ESS Volunteer Sustainability Strategy

Supporting Paper

Government of South Australia
South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission

CFS

SES RESCUE

VMR RESCUE

CFSVA

SES SOUTH AUSTRALIAN VOLUNTEERS' ASSOCIATION INC.

ESS Volunteer Sustainability Strategy – YourSAy Supporting Paper

Our volunteers are at the heart of South Australia's emergency services. Every day, thousands of South Australians contribute their time, skills and experience to protecting lives, property and communities from emergencies.

From responding to bushfires, storms and floods to undertaking search and rescue, road crash rescue and community engagement - our volunteers play a crucial role in keeping South Australian's safe.

Recognising the vital role volunteers play in protecting South Australian communities, there is a need to ensure emergency services volunteering remains strong, accessible and sustainable into the future.

To support this, the South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM), in partnership with the South Australian Country Fire Service (SACFS) and South Australian State Emergency Service (SASES) is developing the Emergency Services Sector (ESS) Volunteer Sustainability Strategy.

The strategy will consider how the sector can continue to attract, support and retain our emergency services volunteers, while responding to changing community expectations, operational requirements and the needs of current and future volunteers.

A key part of this work is understanding the views and experiences of the broader South Australian community.

Why a Volunteer Sustainability Strategy is needed

Volunteering with emergency services has a long and proud history in South Australia. Our volunteers bring a diverse range of skills, experiences and perspectives to their agencies. Not only contributing to emergency response, but also to a stronger, more connected South Australia.

The environment, however, in which our people volunteer continues to change.

Work and family commitments, changing lifestyles and populations and increasing demands on peoples time has had an influence on our volunteers.

At the same time, emergency service agencies must continue to maintain the capabilities, skills and availability needed to meet the needs of the communities they serve.

A sustainable volunteer workforce is not simply about recruiting more people. It is also about creating an environment where volunteers feel valued, supported and equipped to contribute, and where opportunities to participate reflect the different circumstances and capabilities of individuals and communities.

The strategy provides an opportunity to take a coordinated, long-term approach to these challenges across the emergency services sector.

It will consider both the experiences of existing volunteers and the perspectives of people who may be interested in volunteering in the future.

Understanding volunteering in a changing community

The way people participate in volunteering is evolving.

Traditional volunteering arrangements may not suit everyone, particularly those balancing employment, caring responsibilities, education and other commitments.

For some people, volunteering may involve a significant and ongoing commitment. Others may be interested in contributing their skills through different roles, more flexible arrangements or opportunities that better align with their availability.

ESS Volunteer Sustainability Strategy – YourSAy Supporting Paper

What the strategy aims to achieve

The ESS Volunteer Sustainability Strategy will establish a shared direction for strengthening volunteer participation and sustainability across the CFS, SES and VMR.

It will identify priorities and practical opportunities to support emergency services volunteering into the future, informed by evidence, consultation and the experiences of volunteers and communities.

The strategy will explore several areas:

Attracting future volunteers

Understanding what motivates people to volunteer, how they learn about opportunities and what may encourage them to consider joining the emergency services. This includes exploring ways to improve community awareness, strengthen recruitment pathways and communicate the roles available.

Improving accessibility and inclusion

Exploring opportunities to ensure people from different backgrounds, ages, abilities and circumstances can see themselves contributing to emergency services volunteering. This includes understanding perceived and practical barriers to participation and how volunteering opportunities can better reflect the diversity of South Australian communities.

Responding to changing expectations

Understanding how people's availability, interests and expectations of volunteering are changing, and considering what this may mean for future recruitment, participation and workforce planning

Why we want to hear from the community

While existing volunteers provide valuable insight into the realities of emergency services volunteering, understanding the perspectives of the broader community is equally important.

People who have never volunteered, previously considered joining, or have supported a family member or colleague who volunteers can offer valuable insights into how emergency services organisations are perceived and what might influence future participation.

Community feedback will help us better understand:

- How familiar South Australians are with the CFS, SES and the volunteering opportunities available.
- What motivates people to volunteer or consider volunteering.
- What barriers or concerns may prevent people from becoming involved.
- How work, family and other commitments influence people's capacity to volunteer.
- Whether current volunteering opportunities are perceived as accessible, welcoming and inclusive.
- What information, support or changes could encourage greater participation.
- How families, employers and communities can help support emergency services volunteers.

We are particularly interested in hearing from people who have not previously volunteered, as well as those who may have considered volunteering but decided not to proceed.

ESS Volunteer Sustainability Strategy – YourSAy Supporting Paper

Developing a strategy based on evidence

The strategy is being developed through a coordinated approach that brings together existing evidence, sector knowledge and consultation with volunteers and the wider community.

This includes considering relevant research, workforce information, current recruitment and retention practices, and lessons from volunteering initiatives in South Australia and other jurisdictions.

The project is also drawing on the expertise and experiences of the CFS, SES and SAFECOM, with engagement involving the CFS Volunteers Association (CFSVA), SES Volunteers Association (SASESVA) and Volunteer Marine Rescue (VMR) representatives.

Consultation with existing volunteers is being undertaken through dedicated engagement activities, including a volunteer survey and targeted discussions.

The YourSAy consultation provides a complementary opportunity for the broader community to contribute.

Together, these activities will help develop a more complete understanding of the factors affecting volunteer participation and sustainability.

This approach recognises that no single perspective or source of information can fully explain the challenges and opportunities facing emergency services volunteering.

Why we want to hear from the community

Community feedback will be considered alongside volunteer consultation findings, workforce information, research and other evidence gathered throughout the project. The information will help identify common themes, areas of concern and opportunities for improvement.

In particular, community perspectives will help inform the strategy's approach to attracting new volunteers, improving awareness of volunteering opportunities, addressing barriers to participation and strengthening support from employers, families and communities.

Feedback will also help identify where additional investigation or targeted consultation may be valuable.

The strategy will use these findings to develop priorities and practical actions for consideration across the emergency services sector.

The aim is to ensure the strategy is informed by the people it is intended to support and the communities that rely on emergency services.

Have your say

We invite South Australians to share their views, experiences and ideas through the YourSAy community survey. Whether you have considered volunteering, previously enquired about joining, support someone who volunteers or simply have an interest in the future of emergency services in your community, your perspective is valuable.

Your feedback will help inform the development of the ESS Volunteer Sustainability Strategy and identify opportunities to make volunteering more attractive, accessible and sustainable for future generations.

For more information about the project and consultation process, please refer to the Frequently Asked Questions available in the YourSAy document library.