

A photograph of two volunteers from the Australian Red Cross Victoria Emergency Services. They are standing outdoors, wearing high-visibility yellow and orange safety vests over their clothing. Both are wearing face masks: a light blue surgical mask for the man on the left and a white surgical mask for the woman on the right. They are holding a large white bag filled with various supplies, including boxes of instant noodle cups and other packaged food items. The background shows green foliage and a metal railing. A semi-transparent white box with black text is overlaid on the center of the image.

Analysis and Improvement of the Volunteer Experience at the Australian Red Cross Victoria Emergency Services

A photograph of two firefighters in a forest at night. The scene is illuminated by a warm, orange glow, likely from a fire. The firefighters are wearing protective gear and are positioned in the middle ground, facing each other. The background is filled with tall, thin trees, and the ground is covered in a layer of ash or charred wood. The overall atmosphere is one of a controlled fire in a natural setting.

There is a critical
need for volunteerism
in Australia

RECEIVING AND
DISPATCHING DEPOT

5
Million

19%

700,000

Wanted VOLUNTEER
HELPERS



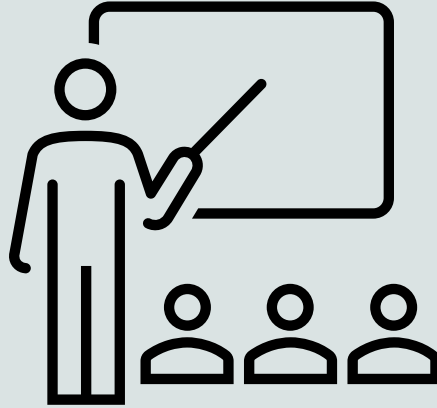
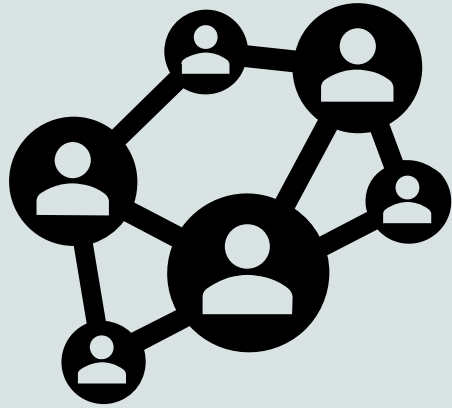
The Vic ES responds
before, during, & after



The Problem

- Struggles with volunteer engagement/retention
- Unsure what the volunteer perspectives are
- Unsure of how to improve and address the challenges of the system

The volunteer induction process encompasses 3 major stages



Recruitment

Onboarding

Activation

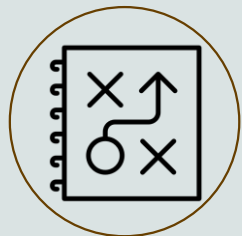
Three key challenges of onboarding



Prepare



Integrate



Manage

Six Volunteer Motives



Self Esteem



Career Experience



Social Acceptance





A successful onboarding system is key to good volunteer experience.

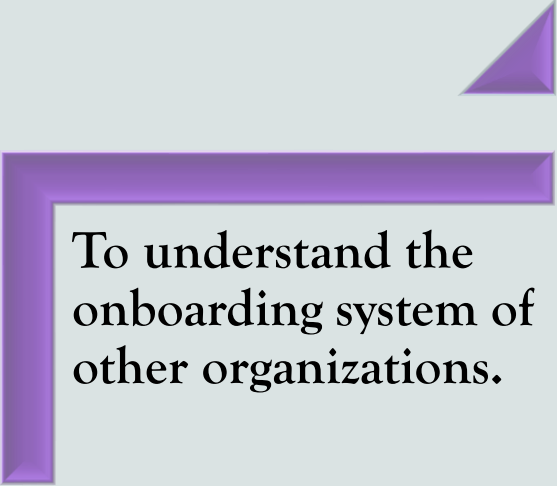


Our Goal

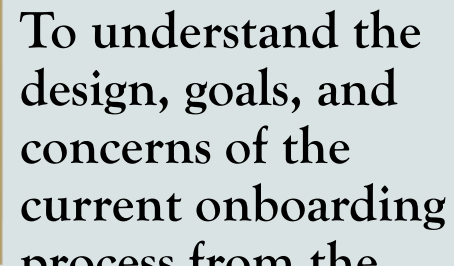
To help make the Victoria Emergency Services volunteers feel more comfortable and capable in their roles by providing recommendations to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the onboarding process.



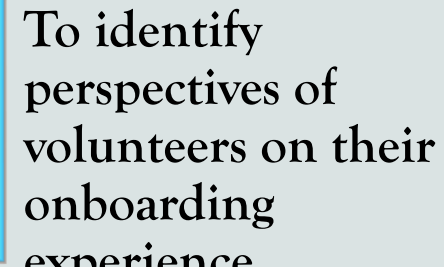
Objectives




To understand the onboarding system of other organizations.



To understand the design, goals, and concerns of the current onboarding process from the viewpoint of organization leadership.



To identify perspectives of volunteers on their onboarding experience.



To analyze our findings and develop recommendations to the Australian Red Cross Victoria Emergency Services Division to improve their onboarding process.

Objective 1

To understand the onboarding system of other organizations



The American Red Cross

- 48 hr. background check turnover
- Engage volunteers within 30-90 days of interest
- Prepare, Respond, Recover roles
- Difficulties designating fit & qualified volunteer leaders
 - Frequent volunteer leader evaluations



American Red Cross



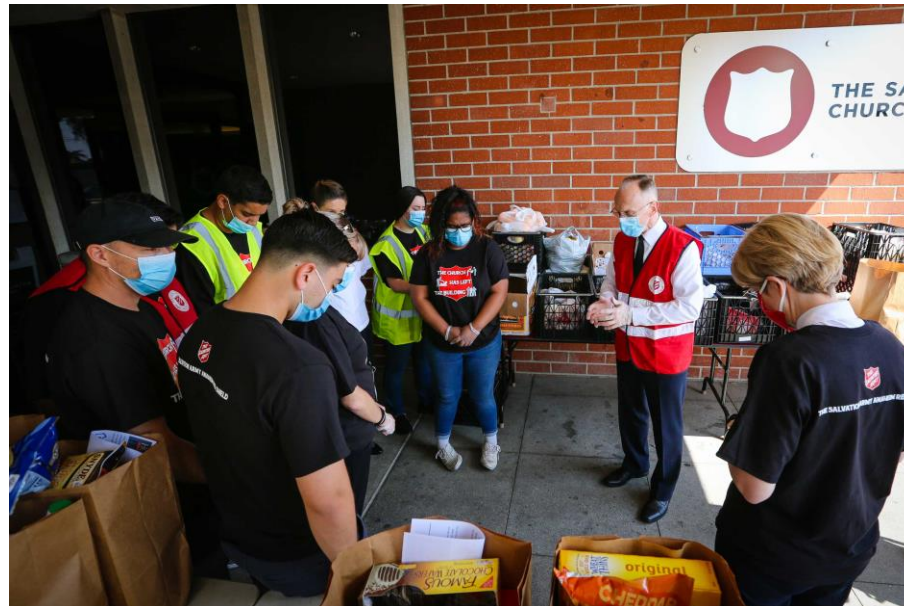


The Polish Red Cross

- Support from the American Red Cross to improve system
- +/-100 hrs of basic training plus supporting activities
- Volunteer examinations
- Youth, intermediate and elder volunteer groups
- Difficulties with volunteer engagement

Salvation Army

- Onboarding process is completed as soon as possible after police checks
- Online platform for onboarding
- Volunteers can shadow to be engaged before completing training
- Volunteer engagement is the main issue



Objective 2

To understand the design, goals, and concerns of the current onboarding process from the viewpoint of organization leadership.



Staff
members

Divisional
Operations
Officers

Team
Conveners



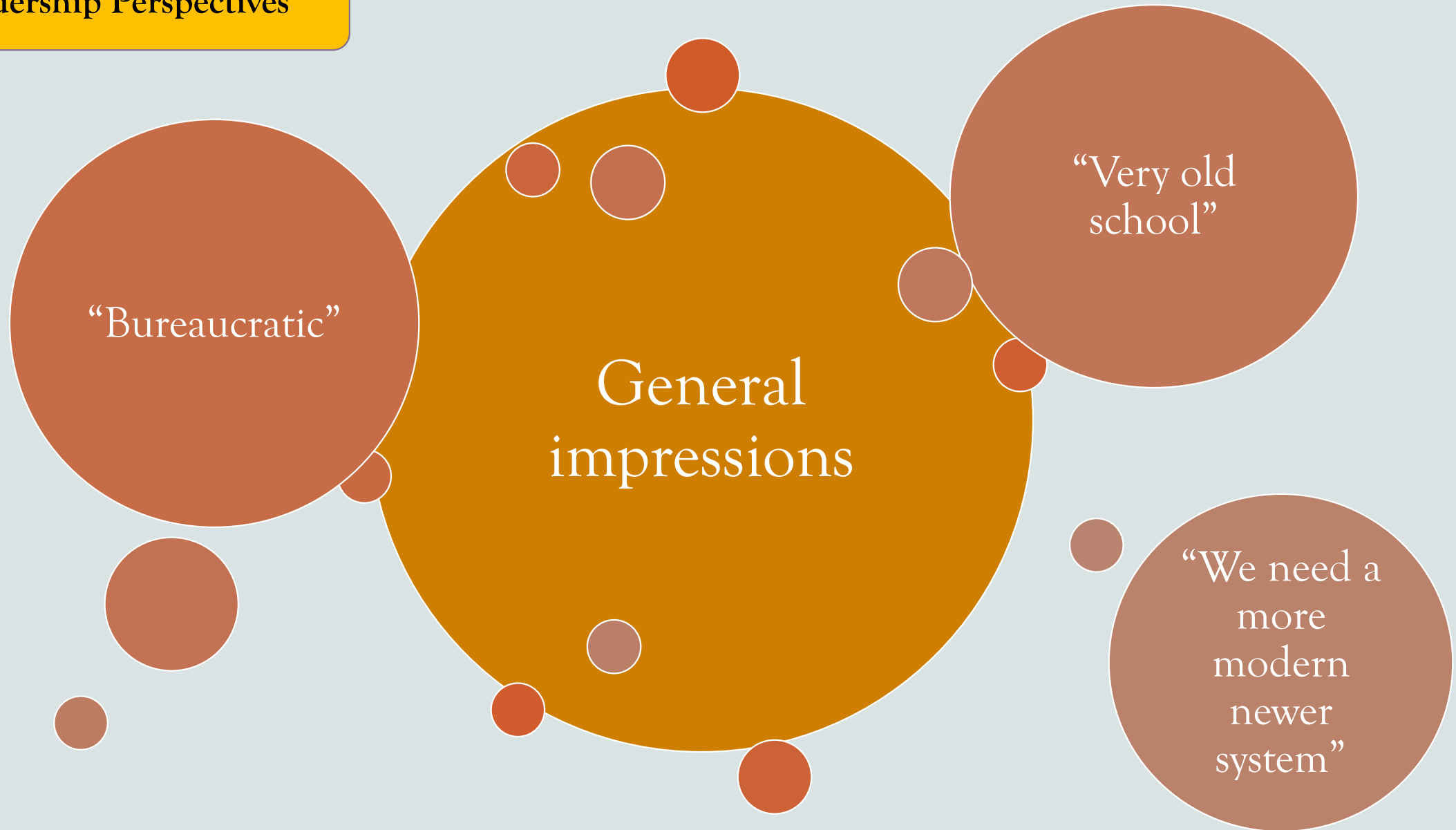
Staff Interviews

Police
checks can
cause
delays

The onboarding process
is dragged on

Delay in receiving system
access

Leadership Perspectives



Communication can
be improved

Any delay in onboarding pushes
the time of activation



Lack of communication cause
many volunteers to leave



Retaining volunteers is a potential
problem





Volunteer Leadership Interviews

The onboarding process is confusing.

Multiple Databases

Lost Information

Role Descriptions

There is no consistency across different divisions at the ARC Vic ES.

Buddy System

Monthly Meetings

Timing Differences

Volunteer
engagement
across the
board is
lacking.

Disasters don't happen everyday

Small amount of deployments

Too many vs too little

Leadership Perspective Successes

Psychological First Aid is top class

Interviews for potential volunteers
are extremely beneficial

There are so many people who care



Objective 3

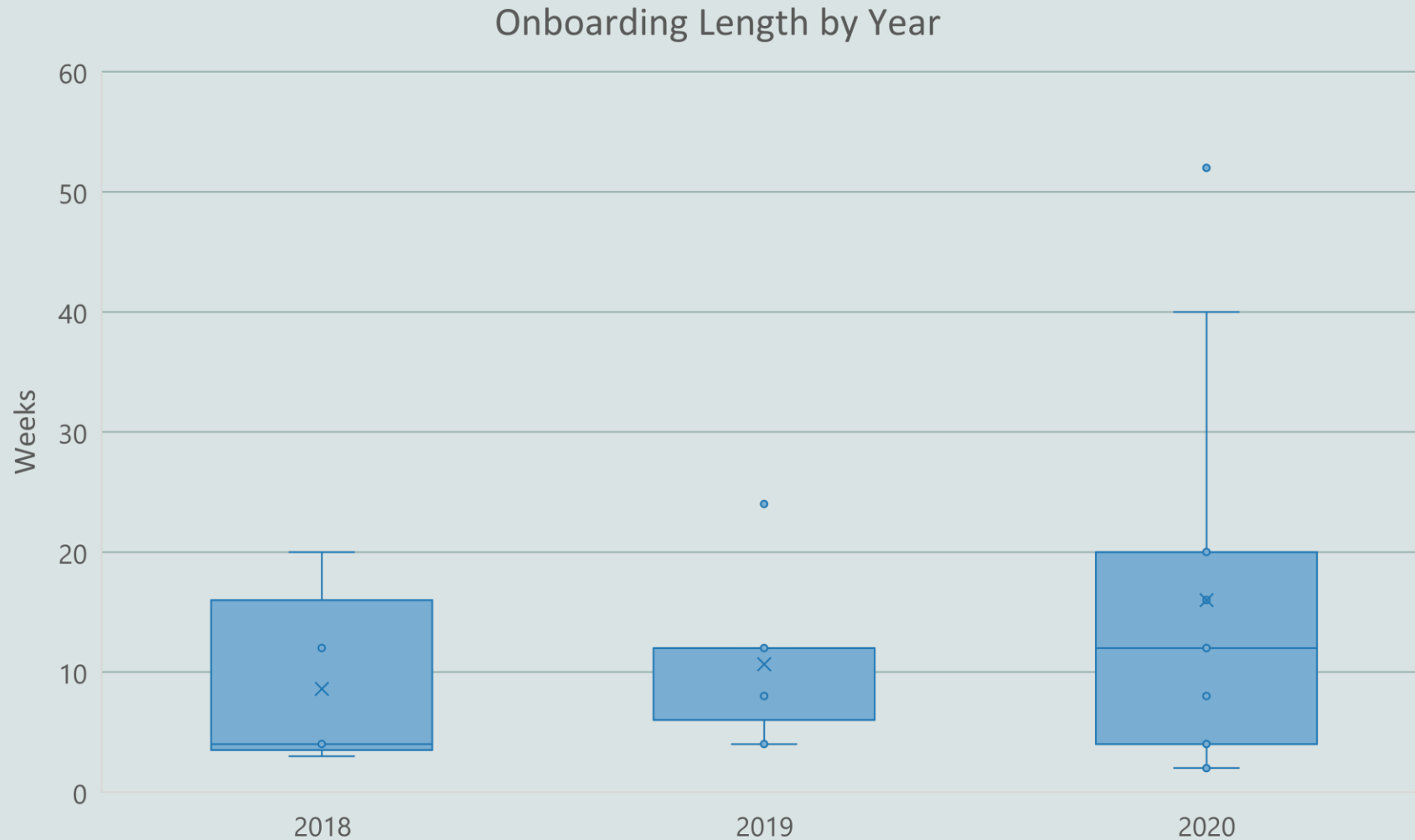
42 survey responses, sent via Facebook & REDS Newsletter

To identify perspectives of volunteers on their onboarding experience

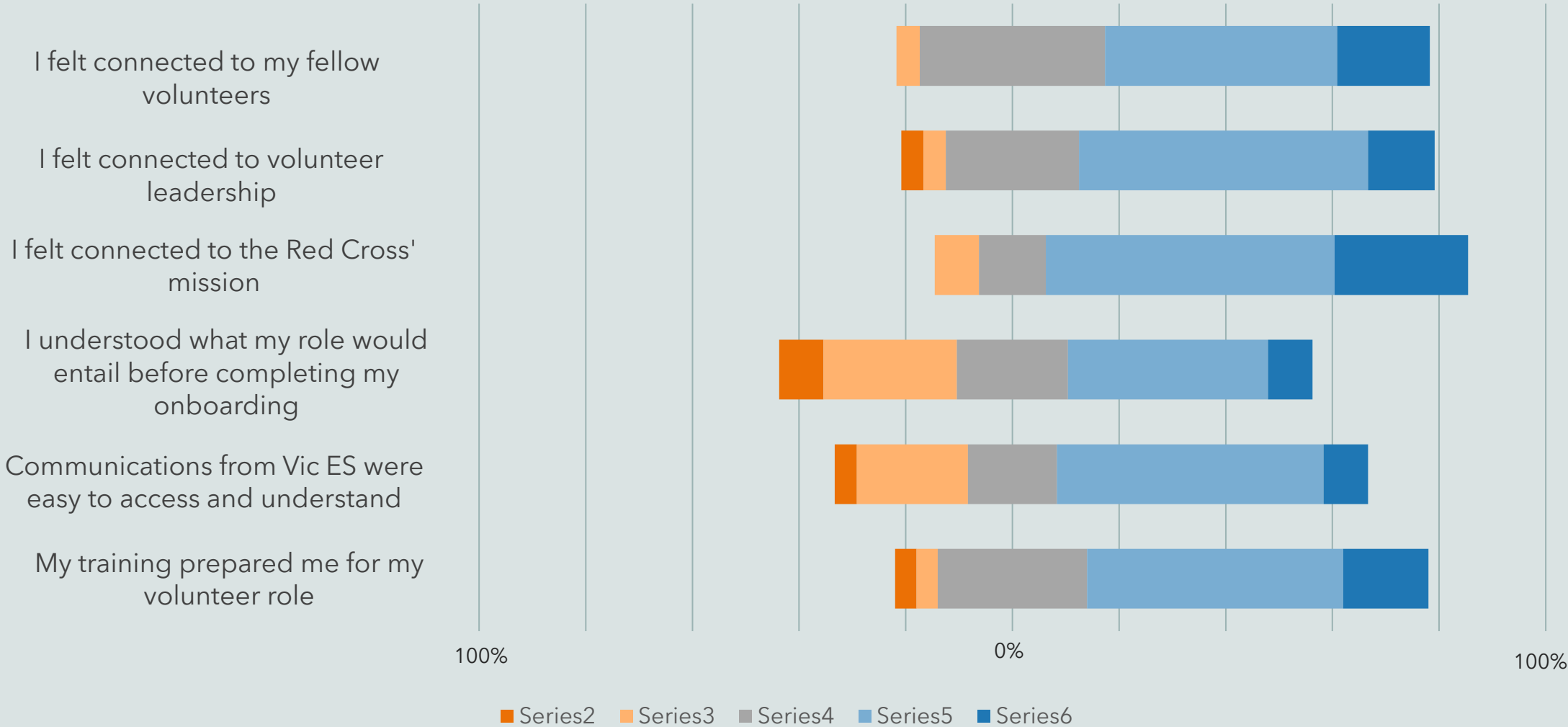
Group discussions and interviews with volunteers

Experiencing onboarding modules ourselves

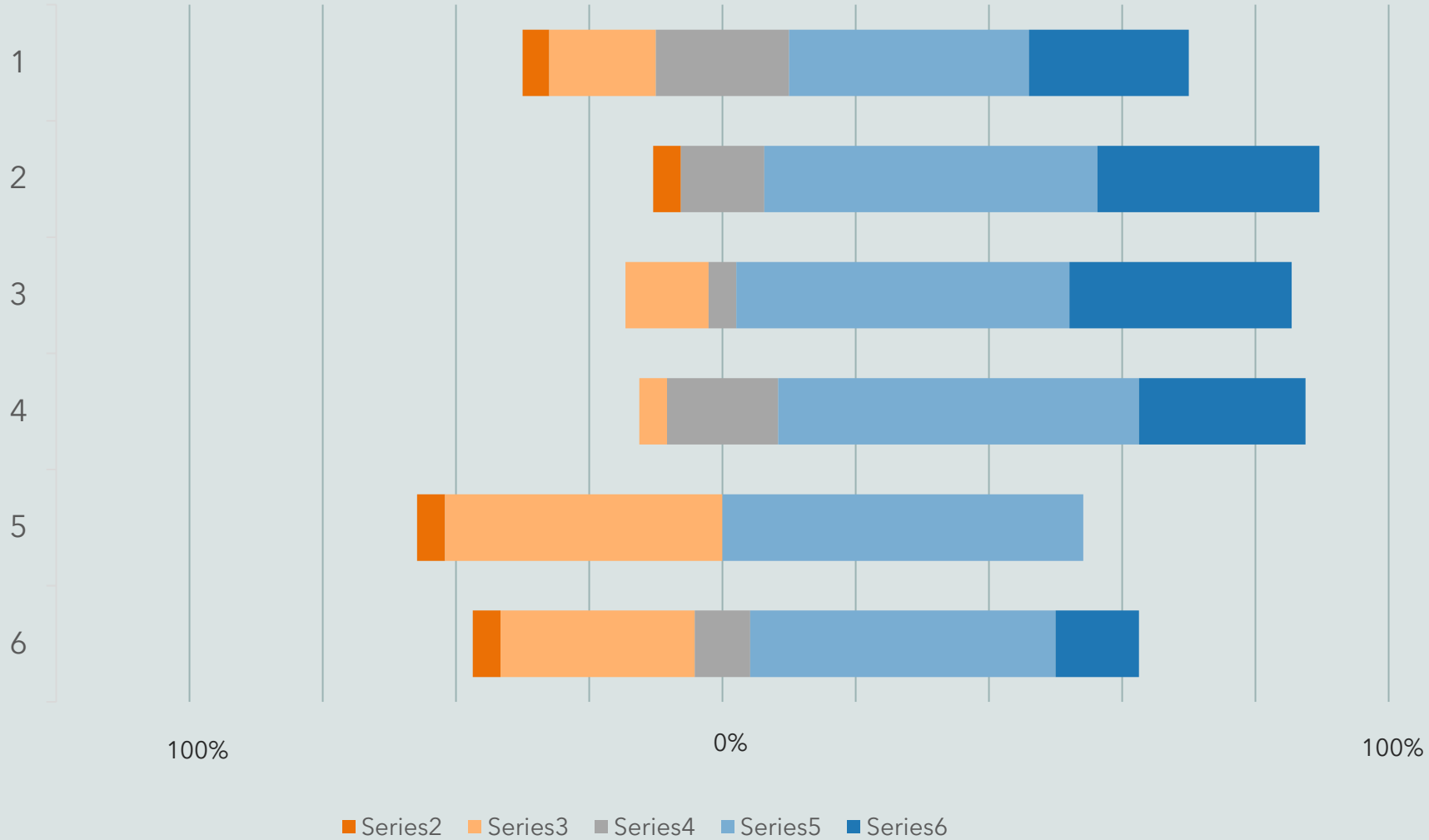
Onboarding length has remained consistent



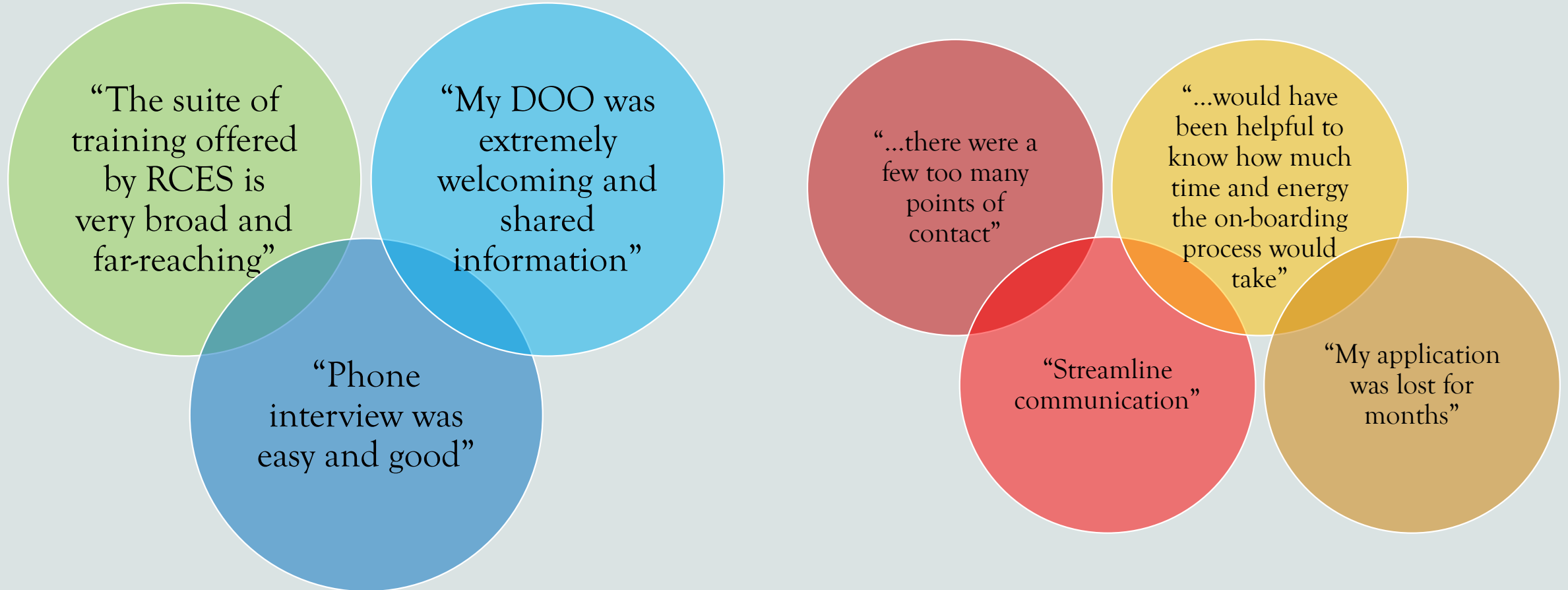
Perspectives on onboarding goals



Perspectives on induction steps



Positive and negative onboarding experiences



Participatory Research



- Pros
 - Short and straightforward application
- Cons
 - Many linked documents to read
 - Doesn't collect important data on motivations and expectations

To analyze our findings and develop recommendations to the Australian Red Cross Victoria Emergency Services Division to improve their onboarding process.



Emergency
Services



Key Takeaways

Individual volunteer onboarding experiences can vary between groups

Volunteers struggle with understanding their role, accessing communications and feeling engaged

Holdups such as an extended police checks or losing data can cause volunteers to disengage

Recommendations



Data to support the implementation of new processes



Transition to a singular platform for internal documents



FAQ page compiled by the hotline representatives



Informational videos to visually explain onboarding steps, volunteer roles, etc.



Youth Volunteer Programs

Deliverables



Volunteer Leader
Feedback Form



Volunteer Preparedness
Evaluation



Volunteer Involvement
Plan

Volunteer Leader Feedback Form

- Implemented at the American Red Cross
- First completed at the end of an onboarding experience and beyond

Instructions:

1. Using the following four ratings, assess your volunteer leader's performance on each of the following categories:
 - 3 – Exceeds Expectations
 - 2 – Meets Expectations
 - 1 – Needs Improvement
 - 0 – Not Applicable
2. After completion of the form, it will be sent to the next higher supervisor for review and discussion with the evaluated.

	3	2	1	0
Can successfully direct subordinates in volunteer duties				
Demonstrates the necessary knowledge for emergency relief and management.				
Supports and motivates team members.				
Functions well under pressure				
Encourages team suggestions.				
Defines and explains expectations clearly.				
Successfully coordinates team members.				
Effectively delegates work.				
Fosters a good teamwork environment.				
Comments:				

1. American Red Cross, Vic ES - Values & Mission

Formulate questions that assess volunteers on what they understand are the main goals and values of the organization. Some great interactive question here may be 'How do your values align with those of the Vic ES?' or 'How do the values of the Vic ES motivate your personal values?'

2. Crisis Action Response

Prompt volunteers to briefly share their action plans in a moment of emergency, deployment, SMS alert, etc. This may vary for response, proactive, and IMT volunteers.

3. Psychological First Aid

This section should assess the volunteers understanding of the psychological first aid training they receive. Have each volunteer share their understanding of what psychological first aid is and what it aims to do. You may also assess their understanding of the basic principles of the psychological first aid.

4. Safety & Equipment

This section is likely geared more towards the response volunteers. Here, volunteers can be asked how to set up certain safety materials that they use in the event of disaster. I.e., generator, tents, heaters, etc.

5. Product Distribution

This section should have volunteers identify the necessary products to be handed out when on a deployment. Here you may prompt volunteers with a scenario or describe the needs of an individual seeking help, and volunteers can list main materials they deem necessary to provide them with. This may be food, water, hygiene products, medical supplies, etc.

6. Specific Trainings

Formulate questions that assess the volunteer's knowledge on specific trainings they have received. This section may differ for response, proactive, and IMT volunteers, as they do not all receive the same specified trainings.

7. Scenario

Lay out a detailed mock scenario of a disaster or emergency a volunteer may respond to, to see what their thought process would be in action. This will give the volunteers an idea of what they would experience on a real-life deployment. This would also help the volunteers to understand their roles in greater detail and in a real-world scope.

Volunteer Preparedness Evaluation

- Assess volunteer knowledge and preparedness
- Allows volunteers to describe 'What would you do' situations in various sections

Volunteer Involvement Plan

- Based on research and data collection
- ‘Why’ to justify each step
- Activity to exemplify each step
- Seven key strategies to keep volunteers involved

Component	Definition	Answer
Job Title	What is the official name of my position?	
Purpose	What is the specific purpose of this position in relation to the organizations mission and goals?	
Key Responsibilities	What are my major duties during a disaster, and in between disasters?	
Supervisor	Who do I report to? Who is my volunteer leader?	
Time Commitment	How many hours do I need to dedicate to this role weekly, monthly, or annually?	
Qualifications	What qualifies me for this role?	
Support	Who do I go to when I have questions? What are the available resources?	

Clearly define your volunteer’s roles, and ensure they know what to expect.

4. Connect their motivations to the mission of the organization.

Why: This will create a sense of purpose and matching your volunteer’s motivations to tasks you assign is a great way to keep them engaged (Volunteer Engagement Strategy: 7 Tips for Your Nonprofit, 2015). Stating the connection between a person's motivations and the mission of the organization makes volunteers feel like their work matters and is making a difference. Continually emphasize that their presence and efforts are important (*Volunteer Engagement | Strategies for Smart Organizations*, n.d.).

Activity: Mapping activity – display the main components of the organizations mission on a board, and have each volunteer write their motivations on a sticky note; allow each volunteer to identify what category their motivation falls into (*Motivational Maps*).



Thank You!

To everyone who sat down for an interview,
focus group, or survey!

To our sponsor at Vic ES Margaret McCarthy
and Will Tran for all your help.

To our advisors, Professor McCauley and
Professor Ó Catháin.

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