educates our people on the value and role of volunteerism
- ▶ Strengthen employer engagement and recognition programs to build commitment to volunteerism (partner with EMV and Government in this work).

Maintain

- ▶ Implement improved practical, regional support for volunteerism through a *Volunteer Support Model*
- ▶ Establish a grass roots Volunteer Leadership and Management Development Program
- ▶ Deliver a new volunteer recruit firefighter training program (to replace Minimum Skills)
- ▶ Contribute to emergency services sector-wide strategic planning and development of volunteerism.

Strengthen

- ▶ Develop and implement targeted youth programs
- ▶ Enable grass roots volunteer recruitment
- ▶ Develop more flexible membership models to encourage and support greater diversity of members and roles.

References and endnotes

A review of literature has been conducted to inform the development of this Strategy. Some of the key references, including those specifically noted in this document, are provided below.

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- Western Australian Government – Department of Fire and Emergency Services (2013) *Strategic Workforce and Diversity Plan 2013-2016*

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- 1 National Volunteering Strategy: page 1
 - 2 CFA Act 1958 s6l & Emergency Management Act 2013 s12(4A)
 - 3 National Volunteering Strategy: page 11
 - 4 Fire Services Commissioner – Climate change report: page 6
 - 5 Fire Services Commissioner Investment Logic Map (2012)
 - 6 <http://www.emv.vic.gov.au/our-work/research/2021-2/>
 - 7 Victorian Government: Victoria in Future 2014 population projections
 - 8 2012 Emergency Services Framework: page 10
 - 9 National Volunteering strategy: page 11
 - 10 Volunteering Australia 2011 National Survey of Volunteering Issues: page 14
 - 11 2014 VAGO Report: Managing Emergency Services Volunteers: page 12
 - 12 CFA People Strategy: page 11
 - 13 CFA Strategy: Towards Resilience: page 5
 - 14 CFA People Strategy: page 4

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