

Fire Research Report

UFBA Event Evaluation: benchmarking their impact and identifying opportunities to improve

Synovate Ltd

June 2009

This research measured the effectiveness of the Challenge series by identifying the nature of the experience and expectations of participants. The effectiveness of the challenge events in delivering a range of benefits to the New Zealand Fire Service, the brigades, and participants was also measured as well as identify opportunities to improve the delivery of benefits.

The research found that the majority of firefighters do not participate in events; rather a relatively small number of brigades contribute the majority of participants with individuals tending to participate in one event only. However participants are strong advocates of all the events, with no less than 80% indicating they would recommend participation to others.

The Challenge Events are seen to be most important in:

- Building teamwork;
- Building pride in the service; and
- Developing skills.

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UFBA Event Evaluation:

Benchmarking their impact
and identifying opportunities to
improve

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- June 2009

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Background & Objectives

Research objectives

Background:

- The UFBA hosts a range of challenge events throughout the year. These events include the Waterway Challenge, Drivers Challenge, Road Crash Rescue, and the Firefighters Combat Challenge. These challenges are in part funded by The New Zealand Fire Service. The UFBA and the NZ Fire Service wish to establish a measure of the benefits these events deliver to participants and the New Zealand Fire Service more broadly.

The objective of the research is:

- To measure the effectiveness of the challenge events in delivering a range of benefits to the New Zealand Fire Service, the brigades, and participants. It is also to identify opportunities to improve the delivery of benefits.

Specifically the research provides measures of:

- Awareness, consideration, and actual involvement across all volunteers;
- The perceived importance of the events and the extent to which benefits are derived;
- Opportunities to increase participation and positive impacts.

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Research Approach

Research approach

To meet the project objectives:

- A total of 193 conference interviews were completed, of which:
 - 115 participated in at least one challenge event;
 - 78 did not participate in any challenge events.
- All respondents were interviewed via Computer-Assisted Telephone Interviewing (CATI).
 - All interviews were conducted in-house by Synovate's call centre.
- Fieldwork was conducted between Thursday 23 April and Monday 11 May.
- The survey length was 12.5 minutes on average.
- NOTE: Respondents were classified as *non-participants* if they had not participated in an event in the last 5 years.

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Executive Summary

- *“I may get involved if I knew more about them.”*

Summary (i)

- Overall the events are well regarded by the majority of both participants and non-participants.
- The majority of firefighters do not participate in events; rather a relatively small number of brigades contribute the majority of participants. Individuals tend to participate in one event only.
- Overall awareness of the range of events is mixed, with the Drivers Challenge in particular being less known.

Summary (ii)

- Participants are strong advocates of all the events, with no less than 80% indicating they would recommend participation to others.
- Events are seen to be most important in:
 - Building teamwork;
 - Building pride in the service; and
 - Developing skills.
- They are seen as less important in relation to encouraging volunteer recruitment.
- Overall the Firefighter Challenge is seen as important, though slightly less important to brigades overall at 80% compared to the other events.



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Summary (iii)

- Generally non-participants do not see the events as important to themselves or their brigades. However, they do acknowledge that the events deliver a range of benefits to participants and the firefighter community, and would recommend the events to others. Furthermore, around 60% expressed an interest in participating in future events. This demonstrates there is some potential to increase the numbers of participants in all events.
- Non-participants are more likely to get involved if:
 - They were more aware of the events, what is required, and how they can get involved.
 - The events were more flexible and catered more for regional brigades in terms of timing and location.
- Interestingly non-participants are also less likely to be involved in sporting-related activities outside of firefighting than those who participate (15% versus 46%). This suggests that involvement in other sporting activity is not a barrier; rather it is an indicator of potential interest in the UFBA events.

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Detailed Findings



Participation & awareness of challenge events

The majority of firefighters do not participate in events.

Involvement is centred around brigades.

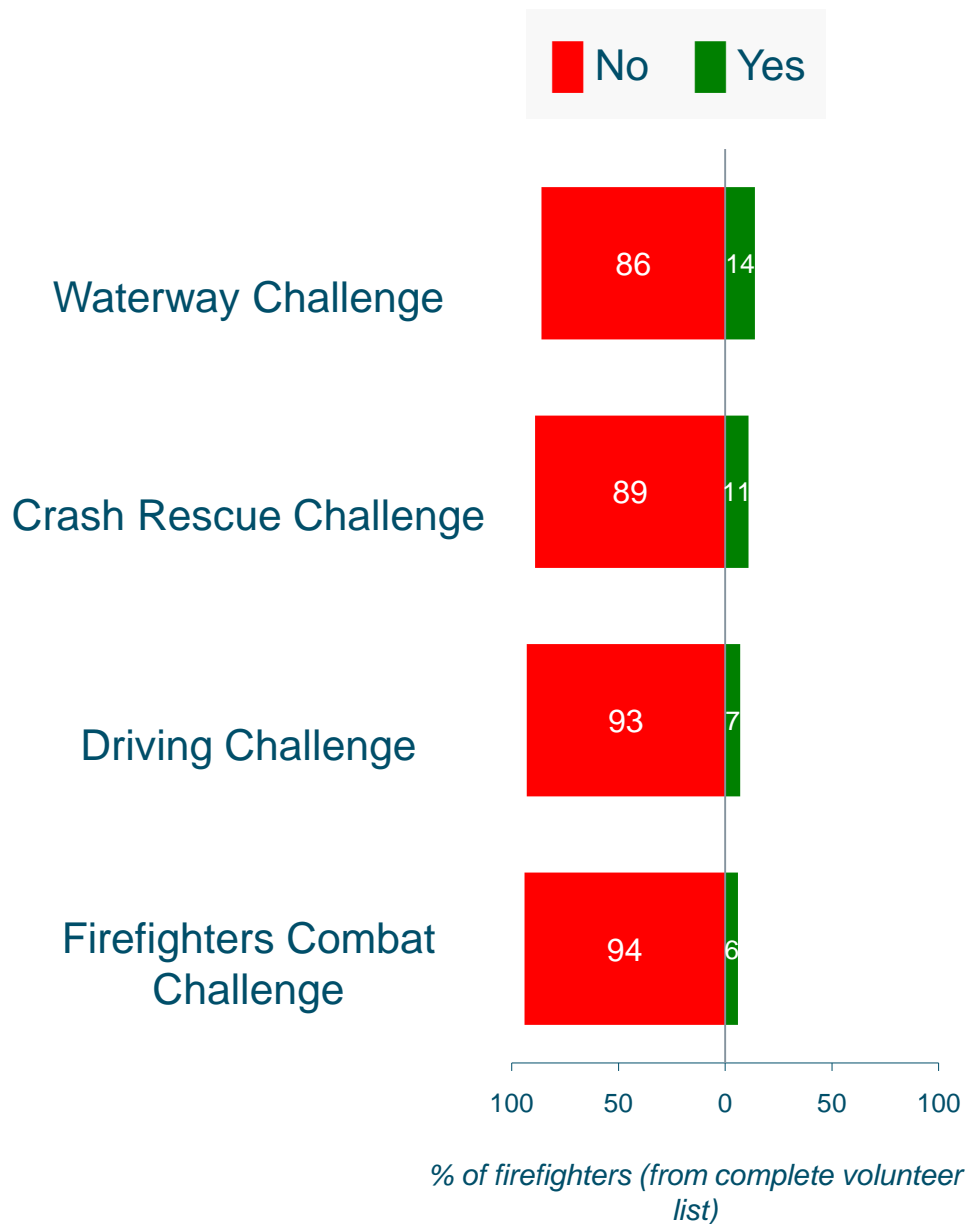
Those who do typically perform in one only.

There is an opportunity to raise awareness of some events (especially Drivers Challenge)



Participation rates

Q3b Have you participated in this event in the last five years?



A minority of firefighters have participated in events in the last 5 years.



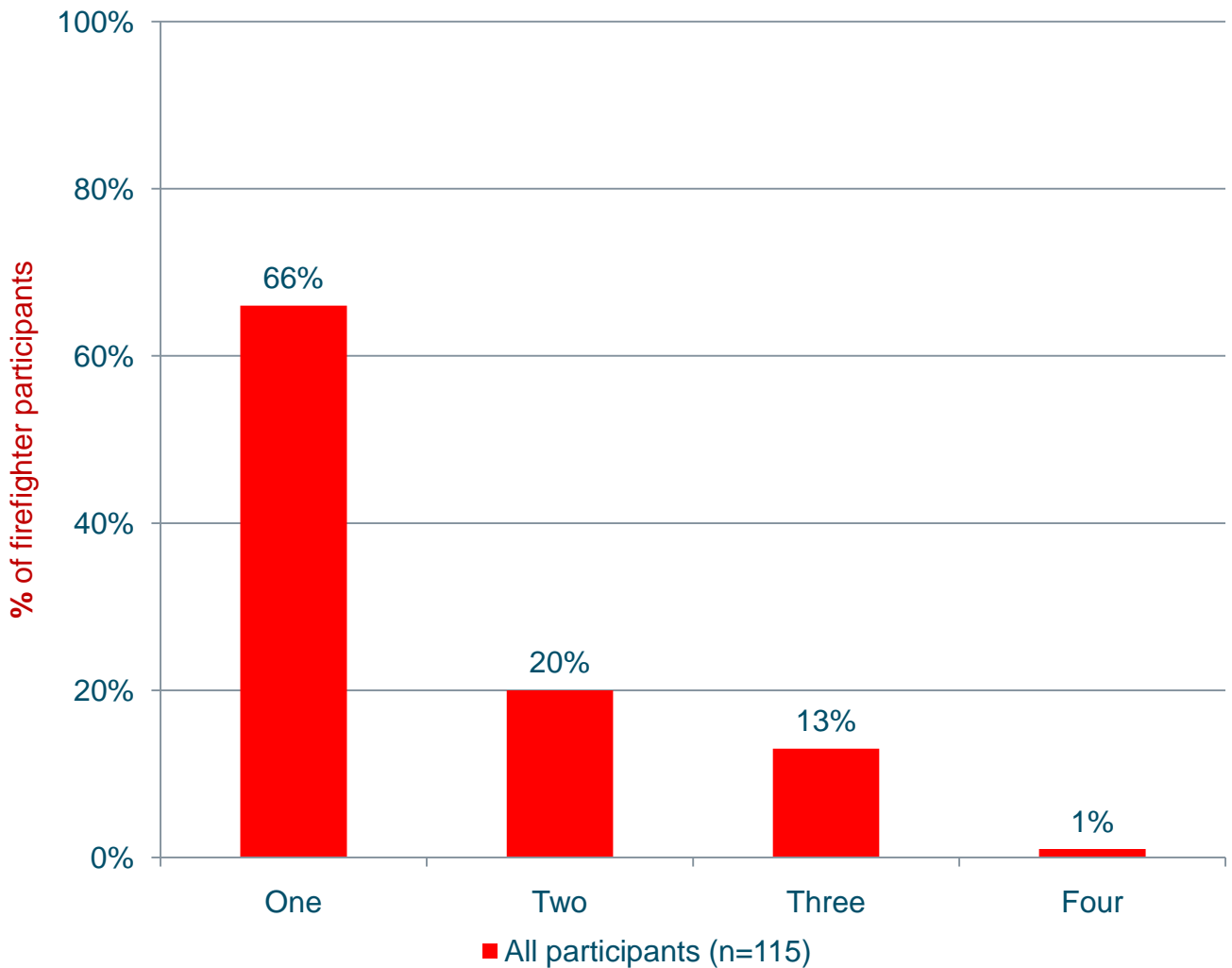
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Number of events participated in

* **Data is based on Q3b** Have you participated in this event in the last five years?

Number of events participants have been involved in

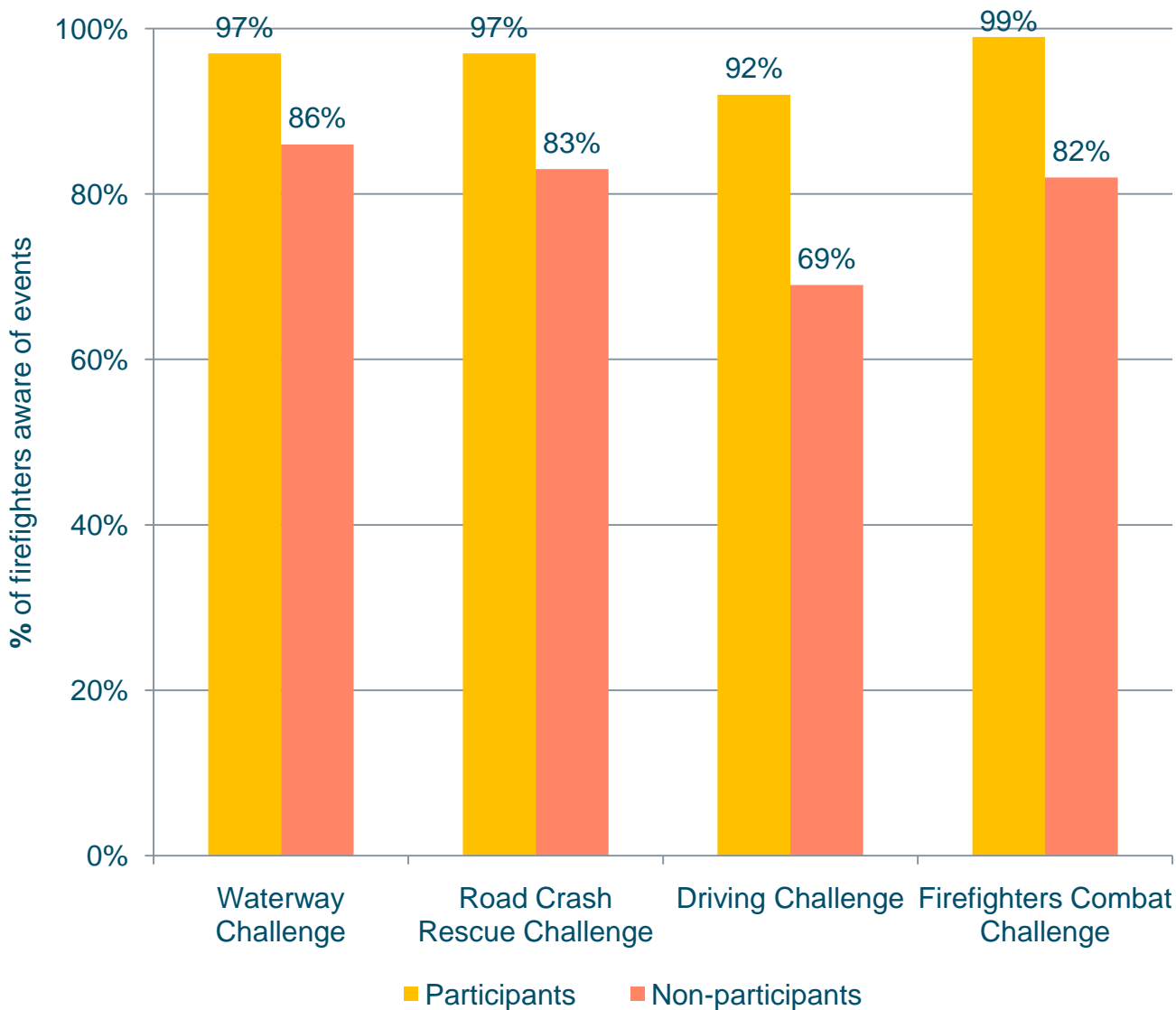


Most of those who participate do so in one event only.



Awareness of events

Q3a Are you aware of the following events?



There is an opportunity to raise the overall awareness of the events amongst non-participants.
Over 30% had not heard of the Driver Challenge.

Perceived importance of events

Non-participants do not see the events as important to themselves or their brigades.

However, over 60% indicated an interest in participating in an event in the future.

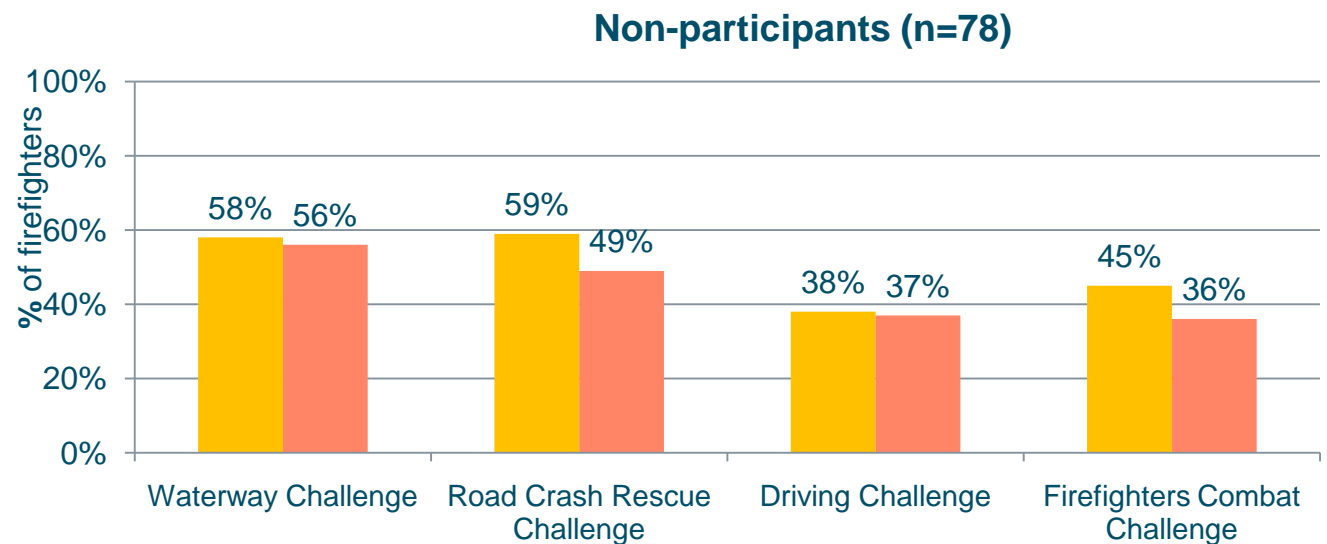
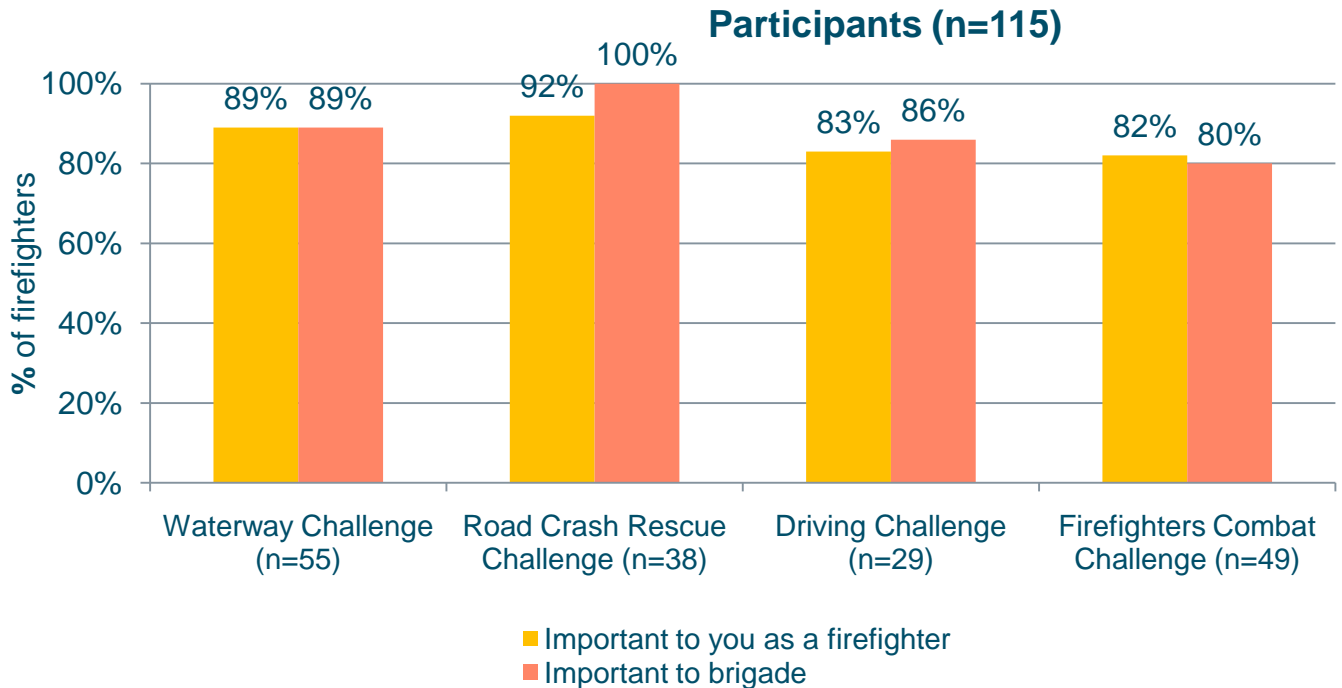
And they, along with participants, do acknowledge a range of benefits for participants and the firefighter community, and would recommend the events to others...

Perceived importance – By event



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Q8b Which event or events are important to you as a firefighter? / **Q8d**
Which event or events are important to your brigade?



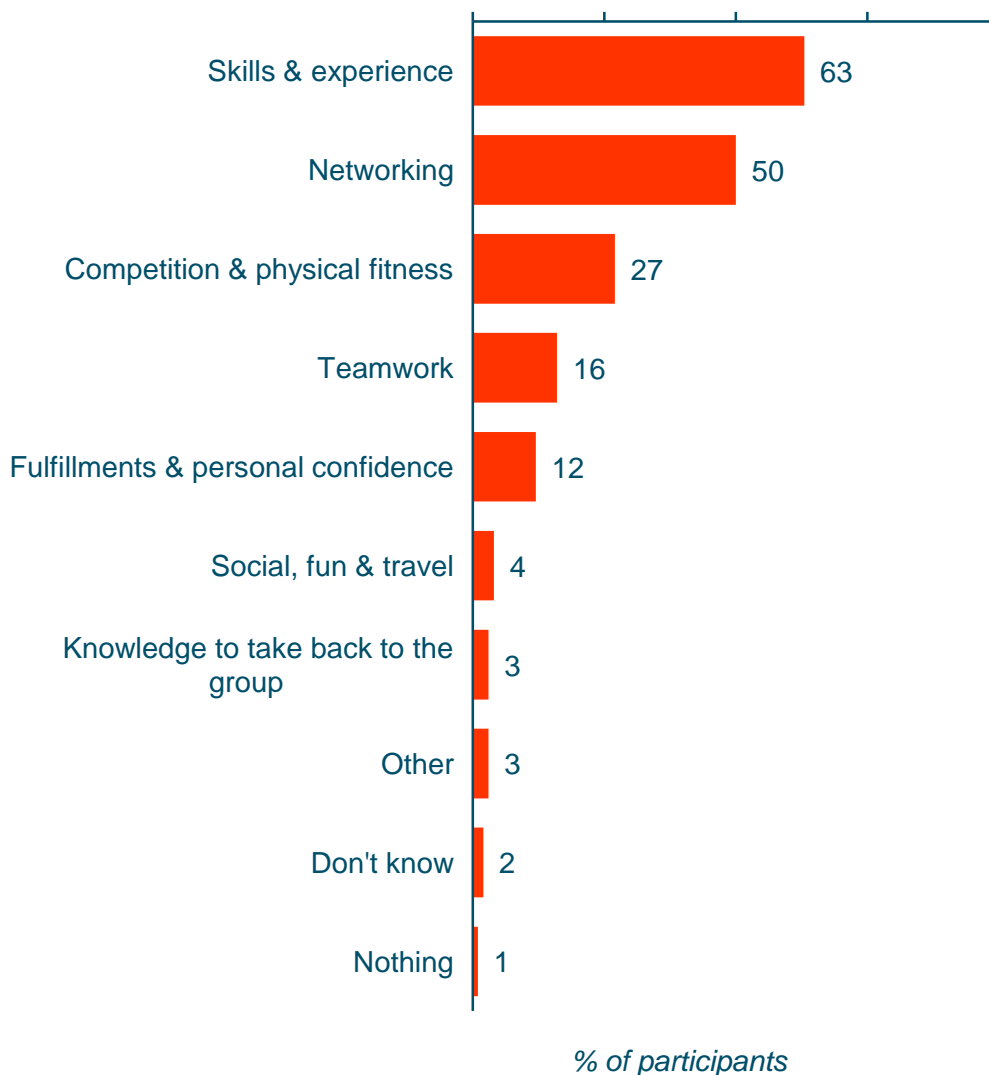
The vast majority of participants believe the events are important to themselves and their brigades.

Overall, the Firefighter Challenge, while important to the majority, has less support in terms of being important than other events. Significantly fewer non-participants believe the events are important. However, Waterway Challenge and Road Crash have some support, with over half believing it to be important to themselves or their brigades.



Perceived benefits – Participants

Q5a Overall what would you say are the benefits that you derive from having participated in these UFBA challenge events personally?



When asked to describe the key benefits, the majority of participants believe the events improve their skills and provide firefighting experience. Building networks within the firefighting community and gaining fitness are also seen as benefits.

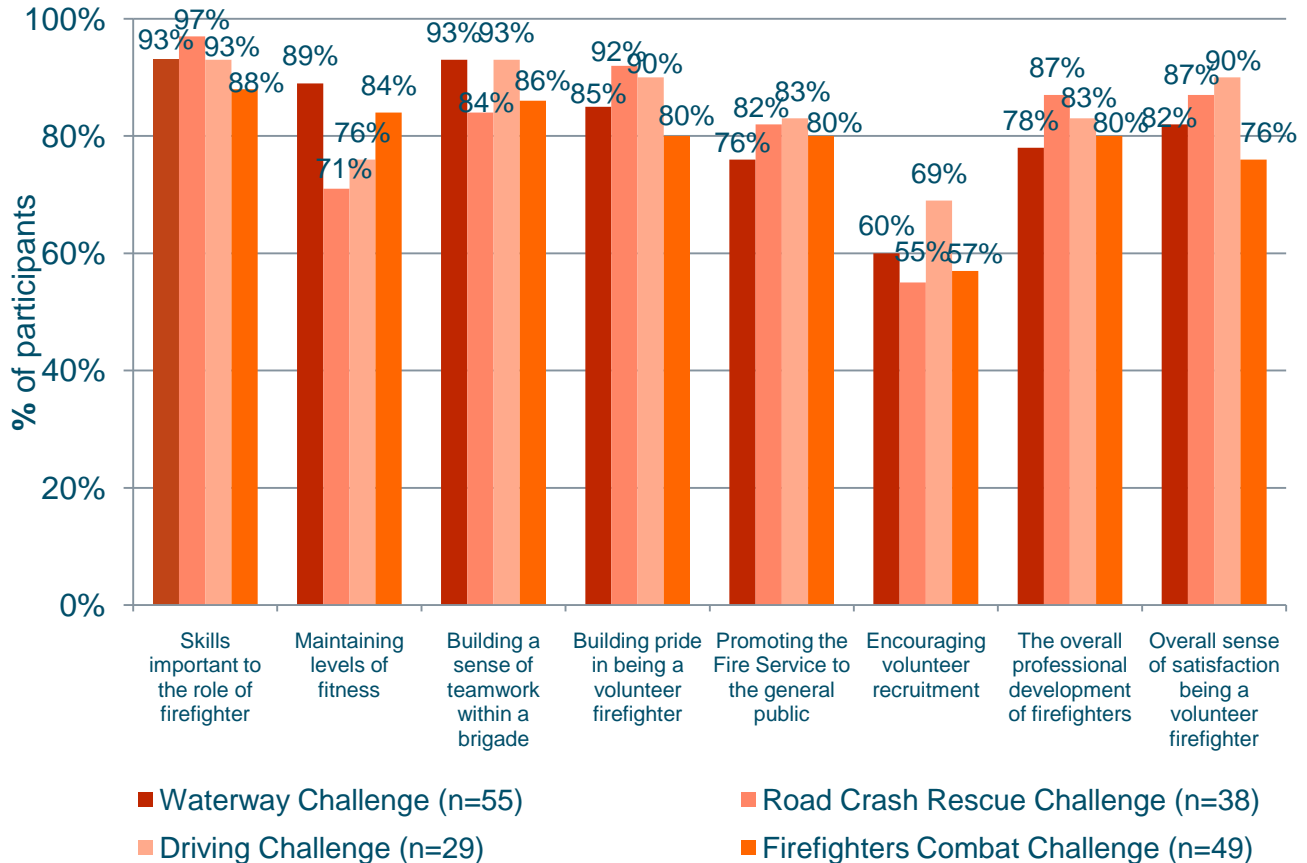


Perceived importance – By event synovate

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Q7 Now thinking about the importance of various aspects of the UFBA challenge events, how important are the challenges in terms of...?

Top-two box ratings of those who participated in the events

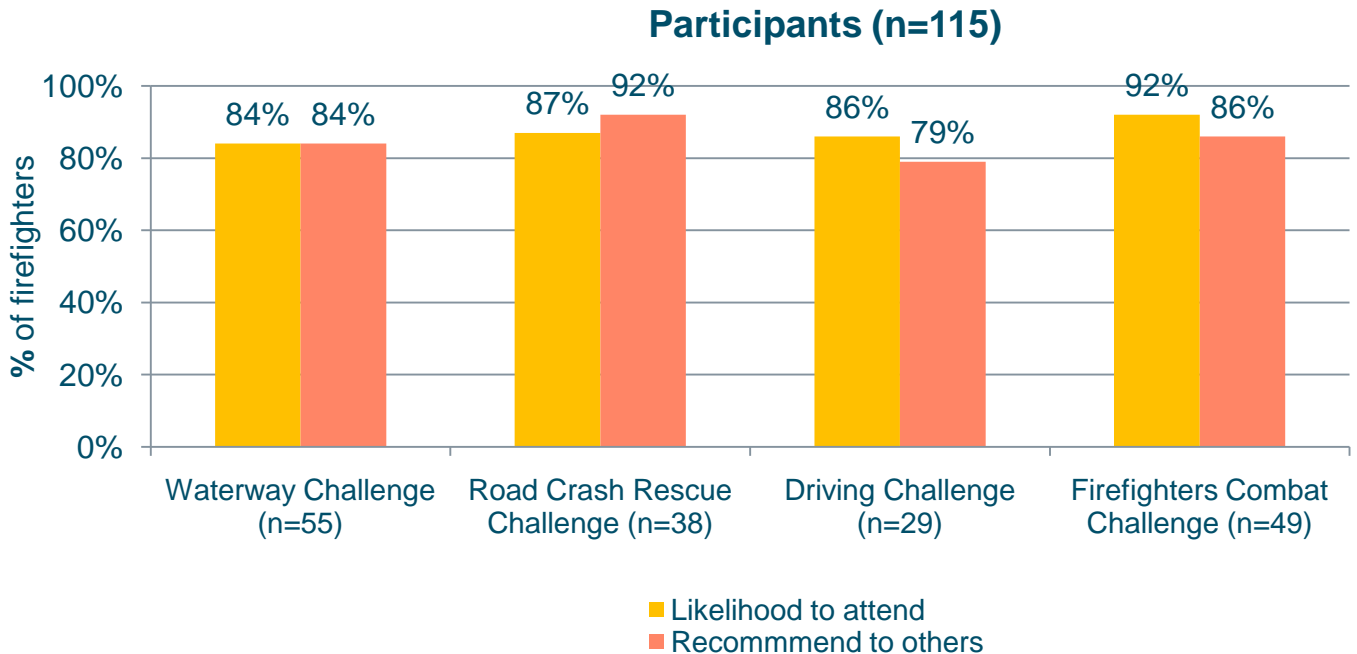


* Top-two box consists of 'important' or 'very important' scores

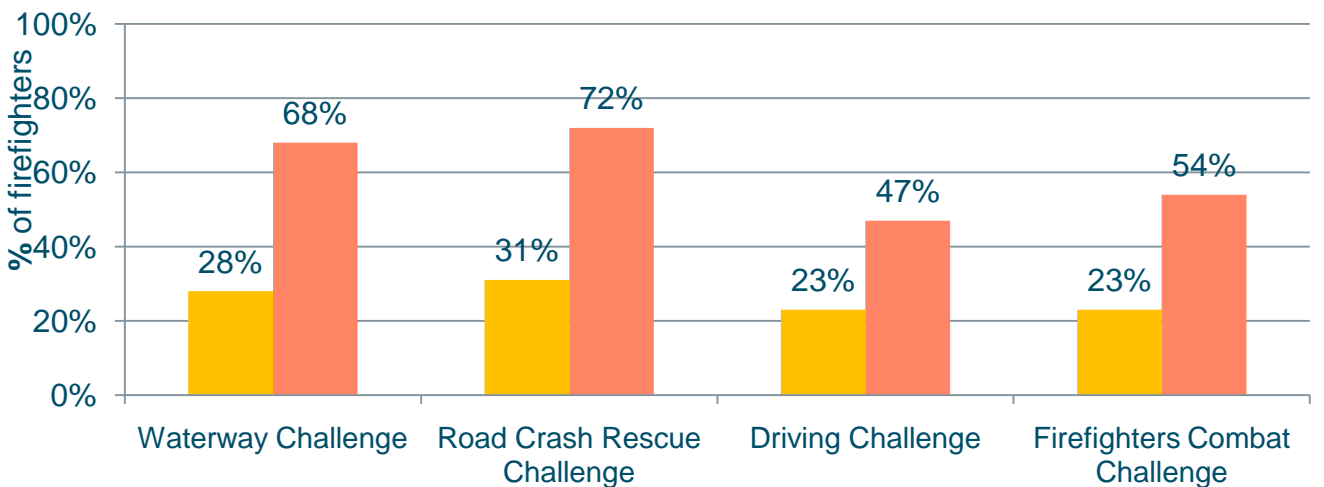
Those who participated in Combat Challenge events are more likely to feel 'maintaining fitness' is important or very important, while they are less likely to feel 'building pride in being a volunteer firefighter' and 'overall satisfaction being a volunteer firefighter' are important.

Likelihood to participate and recommend

Q8a Which event or events are you likely to participate in the future? / **Q8c** Which event or events would you recommend to others?



Non-participants (n=78)

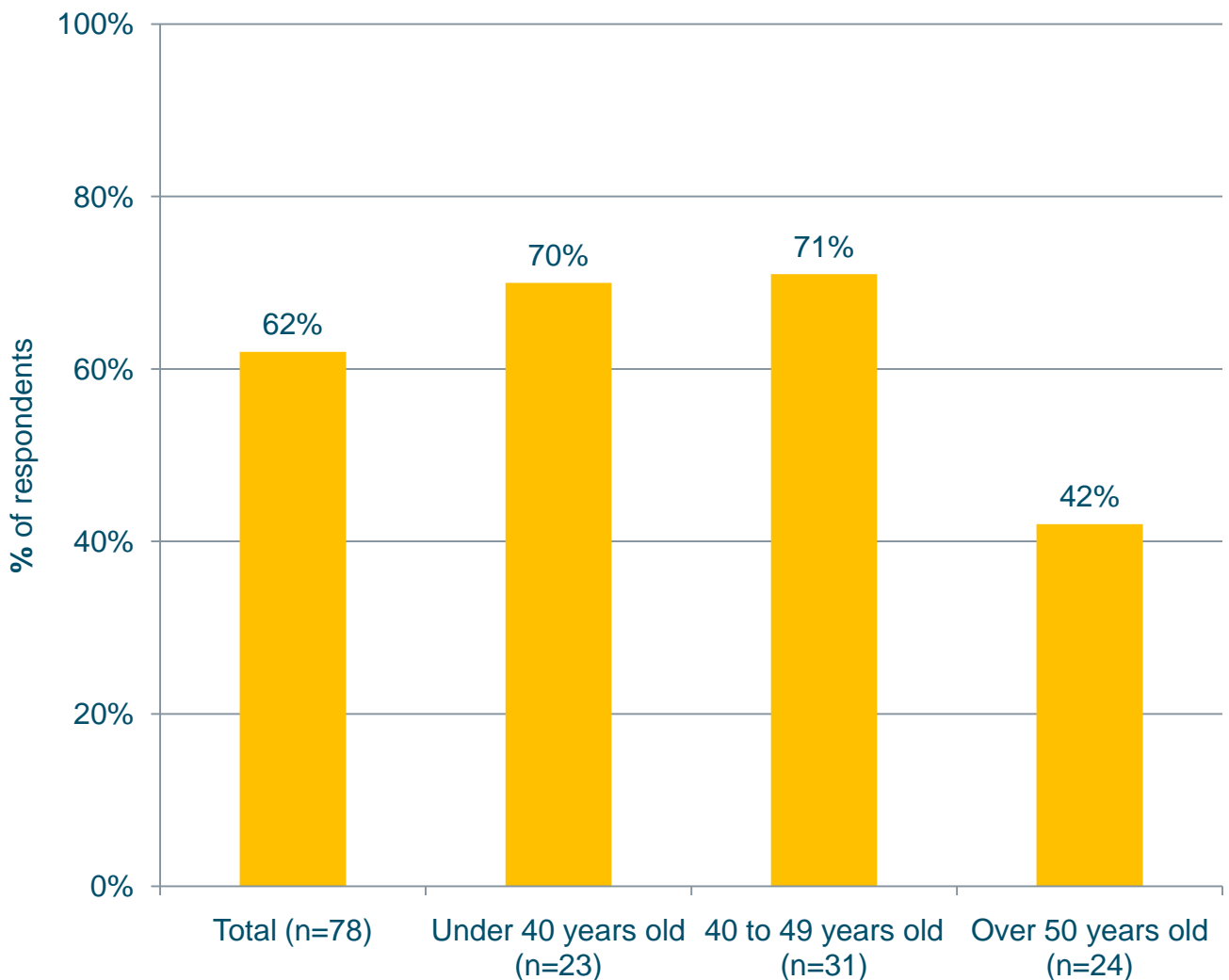


Further evidence of the strong support the events have within the participant base is that most would participate again and most would recommend participation to others. Non-participants again show their support for the events, with the majority recommending three out of the four events to others. The low levels of awareness of the Drivers Challenge are likely contributing to the low advocacy of this event. Encouragingly many non-participants are likely to participate in future events.

Likelihood to participate in any event – By age

Q8a Which event or events are you likely to participate in the future?

Likelihood to participate any event by age



Over 60% of non-participants indicate a likelihood to participate in any of the four events in the future.

Those aged below 50 years old are more likely to have an interest in participating in future events.



Event perceptions: Overall

Overall the events are well regarded.

Minor issues exist around rules and time required to participate.

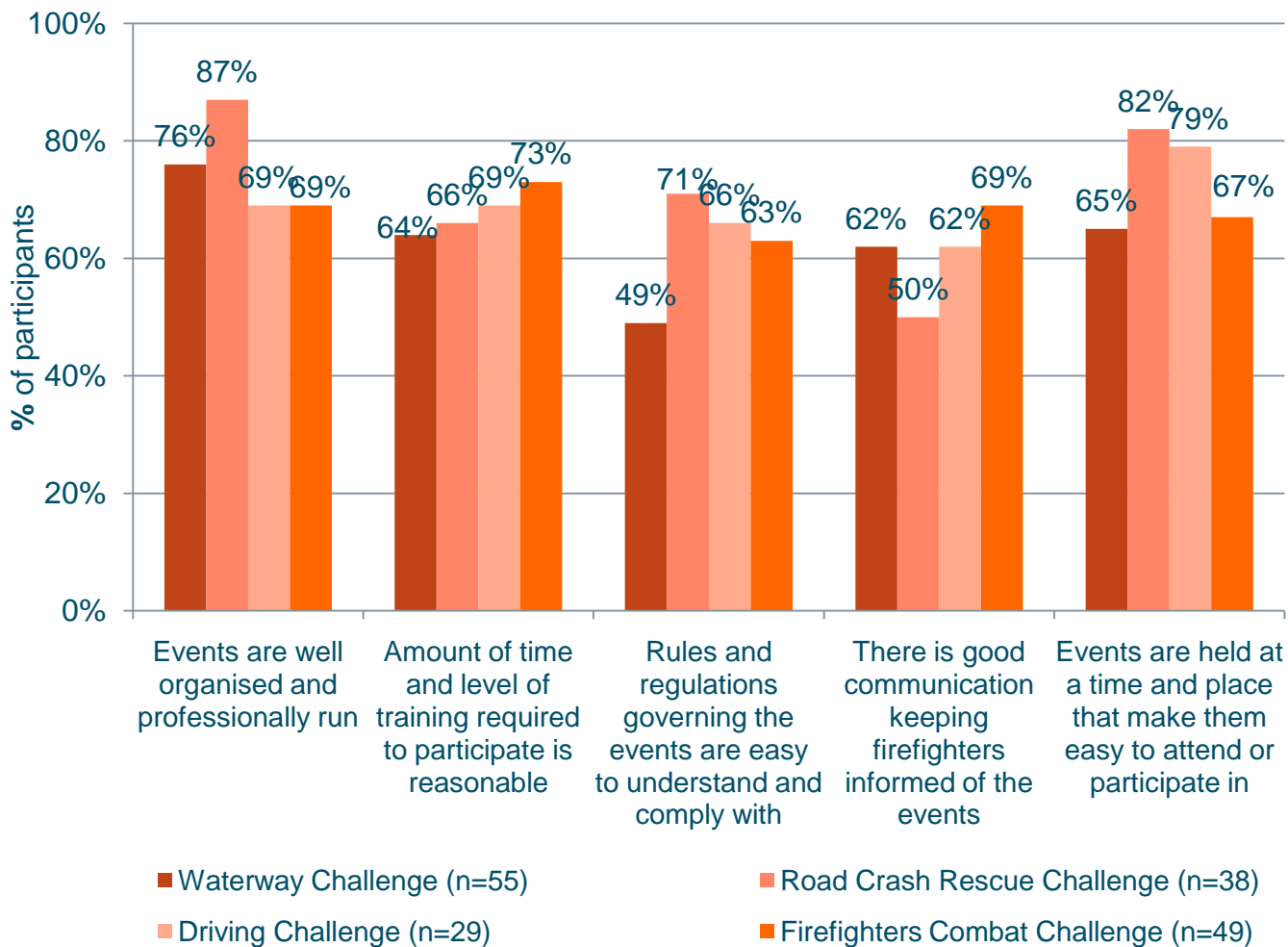
Opportunity to improve communication especially to non-participants.



Event satisfaction – By event

Q4 Now thinking about the UFBA challenge events overall, please tell me to what extent you agree or disagree with the following...?

Top-two box ratings of those who participated in the events



* Top-two box consists of 'agree' or 'strongly agree' scores

Those who participated in Combat Challenge events are more likely to agree or strongly agree that the 'amount of time and level of training required to participate is reasonable' and that there is 'good communication keeping firefighters informed of events'.

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Event perceptions: Participants

Again, high levels of satisfaction.

Suggestions to improve mainly around rules and promotion of the events.

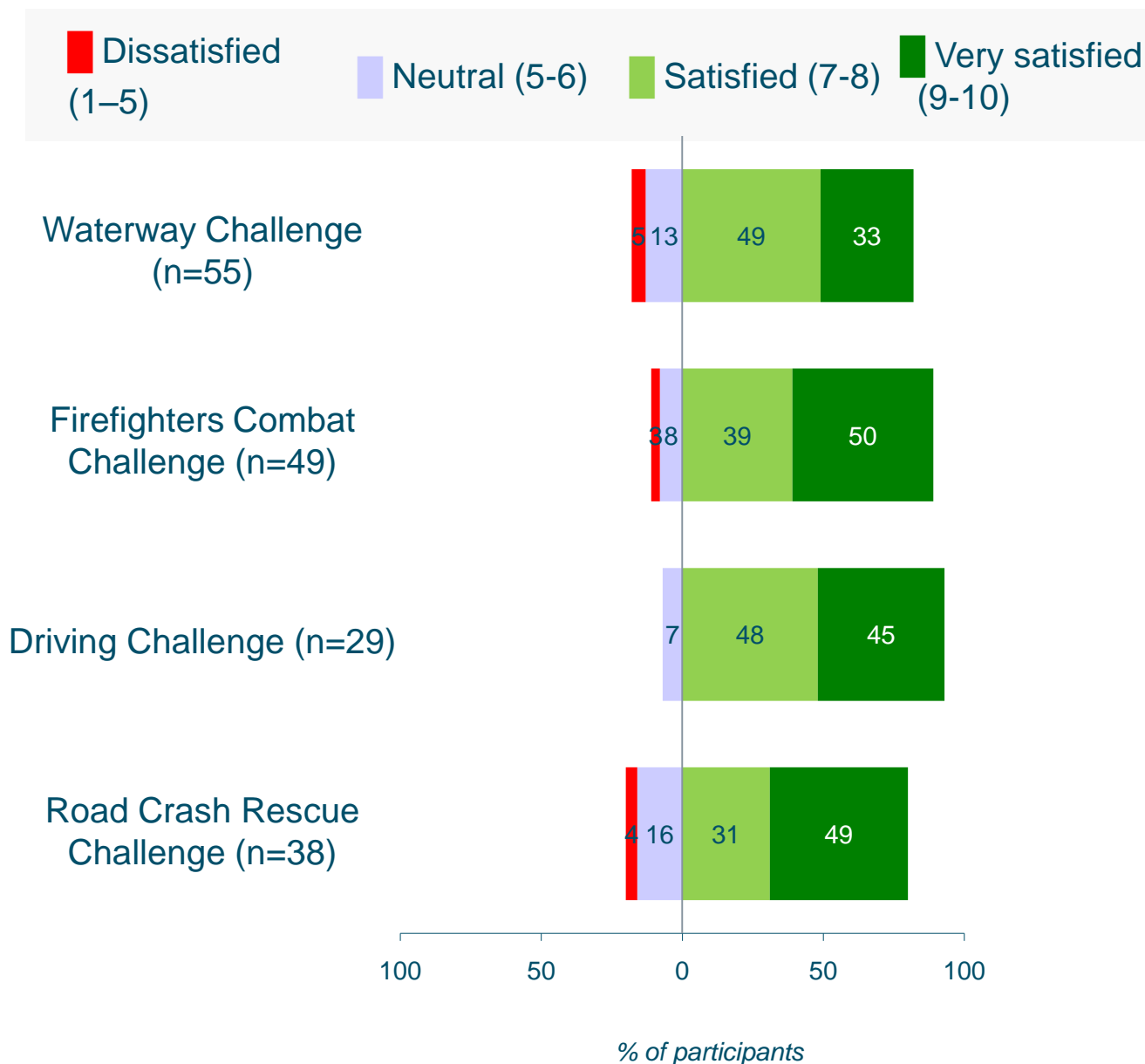


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Satisfaction with event

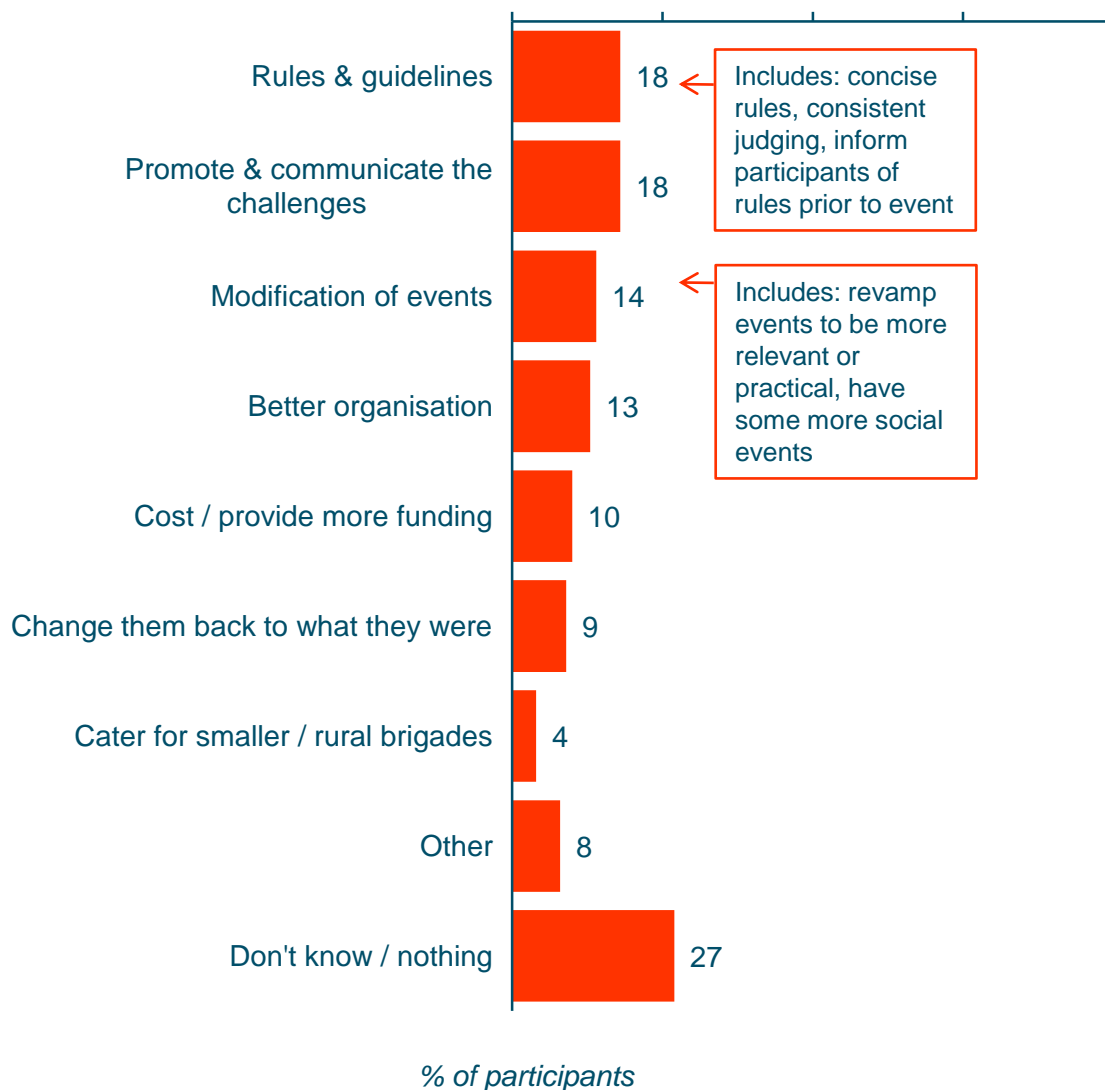
Q3d And as a participant, how would you rate your satisfaction with this event from 1 to 10, where 1 is completely dissatisfied and 10 is completely satisfied?



Almost all participants are satisfied with the events.

Opportunities to improve the events

Q5a Overall what would you say are the benefits that you derive from having participated in these UFBA challenge events personally? / **Q5b** And what, if anything, could be improved to make the UFBA challenge events more beneficial in the future?



Key areas for improvement relate to aspects of 'the rules and guidelines', such as consistent judging and clear communication of requirements, and 'communication of challenges'.

Event perceptions: Non-participants

Non-participants are more likely to get involved if:

- There is greater awareness of the events, what is required, and how they can engage.*
- The events are more flexible and catered more for regional brigades.*

Benefits of participating in UFBA challenge events

Q6a *What, if anything, do you believe are the benefits that come from firefighters participating in these UFBA challenge events?*

Developing skills

- “The skill improvement”
- “They end up honing their skills and increasing their speed in terms of real events”
- “Honing their skills, learning a new technique and comradeship”
- “Team building, development or improvement of skills, just the social aspect – improving communication between different groups”

Comradeship

- “Comradeship, fire fighting skills are increased, the communication between volunteer brigade are enhanced”
- “Comradeship and bonding”
- “Building comradeship”
- “Just the friendship, team building and comradeship”

Team building

- “Probably more skill, you learn to work together, teamwork, communication. You’re working with different ethnic backgrounds too”
- “Fostering teamwork in general, the more things you can do as a team it’s better off for the team on the ground”
- “Good team building and practice for when we have to do the call-out jobs”

Others

- “Fitness, competition, socialising”
- “Teamwork, good for your health”

A small proportion (10%) either ‘don’t know’ or ‘can’t comment’ on possible benefits.

Those who have not been involved in the UFBA challenges believe the key benefits of the events include developing skills, building comradeship and teamwork. These are very similar beliefs to those held by participants.

Improvements to the UFBA challenge events

Q6b And what, if anything, could be improved to make the UFBA challenge events more beneficial in the future?

Hold at a regional level

- “Maybe have regional ones as well as national events...”
- “Have them more on a smaller regional basis”
- “Maybe more regional stuff. We used to have quite a following, but now it is very difficult to get people involved, mainly made up of shift workers, so it is a hard time to get people involved”

Increase awareness of events

- “Better information on the website. The combat challenge did not have enough details for people who did not know what it was. They could put more emphasis in opportunities for training for the combat challenge”
- “More communication with volunteer firefighters regarding the events”
- “I need to know more about them. The process involved in them if you want me to go and do these events”

Get more involved

- “They need to relate more to volunteer areas rather than city areas”
- “Get as many people as possible to be involved”
- “Opening up to more brigades instead of just the top 5”
- “Allowing more participants and not be so restrictive in qualifying for n

The majority (53%) “don’t know” of possible improvements that can be made.

Work with brigades

- “Have to work more with rural brigades who don't work from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. We can't get members to practice because they don't work same hours”
- “Communication with brigades, they would need to make some challenges more accessible”
- “They need to relate more to volunteer areas rather than city areas”

To create further benefits from the events the majority of comments relate to encouraging broader participation. More should be run at a regional level, the UFBA should increase the level of awareness and understanding of the events, and communicate more effectively.

Other activities

Non-participants are less likely to be involved in sporting-related activities outside of firefighting than event participants (15% versus 46%).

Other activities: Non-participants

Q3e *Are there any other sports or competitive events that you participate in with your brigade?*

Nothing else ~ 85% of comments

- “No”
- “No, haven’t done any of that stuff”
- “No, I used to do competitions but not for about 12 years”

Sports

- “Fire Service national golf tournament held every year in which I participate”
- “Just social events we have within our brigade”
- “Darts, snooker, pool”
- “Social cricket events”
- “Volleyball and paintball”
- “Social cricket events”

Others

- “Event yes, we have a bit of a connection with the army in Christchurch and we have been invited several times to go down and do their combat obstacle course. It is quite strenuous and pretty tough on the crew, but it’s a good team building exercise”
- “Forestry runs, road crash rescue – in our own local brigade and area”
- “We have our own in brigade trophy type things, sort of waterway running type stuff but nothing really noted by the Fire Service, I don’t think”

The majority of non-participants do not get involved other competitive events. However those who do mostly take part in the competitive sports events such as golf, darts, and cricket.

Other activities: Participants

Q3e Are there any other sports or competitive events that you participate in with your brigade?

Nothing else ~ 54% of comments

- “Not really”
- “No”
- “Nothing else”

SkyTower Challenge

- “Sky Tower Challenge”
- “Firefighter Sky Challenge”

Sports

- “We have a fishing competition which is held at our station in Turangi”
- “Fishing competitions”
- “We have soccer challenges annual, softball (we versus the police within our district)”
- “Play in the southern golf tournament, Otago, Southland basketball”
- “Toughest firefighter around the mountain, basketball”
- “Just a golf match that we have within the brigade”
- “Rugby tournaments”
- “National Fire Service darts, golf tournament, bowls”
- “Golf, claybird shooting”
- “Indoor bowls – this is the only thing I have participated in for the Fire Service in a while”

Participants are more likely to be involved in events outside the UFBA events. These include the Sky Tower Challenge and sports such as golf, soccer, and fishing.



Summary



Summary

- There is broad support of the UFBA events in terms of their importance to various aspects of volunteer fire fighting. Both participants and non-participants recognise the value they provide to skill development and team building.
- There is significant potential to increase participation in the events, with around 60% of non- participants expressing an interest in future participation.
- Raising awareness and communicating both how to participate and what the benefits of getting involve are, are likely to raise participation rates. Any opportunity to increase access via introducing additional flexibility will likely increase involvement.
- Non-participants tend to be less likely to be active outside their brigade. As such, other sports commitments are unlikely to be barriers for non-participants. This suggests that by encouraging non-participants to get involved in events, the UFBA will likely be increasing their overall activity level significantly.
- While recent rule changes and modifications have been made, some additional communication may be required to make brigades aware of these.

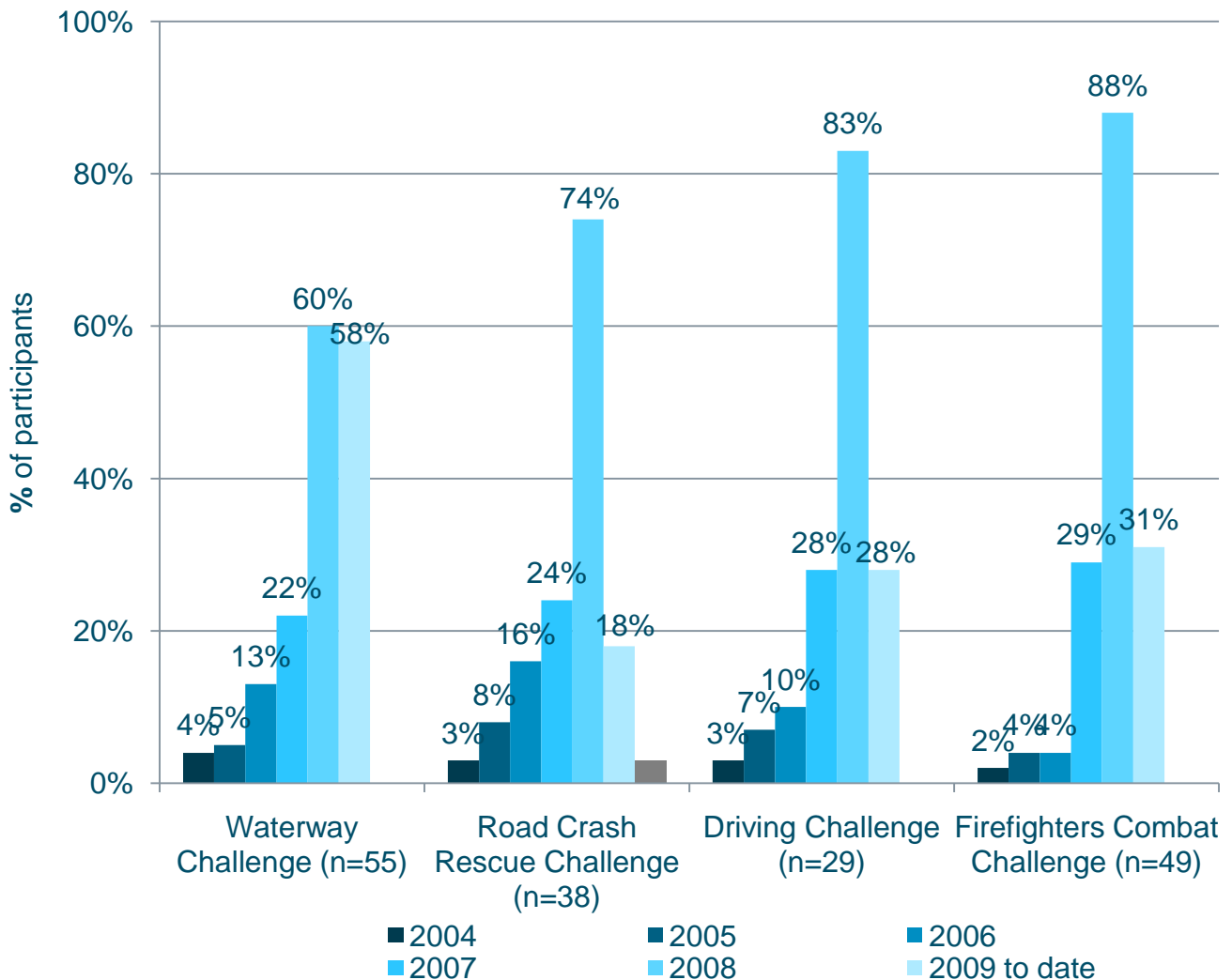


Appendix

Year firefighters participated in the event

Q3c In what year did you last participate?

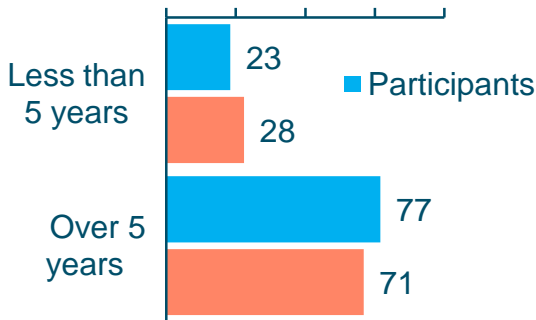
Year participated in event...



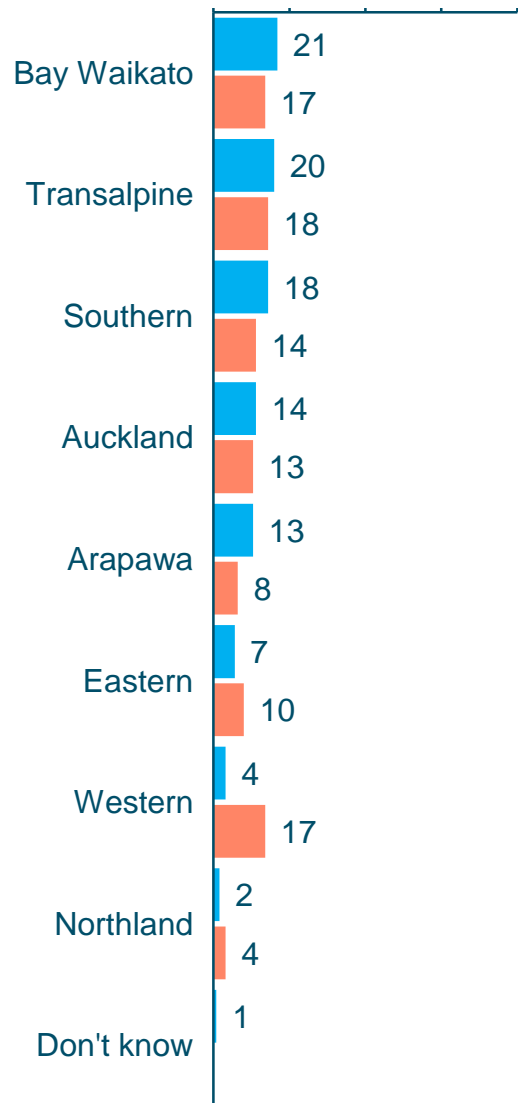
Event participation has built since 2004 and was significantly higher in 2008 for all challenges. Participation in the Waterway Challenge is significantly higher than for other challenges so far this year – participation in other events will increase as more events are held throughout the year.

Sample breakdown

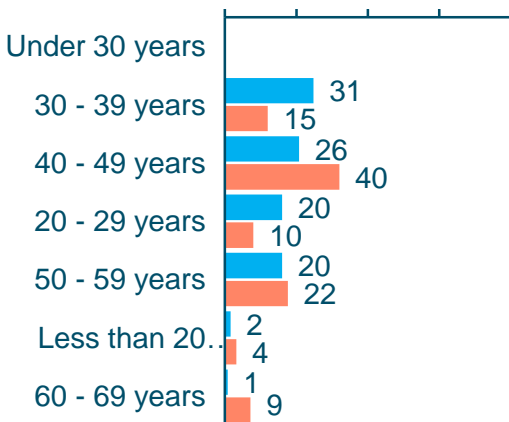
Time with Fire Service (Q16)



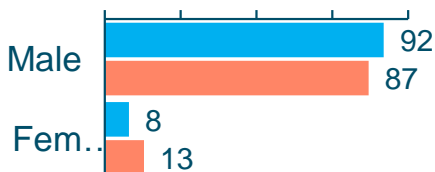
Region (Q2)



Age (Q11)



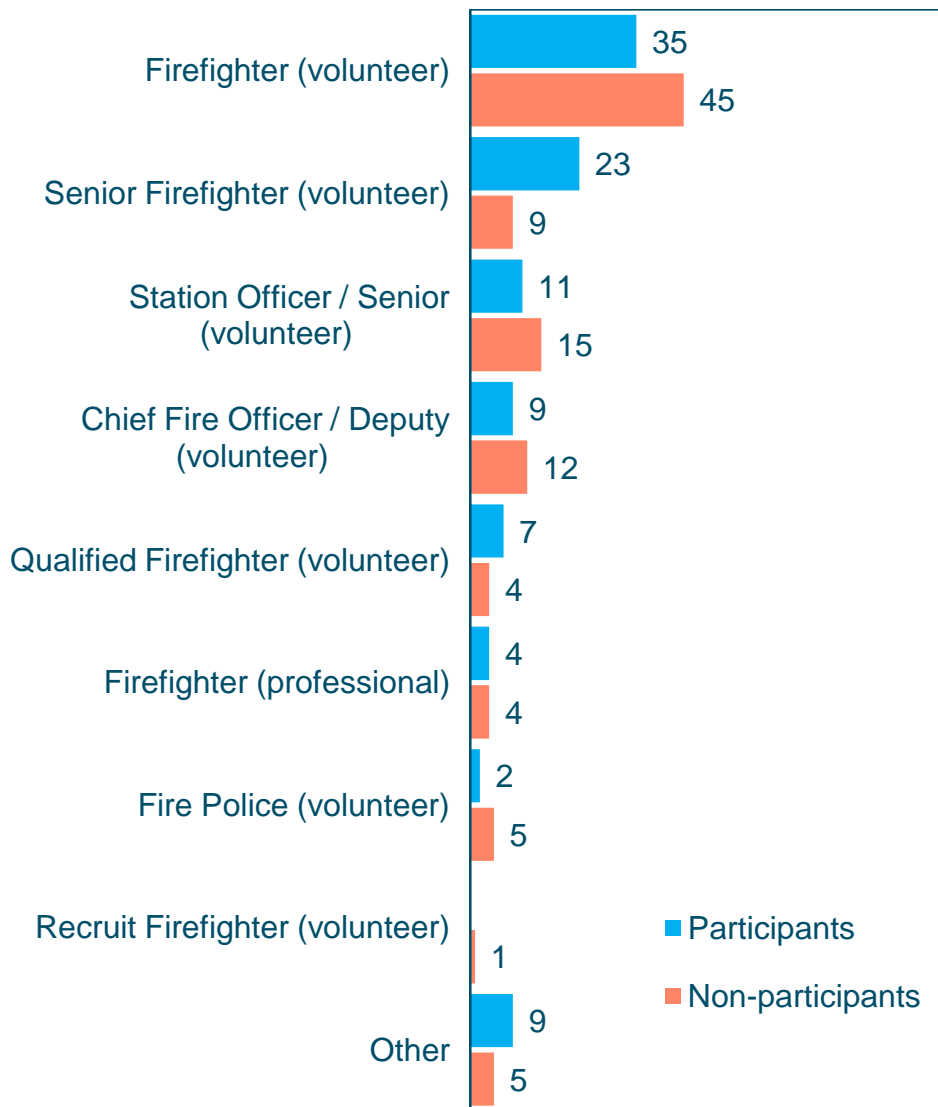
Gender (from sample)



% of firefighters

Sample breakdown

Current role with NZ Fire Service (Q1)



% of firefighters