



Towards a **National Strategy for Volunteering**

Volunteering in Australia Research: Early Findings from the Volunteer Involving Organisation Perspective

As part of the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering, Volunteering Australia is leading the *Volunteering in Australia* research project. The research project will produce a series of four reports that will serve as a core evidence base on contemporary volunteering in Australia, which will inform the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering.

The four reports will be based on:

1. A representative survey of the general Australian population
2. A survey of and a series of focus groups with volunteer involving organisations
3. An analysis of supply and demand for volunteers among organisations across Australia
4. A review of methods of valuing the contributions of volunteering in Australia

This paper is the second research output from the larger body of research for the *Volunteering in Australia* research project and focuses on the perspective of volunteer involving organisations.

The *Volunteering in Australia* organisation survey included questions on types of organisations and volunteering roles, how organisations involve volunteers, volunteer recruitment, volunteer management, demand for volunteers, use of technology, challenges for volunteer involving organisations, volunteer inclusion, drivers of change, and more.

The survey of volunteer involving organisations was undertaken by a consortium of researchers from Curtin University, Griffith University, and the University of Western Australia.

Note: 1,208 unique organisations responded to the survey. The use of an open link means that the survey was not randomly distributed. Therefore, caution must be used in generalising the findings to the wider voluntary sector.

About the respondents

Most respondents were paid Managers or Coordinators of Volunteers, with many years of experience at their organisation.

- Respondents were asked to identify their role:
 - 45 per cent were Managers or Coordinators of Volunteers
 - 14 per cent were CEOs/Executive Directors
 - 9 per cent were Board/Committee Members
 - 8 per cent were General Managers
 - 5 per cent were Human Resource Managers
 - 1 per cent were Program Coordinators
 - 17 per cent of respondents selected the “other” category in response to this question.
- Majority of respondents were in paid roles and spent approximately 40 per cent of their time supporting volunteers.
- On average, respondents had worked for their organisations for almost nine years, with more than 80 percent reporting having worked there for at least two years.

The survey included organisations of diverse size, type, and area of focus.

- Respondents were asked how many volunteers were currently involved in their organisation or group:
 - 12 per cent engaged 0-10 volunteers
 - 15 per cent engaged 11-20 volunteers
 - 23 per cent engaged 21-50 volunteers
 - 16 per cent engaged 51-100 volunteers
 - 7 per cent engaged 101-150 volunteers
 - 6 per cent engaged 151-250 volunteers
 - 8 per cent engaged 251-500 volunteers
 - 13 per cent engaged 500 or more volunteers
- The most common response to core organisational focus was Community Services/Welfare/Homelessness. These organisations accounted for almost one third (30 per cent) of respondents.
- 57 per cent of organisations indicated they assisted the general community rather than identifying a specific group their efforts were focused on supporting.
- For those that did identify target groups they assisted, the top four responses were Children/youth (24 per cent), Older people (aged 65+) (21 per cent), People with disability (18 per cent), and Culturally/linguistically diverse communities (18 per cent).

Nature of volunteering activities

Most organisations engaged volunteers in person in regular ongoing roles. However, a large number engaged volunteers in episodic, virtual, and micro-volunteering roles.

- Organisations overwhelmingly indicated that they involved volunteers in ongoing roles performed regularly (e.g., weekly, fortnightly). The next most prominent response was indicative of episodic volunteering for specific events or activities that occur once or infrequently. Micro-volunteering¹ was used as a mode of engagement for approximately one quarter of the organisations surveyed.
- 80 per cent of organisations indicated their volunteers performed their roles in person at the organisation. 68 per cent of organisations also had volunteers representing them out in the field/community. 39 per cent of organisations involved their volunteers remotely over the internet.
- Organisations reported that the top three activities volunteers performed were Board/Committee work (57 per cent), Accounting/finance/administration/management (54 per cent) and Fundraising/sales/events (51 per cent).

Volunteer recruitment and support

Volunteers were primarily recruited through personal networks. Most organisations supported their volunteers through training, induction, and recognition.

- Word of mouth referrals (89 per cent) and personal approaches (69 per cent) were the most widely used recruitment methods. Both were rated as highly effective by organisations.
- Recruitment via an organisation's own website was also prominently used (75 per cent) but was viewed as being less effective.
- Organisations indicated that they provided a broad range of support to their volunteers, with training (84 per cent), induction (84 per cent), and recognition activities/events (78 per cent) being the most common forms of support provided.
- Almost one in three respondents had either not heard of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement or did not see them implemented at their organisation. However, 28 per cent of respondents indicated that their organisation's practices were completely or close to completely consistent with the National Standards.

¹ This describes volunteering in small chunks, typically less than 30 minutes in duration. Micro-volunteering can take place online or offline, and usually does not require an ongoing commitment from volunteers.

Volunteer contributions and demand

The contributions of volunteers were very highly regarded by responding organisations. Demand for volunteers is high, with most respondents reporting that their organisations need more volunteers in the short-term.

- Organisations overwhelmingly reported positive contributions from their volunteers. They reported that volunteers were important to effective service delivery, had a positive impact on organisational image, brought new insights to the organisation, and were important to organisational morale.
- Most respondents (83 per cent) indicated that they needed more volunteers immediately or in the near future. Of these organisations, most reported that they needed between 1 and 20 volunteers. Alarming, 11 per cent of organisations reported that they needed more than 101 volunteers in the short-term.
- Five years into the future, 60 per cent of organisations reported that they expected to need more or significantly more volunteers. Only 8 per cent of organisations reported that fewer volunteers would be necessary.

Employee volunteering

A large proportion of organisations engage employee volunteers (also known as corporate volunteers). Those that do not engage employee volunteers indicated that they lacked appropriate opportunities.

- Almost one in three respondents (30 per cent) indicated that their organisation involved employee volunteers. Of these, respondents reported that they primarily engaged with employee volunteers through corporate networks (28 per cent), personal connections (18 per cent), and word of mouth recommendations (17 per cent).
- Most respondents (58 per cent) indicated that their organisation did not involve employee volunteers. Of these, 53 per cent indicated that they lacked appropriate volunteering opportunities for employee volunteers.

Changes and future trends

COVID-19 was reported as the most significant challenge facing volunteer involving organisations. However, many organisations also reported an increasingly complex regulatory environment, shifts in volunteering styles, and technological changes as significant drivers of change.

Respondents were asked to estimate the extent to which 16 changes had been observed in their organisation using a 5-point response scale.² Mean scores are shown in Figure 1.

- The most common changes reported were regulation and administrative requirements becoming more complicated, reduced availability of volunteers due to COVID-19, reduced capacity of volunteering programs, and a decline in the number of volunteers engaged.

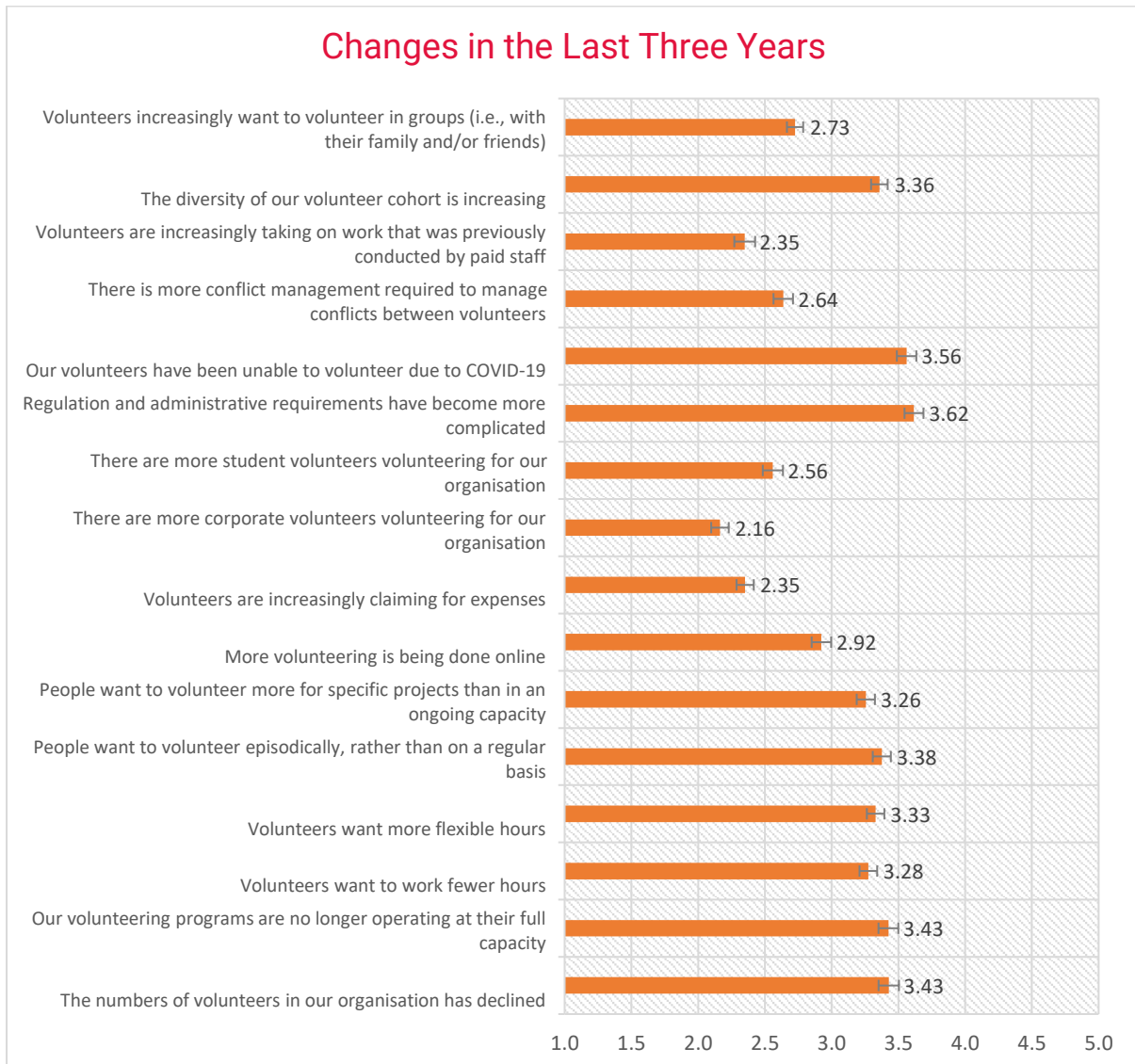


Figure 1: Mean scores on organisational change items

² This question was only asked of respondents who indicated that they had been with their organisation for at least three years at the time the survey was completed.

Respondents were also invited to identify the three strongest **drivers** of change in their organisation. Figure 2 shows the percentage of respondents who nominated each driver of change in their top three.

- COVID-19 was a clear driver of change for nearly all organisations.
- Most organisations indicated a need to be increasingly resilient and adaptable in the face of change.
- Shifts in volunteering styles, population changes, and technological changes appeared to each affect about one-quarter of organisations.

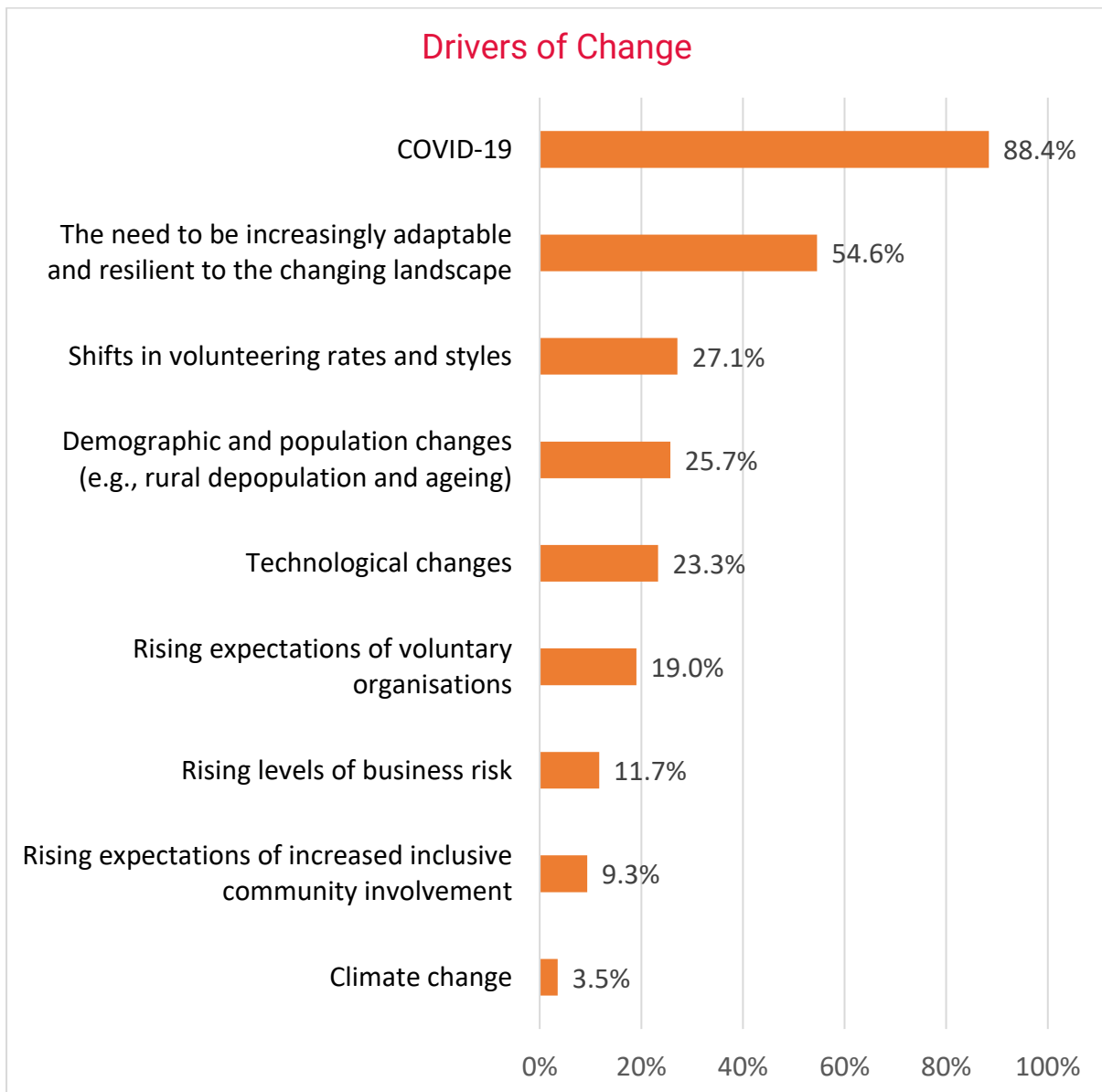


Figure 2: Mean scores on drivers of change items

About the National Strategy for Volunteering

Volunteering Australia is leading the development of Australia's first National Strategy for Volunteering in ten years. The National Strategy will be designed and owned by the volunteering ecosystem and will provide a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia.

More information on the National Strategy for Volunteering project can be found at volunteeringstrategy.org.au

Contact Details

Enquiries about this information sheet should be directed to:

Jack McDermott
Policy Officer and National Strategy Research Fellow
Volunteering Australia
jack@volunteeringaustralia.org
