

# National Strategy for Volunteering

2023–2033



National Strategy  
for Volunteering

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## Acknowledgement of Country

**The National Strategy for Volunteering acknowledges the Traditional Custodians of Country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. It pays respect to Elders past and present.**

Activities undertaken through the co-design process for the National Strategy for Volunteering took place on the ancestral lands of many of Australia's First Peoples. This included the lands of the Ngunnawal, Gadigal, Lutruwita, Nipaluna, Dja Dja Wurrung, Wurundjeri, Turrbal, Jagera, Yugambeh, Kombumerri, Kurna, Yawuru, Bindjareb, Noongar, Ngadjuri, Narungga, and Larrakia Peoples.

The National Strategy for Volunteering recognises that community giving has been taking place in First Nations communities for tens of thousands of years. It is committed to recognising the contribution of First Nations Peoples and celebrating the power of volunteering and community giving to promote reconciliation.

## **Dedication**

**The National Strategy for Volunteering is dedicated to the millions of volunteers across Australia who contribute their time to making Australia a vibrant, inclusive, supportive, and joyful place to live. It is also dedicated to the Leaders, Managers, and Coordinators of Volunteers, paid and unpaid, who provide inspiring leadership and enable volunteering to take place across Australian communities every day.**

## Acknowledgement of Contributors

**Many individuals and organisations contributed their time and expertise to co-designing the National Strategy for Volunteering. Volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, researchers and academics, volunteering peak bodies, volunteering support services, staff in local, state, and federal government departments, staff representing employee volunteering programs, enabling organisations, and members of the general public all guided the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering. These stakeholders make up the volunteering ecosystem.**

The National Strategy for Volunteering was funded by the Department of Social Services and led by Volunteering Australia. It is the culmination of a 12-month co-design process that benefited from an exceptional amount of hard work and dedication from those involved. Everyone who participated shared their time, expertise, and lived experience with passion and enthusiasm. The final product is a testament to the power of genuine collaboration towards a common goal and Australia's enduring devotion to volunteering.

Volunteering Australia would like to acknowledge the members of the National Strategy for Volunteering Council, the Corporate Volunteering Working Group, the Policy Working Group, the Research Working Group, and the Volunteer Management Working Group. The Council and Working Groups met throughout the project's 12-month lifespan to provide project governance and expertise. Their input added an additional layer of depth and rigour to the project, and we thank them for their ongoing strategic guidance.

Volunteering Australia would also like to acknowledge the work of the project's Core Design Team, comprised of members of the Council, Working Groups, and other individuals with expertise in volunteering. The Core Design Team was integral to the project's success, and we thank members for the generosity of their time and knowledge and for their invaluable critique.

# National Strategy for Volunteering

## VISION

### Volunteering is the heart of Australian communities

Where more people volunteer more often.

Where volunteers feel respected and know their contribution makes a difference.

Where volunteering is valued and properly considered in policy settings, service design, and strategic investment.

Where diversity in volunteering is recognised, celebrated, and supported.

Where people individually and collectively realise their potential for creating thriving communities.

## FOCUS AREAS & AIMS

### Individual Potential and the Volunteer Experience

Volunteering is safe, inclusive, accessible, meaningful, and not exploitative.

### Community and Social Impact

The diversity and impact of volunteering is articulated and celebrated.

### Conditions for Volunteering to Thrive

The right conditions are in place for volunteering to be effective and sustainable.

# STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

## 1.1 Focus on the Volunteer Experience

A good volunteer experience is paramount to achieving individual and collective goals. Providing volunteers with the opportunity to satisfy their motivations and aspirations, ensuring their time is used efficiently, and communicating how their involvement makes a difference will promote positive outcomes and improve retention.

## 1.2 Make Volunteering Inclusive and Accessible

Participating in volunteering should be an easy choice where everyone feels welcome to come as they are and contribute their time, skills, and passion to activities and causes they care about. Access should not be mistaken for ability and volunteering should take place in environments where people feel culturally and psychologically safe and included.

## 1.3 Ensure Volunteering is Not Exploitative

Volunteering should be safe and ethical. Appropriate supports are required to ensure that volunteers are protected. Volunteering should not be exploited as 'free labour', used to replace paid workers or compensate for shortages in the paid workforce, or be wholly responsible for delivering public services.

## 2.1 Diversify the Understanding of Volunteering

Improving the understanding of volunteering to include different cultural expressions and interpretations will ensure volunteering, in all forms, is well supported and celebrated across Australian communities.

## 2.2 Reshape the Public Perception of Volunteering

Expanding the public consciousness on volunteering will inspire more people to contribute to activities and causes they care about and will improve awareness about the role of volunteering in Australian society.

## 2.3 Recognise the Inherent Value of Volunteering

Celebrating and supporting volunteering as an activity with inherent value makes a powerful statement about the importance attributed to volunteering in Australian society. The innate value of volunteering should be recognised alongside the role volunteering plays in achieving other individual and collective outcomes.

## 2.4 Enable a Community-Led Approach

Empowering and enabling communities to be drivers of how volunteering influences their futures will ensure everyone who wants to participate can do so irrespective of their level of power or access to resources.

## 3.1 Make Volunteering a Cross-Portfolio Issue in Government

Governments need to consider volunteers and volunteering across all domains. Comprehensive policy and investment in volunteering should be recognised as an essential remit of governments at every level.

## 3.2 Build Strong Leadership and Shared Accountability

Strong leadership for a shared agenda on volunteering will elevate its importance and foster collaboration and accountability, enabling greater collective impact.

## 3.3 Commit to Strategic Investment

The availability of and investment in common enabling infrastructure, including technology, research, resources, and support services, will improve capacity and capability across the volunteering ecosystem.

## 3.4 Recognise the Importance of Volunteer Management

Recognition of and adequate resourcing for Volunteer Management as a function and profession will improve the experience of volunteers and amplify the impact of volunteering.

## Summary

**The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023–2033) is a ten-year blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. It is the first National Strategy for Volunteering in a decade, providing a strategic framework for enabling safe, supported, and sustainable volunteering.**

The purpose of the National Strategy for Volunteering is to guide the actions needed to achieve a better future for volunteering. It sets out the desired outcomes for volunteering in Australia over the next ten years. It provides a clear and compelling case, underpinned by robust data and evidence, for targeted and sufficient investment in volunteering and celebration of the role it plays in creating thriving communities.

The National Strategy for Volunteering identifies an ambitious yet achievable future state for volunteering where individual and collective potential is harnessed for the common good.

The National Strategy for Volunteering includes the following:

- 1. A vision for volunteering to be achieved over the National Strategy for Volunteering's ten-year timeframe.**
- 2. Three focus areas, which include the aims of the National Strategy for Volunteering.**
- 3. Eleven strategic objectives, which detail the work required to achieve the vision and aims.**
- 4. A timeline for phased implementation.**

## Vision

### Volunteering is the heart of Australian communities

- Where more people volunteer more often.
- Where volunteers feel respected and know their contribution makes a difference.
- Where volunteering is valued and properly considered in policy settings, service design, and strategic investment.
- Where diversity in volunteering is recognised, celebrated, and supported.
- Where people individually and collectively realise their potential for creating thriving communities.

## Focus Areas & Aims

Three interconnected focus areas, each with a clear aim, form the framework for the National Strategy for Volunteering:

1. **Individual Potential and the Volunteer Experience** – volunteering is safe, inclusive, accessible, meaningful, and not exploitative.
2. **Community and Social Impact** – the diversity and impact of volunteering is articulated and celebrated.
3. **Conditions for Volunteering to Thrive** – the right conditions are in place for volunteering to be effective and sustainable.

## Strategic Objectives

The eleven strategic objectives identify what needs to be achieved over the National Strategy for Volunteering's ten-year timeframe to achieve the vision and aims.

### 1.1 Focus on the Volunteer Experience

A good volunteer experience is paramount to achieving individual and collective goals. Providing volunteers with the opportunity to satisfy their motivations and aspirations, ensuring their time is used efficiently, and communicating how their involvement makes a difference will promote positive outcomes and improve retention.

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## Target Audience

The National Strategy for Volunteering was co-designed by stakeholders from across the volunteering ecosystem. It is intended to be implemented by and provide benefits for anyone who volunteers, works with volunteers, enables volunteering, or benefits from volunteering. It is up to individuals, communities, organisations, businesses, and governments to embrace their unique and important roles in creating a better Australia through volunteering.

## Volunteering in Australia

The National Strategy for Volunteering was developed using a wide range of evidence including experience, expertise, and research.

Research evidence was collated through an original research project (the Volunteering in Australia research) and a series of research papers (the Volunteering Research Papers Initiative), which capture evidence on a wide array of topics related to volunteering.

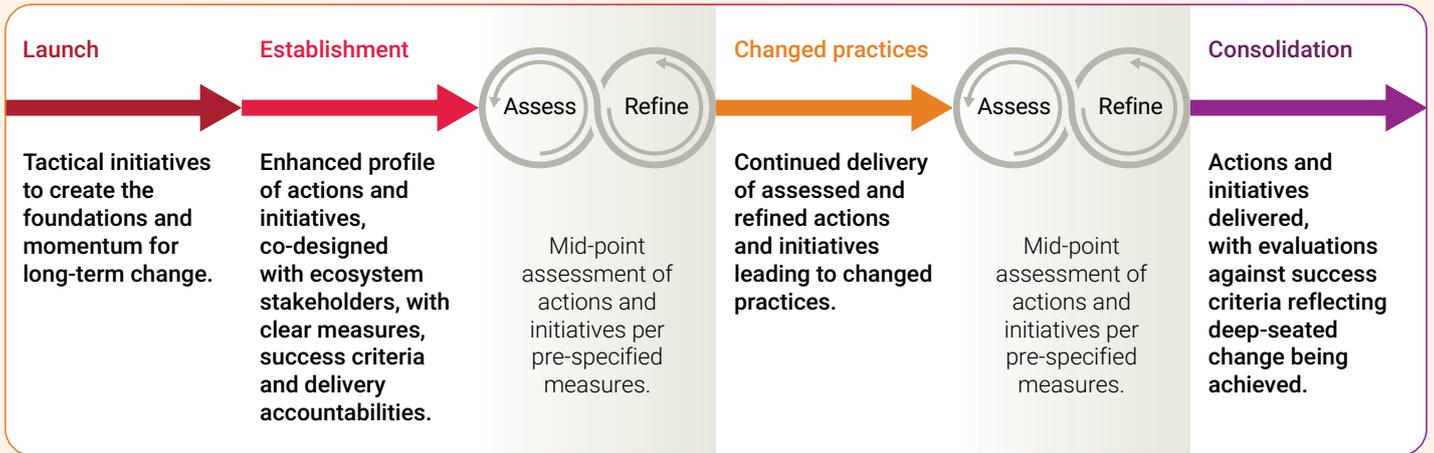
The Volunteering in Australia research is a series of reports that provide the core evidence base on contemporary volunteering in Australia, which informed the National Strategy for Volunteering. The Volunteering in Australia research was undertaken by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the Australian National University (ANU) Centre for Social Research and Methods, and a consortium of researchers from Curtin University, Griffith University, and the University of Western Australia.

The research undertaken to inform the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering is available on the [National Strategy for Volunteering website](#).

## Next Steps

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

A staged approach to implementation will focus on building the right conditions and coalitions to generate long-term success. This staged approach to the implementation will be guided by the following delivery framework:



## Establishment Phase

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



## How to Use the National Strategy for Volunteering

Members of the volunteering ecosystem can use the National Strategy for Volunteering to:

- Develop **new initiatives** or **align existing work** with those of other actors.
- Make the case for **investment** and in-kind resourcing to governments, philanthropists, foundations, and other grant-makers.
- **Collaborate** with other members of the volunteering ecosystem to achieve shared goals.
- **Conduct internal reviews** to understand the efficacy of one's own operations and identify areas for improvement.
- **Work together to advance a shared agenda** on volunteering to ensure volunteering in Australia is sustainable over the long-term and continues to be part of the rich social and cultural fabric of society.

# Forewords

## Minister for Social Services

The challenges of COVID-19 and natural disasters have highlighted the generous spirit of Australians, and their willingness to help those around them.

However, these challenges have also shone a light on the capacity of people to volunteer during such trying times, particularly as the demand for support and volunteers increases.

In such a complex and shifting environment, a cohesive strategy is essential in unifying all stakeholders to work towards a shared vision.

Volunteering is the thread that binds together the Australian spirit. It betters all our communities.

I acknowledge the valuable work and leadership of Volunteering Australia. Their extensive consultation and development of this significant piece of work is testament to the sector leading the way forward and I'm pleased the Australian Government has invested in this important work.

The National Strategy for Volunteering is a key step in re-imagining the future of volunteering in Australia. It is an important blueprint for our vital volunteering ecosystem and the many stakeholders involved.

Thank you to everyone across the volunteering sector for your tireless efforts and for committing to improving our volunteering system.

Together, we will create a supported and sustainable volunteering community across Australia that will benefit all of us.

*The Hon Amanda Rishworth MP, Minister for Social Services*

**The National Strategy for Volunteering is a key step in re-imagining the future of volunteering in Australia.**

## **CEO, Volunteering Australia**

Australia's vast volunteering ecosystem remains an essential albeit often under-recognised pillar of our nation's social and economic infrastructure. Supporting the innovative nature of volunteering whilst also forging a path to greater consistency is a significant challenge, and so leading the development of Australia's first National Strategy for Volunteering in a decade was a responsibility that Volunteering Australia did not take lightly. The project was undertaken during a time of precipitous change in Australia and around the world, which only further underscored the importance of developing a National Strategy that would both safeguard volunteering for the future and enable it to thrive. Stakeholders from across the volunteering ecosystem participated in the National Strategy project with a genuine desire to co-create a bright and prosperous future for volunteering. On behalf of Volunteering Australia, I thank everyone who contributed their time and expertise to this project of national significance.

The National Strategy for Volunteering was undertaken by a dedicated project team within Volunteering Australia, led by National Strategy Director Sarah Wilson, and which included National Strategy Research Fellow Jack McDermott, Deputy CEO and Policy Director Dr Sue Regan, and Communications Manager Kylie Hughes. Their extensive subject matter expertise, unparalleled skill, and unwavering passion for volunteering were critical to the success of this project. The sheer pace of the project and both the quality and quantity of its outputs were astounding and demonstrate what can be achieved when a project has such a remarkably talented team at its core.

The delivery of the National Strategy for Volunteering document is just one of many achievements of this project. As importantly, the scale of stakeholder engagement, the relationships built, and the volume of expertise and experience that were contributed through research, consultations, our Council, our Working Groups, and our Core Design Team leave a powerful legacy. For the first time in Australia's history, the entire volunteering ecosystem came together to build a shared agenda for volunteering. The National Strategy for Volunteering presents an exciting future and provides a roadmap for how we can get there. If the energy and enthusiasm contributed to this project are anything to go by, the next ten years will be a transformative period for volunteering in Australia.

*Mark Pearce, CEO, Volunteering Australia*

## **Chair, National Strategy for Volunteering Council**

It has been a privilege to Chair the National Strategy for Volunteering Council throughout 2022 and to work alongside a group of such committed, energised and highly knowledgeable peers. I would like to thank my Council colleagues who met regularly and were highly invested in ensuring that the new National Strategy for Volunteering would identify an ambitious, aspirational, yet achievable future state for volunteering across the country. The National Strategy for Volunteering provides a pivotal foundation for us to realise our aspirations for volunteering in Australia. The work undertaken in 2022, including the exceptional amount of expertise contributed by various stakeholders, is a testament to the power of genuine collaboration. Bringing the National Strategy to life is our next challenge and will require everyone to progress the shared agenda we have built to create a thriving future for volunteering.

*Grainne O'Loughlin, CEO, Karitane  
Chair, National Strategy for Volunteering Council*

## Chair, Research Working Group

Research evidence is an essential aspect of good policy and program design and was a central pillar of the National Strategy for Volunteering project. For more than 12 months, the Research Working Group, comprised of interdisciplinary academics from around Australia, volunteered their time to provide essential research knowledge and expertise to inform the development of the National Strategy and its strategic objectives. This includes the highly successful Volunteering Research Papers Initiative, a series of relevant and accessible papers produced during the year, and an excellent example of engagement and impact by leading Australian researchers within the volunteering ecosystem. The case for necessary strategic investment in volunteering research to progress the National Strategy for Volunteering has been made. Addressing research gaps is a priority to ensure relevant and up to date evidence continues to inform future actions and initiatives. I look forward to working with all stakeholders to ensure that happens over the next ten years.

*Professor Melanie Oppenheimer, Honorary Professor, Australian National University;  
Professor Emerita, Flinders University  
Chair, Research Working Group*

## Chair, Corporate Volunteering Working Group

When contemplating the future of volunteering and a National Strategy that goes further than any other volunteering strategy before it, the Corporate Volunteering Working Group was determined to create a legitimate voice for employees and workplace volunteering. We were clear we wanted to articulate the unique and enormous opportunity to unleash the power of people towards social impact, supported and coordinated by employers. While employee volunteering has grown in popularity and sophistication and the ecosystem of vendors and platforms to bridge the gap between the employees and the causes has advanced, employee volunteering remains under-utilised, under recognised and under resourced. The National Strategy for Volunteering provides an opportunity for us to harness the potential of employee volunteering to build a better Australia for all, and I encourage all Australian workplaces to rise to the challenge.

*Leigh Simmonds, Senior Manager Patient Advocacy, Corporate Social Responsibility  
and Reconciliation Action Plan Lead, Pfizer Australia  
Chair, Corporate Volunteering Working Group*

## Chair, Volunteer Management Working Group

Volunteers are integral to thriving communities. They support the social, cultural, and economic fabric of communities, benefitting not only others, but themselves as well. Just as important are the people who enable and support these volunteers – the Volunteer Managers – who work to ensure the volunteer experience is positive. The Volunteer Management Working Group brought the voice of Volunteer Managers to the National Strategy project and provided a critical lens of experience and expertise.

The relationship between volunteers and their managers is an important, yet frequently underrated, one. The National Strategy for Volunteering seeks to address that – to build awareness and understanding of the role of Volunteer Manager and ensure those roles are appropriately resourced and supported – so that, in the end, the volunteering experience is meaningful and rewarding for all.

*Dr Jessie Harman, Director, Rotary International  
Chair, Volunteer Management Working Group*

## Introduction

At its core, volunteering is about people: people doing things for others, for their community, and for the planet. Volunteering is simultaneously a deeply personal and collective pursuit. It involves an intentional choice to contribute time and energy to activities and causes that make a difference and add value to the world. Participating in volunteering enables people to turn their aspirations for their community into practical acts of generosity that have a profound influence on the ability of individuals, organisations, and communities to connect and flourish.

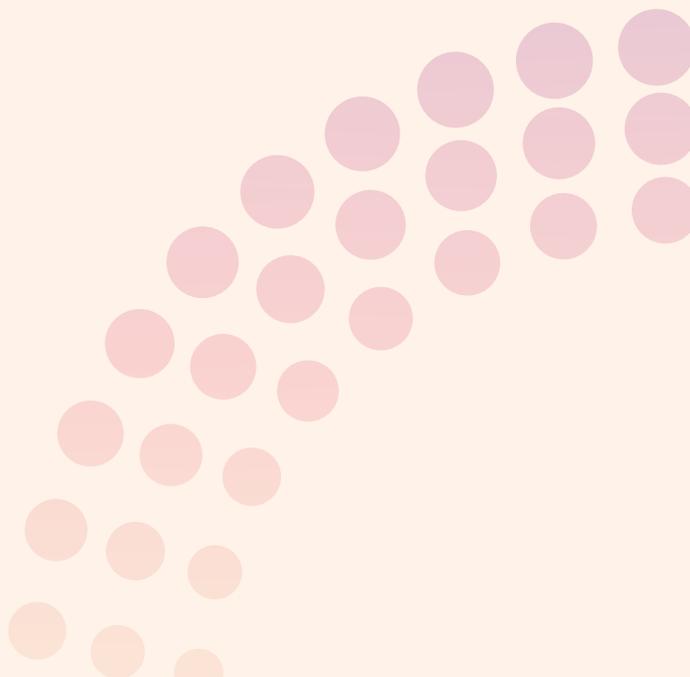
**At its core, volunteering is about people: people doing things for others, for their community, and for the planet.**

Volunteering is prolific across Australian society, but it is often invisible or not fully recognised or acknowledged. Volunteer contributions ensure delivery of arts, sports, events, community building, social welfare, health, education, animal welfare, conservation, and emergency services.

Volunteers offer an invaluable asset – their time – to contribute to activities and causes they care about, without expectation of reward. Throughout history, volunteering has been at the centre of communities and the driver of social change. As Australian communities evolve, the richness of an increasingly diverse population is reflected in the myriad of ways volunteering takes place. Whether connected by place, time, passion, or interest, volunteers come together to make an individual contribution to a collective effort for the betterment of society.

Because volunteering is an integral part of community with far-reaching benefits across society, its impact cannot truly be quantified. Measuring outcomes as numbers of volunteers or hours contributed does not fully capture what is an inherently personal and social activity. Measuring what matters begins with understanding and then celebrating the multitude of benefits volunteering creates for people, places, and the planet.

**Volunteering is prolific across Australian society, but it is often invisible or not fully recognised or acknowledged.**



# Volunteering in Australia: A Snapshot

**56.7%** of Australians volunteer either formally or informally

In 2022, approximately one quarter of Australians (26.7%) had undertaken formal volunteering and just under half (46.5%) had undertaken informal volunteering. Combined, **over half of Australians (56.7%) had undertaken either formal or informal volunteering in 2022.**

**The rate of volunteering has been gradually declining from 1/3 of adults in 2010 to 1/4 in 2022**

Formal volunteering in Australia has been declining since 2010 and dropped sharply in 2020 at the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. **The number of volunteers declined from 36.0% of the population in 2019 to 26.7% in 2022.** This equates to 1.86 million fewer volunteers at the start of 2022 compared to pre-COVID-19.

**83%** of volunteer involving organisations need more volunteers

**Most organisations reported that they needed between 1 and 20 additional volunteers.** Alarming, 11% of organisations reported that they needed more than 101 volunteers in the short-term.

**A significant mismatch exists between the volunteering opportunities being offered and what non-volunteers are interested in.** This applies to both the types of organisations and types of roles.

**Animal welfare** was the most common type of organisation people were interested in volunteering for (29.4%) followed by **environmental organisations** (23.0%) and **children and youth** (22.7%). Demand for volunteers appears to be greatest among mental health, emergency services, and health organisations.

# Why Australia Needs a National Strategy for Volunteering

The National Strategy for Volunteering has been developed at a pivotal time in Australia's history. Volunteering is ubiquitous in Australian society; however, a multitude of factors are threatening its sustainability, including declining numbers of formal volunteers, barriers to participating in volunteering, and increasing demand for services delivered by volunteers.

Volunteering also faces challenges from current demographic and economic circumstances: the compound effects of Australia's ageing population, the ongoing impacts of COVID-19, the housing and cost of living crises, and the mental health epidemic will make continued participation in volunteering untenable for many and out of reach for those who were never able to start in the first place.

Volunteering has a role in addressing demographic and social trends – including the growth of single person households and increasing loneliness. Volunteering does this by providing opportunities for connection with like-minded people and groups, engagement beyond existing social networks, and access to activities and decision-making processes that shape our collective future.

**There is no longer time to wait to address the sustainability crisis facing volunteering in Australia.**

Following a global pandemic and consecutive, record-breaking natural disasters, there is no longer time to wait to address the sustainability crisis facing volunteering in Australia. The good news is a different future is possible. Across eleven strategic objectives, the National Strategy for Volunteering highlights what is needed to avoid or reverse the damaging effects of the challenges facing volunteering.

The National Strategy for Volunteering maps how we will create a future in which volunteering can be sustained so it continues to be a rewarding experience for people who volunteer and strengthens our society, economy, and environment.

## The Case for Change

Volunteering has always been a constant in Australian society, but it has never achieved its full potential. Overall, more than half of adult Australians volunteered formally through an organisation or informally in the community in the period leading up to April 2022. However, the rate of formal volunteering has been declining for decades.

Access to volunteering remains unequal and there is an increasing and unsustainable reliance on an unpaid workforce to deliver essential services and programs in the community. This section highlights some of the significant trends impacting volunteering and threatening its future sustainability.

### Decline in Formal Volunteering

The reported rate of formal volunteering in Australia has been steadily declining, from about one in three people in 2010 to just over one in four in 2022.<sup>1</sup> This decline has been found in several data sources, including the General Social Survey, the Census, and the Household, Income and Labour Dynamics in Australia (HILDA) Survey.<sup>2</sup> Several factors are responsible for this decline, many of which relate to the challenges people face in their broader lives such as being time poor or having to balance paid work and unpaid care.

Decreased participation in formal volunteering creates significant challenges for volunteer involving organisations and for the general population, with many critical services such as emergency management, 24-hour helplines, and food security programs being heavily dependent on formal volunteer involvement. This reiterates the importance of creating volunteering opportunities that focus on the volunteer experience and encouraging new people into volunteering.

### Ongoing Impacts of COVID-19

Whilst many people continued to volunteer during the COVID-19 pandemic, enabled through organisational innovation and individual resilience, overall, there was a dramatic decrease in volunteering levels.<sup>3</sup> Many who stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 indicate they intend to resume in the future; however, predictions suggest it is unlikely there will be a return to pre-COVID rates in the coming years unless concerted action is taken to reverse this trend.

COVID-19 changed the demographics of formal volunteers, with men, those born overseas in non-English speaking countries, and those facing financial difficulties being less likely to have resumed volunteering. COVID-19 also placed ongoing pressure on services delivered or supported by volunteers. This caused increased workloads for volunteers, heightened demand for volunteers from volunteer involving organisations, and intensified concerns over risks of volunteering in the case of future pandemics.

## Australia's Ageing Population

Like many developed nations around the world, Australia has an ageing population.<sup>4</sup> The proportion of the population aged 65 years and over increased to 16.3 per cent in 2020 (from 12.4 per cent in 2000) and is projected to increase rapidly over the next decade.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, there has been a 110 per cent increase in the population aged 85 years and over since 2000, compared to a total population growth of 35 per cent.<sup>6</sup> This has implications for both the supply of volunteers (for example, as people stay in the paid workforce longer) and for the demand for volunteers, particularly across the care economy.

Volunteering creates opportunities for social interaction and meaningful activity for older people, and the community engagement it facilitates is an invaluable contribution to healthy ageing in Australia. The role of volunteering and volunteers in the lives of older people in Australia should be supported and strengthened as the population ages.

Volunteers are engaged extensively in aged care services, with a reported 83 per cent of residential and 51 per cent of in-home aged care providers involving volunteers respectively pre COVID-19.<sup>7</sup> Additionally, volunteers in aged care deliver significant services not provided by the paid workforce such as additional transport. Projected paid workforce shortages in the aged care sector will have an impact on volunteering and may place additional pressure on aged care volunteers. In this environment, volunteering should be supported to add value to the aged care system, while ensuring that volunteering across the care economy is safe and ethical.

## Rising Inequality and the Cost of Living

Cost of living and housing pressures in Australia sharpened in 2022, with the Australian Bureau of Statistics recording the largest quarterly increase in living costs in over 20 years.<sup>8</sup> The cost of living has also increased slightly over the past decade, particularly for pensioner households and households that rely on government payments.<sup>9</sup> Further, income and wealth inequality has been increasing in Australia since the mid-1990s.<sup>10</sup>

Cost of living and housing pressures will challenge both the capacity of people to volunteer and the work of volunteers in Australia. These pressures are acutely felt by community services organisations, many of which are experiencing increased demand for services and rely heavily on volunteer involvement to meet this need.<sup>11</sup> Further, people experiencing financial difficulties were more likely to have stopped volunteering during COVID-19 and are less likely to have recommenced, and financial barriers to volunteering can be significant.

## Mental Health Challenges

Mental wellness is an essential part of overall health and wellbeing. The 2020 National Study of Mental Health and Wellbeing found that two in five people in Australia have experienced a mental disorder during their lifetime.<sup>12</sup> Further, the Report to the Nation from Mental Health Australia found that more than half of respondents reported that they needed mental health support in the previous three months.<sup>13</sup>

Australia's mental health system faces acute challenges. The Productivity Commission Inquiry into Mental Health revealed that Australia's mental health system is fragmented and under-resourced.<sup>14</sup> As cost of living pressures, environmental challenges, natural hazards, workforce changes, and the ongoing impact of COVID-19 are likely to pose further challenges to mental health across the country, this system will be placed under even greater strain.

Volunteering is associated with better life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, and perceived mental health, and volunteering can play a strong role in mental health recovery.<sup>15</sup> The Productivity Commission Inquiry noted the extensive contributions of volunteers to the delivery of mental health services in Australia. Ensuring volunteering thrives in the coming years will not only be beneficial but crucial to safeguarding mental health in Australia.

**Volunteering is associated with better life satisfaction, happiness, self-esteem, and perceived mental health, and volunteering can play a strong role in mental health recovery.**

### Loneliness

Loneliness can be harmful to mental and physical health. In surveys conducted prior to COVID-19, it was estimated that at least one in four people in Australia experienced problematic levels of loneliness.<sup>16</sup> This was exacerbated by COVID-19, with almost half of Australians experiencing loneliness in April 2020.<sup>17</sup> Loneliness is more commonly experienced by young adults, those living alone, those with children (either singly or in a couple), and men, though women were more likely to have experienced loneliness during COVID-19.<sup>18</sup>

Volunteering has been found to reduce social isolation and loneliness. Those who stopped volunteering during the first year of COVID-19 were far more likely to say that they felt lonely at least some of the time than those who continued to volunteer.<sup>19</sup> Opportunities to engage in meaningful volunteering must be visible and accessible to help tackle loneliness, particularly for those most susceptible.

### Challenges Facing Regional, Rural and Remote Australia

Australia is one of the most urbanised countries in the world, with one of the lowest population densities outside its major cities.<sup>20</sup> Compared to those in cities, people in regional, rural, and remote areas experience poorer education, health, and economic outcomes.<sup>21</sup>

Volunteering in regional, rural, and remote communities was hit hard by COVID-19. More limited access to technology in these communities compounded the effects of COVID-19 on volunteering, particularly among smaller community-based organisations. A study from the Foundation for Rural and Regional Renewal found that volunteer-only organisations were significantly less likely to be using most forms of digital technology than were their counterparts with paid employees.<sup>22</sup> Almost one in ten volunteer-only organisations indicated that they did not have internet access at all.<sup>23</sup>

Despite ongoing challenges, volunteering is a vital part of community in regional, rural, and remote Australia. Efforts to advance volunteering in Australia must acknowledge the strengths and unique geographical challenges of volunteering.

### The Future of Work

The nature of paid work is changing, both in Australia and internationally, driven by increased use of automation and artificial intelligence technologies, increased demand for digital skills, changing demographics in the workforce (particularly an increased proportion of workers aged 65 and over), and changing work patterns marked by an increase in part-time, casual, and “gig” roles, and emerging interest in a four-day work week.<sup>24</sup>

Greater flexibility and a move away from traditional “9–5” work hours could give people new opportunities to volunteer. Equally, as expectations of paid work conditions and employment practices change, volunteers may expect their volunteering roles to change as well.

## Employee Volunteering

There is a huge opportunity for workplaces to invest in employee volunteering programs that enable their paid workforce to contribute time and skills to volunteer involving organisations and charitable causes. As of November 2022, there were 13,752,800 Australians in paid employment.<sup>25</sup> This represents a latent workforce of prospective volunteers that could add significant value to Australian society through employee volunteering. In addition to the benefits that employee volunteering generates for volunteer involving organisations and the community, it also increases affective commitment (emotional attachment) to one's job and improves job satisfaction for the employees who participate.<sup>26</sup>

An increase in employee volunteering initiatives could provide vital surge capacity to Australian communities; however, this must be done in a way that genuinely creates value for both parties and doesn't place additional strain on volunteer involving organisations. The National Strategy for Volunteering provides a foundation to consider how Corporate Australia and workplaces of all sizes can help to futureproof volunteering through employee volunteering.

## Technology

Technology is likely to play an increasingly important role in volunteering in the future. Technology is currently being used to improve volunteer recruitment, enable faster communication with volunteers, facilitate volunteer management processes, and improve information and data collection.

Greater use of technology can unlock new virtual or remote volunteering opportunities, which can meet the desire for flexibility and remove geographical barriers to participation. The use of technology in volunteering must be done with caution to ensure it does not inadvertently limit accessibility, particularly for older volunteers and those living in regional, remote, and rural Australia.

**Reducing barriers to volunteering is essential for ensuring the young people of today and tomorrow can continue Australia's strong tradition of volunteering.**

## Young People

Young people volunteer at a similar rate to most other age groups, and prior to COVID-19, the proportion of people aged 15–24 years who volunteer was steadily increasing.<sup>27</sup> However, volunteering among young people has not shown signs of recovery since COVID-19. Young people are the future of volunteering with research finding Gen Z (48 per cent) and Millennials (42 per cent) represent the vast majority of those willing to volunteer in the future.<sup>28</sup>

Gen Zs and Millennials are deeply worried about the state of the world, but they are struggling to balance their desire to effect change with the demands of everyday life, citing the cost of living as their greatest concern.<sup>29</sup> Despite this, they are willing to turn down jobs that do not align with their values with nearly two in five rejecting a role based on their personal ethics. Young people want to volunteer. Reducing barriers to volunteering is essential for ensuring the young people of today and tomorrow can continue Australia's strong tradition of volunteering.

# National Strategy for Volunteering

**The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023–2033) is a ten-year blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. It is the first National Strategy for Volunteering in a decade, providing a strategic framework for enabling safe, supported, and sustainable volunteering.**

The purpose of the National Strategy for Volunteering is to provide guideposts to a better future for volunteering. It highlights activities and approaches that are currently working and should be preserved, as well as opportunities for improvement and change. The National Strategy for Volunteering identifies an ambitious yet achievable future state for volunteering where individual and collective potential is harnessed for the common good. It is up to individuals, communities, organisations, businesses, and governments to embrace their unique and important roles in creating a better Australia through volunteering.

## A Guide to This Document

**The National Strategy for Volunteering sets out the desired outcomes for volunteering in Australia over the next ten years. It provides a clear and compelling case, underpinned by robust data and evidence, for targeted and sufficient investment in volunteering and celebration of the role it plays in creating thriving communities.**

The National Strategy for Volunteering includes the following:

1. A vision for volunteering to be achieved over the National Strategy for Volunteering's ten-year timeframe.
2. Three focus areas, which include the aims of the National Strategy for Volunteering.
3. Eleven strategic objectives<sup>1</sup>, which detail the work required to achieve the National Strategy for Volunteering's vision and aims.
4. A timeline for phased implementation.

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<sup>1</sup> In the Draft Framework for the National Strategy for Volunteering, which was published for feedback, the Strategic Objectives were referred to as 'Systemic Shifts'.

## Things to keep in mind when reading this document

### Volunteering exists on a continuum

- Volunteering exists on a continuum of participation and civic engagement, which does not have defined borders. It is not possible to holistically define or describe volunteering in a way that adequately captures the range of activities and expressions that occur under the umbrella of volunteering. The National Strategy for Volunteering is largely directed towards formal volunteering, but the benefits it creates will naturally flow to other forms of participation and civic engagement, including informal volunteering.

### The eleven strategic objectives represent the key challenges facing volunteering

- The strategic objectives identify changes that are needed over the next ten years to ensure the safety, strength, and sustainability of volunteering; however, the objectives don't necessarily generalise to all forms or expressions of volunteering. Feedback received through the co-design process identified the eleven objectives as being broadly representative of the key challenges facing volunteering and the opportunities for improvement. For some stakeholders, the objectives may not directly reflect or easily translate to what is happening in their community or organisation.

### Futureproofing volunteering requires both innovation and continuity

- The National Strategy for Volunteering is about both innovation and change *and* preserving what works by investing in continuity of good practice where this makes sense. There is considerable good practice that could be adopted more widely and leveraged to improve outcomes in diverse settings for volunteering.

### Implementation will require multidimensional approaches

- The National Strategy for Volunteering will need to complement other initiatives taking place both within and outside the volunteering ecosystem to ensure there are collaborative approaches to common challenges and opportunities. The sheer vastness of the volunteering ecosystem and the unique needs and expectations of different stakeholders is difficult to adequately capture in one strategy, and many challenges will need to be resolved with multidimensional approaches.

### This is only the beginning of the conversation

- The publication of the National Strategy for Volunteering is only the beginning of the conversation. There is more work to be done to determine what implementation looks like, which will require further consultation and collaboration. The National Strategy for Volunteering provides a blueprint for a way forward that is designed to be adaptable and informed by continuous improvement based on feedback, evidence, and lived experience.

# Terminology

## What is Volunteering?

Volunteering is a fluid concept that has various expressions and interpretations. The National Strategy for Volunteering has adopted Volunteering Australia's definition of volunteering as *'time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.'* This captures both formal and informal volunteering.

It is acknowledged that the concept of volunteering is not universally understood. In First Nations communities, the term 'community giving' is often used to describe what otherwise might be considered volunteering, and in some cultures there is no equivalent word for volunteering.

Not everyone agrees on terminology and terminology is often context dependent. The terms used in the National Strategy for Volunteering are based on commonality of use, but they are not exhaustive. Some terms may be foreign to some readers and alternative terms may be used to mean the same thing in different contexts.

## Terms Used in the National Strategy for Volunteering

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### **Volunteers**

Those who give their time willingly for the common good and without financial gain.

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### **Volunteering**

Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.

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### **Volunteering Ecosystem**

A network of people, organisations, institutions, and agencies all working for the collective viability and recognition of volunteering in Australia.

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**Activity-Based Volunteering**

Where individuals or groups volunteer to complete an activity-based task or role. For example, planting trees or sorting donations.

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**Employee Volunteering**

Where employees are empowered or enabled by their workplace to contribute time, skill, or effort to a volunteer involving organisation or cause.

*Also referred to as Corporate Volunteering.*

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**Formal Volunteering**

Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations and groups (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.

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**Informal Volunteering**

Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside the context of a formal organisation or group. This includes assisting people in the community, excluding one's own family members. For example, looking after children, property, or pets; providing home or personal assistance; or giving someone professional advice.

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**Skills-Based Volunteering**

Where individuals or groups with professional qualifications and/or experience volunteer their skills and expertise. For example, building a website or providing bookkeeping services.

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**Spontaneous Volunteers**

People without a formal association with a volunteer involving organisation who seek out or are invited to help with various volunteering opportunities, often in connection with a community response to disasters.

*Also referred to as Emergent Volunteers and Unaffiliated Volunteers.*

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**Volunteer Management**

The function of managing, leading, and supporting volunteers.

*Also referred to as Volunteer Coordination and Volunteer Leadership.*

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**Volunteer Managers**

The person/s responsible for volunteer management/engagement in an organisation or group. The role typically includes responsibility for recruitment, induction, training, supervision, ongoing support, and recognition.

*Other common titles for this role include Volunteer Coordinator, Manager/Coordinator of Volunteers, Leader of Volunteers, and Leader of Volunteer Engagement.*

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**Volunteering Infrastructure**

The enabling governance, operational, and technological structures and systems that provide capacity and capability for the volunteering ecosystem.

## What is the Volunteering Ecosystem?

Historically there has been an absence of an agreed term that encompasses the breadth of people, organisations, institutions, and agencies involved in volunteering. Historically, the term 'volunteering sector' has been used, which is generally understood to mean the organisations that engage volunteers. This term does not capture the range of stakeholders with an interest in volunteering. Further, volunteering is not confined to a single 'sector,' but takes place in an array of contexts and is a vital part of day-to-day community life across Australia. For this reason, the National Strategy for Volunteering coined the term 'volunteering ecosystem'.

The volunteering ecosystem is a network of people, organisations, institutions, and agencies that are all working for the collective viability and recognition of volunteering in Australia.

### Stakeholders in the Volunteering Ecosystem

**Volunteers** – those who give their time willingly for the common good and without financial gain.

**Volunteer Involving Organisations** – any organisation/group/business/government department that engages volunteers.

**Volunteering Support Services (also known as Volunteer Resource Centres and Volunteer Support Organisations)** – place-based organisations that promote, resource, and support volunteering in local communities. These organisations work with volunteers to ensure their experience is positive and safe, and with volunteer involving organisations to provide support for recruitment, management, and recognition of volunteers.

**Volunteering Australia** – the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community.

**State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies** – the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies that advocate for volunteering and deliver state/territory/local programs and initiatives.

**National Peak Bodies** – national organisations that represent a sector, industry, or the community.

**Community Organisations/Groups (including Grassroots Associations)** – a broad range of organisations that provide activities, services, and/or programs in the community.

**Philanthropy** – funders, social investors, and social change agents working to achieve positive social, cultural, environmental, and community change by leveraging assets and influence.

**The Business Community** – businesses and companies with an interest in volunteering.

**The Research Community** – researchers, academics, universities, and other educational institutions with an interest in volunteering.

**Governments** – Federal, State, Territory and Local Governments in Australia.

**Enabling Organisations** – organisations that act as an intermediary by providing resources and support to enable volunteering. For example, organisations that provide IT infrastructure to support volunteering.

The purpose of introducing the term 'volunteering ecosystem' is to holistically capture the range of different stakeholders that have an interest in volunteering. Whilst the term does not yet have a broad understanding, creating shared language is an important part of the way forward for the future of volunteering in Australia.

The volunteering ecosystem is vast and complex. In many cases, certain stakeholders might fit more than one category. For example, many Government departments also run volunteering programs, making them volunteer involving organisations as well as policymaking institutions. The role of stakeholders can also be very different depending on jurisdiction, location, legislation, funding, or community need. This includes volunteer involving organisations and community groups that might be volunteer-led and involve no paid staff.

Some stakeholders, such as national peak bodies, might not have a specific focus on volunteering but will likely have members that involve volunteers or be representing interests or issues that affect volunteers in some capacity. Many organisations, groups, and communities, such as informal, cultural, and interfaith groups, may not identify as being part of the volunteering ecosystem, yet many of their activities would be considered volunteering.

**It is hoped that the term volunteering ecosystem will expand the understanding of the diverse range of stakeholders that have an interest in or are involved in volunteering.**

It is hoped that the term volunteering ecosystem will expand the understanding of the diverse range of stakeholders that have an interest in or are involved in volunteering. It is also hoped the broader term will enable individuals and groups that do not currently recognise themselves in the broader volunteering landscape to see themselves reflected in the volunteering ecosystem going forward.

# How the National Strategy for Volunteering was Developed

## The National Strategy for Volunteering was developed through a 12-month co-design process.

During the Establishment Phase of the project, a National Strategy for Volunteering Council was formed to provide oversight and strategic guidance to the project. In addition, four working groups were appointed to represent the following interests: Corporate Volunteering, Volunteer Management, Volunteering Policy, and Volunteering Research.

The National Strategy for Volunteering Council and Working Groups had 94 members and collectively met 29 times. In addition, three Cross-Government Workshops were held, which were attended by 33 people representing 17 Federal Government Departments and Agencies.

The names of the National Strategy for Volunteering Council and Working Group Members can be found at [Appendix A – Development of the National Strategy for Volunteering](#).

The co-design process was conducted in four stages:

### Stage One: Discovery Phase

The Discovery Phase focused on building the evidence base for the National Strategy for Volunteering. Consultations with stakeholders during this phase included open engagements, focus groups, interviews, open submissions, the Volunteering in Australia research surveys, and the Volunteering Research Papers Initiative.

During the Discovery Phase, 84 consultations were attended by 400 stakeholders representing 276 organisations. Forty-four open submissions were also received.

The Volunteering in Australia research was undertaken to provide a robust evidence-base on the contemporary state of volunteering in Australia. The population survey, which informed The Volunteer Perspective report, collected data from 3,587 people. The organisation survey, which informed The Organisation Perspective report, collected data from 1,345 respondents representing 1,209 organisations.

Researchers and academics from across Australia also produced a series of Volunteering Research Papers on topics of interest in volunteering. Twenty-two papers were received from 38 authors.

More information on the Research Evidence used to inform the evidence-base for the National Strategy for Volunteering can be found in the Research Evidence section and a list of the Volunteering Research Papers can be found at [Appendix B](#).

## Stage Two: Visioning Phase

The Visioning Phase involved face-to-face participatory-design workshops. During these workshops participants individually and then collectively designed their vision for the future of volunteering. The workshop materials were created based on feedback received during the Discovery Phase and ideas and comments provided during the Visioning Workshops will be used to inform the first three-year Action Plan.

A total of 16 Visioning Workshops were attended by 355 participants. The workshops were held in the following locations:

- Sydney (2)
- Melbourne (2)
- Broome
- Launceston
- Brisbane (2)
- Mandurah
- Hobart
- Gold Coast
- Perth
- Bendigo
- Adelaide (2)
- Canberra

## Stage Three: Build Phase

The Build Phase involved seven iterative workshops over a four-week period. A Core Design Team made up of 23 experts from across the volunteering ecosystem distilled the findings from the Discovery Phase, the evidence from the Volunteering in Australia research, and the outputs of the Visioning Phase into a Draft Framework for the National Strategy for Volunteering.

The Members of the Core Design Team can be found at [Appendix A](#).

## Stage Four: Test and Refine Phase

The Draft Framework was published for feedback and stakeholders were invited to respond to the vision, aims, and strategic objectives (called systemic shifts in the Draft Framework). Feedback was obtained through an open consultation, online survey, and meetings with various stakeholder groups. Face-to-face workshops and meetings were also held in Balaklava, Darwin and Perth.

Consultations on the Draft Framework were attended by 137 stakeholders. The online survey received 101 responses and 14 written submissions were received. The National Strategy for Volunteering was finalised based on feedback received on the Draft Framework.

The co-design journey involved 1,541 individual engagements with stakeholders representing 672 organisations, groups, and interests from across the volunteering ecosystem. A considerable number of stakeholders who were involved in the project participated on multiple occasions and through a variety of consultation methods.

The Volunteering Peak Bodies in every state and territory provided support throughout the project. This included acting as a conduit to their members and networks, assisting with disseminating the Volunteering in Australia Organisation Survey, providing support at Visioning Workshops, and participating in various working groups and the co-design process.

# Vision

## Volunteering is the heart of Australian communities

Where more people volunteer more often.

Where volunteers feel respected and know their contribution makes a difference.

Where volunteering is valued and properly considered in policy settings, service design, and strategic investment.

Where diversity in volunteering is recognised, celebrated, and supported.

Where people individually and collectively realise their potential for creating thriving communities.

The vision for the National Strategy for Volunteering was co-designed through interactive workshops held across Australia in 2022. These workshops built on earlier visions for the future expressed during the project's Discovery Phase. Through every conversation that helped to build the vision, irrespective of people's background or experience, five themes emerged:

1.

Everyone should be able to volunteer if they want to, on their terms, and throughout their life.

2.

Volunteering is an innately personal undertaking that is purposeful and provides meaning.

3.

Volunteers should be valued and celebrated, and their contribution should be recognised and underpinned by strong leadership, shared infrastructure, and sufficient resourcing.

4.

There are countless expressions of volunteering, which are influenced by a range of factors including age, place, culture, ethnicity, faith, history, and shared interests.

5.

Volunteering is seen as the single most impactful way to realise individual and collective potential to create and sustain thriving communities.

# Principles

The National Strategy for Volunteering is designed to be a living document that is regularly reviewed and adapted as circumstances change and volunteering evolves. The National Strategy for Volunteering's five guiding principles will enable it to be dynamic, respond to emerging trends, and learn from and build on what works.

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## 1. Evidence-Based Approach

The National Strategy for Volunteering is underpinned by a robust evidence-base. This includes data and findings from research, insights from lived experience, and the incorporation of knowledge and expertise from individuals, communities, and organisations. This will allow the National Strategy for Volunteering to promote existing practice which is working well and highlight where change and innovation is needed. Continuing to learn from and building the evidence-base for volunteering will be integral to success.

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## 2. Commitment to Co-Design

The National Strategy for Volunteering was developed using a co-design approach. This recognised the importance of engaging with stakeholders from across the volunteering ecosystem to ensure the National Strategy for Volunteering reflected their experiences and captured their needs and aspirations. An ongoing dialogue with the volunteering ecosystem will ensure that the National Strategy for Volunteering is intersectional, shaped by diverse perspectives, and its actions are inclusive and relevant in different contexts.

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## 3. Investment in Collaboration

Achieving the vision of the National Strategy for Volunteering requires diverse stakeholders to unite around and promote a shared agenda. Constructive collaboration, which leverages the expertise of different stakeholders, minimises duplication, and shares responsibility for action, will enable efficient and effective use of resources towards a common goal.

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## 4. Courage to be Experimental and Adaptable

Many of the actions that flow from the National Strategy for Volunteering will be experimental by nature as new collaboration and ideas are explored and tested. An openness to experimenting, learning, and adapting will enable the adoption of new practices, which will ensure relevance over time in an ever-changing world.

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## 5. Investment in Continuous Improvement

A commitment to continuous learning and improvement will facilitate proactive reflection and adaptation. This will require strong monitoring and evaluation, a willingness to reflect honestly on progress, and stopping or adjusting when things are not working for volunteers or intended beneficiaries, or not meeting agreed objectives.

# Focus Areas

Three interconnected focus areas form the framework for the National Strategy for Volunteering.

## 1. Individual Potential and the Volunteer Experience

Volunteering is safe, inclusive, accessible, meaningful, and not exploitative.

## 2. Community and Social Impact

The diversity and impact of volunteering is articulated and celebrated.

## 3. Conditions for Volunteering to Thrive

The right conditions are in place for volunteering to be effective and sustainable.

## 1. INDIVIDUAL POTENTIAL AND THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

<b>AIM</b>	
Volunteering is inclusive and accessible, allowing everyone to express themselves and contribute to causes and activities they care about.	
<b>WHAT THE FOCUS AREA IS ABOUT</b>	
Participating in volunteering should be inclusive and accessible for everyone. Volunteering should be an activity that people can engage in across their lifespan, which provides meaning and purpose.	
<b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
<b>1.1 Focus on the Volunteer Experience</b>	Volunteers have a meaningful and enriching experience, feel valued, and know how their contribution makes a difference.
<b>1.2 Make Volunteering Inclusive and Accessible</b>	Volunteering is inclusive and accessible to everyone on their terms.
<b>1.3 Ensure Volunteering is Not Exploitative</b>	Volunteers are engaged safely and ethically, with supports in place to protect their safety, interests, and wellbeing.

## 2. COMMUNITY AND SOCIAL IMPACT

<b>AIM</b>	
Volunteering is recognised and celebrated for the critical role it plays in bringing together and nurturing flourishing and resilient communities.	
<b>WHAT THE FOCUS AREA IS ABOUT</b>	
Volunteering is an essential pillar of individual and community wellbeing. It is an activity at the heart of communities and is a key enabler of creating healthy, happy, connected, and resilient people and places.	
<b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
<b>2.1 Diversify the Understanding of Volunteering</b>	Volunteering is respected and supported in all its forms through an expanded understanding of different cultural interpretations and expressions.
<b>2.2 Reshape the Public Perception of Volunteering</b>	A comprehensive understanding of volunteering is embedded in Australia's public consciousness.
<b>2.3 Recognise the Inherent Value of Volunteering</b>	Volunteering is recognised and supported as an activity with inherent value and for its role in facilitating individual and community outcomes.
<b>2.4 Enable a Community-Led Approach</b>	Communities are the primary drivers of how volunteering influences their future.

## 3. CONDITIONS FOR VOLUNTEERING TO THRIVE

<b>AIM</b>	
Volunteering has intentional and sustainable leadership, investment, policy conditions, and partnerships, which provide the critical foundation for long-term impact.	
<b>WHAT THE FOCUS AREA IS ABOUT</b>	
Establishing and sustaining the right conditions for volunteering to thrive, to improve collaboration and accountability, and to enable greater impact.	
<b>STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES</b>	<b>OUTCOMES</b>
<b>3.1 Make Volunteering a Cross-Portfolio Issue in Government</b>	Governments are consistently considering the needs of volunteers and supporting volunteering through comprehensive policy settings and investment.
<b>3.2 Build Strong Leadership and Shared Accountability</b>	Volunteering is advanced through a common agenda, underpinned by strong leadership, shared accountability, and genuine collaboration.
<b>3.3 Commit to Strategic Investment</b>	Volunteering is supported across Australia by common infrastructure and continuous strategic investment.
<b>3.4 Recognise the Importance of Volunteer Management</b>	Strong volunteer engagement practices and the role of Leaders of Volunteers are acknowledged as critical and appropriately supported.

# Overview of Strategic Objectives

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## 1.1 Focus on the Volunteer Experience

A good volunteer experience is paramount to achieving individual and collective goals. Providing volunteers with the opportunity to satisfy their motivations and aspirations, ensuring their time is used efficiently, and communicating how their involvement makes a difference will promote positive outcomes and improve retention.

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## 1.2 Make Volunteering Inclusive and Accessible

Participating in volunteering should be an easy choice where everyone feels welcome to come as they are and contribute their time, skills, and passion to activities and causes they care about. Access should not be mistaken for ability and volunteering should take place in environments where people feel culturally and psychologically safe and included.

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## 1.3 Ensure Volunteering is Not Exploitative

Volunteering should be safe and ethical. Appropriate supports are required to ensure that volunteers are protected. Volunteering should not be exploited as 'free labour', used to replace paid workers or compensate for shortages in the paid workforce, or be wholly responsible for delivering public services.

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## 2.1 Diversify the Understanding of Volunteering

Improving the understanding of volunteering to include different cultural expressions and interpretations will ensure volunteering, in all forms, is well supported and celebrated across Australian communities.

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## 2.2 Reshape the Public Perception of Volunteering

Expanding the public consciousness on volunteering will inspire more people to contribute to activities and causes they care about and will improve awareness about the role of volunteering in Australian society.

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## 2.3 Recognise the Inherent Value of Volunteering

Celebrating and supporting volunteering as an activity with inherent value makes a powerful statement about the importance attributed to volunteering in Australian society. The innate value of volunteering should be recognised alongside the role volunteering plays in achieving other individual and collective outcomes.

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## 2.4 Enable a Community-Led Approach

Empowering and enabling communities to be drivers of how volunteering influences their futures will ensure everyone who wants to participate can do so irrespective of their level of power or access to resources.

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### **3.1 Make Volunteering a Cross-Portfolio Issue in Government**

Governments need to consider volunteers and volunteering across all domains. Comprehensive policy and investment in volunteering should be recognised as an essential remit of governments at every level.

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### **3.2 Build Strong Leadership and Shared Accountability**

Strong leadership for a shared agenda on volunteering will elevate its importance and foster collaboration and accountability, enabling greater collective impact.

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### **3.3 Commit to Strategic Investment**

The availability of and investment in common enabling infrastructure, including technology, research, resources, and support services, will improve capacity and capability across the volunteering ecosystem.

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### **3.4 Recognise the Importance of Volunteer Management**

Recognition of and adequate resourcing for Volunteer Management as a function and profession will improve the experience of volunteers and amplify the impact of volunteering.

## **Interdependencies of Strategic Objectives**

The National Strategy for Volunteering has a bold agenda. It identifies a roadmap for implementation that will require the simultaneous execution of many interconnected parts. The eleven strategic objectives of the National Strategy for Volunteering are all interdependent. Each objective must be progressed in tandem for the National Strategy for Volunteering to achieve its vision and aims, and new objectives and priorities may emerge as implementation progresses.

# Indicators of Success

Measuring the outcomes of volunteering is complex. Volunteering provides different and often simultaneous benefits to different stakeholders, including volunteers, organisations and groups, those volunteering aims to assist, and broader society. Volunteering influences both the strength and direction of outcomes, and it is responsible for creating outcomes.

The National Strategy for Volunteering has identified understanding and improving the volunteer experience as the most critical success factors to assess in the short-term, because this will contribute to addressing the current need to grow volunteering and will inform the longer-term volunteering sustainability agenda.

Three indicators of success are essential to achieving the National Strategy for Volunteering's vision and aims:

- 1. The volunteer experience has been improved**
- 2. Volunteering is comprehensively valued**
- 3. There is an increase in the number of volunteers**

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## 1. Improving the volunteer experience

People are at the centre of volunteering. Irrespective of how, when, or where volunteering takes place, it relies on the deliberate generosity, knowledge, skills, and commitment of individuals. Three attitudes emerge as strongly associated with volunteer retention: self-reported engagement, commitment, and job satisfaction. Unsurprisingly, volunteers want to feel engaged and like their involvement makes a difference. The strongest predictors of retention in formal volunteering contexts are:

- Support from paid staff, supervisors, and peers
- Having autonomy
- Feeling productive
- Avoiding burnout

Paying attention to these factors will facilitate meaningful and rewarding experiences for volunteers and maximise their willingness to continue to be a volunteer.

Failure to prioritise and continuously evaluate the volunteer experience not only results in volunteers leaving, but potentially dissuades them from volunteering again in the future. The associated opportunity cost, for individuals, organisations, and society, is enormous. Fortunately, the detrimental outcomes of volunteer turnover are avoidable and there is good evidence on how to improve retention.

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## 2. Comprehensively valuing volunteering

The value of volunteering is profound because its benefits are multifaceted. Volunteering is a truly unique phenomenon because it simultaneously creates outcomes for multiple beneficiaries irrespective of the role, activity, or cause. Volunteering has immense personal, social, cultural, community, economic, and societal benefits, which are difficult to quantify.

Comprehensively valuing volunteering means more than just holding volunteers in high regard or speaking about the importance of their contribution at special events. It also means more than reducing volunteering to an economic valuation. Genuinely valuing volunteering requires action to support it, including recognition of its contribution to essential services that would otherwise need to be provided through a paid workforce, consideration of its value add to social (including health, welfare, connectivity, cohesion, and inclusion), economic, and environmental objectives and outcomes, and investment in action that supports sustainability of volunteering.

For volunteering to achieve its true potential, it must be valued internally by organisations and groups and externally by governments and society. This requires all stakeholders in the volunteering ecosystem to actively confront how their own actions might be perpetuating many of the challenges facing volunteering. Claims that volunteering is valued must be backed up with evidence that supports this claim. This includes recognising the criticality of enabling infrastructure, including the role of Volunteer Managers and volunteering support services in all their forms.

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## 3. Increasing the number of volunteers

Increasing the number of volunteers in Australia will only be effective and sustainable if the following insights from consultation and research on volunteering inform the actions taken to achieve this objective:

First, increasing the quantity of volunteers needs to be balanced with ensuring the quality of volunteer engagement. More volunteers are not always better, especially if an increase in the volume of volunteers results in a decrease in volunteer satisfaction and retention or other poor outcomes.

Secondly, volunteering exists first and foremost to add value. Volunteer recruitment efforts need to be person-centred and find a balance between individual and organisational goals. Volunteers should never be exploited to backfill workforce shortages or compensate for a reduction in resourcing.

Thirdly, volunteering is, by definition, a choice. Increasing the number of volunteers should only occur if participants genuinely wish to engage in volunteering. People should not be forced into volunteering.

These structural changes need to be designed and delivered through a coordinated approach to providing resources, training, and other tools to support implementation across all fields of volunteering.

With these considerations in mind, evaluation of the rate of volunteering in Australia should be considered alongside other relevant quantitative and qualitative data on a number of factors, including volunteer motivations, retention/attrition, the volunteer experience, organisational capacity to engage in and support volunteering, the intersection between paid and unpaid roles (especially in sectors such as the arts, sport, social welfare, health, and emergency services), barriers to volunteer engagement, and outcomes for beneficiaries. New data collection should also include both formal and informal volunteering to understand the full scale of volunteering taking place across Australia.

Increasing the number of volunteers in Australia should be a natural outcome of the National Strategy for Volunteering if structural changes are achieved. Growing participation in volunteering cannot be progressed in isolation. Improving the volunteer experience and comprehensively valuing volunteering will pay dividends when it comes to increasing volunteer participation.

# Strategic Objectives in Detail

## Focus Area 1: Individual Potential and the Volunteer Experience

The aim of Focus Area 1 is that by 2033, volunteering is inclusive and accessible, allowing everyone to express themselves and contribute to causes and activities they care about.

There are three strategic objectives required to achieve this aim:

### 1.1 Focus on the Volunteer Experience

### 1.2 Make Volunteering Inclusive and Accessible

### 1.3 Ensure Volunteering is Not Exploitative

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.1: FOCUS ON THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

### OBJECTIVE

Volunteers have a meaningful and enriching experience, feel valued, and know how their contribution makes a difference.

### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about enabling volunteers to have a meaningful experience by empowering them to participate in ways that suit them and meet their motivations. Volunteer involvement generally takes a needs-based approach, which recruits volunteers for pre-identified roles and focuses on the outcomes for beneficiaries or a cause. This approach is not always aligned with the way people want to volunteer. The focus of this objective is positioning the volunteer experience as central to success and finding a balance between the needs of volunteers and the organisation or cause for which they are volunteering.

### THE CURRENT STATE

Australia is undergoing significant and rapid demographic change. So too are perceptions of volunteering, how people want to contribute, and the kinds of change they want to bring about through volunteering. It is anticipated that volunteering roles in the future are likely to remain largely formal and structured; however, the desire for a more decentralised model is growing.

Changes in the external environment, such as future of work shifts, Australia's ageing population, and where people are choosing to live, have implications for volunteering, including 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 many reasons. Identifying and enabling volunteers to fulfil their motivations plays a pivotal role in satisfaction and retention.<sup>30</sup> Volunteers often have a unique and special relationship with the mission or cause they're volunteering for, making them dedicated workers and powerful advocates. However, the intrinsic desire to make a difference can be taken for granted and organisations may inadvertently miss out on the latent potential and capacity of their volunteers as a result.

There are significant mismatches between the types of activities that current volunteers undertake and the types of activities that non-volunteers would consider.<sup>31</sup> There is also a disconnect between the commitment volunteers prefer and the commitment organisations ask for.<sup>32</sup> This suggests more flexible models of volunteer engagement are required to find a balance between supply and demand. Embedding a consultative approach

to volunteer engagement that removes barriers to role flexibility will align individual and organisational goals for mutual benefit.

Volunteering is a uniquely personal undertaking and people are not looking for volunteering to replicate the experience of paid work. More emphasis on providing volunteers with a good experience will deliver better outcomes for volunteers, organisations, and the people and causes that volunteering aims to assist.

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### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The available evidence on volunteer motivations<sup>33</sup> and retention<sup>34</sup> is unequivocal in concluding that individualised approaches that promote autonomy, social support, the productive use of time, and prevention of burnout are essential ingredients for successful volunteer involvement. Whether considered from the perspective of the volunteer or the volunteer involving organisation, the factors predicting success are the same.

From the volunteer perspective, having one's primary motivations met is the key to successful recruitment and retention. Different volunteers may engage in the same activity for different reasons, and volunteers may have multiple motivations that change over time. However, those who find activities that allow them to fulfil their most important motivations are more satisfied and persist longer than those whose motivations are not met. Further, volunteer wellbeing arises from the satisfaction of three key needs: autonomy, relatedness, and competence.

Volunteers need a degree of choice and freedom in how they carry out their role, they need opportunities to develop meaningful relationships in their volunteering, and they need the ability to demonstrate and improve their skills. An increased desire for flexibility from volunteers may increase the prevalence of online volunteering in the future, which is attractive for both its convenience and accessibility.<sup>35</sup> Creating more flexible opportunities is also identified as the most important factor that could motivate more people over the age of 70 to volunteer.<sup>36</sup>

From the volunteer involving organisation perspective, four key actions are proven to minimise volunteer turnover: increasing social support for volunteers, improving the experience of autonomy, helping volunteers to feel productive, and minimising burnout. Unsurprisingly, these actions mirror the factors that predict satisfaction from the volunteer perspective.

There are several significant challenges that affect the ability of volunteer involving organisations to provide meaningful experiences for their volunteers. Effective leadership is a pre-requisite for volunteer satisfaction, performance, and retention. However, despite often having the necessary skills and competencies to provide robust leadership, the competing demands of volunteer management forces many Volunteer Managers to sacrifice relationship-building for administration. This can result in a diminished volunteer experience and poorer outcomes for volunteering programs, organisations, and the beneficiaries of volunteering.<sup>37</sup>

Research on non-volunteers suggests only six per cent are deterred due to onerous paperwork or administrative requirements. Further, an increased interest in informal volunteering does not emerge as a major contributor to the decline in formal volunteering. Focusing on the volunteer experience is likely to reduce barriers to volunteering. For example, recruitment messages that appeal to one's primary motivations for volunteering are proven to be more effective and persuasive.<sup>38</sup>

With 83 per cent of volunteer involving organisations indicating they need more volunteers,<sup>39</sup> and a long-term trend of declining rates of formal volunteering, the future of volunteering relies on a reformed approach to volunteer involvement. This reform must balance the needs of organisations with the experience of their volunteers.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.2: MAKE VOLUNTEERING INCLUSIVE AND ACCESSIBLE

### OBJECTIVE

Volunteering is inclusive and accessible to everyone on their terms.

### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about making volunteering more inclusive and accessible. People experiencing disadvantage or those who are impoverished face significant barriers to volunteering. These barriers need to be dismantled for volunteering to be genuinely inclusive. The focus of this objective is acknowledging the current limitations to being inclusive and aligning understanding with action to create socially, culturally, and psychologically safe volunteering experiences.

### THE CURRENT STATE

Access to 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 volunteer. Different people also experience different barriers to volunteering, such as health and financial reasons. The systemic barriers to participation that are prevalent across society are also evident in volunteering, where access is often mistaken for ability.

Volunteer involving organisations straddle a tension between the desire to be inclusive and having the necessary resources to do so. At the same time, volunteering is an extremely fertile environment for fostering inclusion. Organisations and groups are often innately adaptable, enabling them to address emerging community needs in agile ways. This means they are often uniquely skilled at creating inclusive environments for both volunteers and service users.

The volunteering ecosystem is not currently where it needs to be when it comes to accessibility and inclusion. Finding new ways to identify shortcomings, share learnings, and bring in new knowledge are all integral to fostering a culture of inclusion in volunteering.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

When examining barriers to volunteering, the 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 are, to varying degrees, more likely than average to participate in formal volunteering.<sup>40</sup>

Women, people aged 65+, those living in highly socio-economically disadvantaged areas, and First Nations peoples are more likely to report they do not volunteer for health reasons. Younger people are more likely to report financial reasons as a key barrier, and older people (aged 65+), those in the middle socio-economic quintile, and those born in a non-English speaking country are more likely to report there were no suitable volunteering opportunities in their area.<sup>41</sup>

Processes such as background checks are not easy or inclusive for those without the requisite identification documents or access to private transport. People with disability identify stigma, unconscious bias, and lack of understanding as the greatest barrier to inclusion. This includes the prevalence of ableism, where people with disability are seen as less capable, less able to contribute, and not valued as much as those without disability.<sup>42</sup>

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. There is often little consideration of people with disability as co-creators, co-owners, and co-deliverers in volunteering. For example, major sporting events such as the 2012 Summer Olympic Games routinely fail to operationalise their vision to be inclusive in the day-to-day volunteer experience.<sup>43</sup>

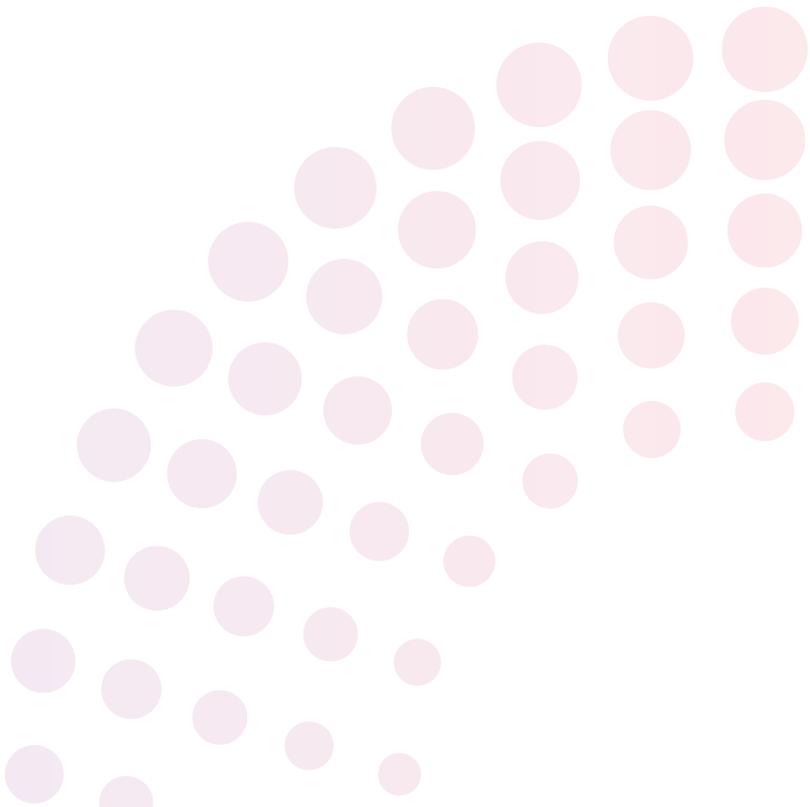
When it comes to cultural and psychological safety, many people choose to volunteer within their own communities. For example, First Nations people describe a fear of judgment by non-Indigenous community members and uncertainty about whether an organisation will provide a culturally safe space as barriers to volunteering in non-Indigenous organisations. They further identify that a lack of their own community members volunteering for these organisations is a deterrent, as are screening check requirements, which are prohibitive for those without identification documents or those with a criminal record. The extensive contribution First Nations people already make to their own communities also precludes them from engaging in further volunteering in non-Indigenous organisations.<sup>44</sup>

LGBTQI+ volunteers report a consistent and high degree of community engagement as well as a strong sense of attachment with the LGBTQI+ community.<sup>45</sup> However, potential wellbeing benefits of volunteering may be negated if LGBTQI+ volunteers are concerned about experiencing discrimination or stigma within organisations.<sup>46</sup> There is little research on the cultural safety of non-LGBTQI+ organisations and how this impacts volunteering.

How a person's gender affects their experience volunteering also requires greater investigation. Volunteering was historically dominated by women because they were excluded from the paid workforce and feminised labour has been consistently undervalued in Australian society.<sup>47</sup> During the COVID-19 pandemic the proportion of men engaged in formal volunteering decreased more significantly than the proportion of women, and women were more likely to volunteer formally than men.<sup>48</sup>

At the same time, women were more likely than men to participate in most types of domestic activities, including housework (70 per cent of females compared to 42 per cent of males), food and drink preparation/service (75 per cent compared to 55 per cent), and shopping (38 per cent compared to 31 per cent).<sup>49</sup> Gender dynamics in volunteering, including the relationship with paid work and domestic labour, needs greater exploration to ensure volunteering does not continue to perpetuate power imbalances and systemic barriers that exclude certain people from volunteering.

Overall, it is clear that more intersectional research is required to understand the impact of intersecting identities, experiences, and systems of oppression that shape individual lives and communities. Exploring how different forms of inequality overlap, including gender, race, class, and sexuality, is important for understanding how different individuals and groups are treated and represented in volunteering. Theories of volunteering mainly investigate the preconditions, motivations, and consequences of volunteering.<sup>50</sup> The scholarly focus on predicting participation neglects examination of inequality in volunteering, which has been identified as a new research front.<sup>51</sup> Building the knowledge base in this area is integral for understanding and dismantling systemic and cultural barriers to volunteering.



## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 1.3: ENSURE VOLUNTEERING IS NOT EXPLOITATIVE

### OBJECTIVE

Volunteers are engaged safely and ethically with appropriate supports in place to protect their safety, interests, and wellbeing.

### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about acknowledging and addressing the ways volunteering can be exploitative. Like paid work, volunteering activities can be hazardous. However, safeguards for volunteers are often less robust than those offered to paid workers. Volunteers may face pressure to undertake duties they do not want to undertake, are not qualified for, or that should be paid. The focus of this objective is to ensure that volunteering is safe and ethical across Australia and that there are mechanisms in place to identify and address exploitation of volunteers.

### THE CURRENT STATE

There is no one size fits all approach to what makes something 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 opportunities 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 do not want to, asking volunteers to do more when they do not have capacity, and asking volunteers to undertake duties they feel unsafe or uncomfortable carrying out.

Safeguarding mechanisms in volunteering are piecemeal and regulatory measures that do exist are not applied consistently to volunteers, particularly those in less formal organisations or those without any paid staff. 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. There must be greater awareness

and vigilance of the possibility of exploitation of volunteers, including by omission, to ensure that volunteers and communities are safe. This includes considering the impact of decisions such as the outsourcing of service delivery to charities and not-for-profits without equivalent resourcing, which places an increasing and unsustainable reliance on the volunteer workforce.

Volunteers give their most precious resource: their time. In return they should be able to expect that the environments they volunteer in are safe and they are protected from physical and psychological harm. This requires greater consideration of how the regulatory landscape applies to volunteering. This must balance compliance requirements with individual and organisational capability to ensure compliance-related burdens are not a disincentive to volunteer or involve volunteers.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Volunteers can encounter physical and psychosocial hazards in the course of their volunteering.<sup>52</sup> In organisations that engage both paid staff and volunteers, work, health, and safety laws apply to both paid workers and volunteers.<sup>53</sup> Volunteer involving organisations comprised solely of volunteers are excluded from work, health, and safety laws in Australia,<sup>54</sup> and an alarming one in four volunteer involving organisations do not offer insurance to their volunteers.<sup>55</sup>

Much of the literature on volunteering examines wellbeing benefits, but little attention has been paid to psychosocial hazards and their impact on volunteers. Psychosocial hazards include factors of work that increase the risk of work-related stress and can lead to psychological or physical harm.<sup>56</sup> Volunteers can often experience overload or burnout in their role. During COVID-19, many volunteers felt that undue responsibility was placed upon them, their workload became unmanageable, and that it became difficult to balance voluntary work with other commitments.<sup>57</sup> Given that there may be a threshold for “too much”

volunteering,<sup>58</sup> which reverses wellbeing benefits and creates adverse outcomes for volunteering, it is imperative that the safety risks associated with volunteering are identified and properly managed.

The Fair Work Ombudsman provides guidelines on paid and unpaid work, which designates volunteering as a form of unpaid work.<sup>59</sup> The guidelines suggest three key characteristics of a “genuine volunteering arrangement”: no intention to create a legally binding relationship, the volunteer being under no obligation to attend the workplace or perform work, and no expectation of payment from the volunteer. The Fair Work Ombudsman also suggested the more formalised volunteer work becomes, the greater the likelihood than an employment relationship will exist. Despite these guidelines, there is significant ambiguity about what is a valid volunteering role and what should be paid work.

Volunteers across Australia deliver essential services, which further complicates the distinction between paid and unpaid work. Determination of how volunteer contributions are equivalent to, distinct from, or complement paid work is critical for better understanding the size, scale, and contribution of volunteer workforces.<sup>60</sup> It will remain important to differentiate paid and unpaid work in different settings, so a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between paid and unpaid work is paramount.

The conversation must also consider how volunteers can be better protected through access to adequate insurance and other mechanisms. Similarly, whilst volunteers do not expect to be rewarded or remunerated for their contribution, the conversation about incentives must evolve to focus on ensuring volunteers are not out-of-pocket. This includes renewing the discussion about enabling tax deductions for volunteer expenses and subsidisation of transport.

## Focus Area 2: Community and Social Impact

The aim of Focus Area 2 is that by 2033, volunteering is recognised and celebrated for the critical role it plays in bringing together and nurturing flourishing and resilient communities.

There are four strategic objectives required to achieve this aim:

### 2.1 Diversify the Understanding of Volunteering

### 2.2 Reshape the Public Perception of Volunteering

### 2.3 Recognise the Inherent Value of Volunteering

### 2.4 Enable a Community-Led Approach

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.1: DIVERSIFY THE UNDERSTANDING OF VOLUNTEERING

### OBJECTIVE

Volunteering is respected and supported in all its forms through an expanded understanding of different cultural interpretations and expressions.

### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about increasing knowledge and understanding of how volunteering takes place in different cultures and communities, and how it is integrated into their infrastructure. An expanded understanding of volunteering will reflect Australia's diversity and ensure all forms of volunteering are recognised, supported, and celebrated. The focus of this objective is recognising and respecting volunteering that is already happening in culturally specific contexts and finding ways to better support diverse 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 volunteering is understood, recognised, supported, and celebrated. 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. Capturing the breadth of volunteering is difficult for several reasons, including the limitations of not having shared language to describe volunteering.

As Australia becomes an increasingly multicultural country, it is paramount that volunteering is understood from a broad range of perspectives. This requires a concerted effort to expand the conversation to include historically underrepresented populations, including revisiting how volunteering is conceptualised and opening a discussion about language. Until there is an increased understanding of the myriad of ways that volunteering takes place across Australia, much of the work of volunteers in First Nations, multicultural, and multifaith communities will continue to go unrecognised, unmeasured, and unsupported at a national level.

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## SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Australia is home to the world's oldest surviving culture, with First Nations people living on the continent for over 60,000 years. Volunteering is not a First Nations concept; however, when understood as cultural obligation and reciprocity, 'community giving' amongst First Nations people actively embodies the principles of formal volunteering as time willingly given for the common good.<sup>61</sup>

Research demonstrates that for many First Nations people, community giving is a key aspect of cultural survival, and many extend kinship support to thousands of self-determined and community-managed groups, agencies, and programs across Australia. This includes the participation of First Nations people on boards, committees, government inquiries, and other consultative bodies.<sup>62</sup>

In terms of participation rates, the first National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Survey in 1994 found that First Nations people engaged in voluntary work at a higher rate than non-Indigenous Australians (26.9 per cent and 19 per cent respectively).<sup>63</sup> In 2002, 28 per cent of First Nations people volunteered according to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey.<sup>64</sup> Those living in non-remote areas (32 per cent) were twice as likely to report undertaking voluntary work compared to those in remote areas (16 per cent).

Interestingly, research on motivations for community giving shows parallels between First Nations peoples and the general population of volunteers. For example, First Nations people cite responding to needs

or challenges faced by family, friends, and the broader community, commitment to community, and the desire to develop skills and experience as motivations for community giving.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, the general population of volunteers cite doing something worthwhile, helping others/the community, and learning new skills as key motivators.<sup>66</sup> Perhaps the most striking difference is that the general population cite 'personal satisfaction' as a motivator, whereas First Nations people see community giving as something they feel compelled to do to ensure there is a shared responsibility for supporting community. Notably, volunteering through organisations was cited as less common by First Nations people, and the expectation to provide skilled or cultural contributions to non-Indigenous organisations without remuneration has been described as tokenistic.<sup>67</sup>

Data from the 2021 Census shows Australia continues to become increasingly culturally diverse, with nearly half of the population having at least one parent born overseas and almost a quarter speaking a language other than English at home.<sup>68</sup> There is a paucity of research on volunteering within culturally or religiously diverse contexts; however, available data suggests that, although Australians born overseas are less likely to have engaged in formal volunteering, they are equally likely to have undertaken informal volunteering. Volunteering participation rates also differ by migrant cohorts and settlement outcomes.<sup>69</sup> For example, skilled visa holders and non-recent arrivals are more likely to volunteer than other visa cohorts and recent arrivals.

Like First Nations people, volunteers in multicultural communities do not necessarily resonate with the term volunteering and more commonly use words such as ‘giving’, ‘helping’, and ‘sharing’ to describe their voluntary activities.<sup>70</sup> Some cultures do not even have an equivalent word for volunteering and volunteer work undertaken by Australians born overseas often takes place within ethnic, cultural, or religious communities.<sup>71</sup> Faith-based and culturally-nuanced expressions of volunteering may be more fluid, unbounded, and value-driven than formal, role-based positions in established organisations.<sup>72</sup>

Understanding different expressions of volunteering is important for dispelling myths. For example, there can be an assumption that volunteering within one’s cultural or religious community leads to self-segregation.<sup>73</sup> To the contrary, intra-community volunteering is primarily driven by a commitment to advancing the common good, and those involved in intra-community volunteering are statistically more likely to be involved in wider community volunteering.<sup>74</sup>

The current, dominant approach to volunteering in Australia can be traced back to colonial settlement. The Australian colonies inherited British customs, including religious and political structures and modes of philanthropy and charity.<sup>75</sup> Formal volunteering through an organisation or group evolved to become the primary lens through which volunteering in Australia is understood, which does not adequately capture the breadth and diversity of volunteering in Australia today.

The language used to describe volunteering and people’s understanding of what constitutes volunteering has important implications. Ongoing demographic changes highlight the importance of understanding how volunteering takes place in First Nations, multicultural, and multifaith communities in Australia. This requires creating safe spaces for listening and storytelling that build a shared understanding of volunteering, whilst not stifling or corrupting fluid and informal modes of volunteering. Similarly, it is crucial that the current Western approach to volunteering is not positioned as the only or desired way forward.

Diversifying the understanding of volunteering is important for several reasons, including the collection of accurate data to inform relevant policy, to ensure equity in access to funding and other support, and to dispel myths about volunteering. Efforts to expand the understanding of volunteering require an extensive engagement strategy and cannot be conducted at a single point in time. Ongoing investment will foster a more dynamic approach to understanding volunteering, which respects and is shaped by multiculturalism.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.2: RESHAPE THE PUBLIC PERCEPTION OF VOLUNTEERING

### OBJECTIVE

A comprehensive understanding of volunteering is embedded in Australia's public consciousness.

### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about expanding the public understanding of what volunteering is and the different ways it takes place across Australia. Volunteering is often perceived as being formalised, role-based, and service-focused. The public narrative is dominated by highly visible forms of volunteering, which detracts from a common understanding about the breadth of activities undertaken by volunteers. The focus of this objective is promoting different types of volunteering across various domains to expand public awareness and encourage participation.

### THE CURRENT STATE

Volunteering takes many different forms. It may be structured and organised through an organisation or group or self-directed and spontaneous. There is no 'one size fits all' approach to defining what makes something a volunteering role or activity. Some activities are regular and ongoing whereas others may be one-off, short-term, or project based. All forms of volunteering are important and valuable. The goal is not to define volunteering with concrete parameters, but to open the conversation to better recognise and appreciate different volunteering roles and activities.

Building a shared understanding of volunteering in Australian society requires both preserving recognition for established and well-known forms of volunteering and generating conversation about hidden and emerging forms of volunteering. Increasing awareness in the general population about the scope and potential of volunteering is also important for ensuring that activities, programs, and services delivered by and with volunteers are adequately resourced and supported. Many people may not be aware that the 43,000 lifesavers patrolling Australian beaches are volunteers, or that more

than 100,000 Australians publicly participate and collaborate in scientific research as citizen science volunteers.<sup>76</sup> Countless other examples, such as the more than 4,000 environmental volunteers aiming to conserve over 330,000 hectares of natural habitat across Australia, demonstrate just how deeply volunteering is embedded in Australian society.<sup>77</sup>

Expanding the public consciousness on volunteering will encourage storytelling, the sharing of new perspectives, and a curiosity in volunteering. This will ensure that diverse forms of volunteering are recognised, supported, and celebrated and will encourage more people to get involved.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Volunteering is a critical part of Australian society. It is essential to the day-to-day functioning of communities and the contribution of volunteers generates significant social and cultural value. In April 2022, 26.7 per cent of adult Australians had undertaken formal volunteering in the previous 12 months.<sup>78</sup> This equates to approximately 6.9 million people, which is more than the population of South Australia, Western Australia, Tasmania, the Australian Capital Territory, and the Northern Territory combined.<sup>79</sup> If the population of Australian volunteers were a country in their own right, it would be the 113th most populous country in the world ahead of Bulgaria, Singapore, and New Zealand.<sup>80</sup>

In addition to formal volunteers, in April 2022, 46.5 per cent of adult Australians had undertaken informal volunteering in the previous four weeks.<sup>81</sup> Combined, over half (56.7 per cent) of Australians had undertaken some form of volunteering. Despite the sheer enormity of the volunteer population, much of the work undertaken by volunteers isn't routinely acknowledged in the public narrative. This is for a range of reasons, including misconceptions about what volunteers do and the time required, lack of self-identification as a volunteer, and persistent stereotypes such as the 'older charity shop worker'.<sup>82</sup>

Non-volunteers tend to express narrower, more stereotypical views of volunteering and perceptions vary greatly between cultural groups.<sup>83</sup> For non-volunteers, when asked why they do not volunteer, the most common reason was ‘work/family commitments’ (40.8 per cent) followed by ‘not interested’ (21.9 per cent). ‘No suitable opportunities’ (14.7 per cent) and ‘nobody asked’ (13.9 per cent) also ranked highly as reasons for not volunteering.<sup>84</sup> This suggests there is latent potential in the non-volunteer population that could be realised.

In addition to widening the appeal of volunteering, an increased public understanding of the role of volunteering in Australia is also important to ensure programs, services, and activities delivered through volunteer involvement are adequately resourced. Increased visibility of the breadth of activities in the community, including informal and community-led initiatives,<sup>85</sup> delivered by or with volunteers is important for attracting support and investment.

The psychological factors that drive charitable behaviour include emotions, the mental shortcuts used to make decisions, and the propensity to adhere to social norms. Practical actions to increase volunteering that emerge from behavioural economics include appealing to people’s emotions by identifying the beneficiaries of volunteer work, weaving vivid narratives about the anticipated impact of involvement, and describing volunteering as a social norm with messaging that indicates “people like you” typically volunteer.<sup>86</sup>

By raising awareness and understanding of volunteering within the general public, there is an opportunity to not only highlight the various ways in which people can contribute their time and skills, but to foster a greater recognition and appreciation of the various forms of volunteering that exist. This can help to increase participation by normalising volunteering and further embedding it in Australia’s already strong culture of giving.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.3: RECOGNISE THE INHERENT VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

### OBJECTIVE

Volunteering is recognised and supported as an activity with inherent value as well as for its ability to facilitate individual and community outcomes.

### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about strengthening recognition and support for the intrinsic value of volunteering. Volunteering is an activity that creates and adds value, with benefits often extending beyond the immediate task being completed. However, contemporary public policy and associated programs often position volunteering as a means to achieving an alternative outcome such as employment, rather than investing in volunteering as an end unto itself. The focus of this objective is promoting the inherent value of volunteering to ensure future resourcing is not exclusively tied to services and programs where volunteering is used a vehicle to achieve a different aim.

### THE CURRENT STATE

Volunteering is a highly personal and social act and, irrespective of their motivations, people generally seek out volunteering opportunities that provide them with a sense of meaning and purpose. In Australia, public services have been increasingly outsourced to non-government organisations, which then involve volunteers in service delivery. There are many positives to this approach, including the unique vantage point and relationships many non-government organisations have in their local communities. Similarly, involving volunteers in the delivery of public services and programs provides opportunities for people to get involved in their community, providing a sense of agency, and deepening social ties. But this approach is not without challenges as organisations become reliant on volunteers because of inadequate funding.



Volunteering generates a suite of positive outcomes. It is a proven pathway to employment, reduces social isolation, improves physical and mental health and wellbeing, contributes to service delivery, and allows volunteers to develop new and cultivate intercultural awareness and competency.<sup>87</sup> However, investing in volunteering for the purpose of fostering these outcomes can be problematic. Positioning volunteering as an intervention can have adverse effects on those involved. Further, where volunteering is positioned as a pathway to a specific outcome, such as employment, there is often little resourcing provided for enabling infrastructure. This places an additional burden on volunteer involving organisations, volunteering peak bodies, and other volunteering support services, who often absorb the work of supporting this form of participation. When volunteering is part of mandatory mutual obligation requirements these tensions are exacerbated.

Reaffirming volunteering as an activity that is innately valuable for people, places, and the planet is a critical step to ensuring sustainability. Volunteering is unquestionably an important vehicle for fostering positive outcomes for individuals and communities. However, the desirable outcomes for society should not supersede the individual value people ascribe to volunteering. Where volunteering is positioned as a means to facilitate specific outcomes for individuals and communities it must be accompanied with adequate resourcing.

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### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

The benefits of volunteering are broad and multifaceted. Volunteering improves mental health and wellbeing,<sup>88</sup> delivers essential services, adds unique value to services,<sup>89</sup> improves community cohesion, provides a sense of purpose and meaning, creates opportunities for civic participation and engagement with Australian democracy, supports Australia's charities and not-for-profits sector, and contributes significantly to the economy. However, these contributions are rarely measured or recognised. For example,

an official evaluation of the contributions of volunteers in non-profit institutions has not been released since the 2012–13 financial year,<sup>90</sup> and even this figure does not account for the broad-ranging ways that volunteering adds value in Australian communities. There is also a need for volunteer involving organisations to measure and account for volunteer efforts in their financial reporting.<sup>91</sup>

Research on the benefits of volunteering suggest that “mandatory volunteerism” has been shown to reduce intentions to volunteer in the future.<sup>92</sup> There are additional consequences of positioning volunteering as unpaid labour. An uncritical push for an increase in volunteering and the propensity to badge volunteering as a “cure-all” ignores important aspects of volunteering that may inadvertently increase inequality.<sup>93</sup> For example, the reconfiguration of volunteering in precarious labour markets as a form of “hope labour” suggests the exposure and experience gained through volunteering will lead to employment.<sup>94</sup> Despite the fact that volunteering is a proven pathway to employment, it is also true that the way “hope labour” is structured can reproduce social inequalities. Additionally, volunteering undertaken to receive welfare or income support payments can often have an inferior status compared to paid work and may actually act as a negative signal to potential employers.<sup>95</sup>

Similarly, encouraging migrants and refugees into volunteering to learn English reinforces the perception that this type of volunteering should only be recognised when it serves a different purpose, rather than recognising the value people choose to attach to their volunteering. It also fails to adequately consider or value intra-community volunteering, which has been shown to increase active community engagement particularly among those who do not speak English. This has significant flow on benefits including enabling older populations to access appropriate supports and services that reduce future health crises.<sup>96</sup>

There are other uncomfortable aspects of volunteering that warrant discussion. This includes the consideration of volunteering as

“work”, which may devalue leisure and informal volunteering by suggesting a hierarchy of value. In Australia, the concept of volunteers as workers is enshrined in law under work, health, and safety legislation. Conceptualising some forms of volunteering as work, such as activism or volunteering in the arts, is difficult and can detract from the reasons people choose to engage in volunteering in the first place.

An increasing tendency to position volunteering as the solution to the significant and varied crises facing Australian society is risky. It can romanticise volunteering without respecting and resourcing the infrastructure that makes volunteering possible. The sustainability of volunteering relies on valuing and then supporting volunteering as inherently beneficial for people and communities.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 2.4: ENABLE A COMMUNITY-LED APPROACH

### OBJECTIVE

Communities are the primary drivers of how volunteering influences their future.

### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about supporting people and communities to respond to their own challenges and opportunities through volunteering. Policy, funding, and program design commonly take a top-down approach where a need is identified and communities are asked to respond to that need. The focus of this objective is about devolving power and providing mechanisms for bottom-up approaches that provide people and communities with control over the ways volunteering takes place with and through them.

### THE CURRENT STATE

Volunteering takes place within communities and volunteers take action every day to drive change, make a difference, support those less fortunate, and enable their communities to thrive. A top-down approach fails to adequately include the voice of community, which disenfranchises volunteers from having agency and reduces the efficacy of services and programs. A top-down, needs-based approach can also perpetuate the notion that identification of a problem is a prerequisite for funding and support. Whilst this approach can channel effort to areas of greatest need, it can detract from forms of volunteering that are essential to the everyday functioning of communities.

When it comes to spontaneous or emerging needs, communities tend to self-mobilise and self-fund to fill critical gaps. The effectiveness

and efficiency of spontaneous helping demonstrates the power of a community-led approach. A top-down approach led by a centralised agency often positions volunteer involving organisations as benefactors rather than collaborators. This approach can also force organisations and groups to contort themselves to pre-identified parameters, instead of enabling them to use their firsthand experience. Rigid and prescriptive funding and grant agreements also dissuade recipients from being innovative and agile. Similarly, the outcomes sought may be too generic or impractical and can create competition for resources, which tends to favour larger or better-resourced organisations.

Moving forward, better and more efficient ways to identify needs and co-design solutions need to be found. This includes involving those affected in planning and decision-making processes.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

There is increasing recognition of the importance of new approaches for facilitating public engagement in response to policy problems facing Australia. Co-design and ‘commissioning for outcomes’ are two approaches that have grown in popularity. Co-design involves three stages: discovery and insight, prototyping, and evaluating and scaling interventions.<sup>97</sup> While there is no single definition, ‘commissioning for outcomes’ involves a strategic and collaborative way of working centred on relationships.<sup>98</sup>

It assigns government a more dynamic role that recognises the complexity of the service-delivery landscape, which increasingly

involves multiple actors. The challenge for governments is moving successfully from a top-down approach to a collaborative and whole-of-system approach.

The importance of community-led solutions is particularly salient in the context of disaster response and recovery. The Senate Inquiry into the 2019-20 Bushfires noted the grant application process was complicated, placed considerable burden on volunteers, and created an unnecessary level of competition.<sup>99</sup> It also noted that community groups are frequently small and largely volunteer-run, yet they are expected to execute professional and competitive grant applications on top of the recovery work they are trying to complete and alongside their paid jobs. The administrative and bureaucratic red tape was identified as so onerous that some groups decided not to pursue an application at all and sharing of information was described as a “gaping hole in the disaster recovery process.” This example demonstrates the importance of community-led solutions.

Currently, the Australian volunteering ecosystem does not adequately recognise informal and community-led initiatives or how they intersect with established volunteer involving organisations and government. In seeking to better understand the role of informal volunteering in communities, care should be taken to ensure that policies and support mechanisms do not hinder the agency and innovation of informal volunteers, especially in community-led initiatives.<sup>100</sup>

Self-mobilisation is one of the defining features of volunteering. Throughout history and the world over, volunteers have been at the forefront of social change. The challenge going forward is considering how and when other actors, such as government, should get involved and what that involvement should look like. Empowering people to shape the communities they want to live in through volunteering provides everyone with the opportunity to determine what matters to them and create the future they envision.

### Focus Area 3: Conditions for Volunteering to Thrive

The aim of Focus Area 3 is that by 2033, volunteering has intentional and sustainable leadership, investment, policy conditions, and partnerships, which provide the critical foundation for long-term impact.

There are four strategic objectives required to achieve this aim:

#### 3.1 Make Volunteering a Cross-Portfolio Issue in Government

#### 3.2 Build Strong Leadership and Shared Accountability

#### 3.3 Commit to Strategic Investment

#### 3.4 Recognise the Importance of Volunteer Management

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.1: MAKE VOLUNTEERING A CROSS-PORTFOLIO ISSUE IN GOVERNMENT

#### OBJECTIVE

Governments are consistently considering the needs of volunteers and supporting volunteering through comprehensive policy and investment.

#### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about making volunteering a cross-portfolio issue in all levels of government to ensure that policies that affect volunteers are developed with careful consideration of the opportunities and challenges they may create for volunteer involvement. The focus of this objective is repositioning volunteering as a whole of government imperative to ensure it is routinely considered and invested in.

#### THE CURRENT STATE

Volunteering activities take place across all domains of public life in Australia. 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, international development, 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.

Making volunteering a cross-portfolio issue will ensure that it is consciously and adequately considered in the design and execution of government services, programs, and policies. This will streamline approaches to enabling volunteer involvement and create efficiencies through reduced duplication, knowledge sharing, and fit-for-purpose regulation.

## SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

While responsibility for volunteering at the Commonwealth level sits within the Department of Social Services, volunteers are heavily involved across an array of sectors. Volunteers involved in community services, welfare, and homelessness, represent only one fifth of Australia's formal volunteers. Other large sub-sectors, such as sport and recreation, religious, faith-based, and spiritual, and children and youth each engage over one million volunteers, yet the government portfolios for these domains do not have explicit responsibilities for volunteering.

Data also reveals sizeable volunteer workforces in mental health (4.4 per cent of volunteers), aged care (8.8 per cent), and disability (4.7 per cent).<sup>101</sup> Based on estimates of the current Australian population, each of these sectors engage more than 300,000 volunteers. This means that key government initiatives, such as A Matter of Care: Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy, Australia's Disability Strategy, and the National Mental Health Workforce Strategy, need to plan for the involvement of volunteers and consider how underpinning initiatives will affect volunteering.

Beyond workforce implications, a detailed understanding of volunteering is necessary to advance other priorities across government. For example, 32.5 per cent of volunteers identified that their volunteering primarily aimed to assist children and youth. This suggests that an estimated 2.2 million people may volunteer with children and young people in Australia.<sup>2</sup> Volunteering is also important to Australia's international obligations, with international development volunteers contributing significantly to international aid and development efforts.<sup>102</sup> Understanding the many ways volunteering can be affected by policy, and the significant ways it supports key government and societal priorities, requires a comprehensive approach that acknowledges all types of volunteering.

The Australian Government's 2023 Budget Statement *Measuring What Matters* aims to provide a foundation for Australia's effort to "lift living standards, boost intergenerational mobility, and create more opportunities for more people."<sup>103</sup> It recognises that traditional macroeconomic indicators do not provide a holistic view of community wellbeing. Volunteering is a uniquely good indicator for community wellbeing as it captures social connections, physical and mental health, sense of purpose and connection to place.<sup>3</sup> Volunteering is a critical indicator for the Wellbeing Framework being developed in Australia, which underscores the importance of making volunteering a cross-portfolio issue in government.

2 Based on a population of 25,422,788 as reported in the 2021 Census. Note: no weighting of survey responses was applied in calculating this figure.

3 Increasing the number of volunteers in Australia should be a natural outcome of the National Strategy for Volunteering if structural changes are achieved. Growing participation in volunteering cannot be progressed in isolation. Improving the volunteer experience and comprehensively valuing volunteering will pay dividends when it comes to increasing volunteer participation.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.2: BUILD STRONG LEADERSHIP AND SHARED ACCOUNTABILITY

### OBJECTIVE

Volunteering is supported and advanced by strong leadership based on shared accountability and genuine collaboration that provides a united voice for volunteering.

### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about building the capacity of the volunteering ecosystem to speak with one voice. Many members of the volunteering ecosystem do not identify themselves as part of the ecosystem or acknowledge the cross-cutting challenges which affect volunteers and volunteering. The focus of this objective is about strengthening leadership for volunteering and considering how accountability for protecting and advancing volunteering can be shared for the benefit of all.

### THE CURRENT STATE

The complexity and diversity of the volunteering ecosystem is one of its biggest strengths, but its sheer enormity can also cause fragmentation and detract from collaboration. The expansiveness of volunteering, its myriad of expressions, and its existence on a continuum of community participation all contribute to a disjointed 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 often poorly recognised and understood.

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 volunteers and volunteering programs, need to coalesce around a strategic agenda for volunteering and advocate for cross-cutting priorities. This will require the courage to have uncomfortable conversations about how some stakeholders have failed to

prioritise volunteering, including in their own departments, companies, and organisations.

The National Strategy for Volunteering will serve as the centrepiece for new dialogue about what leadership and shared accountability can look like. It provides an opportunity to bring new people into the conversation and re-think the ways volunteering has historically been led and supported.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

There is a growing body of evidence that supports the need for strong leadership and shared accountability in organisations and systems. Strong leadership is associated with a range of positive outcomes, including increased productivity and innovation. Shared accountability has been linked to increased transparency, improved decision-making, and better outcomes for stakeholders.

Various leadership theories have emerged over the years, including Transformational Leadership Theory, which has been positively associated with innovation and creativity.<sup>104</sup> Transformational leadership styles also heighten awareness of collective interests and help to create an environment where mistakes and failure are part of the learning process.<sup>105</sup>

Accountability is the process that holds people responsible for their actions. It is not necessarily a strict legal responsibility, though there can be some crossover.<sup>106</sup> Shared accountability can become a dilemma when those concerned cannot agree where accountability lies, or it is persistently difficult to implement and regulate. However, when done well, shared accountability results in improved performance and increased trust.<sup>107</sup>

A salient example of shared accountability in action is Australia's National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS). The NDIS represents the single most significant national shift from block-funded services to a personalised model. A 2017 review of the NDIS identified that accountability for care outcomes has begun

to shift to a shared 'logic of care' approach, where government, individuals, and service providers share accountability. This is done through strong communication and adaptation with a focus on providing the best care for the individual.<sup>108</sup> Whilst the NDIS is not perfect, it demonstrates that a shared accountability model is possible on a national scale.

Strong leadership and shared accountability are particularly important during times of crisis as they promote resilience and adaptability to changing circumstances. The Charities Crisis Cabinet, convened in March 2020 in response to COVID-19, brought together 20 leaders from across the Australian charities sector to coordinate a strategic response to the impact of COVID-19 on charities. It proved an invaluable way for charity leaders to share information and develop common positions, including addressing counter-productive red tape and improving contract management.<sup>109</sup>

Similarly, the Emergency Relief National Coordination Group (NCG) was formed in April 2020 to advise the Minister for Social Services on emergency relief, food relief, and financial counselling. NCG has 12 members comprised of charities and not-for-profits and the Department of Social Services, with the express purpose of conducting research and data review to ensure the effectiveness of emergency relief and provide the Minister for Social Services with evidence-based advice.<sup>110</sup>

These examples demonstrate the importance and efficacy of strong leadership and shared accountability. The National Strategy for Volunteering provides an opportunity to leverage the unique skills and experience of different stakeholders to collectively advance a shared agenda for volunteering.

### STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.3: COMMIT TO STRATEGIC INVESTMENT

#### OBJECTIVE

Volunteering is supported across Australia by common infrastructure and continuous strategic investment.

#### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about making sure the conditions that support effective volunteering are in place and are sustainable into the future. Volunteering requires fit-for-purpose infrastructure, including policy, research and data, systems, tools, and resources. The focus of this objective is building or enhancing common infrastructure, reducing duplication, and routinely investing in improvements to enable impactful volunteering.

#### THE CURRENT STATE

Volunteering infrastructure is defined by United Nations Volunteers (UNV) as:

*An enabling environment, operational structures, and implementation capacities to promote volunteerism, mobilise volunteers, and support them in their work. The enabling environment includes the body of policies and laws that protect volunteers and provide incentives for volunteer action. Operational structures include schemes through which volunteers are mobilised, deployed, and supported. Implementation capacities include functional and technical resources of volunteer [involving] organisations to adapt to changing circumstances, function at high standards of efficiency, and achieve results.<sup>111</sup>*



Globally, there are three main trends on the expansion and consolidation of volunteering infrastructure: innovations in technology; modalities and partnerships; and a focus on inclusion. UNV highlights the inherent challenges to volunteering infrastructure including the influence and impact of context, available resources, and the negative consequences of some interventions.

Volunteer involvement is multifaceted and requires considerable resources. Providing and promoting volunteering opportunities requires investment in:

- tools and resources
- accessible and relevant research and data
- referral services
- education and training
- marketing and awareness raising
- fast and accessible screening processes
- fit-for-purpose policy and regulation
- platforms for recruiting and managing volunteers
- accessible funding mechanisms
- insurance and work, health, and safety protocols
- processes for evaluation
- celebration and recognition

Currently, the volunteering ecosystem is hindered by low investment in capacity and capability-building initiatives.

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.

There is considerable opportunity through the National Strategy for Volunteering to reconsider how to build and enhance volunteering infrastructure as a key enabler of effective volunteering.

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## SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Volunteering support services take various forms throughout Australia. They are responsible for the promotion, resourcing, and support of volunteering in local communities. In one example, a 2017 report found a select group of volunteering support services were shown to have enabled nearly 12.3 million volunteer hours across Australia. This volunteering was valued at \$477.5 million and demonstrates the value-add of support services as an intermediary.<sup>112</sup>

Agencies such as migrant and refugee settlement services and community hubs are important sites for local volunteering support and are often uniquely positioned to provide culturally appropriate client-centred support. For example, a 2022 study found the Chinese Australian Services Society (CASS) Community Volunteer Model is a service-based incubator for volunteering, which nurtures volunteerism in both the Chinese and non-Chinese communities.<sup>113</sup>

Research on volunteering in Australia is widespread, robust, and highly diverse, spanning a broad range of subjects and academic disciplines and keeping pace with methodological advancements over the past ten years.<sup>114</sup> However, inconsistent funding has historically disrupted efforts to undertake and disseminate research on volunteering. For example, the Australian Journal on Volunteering, a peer-reviewed journal launched by the Volunteer Centre of South Australia in 1996, was discontinued in 2009 due to a loss of funding.<sup>115</sup> More coordinated funding of research projects and improved efforts to make research insights accessible and

clear to practitioners are needed. Investing in the infrastructure needed to gather and disseminate research is vital to better connect research on volunteering to policy and practice.

Other enabling organisations, such as those that facilitate employee volunteering and international volunteering, play a critical role in negotiating volunteering projects and placements. These types of intermediaries are especially skilled in matching supply and demand for mutually beneficial outcomes. In the case of employee volunteering, enabling organisations can help corporates and businesses understand how to channel their employees' time and skill to areas of greatest need whilst simultaneously reducing the burden on volunteer involving organisations to resource this type of volunteer involvement.

Other parts of the volunteering infrastructure in Australia such as screening systems are often designed without volunteers in mind, which can cause bottlenecks for volunteer involvement. In Victoria the NDIS Worker Screening Check process has involved manual approval of volunteer fee waivers, causing significant delays as a larger number of volunteers required screening than anticipated. Volunteering should be safe for both volunteers and the people they volunteer with. Ensuring that screening processes, worker checks, and other safeguards that include volunteers are well-resourced and efficient is crucial to effective volunteer engagement.

Insurance is another challenging aspect of Australia's volunteering infrastructure. Alarmingly, almost one in four organisations (24 per cent) surveyed in 2022 reported that they did not provide insurance to their volunteers. Volunteer involving organisations<sup>4</sup> owe a duty of care to their volunteers under

statutory work, health, and safety provisions or under common law.<sup>116</sup> Volunteers are not typically covered by Workers Compensation and Voluntary Workers Personal Accident Insurance covers injury but not illness. This creates challenges for both organisations and volunteers, which was especially relevant during COVID-19. A more accessible model for volunteer insurance in Australia that better protects volunteers in the course of their duties is urgently required.

Technology routinely comes up in conversations about volunteering infrastructure. Platforms that support recruitment and management of volunteers provide important efficiencies for volunteers and organisations alike. Improving access to technology, including digital literacy, and considering long-term strategic investment in technological enhancement has the potential to drastically reduce the burdensome administrative requirements associated with many forms of volunteering. This would enable volunteers and organisations to better use their time and would free up Volunteer Managers to invest more time in building relationships and curating meaningful experiences with their volunteers.

Strategic investment is a critical component of planning for the future. Trends in volunteering are expected to shape future scenarios where volunteers will be required, such as emergency response and recovery. Broad shifts in participation, changing community and government expectations, demographic changes, and climate change will all impact volunteering in Australia.<sup>117</sup> Other areas of uncertainty, including enabling infrastructure and the degree of technological disruption, highlight the importance of adapting current processes to plan for future scenarios.

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<sup>4</sup> Applies to volunteer involving organisations that have at least one paid employee and are therefore covered by work, health, and safety legislation.

## STRATEGIC OBJECTIVE 3.4: RECOGNISE THE IMPORTANCE OF VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

### OBJECTIVE

Effective volunteer engagement practices and the critical role of Volunteer Managers are recognised as essential and resourced accordingly.

### PURPOSE OF OBJECTIVE

This strategic objective is about recognising the critical importance of volunteer management, including the role of Volunteer Managers, in enabling effective and impactful volunteering. Volunteering does not 'just happen'. Instead, it requires deliberate and ongoing strategic investment underpinned by adequate resourcing. Leading and managing volunteers is more than just administration; it requires time, talent, and skill. The focus of this objective is about better recognising and investing in the functions of volunteer management and the managers and leaders undertaking these duties.

### THE CURRENT STATE

Without leadership, there is no volunteering. Whether paid or unpaid, Volunteer Managers are the lynchpin of effective volunteer involvement. Those with responsibility for leading and 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 formal volunteering and exacerbated enduring recruitment and retention challenges. For formal volunteering to survive in Australia, correcting this is no longer a matter of choice.

One of the single most impactful changes that could be achieved 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 Volunteer Managers and recognition of and investment to support the true cost of involving volunteers.

Those responsible for leading, managing, and coordinating volunteers, whether paid or unpaid, are the gatekeepers to positive volunteering experiences and impactful volunteering outcomes. Elevating the profession of Volunteer Management and investing in infrastructure to reduce the burdensome administration associated with volunteer involvement is critical to any serious effort to futureproof volunteering. Achievement of this strategic objective is a fundamental pillar of the National Strategy for Volunteering and will have a profound return on investment.

### SUPPORTING EVIDENCE

Effective leadership is a pre-requisite for volunteer satisfaction, performance, and retention. Volunteer Managers often have the necessary skills and abilities to be effective leaders; however, the competing demands of their role routinely require them to sacrifice relationship-building for administration. This results in poorer outcomes for volunteers, the organisation, and the beneficiaries of volunteering.<sup>118</sup>

Challenges associated with volunteer management can be observed in all types of organisations. There are an estimated almost half a million grassroots organisations such as sporting clubs, community bands, and hobby groups operating in Australia. Grassroots associations are crucial for community connectedness, especially in rural areas, however membership numbers are declining, and fewer members are willing to step into leadership positions.<sup>119</sup> Governance obligations and regulations introduce red tape and have been cited alongside the demands of coordination as key reasons people leave leadership positions.

Misuse of power and internal politics have been cited as primary barriers for joining committees in grassroots organisations.<sup>120</sup> In emergency response volunteering, the heavier workload and increased expectations of leaders can impact recruitment and retention of volunteers into these positions. Ensuring there is infrastructure to support leaders of volunteers has been identified as an important intervention to promote uptake of leadership roles in emergency response agencies.<sup>121</sup> This underscores the importance of investing in volunteer management infrastructure to ensure leaders can focus on supporting their volunteers rather than navigating bureaucracy.

The 2022 Volunteering in Australia research found nearly 70 per cent of responding organisations reported adopting the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement to some extent.<sup>122</sup> There was considerable variation by service focus, with sport and recreation, religious, faith-based, and spiritual, and environment organisations being less aware of the National Standards. Fewer than a third of organisations identified that their practices were completely or close to completely consistent with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement.<sup>123</sup>

A 2020 study on Victorian Public Health Sector Organisations found a strong,

positive correlation between satisfaction with volunteer management and intention to remain.<sup>124</sup> International studies show a similar relationship. The factors predicting volunteer retention also demonstrate the critical importance of volunteer management. International studies demonstrate reward and recognition, job satisfaction,<sup>125</sup> and proactive leadership in terms of creating a positive work environment<sup>126</sup> as being strong predictors of volunteer retention. The Volunteer Manager is at the centre of all of these factors.

Yet, despite the overwhelming evidence about the substantial benefits and outcomes generated through properly resourced volunteer management, Volunteer Managers report experiencing a constant battle in getting internal legitimacy for their role from colleagues and leadership.

Proper investment in volunteer management has the potential to profoundly transform volunteering in Australia. This investment must be both internal – from within volunteer involving organisations – and external – through funding, grants, and other mechanisms. Volunteer Managers are exceptionally passionate and talented professionals and elevating this critical role and function is long overdue.

# Research Evidence

The National Strategy for Volunteering was developed using a wide range of evidence including experience, expertise, and research.

Research evidence was collated through an original research project (the Volunteering in Australia research) and a series of research papers (the Volunteering Research Papers Initiative), which capture evidence on a wide array of topics related to volunteering. This included an overview of volunteering research published in Australia since the last National Strategy for Volunteering in 2011. The overview identifies who is undertaking volunteering research in Australia, how it is funded and disseminated, and how we might ensure quality research continues. The full overview, entitled *Time to be bold: Australian volunteering research since IYV+10 2011*, includes a short critical review and is available on the [National Strategy for Volunteering website](#).

## The Volunteering in Australia Research

The Volunteering in Australia research is a series of reports that provide the core evidence base on contemporary volunteering in Australia, which informed the National Strategy for Volunteering. The Volunteering in Australia research was undertaken by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the Australian National University (ANU) Centre for Social Research and Methods, and a consortium of researchers from Curtin University, Griffith University, and the University of Western Australia.

### Volunteering in Australia – The Volunteer Perspective

This analysis of the volunteer perspective draws on several data sources. These include new data collection through the ANUpoll series of surveys and earlier data from the ABS General Social Survey and the Census. The main source of data on contemporary volunteering comes from the ANUpoll series of surveys collected by the ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods, which included questions about volunteering in late-2019, April 2020, April 2021, and April 2022. The ANUpoll data is representative of the adult Australian population and the April 2022 survey collected data from 3,587 people in Australia.

The full report on the Volunteer Perspective, including information about the survey, is available on the [National Strategy for Volunteering website](#).

#### Key Insights from the Volunteer Perspective

- The diversity of how people volunteer is striking. People volunteer across a wide range of sectors and undertake a variety of activities.
- Several different data sources show formal volunteering is decreasing, and that this trend started long before the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Formal volunteering has declined for a number of reasons, many of which relate to the challenges people face in their broader lives. For example:
  - People who work longer hours are less likely to volunteer.
  - Work and family commitments, lack of interest, health reasons, and financial reasons are common reasons for not volunteering, though reasons vary among demographic groups.
  - Volunteering declined sharply during the COVID-19 pandemic.
  - Other changes in the volunteering landscape, such as increases in administrative requirements or increased interest in 'informal' volunteering, do not emerge as major contributors to this trend in the data.

- Formal volunteering has not returned to its pre-COVID levels, and it appears unlikely that many former volunteers will return in the near future. The effects of COVID-19 have been particularly significant for certain demographic groups. For example:
  - Volunteers aged 65 years and over and people who speak a language other than English at home were more likely to have stopped volunteering during COVID-19.
  - Men, those born overseas in a non-English speaking country, and those experiencing financial difficulties were less likely to have recommenced volunteering by 2022.
- There are very large differences in volunteering rates depending on where people live.
- There is a significant mismatch between the volunteering opportunities being offered and the opportunities that non-volunteers are interested in. This applies to both the types of organisations and types of roles.
- There is a strong connection between volunteering and wellbeing, with those who volunteer reporting greater life satisfaction than those who do not volunteer.
- While most volunteers report positive experiences, negative aspects of volunteering such as role overload, stress, and increased time pressures are reported by many volunteers. Negative experiences are reported by both current and former volunteers.

### Who Volunteers

- In April 2022 about a quarter (26.7 per cent) of Australians had undertaken formal volunteering in the previous 12 months and just under half (46.5 per cent) had undertaken informal volunteering in the previous four weeks.
- Combined, over half (56.7 per cent) of Australians had undertaken either formal or informal volunteering over the relevant periods as of April 2022.
- To varying degrees, those more likely to have volunteered formally were:
  - Women
  - People aged 55 years and older
  - Those born in Australia or born in another English-speaking country
  - Those with a higher level of education
  - Those living outside of a capital city
  - Those in paid employment
- Those born overseas in a non-English speaking country were more likely to have undertaken informal volunteering than those born in Australia.
- There were no differences in rates of volunteering by the socioeconomic characteristics of the area in which a person lives, or between people with disability and people without disability.<sup>5</sup>
- Women and older Australians were more likely to volunteer informally than men and younger Australians, respectively.
  - The absolute differences by sex (in particular) are much larger for informal compared to formal volunteering. Specifically, 51.3 per cent of women undertook informal volunteering in the previous four weeks compared to 41.5 per cent of men.

<sup>5</sup> The 2022 ANUpoll survey and the 2019 and 2020 General Social Surveys all indicate that people with disability volunteer at a similar rate to the general population of Australia.

## How People Volunteer

- The most common types of organisations volunteered for are sport and recreation (25.0 per cent), community services, welfare, and homelessness (22.2 per cent), and religious, faith-based, and spiritual (20.5 per cent).
- There are sizeable volunteer workforces in specific sectors that are not identified in official data collection, such as aged care (8.8 per cent), disability (4.7 per cent), and mental health (4.4 per cent).
- The most common types of activities undertaken by volunteers were fundraising, sales, and events (24.6 per cent), teaching, instruction, and providing information (24.5 per cent), and accounting, finance, administration, and management (22.8 per cent).
- Most volunteers (47.8 per cent) undertook activities that were targeted towards the general community. Where there is a focus on particular groups of beneficiaries, the most common focus was children / youth (32.5 per cent) and older people (20.5 per cent).
- Most volunteering is undertaken in person at an organisation (69.4 per cent) or in the field (41.5 per cent). Over the internet (30.2 per cent) and over the phone (16.9 per cent) were also prevalent modes of volunteering.

## Motivations and Barriers to Volunteering

- People predominantly volunteer for personal satisfaction and to do something worthwhile (71.9 per cent), to help others and their communities (61.4 per cent), for social contact (33.3 per cent), to use their skills and experience (32.3 per cent), and to stay active (27.8 per cent).
- The most common reason for not volunteering was work/family commitments (40.8 per cent). About one-in-five (21.9 per cent) non-volunteers indicated that they were 'not interested' as one of their reasons for not volunteering. Fewer than one-in-five non-volunteers identified each of the remaining ten reasons provided for not volunteering.
- Interestingly, one-in-eight (14.7 per cent) non-volunteers said that they did not volunteer because there were "no suitable opportunities" and a similar proportion said it was because "nobody asked" (13.9 per cent). This is indicative of a potential untapped pool of future volunteers.
- There was significant variation in reasons for not volunteering among demographic groups:
  - Women (46.3 per cent compared to 35.6 per cent of men) and people aged 35 to 44 years (50.3 per cent compared to 42.2 per cent of those aged 18 to 34 years, 44.7 per cent of those aged 45 to 64 years, and 25.7 per cent of those aged 65 years and older) were the most likely to cite work and family commitments.
  - Women, people aged 65 years and older, those who live in highly socio-economically disadvantaged areas, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples were more likely to report health reasons.
  - Younger people (aged 18 to 35 years) and people living in a capital city were more likely to report financial reasons. Somewhat surprisingly, there does not appear to be much variation in reporting financial reasons across the socioeconomic characteristics of the neighbourhood in which a person lives.
  - Older people (aged 65 years and older), those in the middle socio-economic quintile, and those born in a non-English speaking country were the most likely to report that there were no suitable opportunities in their area.



## Current Trends and the Future of Volunteering

- Rates of volunteering have been gradually declining from around one-third of adults in 2002 to around one-quarter in 2022.
- COVID-19 has resulted in a substantial decline in formal volunteering. The proportion of adults who had volunteered in the previous 12 months declined from 36.0 per cent in 2019 to 26.7 per cent in April 2022. This equates to around 1.86 million fewer volunteers at the start of 2022 compared to pre-COVID-19.
  - Volunteers aged 65 years and over, those who speak a language other than English at home, who work short hours or full-time hours, those experiencing a high level of psychological distress, those who lived in a state with strict COVID-19 restrictions, or those experiencing financial difficulties were the most likely to have stopped volunteering.
  - People were particularly likely to have stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 if they were involved in organisations with a focus on Disability (49.8 per cent), Arts / Heritage (42.9 per cent), Environment (42.2 per cent), Aged Care (42.2 per cent), and Mental Health (40.9 per cent). In comparison, only 26.3 per cent of those volunteering for organisations with a focus on Emergency Services / Disaster Relief stopped volunteering due to COVID-19.
  - Men, those born overseas in a non-English speaking country, and those experiencing financial difficulties were less likely to have resumed volunteering.
  - Those aged 65 to 74 (35.4 per cent), those aged 75 plus (24.7 per cent), and those who lived in the most disadvantaged areas (36.6 per cent) were less likely to say they intend to commence/recommence volunteering in the near future.
- Formal volunteering was already declining before COVID-19. Other changes in the volunteering landscape, such as increases in administrative requirements or increased interest in 'informal' volunteering, **do not** emerge as major contributors to this trend in the data:
  - Only 6.0 per cent of non-volunteers indicated that they did not volunteer due to onerous paperwork or administrative requirements.
  - While informal volunteering likely increased between 2020 and 2022, there is no evidence that it has increased in the longer term, with comparison to earlier data suggesting that it did not increase between 2016 and 2022.<sup>127</sup>
- Over the longer-term, the rate of youth volunteering has been gradually increasing. There was an increase in volunteering amongst young adults (15–24 years) between 2006 to 2016, but then a big drop between 2016 and 2021, partly due to the impact of COVID-19. The rate of volunteering among people aged 18–24 years has not shown signs of recovery in 2022.
- A comparison of data collected by the ABS in 2020 and the survey used for the Volunteering in Australia research in 2022 indicates that informal volunteering may have substantially increased during this time.



## Volunteering in Australia – The Organisation Perspective

Research on the organisation perspective was based primarily on new data collection undertaken through a survey and focus groups with representatives of volunteer involving organisations in Australia during May–June 2022. Information about the survey and a link to the survey was distributed by direct emails to contacts, social media posts, through sector relevant newsletters and via the VIKTOR/VIRA database courtesy of Volunteering Western Australia. It was completed by representatives of 1,345 volunteer involving organisations in Australia.

The full report on the Organisation Perspective, including information about the survey, is available on the [National Strategy for Volunteering website](#).

### Key Insights from the Organisation Perspective

- Demand for volunteers remains high among volunteer involving organisations, with 83 per cent of respondents indicating they need more volunteers.
- There appears to be a disconnect between the level of commitment that volunteers prefer compared to the commitment that organisations require. Organisations overwhelmingly indicate they involve volunteers in regular, ongoing roles while acknowledging a preference among volunteers for more episodic or project-based opportunities.
- While technology has been widely adopted by organisations for recruiting volunteers, word of mouth referrals and personal approaches remain the most prevalent methods of recruitment.
- Just over half (51 per cent) of organisations indicated they used technology to manage their volunteers.
- While supports such as induction and training are provided to volunteers by most organisations, an alarming 24 per cent of organisations (almost one in four) do not provide insurance to their volunteers.
- Most organisations report that they involve volunteers from minority groups and have a diversity and inclusion strategy in place. Awareness of physical barriers was relatively high among organisations surveyed, though few identified active measures to promote inclusion, such as cultural competency training or having staff with non-English speaking or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.
- COVID-19 is the main driver of change for volunteer involving organisations. Shifts in volunteering styles, population changes, and technological changes are also perceived to be significant.

### Attracting and Recruiting Volunteers

- Volunteer involving organisations have a high demand for volunteers, with most respondents (83 per cent) reporting that their organisations need 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.
- 60 per cent of organisations reported that they expected to need more or significantly more volunteers in five years' time. Only 8 per cent of organisations reported that fewer volunteers would be necessary.
- Organisations identified finding volunteers with available time (n = 186), COVID-19 and vaccination status (n = 112), difficulties finding people willing to commit (n = 94), finding interested volunteers (n = 58), and difficulties getting young people to volunteer (n = 55) as prominent barriers to recruitment and retention.

- Demand seems to be greatest among organisations in the Mental Health, Emergency Services / Disaster Relief, Animal Welfare, Health, and Education / Training sectors.
  - Mental Health, Emergency Services / Disaster Relief, and Animal Welfare organisations were also the most likely to report that they expected to need more or significantly more volunteers in five years' time.

### **How Organisations Engage Volunteers**

- Training (84 per cent) and induction (84 per cent) are commonly provided by organisations.
- Nearly 70 per cent of organisations reported adopting the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement to some extent.
- The most significant reported benefits of involving volunteers include the services offered to clients and beneficiaries and the impact of volunteers on the effectiveness of an organisation's operation.
- Respondents were less likely to agree that volunteers allowed their organisations to fill skills gaps, however this statement was still supported overall.
- The most rewarding aspects of involving volunteers were identified as meeting new people, friendships/camaraderie, fostering a sense of community spirit, seeing volunteers grow and develop, and learning new things.
- 30 per cent of organisations involved employee volunteers.
  - A lack of suitable opportunities for employee volunteers was cited as the major reason for not involving employee volunteers (53 per cent of respondents).
  - Employee volunteering is more common among organisations in the Animal Welfare, Environment, Disability, and Welfare sectors.
  - Organisations suggested that whilst employee volunteers brought a range of valuable professional skills and expertise, there was also an associated rise in the standard of support expected by this cohort.
- Despite 80 per cent of respondents identifying they involve volunteers from minority groups, resourcing issues were identified as a barrier to diversity and inclusion.

### **Trends in Volunteer Involving Organisations**

- COVID-19 was a clear driver of change for nearly all organisations (88 per cent). Affecting slightly over half (55 per cent) was the need to be increasingly resilient and adaptable in the face of change. Shifts in volunteering styles (27 per cent), population changes (26 per cent), and technological changes (23 per cent) appeared to each affect about one-quarter of organisations.
- Rising expectations was a relatively weaker driver of change (19 per cent), as were business risk (12 per cent), and climate change (4 per cent).
  - Given the dominance of COVID-19 as a perceived driver of change in 2022, future research may reveal whether the less prevalent drivers of change emerge as more important concerns for organisations in the coming years.
- Examining the data by sector, organisations from the Emergency Services / Disaster Relief and Sport / Recreation sectors were more likely to report rising community expectations as a driver of change. Mental Health organisations reported that rising levels of business risk and the need to be adaptable were key drivers more so than other organisation types.

- The increasing complexity of regulation and administrative requirements was seen as a more prominent change for Religious / Faith-Based / Spiritual, Youth, and Aged Care organisations, while the reduced capacity of volunteering programs was more strongly identified by organisations with a focus on Health, Cultural / Ethnic groups, and Human Rights / Justice / Legal areas.

### Access to Survey Data

Open, accessible, and discoverable data is a key principle of the Volunteering in Australia research project. The survey data used for the Volunteering in Australia research has been publicly released through the Australian Data Archive and is available to researchers and practitioners by application through the links below.

- Volunteering in Australia – The Volunteer Perspective: [Dataset](#)
- Volunteering in Australia – The Organisation Perspective: [Dataset](#)

### The Volunteering Research Papers Initiative

The Volunteering Research Papers, produced as part of the National Strategy for Volunteering project, capture evidence on a wide range of topics related to volunteering and outline key insights for policy and practice. Twenty-two papers were developed by 38 authors. The papers summarise literature on an array of topics in volunteering, including:

- Volunteer retention
- Corporate volunteering
- Volunteer leadership
- Volunteering in grassroot organisations
- Volunteering in ethno-religious communities
- Motivations to volunteer
- Emergency volunteering
- Trends in the rate of volunteering
- Measuring volunteer workforces
- The history of volunteering
- Online volunteering
- Volunteering and mental health
- Volunteering in sporting events
- Behavioural insights and volunteering
- Australian volunteering research since 2011
- Volunteering in culturally and linguistically diverse communities
- International development volunteering
- Volunteering among older people
- Informal volunteering

The Volunteering Research Papers are available on the [National Strategy for Volunteering website](#).

## Research Gaps

The Volunteering in Australia Research and the Volunteering Research Papers Initiative aimed to collate a broad evidence base to inform the National Strategy for Volunteering. Some notable research gaps remain, including but not limited to:

- Measuring and understanding the volunteer experience
- Measuring and understanding the predictors of effective volunteering
- Volunteering and inclusion (people with disability, LGBTIQ+ people, and other excluded people and communities)
- The relationship between volunteering and gender
- Volunteering and power dynamics
- Exploitation or misconduct in volunteering
- Volunteering in regional, rural, and remote Australia
- Volunteering in First Nations communities
- Volunteering on boards and committees
- The role of volunteering in addressing climate change
- Volunteering in grassroots organisations and service clubs
- Family volunteering

Addressing research gaps will be a priority as the National Strategy for Volunteering is progressed to ensure there is an evolving, contemporary evidence base to inform actions and initiatives.

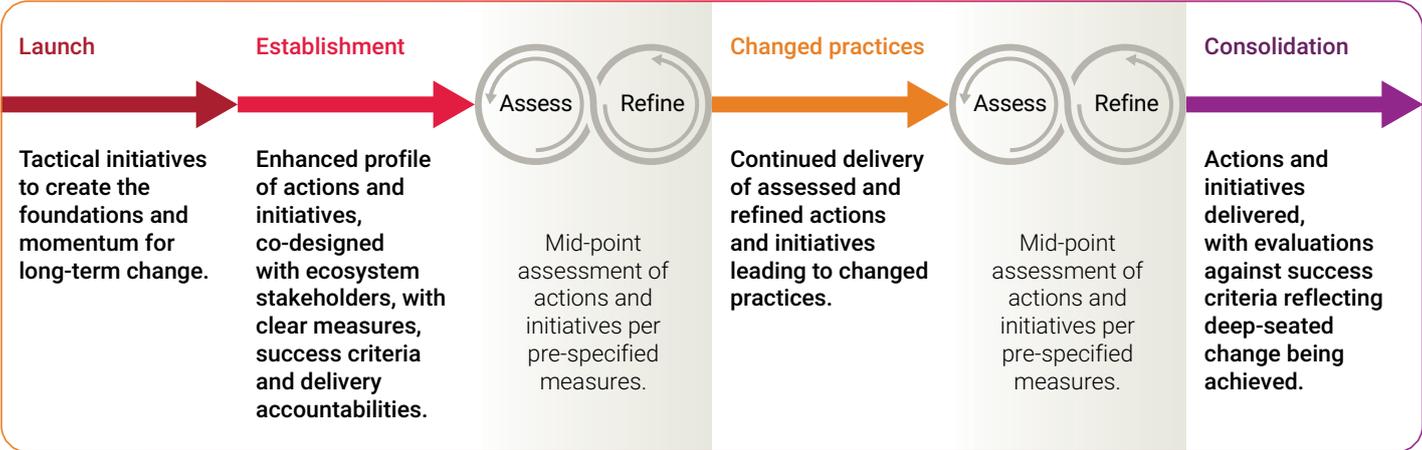
# Realising the National Strategy for Volunteering: Actions and Initiatives

## Approach to Implementation

The National Strategy for Volunteering represents an ambitious program of change. The strategic objectives and aims 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 for Volunteering 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 volunteering ecosystem to ensure continuous momentum and relevance over its ten-year lifespan.

A staged approach to implementation will focus on building the right conditions and coalitions to generate long-term success. This staged approach to the implementation will be guided by the following delivery framework:



## Establishment Phase

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



### **Co-Design of a Three-Year Action Plan**

During the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering, participating stakeholders identified a suite of actions that could be progressed during implementation. This information has been synthesised and will be presented back to the volunteering ecosystem for validation.

Adhering to the National Strategy for Volunteering's principles of ongoing co-design and collaboration, the first three-year Action Plan will build on ideas to date. It will also consider alignment with other initiatives that are already taking place or are due to be commenced as well as the appropriate stakeholder/s to lead different actions.

### **Development of a Monitoring and Evaluation Framework**

The National Strategy for Volunteering will require ongoing monitoring and evaluation. Development of a framework to support this process will be undertaken during the Establishment Phase. Many of the actions likely to be progressed through the National Strategy for Volunteering are likely to be multi-year actions. The Monitoring and Evaluation Framework will consider how to track progress against short, medium, and long-term outcomes.

### **Development of a Governance Blueprint**

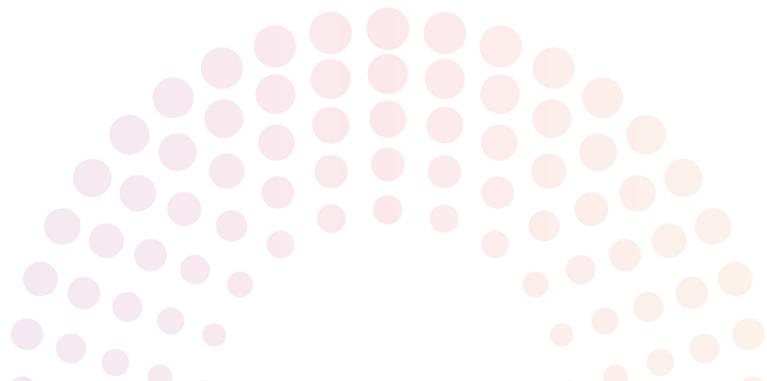
The purpose of a Governance Blueprint is to provide a framework for implementation and evaluation of the National Strategy for Volunteering. The Governance Blueprint will identify the processes and systems required to ensure the National Strategy for Volunteering is implemented effectively and efficiently to maximise outcomes and achieve its objectives, aims, and vision. It will also consider mechanisms for accountability and oversight, such as regular reporting, and will focus on inclusivity to ensure the participation of marginalised and underrepresented groups in decision-making.

The Governance Blueprint will help to ensure that the National Strategy for Volunteering is implemented in a transparent, accountable, and ethical manner, and will help to build trust and confidence among stakeholders.

### **Development of a Model for Shared Accountability**

A Model for Shared Accountability will provide a framework that establishes clear roles and responsibilities for implementation of the National Strategy for Volunteering. The model will be based on the premise that stakeholders from across the volunteering ecosystem are expected and encouraged to contribute to the implementation of the National Strategy for Volunteering. It will be based on the idea that achieving shared goals requires collaboration and cooperation amongst stakeholders and that everyone has a role to play in ensuring the National Strategy for Volunteering is successful.

The framework will prioritise transparency and open communication to build trust and foster collaboration. It will recognise the considerable expertise and experience of different stakeholders and identify how the volunteering ecosystem can work together to advance a shared agenda for volunteering for the first time in Australia's history.



## Links to Other Initiatives

The National Strategy for Volunteering will be carried forward alongside other major national initiatives. Many of these policies and initiatives are connected to the volunteering ecosystem. These include existing frameworks related to volunteering such as the *Sport Volunteering National Plan*, other national initiatives such as Australia's Disability Strategy 2021–2031, and initiatives which are currently in development, like the *National Mental Health Workforce Strategy*.

The National Strategy for Volunteering will also intersect with State and Territory volunteering strategies.

## The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals

Volunteering is vital to achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The United Nations acknowledges the role of volunteering, with 'volunteer groups' acknowledged specifically as key stakeholders in implementing all 17 Goals in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.<sup>128</sup>

Engaging volunteers in the implementation of the SDGs is crucial to a "whole-of-society" approach, which encourages opportunities for people to be directly involved in delivering development outcomes. Significant opportunities also exist for international knowledge-sharing and collaboration.<sup>129</sup> For example, between volunteer involving organisations in Australia, international volunteering cooperation organisations, United Nations Volunteers, international non-government organisations that involve volunteers, and peak bodies and governments in other countries.

The National Strategy for Volunteering acknowledges and aims to support the role of volunteers in the development of the SDGs. The National Strategy for Volunteering aims to promote inclusion in volunteering, expand the public understanding of volunteering, support efforts to enhance the protection, safety, and wellbeing of volunteers, move towards a sustainable and strategic model of investment in volunteering, and promote new volunteering opportunities. Through these objectives, the National Strategy for Volunteering will strengthen Australia's involvement in the achievement of the SDGs.<sup>130</sup>

# How to use the National Strategy for Volunteering

The National Strategy for Volunteering is a co-designed and co-owned national strategy that provides a roadmap for volunteering from 2023 to 2033. This means everyone in the volunteering ecosystem has ongoing opportunities to make decisions about the priorities and initiatives that support the objectives of the National Strategy for Volunteering over the next ten years. It also means that responsibility for implementation can be shared by all members of the volunteering ecosystem.

The National Strategy for Volunteering provides a guide to shape the priorities of different stakeholders in the volunteering ecosystem. It synthesizes insights from ten months of in-depth consultation and original research. The focus areas and strategic objectives outlined in the National Strategy for Volunteering draw on an extensive evidence-base of experience, expertise, and research, and have been validated throughout the co-design process. All stakeholders can draw upon the insights in the National Strategy for Volunteering to work towards its shared vision.

Members of the volunteering ecosystem can use the National Strategy for Volunteering to:

- Develop **new initiatives** or align **existing work** with those of other actors.
- Make the case for **investment** and in-kind resourcing to governments, philanthropists, foundations, and other grant-makers.
- **Collaborate** with other members of the volunteering ecosystem to achieve shared goals.
- **Conduct internal reviews** to understand the efficacy of one's own operations and identify areas for improvement.
- **Work together to advance a shared agenda** on volunteering to ensure volunteering in Australia is sustainable over the long-term and continues to be part of the rich social and cultural fabric of society.

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# Appendix A – Development of the National Strategy for Volunteering

## Volunteering Australia Project Team

Sarah Wilson, National Strategy Director,  
Volunteering Australia

Jack McDermott, National Strategy  
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Dr Sue Regan, Deputy CEO & Policy Director,  
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Kylie Hughes, Communications Manager,  
Volunteering Australia

Mark Pearce, CEO, Volunteering Australia

Susan Fisher, Project Officer, Volunteering  
Australia (March to June 2022)

## National Strategy for Volunteering Council

Grainne O'Loughlin (Chair), CEO, Karitane

Mark Pearce (Deputy Chair), CEO,  
Volunteering Australia

Andrew Coghlan, Head of Emergency Services,  
Australian Red Cross

Ashleigh Streeter-Jones, Founder,  
Raise Our Voice Australia

Brianna Casey, CEO, Foodbank Australia

Camilla Rowland, CEO, Palliative Care Australia

Gary Oliver, Managing Director,  
Synergy Nation Group

Jo Watson, Director of Supporter Engagement,  
Save the Children

Dr Lisa Schimanski, CEO, Volunteering  
Tasmania (outgoing)

Matthew Calf, Senior Manager –  
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Professor Melanie Oppenheimer,  
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Mohammad Al-Khafaji, CEO, Federation of  
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Sue Woodward AM, Chief Adviser  
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## Research Working Group

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Dr Mario Peucker, Associate Professor, Victoria University

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Associate Professor Patrick Dunlop, Associate Professor, Curtin University

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## Corporate Volunteering Working Group

Leigh Simmonds (Chair), Senior Manager Patient Advocacy, Corporate Social Responsibility and Reconciliation Action Plan Lead, Pfizer Australia.

Ash Rosshandler, CEO, GoodCompany

Carlie Jones, Manager Community Volunteering, Royal Automobile Club of WA

Debbie Haski-Leventhal, Professor of Management, Macquarie University

Kris Ashpole, CEO, Goodman Foundation

Laura Cochrane, Head of Strategic Giving, National Australia Bank (NAB)

Lucy Doyle, Head of Strategic Giving, National Australia Bank (NAB)

Dr Margaret Moreton, Mission Lead, Resilient Communities Mission, Minderoo Foundation Fire and Flood Resilience (Now Executive Director, Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience)

Olivia Gatt, Corporate Relationship Officer, Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation

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Ruth Lee, Manager, Give2 and Give Time, Origin Energy Foundation

Traci Gamblin, Executive Manager Engagement, Volunteering WA

Victor Lee, CEO & Co-Founder, Communitier

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## Volunteer Management Working Group

Dr Jessie Harman (Chair), Director,  
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Adam Woods, DigiVol Online Coordinator,  
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Research Institute

Carol Cunningham, Head of Volunteer  
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Dalovia Auyang, Corporate Affairs Officer,  
Chinese Australian Services Society

DJ Cronin, State Manager Volunteering  
Services, UnitingCare Queensland

Gerri Clay, CEO, EdConnect Australia

Kylie Elliott, Volunteer and Supporter  
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Hospitals Foundation

Leesa Riley, Statewide Volunteering Manager,  
Parks Victoria

Loren Ayres, Senior Manager,  
People (Volunteering), Cancer Council  
Queensland (now Senior Manager Operations  
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Michelle Greenwood, Founder,  
Invisible Illnesses Inc

Mike Feszczak, CEO, Grandparents for  
Grandchildren SA

Sabrina Fuechsle, Volunteer Experience  
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Stella Molloy, Volunteer Coordinator,  
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Tracey O'Neill, Senior Manager Volunteer  
Engagement, Brotherhood of St Laurence

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## Policy Working Group

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Cath Cook, Sector Development Manager,  
VolunteeringACT

Meredith Blais, Senior Policy Advisor,  
Volunteering WA

Olympia Vozvotecas, Policy & Advocacy  
Manager, Volunteering SA&NT

Dr Sue Regan, Deputy CEO and Policy Director,  
Volunteering Australia

Tamsin Quinn, Deputy CEO and Director  
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The Centre for Volunteering

Vicki Nash, Strategic Manager,  
Advocacy & Communication,  
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Zac Reimers, Policy and Advocacy Lead,  
Volunteering Queensland

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## Core Design Team

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Chun-Yin San (Co-Facilitator), Practice Lead – Strategy, Foresight & Futures, ThinkPlace

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Carlie Jones, Manager Community Volunteering, Royal Automobile Club of WA

Cath Cook, Sector Development Manager, VolunteeringACT

Denisa Konecny, Executive Officer, Broome CIRCLE

DJ Cronin, State Manager Volunteering Services, UnitingCare Queensland

Jack McDermott, National Strategy Research Fellow, Volunteering Australia

Dr Jessie Harman, Director, Rotary International

Kylie Elliott, Volunteer and Supporter Engagement Lead, Sydney Children's Hospitals Foundation

Leesa Riley, Statewide Volunteering Manager, Parks Victoria

Dr Lisa Schimanski, CEO, Volunteering Tasmania (outgoing)

Loren Ayres, Senior Manager, People (Volunteering), Cancer Council Queensland (now Senior Manager Operations Support, Orange Sky Australia)

Matthew Calf, Senior Manager – Industry Projects, Australian Sports Commission

Dr Megan Paull, Senior Lecturer & Postgraduate Research Chair, Murdoch University

Professor Melanie Oppenheimer, Honorary Professor, Australian National University; Professor Emerita, Flinders University

Meredith Blais, Senior Policy Advisor, Volunteering WA

Penny Aquino, General Manager – Volunteer Resources, The Salvation Army

Sabrina Fuechsle, Volunteer Experience Manager, Lifeline Australia

Sharon Walsh, Volunteer Services Director, Bendigo Health

Traci Gamblin, Executive Manager Engagement, Volunteering WA

Victor Lee, CEO & Co-Founder, Communitier

Zac Reimers, Policy and Advocacy Lead, Volunteering Queensland

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## State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies CEO Network

Dr Antoine Guillemette, Acting CEO,  
Volunteering Victoria

Gemma Rygate, CEO, The Centre  
for Volunteering

Hamilton Calder, CEO, Volunteering SA&NT

Jean Giese, CEO, VolunteeringACT

Dr Lisa Schimanski, CEO, Volunteering  
Tasmania (outgoing)

Mara Basanovic, CEO, Volunteering Queensland

Mark Pearce, CEO, Volunteering Australia

Susan Helyar, Acting CEO, VolunteeringACT

Tina Williams, CEO, Volunteering WA

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## State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies

The Centre for Volunteering

VolunteeringACT

Volunteering Queensland

Volunteering SA&NT

Volunteering Tasmania

Volunteering Victoria

Volunteering WA

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## Project Volunteers

Akansha Kapoor, Customer & Digital Experience  
Senior Manager, PwC Australia

Pauline Kanhalikham, Finance & Program  
Coordinator, Origin Energy Foundation

Stephanie Zolis, Digital Transformation Senior  
Manager, PwC Australia

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## Project Supporters

Bendigo Volunteer Resource Centre

Broome CIRCLE

City of Gold Coast

National Australia Bank Limited

Origin Energy Foundation

Peel Volunteer Resource Centre

PwC Australia

ThinkPlace

The Platform and Purpose Studio

Wakefield Regional Council

In addition to those formally involved in the National Strategy for Volunteering project, there were many others who provided considerable support in other ways. This included arranging site visits and consultations with colleagues, volunteers, and service users, disseminating project information to various networks, sending research evidence and other materials for consideration, and providing practical support for workshops. This project would not have been possible without the help of those who connected the Project Team with people and places across Australia and Volunteering Australia thanks everyone who participated for their unwavering commitment to volunteering.

## Appendix B – Volunteering Research Papers

The following Volunteering Research Papers were developed to inform the evidence-base for the National Strategy for Volunteering. The Volunteering Research Papers cover various topics in volunteering.

*Psychosocial hazard management in regional volunteer involving organisations:*

*A review of the current research landscape*

by Adam Nebbs

*Emergency volunteering: leading engagement and retention*

by Amber Tsai, Toby Newstead, and Gemma Lewis

*International development volunteers: A potential source of global experience, knowledge and enterprise*

by Anthony Fee

*Understanding motivations to volunteer*

by Arthur Stukas and Sarah Wilson

*Planning for an uncertain future: future scenarios for emergency volunteering in Australia*

by Blythe McLennan

*Volunteering inclusion for people from CALD backgrounds*

by Carissa Jedwab

*Informal volunteering and community-led problem-solving*

by Carolyn Hendriks, Elise Klein, and Sue Regan

*The free-fall of volunteer leaders in Australian grassroots associations*

by Christel Mex

*Defining, Measuring and Reporting charitable volunteering in Australia*

by Craig Furneaux and David Gilchrist

*Without leadership there is no volunteering: The importance of strategic investment in leadership development in Australia*

by Darja Kragt, Sarah Wilson, Toby Newstead, and Vivien Forner

*Corporate volunteering: implications for policy and practice*

by Debbie Haski-Leventhal

*Online volunteering: Unlocking untapped potential*

by Debbie Haski-Leventhal, Irit Alony, Paul Flemons, and Adam Woods

*Volunteering and mental health*

by Jack McDermott

*Volunteering within ethno-religious community contexts: Empirical insights with a focus on Muslim intra-community engagement in Australia*

by Mario Peucker

*Time to be bold: Australian volunteering research since IYV+10 2011*

by Megan Paull

*Methodological approaches to, and challenges of, determining the size, scale, and contribution of volunteer workforces*  
by Megan Woods and Karen Douglas

*The Seven Waves of Volunteering in Australia: a brief history*  
by Melanie Oppenheimer and Sue Regan

*The Decline of Formal Volunteering in Australia (2001–2020): Insights from the HILDA Survey*  
by Rong Zhu

*Applying insights from behavioural economics to increase volunteering*  
by Swee-Hoon Chuah

*Factors influencing older adults' decisions to volunteer*  
by Tim Windsor, Leeann Mahlo, Susan Gordon, Stephanie Champion, and Edoardo Rosso

*Surviving and Thriving from the Volunteer Involvement in Mega-Sport Events*  
by Tracey Dickson and Simon Darcy

*The great (volunteer) resignation: An evidence-based strategy for retaining volunteers*  
by Vivien Forner, Djurre Holtrop, Darja Kragt, and Anya Johnson

The Volunteering Research Papers are available to view and download on the [National Strategy for Volunteering website](#).

