

AUSTRALIAN EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT VOLUNTEER FORUM

# *The Cost Of* VOLUNTEERING

A Report on a National Survey of  
Emergency Management Sector Volunteers



Susan King, John Bellamy and Connie Donato-Hunt **November 2006**

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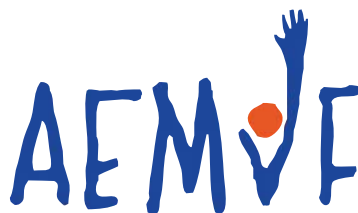
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# Contents

List of Tables	page	3	5.3 Frequency of Volunteering	24
List of Charts		3	5.4 Use of Transport	25
Acknowledgments		4	5.5 Distances Travelled	26
Executive Summary		5	5.6 Training	27
<b>1. Introduction</b>		7	<b>6. The Costs of Volunteering</b>	28
1.1 Organisations in the Study		7	6.1 Direct Financial Costs	28
1.2 Main Research Issue		8	6.2 In-Kind Contributions	31
<b>2. Background to the Study</b>		9	6.3 Reimbursements	32
2.1 Defining a 'Volunteer'		9	6.4 Additional Costs Associated with Employment	35
2.2 The Value of Volunteer Services		10	6.4.1 Additional Costs for Employees	35
2.3 Types of Emergency Management		11	6.4.2 Additional Costs for the Self-Employed	36
<b>3. Study Methodology</b>		12	6.5 Summary of All Identified Costs	37
3.1 Questionnaire Design and Pretest		12	6.6 Variations in Volunteering Costs	38
3.2 Sampling Strategy		13	6.6.1 Cost Variation by Type of Organisation	39
3.3 Response Rate by Agency		14	6.6.2 Cost Variation by Location	40
<b>4. A Profile of Volunteers</b>		16	6.6.3 Cost Variation by Volunteer Activity	41
4.1 Age Group		16	6.6.4 Cost Variation by Personal Income	42
4.2 Gender		17	<b>7. Conclusion</b>	44
4.3 Income		17	7.1 Strategies for Offsetting Volunteer Costs	45
4.4 Employment Status		18	References	47
4.5 Motivations for Volunteering		18		
4.6 Factors Inhibiting Volunteering		20		
<b>5. Volunteering Activity</b>		22		
5.1 Frequency of Activation		22		
5.2 Major Activities		23		
5.2.1 Activities during Non-activation		23		
5.2.2 Activities during Activation		24		

# List of Tables



1. Response rate by agency	page 14
2. Employment status of respondents	18
3. Stated reasons for volunteering	19
4. Factors inhibiting further volunteering	20
5. Number of incidents attended in last 12 months	22
6. Activities during non-activation	23
7. Activities during an incident	24
8. Transport used for volunteering	25
9. Net direct financial costs	29
10. Range of net direct financial costs	30
11. Net in-kind contributions	31
12. Range of net in-kind contributions	31
13. Reimbursements as a proportion of costs	33
14. Reasons for not being reimbursed	34
15. The employed: additional costs of volunteering	35
16. Available support from employers	36
17. Self-employed: additional costs of volunteering	36
18. Average costs of volunteering	38
19. Average annual costs of volunteering by organisational type	39
20. Average annual costs of volunteering by location of volunteering organisation	41
21. Average annual costs of volunteering by frequency of volunteering	42
22. Average annual costs of volunteering by personal annual income of respondents	43

# List of Charts

1. Age distribution of respondents	page 16
2. Gender profile of respondents	17
3. Income distribution of respondents	18
4. Frequency of volunteering	25
5. Average distances travelled	26
6. Types of training received	27
7. Most common items of expenditure	30
8. Average costs: response vs recovery organisations	40

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# Executive Summary



ANGLICARE Sydney was commissioned on behalf of the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum (AEMVF) by Emergency Management Australia (EMA) to design a national survey to estimate the direct financial costs and in-kind contributions of volunteers in the emergency management sector. Such costs are those borne personally by volunteers after any reimbursement and exclude the cost of items fully provided by volunteer organisations.

This report is based on findings from the national survey carried out from May to July 2006. A total of 2982 questionnaires were distributed and 702 were returned, giving a response rate of 24%. About 70% of the volunteers in this survey were aged between 35 and 64 years. The respondents were predominantly male (60%) with 44% having a personal income of more than \$40,000 per annum. The predominant reasons given for volunteering were altruistic and the main factor inhibiting further volunteering was family or work commitments.

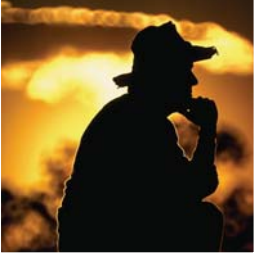
Volunteers engage in a wide range of activities and these do vary between non-activation and activation (when involved in an emergency or incident). The predominant activities during a non-activation period were being on stand-by, training, and operational exercises. During an emergency or incident, communication activities (eg phone, radio usage), being on stand by, clean-up and leadership and coordination were predominant activities.

Volunteering occurs on a frequent basis for most respondents. Almost two-thirds (62%) reported that their volunteering happened at least once a week – indicating a high level of time commitment. The majority used their own vehicles during both activation and non-activation periods as part of travelling to their volunteering work.

The focus of this research project was that of direct financial, and in-kind, contributions made by volunteers – based on their own estimates for the preceding 12 months. Direct financial costs were the out-of-pocket expenses incurred as a result of volunteering. In-kind contributions reflected use of a volunteer's personal equipment or resources. The following findings emerged:

- The *average direct financial cost per volunteer*, for the period April 2005 to March 2006, after reimbursements, was **\$544**.
- The *average in-kind contribution per volunteer* after reimbursements was **\$406** per annum.
- Therefore, *the combined average* of both direct costs and in-kind contributions per volunteer was **\$950** per annum.





These costs are net of reimbursements. Only a small amount of the money expended by volunteers was reimbursed by volunteer organisations. Reimbursements were assessed at 9.9% of direct financial costs and 5.1% of in-kind contributions.

There were also the following additional costs depending upon employment status:

- Volunteers in paid employment comprised more than half of the respondents (54%). For those **employed** - if direct costs, in-kind contributions and employment costs are all taken into account - the average cost of volunteering was **\$1679** for the period April 2005 to March 2006. It is also clear that some of the cost burden is shared with their employers through special leave arrangements, roster flexibility and access to work vehicles or office equipment.
- Volunteers who were self-employed comprised another 13% of respondents. For those **self-employed** – the average cost of volunteering taking into account direct costs, in-kind contributions and business costs were **\$3282** for the period April 2005 to March 2006.
- Calculations were also made for the 20% of respondents who indicated that they were **retired**. The average costs for this group, taking into account direct costs and in-kind contributions was **\$687** for the period April 2005 to March 2006.

Not only was there a marked difference in costs to the volunteers depending on their employment status, there was also an indication that those on low incomes were making significant contributions to sustain their level of volunteering.

There were other significant variations to the costs of volunteering depending upon:

- the type of volunteer agency with which a volunteer is associated;
- whether the local branch of the volunteer agency is located in a metropolitan, rural or remote location;
- the frequency of involvement in the volunteer organisation; and
- the level of income of the volunteer.



# 1. Introduction

Volunteers assist their communities in a wide variety of ways. One of the most important forms of volunteer service is in the emergency management sector. These volunteers assist the community in times of crisis, such as in floods, severe storms, bushfires and other natural disasters, as well as in providing assistance at accidents, with injuries and in life-threatening situations. The State Emergency Service (SES), Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) and Australian Red Cross are just some of the organisations in this sector that provide a vital coverage in emergencies. There are more than 500,000 volunteers in the sector who are the backbone of emergency management structures throughout Australia.<sup>1</sup>

Volunteers give freely not only of their time but also of their other resources. There are costs associated with being a volunteer that are willingly absorbed by volunteers but which may act as a deterrent towards some people volunteering. These costs may also lead to some volunteers reducing their level of involvement due to reduced income, such as occurs when people move into retirement. The Policy Unit of ANGLICARE (Diocese of Sydney) was commissioned to undertake a study of the costs of being an emergency management sector volunteer. The research was commissioned by the Federal Government's Emergency Management Australia (EMA), responsible for providing a comprehensive approach to emergency management in cooperation with other Government agencies. Responsibility for directing the study rested with the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum (AEMVF), which is the peak body of volunteer organisations in the emergency management sector.

The research was carried out during 2005 and 2006. The survey form was designed and pilot tested in 2005. The national survey was carried out from May to July 2006 with a preliminary report presented to the AEMVF in August 2006 and this final report in November 2006.



## 1.1 ORGANISATIONS IN THE STUDY

The AEMVF represents a number of volunteer organisations. Volunteers associated with the following member organisations took part in this national study:

- Adventist Development and Relief Agency Australia
- ANGLICARE (Diocese of Sydney)
- Australian Council of State Emergency Services
- Australian Red Cross
- Australian Volunteer Coast Guard
- NSW Volunteer Rescue Association
- St John Ambulance Australia
- St Vincent de Paul Society
- Surf Life Saving Australia
- The Salvation Army
- Volunteer Ambulance Officer Association of Tasmania (representing the Council of Ambulance Authorities)

Volunteers associated with the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol (RVCP) were part of a pilot study leading up to the national survey.

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<sup>1</sup> AEMVF website [www.aemvf.org.au](http://www.aemvf.org.au)

The Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC), representing volunteer bush fire organisations and one of the largest volunteer agencies, withdrew from the study just prior to the conducting of the national survey. But it is likely that the costs of volunteering in the bush fire services are similar to other response organisations.

## 1.2 MAIN RESEARCH ISSUE

The main research issue for the study posed by EMA and the AEMVF was as follows:

**To assess the negative direct and in-kind financial impost on volunteers from their activities in emergency management services.**

The research undertaken to address this issue has a number of distinctive features:

1. Unlike other research into volunteering, it deals specifically with emergency management volunteers rather than the wider volunteering population.
2. The research is not trying to determine the value of the economic contribution which volunteers make through this voluntary work, but rather the negative in-kind and direct financial impacts that volunteering has on those involved in the emergency management sector.
3. The focus of the research is not on the costs incurred by the volunteer agencies but by individual volunteers. Such costs are those borne personally by volunteers after any reimbursement and exclude the cost of items fully provided by volunteer organisations.

Given these parameters, the focus of the research has been on developing an estimate of the dollar cost to volunteers, as individuals, of involving themselves in voluntary work in the emergency management sector, apart from the time that they give to volunteering. It should be remembered, however, that 'giving time is giving money' and that the donation of time can also be costed. Indeed some researchers go so far as to recommend that such hours be considered a tax deductible donation to the not-for-profit sector to encourage volunteering in that sector.<sup>2</sup> As Ironmonger states:

*It is critical that we as a community acknowledge that volunteer time is a real donation as valuable as money.<sup>3</sup>*

Participants in the survey were asked to indicate the average number of hours volunteered per week and how many weeks over the course of a year, in order to arrive at an estimate of the amount of time spent in volunteering. While it was beyond the brief of this study to cost the time spent by volunteers, time spent is included in this report to more fully describe the volunteer commitment.

The findings from the study are presented in three parts in this report:

1. A profile of volunteers responding to the survey questionnaire
2. Volunteering activity of respondents
3. The costs of volunteering among respondents

<sup>2</sup> Soupoumas, F. and Ironmonger, D. (2002) *Giving Time – The Economic Value of Volunteering in Victoria*, Department of Human Services, Melbourne, p77. Online at <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/pdppd/pdfs/givingtime.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> Ironmonger, D. (2002) *Valuing Volunteering – The Economic Value of Volunteering in South Australia*. A report to the Government of South Australia and the Office for Volunteers, University of Melbourne: Melbourne

## 2. Background to the Study

Volunteers make a significant contribution to Australia's national life. In 2004 just under half of the adult Australian population provided 836 million hours of service, a 19% increase since 1995.<sup>4</sup>

### 2.1 DEFINING A 'VOLUNTEER'

There are a number of definitions of volunteering, both for the individual and for agencies, which have been developed in the literature. For example an international study of 24 countries from the John Hopkins University defined the parameters of **volunteer agencies** as those that met the following five criteria:

- A formal organisational structure with rules, goals, activities and membership clearly defined
- Self governance
- Non-Profit
- Private
- Voluntary – neither coerced nor mandated by law.<sup>5</sup>



**A volunteer** has been defined by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) as:  
*...a person willingly giving unpaid help in the form of time, services or skills, for or through an organisation or group.*

**An organisation** has been defined by ABS as:  
*...any body with a formal structure. It may be as large as a national charity or as small as a local book club. Purely ad hoc, informal and temporary gatherings of people do not constitute an organisation.<sup>6</sup>*

According to a Western Australia study the definition of volunteering that is most widely used in the Australian context is based on three important principles:

- a. It involves the provision of a service to the community
- b. There is a freedom of choice in terms of involvement
- c. The service provided is not compensated except for the reimbursement of expenses – ie volunteers are not paid for their time.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Dept of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FACSIA) (2005) *Giving Australia: Research on Philanthropy in Australia*. A report commissioned for the Giving Australia Project, Canberra, pviii

<sup>5</sup> Salamon L. M. and Sokolowski, W. (2001) *Volunteering in Cross National Perspective: Evidence from 24 Countries*, Working Paper of the Johns Hopkins Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Center for Civil Society Studies, p3.

<sup>6</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000, *Voluntary Work, Australia*, ABS cat. no. 4441.0, Canberra, p41

<sup>7</sup> Rosenberg-Russell, Julie (1995), *Volunteering in Western Australia*, Policy and Planning Department of Community Development, Perth, p7.

A 2006 Australian study has offered the following definition:

*The term 'volunteer' generally designates a person who provides services or benefits to others for motivations other than financial or material rewards.<sup>8</sup>*

Within the context of this research project a volunteer is defined as:

**An individual choosing freely to provide a service to the community, without payment, except for reimbursement of expenses.**

## 2.2 THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEER SERVICES

There have been attempts to estimate the financial value of volunteering of all kinds in Australia. Recent estimates (2006) indicate that services from volunteering are 'worth more than double the value of services provided by all levels of government in Australia.'<sup>9</sup> This value can be established in terms of simple opportunity cost – since volunteering activity often substitutes for expenditure by governments.<sup>10</sup> A Victorian study in 2001, for example, estimated that the contribution by volunteer fire fighters was worth more than half a billion dollars.<sup>11</sup> The total value of volunteering nationally has been estimated to range between \$30 billion and \$53 billion or 5.7% of GDP.<sup>12</sup>

Other studies have sought to measure the value of volunteering in non-monetary terms as well, such as its contribution to the growth of social capital and the building of resilience in communities. A Victorian study claimed that:

*Volunteering helps create a cohesive and stable society and adds value to the services that governments provide... The levels of volunteering have often been used to measure the well-being of a democratic and committed society. Most voluntary work by bringing people together for the good of the community creates bonds of trust and encourages cooperation. In other words, voluntary and community activity creates social capital.<sup>13</sup>*

The positive impact of volunteering on social capital, social connectedness and strengthening communities has also been echoed in a recent report by FACSIA.<sup>14</sup> Some have even gone so far as to describe volunteering as the 'moral spinal cord of our economic and social fabric'.<sup>15</sup>

There have also been cited benefits to the volunteers themselves in terms of potential employment opportunities, upskilling, social interaction and inclusion.

However, while there have been numerous studies and methodologies developed internationally to impute the value of volunteering services there has been very little work done on estimation of the actual cost to volunteers of providing such services. This research study bridges that gap.

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<sup>8</sup> Bittman, M. and Fisher, K. (2006) *Exploring the Economic and Social Value of Present Patterns of Volunteering in Australia*, Social Policy Research Paper No. 28, FACSIA, Sydney, pv

<sup>9</sup> *ibid*, p5

<sup>10</sup> Barnett, G. (2006) *Volunteering in Australia: How Can We Help?* A report supported by Volunteering Australia and Volunteering Tasmania p4, Online at [http://www.guybarnett.com/index.php?page=show\\_article&artid=558](http://www.guybarnett.com/index.php?page=show_article&artid=558)

<sup>11</sup> *ibid*, p15

<sup>12</sup> *ibid*, p4

<sup>13</sup> Soupormas F. and Ironmonger, D. *op cit*, p77

<sup>14</sup> Bittman, M. and Fisher, K. *op cit*, p3

<sup>15</sup> Barnett, G. *op cit*, p1



## 2.3 TYPES OF EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT

Within the emergency management sector volunteering can range from response to an emergency situation such as bushfires, sea rescues, life threatening accidents and potential drowning (response) to provision of transport for people and goods, preparation of food and shelter, assisting with clean up operations etc (recovery).

Participants in this study are generally involved in one of two types of organisation: response or recovery. Response organisations included the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard, State Emergency Services, Surf Life Saving Australia, St John Ambulance, NSW Volunteer Rescue Association and the Volunteer Ambulance Officer Association. Recovery organisations included the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, ANGLICARE, Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul Society.

These organisations are represented in the Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum (AEMVF) which directed the current study.



# 3. Study Methodology

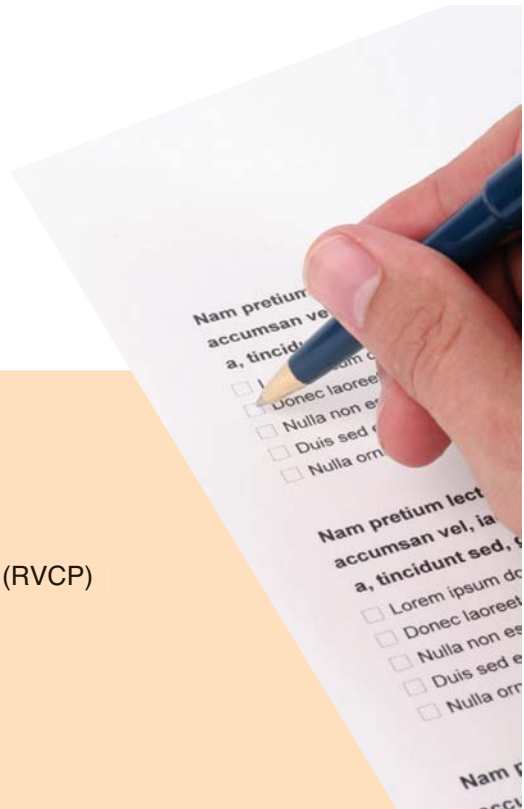
The methodology used in carrying out this study has been a national survey of volunteers. This was considered to be the best way to arrive at estimates of the costs of volunteering among individuals. The steps in designing, implementing and reporting the findings of this study were as follows:

## Phase 1:

1. Literature review
2. Design and development of a questionnaire
3. Pre-test amongst volunteers
4. Pilot test of questionnaire on Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol (RVCP) volunteers
5. Data entry, analysis and reporting
6. Mid Term Report – August 26th 2005

## Phase 2:

1. Revision of questionnaire based on pilot input.
2. Sampling strategy devised by Denise Conroy, Queensland University of Technology
3. Dissemination of questionnaires
4. Survey implementation
5. Collation, data entry and analysis
6. Interim report to AEMVF – August 2006
7. Final Report to EMA and AEMVF – November 2006



## 3.1 QUESTIONNAIRE DESIGN AND PRETEST

Designing such a survey proved to be quite complex. Defining all of the different kinds of direct and in-kind costs, such as motor vehicle expenses, and phone, office, uniform, food and membership fees required consultation with AEMVF representatives and feedback from volunteers themselves. The questionnaire went through a number of review phases and it was pre-tested on a focus group of ANGLICARE emergency service volunteers. The feedback from these respondents assisted in further improving the design. This was then followed by further feedback from the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol (RVCP) board members relating to terminology and length of time required to complete the questionnaire.

Consequently, while the resulting questionnaire was comprehensive, it could also be quite daunting to potential respondents. For this reason, a large pilot study was conducted among volunteers from one agency, the RVCP, in order to be satisfied that the length of the questionnaire was appropriate and there was no ambivalence in the question wording. Response to the pilot study exceeded expectations, with some 43% of volunteers in that agency completing the pilot survey.

The focus of the questionnaire was on volunteering activities undertaken and costs incurred over a 12 month period. Respondents were asked to provide this information for the 12 month period prior to the survey: 1st April 2005 to 31st March 2006.

## 3.2 SAMPLING STRATEGY

Following amendments to the questionnaire, a national sample was drawn of potential respondents.

Three options were considered for drawing the sample:

- A **random sample** of volunteers, in proportion to the size of their agencies
- A **quota sample**, in proportion to the size of agencies
- A **purposive (convenience) sample**.

It was immediately clear that there were too many gaps in agency listings of volunteers to enable a **random sample** of volunteers nationally. In addition, there was the problem of distinguishing active from inactive volunteers on such lists. For these reasons, a national random sample of volunteers was not considered feasible for this study.

A **quota sample** would involve drawing a sample of volunteers from available lists, based on the estimated size of each agency. However from the data available on the size of each agency, it became clear that such a sample would be dominated by volunteers associated with the Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) and Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA), which together would have accounted for 75% of potential survey respondents. This was considered undesirable for painting a broader picture of volunteering across the agencies represented in the AEMVF. (AFAC withdrew from the survey just prior to its distribution).

The adopted sampling strategy was a **purposive or convenience sample**, where the numbers of volunteers were selected both by agency and by location type. This approach ensured that there would be adequate coverage of the variables deemed to be most important by the AEMVF:

- Location (metropolitan/ rural/ remote)
- Agency type (response/recovery) and
- Volunteering status (active/ non-active)

The final sample size was a function of the budget allocated for this research, with a target set of 750 completed questionnaires.

The 'metropolitan' classification included all state capital cities, the ACT and large urban areas such as Newcastle and Wollongong. The 'rural' classification included regional centres and surrounding districts. The 'remote' classification included postcodes defined as such under the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) *2001 Statistical Local Area to Remoteness Area Concordance*. Postcodes selected from each of these classifications reflect the locations of emergency management operations. The selection of postcodes was also purposive to gain a wide spread of respondents from each of the three geographic classifications and to minimise the possibility of respondents receiving more than one questionnaire through belonging to more than one agency. Therefore, the results from the survey will be indicative only, in the absence of a full random sample. Despite this, it needs to be recognised that the data is immensely valuable as it provides insights into aspects of volunteering that have not been collected previously.

The questionnaires were distributed by each agency to a prescribed number of volunteers in each agency in urban, rural and remote locations. Although the questionnaire was distributed by each agency rather than from a central point, such distribution was conducted by each agency according to instructions from ANGLICARE. Completed questionnaires were returned directly to ANGLICARE. While distribution of the materials by each agency carried certain advantages, it was found that response rates by agency varied considerably, reflecting the differing structures, cultures and level of survey promotion and follow-up within each agency.



### 3.3 RESPONSE RATE BY AGENCY

A total of 2982 questionnaires were distributed and 706 were returned during the survey period from May to July 2006. Four of the questionnaires were unusable, making a total of 702 completed questionnaires for analysis.

Based on these figures, an average of 23.7% of survey forms were returned across all organisations. It should be noted that this response rate would probably be higher if it was possible to determine whether the full quota of forms was actually received by volunteers within each agency. Distribution within some agencies involved two or three tiers of management, making it difficult to gain feedback on the distribution process.

Table 1 shows that the response rate by agency varied markedly, from less than 10% in some agencies to more than 40% in other agencies. Nearly 70% of questionnaires sent to State Emergency Services (SES) volunteers were returned.

**TABLE 1 Response Rate by Agency**

Volunteer Agency	Total returned	Total sent	Percent Return
Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)	6	80	7.5%
ANGLICARE Emergency Services	46	80	57.5%
Aust Volunteer Coast Guard (AVCG)	84	185	45.4%
Australian Red Cross National Disaster Services	42	417	10.1%
NSW Volunteer Rescue Assoc (VRA)	32	185	17.3%
State Emergency Services (SES)	262	385	68.1%
Surf Life Saving – Australia (SLSA)	101	1150	8.8%
St John Ambulance	59	225	26.2%
St Vincent De Paul Society Disaster Services	16	40	40.0%
The Salvation Army Emergency Services	31	100	31.0%
Volunteer Ambulance Officers Assoc (VAO)	27	135	20.0%
<b>TOTAL SAMPLE</b>	<b>706</b>	<b>2982</b>	<b>23.7%</b>

There are several possible reasons why these response rates varied so much:

- It was observed in the pilot study that one of the reasons for the high response rate of 43% among Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol (RVCP) volunteers was that the questionnaire was not mailed out, but was distributed by RVCP personnel to volunteers as they arrived at their base. Much of this positive result is thus attributable to the diligence of both the management of the RVCP and the staff involved in the distribution process. Agencies that relied upon personal distribution would be expected to have achieved a higher response than they would have otherwise.
- The structure of some agencies appeared to make the promotion, distribution and follow-up of the survey more effective.

- Some agencies were more prepared than others to engage in follow-up of volunteers who had received survey forms.
- Inactive members would be expected to be less likely to respond to the survey than active members. In this respect Surf Life Saving Australia (SLSA) was found to be at a disadvantage compared with most other agencies, having a higher proportion of inactive members.

Other characteristics of the sample generally reflect that of the original distribution. It was considered that volunteering costs would vary significantly according to whether the volunteer was associated with a response organisation or a recovery organisation. Response organisations deal directly with an emergency situation, while recovery organisations provide support and deal with the aftermath of an emergency. In this respect, 76% of questionnaires were distributed to response organisations and 24% to recovery organisations. Of the 702 respondents, 80% were from response organisations and 20% from recovery organisations.

It was also thought that costs could vary according to whether the volunteering activity was in a metropolitan, a rural or a remote location. Some 46% of survey forms were to be distributed in metropolitan locations, 40% in rural locations and 14% in remote locations. Among the 702 respondents, some 44% of forms were received from metropolitan locations, 43% from rural locations and 13% from remote locations.

Therefore although the sample has a different individual agency distribution than was originally intended, the responses generally reflect the original distribution according to both agency type and location.



## 4. A Profile of Volunteers

A profile of volunteers (respondents) was developed according to their demographic characteristics and their attitudes towards volunteering. This part outlines the characteristics of the respondents in relation to:

- age
- sex
- income
- employment status
- motivations for volunteering
- inhibitors to volunteering.

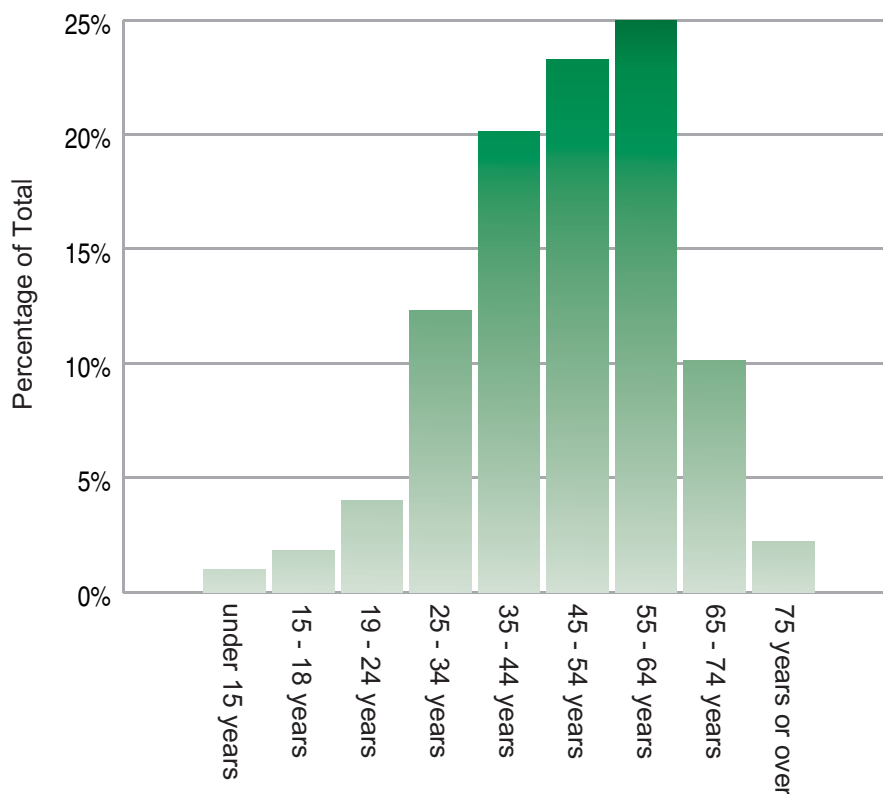


### 4.1 AGE GROUP

Respondents were mainly middle aged, with almost 70% between the ages of 35 and 64 years. In this respect the age profile for volunteers is different to the Australian population aged over 15 years, with 48% aged 35 to 64 years. Far fewer respondents were aged 15 to 34 years (19%) than in Australia as a whole (36%) and fewer respondents were aged over 75 years (2%) than in Australia as a whole (7%). The chart below shows the age distribution of respondents.

It is likely that the relatively low proportion of over 75s reflects the significant physical demands of volunteering, especially the work of response agencies.

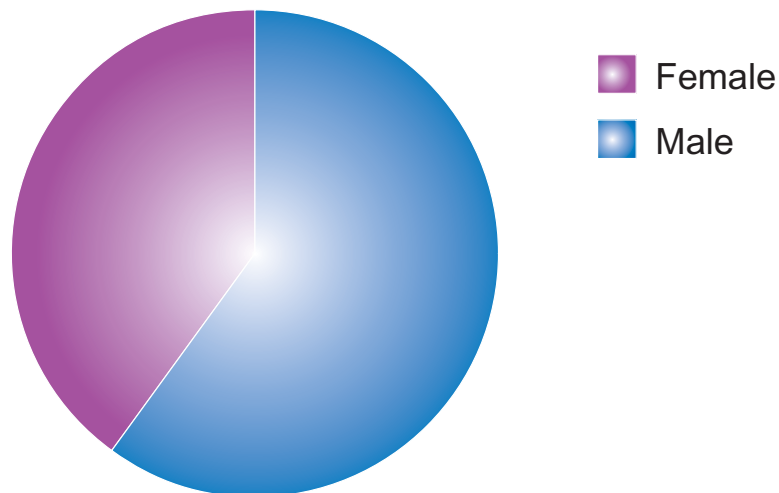
**Chart 1 Age Distribution of Respondents**



## 4.2 GENDER

The gender distribution in the current survey conforms to this general pattern. Just over 60% of respondents were male and a little under 40% were female. It would be expected that the majority of emergency management volunteers would be male. However, according to the AEMVF, the relatively high proportion of females reflects anecdotal evidence of increasing numbers of females in volunteer ranks in recent years.

**Chart 2** Gender Profile of Respondents



## 4.3 INCOME

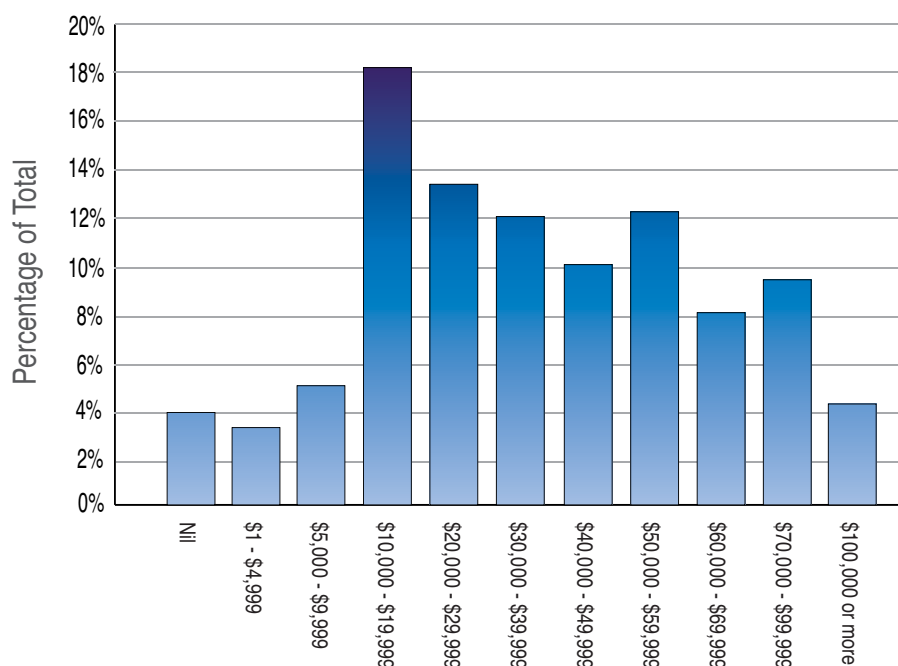
It is understandable that some people are not comfortable in revealing their income in a questionnaire survey. However, in this survey, respondents were very willing to provide this information; only 14% did not supply income details.

The study shows that around 44% of respondents had personal incomes of \$40,000 per annum or above (See Chart 3). The 2001 Census found that, by comparison, only 19% of Australian adults had personal incomes above \$40,000 per annum. Even allowing for growth in wages since the last Census, it is clear that respondents with upper middle and higher incomes were over-represented.

To some extent, the higher income profile of volunteers reflects the predominant age groupings found amongst this volunteer sample, with both young adults and the older retired age groups being under-represented.

Most respondents (56%) had an annual personal income of less than \$40,000. Indeed just over 30% reported incomes of less than \$20,000. The large proportion of respondents in lower income groupings is significant in a study on the cost of volunteering. Volunteer financial contributions need to be viewed within the context of a capacity to pay, an issue that is taken up later in this report.

**Chart 3** Income Distribution of respondents



## 4.4 EMPLOYMENT STATUS

Two-thirds of those responding (67%) were employed full-time, part-time, or casually, or were self-employed, reflecting the high number of respondents of working age. This compares with 56% of the Australian population aged over 15 years.

**TABLE 2** Employment Status of Respondents

	Frequency	Percent
Employed - full time	272	40.4%
Employed - part time or casually	93	13.8%
Self employed - full time	69	10.2%
Self employed - part time or casually	20	3.0%
Student	27	4.0%
Full time home duties	26	3.9%
Retired	134	19.9%
Unemployed and looking for work	14	2.1%
Other	19	2.8%
<b>Total</b>	<b>674</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

(Did not answer = 28)

## 4.5 MOTIVATIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING

Motivation for volunteering has been examined in this study, to better understand the extent to which the cost of volunteering can act as a disincentive towards further volunteering.



The volunteering literature identifies a number of positive benefits from volunteering for the individual concerned. A study of Australian Bureau of Statistics results for Western Australia indicated that the benefit most cited by volunteers from their activities was that of personal satisfaction, followed by social contact, helping others and doing something worthwhile.<sup>16</sup>

International studies have also explored the relationship between volunteering and the acquisition of job related skills and the enhanced job opportunities that can result. One Canadian study established a high correlation between volunteering and job-related motivations among young people aged between 15 and 24 years. This correlation dropped as volunteers moved into the next age bracket – 25 to 34 years. It was not only the case for young people but also for the unemployed where 42% gave this as the reason for volunteering.<sup>17</sup> The gaining of interpersonal communication skills may have accounted for the fact that almost one quarter of the volunteers in this study in the 15-24 year age group, indicated that volunteering had assisted them in gaining employment in the past and almost two thirds of the unemployed volunteers felt that it would lead them to full time work in the future.<sup>18</sup>

These authors also have suggested that volunteering by those physically disabled can mitigate negative stereotypes and aid social integration. For young people it offers ‘opportunities for self development and risk taking, and provides a valuable grounding in citizenship.’<sup>19</sup>

Respondents in the current study were asked to indicate what factors attracted them to volunteering. This information is helpful in gauging an understanding of retention. Respondents were given a number of choices of possible motivations for volunteering and were allowed to select more than one.

The results in Table 3 indicate that the volunteers do so for predominantly altruistic reasons – that of giving back to the community and helping those in need. For almost two thirds there was also the motivation related to learning new skills, as well as being active and the social contact that derives from the activity.

**TABLE 3 Stated Reasons for Volunteering**

Reason	Frequency	Percent
Help others/community	619	90.8%
Personal satisfaction	568	83.3%
To do something worthwhile	541	79.3%
To learn new skills	443	65.0%
Use skills/experience	406	59.5%
To be active	388	56.9%
Social contact	346	50.7%
Personal/family involvement	192	28.2%
Gain work experience	101	14.8%
Religious beliefs	86	12.6%
Just happened	43	6.3%
Feel obliged	22	3.2%
Other reasons	35	5.1%

*Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select more than one answer.*

<sup>16</sup> Cited in Conroy, D. K. (2002) *Preliminary Research Findings: Volunteers in Queensland State Government*, Working Paper No CPNS 4, Centre for Philanthropy and Non Profit Studies, Queensland University of Technology, Brisbane.

<sup>17</sup> National Survey of Giving, Volunteering and Participating (2000) *The Benefits of Volunteering*, Statistics Canada, Ottawa., p1. Online at <http://www.givingandvolunteering.ca>

<sup>18</sup> *ibid* p2

<sup>19</sup> *ibid* p2

These findings support a Western Australian study where the most common reasons given for volunteering were those centred on altruism – that is, providing a service to the community.<sup>20</sup> Soupourmos and Ironmonger have identified, that within general volunteering, these motivations can change over a volunteer's life cycle. Their study indicated that older volunteers tend to be more motivated by personal satisfaction and the opportunities given for social interaction.<sup>21</sup>



## 4.6 FACTORS INHIBITING VOLUNTEERING

Respondents were also asked what factors might inhibit them from volunteering more frequently, including the costs involved in volunteering. More than half did not consider that there were any such factors; for the remainder however the most serious barriers to further volunteering were family/work commitments (42%).

Costs were viewed as a significant barrier to further volunteering by 13% of respondents overall. Further analysis of those identifying cost as a factor, found no statistically significant relationship between the perception of cost as an inhibitor to further volunteering, and the personal income of volunteers. Cost was seen as a barrier among all income groups.

Cost was viewed as more of a barrier among respondents from response organisations (15%) than recovery organisations (5%), an issue which is discussed later in this report. The pilot study conducted with Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol (RVCP) members revealed cost to be a particular issue, with 46% of respondents citing the costs of volunteering as an inhibitor to further volunteering.<sup>22</sup> This higher percentage may reflect the much higher proportion of retirees found among RVCP volunteers (64%) than among respondents to the national survey (20%). In addition, there is anecdotal evidence that the cost of volunteering in the marine rescue environment may be higher than for other forms of emergency management.

**TABLE 4 Factors Inhibiting Further Volunteering**

FACTORS	Frequency	Percent
Nothing	350	52.2%
Family/work commitments	283	42.2%
Costs of volunteering	86	12.8%
Exploitation	66	9.8%
Unpredictable nature of the work	54	8.0%
Lack of support	49	7.3%
Lack of recognition	43	6.4%
Problems with child care	32	4.8%
Transport difficulties	20	3.0%
Cost of child care	18	2.7%
Poor training	11	1.6%
Other factors	82	12.2%

*Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select more than one answer.*

<sup>20</sup> Soupourmos, F. and Ironmonger, D. (2002) *op cit*, p75

<sup>21</sup> *ibid*, p75

<sup>22</sup> ANGLICARE Research and Planning Unit, 2005, p14



Although it is not within the scope of this research to examine issues in relation to retention, such issues are important determinants of the future of emergency service volunteering and community welfare in general, as noted by Bittman and Fisher:

*Indeed, lack of access to sufficient equipment and training for voluntary workers, excessive demands from the fire services that created a work-life imbalance for volunteers, lack of recognition and time wasting have contributed to many volunteer fire fighters leaving the system, which may potentially leave some areas vulnerable.* <sup>23</sup>



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<sup>23</sup> Bittman, M. and Fisher, K. *op cit*, p15

## 5. Volunteering Activity

Questions were included in the study about volunteer activity, including the frequency of volunteering. This was to complement the picture of the costs of volunteering. Time spent on volunteering can result in volunteers foregoing income.

The following issues are examined in this part of the report:

- How often volunteers are activated
- Activities undertaken during periods of activation and non-activation
- Frequency of involvement
- Transport used
- Training.



### 5.1 FREQUENCY OF ACTIVATION

In terms of the number of operational emergencies or incidents attended in the last 12 months almost 30% of respondents had not been so involved – reflecting the mix of both response and recovery services in this study. Some 81% of respondents from recovery organisations had not attended an emergency or incident in the previous year, compared with just 16% of respondents from response organisations.

At the other end of the spectrum, more than one third of all respondents had attended 11 or more emergencies or incidents and just over 13% had indicated they had attended more than 30 emergencies or incidents over the last year.

**TABLE 5 No. of Incidents Attended in Last 12 Months**

Number	Frequency	Percent
None	184	28.8%
1 to 5	132	20.7%
6 to 10	88	13.8%
11 to 15	63	9.9%
16 to 20	38	6.0%
21 to 30	48	7.5%
More than 30	85	13.3%
<b>Total</b>	<b>638</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

*(Did not answer = 64)*

## 5.2 MAJOR ACTIVITIES

In order to assess the nature of the volunteer work that is being conducted, respondents were asked to indicate the type of activities that represented their volunteering work. A distinction was made between activation and non-activation for an emergency, since there may well be a relationship between the nature and frequency of certain activities and costs incurred.

### 5.2.1 Activities during Non-Activation

The study shows that respondents were involved in a wide range of activities during periods of non-activation, which can contribute to volunteering costs. When not attending an incident, more than half of the respondents stated that their chief activities included being on stand by, training and team building, operational exercises, administration and maintenance of equipment. Table 6 shows the most common activities during periods of non-activation.

**TABLE 6 Activities during Non-Activation**

Activity	Frequency	Percent
On stand by / at home / at base	469	68.0%
Training/skills development/team building	455	65.9%
Operational exercises	426	61.7%
Communication - phone, radios etc	384	55.7%
Administration/clerical/recruitment	378	54.8%
Equipment maintenance	362	52.5%
Befriending/listening/supporting	339	49.1%
Teaching/instruction/providing information	335	48.6%
Management/committee work/co-ordination	312	45.2%
Fundraising/sales	310	44.9%
Team leader/group or unit leader	309	44.8%
Free use of your professional expertise	259	37.5%
Transporting people/goods	239	34.6%
Media / public education	173	25.1%
Preparing or serving food	155	22.5%
Counselling	113	16.4%
None	9	1.3%
Other activity	63	9.1%

*Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select more than one answer. (Did not answer = 12)*

## 5.2.2 Activities during Activation

The study provides an outline of the array of activities carried out by response and recovery volunteers during periods of activation. Respondents could indicate more than one activity on the questionnaire and therefore the results below do not sum to 100% as there were multiple responses.

These results are provided in Table 7.

During activation, direct emergency activities are frequently cited such as rescue (38%), first aid and patient care (37%) and land/water search (31%). However the most frequently cited activity during an emergency was communication on the phone or radio – and this was true for just under 60% of respondents. Being on stand-by was also significant as in periods of activation.

**TABLE 7 Activities during an Incident**

Activity	Frequency	Percent
Communication - phone, radios etc	404	59.9%
On stand by / at home / at base	327	48.4%
Clean up of equipment and sites	323	47.9%
Co-ordination / leadership	318	47.1%
Befriending/listening/supporting	276	40.9%
Rescue	255	37.8%
First aid / patient care	247	36.6%
Land / water search	212	31.4%
Transporting people / goods	200	29.6%
Free use of your professional expertise	175	25.9%
Storm damage operations	154	22.8%
Counselling	103	15.3%
Never been activated	100	14.8%
Media / public education	91	13.5%
Flood operations	83	12.3%
Preparing /serving food	83	12.3%
Meeting basic needs - clothing, accommodation	68	10.1%
Fire fighting	36	5.3%
Other activity	74	11.0%

*Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select more than one answer.  
(Did not answer = 27)*



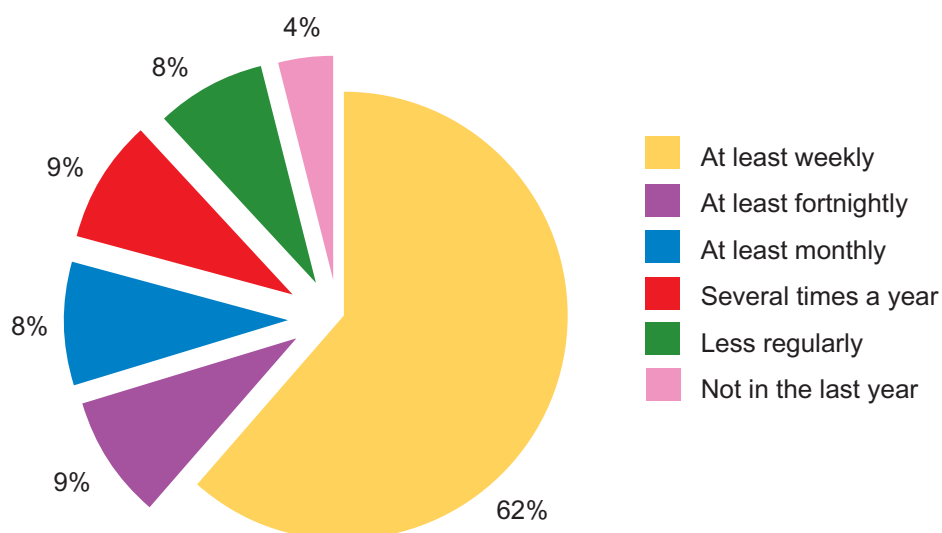
## 5.3 FREQUENCY OF VOLUNTEERING

Although no attempt is being made in this project to value financially the time spent on volunteering activities, it is important to gain some understanding of this cost to the individual – even if it is not being quantified.

Accordingly, respondents were asked how often they were involved in volunteering activity and for how many hours per time in the last 12 months. As is evident from the table below, for almost two thirds of respondents

it is a weekly activity – which is a considerable commitment of time. This resonates with a 2005 FACSIA study on national volunteering where the average time given by each volunteer was 132 hours per annum.<sup>24</sup>

**Chart 4 Time Spent on Volunteering Activities**



## 5.4 USE OF TRANSPORT

In considering costs to the volunteer it is important to understand the use of transport, whether it is an organisational or a private vehicle, and the distances travelled both during activation and non-activation. Results are indicated in Table 8.

Almost all respondents reported using private vehicles during non-activation for their volunteering activities. This proportion falls during activation with the organisation’s vehicles being used more frequently. Even so, three quarters of the respondents still use their own vehicle during activation.

**TABLE 8: Transport Used for Volunteering**

Transport Mode	During Activation (%)	During Non Activation (%)
Private vehicle transport	74.5%	94.5%
Public transport	0.8%	2.5%
Walking or bicycle transport	4.4%	9.9%
Vehicles owned by organisation	32.0%	14.1%
Other	2.2%	2.2%
None - Volunteer from home	1.7%	1.8%
Never been activated	9.7%	-

*Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select more than one answer. (Did not answer = 70 and 35 respectively)*

<sup>24</sup> FACSIA, *op cit*, pviii

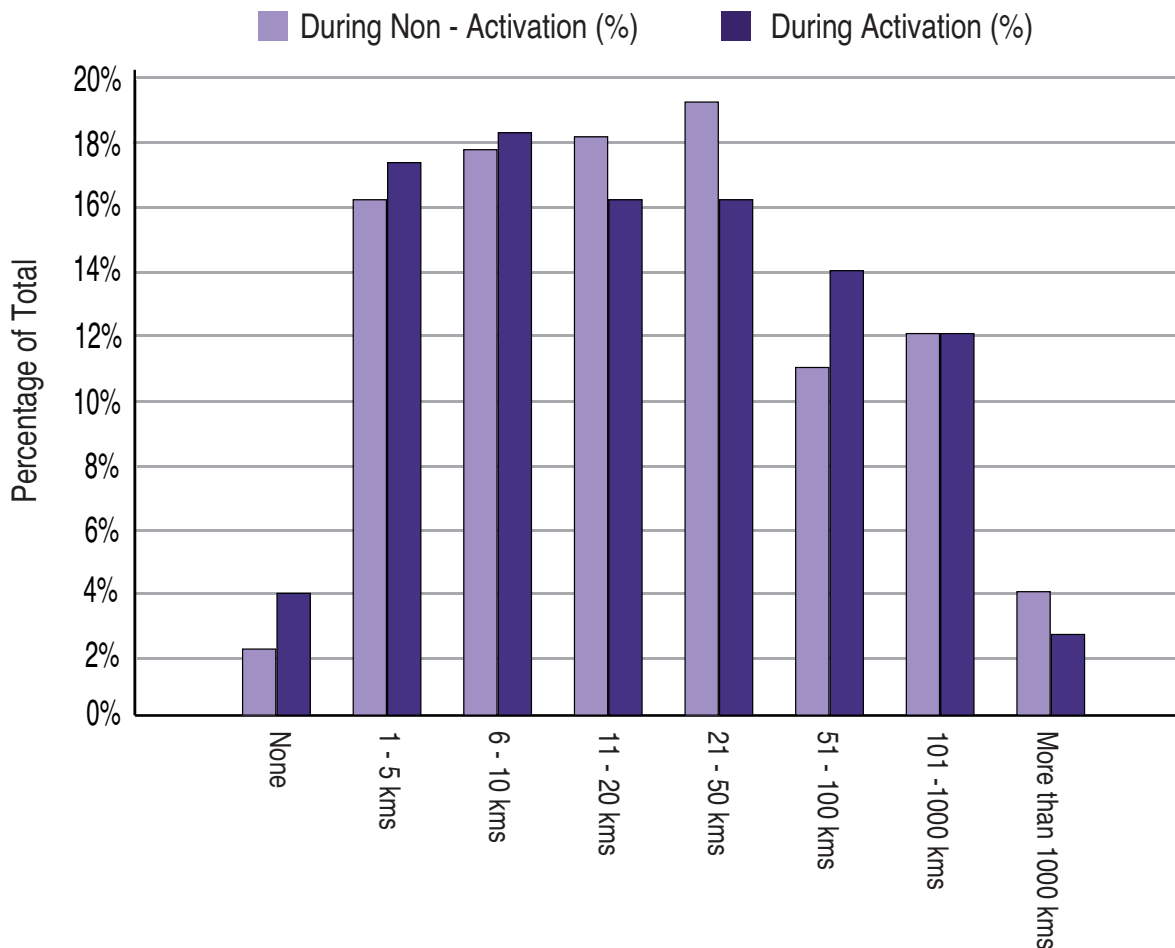


## 5.5 DISTANCES TRAVELLED

Respondents were also asked to estimate the average distance travelled during non-activation periods and also when activated for an emergency or incident during the previous 12 months. Some volunteers travelled substantial distances as part of volunteering. Chart 5 shows that about a quarter of respondents travelled more than 50 kms during periods of both activation and non-activation. For 35-40% of respondents, volunteering was a more localised activity, involving less than 10kms of travel.

It might be thought that volunteers would travel much greater distances during periods of activation. However, these results indicate that the distances travelled were not significantly different between activation and non-activation. This reflects the decentralised nature of the delivery of emergency services and emphasises the importance of the local involvement of volunteers in emergency management work.

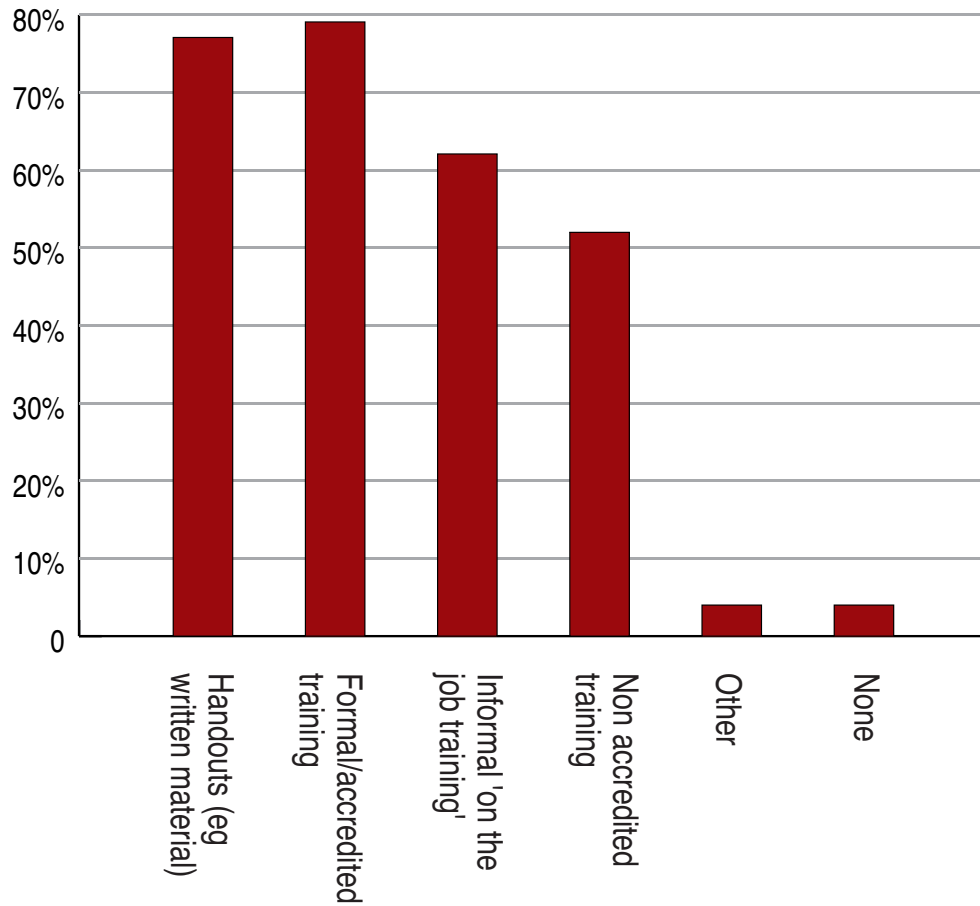
**Chart 5** Average Distance Travelled



## 5.6 TRAINING

Training is an important aspect of volunteering activities and respondents were asked to indicate the type of training they received as a volunteer. Respondents were allowed to tick all types that applied to them. It is apparent that the most significant method of training they received is that which is formal and accredited (79%) followed closely by handouts from the relevant organisation (77%).

**Chart 6**      **Types of Training Received**





## 6. The Costs of Volunteering

In designing this study it was recognised that financial costs can be incurred in many different ways by volunteers. A goal of the study was to identify the range of the most significant costs. Three primary financial costs were identified and explored through the study:

- **Direct financial costs** – these are out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers as part of their volunteer activities. A wide range of these was identified individually through the study, including petrol, food and drink, clothing, membership fees, training and self-education.
- **In-kind contributions** – these are where volunteers commit their own equipment or other resources at no cost to the volunteer organisation. Volunteers were asked to estimate the size of such in-kind contributions; the use of their own phone, office equipment, motor vehicle repairs and maintenance, machinery, tools, boat repairs and maintenance and laundry.
- **Employment costs** – Employees who volunteer sometimes need to take annual or unpaid leave or forego overtime. Similarly self-employed volunteers may need to close their business or hire additional staff to keep the business operating. These costs have also been estimated by volunteers in each of these employment situations.



In order to estimate the costs to the volunteer both direct financial and in-kind, respondents were asked to identify these costs and were also asked details about any reimbursements. This is an important factor as it can offset costs. Further, the nature of employment may also be a cost or an offset. Those who are employed may take a leave entitlement to support their volunteering activity – which is considered in this analysis to be a cost. Their employer, however, may provide paid leave or other in-kind contributions. For the self-employed the situation is somewhat different. There may well be the need to close the business down for the length of an emergency/incident or the need to employ casual labour to keep the business operating.

All expenses were for the 12 month period immediately prior to the commencement of the survey: ie April 2005 to March 2006. Such expenses may fluctuate from year to year depending upon the level of activation in any given year. It is not really possible to control for these events, which varies from service to service and from region to region.

### 6.1 DIRECT FINANCIAL COSTS

These are direct financial or out-of-pocket expenses related to volunteering. The majority of respondents (84%) incurred direct expenses that were not otherwise covered by reimbursements. Respondents were asked to select, from a comprehensive list, the items for which they had to make payment and if there were any reimbursements. They were also given the option to include in an 'other' section any items which were not included in the list.

Table 9 shows that the item of greatest average cost per respondent was petrol (\$227), which was four times greater than the next most costly item – food and drink purchases (\$56). This was followed by protective clothing (\$47) and dress uniform costs (\$38). The average cost for all items combined across the 702 respondents was \$544.<sup>25</sup>

## TABLE 9 Net Direct Financial Costs

April 2005 to March 2006

n=702

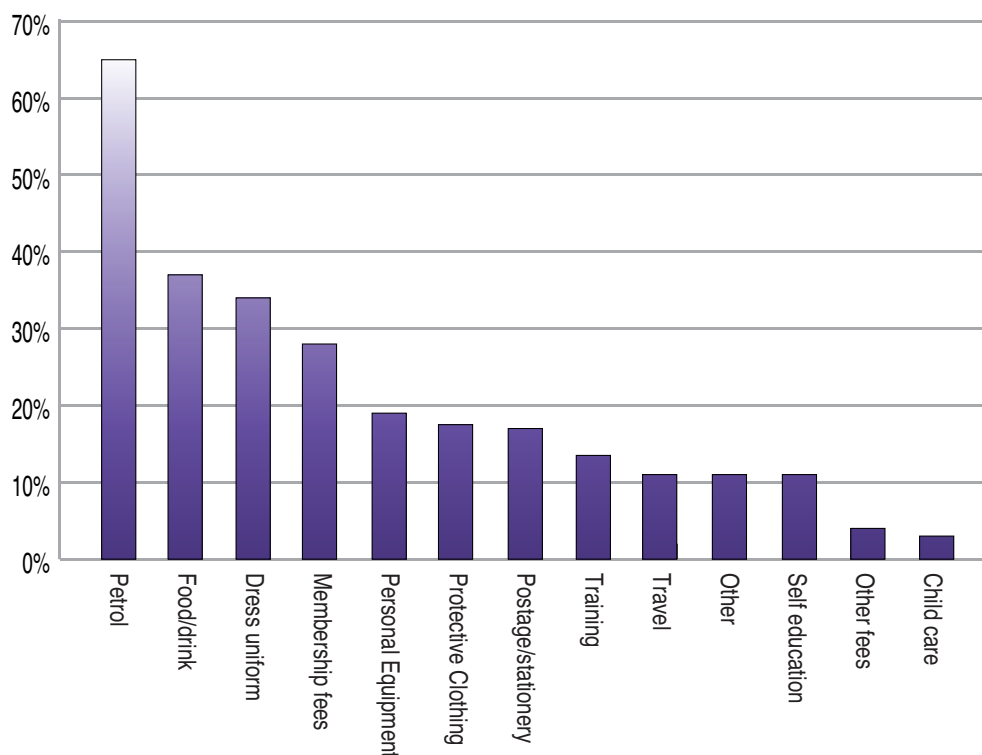
Item	Average Costs
Petrol	\$227
Food and drink	\$56
Protective clothing	\$47
Dress uniform	\$38
Personal equipment	\$31
Travel costs	\$28
Training	\$18
Self education	\$16
Membership fees	\$14
Child minding	\$8
Postage/stationery	\$8
Other fees	\$3
Other costs	\$50
<b>Combined Total</b>	<b>\$544</b>

It should be noted that 'other costs' in Table 9 may include some in-kind contributions that appear in the next section. It is not really possible from the brief descriptions supplied by volunteers in response to this 'other' option, to reallocate any of these as in-kind contributions or to determine whether overlap occurs.

The response rate per item indicates that the most common item of expenditure was on petrol (65%), which was also the item that incurred the greatest average level of expenditure. Food and drink (38%) was the next most common expense, followed by dress uniform (34%) and membership fees (28%). Chart 7 illustrates these trends.

<sup>25</sup> Averages in the table were obtained by dividing the total net value of costs per item by the total number of respondents (702).

**Chart 7 Most Common Items of Expenditure**



In understanding the costs involved in volunteering, it is important to gauge the range of costs, not just the average. Table 10 shows that some respondents incurred high or very high direct costs. Some 14%, or about 1 in 7 respondents, incurred costs of more than \$1000 for the year. Table 10 also shows that for nearly half of volunteers (47%), direct costs were less than \$200. A further 27% incurred direct costs of between \$200 and \$600. For around two thirds of volunteers, direct costs were below the average of \$544 per year.

It is important to bear in mind that the average cost is significantly affected by the small proportion of respondents who experienced higher order costs. By comparison with the average direct cost, the median direct cost, or that cost reported by the middle ranked respondent, was \$250. This reflects the larger proportion of respondents for whom direct costs were less than \$200 per annum.

**TABLE 10 Range Of Net Direct Financial Costs**

April 2005 to March 2006

Cost Ranges	Frequency	Percent
Nil	113	16.1%
\$1 to \$199	214	30.5%
\$200 to \$399	100	14.2%
\$400 to \$599	87	12.4%
\$600 to \$799	45	6.4%
\$800 to \$999	42	6.0%
\$1000 to \$1999	64	9.1%
\$2000 to \$2999	18	2.6%
\$3000 to \$4999	11	1.6%
\$5000 or more	8	1.1%
<b>Total</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

## 6.2 IN-KIND CONTRIBUTIONS

Apart from direct costs, volunteers also make in-kind contributions, where people provide their own resources and equipment at no cost to the organisation in order to support their volunteering activity. Again the majority of respondents indicated that they had incurred in-kind costs during the year (78%), only a little less than the percentage that had incurred direct expenses.

As with direct costs, respondents were asked to indicate these in-kind contributions and estimate their cost and any reimbursement. The item that provided the greatest cost of this nature was 'use of own car', which averaged \$135 per respondent. This item included maintenance and repair costs but excluded petrol costs. The second largest in-kind cost was the 'use of own phone', which averaged \$88 per respondent, followed by office costs (\$78). The average combined in-kind contribution was \$406 per respondent.

**TABLE 11 Net In-Kind Contributions**

April 2005 to March 2006

Item	Average Cost
Use of own car	\$135
Use of own phone	\$88
Fax/internet/stationery	\$78
Use of own personal equipment	\$41
Laundering of uniforms	\$37
Use of own boat	\$8
Other costs	\$19
<b>Combined Total</b>	<b>\$406</b>

As with direct costs, in-kind contributions were also provided in cost ranges (Table 12). It emerges that more than half of all respondents incurred nil or less than \$200 per annum worth of in-kind costs. Around 8% of respondents, or about 1 in 12 respondents, made more than \$1000 per annum of in-kind contributions. The median (or middle) in-kind contribution was \$140.

**TABLE 12 Range of Net In-Kind Contributions**

April 2005 to March 2006

Cost Ranges	Frequency	Percent
Nil	154	21.9%
\$1-\$199	233	33.2%
\$200 to \$399	106	15.1%
\$400 to \$599	61	8.7%
\$600 to \$799	54	7.7%
\$800 to \$999	36	5.1%
\$1000 to \$1999	43	6.1%
\$2000 to \$2999	6	0.9%
\$3000 to \$4999	3	0.4%
\$5000 or more	6	0.9%
<b>Total</b>	<b>702</b>	<b>100.0%</b>

A summary of costs that takes into account both direct costs and in-kind costs is outlined in section 6.5 of this report.



## 6.3 REIMBURSEMENTS

Some have questioned whether the reimbursement of volunteers for their services, even minimally, challenges the definition of a volunteer.<sup>26</sup> A distinction needs to be made between payment for services rendered and reimbursement for costs incurred as a result of the activity. Volunteering is not without cost to the individual. There is thus a reasonable argument to support the view that both individuals and organisations need to be properly funded and supported.<sup>27</sup> Indeed it has been argued that volunteers should be allowed to claim out-of-pocket expenses related to their volunteer work via the income tax system<sup>28</sup> The view has also been expressed internationally where the United Nations has argued that:

*'...anyone who volunteers should certainly have all the legitimate expenses arising out of their activities reimbursed by the organisation that involves them; this is important, as it prevents them from being out of pocket as a consequence of their involvement – and therefore helps to ensure that people with limited financial resources are not excluded from volunteering'.<sup>29</sup>*

Internationally, the issue of reimbursement for volunteers has also been canvassed. In a recent report, Volunteering Ireland expressed the view that out of pocket expenses should be reimbursed:

*Volunteers give their time and skills free of charge; it is only fair that they should be reimbursed for any expenses they incur while doing so. In particular, the costs of volunteering should never be allowed to discourage those on low incomes (such as students and unemployed and retired persons), as these are often the very people who have the time to volunteer.<sup>30</sup>*

Among the organisations participating in the study, there is little known about the value of reimbursements to volunteers.<sup>31</sup> However, analysis of the current study data shows that reimbursements for either direct expenses or in-kind contributions are, at best, token. Table 13 shows that respondents only received reimbursement for 9.9% of direct expenses and 5.1% of in-kind contributions.

Of the various items of direct expense, travel costs had the highest degree of reimbursement (37.8%) followed by postage and stationery costs (23.7%) and training costs (23.0%). Yet the item which was the greatest source of cost to volunteers - petrol costs - was among the least supported by way of reimbursements (6.4%).<sup>32</sup>

In terms of in-kind contributions, the item which proportionately received the greatest degree of reimbursement, was the 'use of own phone' (13.4%).

<sup>26</sup> Bittman, M. and Fisher, K. *op cit*, p12

<sup>27</sup> Cordingley, S. (2004) 'Supporting Volunteering in Australia', in *Volunteering Australia*, September, p16

<sup>28</sup> *ibid* p16

<sup>29</sup> Dingle, Alan *et al* (2001) *Measuring Volunteering: A Practical Toolkit*, A joint project of independent sector and United Nations volunteers, Independent Sector: Washington. Online at <http://www.independentsector.org/programs/research/toolkit/IYVToolkit.PDF> p5

<sup>30</sup> Volunteering Ireland, (2006) 'Expenses', Newsletter . Online at <http://www.volunteeringireland.com/page.php?id=6>

<sup>31</sup> Bittman, M. and Fisher, K. *op cit*, p14

<sup>32</sup> These percentages were derived by dividing total reimbursements by total estimated costs for each class of item. A similar calculation was carried out for in-kind contributions.

**TABLE 13 Reimbursements as a Proportion of Costs**

<b>Direct Expenses</b>	<b>Reimbursement/Cost</b>
Petrol	6.4%
Food and drink	11.8%
Protective clothing	1.5%
Dress uniform	8.8%
Personal equipment	3.4%
Travel costs	37.8%
Training	23.0%
Self education	3.4%
Membership fees	3.9%
Child minding	3.1%
Postage/stationery	23.7%
Other fees	0.4%
Other items	8.8%
<b>All Items</b>	<b>9.9%</b>

<b>In-Kind Contribution</b>	
Use of own car	2.3%
Use of own phone	13.4%
Fax/internet/stationery	3.2%
Use of own personal equipment	0.2%
Laundering of uniforms	0.4%
Use of own boat	1.9%
Other costs	10.3%
<b>All Items</b>	<b>5.1%</b>

Why are the levels of reimbursement so low? Respondents were asked to identify the reasons for lack of reimbursement. Over half (52%) indicated that they did not feel any need to claim reimbursement. In this study it is clear that there is an ethos among the respondents that sees such personal costs as part and parcel of volunteering. Comments were made to the effect that the exercise of identifying the costs to volunteers 'goes against the grain' for many volunteers.

Table 14 shows that for one third, however, reimbursement simply was not available for the kind of expenses that they had incurred. Given the altruistic nature of volunteering and the financial situation of the volunteer agencies, it is probable that procedures or funds for reimbursement simply do not exist for many of the items of expenditure in the study.

**TABLE 14 Reasons for Not Being Reimbursed**

n=623

Reason	Percent
Reimbursement not available	34.3%
Don't feel I need to claim it back	51.8%
Too much effort	14.9%
Reimbursement refused	1.9%
Not done by our volunteers	20.2%
Other reasons	7.1%
Not applicable	11.4%

*Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select more than one answer.*

Therefore, it is important to consider the legislative treatment of costs and reimbursements for volunteers. Within the Australian taxation framework, the release of a paper by the Australian Taxation Office in March 2005 clearly articulates the position of volunteers in terms of receipts of funds as a result of volunteering activity.<sup>33</sup> Generally, payments made to volunteers which are a reimbursement for expenses, where there is no legal obligation on the part of the agency to pay, and where the amount is 'token' in comparison to the services supplied by the volunteer, are considered non assessable.

Much depends on how certain payments are treated. If a volunteer is paid for the cost of petrol and/or motor vehicle expenses at a kilometre rate then this is considered a reimbursement. Currently there are no specific deductions for costs incurred during volunteering activity. To quote the ATO:

*There are no specific provisions of the income tax law that allow deductions for expenses while undertaking voluntary work. Voluntary work is usually unpaid, and if an individual receives a payment in their capacity as a volunteer, it is generally non-assessable income. For this reason most expenses incurred in undertaking voluntary work are not tax deductible.<sup>34</sup>*

The only expenses which are tax deductible are those that arise out of activities that generate an income.

Treatment of such costs by the ATO is important because, as participants stated in another survey, '...it costs quite a bit to be a volunteer.'<sup>35</sup>

<sup>33</sup> Australian Tax Office (2005), *Volunteers and Tax*, NAT 4612-03.2005, Canberra. Online at: <http://www.ato.gov.au/content/downloads/n4612-02-2005-w.pdf>

<sup>34</sup> *ibid*, p5

<sup>35</sup> Conroy, D. K. *op cit*, p13



## 6.4 ADDITIONAL COSTS ASSOCIATED WITH EMPLOYMENT

### 6.4.1 Additional Costs for Employees

Emergencies can happen at any time. Volunteers who are in paid employment often need to take time off work to assist with such emergencies. Employees who volunteer may need to take annual or unpaid leave. They may also have to forego overtime.

Respondents to the survey were asked if they had taken any leave to support their volunteering in the last 12 months and what was the equivalent level of income foregone. Even where paid leave is taken, such leave is an indication of cost to the individual, as they use up their leave entitlement in order to volunteer.

Volunteers who are employed represented just over half of all respondents. Table 15 shows that, on average, such respondents had taken 3.32 days of leave or forfeited overtime in the 12 month survey period. This amounted to an average cost of \$656 per employed respondent, on top of direct and in-kind costs incurred as part of volunteering.

**TABLE 15 The Employed: Additional Costs of Volunteering**

April 2005 to March 2006

n=365

<b>Cost</b>	<b>Average Days Taken</b>	<b>Average Dollar Value</b>
Annual leave	1.34	\$258
Leave without pay	0.73	\$136
Overtime entitlement	0.14	\$36
Other	1.11	\$227
<b>Total</b>	<b>3.32</b>	<b>\$656</b>

The respondents were asked to indicate if they received any support from their employer for their volunteering activities in emergency management and if they did so, what was the nature of this support. It is worth noting that for almost three quarters of those employed there was some kind of support from their employer, over and above entitlements such as paid annual leave. In fact the most important type of support offered was that of roster flexibility (25%) followed closely by paid leave as required (23%) as indicated in Table 16.

There is evidence in this study that in-kind contributions are being made not only by volunteers but by businesses and organisations that employ such volunteers. While a quarter of respondents did not receive any such support from employers, the majority have access to a range of formal and informal arrangements which means that some of the costs of volunteering are being borne by employers.

**TABLE 16 Available Support from Employers**

n=355

Support	Percent
No support	27%
Paid leave apart from annual leave, as a yearly entitlement	11%
Paid leave apart from annual leave, as required	23%
Unpaid leave as required	20%
Reimbursement – all volunteering costs	1%
Reimbursement – some volunteer costs	1%
Roster flexibility	25%
Access to work vehicles	8%
Access to work equipment (eg phones)	20%
Other	11%

*Note: Percentages do not add to 100% because respondents could select more than one answer. (Did not answer = 10, N/A =337)*

## 6.4.2 Additional Costs for the Self-Employed

For the self-employed, such employer contributions and leave entitlements are not available. The 89 respondents who indicated they were self-employed gave some interesting responses when asked if their volunteering had required that they close down their business while away and/or employ staff to keep it operating. They were also asked to estimate days lost and dollar costs.

It is clear that self-employed volunteers in this study bear the greatest cost burden of all volunteers. On average, such volunteers had borne the cost of either closing down their business for a period, or employing existing staff or family to fill in for them. For every self-employed respondent, the average reported cost of these actions was \$1942 for the period April 2005 to March 2006.

**TABLE 17 Self-Employed: Additional Costs of Volunteering**

April 2005 to March 2006

n=89

	Average Days Taken	Average Dollar Value
Closing down business while volunteering	4.16	\$975
Employ casual staff to keep the business open	0.69	\$78
Rely on existing staff	3.12	\$756
Other	0.47	\$133
<b>Total</b>	<b>8.44</b>	<b>\$1,942</b>



## 6.5 SUMMARY OF ALL IDENTIFIED COSTS

The purpose of this research has been to identify all potential sources of direct financial costs and 'in-kind' contributions made by volunteers within the emergency management sector. From the preceding analysis the following overall average costs have been identified for those who participated in the survey:

- The **average direct financial cost per respondent**, for the period April 2005 to March 2006, after reimbursements, was **\$544**.
- The **average in-kind contribution per respondent** after reimbursements was **\$406** per annum.
- Therefore, **the combined average** of both direct costs and in-kind contributions per respondent was **\$950** per annum.

These costs are net of reimbursements. Only a small amount of the money expended by respondents was reimbursed by volunteer organisations. Reimbursements were assessed at 9.9% of direct financial costs and 5.1% of in-kind contributions.

There are additional costs depending upon employment status. For the benefit of this analysis, calculations were made of costs by employment status, which took into account not only direct financial and in-kind contributions but also the costs to employees of taking their annual leave entitlement or leave without pay, and the costs to the self employed of keeping their business operational during activation. The following cost estimates have been made for these two situations:

- Respondents in paid employment comprised more than half of the sample (54%). For the **employed** - if direct costs, in-kind contributions and employment costs are all taken into account - the average cost of volunteering rose to **\$1679** per annum. It is also clear that some of the cost burden is shared with their employers through special leave arrangements, roster flexibility and access to work vehicles or office equipment.
- Respondents who were **self-employed** comprised another 13% of the sample. For the self employed – the average cost of volunteering taking into account direct costs, in-kind contributions and business costs rose to **\$3282** per annum.
- Calculations were also made for the 20% of respondents who indicated that they were **retired**. The average costs for this group, taking into account direct costs and in-kind contributions was **\$687** per annum.

Volunteering costs are summarised in Table 18 below. Within this study, the costs of volunteering were significantly higher for those self-employed, compared to those who were employed or retired. However, costs for lower income groupings, such as retirees, take on a new significance when considered as a proportion of their income, an issue taken up later in this report.

**TABLE 18 Average Costs of Volunteering**

Average Direct Costs (n=702)	\$544
Average In-Kind Contribution (n=702)	\$406
<b>Sub-Total Direct and In-Kind Costs</b>	<b>\$950</b>
Average Employee Additional Costs (n=365)	\$656
Average Self-employed Additional Costs (n=89)	\$1,942
<b>Average All Costs for Employees</b>	<b>\$1,679</b>
<b>Average All Costs for the Self-employed</b>	<b>\$3,282</b>

## 6.6 VARIATIONS IN VOLUNTEERING COSTS

In planning this study, it was realised that costs may be spread unevenly across the volunteer workforce, according to variables such as the type of volunteer organisation and the geographic location of the organisation's branch. It was partly for this reason that a purposive, rather than a random sample of volunteers was undertaken, to test for these variables.

This section of the report looks at four variables which potentially could affect the distribution of volunteering costs:

- **Type of volunteer organisation:** While costs will vary from one organisation to another, the projected sample size meant that it was unlikely that a full breakdown of costs for each and every organisation could be achieved. Instead organisations have been grouped into two types: **response organisations** (those dealing directly with an emergency situation) and **recovery organisations** (those providing support and dealing with the aftermath of an emergency).
- **Geographic location of the volunteer organisation's branch:** Most volunteer organisations are present in both urban and rural locations. However the different environments could potentially result in different volunteer costs. The selection process included volunteers from **metropolitan, rural** and **remote** locations.
- **Frequency of Volunteering Activity:** It could be expected that volunteers who are performing activities on a weekly basis would incur greater costs than volunteers who are less often involved or who have infrequent involvement.
- **Personal Income:** It could also be expected that volunteers on higher incomes would have higher volunteering costs, since they have more resources to devote to volunteering. However, it is also important to consider the relative degree of cost burden borne by those on lower incomes, compared with other volunteers.

## 6.6.1 Cost Variation by Type of Organisation

For this analysis, volunteers were allocated to one of two types of organisation: response or recovery. *Response* organisations included the Australian Volunteer Coast Guard, State Emergency Services, Surf Life Saving Australia, St John Ambulance, NSW Volunteer Rescue Association and the Volunteer Ambulance Officer Association. *Recovery* organisations included the Adventist Development and Relief Agency, ANGLICARE, Australian Red Cross, the Salvation Army and St Vincent de Paul Society.

Table 19 shows that there is a marked difference in volunteer costs depending upon the type of agency. Respondents in response organisations had, on average, three times the level of direct and in-kind costs, compared with those in recovery organisations. These differences are associated with the relative level of activation for volunteers in the two types of organisations.

- Some 84% of respondents from response organisations had been activated for an emergency or incident in the previous 12 months compared with 20% of respondents from recovery organisations.
- Similarly some 73% of respondents from response organisations volunteered at least once per week or their organisation, compared with 19% of respondents from recovery organisations.
- While response volunteers tend to be 'on duty' much of the time, recovery volunteers would tend to be called upon only in cases of a widespread emergency. Consequently the costs incurred by the former group will tend to be higher than the latter group.

The earlier pilot study, which involved volunteers from the Royal Volunteer Coastal Patrol (RVCP), showed that volunteers associated with that organisation incurred costs that were greater than the average costs for response organisations. Average direct financial costs for RVCP respondents were \$1061 per respondent and average in-kind costs were \$562 per respondent.<sup>36</sup>

**TABLE 19 Average Annual Costs of Volunteering by Organisational Type**

Costs	Response organisations (n=560)	Recovery organisations (n=141)	All organisations
Average Direct Costs (n=702)	\$631	\$184	\$544
Average In-Kind Contribution (n=702)	\$467	\$162	\$406
<b>Sub Total Direct and In-Kind Costs</b>	<b>\$1,098</b>	<b>\$346</b>	<b>\$950</b>
Average Employee Additional Costs (n=365)	\$742	\$179	\$656
Average Self-employed Additional Costs (n=89)	\$2,263	\$222*	\$1,942
<b>Average All Costs for Employees</b>	<b>\$1,908</b>	<b>\$416</b>	<b>\$1,679</b>
<b>Average All Costs for the Self-employed</b>	<b>\$3,771</b>	<b>\$664*</b>	<b>\$3,282</b>

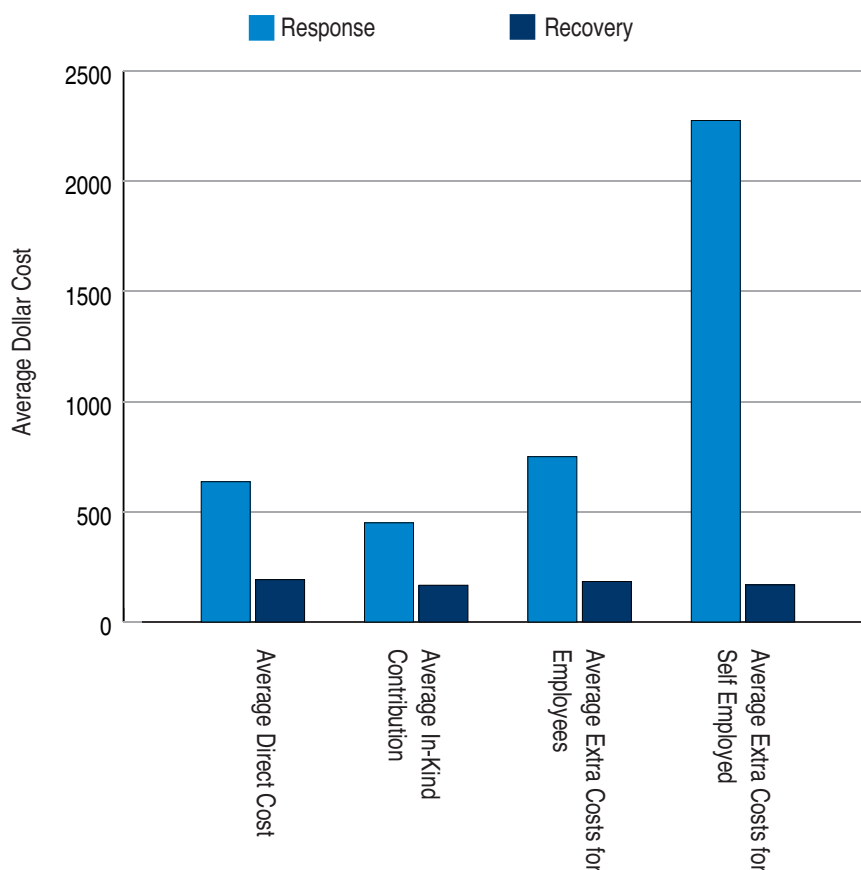
\* Based on less than 30 cases.

<sup>36</sup> ANGLICARE Research and Planning Unit (2005) *Issues Paper – Cost of Volunteering*. Unpublished report on the Cost of Volunteering pilot survey, Parramatta. p34

In view of these differences in cost by organisational type, it should be noted that, if it was possible to achieve a sufficiently large, random sample of volunteers, that the estimated average costs of volunteering may alter from those reported here.

The variations in cost by organisation serve to highlight the value of each volunteer organisation undertaking its own study of its member's costs, since the individual costs of volunteering can vary significantly from one organisation to another, depending upon the demographic composition of the volunteers, the range of activities undertaken by the organisation and the extent to which costs are able to be absorbed by each organisation. What these average data cannot show are the specific costs associated with belonging to a particular volunteer organisation. There may be higher costs for the volunteers of that organisation arising from activities more frequently undertaken by that organisation than by other organisations. For instance, some activities may require greater distances to be travelled, leading to higher volunteer costs. In addition, the extent to which volunteer organisations are resourced by government or other by organisations can have an impact on volunteer costs, since equipment, clothing, food and other items may be able to be provided by some organisations but not by others.

**Chart 8 Average Costs: Response vs Recovery Organisations**



### 6.6.2 Cost Variation by Location

Volunteers were classified according to whether their volunteer activities were located in metropolitan, rural or remote locations. 'Metropolitan' areas included postcodes found in the state capital cities, the ACT and major urban centres such as Newcastle and Wollongong. 'Rural' included regional centres and surrounding districts, while 'remote' included postcodes defined as such under the Australian Bureau of Statistics *Statistical Local Area to Remoteness Area 2001 Concordance*.



Table 20 shows that volunteers in metropolitan and rural locations tended to incur similar levels of cost. Average direct and in-kind costs totalled \$1006 for metropolitan volunteers and \$954 for rural volunteers. Average costs for remote volunteers tended to be somewhat lower (\$614).

**TABLE 20 Average Annual Costs of Volunteering by Location of Volunteer Organisation**

<b>Costs</b>	<b>Metropolitan volunteers (n=302)</b>	<b>Rural volunteers (n=295)</b>	<b>Remote volunteers (n=88)</b>	<b>All Volunteers</b>
Average Direct Costs (n=702)	\$660	\$503	\$291	\$544
Average In-Kind Contribution (n=702)	\$346	\$451	\$323	\$406
<b>Sub Total Direct and In-Kind Costs</b>	<b>\$1,006</b>	<b>\$954</b>	<b>\$614</b>	<b>\$950</b>
Average Employee Additional Costs (n=365)	\$553	\$849	\$519	\$656
Average Self-employed Additional Costs (n=89)	\$2,007	\$2,106	\$1,340*	\$1,942
<b>Average All Costs for Employees</b>	<b>\$1,665</b>	<b>\$1,827</b>	<b>\$1,042</b>	<b>\$1,679</b>
<b>Average All Costs for the Self-employed</b>	<b>\$3,362</b>	<b>\$3,647</b>	<b>\$2,070*</b>	<b>\$3,282</b>

\* Based on less than 30 cases

### 6.6.3 Cost Variation by Volunteer Activity

As noted in the previous section on cost variation by organisational type, there are marked differences in volunteer costs depending upon the level of activation of volunteers. Respondents were asked how often they usually volunteered for their organisation in the past 12 months, to which they could respond 'at least weekly', 'fortnightly', 'monthly', 'several times a year', 'less regularly' or 'not at all'.

For most (62%), volunteering is a weekly activity. Table 21 shows that the costs of volunteering are a function of the time spent in volunteer activities; the average direct and in-kind costs of volunteering on a weekly basis (\$1257) were almost double those of volunteering on a fortnightly or monthly basis (\$742), which in turn were higher than the cost incurred by those volunteering less often (\$244). This pattern was repeated for the additional costs incurred by respondents who were also in paid employment.

**TABLE 21 Average Annual Costs of Volunteering by Frequency of Volunteering**

Costs	Weekly (n=428)	Fortnightly or Monthly (n=119)	Less Often (n=141)	All Volunteers
Average Direct Costs (n=702)	\$704	\$489	\$139	\$544
Average In-Kind Contribution (n=702)	\$553	\$253	\$105	\$406
<b>Sub Total Direct and In-Kind Costs</b>	<b>\$1,257</b>	<b>\$742</b>	<b>\$244</b>	<b>\$950</b>
Average Employee Additional Costs (n=365)	\$869	\$383	\$201	\$656
Average Self-employed Additional Costs (n=89)	\$2,906	\$621*	\$856*	\$1,942
<b>Average All Costs for Employees</b>	<b>\$2,191</b>	<b>\$1,210</b>	<b>\$383</b>	<b>\$1,679</b>
<b>Average All Costs for the Self-employed</b>	<b>\$4,860</b>	<b>\$1,489*</b>	<b>\$1,220*</b>	<b>\$3,282</b>

\* Based on less than 30 cases

## 6.6.4 Cost Variation by Personal Income

Costs would also be expected to vary according to personal income. Those volunteers with higher personal incomes have more resources available and have a higher capacity to spend on volunteering activities.

A question on personal income was included in the study. While most respondents chose to provide an answer to this question, 97 (14%) chose not to do so. Volunteers who did respond were categorised into income bands; those with below average incomes were classified as either 'lower middle income' (\$20000 to \$39000 per annum) or 'low income' (Nil to \$19999 per annum). The remainder were in the upper middle or high income categories (\$40000 or more).

Table 22 shows that volunteers on upper middle or high incomes tended to have both higher direct costs and to make greater in-kind contributions than those on lower middle or low incomes. Those on upper middle or high incomes incurred costs that were, on average, double those of the lowest income group.

**TABLE 22 Average Annual Costs of Volunteering by Personal Annual Income of Respondents**

<b>Costs</b>	<b>Low Income \$0-\$19999 (n=186)</b>	<b>Lower Middle Income \$20000-\$39999 (n=153)</b>	<b>Upper Middle and High Income \$40000 or more (n=266)</b>	<b>All Volunteers</b>
Average Direct Costs (n=702)	\$387	\$422	\$794	\$544
Average In-Kind Contribution (n=702)	\$302	\$381	\$546	\$406
<b>Sub Total Direct and In-Kind Costs</b>	<b>\$689</b>	<b>\$803</b>	<b>\$1,340</b>	<b>\$950</b>
Average Employee Additional Costs (n=365)	\$409	\$278	\$927	\$656
Average Self-employed Additional Costs (n=89)	\$1,777*	\$1,274*	\$2,363	\$1,942
<b>Average All Costs for Employees</b>	<b>\$870</b>	<b>\$991</b>	<b>\$2,240</b>	<b>\$1,679</b>
<b>Average All Costs for the Self-employed</b>	<b>\$2,770*</b>	<b>\$2,800*</b>	<b>\$4,018</b>	<b>\$3,282</b>

\* Based on less than 30 cases

However, Table 22 also highlights the relative size of the cost burden being borne by those at the lower end of the income spectrum. Taking income level as the midpoint of the range, respondents in the low income band would be expending around 6.9% of their annual gross income on volunteering activities while those in the lower middle income bracket would expend around 2.7% of their annual gross income. These proportions rise to 8.7% and 3.3% where low and lower middle income earners are also employees.

When examined from the viewpoint of personal income, the cost of volunteering takes on a new perspective. These costs, as a percentage of pre-tax income, are very significant, much more so when it is considered that many of those on the lowest incomes have limited discretionary income. The capacity to pay is an important consideration that must inform discussion about what forms of reimbursement or recognition could be instituted through the taxation system or through other means.

## 7. Conclusion

Emergency management volunteering is of great value to the wider Australian community. It is also a valuable activity to government, providing a welcome and necessary complement to government services. As Howard (2003) notes:

*As the range of safety services required by the community has increased, governments have found them increasingly costly to deliver, so they have been only too happy to accept the services of the volunteer sector. These services are no longer 'add ons', but are now core business of governments.<sup>37</sup>*



The Australian Emergency Management Volunteer Forum (AEMVF) has a number of areas of responsibility in relation to volunteers and volunteer services, including funding and cost issues. In the past, AEMVF has identified volunteer out-of-pocket expenses as an issue requiring action. The AEMVF has previously advocated that:

- support for emergency volunteer sector organisations be extended to include the direct purchase of personal protective clothing and mandatory individual safety equipment;
- the level of support be increased so that volunteers do not have to pay membership fees;
- any financial assistance schemes provided to offset hardship be available to all AEMVF organisations, not just the lead agency; and
- The charitable status of all emergency sector volunteer organisations be protected.

This research study provides evidence for further advocacy on behalf of emergency management volunteers. It is clear from this research that volunteers incur significant, on-going personal costs. Volunteers responding to the survey encountered average direct costs of \$544 per year and average in-kind costs of \$406, a combined total of \$950 for the previous year. Employed respondents spent an average of \$1679 in the previous year, through loss of earnings or needing to use annual leave for volunteering activities. The situation appears to be more onerous for self-employed respondents who incurred average costs of around \$3282 in the previous year, through closing their businesses temporarily, or employing family members or casual staff.

<sup>37</sup> Howard, B W (2003) *Contemporary Issues in Volunteerism*, Paper presented at the National Disaster Conference, 11 September 2003, Canberra

The greatest direct cost of volunteering was for petrol, which averaged \$227 per respondent, or around half of all direct costs incurred. This figure is explained by the high level of private vehicle usage among volunteers, even during periods of activation, and the number of kilometres which many volunteers must travel as part of their volunteering activity. This is an area of concern given the volatility of petrol prices, which has seen a steep rise and fall in oil prices during and subsequent to this study. It is anticipated that petrol costs will be a major cost for volunteers in future years.



## 7.1 Strategies for Offsetting Volunteer Costs

Costs associated with the volunteering task such as protective clothing, personal equipment and training are also significant direct costs, apart from the cost of petrol. Nevertheless, there would be a strong case for the full reimbursement of expenses on such items and for governments to ensure that sufficient funds are available to volunteer organisations to cover such costs. Where respondents bear such costs personally, this study showed that only a fraction of the cost of such items was reimbursed. A system of reimbursement of agreed expenses could be the best way to offset volunteer costs, providing an equitable way of reimbursing volunteers across all emergency management organisations.

In the USA and UK, tax deductions are permitted for certain volunteer expenses. Volunteer tax deductions are claimable in the USA where there has been no reimbursement. Items such as mileage, travel expenses, paper, copying, convention attendance fees and uniforms, among other costs, can be so deducted.<sup>38</sup> In the UK, there are tax deductions available for volunteers for mileage.<sup>39</sup>

However, in Australia, emergency management volunteers are not permitted tax deductions for costs arising from their volunteer work. Specific rulings which have been adverse to volunteers include:

- ATO ID 2002/206: payments to volunteers to cover expenses are treated as assessable income if the recipient has the discretion whether or not to expend the allowance;
- ATO ID 2002/910: no deduction allowable under Section 8-1 (ITAA 1997) for the cost of fire-fighting equipment for use as a volunteer fire-fighter.<sup>40</sup>

The overall costs to volunteers are significant when direct costs, in-kind contributions and employment costs are all taken into account. Given the central role of volunteers in the system of emergency management across Australia, a case could be made for some recognition to be obtained for individuals through the taxation system; e.g. through rebates or deductions.

Volunteer costs vary by personal income. While higher income groups bear greater dollar costs, it appears that the lowest income group bears significant costs as a proportion of their income. It could be argued that the personal costs of volunteering tend to discriminate against those on lower incomes. Self-employed persons are also another group that appear to bear inordinately higher costs. The suitability of the taxation system as a mechanism for reimbursing volunteer costs should be investigated.

Overseas experience suggests that waiving government fees and charges is another possible mechanism for providing recompense to volunteers. In the USA there are exemptions or reductions for volunteers on charges such as motor vehicle registration and health insurance cover. Similar arrangements should be investigated in Australia in relation to federal and state government charges.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>38</sup> ServiceLeader.org (2004) 'Tax credits for volunteering costs', Lyndon B. Johnson School of Public Affairs, University of Texas, Austin. Online at <http://www.serviceleader.org/new/volunteers/articles/2003/04/000050print.php>

<sup>39</sup> Volunteer Centre Edinburgh (2003) 'Paying volunteer expenses' Online at <http://www.volunteeredinburgh.org.uk/resources/Expenses.htm>

<sup>40</sup> Conroy, D. K. (2003) 'Volunteers in State Government – Preliminary Research Findings', *The Public Interest*, April 2003, p21

<sup>41</sup> *ibid*, p21

The 'mutual obligation' principle employed by the Federal Government in relation to unemployment and other welfare payments could be applied in 'reverse' to volunteers; ie where governments are heavily reliant upon volunteers for the provision of emergency management services. This donation of time and resources could be treated in the same way as donations of money to charitable organisations, and a tax break provided to an agreed amount, or a reduction of fees and charges (eg motor vehicle registration, telephone line rental, property taxes).<sup>42</sup>

We cannot tell from this study whether the costs of volunteering present a barrier to volunteering among those who are currently not volunteers. However, what is clear from the current study is that the willingness of respondents to bear such costs as part of their volunteer commitment overrides the potential impacts of such costs on the level of volunteering. Nevertheless, the 13% of respondents who said that the costs of volunteering currently inhibits their doing further volunteering should be a cause for concern. This is a sign that the current system is very dependent upon the goodwill of volunteers. The limits of this goodwill are unknown, which makes it all the more important that government closely assesses the kind of costs outlined here and provides suitable reimbursement to volunteers that covers basic costs (eg. uniforms, petrol, travel, training) to enable them to continue to provide their invaluable time to serve their communities.



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<sup>42</sup> *ibid*, p21



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