



**National Strategy
for Volunteering**

Exploring the Research-Policy Interface

**How research evidence informed the new
National Strategy for Volunteering**



**National Strategy
for Volunteering**

Acknowledgement of Country and Introductions

Dr Sue Regan, Volunteering Australia



**National Strategy
for Volunteering**

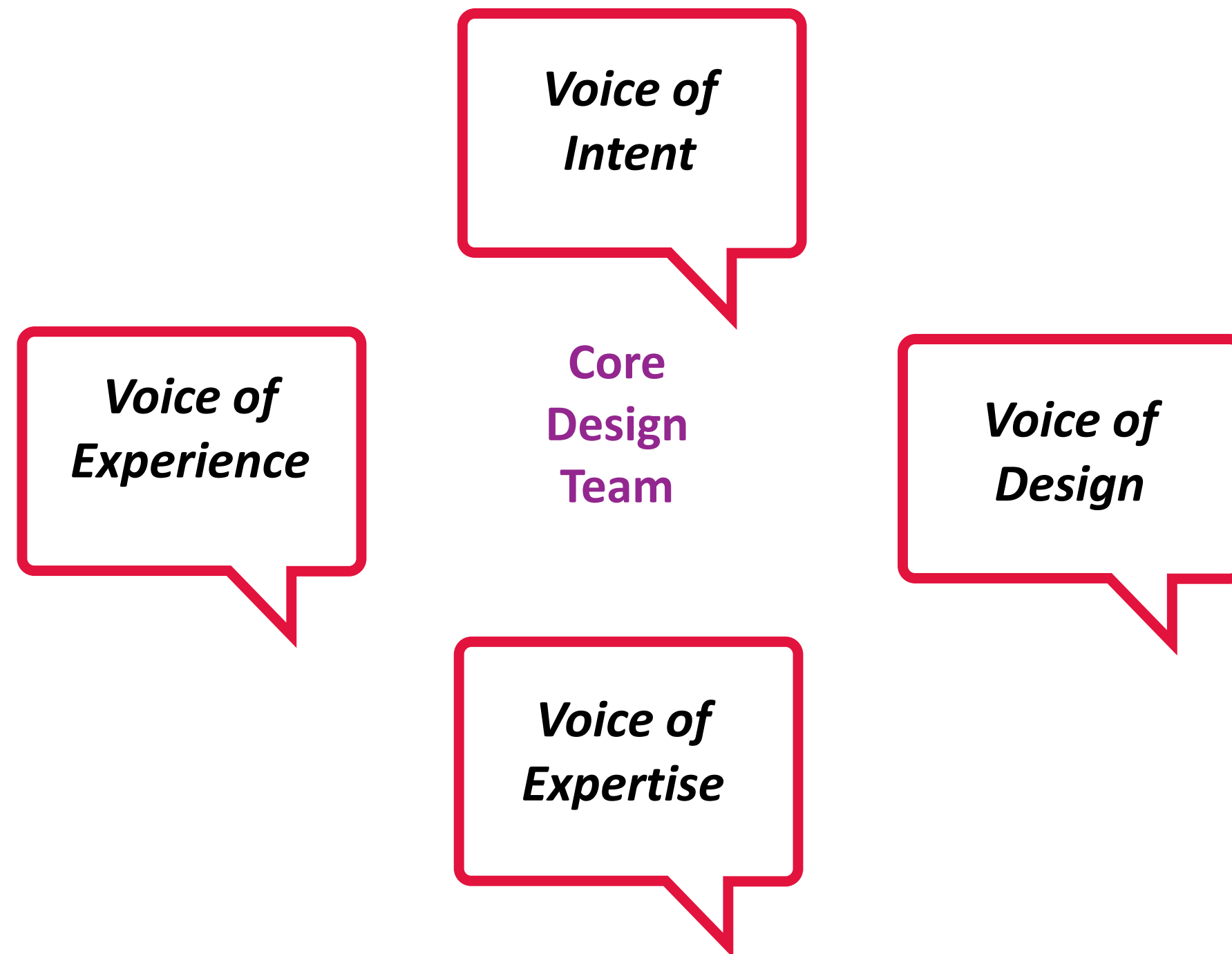
Developing the National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-2033)

Sarah Wilson, Volunteering Australia

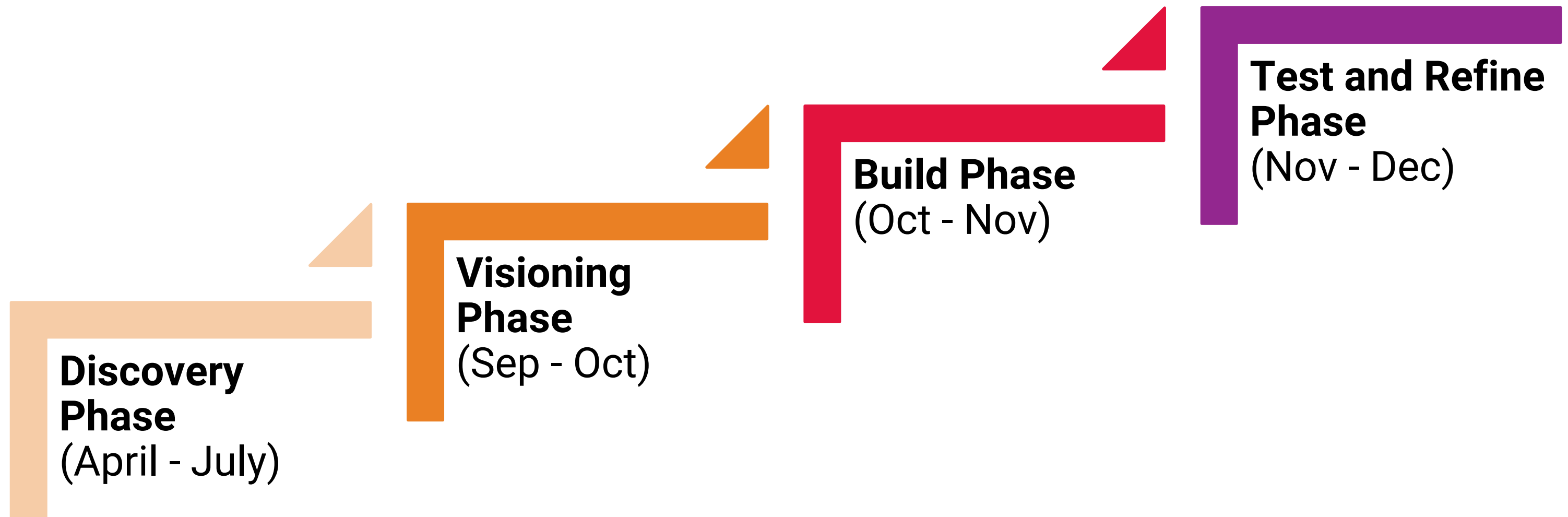
PROJECT VISION

Deliver a National Strategy for Volunteering designed and owned by the volunteering ecosystem that will provide a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia.

FOUR VOICES OF DESIGN



CO-DESIGN PROCESS



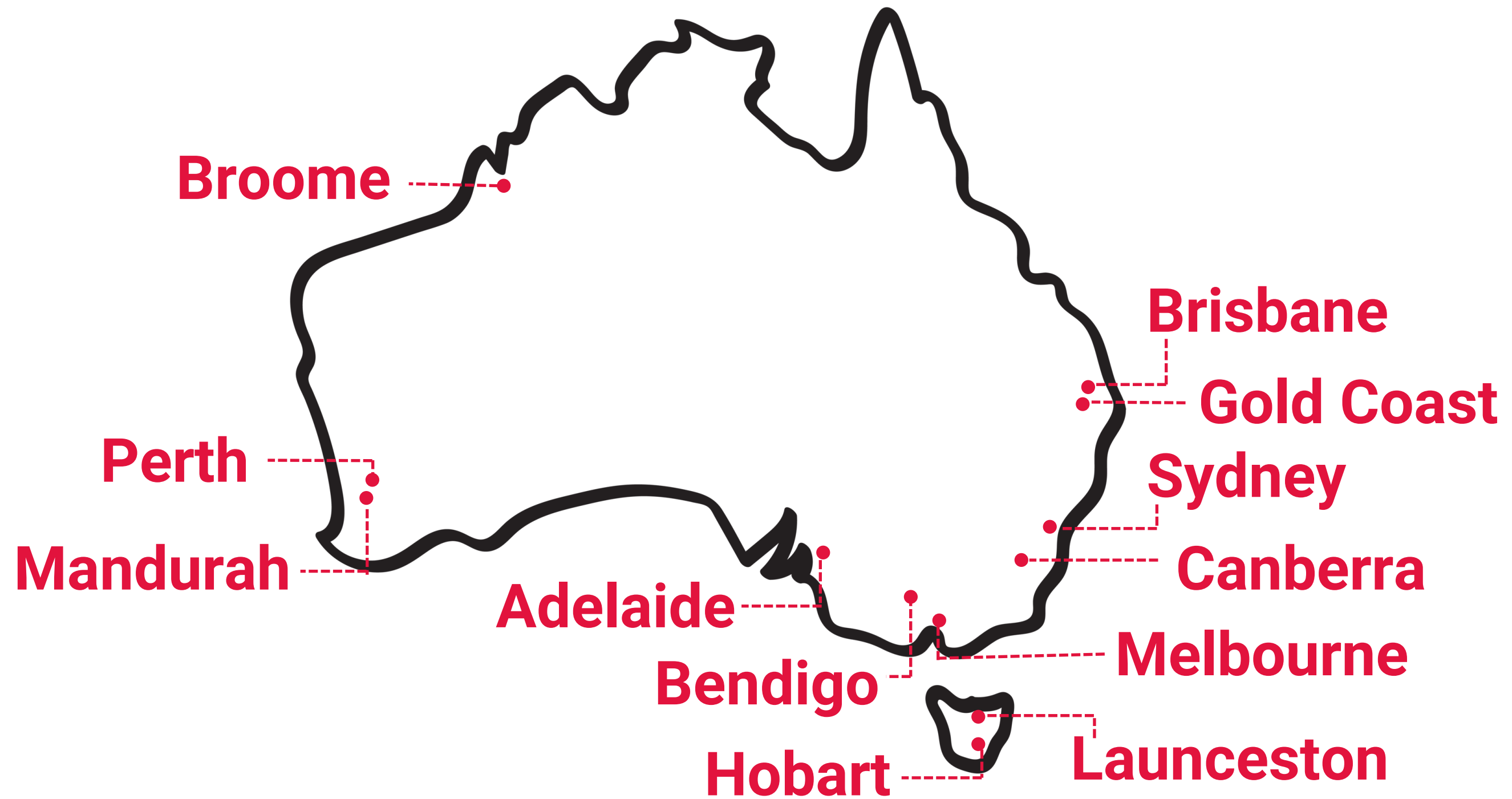
DISCOVERY PHASE



DISCOVERY PHASE

1. Volunteering has an identity crisis
2. Volunteering is a workforce issue
3. Volunteering is an incubator for inclusion
4. Volunteering is a catalyst for systemic change
5. Expectations of the volunteering ecosystem are becoming untenable
6. The ecosystem needs stronger leadership
7. Strategic investment is a pre-requisite for sustainability
8. The ecosystem needs fit-for-purpose regulation
9. The profession of volunteer management is invisible
10. Volunteering is a wide spectrum of activities
11. We need to re-focus on the volunteer experience
12. Research needs to underpin volunteering policy and practice

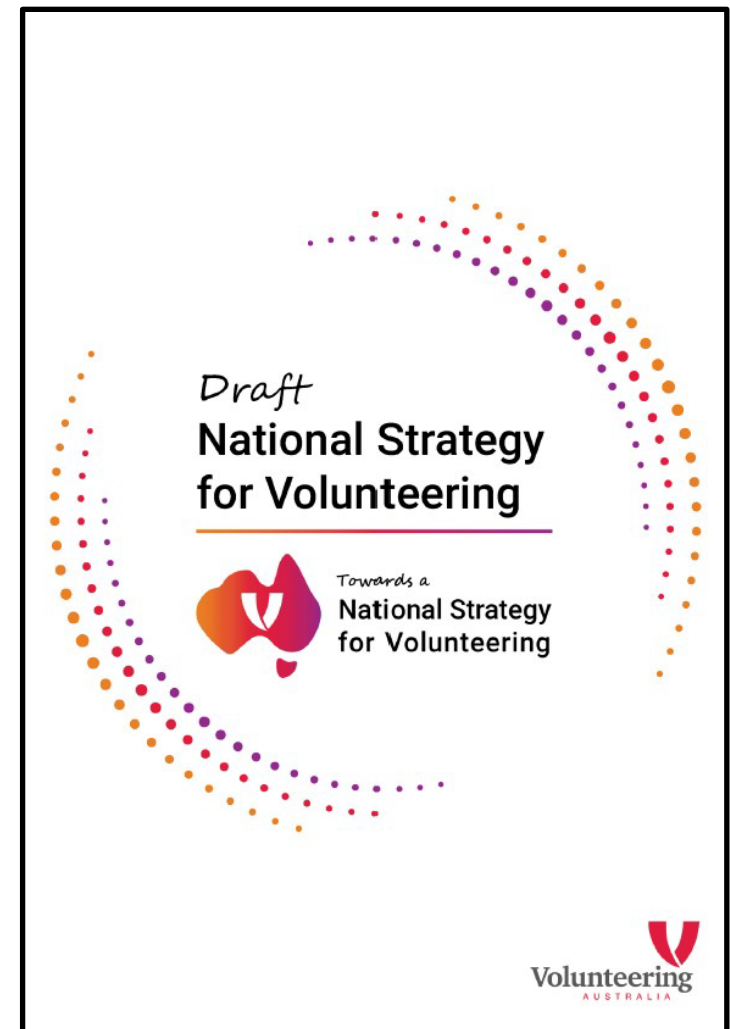
VISIONING PHASE



BUILD PHASE



Core Design Team



TEST AND REFINE PHASE



National Strategy for Volunteering

2023–2033



Exploring the Research-Policy Interface

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

Individual Potential and the Volunteer Experience

1.1 Focus on the Volunteer Experience

1.2 Make Volunteering Inclusive and Accessible

1.3 Ensure Volunteering is Not Exploitative

Community and Social Impact

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

Conditions for Volunteering to Thrive

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

INDICATORS OF SUCCESS

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

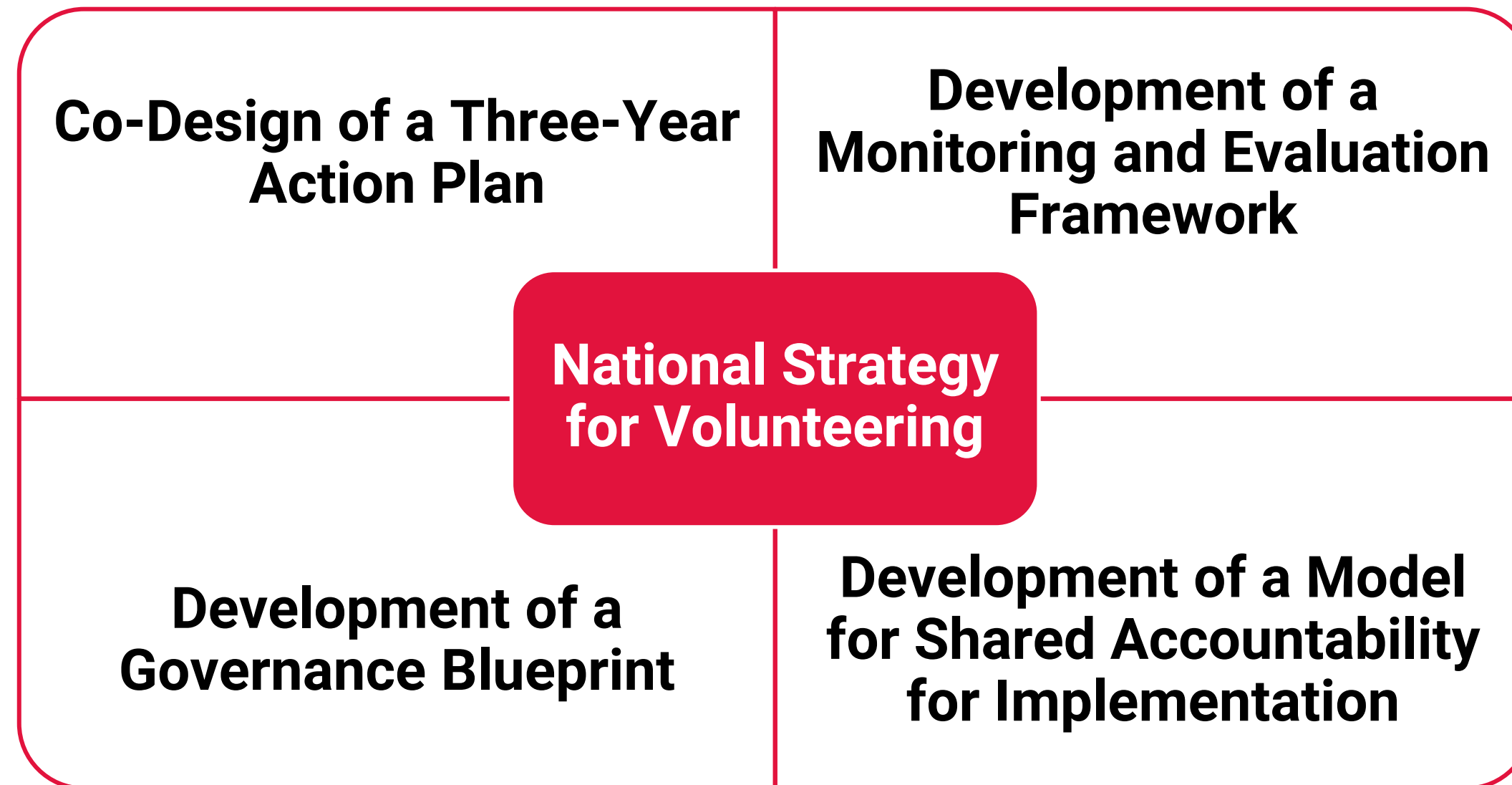
WHY PEOPLE VOLUNTEER

“Simply it’s about connection to the community. I also see a lot of beauty happening here, often with people who don’t experience a lot of beauty in their own lives.”

“Sometimes it’s easy to feel overwhelmed by my own life problems. Volunteering allows me to be present in the moment for another person, reminding me that we are all utterly human and living our own experiences in this world.”

“As a migrant it’s really important to me to feel like I am giving back to a country that has offered me so many opportunities beyond what I would have been afforded in the place I was born. I am grateful every day to call this place home, and volunteering is a part of expressing my gratitude to the people who live here.”

NEXT STEPS





**National Strategy
for Volunteering**

The Research Base for the National Strategy

Jack McDermott, Volunteering Australia

Research Evidence

VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA 2022

The Volunteer Perspective

*Nicholas Biddle, Charlotte Boyer, Matthew Gray,
and Maria Jahromi*



VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA 2022

The Organisation Perspective

*Kirsten Holmes, Patrick D. Dunlop,
Leonie Lockstone-Binney, Amanda Davies,
Hawa Muhammad Farid, Callan Lavery*



**Time to be bold: An overview
of the state of research on
volunteering in Australia over
the ten years since IYV+10**

Dr Megan Paull

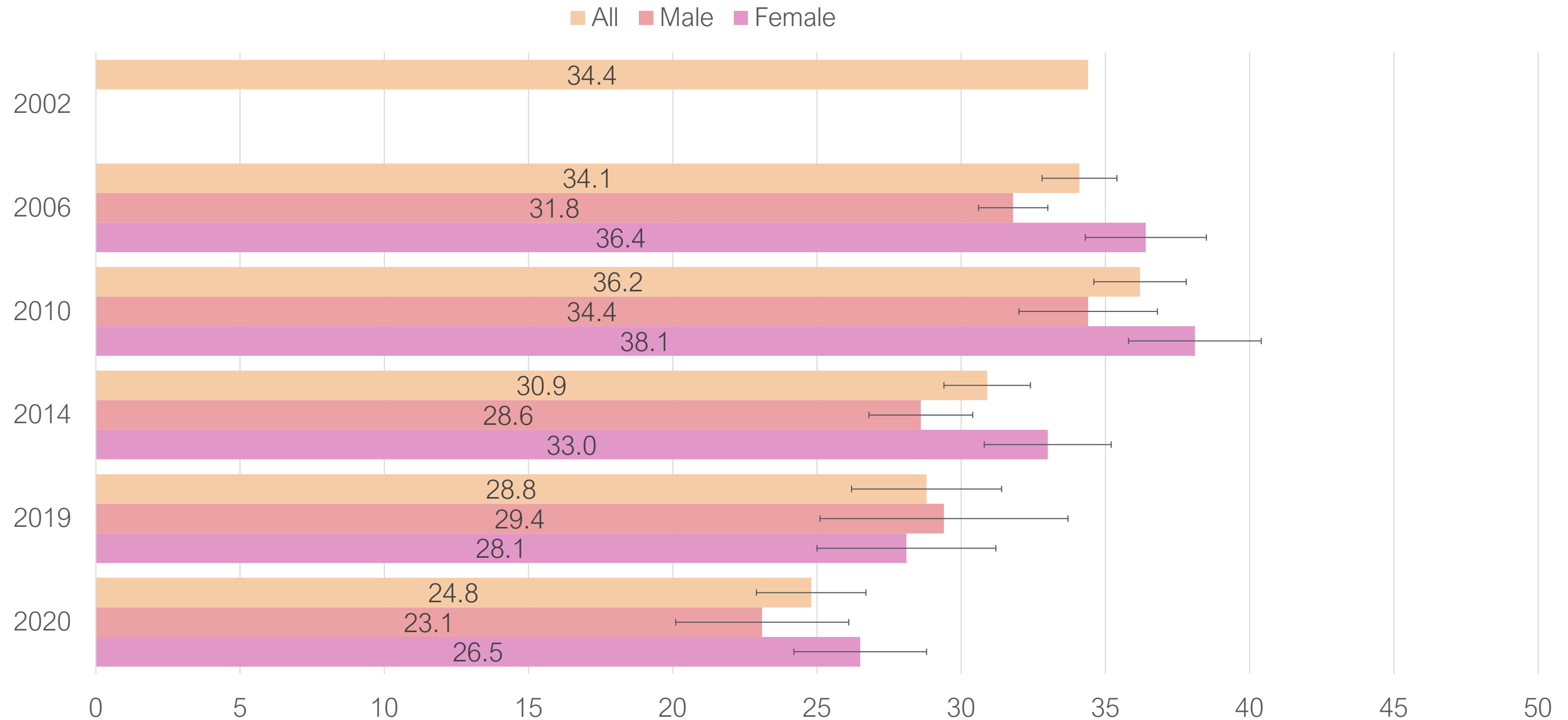
November 2022



Volunteering in Australia

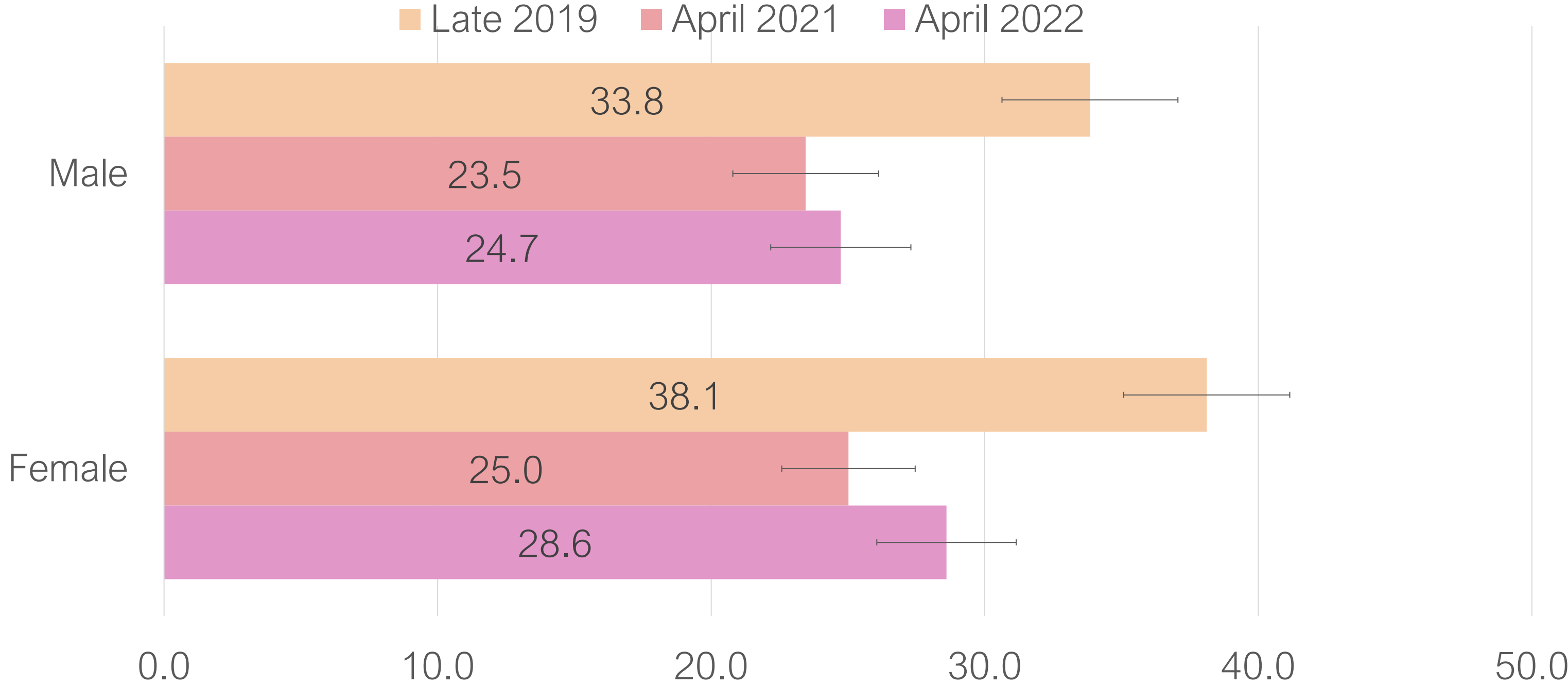
- Conducted in 2022 to inform the development of the new National Strategy for Volunteering
- The Volunteer Perspective: survey of 3,587 people in Australia between 11 and 24 April 2022, which included 1,100 volunteers
- The Organisation Perspective: survey of 1,345 volunteer involving organisations in Australia between 13 May and 22 June 2022, and two focus groups

Volunteering in Australia over time



Volunteering rates by gender, 2002 to 2020 (%) [Source: 2002, 2006, 2010, 2014, 2019 and 2020 ABS General Social Survey]

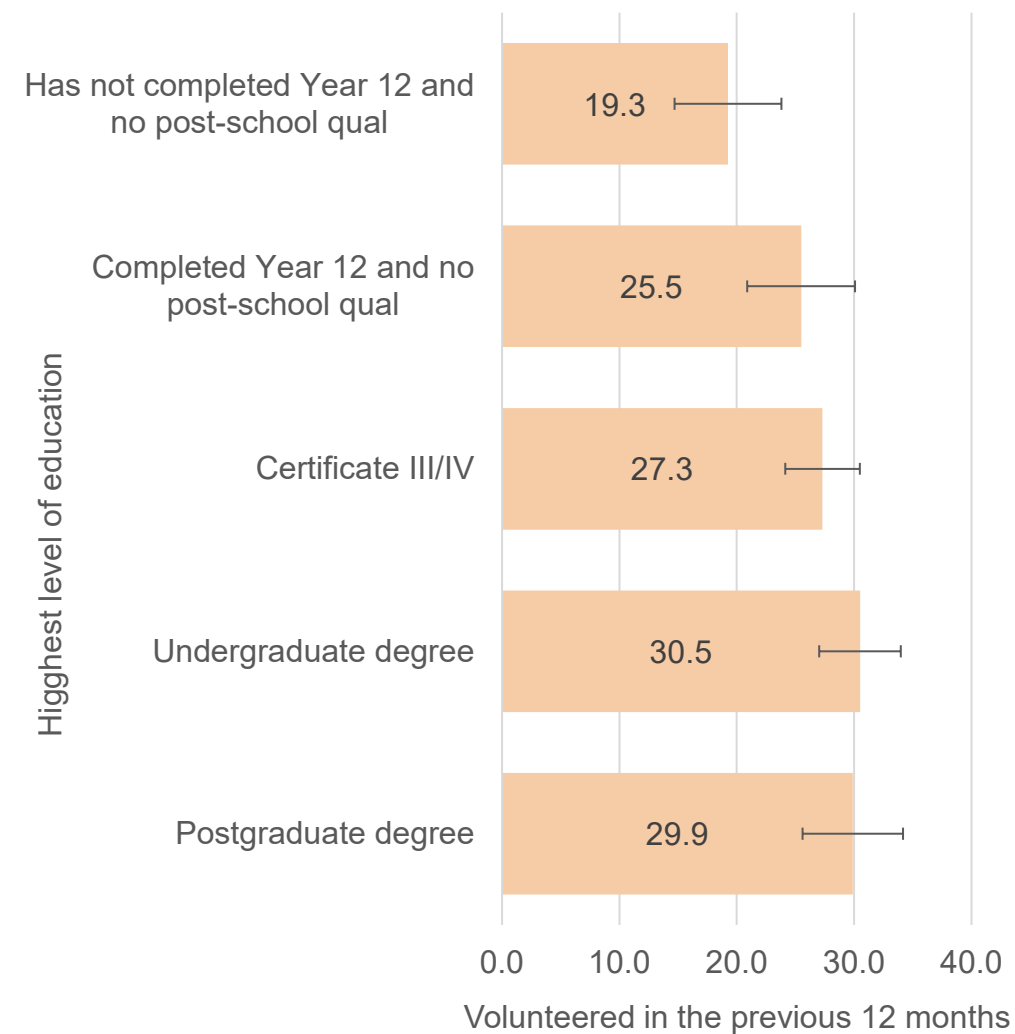
Volunteering in the ANUpoll survey



Per cent of Australians who undertook volunteering in the previous 12 months by sex, late 2019, April 2021, and April 2022

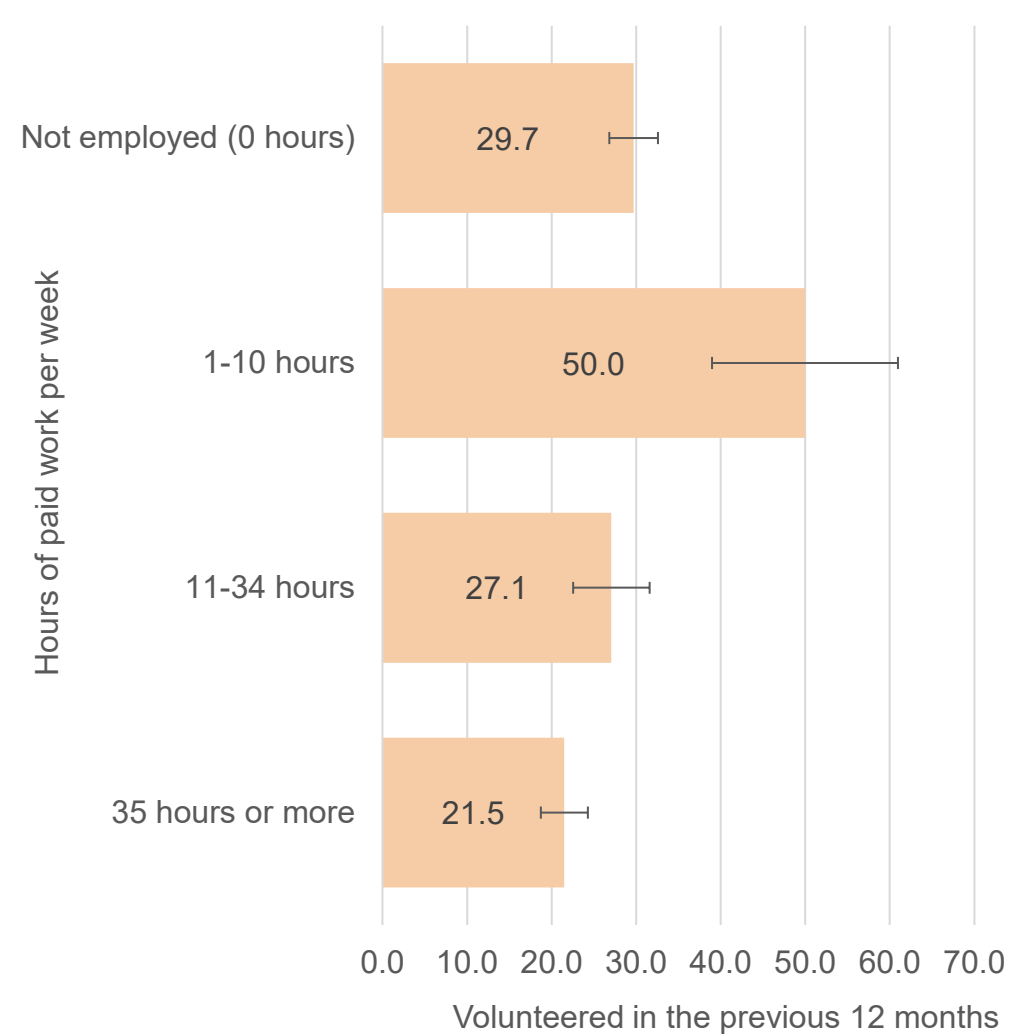
Factors affecting volunteering

Education



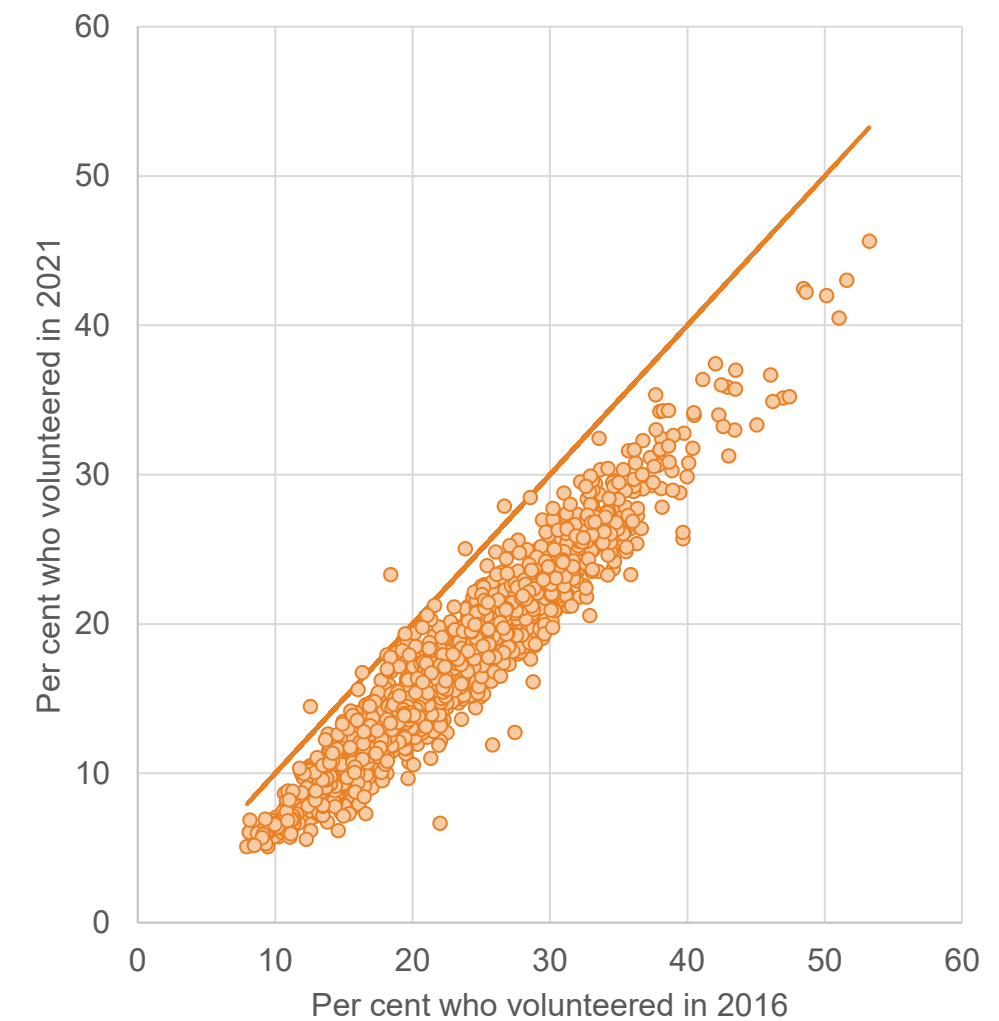
Per cent of Australians who undertook volunteering in the previous 12 months by highest level of education, April 2022

Paid employment



Per cent of Australians who undertook volunteering in the previous 12 months by employment status and hours worked, April 2022

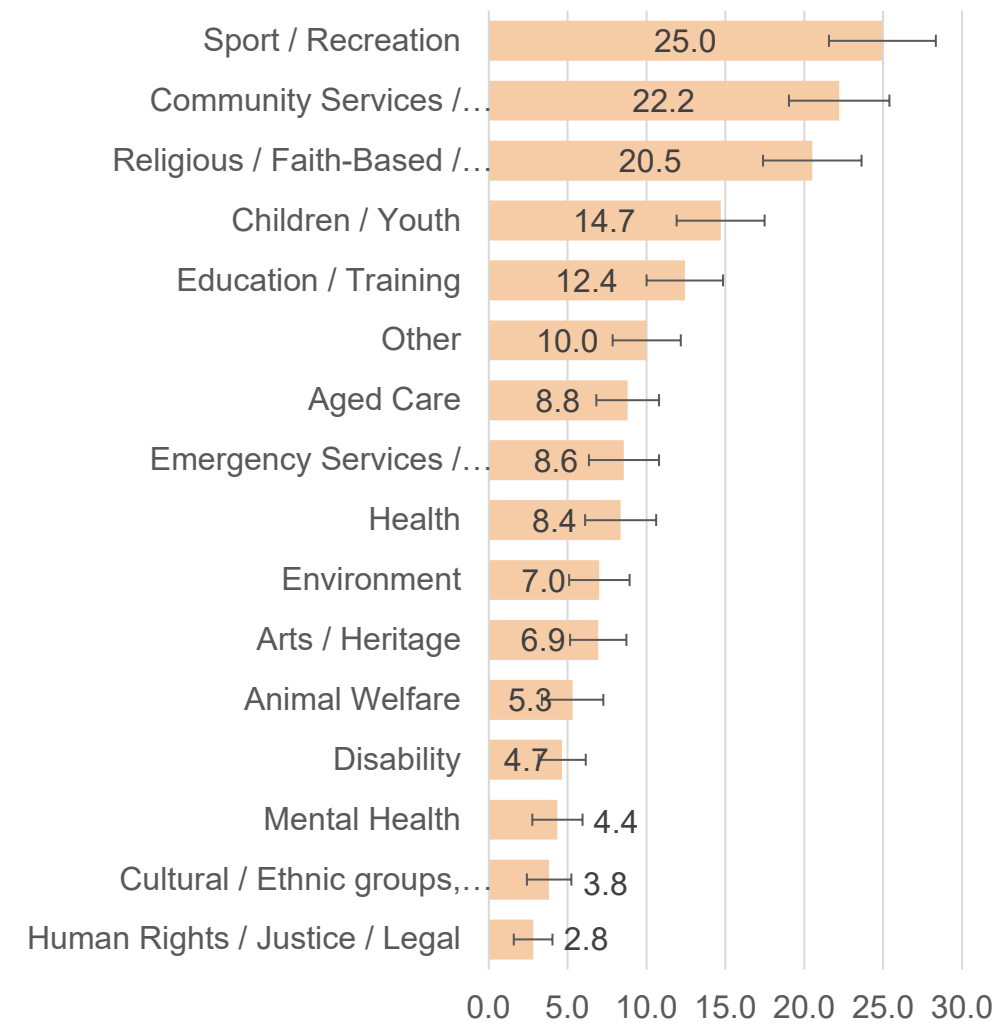
Geography



Per cent of Australians aged 15 years and over who undertook volunteering, 2016 and 2021, by Statistical Area 2

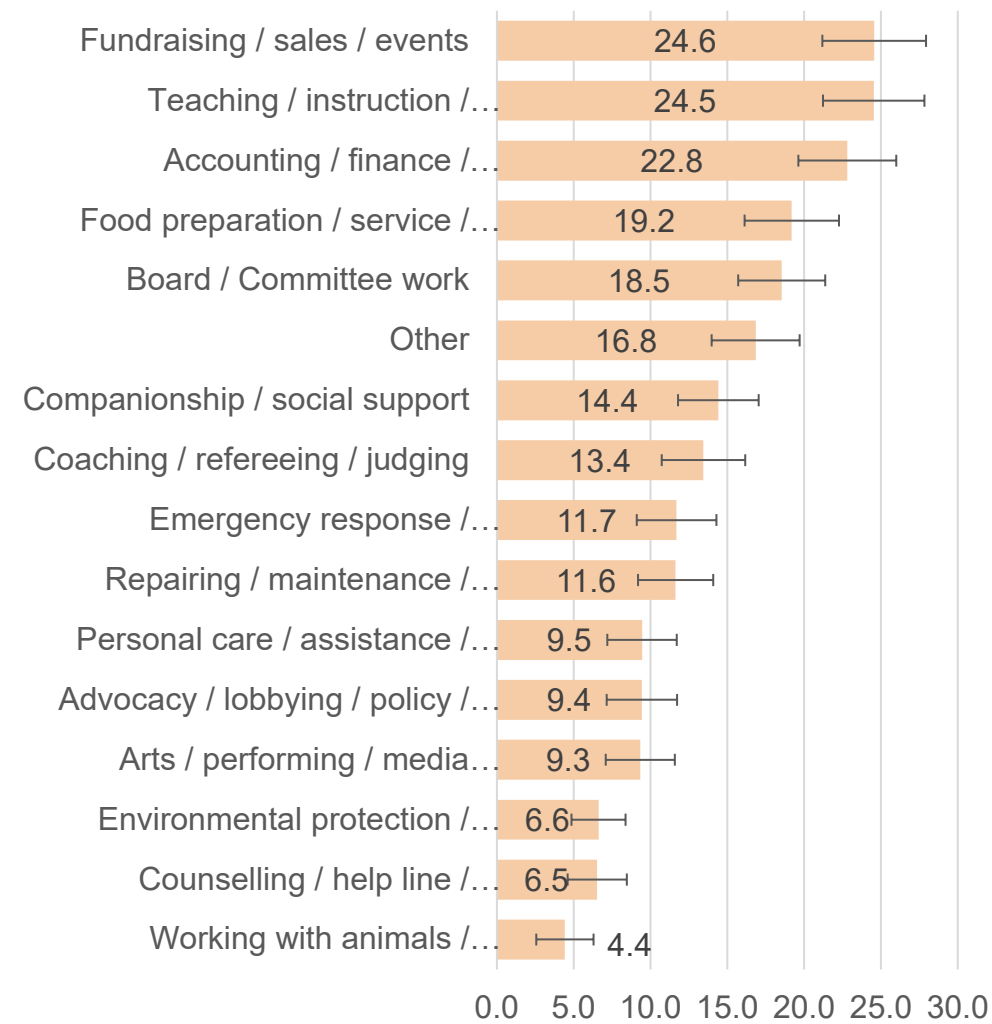
How people volunteer

Type of organisation



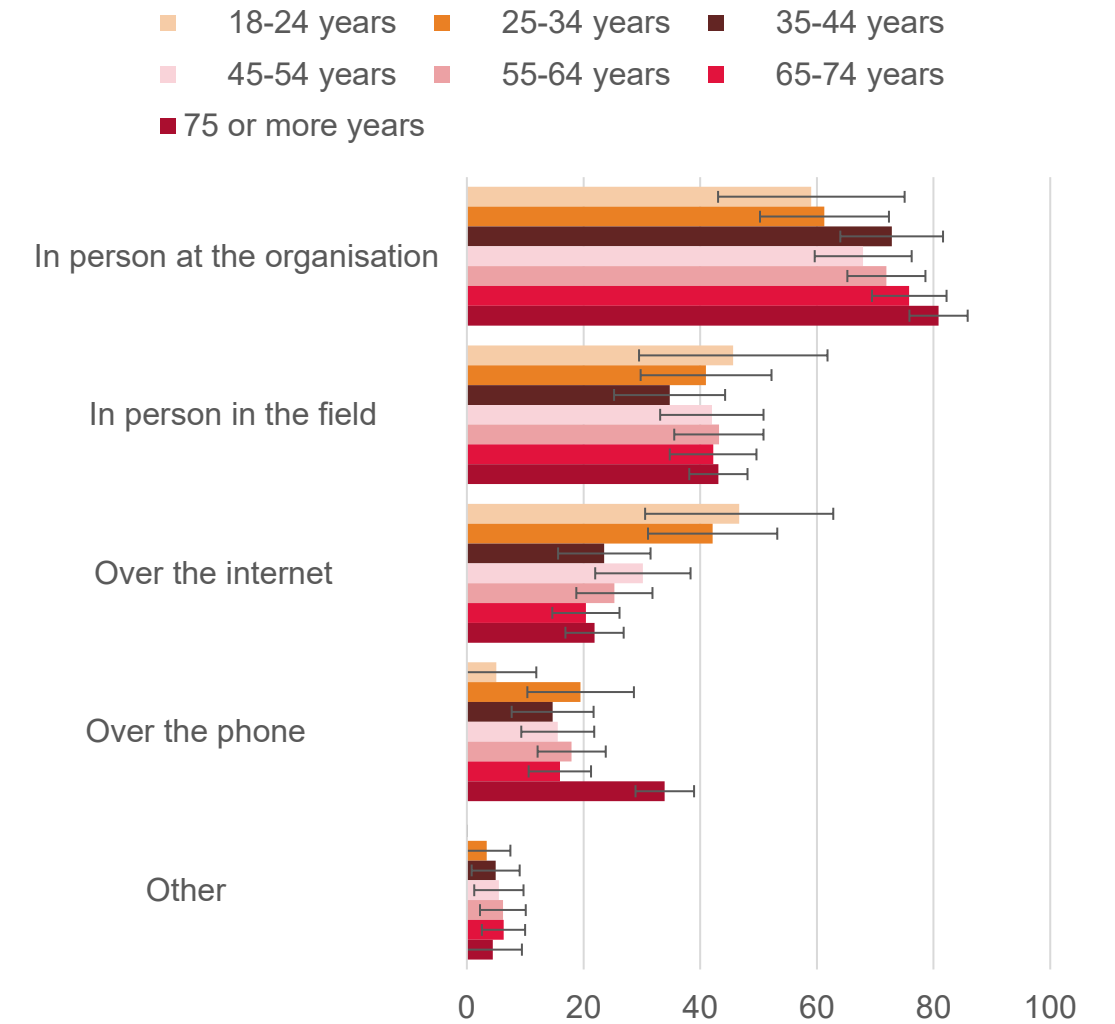
Type of organisation volunteered for (current volunteers), April 2022

Type of activity



Type/sector of organisation would like to volunteer for in the future (non-volunteers), April 2022

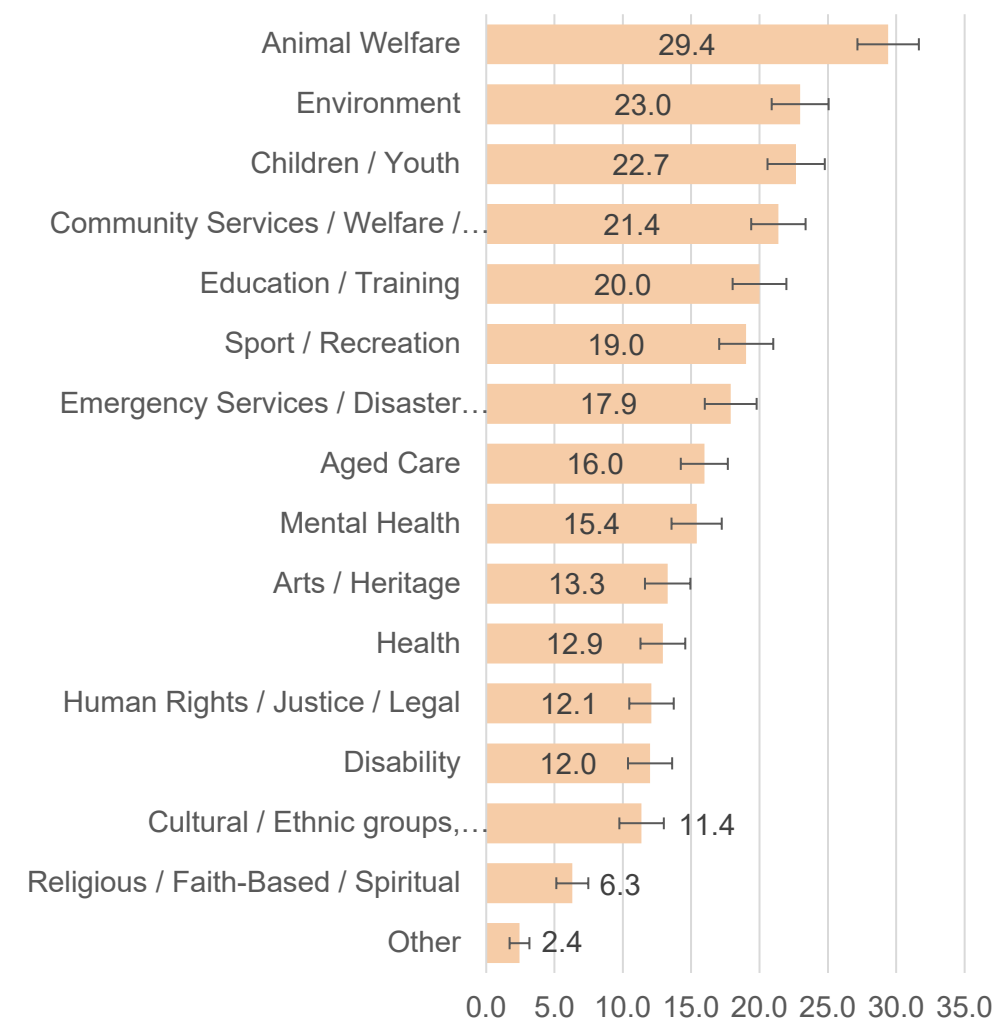
Mode of volunteering



Mode of volunteering by age, April 2022

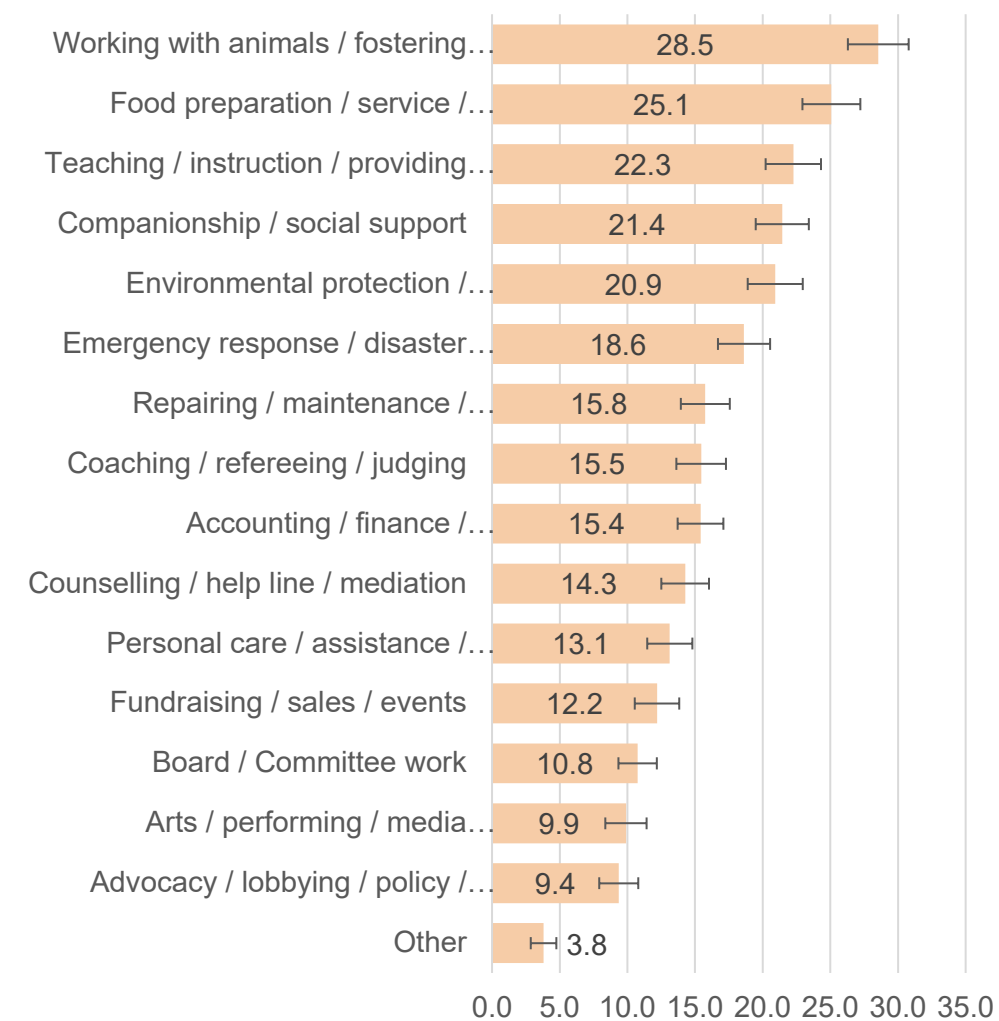
People who don't volunteer

Type of organisation



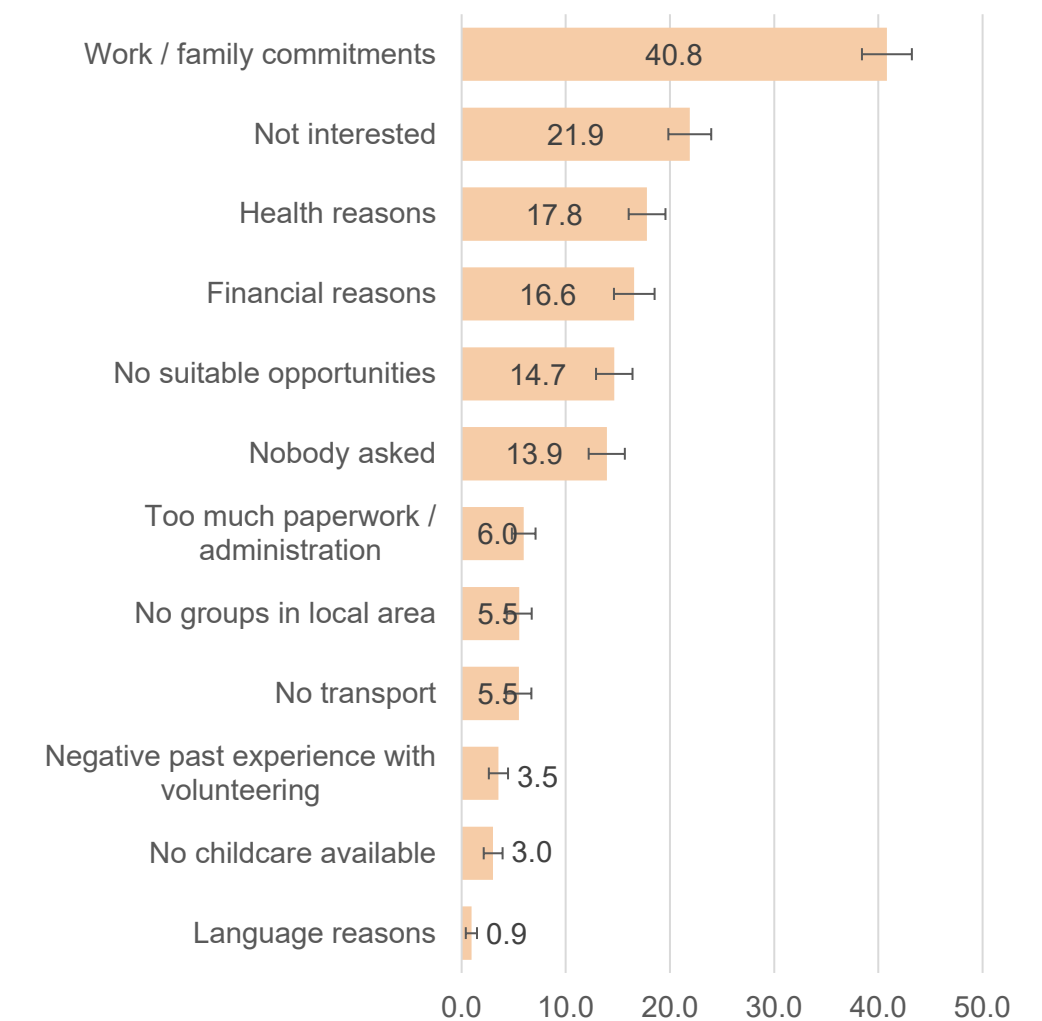
Type/sector of organisation would like to volunteer for in the future (non-volunteers), April 2022

Type of activity



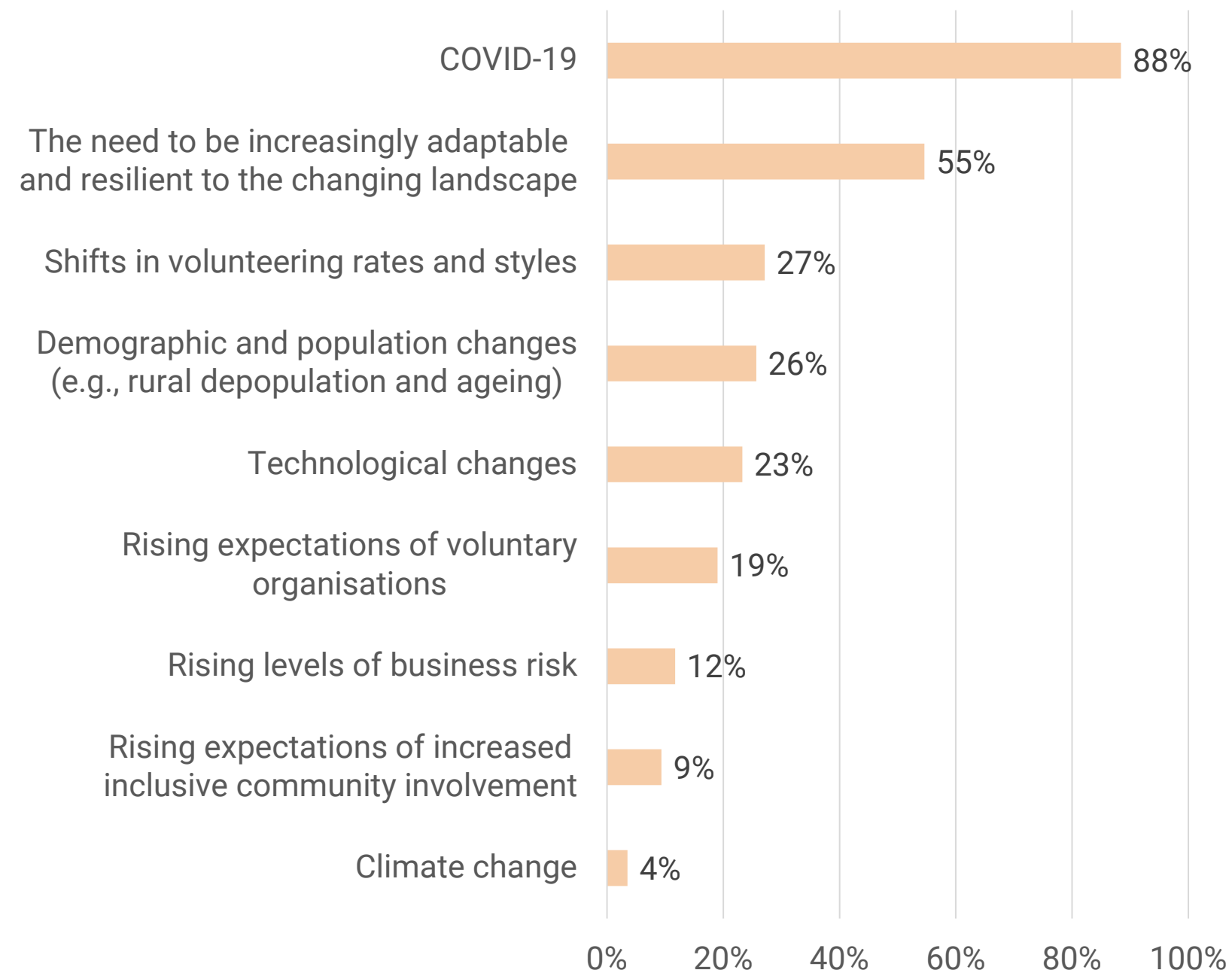
Type of activity would like to undertake when volunteering (non-volunteers), April 2022

Reasons for not volunteering

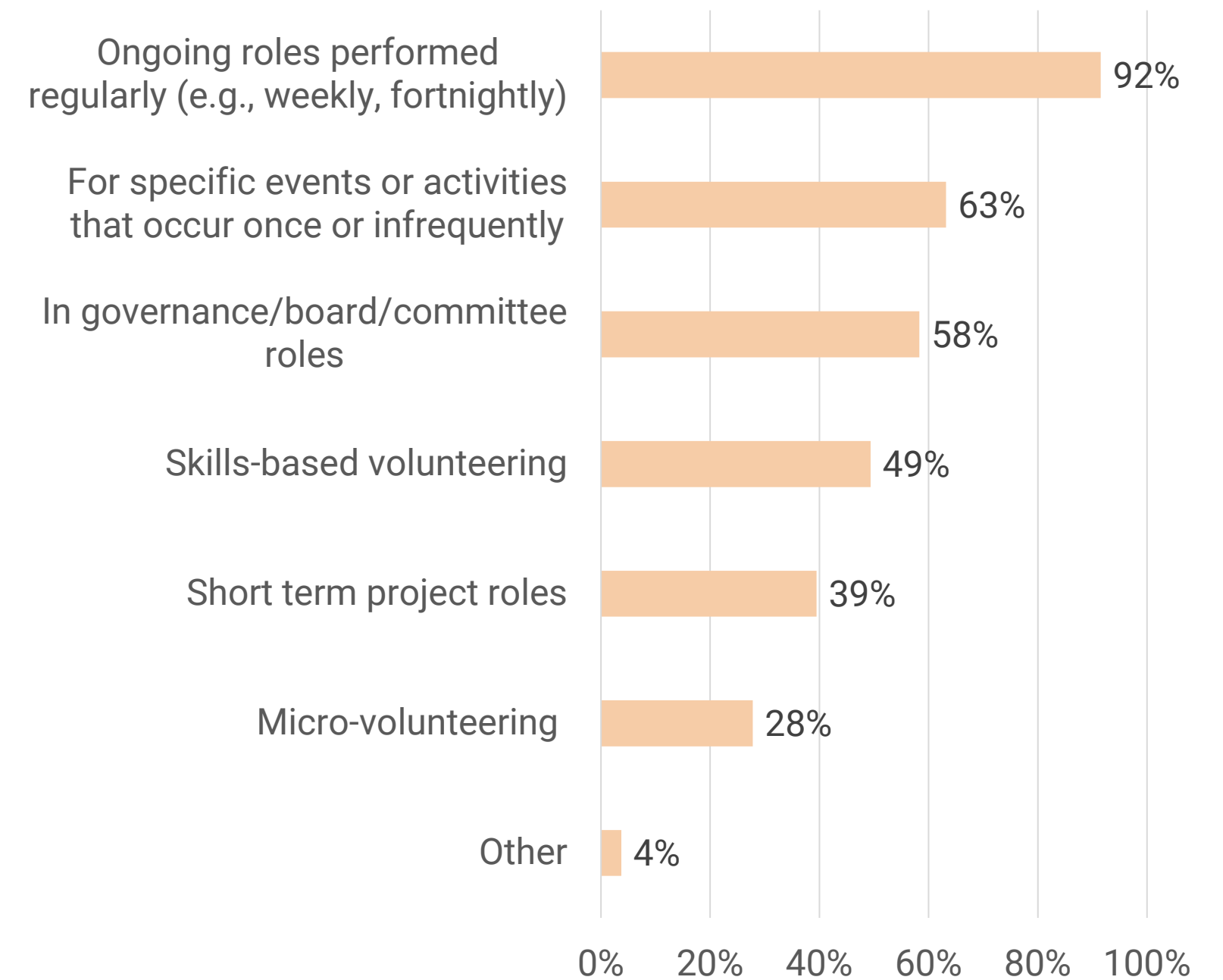


Reasons for not volunteering, April 2022 (%)

Challenges facing organisations



Percentages of participants that placed the corresponding driver of change as one of the top three drivers for their organisation



Manner in which volunteers are involved with the organisation

The Volunteering Research Papers

- Aim was to capture evidence on a wide range of topics related to volunteering and outline key insights for policy and practice
- 22 papers, peer reviewed
- An initiative of the National Strategy for Volunteering Research Working Group

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

Dr Darja Kragt¹, Sarah Wilson², Dr Toby Newstead³, and Dr Vivien W. Forner⁴

Key Insights

- Effective leadership is a pre-requisite for volunteer satisfaction, performance, and retention.
- Leaders of Volunteers often have the necessary skills and competencies, but the competing demands of their role can force them to sacrifice relationship-building for administration, resulting in poorer outcomes for their volunteers, organisation, and the beneficiaries of their work.
- A good amount of leadership expertise already exists within the volunteering ecosystem, and this should be acknowledged and leveraged through an ongoing and substantial investment in leadership development.
- Volunteers and volunteer involving organisations are a workforce in their own right and it is critical that this is accordingly recognised and resourced by public policy.

An evidence-based strategy

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.

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 2022.¹ 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.² 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.³ 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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

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.

Research and the Strategic Objectives



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.



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.

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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.⁴⁰

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.⁴¹

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.⁴²

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.⁴³

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⁴⁴ National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033

Research and the Strategic Objectives

Strategic Objective 1.2: Make Volunteering Inclusive and Accessible

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Strategic Objective 2.1: Diversify the Understanding of Volunteering

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.⁷⁰ 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.⁷¹ Faith-based and culturally-nuanced expressions of volunteering may be more fluid, unbounded, and value-driven than formal, role-based positions in established organisations.⁷²

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.⁷³ 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.⁷⁴



**National Strategy
for Volunteering**

Discussion