A decorative arc of colored dots in shades of orange, red, purple, and pink, curving around the central text.

Draft
**National Strategy
for Volunteering**



Towards a
**National Strategy
for Volunteering**

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Introduction

The development of the National Strategy for Volunteering (the National Strategy) is an ambitious project that aims to create a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia through the transformation of the volunteering ecosystem over the next ten years.

The National Strategy sets out a fresh vision for volunteering in Australia that has been progressively shaped through a ten-month co-design process involving community engagement at-scale across the country, deep-dive interviews and focus groups, deliberations with ecosystem thought leaders, and independent academic research. The consultations and the research revealed that volunteering is facing an uncertain future and is unlikely to thrive going forward without system-wide change. The vision is followed by a series of thematic focus areas and systemic shifts, which demonstrate how the system needs to change to bring about the desired outcomes. This approach has enabled us to chart pathways for creating the deep-seated change required for volunteers, the volunteering ecosystem, and Australian communities at-large.

This is the first National Strategy for Volunteering in Australia's history that has been co-designed by the volunteering ecosystem. While much has changed, and is continuing to change, for volunteering and its societal context since the last national strategy was published by the Australian Government in 2011, one thing is certain: Australia has a strong and enduring tradition of volunteering. The challenge for the next ten years will be to build on this foundation, ensuring volunteering can continue to realise its potential for people, places, and the planet and tackle the formative challenges of our time.

About this Document

This document presents an exposure draft of the core components of the National Strategy for Volunteering, which will be finalised through the end of 2022 and launched in February 2023. The draft is based on the extensive insights, outcomes, and ideas formed through the Discovery and Visioning phases of the National Strategy's co-design process. The outputs of the co-design process were built upon by a Core Design Team for additional depth and rigour of thinking and informed by the Volunteering in Australia research and the evidence summarised in the Volunteering Research Papers.

The draft proposes the focus areas, strategic objectives, and systemic shifts that the National Strategy will be built around. While the draft reflects the substance of the National Strategy, it is not final. The purpose of the exposure draft is to seek further feedback from the volunteering ecosystem to ensure it reflects what we have heard so far.

The Current State and Case for Change sections under each Systemic Shift are provided to give a general overview of the issue and some of the supporting evidence currently available. The information contained within these sections is not exhaustive, and the final National Strategy will provide further information and evidence under each Systemic Shift once they have been finalised based on feedback. Additionally, the final National Strategy will have other sections that do not appear in the draft, such as an executive summary and a summary of the Volunteering in Australia research. As has been the case throughout the co-design journey, feedback will be captured to inform continued iteration and finalisation of the National Strategy.

The National Strategy for Volunteering represents an ambitious, broad, and deep program of change. The agenda that is set out will not be successful without continued engagement, commitment, and action from across the volunteering ecosystem. A key follow-on activity from the development of the National Strategy will be the co-design of a measurable National Action Plan, framed by collective action, innovation, and clear accountability.

Strategy Snapshot

Over the next ten years, the National Strategy for Volunteering will act as the guiding point for an ambitious, whole-of-ecosystem change program to deliver on our vision. This diagram summarises the vision, focus areas, strategic outcomes, and systemic shifts proposed by the National Strategy.



Vision

Our vision for volunteering by 2033

Volunteering illuminates the path to a better Australia

*where participation is easy and everyone feels empowered to make a contribution,
where diversity is recognised, celebrated, and supported in all its forms,
where individual and collective potential is realised,
where problem-solving is person-centred and community-led, and,
where communities thrive.*

Principles

The underlying principles of the National Strategy for Volunteering are:

- An **evidence-based approach**, which seeks out and incorporates insights from research, experience, and expertise.
- A commitment to **co-design** and an ongoing dialogue with the volunteering ecosystem.
- Constructive **collaboration** which builds upon existing work, minimises duplication, and identifies opportunities to share responsibility and action.
- Openness to being **adaptable** to ensure relevance over time in an ever-changing world.
- A commitment to **continuous learning and improvement**, including reflecting on progress and a willingness to stop doing things that aren't working.

The change we want to see

Australia already has a vibrant culture of volunteering; however, the impact and benefits of volunteering are uneven. Limitations in capability, capacity, investment, and our understanding of cultural interpretations of volunteering are constraining its full potential.

Volunteering has also changed significantly, with fewer people in 2022 choosing to volunteer through organisations and groups. Despite this, significant potential exists to support growing forms of volunteering, foster participation in volunteering opportunities that are not always visible, and make formal volunteering more flexible and inclusive.

Volunteering is at the heart of communities. Whether motivated by a desire to make a difference, connect with others, build skills, gain experience, or simply because they were asked, people throughout history have consistently been compelled to volunteer. This innate desire has not abated, but our challenge going forward is to ensure people can fit volunteering into their lives and that the right conditions exist to enable volunteering, in all its manifestations, to thrive.

Over the next 10 years, we have the opportunity to revitalise volunteering, so that we can fulfill the promise of what volunteering can offer us as individuals, communities, and a nation. The National Strategy for Volunteering provides us with an anchor point for this journey.

The Volunteering Ecosystem

An enduring challenge in volunteering has been a lack of agreement and consistency in how we describe the myriad of actors that participate in, enable, and are impacted by volunteering. The National Strategy for Volunteering project coined the term 'volunteering ecosystem' to capture the substantial, interconnected stakeholders that have an interest in volunteering.

The volunteering ecosystem is a network of relationships between volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, Volunteering Support Services, Volunteering Australia, State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies, national peak bodies, community organisations, philanthropy, the business community, the research community, and Governments, all working for the collective viability and recognition of volunteering in Australia.

More information on the different components of this vast ecosystem can be found on page 36 of the [Discovery Insights Report](#).

Thematic Focus Areas

The vision for the National Strategy is brought to life by three focus areas. Underpinning each of these focus areas is a strategic objective we hope to achieve over the coming decade.

1. Community & Social Impact

Volunteering is recognised for the critical role it plays in bringing together and nurturing flourishing and resilient communities.

2. Individual Potential & the Volunteer Experience

Volunteering is easy and accessible, allowing everyone to express themselves and contribute to causes and activities they care about.

3. Conditions for a Thriving Volunteering Ecosystem

Volunteering has revitalised and sustainable leadership, investment, policy conditions, and partnerships, which provide the critical foundation for long-term impact.

The focus areas form the three pillars of the National Strategy. Under each pillar we have identified a series of systemic shifts that are necessary to achieving our ten-year vision. Using all the information and ideas gleaned through the co-design journey so far, combined with the findings from the Volunteering in Australia research and the evidence from the Volunteering Research Papers, each systemic shift summarises the current state, the case for change, and short, medium, and long-term objectives.

The systemic shifts that emerged from the co-design process are not exhaustive. They reflect what the ecosystem told us about issues that were a priority, have a sense of urgency, or where solutions would provide great utility. The diversity and complexity of stakeholders in the volunteering ecosystem means different systemic shifts will resonate with different people, but it is hoped they broadly represent the most significant or urgent levers of change.

Summary of Focus Areas, Strategic Objectives, Systemic Shifts and Outcomes

Focus Area & Strategic Objective	Systemic Shift	Outcomes		
		Initial Outcome <i>Short-term outcomes that will establish the foundation for longer-term change</i>	Intermediate Outcome <i>Implementation of new processes leading to changed practices</i>	Final Outcome <i>Outcomes that demonstrate the achievement of cultural and deep-seated change</i>
<p>1. Community & Social Impact</p> <p><i>Volunteering is recognised for the critical role it plays in bringing together and nurturing flourishing and resilient communities.</i></p>	<p>1.1 Diversifying our Understanding of Volunteering</p> <p><i>From a dominant view of volunteering rooted in Australia’s colonial history to one that understands, supports, and is shaped by different cultural interpretations and expressions of volunteering.</i></p>	<p>Conversations that build awareness of the different identities and perceptions of volunteering in our communities have continued.</p>	<p>We have a more nuanced understanding of volunteering in Australia, with cultural expressions of volunteering actively influencing policy and program design and delivery.</p>	<p>Through an expanded understanding of different expressions of volunteering it is recognised and supported in all its formats.</p>
	<p>1.2 Reshaping the Public Perception of Volunteering</p> <p><i>From a public perception that volunteering is highly formalised and service-focused to a new, more expansive narrative focused on the multifaceted ways people volunteer.</i></p>	<p>Volunteering has become more visible in the public eye through impactful storytelling that resonates with diverse audiences.</p>	<p>More people recognise activities they had not previously understood as volunteering and are inspired to get involved. Through this expanded awareness, people who have volunteered in the past are aware of new ways they can engage if desired.</p>	<p>A comprehensive understanding of volunteering is embedded in our public consciousness.</p>

Focus Area & Strategic Objective	Systemic Shift	Outcomes		
		Initial Outcome	Intermediate Outcome	Final Outcome
<p>1. Community & Social Impact</p> <p><i>Volunteering is recognised for the critical role it plays in bringing together and nurturing flourishing and resilient communities.</i></p>	<p>1.3 Recognising the Inherent Value of Volunteering</p> <p><i>From a primary mindset that positions volunteering as a means to deliver specific outcomes to recognition that volunteering is an activity with innate value that harnesses individual and collective potential to create better futures for all.</i></p>	<p>There is an investment in building the knowledge base on the multidimensional ways that volunteering creates and adds value beyond the immediate production outcomes inherent in service-delivery volunteering.</p>	<p>We have a strong evidence-base for the value of volunteering for people, places, and the planet. Stories about the value and impact of volunteering will be connecting and resonating with diverse audiences.</p>	<p>Volunteering is recognised for both its capacity to facilitate outcomes for individuals and communities and as an activity with inherent value. As a result, there is more volunteering for the sake of volunteering.</p>
	<p>1.4 Enabling A Community-led Approach</p> <p><i>From a top-down system approach that perpetuates reactive problem-solving to empowering communities to identify and respond to their own challenges and opportunities.</i></p>	<p>There is an increased understanding of what communities are already doing, including when and how intervention from or collaboration with other actors adds or detracts value.</p>	<p>Voices of communities are actively sought out, continually heard, and routinely involved in the development of policies and programs related to volunteering. This includes having flexible models that recognise when and how external actors should be involved, and when intervention, collaboration, or involvement is not required or desired.</p>	<p>Communities are the primary drivers of how volunteering influences their futures.</p>

Focus Area & Strategic Objective	Systemic Shift	Outcomes		
		Initial Outcome	Intermediate Outcome	Final Outcome
<p>2. Individual Potential & the Volunteer Experience</p> <p><i>Volunteering is easy and accessible, allowing everyone to express themselves and contribute to causes and activities they care about.</i></p>	<p>2.1 Re-Focusing on the Volunteer Experience</p> <p><i>From a predominantly needs-based model of volunteer involvement to a consultative approach that balances individual motivations with the needs of the organisation or cause.</i></p>	<p>Mechanisms are established to balance role/activity requirements with facilitating a meaningful volunteer experience.</p>	<p>We have embedded a consultative approach to volunteer engagement that removes barriers to role flexibility and aligns individual and organisational goals for mutual benefit.</p>	<p>Volunteering is a mechanism to realise individual and shared potential.</p>
	<p>2.2 Making Volunteering Accessible and Inclusive</p> <p><i>From a system where choice is determined by access and privilege to a future where volunteering is genuinely inclusive and accessible for all.</i></p>	<p>Limitations to being inclusive are acknowledged and culturally and psychologically safe mechanisms to enable people to communicate their inclusion needs are facilitated. Understanding is aligned with action, resulting in co-designed adjustments, evaluation of the efficacy of inclusive practice, and greater shared learnings across the ecosystem.</p>	<p>We are dismantling systemic barriers to inclusion, including power imbalances, and embedding a culture of inclusion grounded in an intersectional approach that amplifies lived experience.</p>	<p>Volunteering is inclusive and accessible to everyone on their terms.</p>
	<p>2.3 Ensuring Volunteering is Not Exploitative</p> <p><i>From a system where volunteering can be exploitative to a future where volunteering is safe and ethical.</i></p>	<p>All relevant stakeholders, including volunteer involving organisations, peak bodies, corporates, unions, and Governments, are engaging in open conversations about safe and ethical volunteering.</p>	<p>Exploitation in volunteering is being effectively identified and prevented, resulting in fewer cases of exploitation of volunteers.</p>	<p>Volunteers are engaged safely and ethically across the ecosystem, with appropriate supports in place to protect their safety, interests, and wellbeing.</p>

Focus Area & Strategic Objective	Systemic Shift	Outcomes		
		Initial Outcome	Intermediate Outcome	Final Outcome
<p>3. Conditions for a Thriving Volunteering Ecosystem</p> <p><i>Volunteering has revitalised and sustainable leadership, investment, policy conditions, and partnerships, which provide the critical foundation for long-term impact.</i></p>	<p>3.1 Making Volunteering a Cross-Portfolio Issue in Government</p> <p><i>From a fragmented approach to volunteering policy to a future where volunteering is recognised as a cross-portfolio issue across all levels of Government.</i></p>	<p>Governments at every level have a better understanding of the relevance of volunteering to different portfolios and the impact of policy on volunteering.</p>	<p>All levels of Government have established mechanisms for seeking input on policies and programs that involve or impact volunteers and this input is considered an essential pillar of design.</p>	<p>Governments are consistently considering the needs of volunteers and the volunteering ecosystem through comprehensive policy and investment.</p>
	<p>3.2 Building Stronger Leadership and Shared Accountability</p> <p><i>From a siloed volunteering ecosystem weakened by unnecessary competition and duplication to one with strong leadership based on shared accountability and genuine collaboration that provides a united voice for volunteering.</i></p>	<p>All stakeholders (volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, community groups, peak bodies, governments at every level, philanthropists, researchers, educational institutions, and businesses) see themselves as part of the volunteering ecosystem and understand their role in creating a thriving future for volunteering.</p>	<p>Stakeholders across the volunteering ecosystem are actively contributing to and implementing a shared agenda to advance volunteering in Australia.</p>	<p>Volunteering is supported and advanced by strong leadership based on shared accountability and genuine collaboration that provides a united voice for volunteering.</p>

Focus Area & Strategic Objective	Systemic Shift	Outcomes		
		Initial Outcome	Intermediate Outcome	Final Outcome
<p>3. Conditions for a Thriving Volunteering Ecosystem</p> <p><i>Volunteering has revitalised and sustainable leadership, investment, policy conditions, and partnerships, which provide the critical foundation for long-term impact.</i></p>	<p>3.3 Making a Commitment to Strategic Investment</p> <p><i>From directing majority of funding and support to volunteering programs based on solving problems to strategic investment approaches that also build common infrastructure, capacity, and capability.</i></p>	<p>The criticality of volunteering infrastructure is recognised and communicated, with a view to re-design funding, grant, and sponsorship agreements to include provisions for supporting infrastructure.</p>	<p>Investment for supportive infrastructure is explicitly allocated in grants and other resourcing strategies for the volunteering ecosystem.</p>	<p>Volunteering is supported across Australia by common infrastructure and continuous strategic investment.</p>
	<p>3.4 Recognising the Criticality of Volunteer Management</p> <p><i>From a perception that volunteering 'just happens' to a recognition that robust volunteer engagement practices and leadership are essential tenets of impactful volunteering.</i></p>	<p>Resourcing requirements of volunteer involvement, including the importance of investment in volunteer leadership, are articulated and communicated.</p>	<p>Volunteer management is recognised and resourced as a necessary function in programs, activities, and services that involve volunteers.</p>	<p>The importance of robust volunteer engagement practices and the critical role of leadership in volunteering is consistently recognised as essential and resourced accordingly.</p>

Focus Area 1: Community & Social Impact

Systemic Shift 1.1: Diversifying Our Understanding of Volunteering

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for how volunteering can bring together and nurture flourishing and resilient communities, we need to move **from a dominant view of volunteering rooted in Australia's colonial history to one that understands, supports, and is shaped by different cultural interpretations and expressions of volunteering.**

The Current State

Volunteering is an incredibly diverse activity that has a myriad of expressions. Capturing and describing this diversity is difficult, which creates challenges for how we understand, recognise, support, and celebrate volunteering in all its manifestations. Paradoxically, this complexity is also part of what makes volunteering beautiful. It is an activity that means different things to different people based on their values, upbringing, culture, faith, lived experience, and geography.

The dominant approach to volunteering in Australia is largely the product of our colonial history, through which we inherited British customs including religious and political structures and modes of charitable giving. This is despite community giving being an intrinsic part of everyday life for First Nations people for tens of thousands of years. When understood as cultural obligation and reciprocity, community giving actively embodies the principles of volunteering as understood through a Western prism. Volunteering also has many conceptualisations and motivations that may be faith-based and culturally-nuanced; however, these expressions of volunteering are poorly understood, recognised, and supported in modern Australia. This detracts from our collective understanding of volunteering, which can have consequences for the volunteering ecosystem and broader society.

Our Case for Change

- Volunteering in many multicultural and First Nations communities is not seen as an 'other' or separate activity but is deeply embedded in their cultures. The ecosystem can be exclusionary, in the sense that diverse forms of volunteering may not be recognised and those with different interpretations of volunteering might not recognise themselves as part of the ecosystem.
- Due to our limited understanding of volunteering in cultural and/or religious communities, there can be a misconception that intra-community volunteering leads to self-segregation. To the contrary, research demonstrates this form of volunteering is mostly driven by a commitment to advancing the common good and serves to enhance social networks. Ethno-religious community organisations are important sites of volunteering for people from culturally and religiously diverse backgrounds and bridges to cross-community engagement and volunteering.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, we need to continue conversations that build awareness of the different identities and perceptions of volunteering in our communities. This will require creating a safe space for listening and storytelling that builds our shared understanding.
- In the medium term, we will have a more nuanced understanding of volunteering in Australia, with cultural expressions of volunteering actively influencing policy and program design and delivery.
- In 10 years, by expanding our understanding of different expressions of volunteering we will have moved towards a future where volunteering is recognised and supported in all its formats.

Systemic Shift 1.2: Reshaping the Public Perception of Volunteering

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for how volunteering can bring together and nurture flourishing and resilient communities, we need to move **from a public perception that volunteering is highly formalised and service-focused to a new, more expansive narrative focused on the multifaceted ways people volunteer.**

The Current State

The prevailing view of volunteering in Australia skews towards a perception that volunteering is formal and service focused. Highly visible forms of volunteering tend to dominate public awareness about volunteering, which can inadvertently detract from the myriad of ways in which people and communities engage in voluntary activities.

Over the next ten years, we want to preserve recognition for established forms of volunteering whilst better recognising and promoting other modes of engagement such as informal, virtual, and microvolunteering. By expanding the public consciousness on volunteering, we can generate curiosity in people about what volunteering is taking place in their communities and beyond. This will build a better shared understanding of the role volunteering plays in Australian society and can serve to inspire a new generation of people to get involved in volunteering.

Our Case for Change

- The rate of formal volunteering through an organisation or group has been declining steadily over the past decade. Further, while the rate of informal volunteering increased between 2020 and 2022, the rate of formal volunteering has not shown significant signs of recovery. This, combined with a misalignment between the roles organisations need filling and the roles prospective volunteers are interested in, demonstrates a critical need for us to expand public perceptions.
- There are persistent stereotypes of volunteers, such as ‘the older charity shop worker’ and ‘the environmental protestor’. Non-volunteers tend to express narrower, more stereotypical views of volunteering and perceptions vary greatly between cultural groups. This speaks to the need to increase awareness in the general population about the scope and potential of volunteering.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, we need to make volunteering more visible in the public eye through impactful storytelling that resonates with diverse audiences.
- In the medium term, more people will recognise activities they had not previously understood as volunteering and will be inspired to get involved. Through this expanded awareness about the multifaceted nature of volunteering, people who have volunteered in the past will be aware of new ways they can engage if desired.
- In 10 years, a comprehensive understanding of volunteering will be embedded in our public consciousness. This will have a positive effect on how we enable, support, and recognise volunteering across our communities.

Systemic Shift 1.3: Recognising the Inherent Value of Volunteering

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for how volunteering can bring together and nurture flourishing and resilient communities, we need to move **from a primary mindset that positions volunteering as a means to deliver specific outcomes to recognition that volunteering is an activity with innate value that harnesses individual and collective potential to create better futures for all.**

The Current State

Australia has a strong culture of volunteering, but this cannot be divorced from the historical influences that have shaped its modern manifestations. Two important influences are the notion of ‘service,’ which emerged from major religions and the impacts of ideologies which promote individualism over collectivism. These influences, combined with the outsourcing of public services to charities and not-for-profits, have increasingly positioned volunteering as a means to achieving specific outcomes such as service delivery. Similarly, the promotion of individualism has routinely positioned volunteering as a pathway to an alternative outcome rather than an end unto itself.

Neither of these outcomes are inherently bad. Charities and not-for-profits are exceptionally skilled at delivering services and programs and the involvement of volunteers adds value that cannot be economically quantified. Likewise, volunteering is a proven pathway to a myriad of positive outcomes, including obtaining paid employment, reducing social isolation, and improving physical and mental wellbeing. The challenge going forward is about restoring balance by recognising the specific advantages of volunteering in and for communities that can’t be achieved through other means, without volunteering and volunteers being exclusively positioned as a factor of production.

Our Case for Change

- In contemporary public policy and associated programs or initiatives, volunteering is either ignored entirely or positioned as an intervention or pathway to an alternative goal. This approach undervalues the inherent value of volunteering in creating and maintaining thriving communities, improving individual wellbeing, and providing opportunities for self-expression.
- Where volunteering is positioned as a pathway (for example, as a pathway to employment) there is little or no support for providing enabling infrastructure. This places an additional burden on the volunteering ecosystem to absorb the work of supporting this form of participation.
- Research suggests “mandatory volunteerism” has been shown to reduce intentions to volunteer in the future. Such programs may achieve short-term aims (e.g., getting jobseekers into paid work) but can have adverse, long-term repercussions such as dissuading people from volunteering in the future.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, we need to invest in building the knowledge base on the multidimensional ways that volunteering creates and adds value beyond the immediate production outcomes inherent in service-delivery volunteering.
- In the medium term, we will have a strong evidence-base for the value of volunteering for people, places, and the planet. Stories about the value and impact of volunteering will be connecting and resonating with diverse audiences.
- In 10 years, volunteering will be recognised for both its capacity to facilitate outcomes for individuals and communities and as an activity with inherent value. There will be more volunteering for the sake of volunteering.

Systemic Shift 1.4: Enabling A Community-led Approach

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for how volunteering can bring together and nurture flourishing and resilient communities, we need to move **from a top-down system approach that perpetuates reactive problem-solving to empowering communities to identify and respond to their own challenges and opportunities.**

The Current State

Volunteering is at the heart of community, yet there is generally a top-down approach to policy, funding, and program-design within organisations and from Government. This approach fails to adequately include the voice of the community, which promotes division and diminishes the efficacy of programs and services. This has resulted in a siloed volunteering ecosystem, with fragmentation often causing duplication of effort and competition for finite resources. When it comes to spontaneous or emerging needs, communities tend to self-mobilise and self-fund to fill critical gaps.

There is a considerable degree of untapped potential in the volunteering ecosystem, which, if harnessed, could drastically improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the services, supports, and programs delivered through volunteering. The current top-down approach positions volunteer involving organisations and community groups as benefactors rather than collaborators. The practical result of this approach is that the lived experience of individuals, the practical experience of organisations and groups, and the theory and evidence from researchers rarely factor into policy, program design, or funding opportunities.

Our Case for Change

- In the current system, volunteer involving organisations and community groups often have to contort themselves to fit the parameters of ever-changing funding and grants programs, rather than playing an active role in identifying and progressing community-led solutions and initiatives.
- Volunteers, Managers and Coordinators of Volunteers, and volunteer involving organisations work at the coalface of community. They see, in real time, the challenges and opportunities that arise. It can take Governments and researchers years to catch up, which means that policy interventions and other initiatives often 'lag' and are no longer fit-for-purpose when they filter back down. This is compounded by a lack of flexibility in grant agreements that can stifle innovation and may disempower recipients from having the confidence to negotiate new outcomes when community need changes.
- The current system is not agile enough to support communities responding to emerging challenges or opportunities. In times of crisis, this places an increasing burden on communities to self-fund and resource as need arises. There is little understanding of how the system can support self-mobilisation without getting in the way or inadvertently corrupting the activities taking place.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, we need to increase our understanding of what communities are already doing, including when and how intervention from or collaboration with other actors adds or detracts value.
- In the medium term, we need to ensure the voices of communities are actively sought out, continually heard, and routinely involved in the development of policies and programs related to volunteering. This includes having flexible models that recognise when and how Governments (at every level), volunteering peak bodies, and other actors should be involved, and when intervention, collaboration, or involvement is not required or desired.
- In 10 years, communities will be the primary drivers of how volunteering influences their futures.

Focus Area 2: Individual Potential & The Volunteer Experience

Systemic Shift 2.1: Re-Focusing on the Volunteer Experience

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for volunteering to be easy and accessible, allowing everyone to express themselves and contribute to causes and activities they care about we need to move **from a predominantly needs-based model of volunteer involvement to a consultative approach that balances individual motivations with the needs of the organisation or cause.**

The Current State

Australia is undergoing significant and rapid demographic change. So too are perceptions of volunteering, the ways people want to make a contribution, and the kinds of change they want to effect through volunteering. Whilst a vast proportion of volunteering roles are likely to remain formal and structured into the future, the desire for a decentralised model is growing. Changes in the external environment, such as future of work shifts, our ageing population, and where people are choosing to live, have additional implications for volunteering in terms of participation rates and modes of engagement. People are increasingly seeking flexibility in how and when they volunteer and report more challenges with juggling volunteering and other competing priorities.

People engage in volunteering for a myriad of reasons and understanding people's individual motivations and goals is an important precursor to considering how to involve them. Volunteers often have a unique and special relationship with the mission or cause they're volunteering for, making them powerful advocates. However, this intrinsic desire to contribute is often taken for granted and organisations can inadvertently miss out on the latent potential and capacity of their volunteers when they don't actively ensure their volunteers can meet their goals and have a meaningful experience.

Our Case for Change

- There are substantial mismatches between the types of activities that current volunteers undertake and the types of activities that non-volunteers would consider. This suggests more flexible models of volunteer engagement are required to find a balance between supply and demand.
- There appears to be a disconnect between the level of commitment that volunteers prefer compared to the commitment that organisations require. In the recent Volunteering in Australia research, most organisations reported that they still require volunteers on an ongoing, regular basis whilst also acknowledging that volunteers are committing less time. Conversely, volunteers reported a continued desire to engage in volunteering but reported they had less time to give than in the past and are experiencing more challenges integrating volunteering into their daily lives.
- Research identifies that increasing social support, improving the experience of autonomy, ensuring volunteers feel productive, and minimising burnout are the four key actions that can minimise volunteer turnover. These all speak to the critical need to make the volunteer experience a paramount consideration.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, we need to establish mechanisms to balance role/activity requirements with facilitating a meaningful volunteer experience.
- In the medium term, we need to embed a consultative approach to volunteer engagement that removes barriers to role flexibility and aligns individual and organisational goals for mutual benefit.
- In 10 years, volunteering will be a mechanism to realise individual and shared potential.

Systemic Shift 2.2: Making Volunteering Accessible and Inclusive

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for volunteering to be easy and accessible, allowing everyone to express themselves and contribute to causes and activities they care about we need to move **from a system where choice is determined by access and privilege to a future where volunteering is genuinely inclusive and accessible for all.**

The Current State

Access to formal volunteering opportunities is not equal. A range of factors, including age, cultural background, level of education, geography, and employment status, can all affect whether, and how, a person can participate in volunteering. Different people also experience different barriers to volunteering, such as health and financial reasons. The systemic barriers to participation that are prevalent across society also manifest themselves in volunteering, where access is often mistaken for ability.

Volunteer involving organisations straddle a tension between the desire to be inclusive and having the requisite resources to do so. At the same time, volunteering is an exceptionally fertile environment for fostering inclusion. The inherent adaptability of organisations and groups in meeting the needs of volunteers and pivoting to address emerging community issues means they are often uniquely skilled at creating inclusive environments. We are not currently where we want to be when it comes to accessibility and inclusion in volunteering and we need to find new ways to acknowledge shortcomings, share learnings, and build a culture of inclusion across the volunteering ecosystem. This includes bringing in knowledge and experience from outside the ecosystem to facilitate mutual exchange and growth.

Our Case for Change

- The recent Volunteering in Australia population survey found women, people aged 55 years and older, those born in Australia or in another English-speaking country, those with a higher level of education, those living outside of a capital city, and those in paid employment were, to varying degrees, more likely than average to participate in formal volunteering.
- Women, people aged 65+, those living in highly socio-economically disadvantaged areas, and First Nations peoples were more likely to report they did not volunteer for health reasons. Younger people were more likely to report financial reasons as a key barrier, and older people (65+), those in the middle socio-economic quintile, and those born in a non-English speaking country were more likely to report there were no suitable volunteering opportunities in their area.
- Processes such as background checks are not easy or inclusive for those without 100 points of identification or access to private transport. Resoundingly, those whose inclusion needs are not met continue to report they are systemically disabled by society, reducing their options for participation, or preventing them from participating at all.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, we need to acknowledge our current limitations to being inclusive and facilitate culturally and psychologically safe mechanisms for people to identify and communicate their inclusion needs. We then need to align understanding with action by co-designing suitable adjustments, evaluating the efficacy of inclusion efforts, and sharing learnings with others.
- In the medium term, we need to dismantle systemic barriers to inclusion, including power imbalances, to embed a culture of inclusion grounded in an intersectional approach that amplifies lived experience.
- In 10 years, volunteering will be inclusive and accessible to everyone on their terms.

Systemic Shift 2.3: Ensuring Volunteering is Not Exploitative

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for volunteering to be easy and accessible, allowing everyone to express themselves and contribute to causes and activities they care about we need to move **from a system where volunteering can be exploitative to a future where volunteering is safe and ethical.**

The Current State

There is no one size fits all approach to what constitutes a volunteering role and the distinction between paid and unpaid work is not dichotomous. This ambiguity is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, it enables volunteering to be fluid and spontaneous, but it also creates space for volunteers to be taken advantage of. Exploitation may come in various forms, such as deploying volunteers in roles that should be paid, pressuring people to volunteer when they don't want to or to volunteer more when they don't have capacity and asking volunteers to undertake duties they feel unsafe or uncomfortable completing.

Safeguarding mechanisms in volunteering are piecemeal and regulatory measures that do exist are rarely created with volunteers in mind. This creates an environment of uncertainty, which impedes the ability of volunteers to understand their rights and responsibilities, and burdens organisations and groups with the responsibility of trying to navigate and comprehend this convoluted landscape. Going forward we need to be aware of and vigilant about the possibility of exploitation of volunteers, including by omission, to ensure that volunteers and communities are safe. Paramount to this is considering the impact of decisions such as the outsourcing of service delivery to charities and not-for-profits without commensurate resourcing, which places an increasing and unsustainable reliance on the volunteer workforce.

Our Case for Change

- Some forms of volunteering can be exploitative or hazardous. Studies have found there are significant risks associated with role strain, over-volunteering, role overload, and responsibility overwhelm in volunteering. Research has also found that bullying, harassment and discrimination, challenges finding work/life balance, and low recognition and reward are experienced by volunteers, detracting from their experiencing and potentially causing harm.
- Research indicates that there can be a threshold for 'too much' volunteering at which point volunteers experience adverse consequences rather than benefits from their participation. Feedback from volunteers in industries where workload strain is high suggests they can feel pressured to volunteer more than they desire or feel capable of due to a fear the work will otherwise not get done, impacting clients, service-users, and the community.
- While volunteers are often motivated to contribute to their communities and do not wish to be paid, volunteering is not free. Financial and other support is required to enable safe and effective volunteering. Financial barriers to volunteering, exacerbated by rising costs of living, are impacting people's ability to volunteer with research indicating 54 per cent of volunteers incur out-of-pocket expenses, with only 14.5 per cent reimbursed in full.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, we will need to have open conversations about safe and ethical volunteering. These conversations require engagement by all relevant stakeholders, including volunteer involving organisations, peak bodies, corporates, unions, and Governments.
- In the medium term, we need to ensure that exploitation in volunteering is more effectively identified and prevented, leading to fewer cases of exploitation of volunteers.
- In 10 years, volunteers will be engaged safely and ethically across the ecosystem, with appropriate supports in place to protect their safety, interests, and wellbeing.

Focus Area 3: Conditions for a Thriving Volunteering Ecosystem

Systemic Shift 3.1: Making Volunteering a Cross-Portfolio Issue in Government

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for revitalised and sustainable leadership, investment, policy conditions, and partnerships, which provide the critical foundation for long-term impact, we need to move **from a fragmented approach to volunteering policy to a future where volunteering is recognised as a cross-portfolio issue across all levels of Government.**

The Current State

Volunteering is ubiquitous in Australian society with activities taking place across all domains of public life. Volunteers are involved in a myriad of services and activities including the arts, aged care, mental health, disability support, animal welfare, food and emergency relief, environment, sports, education, and more. In many cases, the contributions of volunteers are crucial to the survival of the sectors they volunteer in.

Responsibility for volunteering at the Commonwealth level sits within the Department of Social Services. Similarly, at a State and Territory Government level, departmental responsibility for volunteering typically sits within the community services portfolio. At all levels of Government, additional responsibilities for volunteering are rarely assigned to other departments, and volunteering is not consistently considered in the formulation of policy and programs. This results in policy and regulation that either overlooks volunteering entirely or inadequately addresses its unique challenges. The challenges of working in a federation are acutely felt by the volunteering ecosystem, with many receiving a mix of funding from different levels of Government. This compounds challenges and creates significant resourcing gaps in large parts of the ecosystem.

Our Case for Change

- Volunteering is not currently recognised as a cross-portfolio issue within Government at any level. This is despite volunteering being relevant to nearly all Government portfolios (depending on their structure) at a Federal, State/Territory, and local level. This has resulted in a piecemeal approach to supporting volunteering and significant duplication.
- Lack of strategic consideration of volunteering within Government requires stakeholders in the ecosystem to direct significant effort and resources to advocacy on issues such as disparate fundraising regulations, inconsistent background checking requirements, and the importance of robust and sustainable infrastructure to support volunteering. Advocacy on volunteering, including the true costs of enabling safe and effective volunteer involvement, is rarely effective or not prioritised, despite the efficiency and cost gains that could be achieved through addressing systemic issues impacting volunteering.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, we will work with Governments at every level to build a better understanding of the relevance of volunteering to different portfolios and the impact of policy on volunteering.
- In the medium term, all levels of Governments will have established mechanisms for seeking input on policies and programs that involve or impact volunteers and this input will be considered an essential pillar of design.
- In 10 years, Governments will be consistently considering the needs of volunteers and the volunteering ecosystem through comprehensive policy and investment.

Systemic Shift 3.2: Building Stronger Leadership and Shared Accountability

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for revitalised and sustainable leadership, investment, policy conditions, and partnerships, which provide the critical foundation for long-term impact, we need to move **from a siloed volunteering ecosystem weakened by unnecessary competition and duplication to one with strong leadership based on shared accountability and genuine collaboration that provides a united voice for volunteering.**

The Current State

The complexity and diversity of the volunteering ecosystem is one of its biggest strengths, but its sheer enormity has also contributed to enduring issues resulting from fragmentation and lack of collaboration. The expansiveness of volunteering, its myriad of expressions, and its existence on a continuum of community participation all contribute to an incoherent understanding of the centrality of volunteering in Australian society. Volunteering is one of the only unifying elements that transcends industries, people, and places, yet this is poorly recognised and understood.

The lack of coherence in understanding the ubiquity and relevance of volunteering has resulted in an absence of strategic leadership. Irrespective of how volunteering is manifested in a particular sector or community, the requisite elements for success are largely identical. Leaders at every level, from politicians and public servants, to volunteering peak bodies, to board directors and CEOs, and to those leading volunteer workforces, need to coalesce around a strategic agenda for volunteering and advocate for cross-cutting priorities. This will require courage to have uncomfortable conversations about how some stakeholders have failed to prioritise volunteering, including in their own departments, companies, and organisations.

Our Case for Change

- Despite diversity within volunteering there are common challenges that if resolved would improve conditions for the entire volunteering ecosystem. Efforts to address these systemic challenges has been fragmented due to low awareness of the commonality of issues between different actors in the volunteering ecosystem. This has resulted in a weakened advocacy position and significant duplication of effort and resources.
- Strategic prioritisation for volunteering within organisations has been deficient, despite many organisations relying on a volunteer workforce to deliver services and achieve their mission. Lack of internal investment in volunteering exacerbates the challenges experienced by Managers and Coordinators of Volunteers and reduces the efficacy of volunteering programs.
- Volunteering is a priority when conditions are right but is often the first thing to be cut from budgets and programs. This suggests there needs to be a significant shift in the mindset of leaders across the volunteering ecosystem that moves from lip service to action.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, we need to ensure that all stakeholders (volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, community groups, peak bodies, governments at every level, philanthropists, researchers, educational institutions, and businesses) see themselves as part of the volunteering ecosystem and understand their role in creating a thriving future for volunteering.
- In the medium term, stakeholders will be actively contributing to and implementing a shared agenda to advance volunteering in Australia.
- In 10 years, volunteering will be supported and advanced by strong leadership based on shared accountability and genuine collaboration that provides a united voice for volunteering.

Systemic Shift 3.3: Making a Commitment to Strategic Investment

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for revitalised and sustainable leadership, investment, policy conditions, and partnerships, which provide the critical foundation for long-term impact, we need to move **from directing majority of funding and support to volunteering programs based on solving problems to strategic investment approaches that also build common infrastructure, capacity, and capability.**

The Current State

Resourcing is rarely provided to comprehensively support the core functions required for the volunteering ecosystem to operate effectively. Providing and promoting volunteering opportunities requires investment in resources, referral services, education and awareness raising, fast and accessible screening systems, and other aspects that enable volunteering to occur. Currently, the volunteering ecosystem is hindered by low investment in capacity and capability building initiatives and advocacy on this issue continues to be ineffective.

Funding for programs and services that deliver specific outcomes for communities is undeniably important. But where such programs and services include volunteers in their delivery, adequate resourcing is required to support internal and external infrastructure. For volunteering in Australia to thrive, investment priorities need to be broadened to understand and account for the true costs of enabling volunteering and facilitating volunteer involvement. This will require conversations that challenge the status quo and generate new ideas about how volunteering should be funded and which actors in the volunteering ecosystem should have a responsibility for providing financial and other support.

Our Case for Change

- Adequately resourced local, place-based volunteering support services in all their forms can play an important role in volunteer placement, including enhancing the efficacy of the volunteer and promoting good retention outcomes.
- Local, place-based volunteering support services can be best placed to deliver services in support of the broader continuum of participatory action because they have deep community connections and a strong understanding of local needs.
- Funded services and programs often lack specific provisions for enabling volunteer involvement, including accounting for the costs associated with managing and supporting a volunteer workforce. This results in volunteer involving organisations cross-subsidising services, which is a threat to the sustainability of volunteering.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, we need to recognise and communicate the criticality of volunteering infrastructure and re-design funding, grant, and sponsorship agreements to provide for it.
- In the medium term, investment for supportive infrastructure will be explicitly allocated in grants and other resourcing strategies for the volunteering ecosystem.
- In 10 years, volunteering will be supported across Australia by common infrastructure and continuous strategic investment.

Systemic Shift 3.4: Recognising the Criticality of Volunteer Management

The Change We Want to See

To achieve our vision for revitalised and sustainable leadership, investment, policy conditions, and partnerships, which provide the critical foundation for long-term impact, we need to move **from a perception that volunteering 'just happens' to a recognition that robust volunteer engagement practices and leadership are essential tenets of impactful volunteering.**

The Current State

Without leadership there is no volunteering. Whether paid or unpaid, Leaders of Volunteers are the lynchpin of effective volunteer involvement. Those with responsibility for managing a volunteer workforce are under-recognised and under-valued. The invisibility of Volunteer Management as a profession and lack of appreciation for the criticality of this role has consistently stifled the potential of volunteering and exacerbated enduring recruitment and retention challenges. For volunteering to survive in Australia, correcting this is no longer a matter of choice.

One of the single most impactful changes that could be effected through the National Strategy for Volunteering is the immediate recognition and resourcing of volunteer management. This includes recognition of and support for those in leadership roles, but it also requires a concerted effort to create or improve the conditions that enable volunteer management to thrive. This includes investment in bespoke professional development pathways for leaders of volunteers and recognition of and investment in the true cost of involving volunteers. Those responsible for leading and managing volunteers are exceptionally passionate and talented professionals. Elevating this critical role and function is overdue and any serious effort to futureproof volunteering must start with investment in volunteer management.

Our Case for Change

- Effective leadership is a pre-requisite for volunteer satisfaction, performance, and retention. Leaders of Volunteers often have the necessary skills and competencies, but the competing demands of their role can force them to sacrifice relationship-building for administration, resulting in poorer outcomes for all.
- Leadership is important in organisations and groups of all sizes. Research on volunteering in grassroot organisations identified that leadership issues, such the misuse of power in committees, personality clashes, bullying behaviours, internal politics, and governance malpractice, outranked 'lack of time' as the largest barrier to joining committees. This underscores the importance of building a shared understanding of good practice volunteer leadership and the need to provide tools and training to support people in leadership roles.
- Volunteer leadership is a unique profession, requiring skills across multiple domains. The volunteer experience, a crucial factor in retention, relies on the effectiveness of leadership. The level of investment in volunteer management is a significant predictor of all factors associated with volunteering programs.

How We Will Get There

- In the short term, resourcing requirements of volunteer involvement, including the importance of investment in volunteer leadership, will be articulated and communicated.
- In the medium term, volunteer management will be recognised and resourced as a necessary function in volunteering programs, attracting both internal and external support.
- In 10 years, the importance of robust volunteer engagement practices and the critical role of leadership in volunteering will be consistently recognised as essential and resourced accordingly.

Realising the Strategy: Actions & Initiatives

Approach to Implementation

The National Strategy for Volunteering represents an ambitious, broad, and deep program of change. The systemic shifts and outcomes outlined under the three Focus Areas will guide both deep-seated and broad-based transformation, ensuring the promise offered by Australia’s long tradition of volunteering will be fulfilled over the next ten years.

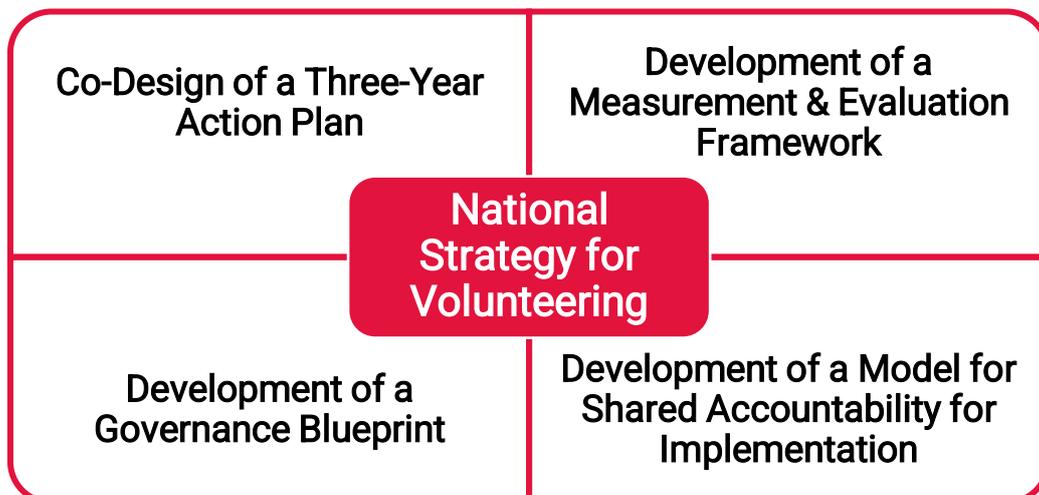
For the National Strategy to be brought to life, there needs to be continued engagement, commitment, and action from across the volunteering ecosystem. The National Strategy for Volunteering has identified a bold agenda. Fulfilling its ambition will require an enduring commitment from across the ecosystem to ensure continuous momentum and relevance over its ten-year lifespan.

A staged approach to implementing the National Strategy will enable us to build the right conditions and coalitions to generate long-term success. This staged approach to the implementation of the National Strategy will be guided by the following delivery framework over the next ten years:



Establishment Phase

The first year of implementation will be an Establishment Phase, which will lay the foundations for success over the National Strategy’s ten-year horizon. In 2023 the following initiatives will take place:



Next Steps

We are now seeking feedback from the volunteering ecosystem on the draft for the National Strategy for Volunteering. Specifically, we are seeking views on:

- Whether the vision resonates, what its strengths are, and any suggestions for improvement.
- Whether the systemic shifts that emerged from the co-design process are the right shifts the National Strategy should focus on.
- Whether there are additional shifts that are currently missing.
- Whether the short, medium, and long-term objectives under each systemic shift reflect the change we want to see.
- Whether the draft effectively captures the experiences and needs of different stakeholders, including volunteers.

As we move forward, we will also be building an understanding of existing initiatives currently in place across the volunteering ecosystem, how they align with the focus areas of the National Strategy, and how they might contribute to achieving the objectives of the systemic shifts. If you know about or are involved in initiatives we should be aware of, we want to hear from you. Initiatives could include specific programs, innovations, other strategies, policy or legislation, regulatory reform, research, or other relevant work taking place both within and outside the volunteering ecosystem.

During the consultations to date, including the Visioning Workshops and the various Working Group meetings, a wealth of new ideas for actions and initiatives were suggested. All this material was considered in the development of the draft, including influencing the design of the systemic shifts and underlying objectives. As we move into the Establishment Phase, these ideas will form the basis of the first Three-Year Action Plan and we are grateful to those who have been involved in the co-design journey for helping us build the foundations for this work.

The public feedback period on the draft will be open from Monday 14 November to Friday 2 December. Throughout this period, we will be engaging extensively with the volunteering ecosystem to validate and make improvements to the vision, focus areas, systemic shifts, and objectives. The draft will then be revised based on feedback and the final National Strategy for Volunteering will be launched in February 2023.

To provide your feedback on the Draft National Strategy for Volunteering complete our [survey](#) or send us a message through our [website](#).