



NSW RURAL FIRE SERVICE AND BRIGADES DONATIONS FUND

DONATED FUNDS UPDATE
FEBRUARY 2022



NSW RFS members with their new BR9 helmets at Armidale.
The rollout of the helmets to members has been funded by the Trust.

About the NSW Rural Fire Service and Brigades Donations Fund

About the Fund

The NSW Rural Fire Service and Brigades Donations Fund (the Trust) is a public fund established by Deed on 10 April 2012. It was founded by the NSW Rural Fire Service to assist rural fire brigades to manage changes to Australian tax law, which came into effect in 2012.

Changes to tax laws meant brigades needed to choose one of two options:

1. Establish, with approval from the Australian Tax Office (ATO), their own Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) fund which will enable them to receive tax deductible donations; or
2. Use a central Public Fund, established by the NSW RFS, allowing brigades to receive tax-deductible donations without the costs and compliance issues of managing their own fund.

Brigades could also choose not to have DGR status, which meant any donations to the brigade would not be tax deductible for the donor.

Purpose of the Fund

The Trust distributes funds for a range of activities, including:

- To enable or assist brigades to meet the costs of purchasing and maintaining firefighting equipment and facilities, providing training and resources and to otherwise meet the administrative expenses of the brigades which are associated with their volunteer-based fire and emergency service activities.
- For authorised investments which are consistent with carrying out the purpose described in the bullet point above.
- To meet the reasonable costs of the current and continuing operation and management of the Trust.

The Trust's financial statements, details of the trustees and updates on donation allocations can be found at <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/about-us/nsw-rfs-and-brigades-donations-fund>

An update on Trust activities

The Trustees of the Trust met 11 times during 2021 to discuss the management and disbursement of funds to or on behalf of brigades.

Through the extraordinary support of the community, our brigades and volunteers will continue to receive many benefits resulting from the significant donations received by the Trust during the 2019/2020 fire season.

These donated funds are being used to accelerate or supplement projects that would otherwise not happen without Trust funding. These funds are for initiatives over and above funding that is normally allocated to the NSW RFS, such as by the Government.

Funds already provided:



\$18m

distributed direct to NSW RFS brigades as part of the brigade grant scheme.



\$9m

to assist with the provision of new firefighting helmets to all NSW RFS volunteers.



\$18m

as part of a district funding arrangement to allow for major projects or the acquisition of larger assets that have broad benefits to many volunteers.



\$5m

to enable key digital projects such as RFS ACTIV and eMembership, as well as funding to provide up to 1,000 volunteers with the opportunity to gain nationally accredited trainer and assessor qualifications.

During 2022 the Trust will be providing more funds for a range of projects including:



\$6m

to allow for the distribution of respiratory protection equipment to all firefighting appliances across the state.



\$10m

to establish a benevolent fund for NSW RFS firefighters.



\$36m

to fund a project to rollout mobile data terminals into all front-line vehicles.

Further information about this expenditure is detailed on page 4-7.

The Trustees are continuing to work with the Executive of the NSW RFS to develop programs and expenditure items that not only meet the purpose of the Trust, but also meet donor and volunteer expectations where possible.

Projects funded



Brigade Grant Scheme (\$18 million)

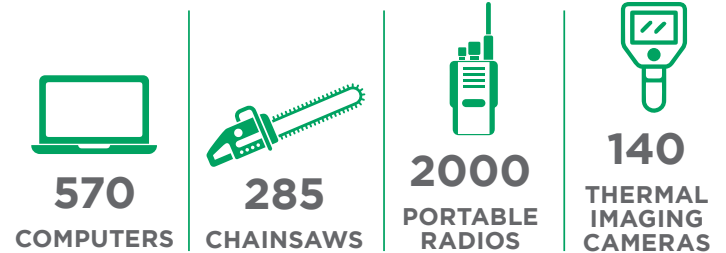
During 2020, the Trustees announced the establishment of a grant scheme whereby all NSW RFS brigades could apply for funding of up to \$10,000 each. Brigades had the flexibility, subject to Trust and NSW RFS requirements, to spend these funds as best suits their particular needs, with a focus on spending in the local community where possible.

This scheme has now closed with more than \$18 million paid directly to these brigades.

Of this \$18 million, more than \$5 million was spent on fire station improvements and equipment such as bathroom and kitchen facilities, solar systems, electrical and lighting upgrades and the construction of training rooms.

A number of brigades pooled their funds and acquired larger items for district use, including prime movers, all-terrain vehicles, motorbikes, trailers, mobile cool rooms, weather stations, marquees and mobile fuel pods.

Other common items acquired by brigades using these grants include:



- 100 water tanks
- 165 generators
- 30 washing machines
- 230 portable pumps
- 560 mobile phone signal boosters
- 215 electric hose reels
- 160 incident scene lighting equipment



Members of the Riverina District with their new prime mover, funded by the Trust through the Brigade Grant Scheme.



NSW RFS district funding (\$18 million)

This funding is intended to be spent on updating volunteer training facilities and training equipment, updating catering facilities or for the purchase of specialised support vehicles as used by NSW RFS volunteers. Where possible and appropriate, districts were given the flexibility to pool funds if this produced a better outcome for volunteers. Through Area Commands, each of the 45 NSW RFS districts was allocated a notional amount of \$400,000.

During 2021, each district’s senior leadership team developed in conjunction with their volunteers plans for the use of these funds. These plans were then reviewed and approved by the NSW RFS executive who subsequently made recommendations to the Trustees for final review, approval and payment.

In late 2021, the Trustees approved and paid \$18 million to the NSW RFS to cover the cost of these district projects. The Trustees have set an expectation with the NSW RFS executive that these funds will be spent by the end of 2022.



A new all-terrain vehicle (ATV) purchased by the Liverpool Range District as part of the Trust's district funding program.

The \$18 million will be spent as follows:



\$11m

on volunteer training facilities and equipment, including new and refurbished facilities, modern training props, virtual reality simulators and first aid mannequins.



\$3.5m

on specialist vehicles for use by volunteers and brigades, including bulk water tankers, forklifts, tilt tray trucks, trailers, operational command vehicles, all-terrain vehicles and specialised vehicles for community engagement.



\$1.6m

on catering facilities, equipment and vehicles including new kitchens, cool rooms, mobile catering vans and trailers.



\$1.9m

on other miscellaneous projects and items including equipment for Group Officers, fireground repeater radios, remote area firefighting equipment, portable weather stations, airbase facilities and equipment, variable message signs and new breathing apparatus support equipment.



New firefighting helmets (\$9 million)

More than 38,000 of the new BR9 helmets have already been distributed to volunteers throughout the NSW RFS. At more than 80 percent completion, the project has hit an unexpected delay due to the global shortage of a critical raw material required by our supplier in the helmet production process.

It is estimated that production will resume in February 2022 with all remaining helmets to be distributed from March 2022.



Respiratory Protection Equipment (\$6 million)

During 2022, the Trust will be providing at least \$6 million to the NSW RFS to fund the distribution of respiratory protection equipment to all firefighting appliances across the state. These will be a selection of half-face and full-face respirators and spare canisters for each firefighting appliance.

In addition to the rollout, collaborative work has commenced with the University of Wollongong for ongoing review and studies focused on better understanding the smoke hazards and impacts to NSW RFS volunteers on the fireground.



NSW RFS Benevolent Fund (\$10 million)

The NSW RFS has committed to establishing a benevolent fund to support the families of firefighters who are killed or injured in the line of duty. Legal and governance work to establish the NSW RFS Benevolent Fund is expected to be finalised in early 2022.

The Trustees have agreed to provide \$10 million as a pool of funds to help establish the NSW RFS Benevolent Fund.



Mobile Data Terminals (\$36 million)

Mobile Data Terminals (MDTs) in firefighting vehicles will be implemented from 2022 onwards to support volunteers responding to incidents.

Vehicle mounted MDTs will display details of the incident our volunteers are attending, provide road and routing information and be linked to RFS ACTIV (see below) to display volunteers allocated to the incident and automatically populate into other post-incident reporting systems.

The Trustees have agreed to provide funding of at least \$36 million to this project.



New BR9 helmet



A Retardant and Suppressant Computerised Automated Loading (RASCAL) system at Wagga Wagga Airport for automated pumping of NSW RFS aircraft. One of only two such systems in operation in NSW, purchased as part of the Trust's district funding program.

Other key NSW RFS projects funded by the Trust (\$5 million)

During 2021, a number of other key projects were funded by the Trust. These include:

eMembership

Launched in October 2021, eMembership is a new mobile-friendly, easy to use online system that supports members of the community to apply for volunteer membership with the NSW RFS. It also allows existing NSW RFS volunteers to change their membership status, such as through dual membership or by transferring to another brigade.

eMembership will improve the application experience for prospective volunteers, and enable brigades, districts and the NSW RFS to manage volunteer applications and membership status changes in a timely and effective way.

RFS ACTIV

RFS ACTIV is the new volunteer response system that provides real time information to NSW RFS management and incident controllers about volunteer availability and incident attendance.

Trainer and assessor qualifications

Trainers and assessors are a critical part of the NSW RFS, particularly across Brigades and Districts. Over the next two years, funding from the Trust will provide support for up to 1,000 volunteers to become an NSW RFS trainer and assessor with nationally-accredited qualifications.

This boost for trainers and assessors provides an opportunity to dramatically increase the number of qualified trainers available to support NSW RFS volunteers in their local communities.



Ongoing Trust Governance

Strategic Audit Services (SAS) has been engaged to conduct the yearly review of the Trust in accordance with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (ACNC) legislation. In addition, SAS has also been engaged to conduct an internal review of member brigades to ensure compliance with NSW RFS service standards and Australian Taxation Office deductible gift recipient legislation. The Trust's financial statements and auditor's report will be lodged with the ACNC in due course.

The Trustees are working closely with the NSW RFS executive team to ensure that all donated funds are spent in accordance with the wishes and intent of the donors, volunteers and many other interested parties. In particular, the Trustees seek assurances from the NSW RFS executive that donated funds are not replacing funding that is normally provided through other means, such as by the Government.

Andrew Macdonald, Chair

NSW Rural Fire Service and Brigades Donations Trust

Email: committees@rfs.nsw.gov.au

Web: <https://www.rfs.nsw.gov.au/about-us/nsw-rfs-and-brigades-donations-fund>