



Victoria Emergency Service Association

Organizational Review 2006

(Sample extract only)

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Executive summary

The Victoria Emergency Service Association (VESA) commissioned an organization review during late 2005. The catalysts for the review were the recent reconstitution of the Victoria State Emergency Service (VICSES) as a statutory authority, and the desire for VESA to remain an effective and relevant volunteer advocate.

Terms of reference

The terms of reference for the review were far reaching:

- what is the role of the Association?
- how does the Association communicate with the new VICSES Chief Executive Officer?
- how does the Association communicate with its membership?
- how does the Association communicate with the VICSES Board members?
- how does the membership communicate with its Association?

This review seeks to answer these five questions.

Review methodology

The review involved extensive volunteer consultation (across all tiers of the Association), external stakeholder consultation, and a comprehensive environmental survey.

The outcomes of each stage were significant, largely due to the constructive frankness and honest good will of respondents.

Premise

The review was based on the premise that 'all options were on the table'. That is, this was a 'warts and all' review, and that all alternatives, including winding up the Association would be objectively considered.

The key driver of the review was to find the best way to advocate for VICSES volunteers. Then as a secondary issue, consider the future role of VESA and recommend an appropriate organisation structure.

Recommendations

The recommendations in the report are broad and are summarised on the following pages.

By way of précis; this report recommends:

- creating an eight member VESA Board of Directors, (including one independent director with skills in good governance, customer service, or corporate planning.)
- appointing a part-time Executive Officer with high level management skills to run the day to day affairs of the Association
- establishing a regular series of meetings with VICSES (both at operational and leadership levels) to ensure clear and effective communication and issue resolution
- the adoption of an effective communication strategy
- placing a greater emphasis on prudent financial management, corporate planning, and the development of the next generation of VICSES volunteers.

Conclusion

VESA is to be commended for being robust enough to commission an independent organisational review. It was a courageous decision and one which will bear many positive outcomes – for VESA and VICSES volunteers alike.

The Association has a committed leadership, a community focussed membership, and the tools necessary to plan for an effective and relevant future.

Terms of Reference

The Terms of Reference for this organisational review were derived from the report by the (then) president of the Victoria Emergency Service Association (VESA), Mr Laurie Russell, to the Association's State Council on 19 August 2005.

In that report, Mr Russell outlined the broad and significant changes to occur within the VICSES and addressed the multiple drivers for change facing the Association.

He also posed five critical questions:

Given the newly reconstituted VICSES Statutory Authority:

1. *what is the role of the Association?*
2. *how does the Association communicate with the new VICSES Chief Executive Officer?*
3. *how does the Association communicate with its membership?*
4. *how does the Association communicate with the VICSES Board members?*
5. *how does the membership communicate with its Association?*

This organisation review seeks to answer these important questions.

Review methodology

The review has been completed in four discrete stages encompassing input from all key stakeholders.

Internal stakeholder consultation

Being a membership based organisation, particular emphasis has been placed on internal stakeholder consultation.

The intention was to capture as much diverse input as possible from across the spectrum of VICSES volunteers. To achieve this:

- 'face to face' or telephone interviews were conducted with VESA State Councillors from all regions
- 'face to face' or telephone interviews were conducted with every VESA Committee of Management member
- a comprehensive questionnaire (Attachment 1) was sent to every VICSES Unit to be completed individually and confidentially by three members from that Unit.
- a telephone interview was conducted with VESA Chaplains, Jean and Walter Smart
- an email address (vesafeedback@pobox.com) was established for further volunteer comment.

External stakeholder consultation

As the Association's principal external stakeholder and operational partner, VICSES was expressly targeted for thorough stakeholder consultation.

Key VICSES officers targeted for consultation included:

- an interview with (then) Acting Director VICSES, Mr Craig Lapsley (Mr Lapsley was on secondment to VICSES from his role as Deputy Chief Fire Officer with the Country Fire Authority.)
- telephone interviews conducted with VICSES Regional Managers, Mr Mark Keily (North west region), Mr Graham Poulton (Central region), and Mr Keith O'Brien (North east region).
- a telephone interview with (then Elect) VICSES Chief Executive Officer, Ms Mary Barry.

Environmental survey

An environmental survey is an essential component of an organisational review, as it forces one's mind to consider wider external influences upon the organisation; and perhaps most importantly, allows the organisation to gain from the valuable experiences of other similar membership based emergency service organisations.

The main components of the environmental survey comprised:

- a telephone interview with Ms Wendy Shirley, Executive Officer of the South Australian Urban Fire Brigades Association
- a telephone interview with Mr Derren Halleday, Executive Officer of the South Australian State Emergency Service Volunteers Association
- a telephone interview with Captain Hans van Hamond AFSM, President Victorian Urban Fire Brigades Association
- consultation with the Municipal Association of Victoria, which is the peak body for Victorian local governments.

Further valuable information was gained from numerous annual reports and corporate plans of kindred organisations, and their respective internet sites.

Preliminary draft report

A preliminary version of this report was then released on a confidential basis for final feedback from the senior officers of the Association and VICSES.

Consultation acknowledgements

It is important to acknowledge all those who participated in interviews and /or completed survey questions. The resulting data was extremely informative and has guided the recommendations in this report.

A special thank you is made to:

- Mr Craig Lapsley, (then) Acting Director VICSES, for so freely assisting the review
- Mr Laurie Russell, immediate VESA Past President and current VICSES Board member, and Mr Denis Purcell, Association Secretary, who each made themselves readily available to provide much needed insights into VESA and VICSES operational procedures and practices
- to all those who participated in telephone interviews (With each telephone interview ranging from 50 to 100 minutes, their frank, constructive input, and readiness to 'stay on the line', was very much appreciated.)
- to those who took the time and gave the considered thought to complete the four page questionnaire.

The passion and commitment of interviewees and respondents was truly remarkable. For whilst almost every individual expressed strongly divergent views on the ails, strengths and future of VESA, and many offered diametrically opposed recommendations, all respondents were:

- stridently positive about the role of VESA as a volunteer association
- positive that much would be achieved by working together
- committed to continuing a valuable and essential voluntary community service.

VICSES as a driver for change

Until late 2005, VICSES was constituted as one of multiple business units within the Victorian Government's Department of Justice.

Department of Justice business unit

Whilst in the government department environment, VICSES was forced to compete with other business units for funding and resources, with the result that VICSES was often under funded and insufficiently resourced.

In many aspects, VICSES was perceived as the poorer cousin to Victoria's other essential services (most notably the Country Fire Authority) because, being constituted as a business unit within the Department of Justice, it had neither the political pull nor bureaucratic gravitas, to gain funding commensurate with its emergency service counterparts.

It was in this environment that VESA was formed in 1983, principally to fill the much needed role of:

- lobbying for increased funding for VICSES volunteers
- seeking funding for essential VICSES equipment
- heightening awareness of volunteers within the Victorian emergency service network
- advocating on behalf on VICSES volunteers in an under-resourced VICSES.

Independent statutory authority

In part to remedy this long-term malaise, the Victorian Government took the commendable initiative in 2005 to formally reconstitute VICSES as an independent statutory authority via the *Victoria State Emergency Service Act*.

This has changed the VICSES and VESA landscape dramatically.

For VICSES will now:

- be an independent statutory authority with an independent voice
- comprise a Board of Directors selected on a range of criteria including an 'understanding of volunteer issues'
- be led by a Chief Executive Officer responsible for the effectiveness of the organisation
- have direct access to the Government of the day via a responsible Minister
- no longer be lost within the mire of bureaucratic budgets and agendas, associated with any large government department.

For VESA, it will create

- a receptive voice for volunteers' interests at the highest level of VICSES
- an environment in which issues which would previously have been considered at length by the VESA State Council and VESA Committee of Management, may be resolved more expeditiously via an accessible VICSES Board.

Implications for the VESA organisation review

Critically, the recommendations contained within this organizational review are based on the assessment that VESA will have a greater ability to influence a more receptive VICSES statutory authority, via the recently appointed VICSES board and VICSES Chief Executive Officer.

Premise of organisational review

This organisational review has been based on five key premises.

These are:

- all options are 'on the table', including the potential winding up of the Association if volunteers can be better represented by some other means
- form must follow function (That is, the Association's organisational structure should be determined after determining what the Association seeks to achieve.)
- all report recommendations must be practical and achievable
- outcomes must be financially sustainable
- change for its own sake serves no purpose.