

EMERGENCY RELIEF VICTORIA SURVEY



REPORT

Report prepared by Andrew Wilson,
ERV Capacity Building Project 2006

Acknowledgements

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Commissioned by the ERV Executive.

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Introduction

This report presents the findings of the Emergency Relief Victoria (ERV) survey 2006. The aim of the survey was to provide the ERV Network with information to assist in the design and implementation of an emergency relief (ER) sector peak body. In particular, the survey was designed to determine:

- The level of interest in an emergency relief peak body from ER organisations;
- Potential sources of funding for a peak body;
- Which functions of a peak are deemed important to ER organisations;
- Which online resources ER organisations consider useful; and
- Demographic information about ER organisations that may assist in the implementation and development of a peak body

The survey forms part of a broader project - the *ERV Capacity Building Project* – which is being conducted on behalf of the ERV Network by the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS). The project will run from November 2005 to August 2006.

Background

The ERV Network

The Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) has convened the Emergency Relief Victoria (ERV) network since 1979. Originally called the Victorian Emergency Relief Committee (VERC), the network currently represents over 150 ER providers throughout Victoria. The network plays

an important role in furthering the advocacy, research and capacity building goals of the ER sector and facilitating information exchange between its members.

It is hoped that an ER sector peak will build on the existing strengths of the ERV Network, acting as a collective voice for the ER sector.

What is a peak body?

One definition of a peak is an independent non-government body that represents the interests of a particular 'industry'¹. A peak body for the ER sector could take many forms – from a basic legal entity providing new funding and advocacy opportunities, to a more complex organisation involved in research and training, information sharing and provision, policy development, provision of resources and services to member organisations, advocating for the rights of emergency relief users, and assisting projects initiated by member organisations.

The ERV Capacity Building Project

The establishment of an ER sector peak has long been an issue of importance to the ERV Network. In 2003 the network agreed in principle to a proposal to form an independent peak body for the ER sector in Victoria. Since then significant work has been carried out toward establishing the peak. A statement of purposes and a draft constitution developed. However, the process stalled after changes within the sector rendered the constitution untenable.

¹ VCOSS 2004, 'Heads, Hearts and Hands On Emergency Relief Victoria Conference Report'

In 2005 the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) was granted funding to reinvestigate the issue, in order to determine an appropriate course of action towards either continuing the push to establish an ER sector peak or developing other ways of strengthening the ERV Network. This resulted in the *ERV Capacity Building Project*. The aims of the project are to:

- Increase understanding of the training and support needs of the ER sector
- Increase understanding of the benefits of networking, and the feasibility of developing an ER sector peak
- Improve administrative and communications systems for the ER sector
- Facilitate ER sector access to supports and services provided by the VCOSS Training and Development Clearinghouse project

It is expected that the *ERV Capacity building project* will be completed by August 2006.

Methodology

A survey comprising 13 multiple-choice and short-answer questions (see appendix) was posted or emailed to approximately 400 emergency relief providers in Victoria. This was followed one week later by an email reminding organisations of the survey and thanking those who had already participated.

Participants were contacted through membership lists of formal ER networks and organisations, and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaCSIA) ER agency

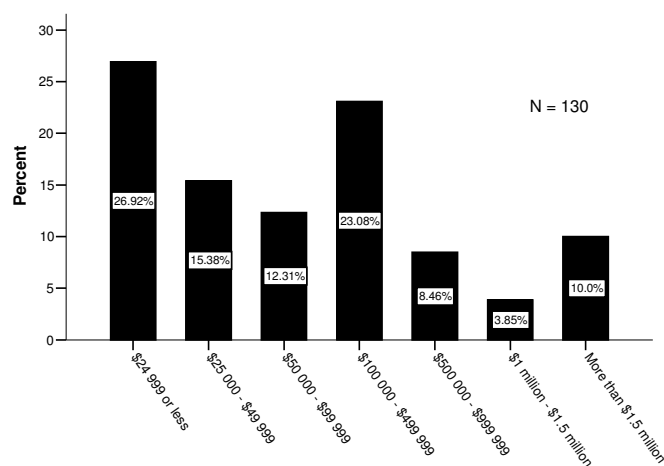
database. A total of 144 responses were received, meaning a response rate of approximately 36 per cent was achieved – a reasonable response rate given the time and staffing constraints many ER agencies are experiencing.

Results

Profile of ER Organisations Surveyed

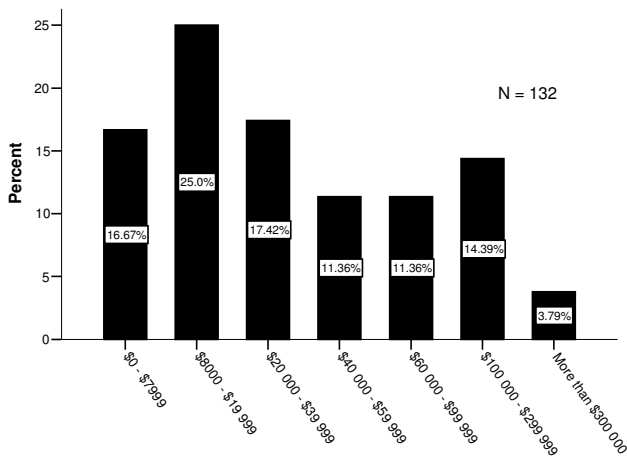
The budget of the ER organisations surveyed varied considerably. The largest group (27 per cent) had a budget of '\$24 999 or less' during the last financial year. This was closely followed by those with a budget of '\$100 000 - \$199 999' (23 per cent of the survey sample). The remaining organisations were spread across the spectrum, ranging from 4 to 15 per cent of the survey sample in each budget category.

Figure 1: Budget for organisations for the last financial year



As some organisations noted ER is just one among a range of services offered by their organisation. Therefore to give a more complete picture of the size and financial circumstances of participating organisations, information on the monetary value of ER provision was also sought.

Figure 2: Monetary value of emergency relief distributed by organisations during last financial year



As figure 2 shows the value of ER distributed by the organisations varied widely. However the value of ER provided by most organisations (59 per cent) was less than \$40 000.

When asked whether their organisation consisted mainly of volunteer or paid staff, over 52 per cent of respondents reported that their organisation relied mainly on volunteer staff. A further 8 per cent indicated that their organisation was an even mix of both volunteer and paid staff, while only 38 per cent of organisations consisted of mainly paid staff.

The survey also asked respondents to state their position within the ER organisation. It was found that the majority of respondents occupy a managerial position within their ER organisation (71 per cent), and are thus well placed to accurately reflect the views and interests of their organisation.

Membership of Networks

Over 77 per cent of participating organisations are currently members of some form of emergency relief network. As Table 1 shows the majority of these are involved in local area networks or the ERV Network.

Table 1. Number of participants by ER network/organisation membership

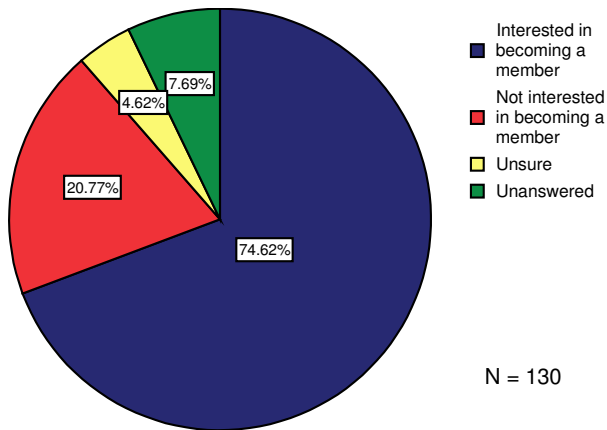
Network membership	Number of member organisations*
ER Network (e.g. ERV Network, local area networks)	97
Organisational network (e.g. Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, VicRelief and Foodbank)	38
Not a member of an ER network	30
Unsure or unanswered	9

* Note: Some organisations are members of more than one network or organisation

Interest in Peak

A significant majority (75 per cent) of the organisations surveyed are interested in becoming a member of a future ER sector peak body (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Proportion of organisations interested in becoming members of an ER sector peak body



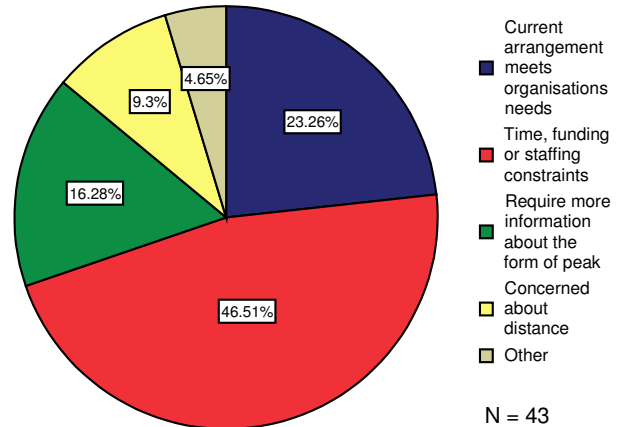
Breaking this down further, Table 2 shows the percentage of organisations interested in becoming members of an ER sector peak correlated with current network membership.

Table 2: Percentage of Organisations interested in becoming members of an ER peak body by current network membership

Network membership	Percentage interested in membership of peak
ER Network (e.g. ERV Network, local area networks)	78%
Organisational Network (e.g. Salvation Army, St Vincent de Paul, VicRelief and Foodbank)	66%
Not a member of an ER network	67%
Unsure or unanswered	44%

Figure 4 shows the reasons why some organisations are not interested in becoming a member of an ER sector peak body.

Figure 4: Reasons for not wanting to become a member of an ER sector peak body

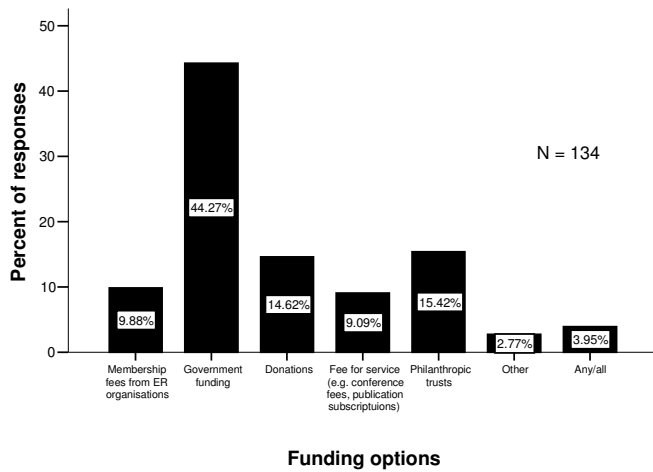


Of the organisations that are not interested in becoming a member of an ER sector peak, almost half (47 per cent) reported the reason as ‘time, funding or staffing constraints’. A further 16 per cent of organisations indicated that they required more information about the form of the peak body before deciding whether they would be interested in becoming members, while only 23 per cent believed that the current arrangements met their organisations needs. Other reasons given were the possible requirement to travel long distances and that ER is not a core business of the organisation

Funding

It is likely that funding will be an important issue influencing the structure and success of a future ER sector peak. When asked which sources of funding they thought would be best to sustain a peak body the most popular choice was ‘government funding’ (44 per cent). The second and third most popular options were ‘philanthropic trusts’ (15 per cent) and ‘donations’ (15 per cent).

Figure 5: Potential sources of funding: Respondents choices for best funding option(s)



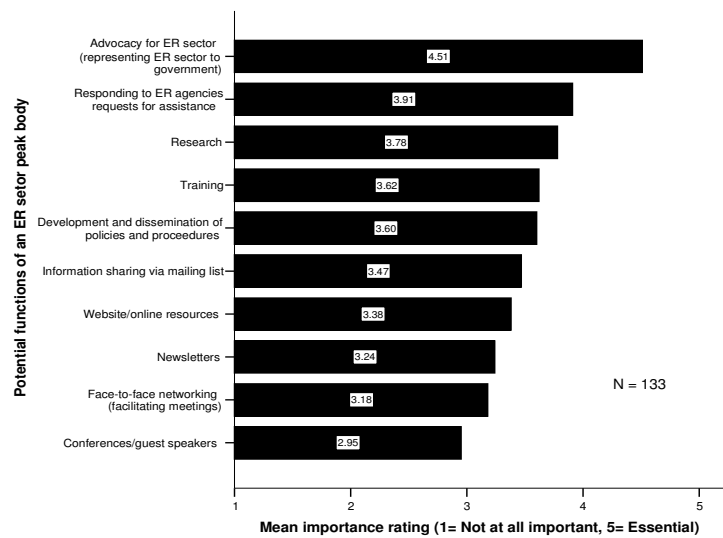
Most ER organisations are not enthusiastic about the idea of fee for service arrangements or membership fees as a source of funding, with just 9 per cent of respondents choosing ‘fee for service’ and 10 per cent choosing ‘membership fees’ as a good funding option (see figure 4).

Functions of an ER Peak Body

On a scale from one to five, where one is ‘not at all important’ and five is ‘essential’, respondents were asked to rate ten potential functions of an ER peak according to how important they believe they are for their organisation. To demonstrate the relative importance of each feature an average rating was determined. These are presented in figure 6.

The respondents rated ‘advocacy for the ER sector’ as the most important function of a potential ER sector peak, followed by ‘responding to ER agencies requests for assistance’ and ‘research’. All potential functions rated between ‘important’ and ‘essential’ except for ‘conferences/guest speakers’, which received average rating slightly less than ‘important’.

Figure 6: How ER organisations rated potential functions of an ER sector peak body



Online Resources

Most of the respondents rated ‘online resources’ as ‘important’ or ‘very important’ to their organisation. In light of this it is important to determine the potential features of an ER website which ER organisations may find useful.

As figure 7 shows all potential features of an ER website received average ratings between 3 (important) and 4 (very important). The most important features were ‘information on how to access pro bono assistance’, ‘examples of best practice policies and procedures’, and ‘useful links’.

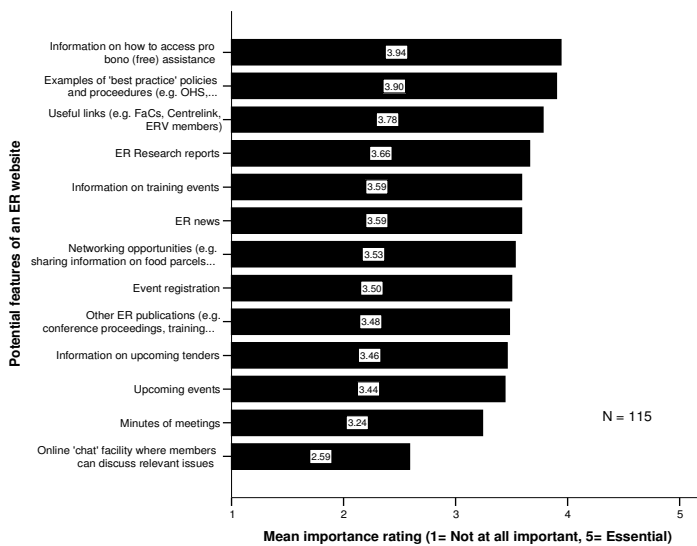
Conclusions and Recommendations

Given the considerable level of support for the idea of establishing an ER sector peak, the primary recommendation of this report is that the ERV capacity building project continue to work towards the establishment of an ER peak

When determining the form this peak may take, it is important to consider the functions that ER organisations consider most important (Figure 6) and also the constraints many organisations are under (financial, time and staffing). It is therefore recommended that membership fees be considered only as a last resort and that other sources of funding be investigated first. If membership fees are unavoidable however, it is recommended that a fee structure be developed based on both the budget (Figure 1) and monetary value of ER provision (Figure 2) of organisations.

Finally, the ERV Capacity Building Project should direct time and resources into developing an ERV website, the contents of which should reflect the interests of ER organisations as shown in Figure 7.

Figure 7: How ER organisations rated potential features of an ER website



Appendix – Cover letter and Questionnaire



EMERGENCY RELIEF VICTORIA

Dear Madam/Sir,

On behalf of the Emergency Relief Victoria (ERV) network the Victorian Council of Social Service (VCOSS) is conducting a study into the feasibility of establishing an independent peak body for the emergency relief (ER) sector in Victoria.

The first stage of the study is a short survey (see attachment), which has been designed to explore the level of interest among ER providers and to find out more about the services that ER providers would find useful. The survey consists of 13 multiple-choice and short-answer questions and should take 10 - 15 minutes to complete. Given the nature of the questions we believe that service coordinators or managers are usually best placed to complete the survey.

Please help us to strengthen the ER sector by completing the survey.

If you have any queries or would like a hard copy of the survey please contact Andrew Wilson by phone on (03) 9654 5050 or by email at andrew.wilson@vcoss.org.au

Thank you for taking the time to participate in this survey.

Yours sincerely,

Andrew Wilson

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Emergency Relief Victoria Survey

ABOUT THIS SURVEY

The aim of this survey is to explore interest in establishing an independent peak body for the emergency relief (ER) sector, and to find out more about the services that you as an ER provider would find useful.

The responses of all individuals and organisations participating in this survey will remain strictly confidential and anonymous. Information gathered in the survey will be collated into a report and made available to all participants. **No identifiable information will be used in the final report.**

The survey consists of thirteen multiple-choice and short-answer questions. For multiple-choice questions please place a cross ☒ in the box next to the answer that best expresses your organisation's position.

INFORMATION ABOUT NETWORKS

1 Is your organisation currently a member of any emergency relief networks or organisations?

Yes

If no go to question 3

No

2 If yes, which networks/organisations?

3 If no, why not?

None in local area

Not aware of any

None relevant to organisation

Don't have time

Other

(Please specify)

4 Would your organisation be interested in becoming a member of an emergency relief peak body?

Yes

If yes go to question 6

No

5 If no, why not?

6 An emergency relief peak body may require funding to operate. Which option(s) do you think would be best for generating income?

Membership fees from ER agencies

Government funding

Donations

Fee for service (e.g. conference registration fees,
publication subscriptions etc)

Philanthropic trusts

Other
(Please specify)

7 Please rank the following functions of a network or peak body according to their importance for your organisation:

Please mark only one box in each row

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Important	Very important	Essential
Training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Newsletters	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Advocacy for ER sector (representing ER sector to Government)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Responding to ER agencies requests for assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Research	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information sharing via mailing list	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Face-to-face networking (facilitating meetings)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Development and dissemination of policies and procedures	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Conferences/guest speakers	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Website/online resources	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- 8 If you rated website/online resources as 'important', 'very important' or 'essential' in the previous question, please rank each of the following features of an emergency relief website according to their importance for your organisation: *Otherwise go to question 9.*
Please mark only one box in each row

	Not at all important	Slightly important	Important	Very important	Essential
Information on training events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Online 'chat' facility where members can discuss relevant issues	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on upcoming tenders	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Upcoming events	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Event registration	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Networking opportunities (e.g. sharing information on food parcels, recipe cards)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Examples of 'best practice' policies and procedures (e.g. OHS, volunteer management, managing critical incidents)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ER news	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
ER Research reports	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Other ER Publications (e.g. conference proceedings, training manuals)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Useful links (e.g. FaCS, Centrelink, ERV members)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Information on how to access pro bono (free) assistance	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Minutes of meetings	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

ORGANISATIONAL INFORMATION

- 9 What is your position in the organisation?
- 10 Is your organisation mainly run by volunteer or paid staff?
- Mainly volunteer staff
- Mainly paid staff
- Other (please specify)

- 11** What was your budget for the last financial year (1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005)?
If you are unable to calculate your organisation's exact budget, please provide us with an estimate. Your best estimate is better than us having no data at all.

- \$24 999 or less
- \$25 000 - \$49 999
- \$50 000 - \$99 999
- \$100 000 - \$499 999
- \$500 000 - \$999 999
- \$1 million - \$1.5 million
- More than \$1.5 million

- 12** What was the approximate value in dollars of emergency relief distributed by your organisation in the last financial year (1 July 2004 to 30 June 2005)?
If you are unable to calculate the exact amount spent on emergency relief, please provide an estimate. Your best estimate is better than us having no data at all.

- \$0 - \$7999
- \$8000 - \$19 999
- \$20 000 - \$39 999
- \$40 000 - \$59 999
- \$60 000 - \$99 999
- \$100 000 - \$299 999
- \$300 000+

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

- 13** If you have any other comments you would like to make please do so here:

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey.

**Completed surveys should be returned to VCOSS by the
24th February 2006**

Email: andrew.wilson@vcoss.org.au

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Attention Andrew Wilson

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Melbourne Vic 3000