

Scouts and UWA Research Project

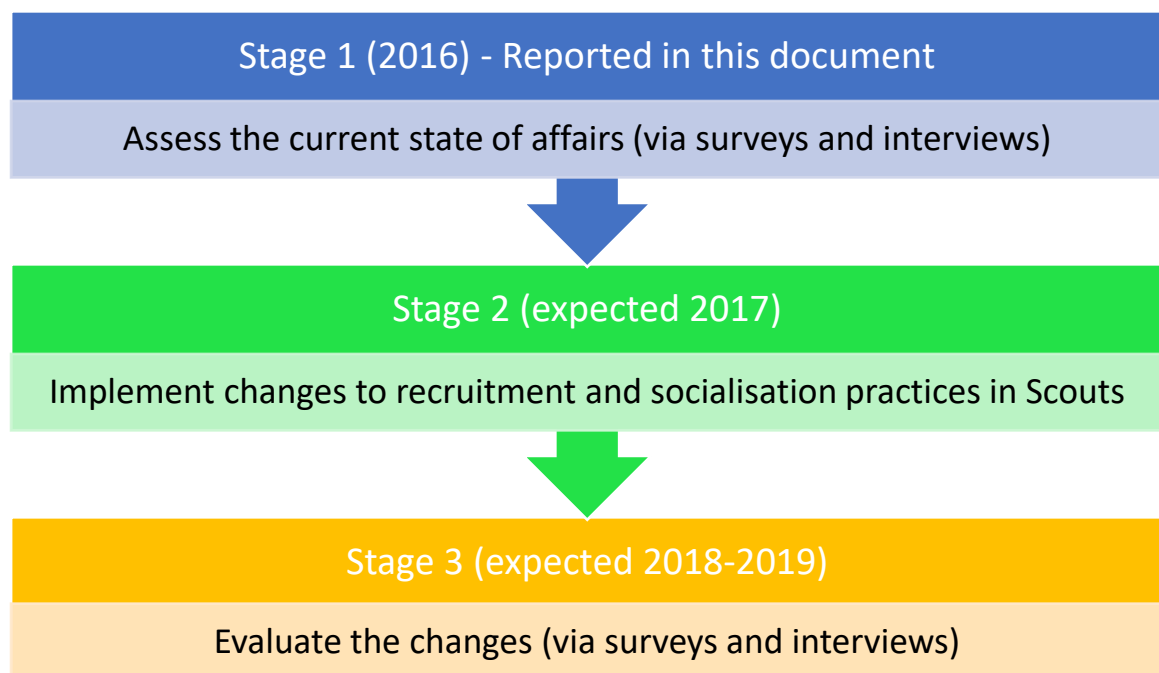


Summary of Volunteer Survey 2016

Introduction to the research project

In this summary you can find the results of the 'Volunteer Survey 2016' that was distributed in seven Scouts Branches to over 17,000 volunteers. This volunteer survey is the first step in an Australian Research Council Linkage scheme research project undertaken by the University of Western Australia (UWA) and Scouts SA, TAS, VIC, and WA. Ultimately, we hope to help Scouts develop successful *evidence-based* practices and strategies to improve volunteer engagement that they can apply to all its branches across Australia.

Altogether, the research project consists of three stages:



Survey participation

This report summarises what we learned from the surveys and interviews we undertook in Stage 1. The goals of this stage were to (1) measure the current engagement and needs of the volunteers to help Scouts design and implement effective interventions and (2) create a baseline measure to evaluate the effect of these interventions. The volunteers in the participating branches (ACT, NSW, SA, TAS, VIC, WA, and QLD) received an email and up to two reminders from the research team inviting them to complete a 30-minute survey. All participating branches also encouraged their volunteers to participate via Facebook, Newsletters, and other Branch networks. The survey was mainly focussed on Adult Leaders and Adult Helpers, but other volunteers were also invited to participate. The overall response rate to the survey was approximately 20%; a total of 4,298 volunteers opened the link to the survey, 3,575 proceeded to complete the first half of the survey,

and 3,321 of those fully completed the survey. The final group consists of 2,468 Leaders of Youth, 272 Helpers, 161 Group Leaders, and 420 others (e.g., Committee members, Activity Leaders, and [District] Commissioners).

A Cautionary Note. We compared the demographics of the survey participants to those of the average Scouts Leader in the participating branches. We found that the survey participants were very equal in terms of gender (44% female) and age (45-54 years) to the average Leader of Youth. However, the survey participants reported that they had been with Scouts for 12 years whereas the average Leader tenure at Scouts is approximately 7 years. This suggests that those who have been with Scouts for longer were more likely to complete our survey. Therefore, we wish to note that the sample may not be entirely representative of the typical Scouts leader. We also found that those who had been with Scouts for a longer time were more likely to report stronger intentions to stay. It is important to this research, and to the sustainability of Scouts services that we learn about why volunteers leave Scouts early, and we strongly encourage the newer volunteers to participate in our next survey so we can learn more about their views.

Finally, we found no meaningful differences between branches on the various aspects of the survey. That means that the results described in this summary are applicable to all branches. Note that some comments were more prevalent in specific branches. For example, more volunteers commented on distance issues in WA compared to ACT. However, these differences did not meaningfully impact the results of the survey.

After completing the survey, the participants were able to receive self-guided feedback on their personality and motivation scores via the project website (www.uwascoutsresearch.com). Additionally, participants had a chance to win vouchers for fun Scout group activities.

Content of the survey

The survey covered the following topics:

#	Topic Name	Topic Content
1	Demographics	
2	Thriving and psychological safety in Scouts	<i>Learning and feeling energised at Scouts, and feeling safe to speak openly.</i>
3	Intention to remain	<i>Intending to stay on as a Leader for at least the next two years.</i>
4	Organisational identity	<i>Identifying with successes / failures of the Scouts organisation, and the role of a Leader therein.</i>
5	Motivation	<i>Feeling motivated to volunteer by fun / interest versus reward / punishment.</i>
6	Psychological need satisfaction	<i>Feeling as an autonomous, competent, and socialised individual within Scouts.</i>
7	Perceived fit with Scouts	<i>Leaders fitting the demands of Scouts and Scouts accommodating the needs of Leaders.</i>
8	Empowering leadership	<i>If the direct Leader of the volunteer group improves their feelings of competence and autonomy.</i>
9	Personality	<i>How humble, emotional, extraverted, agreeable, conscientious and open to experiences the Leader is.</i>
10	Training perceptions	<i>Evaluations of field and digital training at Scouts.</i>
11	Knowledge sharing behaviour & needs	<i>The desire to develop and share knowledge of Scouting between groups, and expected barriers to sharing that knowledge.</i>

Reactions to the surveys

Throughout the survey, the research team actively monitored participation and responded to enquiries. Most comments regarded technical issues and people opting out. We also received some compliments and very constructive criticism. At the end of the survey, the participants could provide feedback on their volunteering in a free text box. A large number of volunteers used this to inform

us about points of improvement for Scouts, but also to offer their appreciation for the opportunity to voice their opinion. Some examples are reproduced below:

“Thanks for asking.”

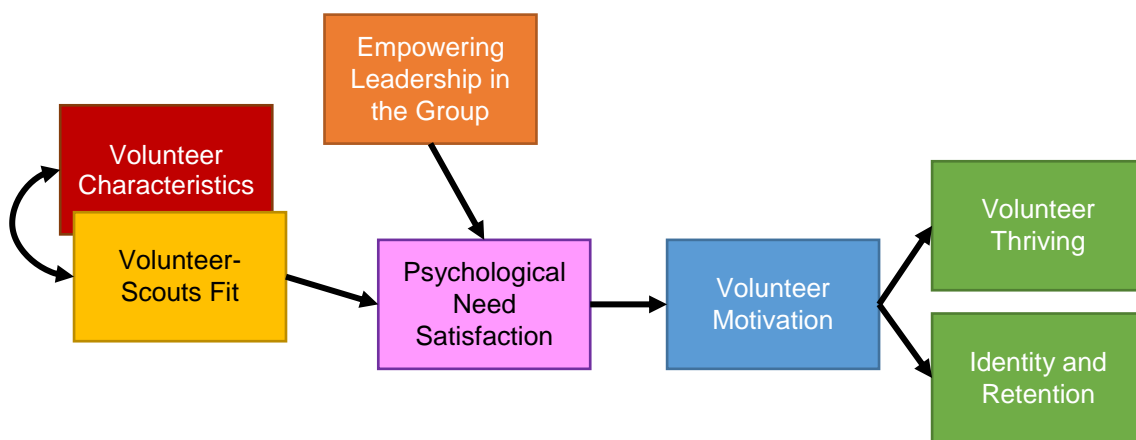
“Thank you this is the first time I have been asked my opinion by scouting movement”

“Thank you for doing this, it can only benefit scouts and hopefully if training and support improve then more volunteers will stay longer, and programs will be fun and kids will stay and bring friends...”

We really appreciated this feedback and were very pleased to give the volunteers at Scouts the opportunity to share their views with us and with Scouts!

Summary of survey results

Ultimately, the goals of this research are to understand what keeps you and other volunteers at Scouts engaged in your volunteering role(s) and to learn how some things could be improved in Scouts to better satisfy your needs and sustain your interests. To explain how this process precisely works, we framed our research in a model, which is shown in the figure below:



In words, the model proposes that **highly motivated volunteers** tend to **thrive** in their volunteering roles, **identify** strongly with Scouts, and **plan to remain** in their volunteering roles for longer. **Volunteer motivation** is best sustained by ensuring that volunteers’ **psychological needs are being satisfied** by their volunteering experiences in Scouts. **Need satisfaction** can be achieved by ensuring volunteers **fit well with the environment** created by Scouts, and by ensuring leadership in Scouts groups **empowers the volunteers**. Of course, every individual is unique, so our model also includes **volunteer characteristics** which we consider in relation to **volunteer-Scouts fit**.

Fit and Empowering leadership leading to Psychological need satisfaction

Altogether, the survey results and interviews provided strong support for the proposed model. On the average, volunteers perceived a moderate to high fit between themselves and Scouts, which is good but still allows room for improvement. This fit led to the volunteers feeling as if their psychological needs were being satisfied; they felt more competent, autonomous, and related in their volunteering activities. Furthermore, we found that volunteers' psychological needs were also satisfied when group leaders were empowering. Empowering Group Leaders especially improved feelings of autonomy. Altogether, the results indeed indicate that **volunteer-Scouts fit** and **empowering leadership** satisfy the **psychological needs** of volunteers.

Psychological need satisfaction leading to Motivation

Volunteers whose psychological needs are satisfied feel competent, autonomous, and related to others during volunteering activities. This need satisfaction is important to sustain motivation in many settings, but it is especially important in volunteering. The feeling of competence refers to the sense of being capable of performing the volunteering work effectively. The feeling of autonomy refers to the sense of being able to make decisions and having choice in how to undertake volunteering work. Finally, the feeling of relatedness refers to the sense of feeling connected and having meaningful relationships with others while volunteering. The survey results indeed confirmed that when a volunteer's **psychological needs** are satisfied during their volunteering, they are typically also highly **motivated** for volunteering; that is, they would describe the volunteering as interesting, personally valuable, and fun. This type of motivation is usually very sustainable over time, most often leads to high quality work, and can expect to make volunteers feel satisfied with their volunteering work and want to continue doing it.

Overall, the volunteers who completed the survey indicated that their psychological needs were moderately to highly satisfied in Scouts, indicating good potential for motivation. Indeed, we found that most volunteers reported that their motivation to volunteer at Scouts was based on interests, values, and fun. In other words, participants reported that they volunteer because they enjoy it and feel that they are doing something important. However, there is room for improvement in the motivation of the volunteers, especially because less tenured Leaders of Youth reported lower motivation. At this point it is important to once more note that more tenured volunteers are over-represented in the survey participants. As such, it is likely that the average motivation as Scouts might be less good than the survey results suggest.

Motivation leading to Intentions to stay and Volunteer thriving

Altogether, these results suggest that Leaders who are less motivated by fun, interests and personal values eventually leave Scouts. These findings further emphasise the vital role of **motivation** in **maintaining volunteers** at Scouts. Since we were very interested to learn about why volunteers consider leaving Scouts, we asked all participants “If there have been instances in which you considered leaving Scouts, what were your primary reasons?” The most frequent reasons fell around four themes:

- 1) Other obligations and not enough time

“Heavy commitment to the several roles held and the feeling that I am not fulfilling my role obligations. I also have family commitments...”

- 2) Conflict with other volunteers/parents and underappreciation

“Bullying & harassment. Feeling unappreciated & unvalued. Excluded & worthless.”

- 3) Different expectations (often referring to the administrative workload)

“Too much time spent on paperwork and too much politics at branch”

- 4) Lack of support

“Lack of support from my Group Leader and other Leaders”

Finally, we observed that the volunteers’ **motivation** saw them **thrive** in their volunteer work (i.e. they feel energised by volunteering and that they are learning/growing). While many volunteers reported that they thrived in their current volunteering role, we found that there was some room for improvement in this area; evidently some volunteers were feeling less energised. Finally, most participants were likely to recommend Scouts to others, expected to be volunteering for Scouts in two years, and wanted to stay.

Moving to stage 2 – Implications and Proposed interventions

One of the purposes of the present survey was to assess the feasibility of and need for three proposed changes to Scouts practices and strategies: (1) Changes in the way training is delivered to new volunteers, (2) Introduction of small knowledge sharing groups called communities of practice, and (3) Changes in recruitment strategies. Based on the findings in the present survey we conclude that the first two proposed changes can provide improvements to the Scouting experience. Furthermore, based on an interview study that is not included in this summary¹, we also conclude that changes to the recruitment strategies are highly recommended.

The aim of these three proposed changes is to improve volunteers' fit with Scouts, satisfy their psychological needs and, subsequently, improve motivation of Scouts Volunteers. According to the model that we have now found evidence for, these improvements should then ultimately improve thriving and retention of Scouts Leaders.

Improving training

The first proposed change is to improve the training experience of new volunteers in Scouts. The survey included a number of questions about how the participants had experienced the training. We received mixed responses, but on the average Scout volunteers indicated that they did not enjoy the online component as much as the face-to-face component of the training. Moreover, participants indicated that both components can be improved. In regards to the mixed training evaluations, volunteers differed widely in their evaluations of e-learning. Some volunteers very much like e-learning and see it as a great way to facilitate their own schedule and not travel great distances. Other volunteers are very negative about e-learning and would like it to be removed from the training program altogether. Volunteers also voiced mixed opinions on the quality of the training weekends. Some think these weekends are a great experience and value the networking opportunity. Others think the quality is severely lacking, referring to rigid trainers and programs that do not take individual needs into consideration. Finally, many regard training as a chore and not as a free opportunity for personal development. There may be room for improvement here, Scouts makes large financial investment in training Leaders that could also be considered an extra benefit or perhaps even a gift.

¹ The results of this study were part of a placement study that took place in June 2016 called "The Recruitment of Section Leaders in Scouts." The placement student interviewed 78 Scouts Adult Leaders and staff about recruitment practices in Scouts SA, Scouts Tasmania, Scouts Victoria and Scouts WA.

The mixed training evaluations clearly indicate room for improvement. The overall evaluations of the online training seem to be most negative. Participants seemed to greatly appreciate the socialisation during field training that is lacking during the online training. As mentioned above, there is a clear desire to build social relations and a network within Scouts during training. Training could emphasise bonding between new recruits who can then continue to support each other after the training concludes. This seems especially important because some Leaders indicated that they had considered leaving due to a lack of support from others. Improving socialisation during training will allow new Leaders to build a social network that they can reach out to in times of need.

Finally, the current training program is the same for all participants and does not allow any room for customisation based on volunteers' prior knowledge. This ignores the wide diversity of individuals joining Scouts as leaders. Customising the training into essential parts and parts that individuals can be exempt from could shorten the training for a number of new Leaders. In determining changes to the training programs over the next year, the research team will work closely with the Youth Program Review and Training team to ensure training content and procedures are well adapted to changes in Youth Programmes.

Introducing knowledge sharing groups

The second proposed change is to implement Communities of Practice, small groups that develop and share knowledge on specific topics through regular meetings. These topics can vary widely, for example a group could be focussed on "running activities with disabled children" or "how to effectively use social media in a Scouts Group". The primary aim of these Communities of Practice is to allow Leaders to develop best practices on a topic they struggle with together with a group of likeminded Scout volunteers. Communities of Practice will thus support its members on a challenging issue and develop content to support other members. As a side product, these groups also improve member involvement and embeddedness.

Around 50% of the survey participants indicated to be keen to share knowledge and experiences between Scouts groups. This means that enough Scout Leaders are interested in joining communities of practice to warrant their creation. Furthermore, the volunteers indicated that these meetings would have to be efficient and not too time consuming. Now that we have established that Communities of Practice would suit a need of a large group of volunteers and what the greatest barriers are, we will proceed to develop an appropriate form for Communities of Practice in Scouts and trial a few pilot groups in 2017 and 2018. We will continuously evaluate group member opinions throughout these trials.

Improving recruitment

The third proposed change is on recruitment strategies and materials. The survey results emphasise that one of the main reasons to consider leaving Scouts is incorrect expectations when commencing as a Leader. This finding highlights the importance of giving accurate role previews during recruitment and finding people who feel attracted to the specific role of being a Scouts volunteer. As the research model shows, volunteers are more likely to stay and thrive in Scouts if they fit in the organisation. Therefore, we propose a targeted recruitment strategy that accurately describes the role of a Scouts Leader and attracts volunteers who will fit well in that role and, as such, improve future Leaders' intentions to stay with Scouts.

A large part of this proposed recruitment strategy is to revise the recruitment materials that are available to Scouts (Group) Leaders and to instruct Scout Leaders on how to identify people who will fit in Scouts. In a separate study, we interviewed 78 Scout Leaders across four branches with regards to their recruitment experiences and needs. Firstly, this interview study showed that information on recruitment is currently very spread out. A new leader of adults would currently have to sit through hours of online training and read through the 262 pages of three documents to be certain that they covered every piece of recruitment information available to them. As a result, most volunteers make no use of the materials or methods available to them when recruiting new members, even if they are aware of the existence of these materials and methods. Based on these observations it seems prudent to provide leaders with accessible and acceptable recruitment materials and strategies and with appropriate training on how to use them. New recruitment materials and procedures will be developed and trialled in 2017.



We would like to thank all who completed the survey. Your opinion was very valuable and helped us to identify critical points for improvement.

Thank you!

For more information visit <http://uwascoutsresearch.com>