

2012

# STATE OF VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA



**volunteering** australia



International Year of Volunteers  
10th anniversary  
2011



# Executive Summary

International Year of Volunteers 2001 was a time of opportunity and optimism in volunteering. The *National Agenda on Volunteering* mapped what the volunteering sector saw as the objectives for the future and what needed to be achieved.

Ten years on we reflect on this legacy of International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001. In Chapters 2 and 4 of the report we review what volunteering looks like in Australia, what progress has been made against each of the objectives set in the *National Agenda on Volunteering* in 2001, what remains to be achieved and suggested actions to focus our energies as we move forward.

## GROWING

Since IYV 2001, Australia has experienced growth in the number and rate of people who volunteer. Notwithstanding some variations associated with life stage, geographic location and other socio-demographic factors, volunteering is part of life across the country.

Volunteering in Australia is influenced by early experiences. Starting to volunteer early and seeing volunteering modelled in one's family positively impacts on future volunteering behaviour.

## SATISFYING

Most Australians who volunteer say they are satisfied with their experience of volunteering. This is not to say that every volunteering experience is positive or to dismiss that sometimes things do go wrong. The report also considers progress on a range of protections for volunteers and the state of volunteer rights in Australia.

Contributing to the community is important to the majority of volunteers. We also know from research that people volunteer for diverse reasons, including the personal satisfaction it gives them, the sense of belonging to community, and as a pathway to employment through the development of work experience and skills. These and other motivations contributed to more than \$14.6 billion of voluntary work to the Australian economy in 2006–2007.

## EVOLVING

More volunteers are needed. At the same time, Australians are asking for a wider range of ways to volunteer. They want meaningful volunteer roles and greater flexibility in how and when they volunteer under different circumstances that arise in their lives – episodic volunteering, online volunteer effort, skilled volunteering and volunteering through the workplace are a few examples of the changing landscape of volunteering.

The demands on volunteering are being shaped in part by a dynamic population base. Like many other countries, the Australian population is ageing. This trend presents challenges for volunteering, both on the demand for volunteers to support the needs of those who are aged as well as the supply of volunteers, particularly in areas that are more reliant on older volunteers than others.



## THE GOLDEN YEARS

The ageing of the population is also an opportunity for volunteering through which we can ‘turn grey into gold’ (Australian Government 2011a). Living longer, in better health and the active lifestyles of many senior Australians makes becoming involved in volunteering possible. This possibility also relies on volunteer-involving organisations being adaptable and able to offer flexible ways to volunteer.

## STARTING YOUNG

Alongside this trend in the ageing of the population, volunteering has become more common among young people. The rate of volunteering by young people in Australia increased from 16% in 1995 to 27.1% in 2010. Young people are engaging in volunteering in diverse ways. For example, volunteer tourism particularly during the student gap year is a growing area of involvement for young people and a start to engaging in lifelong experiences of volunteering. Through partnerships with young people, educational institutions, peak bodies and volunteer-involving organisations are developing new approaches to volunteering.

## RECOGNISING VOLUNTEERING

In Australia, we generally recognise volunteering well at the grass roots level where it takes place. A range of awards also now exist at the organisational, regional, state and Commonwealth level to recognise the efforts and achievements of individual volunteers.

Nationally, high-level data about volunteering has been collected at various intervals between 2002 and 2010, providing a useful baseline for measuring participation trends. However, the lack of consistency in data collection limits the availability of reliable measurement and monitoring of volunteering across Australia.

Adequate funding for research into issues that affect volunteers and volunteering remains one of the greatest challenges and relates more broadly to barriers to access resources for research in the third sector. Recognition of the importance of research in the *National Volunteering Strategy* is a welcome start to changing this state of volunteering in Australia.

## PROTECTING VOLUNTEERS

In the past ten years there have been gains in affording protection to volunteers through legislation and public policy, for example, protection of volunteers in national workplace health and safety legislation enacted in 2012. Some changes have come with unintended consequences and/or at a price e.g. the burden of increased regulation and increased investment of resources for education and implementation. Consistency of protection across jurisdictions, significant gaps in legislative protection and access to protection, such as affordability of insurance, continue to require our attention now, and in future.

## SUSTAINING AND SUPPORTING VOLUNTEERING

Capping of liabilities through reform of civil liability legislation, the group purchase of insurance and the provision of grants for a limited range of out-of-pocket expenses to be reimbursed through the Volunteering Grants Program have represented worthy gains toward protecting volunteers and addressing the costs of volunteering for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

Reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses remains an issue for approximately one quarter of volunteers who incur these expenses and have not been reimbursed. We need to recognise that reimbursement is a complex issue that involves issues of social inclusion, affordability for organisations, and the personal values, circumstances and attitudes of volunteers. Our central concern, however, is that volunteers who incur out-of-pocket

expenses as a result of their volunteering, who need or wish to be reimbursed, can access reimbursement. In order for this to happen, organisations with which they volunteer need to have the capacity to reimburse these costs.

## EXCELLING IN VOLUNTEERING

Providing ongoing learning and development is central to supporting volunteers and excellence in volunteering. Ongoing learning goes beyond training and includes coaching, mentoring and providing volunteers with structured opportunities to reflect on their role and experiences.

Support for further investment in volunteer management and leadership is evident from consultations undertaken both by government and peak bodies. Australia has made strides in the development of training curriculum and associated products in the past 10 years. The ongoing challenge is to improve access to training for volunteers and volunteer managers through greater proximity to relevant training for managers and volunteers. Access to funding by volunteer-involving organisations is necessary to provide training and/or support for volunteers and managers of volunteers to participate in training offered by other organisations.

## RESOURCING VOLUNTEERING

Adequate funding of the infrastructure to involve and manage volunteers remains a priority for the sustainability and growth of volunteering in Australia. This issue arises whether meeting a range of costs associated with volunteer effort – providing insurance protection for volunteers, learning and development for volunteers, or reimbursing out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers. People who volunteer do so for no financial gain and for community benefit. This does not mean volunteering is free of cost.

## REFLECTING ON THE FOUNDATIONS

As we continue to move forward, we want to be confident that the way we understand, discuss and promote volunteering serves us well. In Chapter 5 we reflect on and review the definition, rights and principles of volunteering adopted and promoted by Volunteering Australia and present a set of propositions for further discussion at the local, state and national level.



# Acknowledgement

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# 1

# About this report

International Year of Volunteers 2001 was a time of opportunity and optimism in volunteering. The National Agenda on Volunteering mapped what the volunteering sector saw as the objectives for the future and what needed to be achieved.

Ten years on we reflect on this legacy of International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001. In Chapters 2 and 4 we review what volunteering looks like in Australia in 2011, what progress has been made against each of the objectives set in the National Agenda on Volunteering in 2001, what remains to be achieved and suggested actions to focus our energies as we move forward.

Informed by Volunteering Australia's National Survey of Volunteering Issues and the findings of consultation and research undertaken by a wide range of other organisations, Chapter 5 provides an overview of progress in relation to the objectives of the National Agenda on Volunteering.

As we continue to move forward, we want to be confident that the way we understand, discuss and promote volunteering serves us well today and in the coming years. Ten years after the first International Year of Volunteers, it is timely to revisit Volunteering Australia's foundations of volunteering. In Chapter 5 we report on the outcome of consultations about the current definition, rights and principles of volunteering adopted and promoted by Volunteering Australia and present a set of propositions for further discussion and consideration.

# 2 Volunteering in Australia

*'I avidly believe in giving something back to the community and that the key to our lucky country is being involved and committed to things you believe in. Each day I volunteer brings its positives from meeting caring people to reminding you to be thankful for what you have and giving life perspective'.*

*Volunteer respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

*'Appreciation from the competitors when meeting or dealing with them in an official capacity. Satisfaction that without volunteering, events would not run... Knowledge that competitors will volunteer to let others compete at a later stage'.*

*Volunteer respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

## 2.1 A Giving Nation

In Australia, we have a culture of giving. Our nation ranked in the **top three giving nations in the World Giving Index 2011** measured by someone donating money, volunteering time to an organisation and helping someone he/she didn't know who needed help (Charities Aid Foundation 2011).

## 2.2 Trends In Volunteer Participation

Volunteering by Australians takes place within Australia and internationally. The Australian Government has supported over 12,000 Australian citizens since the 1960s to volunteer overseas<sup>1</sup>. Each year not-for-profit organisations such as Australian Volunteers International (AVI) enable hundreds of Australians to volunteer in developing communities.

Volunteering in Australia continues to grow. In 2010, **36% of the adult population volunteered** (ABS 2010b)<sup>2</sup>. The number of adult volunteers has almost doubled since 1995 from 3.2 million people to 6.1 million in 2010. Whilst the total number of hours has increased, the median hours per person has decreased from 74 hours in 1995 to 56 hours in 2006<sup>3</sup> (Australian Government 2011b, p. 8).

Volunteer-involving organisations have reported increases in the number of volunteers in national and state surveys (Volunteering Australia 2010; Volunteering WA 2011). In Volunteering Australia's most recent national survey the majority of organisational respondents reported the number of volunteers involved in their organisation increased or remained the same in the past 12 months. **More volunteers are needed by the majority of organisations to meet the increasing demand for their current programs** (Volunteering Australia 2011a). In Tasmania, more than three quarters of organisations said they require more volunteers to continue meeting their needs (Webb 2010, p. 2).

**Volunteering is part of life across the country.** The rate of volunteering across states and territories of Australia is consistent with the national average. However, volunteering is more common outside capital cities.

Adults of all ages volunteer. However, volunteer rates vary across age groups in the Australian population and these variations are **associated with life stage**.

People 35–44 years of age to 65–74 years of age were more likely to volunteer than those in the younger and older age groups.

While the rate of volunteering among young people remains lower than for other age groups, the rate for 18 to 24 year olds in Australia increased from 16% in 1995 to 27.1% in 2010 (Productivity Commission 2010; ABS 2010a, p. 10). Volunteering is most common among parents in couple relationships with dependent children aged 5–17 years, with the rate of volunteering measured as 55%. Factors including being employed and female impacts positively on the volunteering rate (ABS 2010a, p. 4).

**Patterns of volunteering also vary across occupational groups.** Within the group of people who are employed, the volunteering rate was higher for professionals and managers compared to machinery operators and drivers, labourers, technicians and trade workers.

**The rate of volunteering in Australia is impacted negatively by variables** including whether a language other than English is spoken at home, fair or poor self-assessed health, being in a household where a government pension, benefit or allowance is the main source of income, not completing a qualification after school, and having a disability or long-term condition (ibid).

Australia is recognised as a sporting nation and this characteristic is reflected in our volunteering. The most common type of organisation that people volunteer for is one related to **sport and physical recreation**, particularly males, and people aged 35–44 and 45–54 years. People most commonly volunteered for sport and physical recreation organisations in all states and territories. However, the rate of participation in sport and recreation is higher in areas outside capital cities. Parents in couple families with dependent children 0–17 years were more likely to volunteer in this area and the rate was higher for fathers with dependent children 15–17 years of age (ABS 2010a, p. 5).

<sup>1</sup> [http://www.usaid.gov.au/publications/pubout.cfm?ID=4164\\_1264\\_7231\\_6496\\_9393&Type=](http://www.usaid.gov.au/publications/pubout.cfm?ID=4164_1264_7231_6496_9393&Type=)

<sup>2</sup> In the General Social Survey 'a volunteer is defined as someone who, in the previous 12 months, willingly gave unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills through an organisation or group' (ABS 2010b, p. 3)

<sup>3</sup> Data for median hours per person was not collected in 2010.

## 2 Volunteering in Australia

**Starting early also makes a difference to volunteering in adulthood** – 43% of adult volunteers had some voluntary work in their childhood compared to 27% of adult non-volunteers (ibid, p. 6).

A richer picture of volunteering in Australia emerges behind the headline statistics. We see increases between 2006 and 2010 in the rate of volunteering by people aged 45–54 years, 55–64 years and 75–84 years. This increase in the rate of volunteering is more apparent for men 55–84 years and for women 45–54 years and 75–84 years of age (ABS 2006b, 2010a).

Over the same period, there is a small decrease in the volunteering rate among younger (18–34 years) and older (85+) aged groups (ibid).

### 2.3 Seeing The Invisible – Informal Volunteering

Volunteering in Australia is generally measured in terms of volunteering undertaken through or mediated by an organisation. This is largely due to the way we conceptualise and define volunteering.

Volunteering also happens through informal means and settings. There has been greater recognition and measurement of informal volunteering in recent years.

While all the data is not necessarily comparable, it indicates a significant level of participation in informal volunteering in Australia. For example, an evaluation of volunteering for the Office for Volunteers found that 47% of South Australians participate in informal volunteering (Etridge and Avery 2010). In Western Australia, 80.9% of formal volunteers indicated they undertake informal volunteering activities in the community (Volunteering WA 2011). In Queensland the Household Survey measures both formal and informal volunteering. Approximately two thirds of the population volunteers informally or formally. There is a significant overlap between informal and formal volunteering.

### 2.4 Demographic Changes – An Ageing Population

Senior Australians contribute the highest number of volunteer hours of any age group although they are not the largest group of volunteers (Australian Government 2011b, pp. 1, 41).

In 2010, 2.9 million Australians over 65 years of age volunteered (ABS 2010b). By 2050, almost a quarter of the population will be aged over 65 years compared to 14 percent now. This demographic change presents both challenges and opportunities for volunteering (op. cit.).

Ageing is receiving greater attention in public policy. Recognising the opportunities, Australia is seeking to 'turn grey into gold' by realising the economic potential of senior Australians. In its most recent report, the Advisory Panel on the

Economic Potential of Senior Australians makes recommendations to enable the participation of senior Australians in volunteering, addressing concerns and barriers relating to liability and insurance (Australian Government 2011b).

**The impact of the ageing of the population** varies in different geographic locations and settings. For example, Tasmania's population is ageing faster than other states with the median age expected to increase to between 41.5 and 44.7 years in 2026. The ageing of the volunteer work force is more keenly felt in rural/remote-based organisations and by the arts/heritage, community welfare, local government and health sectors (Volunteering Tasmania 2012; Webb 2010, p. 40).

The ageing of the population presents increasing demands on the supply of volunteers to support the care needs of an ageing population and challenges to the supply of volunteers as people's capacity and preferences change during this life stage.

Warburton and Paynter (2006) discuss the complexities of realising the potential of seniors in relation to volunteering.

Changes in individual capacity and the incentives and barriers to volunteering noted by older people require volunteering organisations to adapt (Warburton, Paynter and Petriwskyj 2007). Offering more diverse and flexible roles and other adjustments can turn barriers into opportunities.

The opportunity for engagement in volunteering is presented by Australians now living 10 years longer than they did in previous generations. Advances in health, education and technology increase the opportunity for senior Australians to enjoy healthy and active lives (Australian Government 2011b).

### 2.5 Trends In Volunteering Among Young People

In section 2.2 we reported the increasing rate of volunteering among young people. The national data does not necessarily reflect state and local trends in volunteering among this group. For example, modelling undertaken by the Department of Communities in Queensland using data from the ABS General Social Surveys of 2006 and 2010 indicates a steady decline in volunteering among young people and the 25–34 year age group over the next ten years.

**How we engage with young people and the language** we use is vital to their participation. Young people view the term 'volunteer' differently to other age groups. This term does not resonate with them in the same way. The work of 'volunteering' was perceived by most young people interviewed for the Youth Leading Youth research as 'inappropriate of their work and not a label they would place on themselves' (Geale and Creyton 2010, p5).

*'As a bilingual speaker, I become a bridge for communication with the outside world'.*

*'I have skills that I can use and not let die on retirement and I can see them make a difference to others'.*

*'As a very busy and involved 16 year old, it makes me feel good to know that I have taken the initiative to actively contribute to my community'.*

*Volunteer respondents, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

*'Volunteering is a lifelong activity. Very few individuals take up volunteering in later life so although seniors are a large potential source of volunteers, this potential is not being realised. It is very encouraging, however to note that volunteer-based organisations and their management are recognising that they need to be more proactive in their recruitment and management strategies'.*

*'Recognising that seniors today have full lives and not assuming that new retirees will automatically want to 'fill in time' with volunteer work is a major step in the right direction towards developing new and appealing programs to tap into the huge potential resource of seniors ageing productively through volunteer work'.*

*Warburton and Paynter 2006, p. 4*

## 2 Volunteering in Australia

Young people's volunteering is shaped by their age and stage, gender, whether they have a disability, where they live and their cultural background. A community of volunteering plays a key role in young people taking on volunteer roles. Youth-friendly information and meaningful opportunities for diverse groups of young people are important ingredients to increased participation in volunteering by young people (Wynne 2011).

Young people volunteer in a range of settings and communities in Australia and overseas.

The State of the World's Volunteerism Report identifies volunteer tourism as an international phenomenon and whilst not being new, it 'has taken on new dimensions in an age of globalisation' (Leigh 2011, p. xxii).

In Australia there is growing interest among young people in volunteer tourism (volunteering overseas for limited periods of time). The Australian market for volunteer tourism, particularly during the student gap year, has developed in recent years, connecting with Y generation's values and preferences. Lyons et al. (2012, p. 374) explore a range of complex issues and assumptions about volunteer tourism, specifically its impact on the volunteer (his/her perception of self, other cultures, career development) and their relationship with host communities.

### 2.6 The Experience Of Volunteers

Most Australians are **satisfied with their volunteering**. Nine out of ten volunteers who responded to Volunteering Australia's annual survey found their volunteering experience satisfying or very satisfying (Volunteering Australia 2011a).

Volunteering Australia asked volunteers about a positive experience that excited them and reinforced their decision to volunteer. The responses to this open-ended question illustrate the multitude of ways in which Australians volunteer, where they volunteer, their motivation and the impact of their voluntary effort (ibid, pp. 11-12).

Research provides insights into the diverse reasons people volunteer and highlights the complex relationship between motivational factors, segments of the population, different types of volunteering and the settings in which it takes place (e.g. Moffat 2011; Hoye et al. 2008; Dolnicar and Randall 2007).

Quantitative data shows that contributing and making a difference to the community is an important factor for the majority of volunteers (Volunteering Australia 2011a; Australian Government 2011c).

We also know that **patterns of volunteering in Australia are influenced by family behavior**

with 66% of volunteers reporting their parents had done some volunteering work compared to 44% of non-volunteers (ABS 2010a). In Western Australia, 61.8% of volunteers have immediate family members who volunteer (Volunteering WA 2011). Introducing children to volunteering during school was identified in Volunteering Tasmania's research as an important way to build experiences of volunteering in their formative years and establish lifelong involvement in volunteering (Webb 2010, p. 45).

### 2.7 The Social Impact Of Volunteering

**Volunteerism contributes to social inclusion and social capital Australia** (Leong 2008; Wilson and Mayer 2006). It can help reduce feelings of personal isolation, offer people skills, social contacts, support a greater sense of self worth, and challenge the stereotypes we have about different social groups.

Volunteering provides most volunteers with an **increased sense of belonging to their community, opportunities to use their skills, to make a difference to the organisation's work, and to learn and develop**. For some it also provides **pathways or assistance to paid employment** (Volunteering Australia 2010, p. 12).

The Australian experience indicates that volunteering is also a pathway to participating in decision making and influencing the way organisations and communities are shaped (Volunteering Australia 2010, p. 13).

Social inclusion through volunteering is a double-sided coin. Volunteering can increase a person's opportunity for social inclusion where he/she experiences barriers to social and economic participation. Social inclusion can also be facilitated in situations where the volunteer him/herself is not socially excluded.

This happens by bringing together people who may not otherwise have the opportunity to make a connection, understand each other's perspectives and experiences, develop relationships, and learn from and support each other.

Characteristics of volunteering practice that have been found to facilitate social inclusion are the inclusive, accepting and equal quality of the relationship with the volunteer, volunteer-involving organisations' responsiveness to individual strengths and needs, flexibility in job role and design, opportunities for peer learning and support, organisational cultures that demonstrate inclusion, participation, and adaptability, and the development of partnership between sectors (Volunteering Australia 2011b).

**'Young people were largely volunteering in roles with peers – volunteering with youth committees, youth-led organisations or youth groups'... 'Young people were overwhelmingly motivated to volunteer because they wanted to do something to benefit their community as well as themselves... challenging popular rhetoric which depicts young people as selfish, self-centred and disinterested in community'**

*Wynne 2011, p24*

**'Volunteering to help restore and conserve local bushland has shown that I care about my neighborhood. I feel part of it and I am keen to work cooperatively with other concerned neighbours and my local council to make positive changes to our environment'**

**'I feel I am more committed to my community and what happens'**

*Volunteer respondents, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2010*

**'Last year when I was in hospital when I went back in I had various goals. One was to get back into the museum. I said "I can't do everything you want me to". The Volunteers Coordinator took me off various areas and made allowances for me and is still doing that for me. He offered me admin work too. They are very, very accommodating. If you are open with them, they are like that back to you'**

*Esme's story, Australian National Maritime Museum, Volunteering Australia, 2011*

## 2 Volunteering in Australia

### Social Inclusion And Healthy, Active Ageing: A Case In Point<sup>5</sup>

Environmental volunteering offers a model that can contribute to social inclusion and healthy, active ageing in Australia.

Greening Australia Capital Region (GACR) engages the community in vegetation management to protect and restore the local landscape. Community volunteers play an essential role in planting, site maintenance, seed propagation, nursery work, seed collecting and monitoring.

GACR surveys its regular volunteers to gain an insight about how it can improve the quality of its volunteer program. This feedback builds an understanding of the benefits volunteers gain from their involvement. Volunteers are mostly retired seniors who are motivated to be involved in GACR primarily to work outdoors and socialise with others. The volunteers report their involvement in caring for landscape benefits their physical, mental and social health. The social connection during life stages involving retirement and widowhood is valued as is the opportunity to gain knowledge and skills about management of the environment.

Greening Australia Capital Region invests in improving its volunteer programs by providing a variety of opportunities tailored to the lives of volunteers in a way that facilitates the benefits volunteers say they gain through their involvement. Volunteers have suggested improvements to logistics to reduce the physical difficulty of the work and they want more information about the context for their volunteering, e.g. the technical objectives and would like to know about the impact of their work on the actual environment. GACR is seeking to complement its survey of volunteers with rigorous research through post-graduate student programs.

By adding the value of organised, unorganised and travel together, volunteering was worth about \$5.3 billion to the Queensland economy in 1992, growing to \$13.4 billion in 2006.

These estimates show that in dollar terms in the 14 years from 1992 to 2006 Queensland adults, on average, increased their donation of volunteering time and associated costs by more than 80 per cent from \$2396 to \$4430 per annum<sup>6</sup>.

*Ironmonger 2008, p. 10*

### 2.8 The Economics Of Volunteering

The contribution of volunteering is by no means limited to personal and social impact. **Volunteering contributes significantly to the Australian economy.** This contribution of the volunteer workforce was estimated in the ABS satellite accounts to provide over \$14.6 billion of unpaid labour in 2006–07. This estimate is based on the 5.2 million Australians who volunteered in 2007. The number of volunteers has increased to 6.1 million Australians (Section 2.2).

A revised national figure for the economic contribution of volunteers has not yet been released by the Australian Government.

The economic value of volunteering has also been measured by states in Australia (Ironmonger 2002; 2008).

Evaluation of the quality of the volunteer effort and its impact in communities and quantitative measurement of its scope and value are important. Exclusive attention to 'pricing volunteering' can inadvertently perpetuate misconceptions that volunteers are a cost saving and that the value of volunteer effort is best measured by the hours contributed and dollars saved<sup>6</sup>.

Unprecedented volunteer effort in response to natural disasters in Victoria and Queensland and other states demonstrated both the social and economic impact of volunteer effort on recovery and rebuilding in affected communities.

### 2.9 The Policy Context For Volunteering In Australia

*The National Agenda on Volunteering: Beyond the International Year of Volunteers* (the Agenda) was a legacy of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV) 2001 and provided a policy framework for volunteering in the next decade.

Today, the Agenda sits in a broader policy context of reform of the not-for-profit sector and the Australian Government's *National Volunteering Strategy* released in December 2011.

One of the aims of the reform of the not-for-profit sector (NFP) through the establishment of a regulator for the NFP sector is to reduce unnecessary regulatory burden on not-for-profit entities.

Achievement of this aim is shared by the volunteering sector and supports the outcomes that were sought through the Agenda in 2001. Better regulation and risk management is a focus area of the *National Volunteering Strategy* (Australian Government 2011b, p. 21) and the reform of the not-for-profit sector has potential to contribute to achieving this outcome.

#### Key focus areas of the Australian Government's National Volunteering Strategy:

1. Respond to trends in volunteering
2. Harness technology
3. Better regulation and risk management
4. Strengthen management and training
5. Strengthen relationships and advocacy
6. Recognise and value volunteering

*Australian Government 2011*

<sup>5</sup> Acknowledgement: This case study was provided by and is used with the permission of Greening Australia Capital Region

<sup>6</sup> See commentary by Jane Cravens - <http://www.coyotecomunications.com/volunteer/value.shtml>

# 3

## What Volunteering Is and How It Is Manifested

In Chapter 2 we discussed the incidence and patterns related to volunteering in Australia. But what exactly is expressed by the concept of ‘volunteering’?

UN Volunteers notes that ‘scholarly literature and national legal frameworks reveal a multitude of definitions’ (Leigh 2011, p. 3).

### 3.1 International Definitions

#### 3.1.1 United Nations

In its State of Volunteerism report, United Nations Volunteers (Leigh 2011) uses the working definition of volunteerism of the United Nations General Assembly:

Firstly, the action should be carried out voluntarily according to an individual’s own free will, and not as an obligation stipulated by law, contract or academic requirement. It allows for the decision to volunteer to be influenced by peer pressure, personal values or cultural or social obligations but the individual must be able to choose whether or not to act.

Secondly, the action should not be undertaken primarily for financial reward. Some reimbursement for expenses or stipend, or payment in kind such as provisions of meals may be justified.

Finally, the action should be for the common good and should directly or indirectly benefit people outside the family or household or else benefit a cause, even though the person volunteering normally benefits as well.

UN Volunteers has chosen a broader definition that includes ‘acts of volunteerism that take place outside of a formal context’. The element of organisation, particularly through formal organisations, is a further parameter.

#### 3.1.2 International Labor Organisation

The International Labor Organisation (ILO) proposed the following working definition of ‘volunteer work’:

*Unpaid non compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organisation or directly for others outside their own household.*

Key features of the ILO definition is that volunteering: involves work; it is unpaid; it is non-compulsory; it embraces direct volunteering and in organisations; it is done without compulsion; and it is done in all types of institutional settings.

The ILO does not limit the scope of the volunteer work to a particular beneficiary. It recognises and includes voluntary activity undertaken ‘in all types of institutional settings: nonprofit organisations, government, private businesses, and ‘other’ (ILO 2011, pp. 13-16).

#### 3.1.3 Institute for Volunteering Research

Paine et al. (2010) readdressed the basic question of the definition of volunteering as part of the agenda of the Institute for Volunteering Research (IVR) in the UK.

The multi-dimensional spectrum of volunteering developed by the IVR ‘provides a conceptual map of the boundaries of volunteering’ and a ‘useful framework for testing the boundaries of volunteering using real life examples’ (ibid, p. 17).

Our intention is not to duplicate this work, but to draw readers’ attention to its relevance and value in thinking through the dilemmas associated with the current definition of volunteering in Australia.

‘Perhaps more fundamentally, volunteering is changing as is the context in which it takes place (Rochester et al. 2010). This means that it is important that we revisit earlier definitions of volunteering to check that they have stood the test of time. In particular a number of developments in the policy and practice of volunteering have, we believe, challenged perceptions of what is inside and what is outside the boundaries of the field’.

*Paine et al. 2010, p. 33*

‘If we are to develop a theory of volunteering we need to determine what is included in our field of study and what is not and this involves drawing boundaries and ensuring we are aware of all that belongs within them. We also need a means of making sense of the variety of activity within the boundaries by making useful distinctions that create clear categories’.

*Paine et al. 2010, p. 33*

## 3 What Volunteering Is and How It Is Manifested

### 3.2 Definition used in Australia

Various definitions of 'volunteering' have been developed and used in Australia. The major definition evolved from debate and discussion locally, across states and territories and nationally in the 1990s and has been formally adopted by Volunteering Australia.

This definition has guided practice, research, and policy and provided a basis for the emergence of new and hybrid definitions.

The strengths and shortcomings of this definition of volunteering are discussed in Chapter 5.

### 3.3 Volunteering In The World Context

UN Volunteers (UNV) articulates the universal nature and values of volunteering. Volunteering is a human activity, a basic expression of human relationships that occurs in every society in the world. People engage in volunteerism for a great variety of reasons. The terms which define it and the form of its expression may vary in different languages and cultures, but the values which drive it are common and universal: a desire to contribute to the common good, out of free will and in a spirit of solidarity, without expectation or material reward (Leigh 2011, pp. iv, xx).

Volunteerism promotes cooperation, encourages participation and contributes to the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. It is a way for people to engage in the life of their communities and societies, acquiring a sense of belonging and influencing the direction of their lives. Volunteerism has the potential for people to be primary actors in communities and affect their destiny. The UNV does not see volunteerism as a panacea to world problems, rather as 'an essential component of any strategy that recognises progress cannot be measured solely in terms of economic return and that individuals are not motivated by self-interest alone but also by their deeply held values and beliefs' (ibid, p. v).

Opportunities to engage in volunteerism are being shaped by a range of changes. Technological developments are making it possible for people to relate globally. The unprecedented global mobility of people, travel and more leisure time are enabling new forms of volunteerism (ibid).

The United Nations General Assembly resolution 56/38 makes recommendations on how governments and the UN system can support volunteering including factoring volunteering

into the design and implementation of policies.

Understanding that there is no one universal model of best practice, and support for voluntary activities does not imply support for government downsizing or replacing paid employment (Leigh 2011, p. xxi).

Lastly, UN Volunteers identifies the following key global challenges of researching volunteering:

- No common agreement on what volunteerism is
- Widespread misperceptions contradicted by empirical data and anecdotal information
- No agreed methodology for assessing the volume and value of volunteer action.

**'As a bilingual speaker, I become a bridge for communication with the outside world'.**

*Volunteer respondents, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

# 4 Australia's National Agenda on Volunteering

The framework of the National Agenda on Volunteering: Beyond the International Year of Volunteers (Volunteering Australia 2001) outlined six strategic goals, and included specific outcomes to work towards to ensure volunteers are better supported and that volunteering remains an important and sustainable social movement.

## 4.1 Snapshot Of How We Are Doing

Using the objectives and outcomes of the *National Agenda on Volunteering: Beyond the International Year of Volunteers* as the reference point to review progress, let's take a look at both the achievements made so far and challenges that lie ahead.

Across the six strategic objectives and 44 outcomes we can say approximately 17% have been achieved and progress has been made in at least another 50%.

In celebrating Australia's progress, we also need to continually push boundaries and challenge ourselves. There are still considerable barriers that need to be overcome.

The six strategic goals called for the volunteer sector, including business and government, to work together to:

1. Publicly respect and value in enduring, formal and tangible ways the essential contribution that volunteers make to building and sustaining the Australian community.
2. Ensure that volunteers have legal status and are afforded protection through every piece of legislation and public policy that affects them and their work.
3. Ensure that all new legislation, by-laws and public policies, developed at any level of government, which may affect volunteers and their work, works only to facilitate and sustain volunteering.
4. Acknowledge that the activity of volunteering is not without cost and develop means by which Australian volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are supported and funded to provide valuable services.
5. Ensure excellence in all levels of volunteer involvement and volunteer management in order to encourage, protect and enhance the work of volunteers.
6. Ensure that volunteering is a potent, dynamic and unifying social force for community benefit by acknowledging and accepting that it is a diverse and evolving activity.

*Volunteering Australia, 2001*

## HOW ARE WE DOING?



## 4 Australia's National Agenda on Volunteering

### 4.2 A Closer Look At Progress

In this section, each strategic objective is discussed in detail and concludes with a summary table.

#### 4.2.1 Strategic Objective 1

**Publicly respect and value in enduring, formal and tangible ways the essential contribution that volunteers make to building and sustaining the Australian community.**

Outcomes sought under this objective included a call on **governments to gather more frequent and comprehensive data** on the scale and impact of volunteer effort.

The ABS has collected consistent data in 2002, 2006 and 2010. Whilst this data has limitations, it has provided useful baseline data about **participation trends**, reported earlier in this report.

The lack of national consistency presents barriers to the measurement of volunteering in Australia. For example, the different ways in which volunteering is measured limit the availability of consistent and comparable national data.

Another outcome sought in relation to this strategic objective was to have an assessment of the **economic value** of volunteer effort included in the ABS Quarterly National Accounts. Whilst this has not been achieved, the publication of the ABS Non-Profit Institutions Satellite Account in 2009 provided for the first time a reliable calculation of the economic value of formal volunteer effort to the Australian community.

In 2010 the Productivity Commission released its report into the contribution of the not-for-profit sector. Drawing on the previous work of the ABS, it identified that volunteers provided the equivalent of over 317,000 full-time positions and over \$14.5 billion contribution to GDP. The Productivity Commission recommended a 3-year frequency for this satellite report.

A key outcome sought in the context of respecting and valuing volunteering was for **volunteer involving organisations to quantify the economic value of volunteer effort in their annual reports.**

Volunteering Australia's *National Survey of Volunteering Issues* (2010) found 67% of organisational respondents measured the contribution of volunteering. Seventy-one per cent of this cohort reports this information in their annual report. The most common measures of volunteer contribution used by organisations are the number of volunteers and number of hours of volunteering (85.9% and 80% respectively).

Those actively involved in employee or corporate volunteering programs also lead the measurement of volunteer contribution and impact. The work of the London Benchmarking Group<sup>7</sup> is an example.

There are positive indicators in relation to support of corporate sponsors as well as areas for improvement. In 2011, the majority of not-for-profit organisations agreed/strongly agreed with the statement that most corporate sponsors recognise and provide support for volunteer projects of all sizes. However, the same degree of agreement was not indicated about whether most corporate sponsors recognise and provide support for the infrastructure required by not-for-profit organisations to involve volunteers (Volunteering Australia 2011a).

**Increase in funding for research** into issues that affect volunteers and volunteering was also identified as a key outcome towards respecting and valuing volunteering and perhaps remains one of the greatest challenges. Funding for research into volunteering is limited and ad hoc. This barrier applies to research in the third sector generally and is not limited to volunteering.

The relative low ranking of existing journals and conferences relating to volunteering under the **Excellence in Research in Australia Initiative** remains one of the key barriers to advancing the volunteer research agenda.

We acknowledge the considerable contribution of Professor Jeni Warburton and her colleagues on the **Volunteer Research Agenda Advisory Group** who have been working with Volunteering Australia in the past years. This group has been instrumental in advocating for volunteering research within the competing priorities of the third sector, and other research priorities of the Australian Research Council.

Research and evaluation in volunteering provide the evidence base for developing practice and informing policy. Inclusion of the statement in the National Volunteering Strategy that 'Research focusing on volunteering plays a vital role in improving the effectiveness of volunteering policy and programs' (Australian Government 2011b, p. 29) gives legitimacy to the volunteering research effort in Australia and provides a mandate for resources to be dedicated toward this effort.

A specific medal awarded in recognition of volunteer effort has not been established. However, we are pleased to report significant progress has been made in formal recognition of volunteers through a range of awards at the national, state and local level.

**'I am fortunate because my work allows me to volunteer for one hour a fortnight in a mentoring program. It is an agreement with the program and in return my work is publicly recognised as a "community champion".'**

*Volunteer respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

#### Examples of awards recognising volunteers:

##### National Awards

- The AAVA Volunteer Manager Award of Excellence
- National Volunteer Award, Fundraising Institute Australia

##### State Awards

- ACT Volunteer of the Year Awards
- The Premier's Community Volunteering Awards (Victoria)
- Minister for Health Volunteer Awards (Victoria)
- The NSW Volunteer of the Year Award
- NRMA Helping People Awards (NSW)
- The Queensland Young Volunteer Awards
- State Volunteers Day Awards, Office for Volunteers (SA)
- The Andamooka Community Project Award (SA)
- The Premier's Business Award in Volunteering (SA)

##### Regional Awards

- The Regional Arts Australia Volunteer Awards
- Local and organisational awards Taronga National Volunteer Week Awards (NSW)

**'When our final document is produced, we intend to acknowledge the contributions made by these volunteers to demonstrate that volunteers can make a difference.'**

*Organisational respondent, National Survey on Volunteering Issues, 2011*

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.lbg-australia.com/default.asp?id=1>

## 4 Australia's National Agenda on Volunteering

National Volunteer Week (NVW) continues to recognise volunteers across Australia. Historically, it provided a national focus for volunteer-based organisations wanting to recruit volunteers. However, extensive research after NVW 2007 saw the focus change to celebrating volunteering and thanking volunteers.

The consultation for the National Volunteering Strategy found the majority of people support the Australian Government and the community playing an important role in recognising volunteers. There was also a consistent view that recognition of volunteer efforts is an effective tool for promoting and increasing participation in volunteering (Australian Government 2011c, p. 24).

There are diverse preferences about recognition and differences have been identified between the forms of recognition most important to volunteers and those forms most commonly used by volunteer-involving organisations (Volunteering Australia 2010, 2011a). These findings highlight the ongoing need to work toward the right match between how each volunteer wants to be recognised and the suite of methods organisations use.

### Options For Further Progress:

Federal and state governments, the Australian Bureau of Statistics and peak bodies in volunteering work in partnership to increase the availability of reliable, up-to-date and comparable national, state and local data on patterns of participation in volunteering and the economic contribution of volunteering nationally and in state and territories.

Measurement and reporting of volunteer effort through the Australian Charities and Not for Profit Commission (ACNC).

Advocacy for increased funding of volunteering research through the Australian Research Council.

### Table 1. Strategic Objective 1

Publicly respect and value in enduring, formal, and tangible ways the essential contribution that volunteers make to building and sustaining the Australian community.

OUTCOME	STATUS	INDICATORS OF PROGRESS
A permanent inclusion of a volunteer question in the Census.	In progress	Inclusion of a volunteer question in the 2006 and 2011 censuses.
A regular collection of volunteer data by the ABS.	Achieved	Collection of ABS volunteer data 4–5 yearly through multiple surveys. Their timing and comparability need to be improved. Data about volunteering by people under 18 years of age is not collected.
The economic value of volunteering quantified and included in the national accounts published quarterly by the ABS.	Not achieved	Quantified in the Australian National Accounts: Non-Profit Institutions Satellite Account 2006. The Productivity Commission recommended a frequency of 3 years. Some state-based research to quantify the economic value of volunteering has also been undertaken.
Volunteer-involving organisations acknowledge the work of volunteers and quantify its economic value in the Annual Reports.	In progress	In the National Survey of Volunteering Issues 2010, 71.3 % of organisations who measured the contribution of volunteers said they report this contribution in their annual report.
Funding for research into issues that affect volunteers and volunteering.	Not achieved	Funding for research into volunteering is very limited.
A specific Volunteer Medal in the Order of Australia Awards.	Not achieved	A specific Volunteer Medal in the Order of Australia awards has not been achieved. Volunteer effort and achievement is formally recognised through a range of awards at national, state, regional local level.
Recognition by corporate sponsors that volunteer projects of all sizes and the infrastructure to support volunteers merits funding.	In progress	Volunteering Australia's 2011 national survey indicates the majority of NFPs surveyed agree corporate sponsors recognise volunteer projects of all sizes but disagree that the infrastructure to support volunteers merits funding.
Excellence Awards for volunteer projects and services that involve, manage and deploy volunteers according to excellence criteria.	In progress	National Volunteer Awards – a partnership by Volunteering Australia and NAB until 2007.

■ Achieved
 ■ In progress
 ■ Not achieved

## 4 Australia's National Agenda on Volunteering

### 4.2.2 Strategic Objective 2

**Ensure that volunteers have legal status and are afforded protection through every piece of legislation and public policy that affects them and their work.**

Australian volunteers work in many settings and under a variety of conditions. Some work alongside paid employees and under identical circumstances, others work alone or as a group. Unlike paid staff, volunteers have not always been covered by legislation that protects or compensates them within the workplace. Many volunteers are exposed to risk, injury, discrimination or prejudice in the absence of explicit mention in relevant legislation. Others carry huge financial responsibility or are exposed to legal liability. It is in the interests of all Australians that volunteers are protected under law.

A comprehensive approach to occupational health and safety protection of volunteers in the workplace had not been undertaken across jurisdictions in Australia until the implementation of the Model Work Health and Safety Act (MWHSA) in January 2012<sup>8</sup>.

**The Model Work Health and Safety Act** represents a significant step in bringing consistency across all states and territories to the way in which volunteers are protected in the workplace. Volunteering Australia welcomes this Commonwealth initiative.

Legislation may also have unintended adverse consequences, for example placing a greater burden of responsibility on volunteer officers and directors of not-for-profit organisations with the possible effect of discouraging volunteer engagement. Further work is required with government, state peak bodies and volunteer-involving organisations to ensure the implementation of the legislation is effective and its impact is positive for volunteers and organisations in which they are involved.

Another key outcome is to ensure volunteers are afforded the same protection as paid staff in relation to **equal opportunity, anti-discrimination and protection from harassment**. There has been progress in this regard with protection being provided through relevant laws in some, but not all, jurisdictions.

Commonwealth laws and the state/territory laws generally cover the same grounds and areas of discrimination. However, there are gaps in the protection offered between different states and territories and at a Commonwealth level. There are also circumstances where only the Commonwealth law would apply or where only the state law would apply. Some equal opportunity

legislation extends coverage to volunteers. However, there is inconsistency across Australia.

The current proposal to consolidate Commonwealth Anti-Discrimination Laws (Attorney General's Department) presents an opportunity to achieve consistency in protection of volunteers across jurisdictions.

Volunteers are not covered by Workers' Compensation across all states and territories, with a few exceptions, e.g. emergency management volunteers and certain types of volunteers in Queensland.

Volunteering Australia and its members encourage all organisations to protect volunteers with appropriate **insurance**. Personal accident insurance is appropriate to cover volunteers in the case of injury undertaken during the course of voluntary work. This type of insurance would normally cover loss of income or, if the volunteer is not earning, would cover other items such as home help or student tutorial assistance. This insurance does not cover volunteers for any out-of-pocket expenses following accidental injury, disability or death. Due to restrictions under the Federal legislation private insurers are not allowed to cover gaps in Medicare payments.

The concept of portable individual personal accident and liability insurance for volunteers is an alternative option that may be investigated further.

Inconsistencies across jurisdictions regarding **background checks** continue to be a key burden for volunteering. The Government's consultation for the *National Volunteering Strategy* found that working-with-children and police checks are costly and time consuming and need to be able to be transferred between organisations and jurisdictions (Australian Government 2011c).

Approximately 25% of organisations nominated background checking as having the greatest negative impact on their ability to attract and retain volunteers in the past 12 months (Volunteering Australia 2010). This area of negative impact was second to out-of-pocket expenses.

A recent example of progress in more efficient and affordable background checks is the working with vulnerable people checks introduced by the ACT government. A specific licence to work with vulnerable populations, the check is transferrable between organisations within the ACT and free for volunteers. It will be implemented in different sectors progressively over the next 6 years and will replace existing police and working-with-children checks. Other examples of systems to improve background-checking processes include Crimcheck in Victoria and fit2work.

'I actually think it's a misnomer that we talk about rights. There are very few legislated rights and we need to speak more loudly about this'.

'I think it is too easy when rights are not codified and people say "yes we agree in spirit" but the rights stay on the shelf'.

*Interview participants, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

'Volunteer rights would be upheld more strongly if the word "volunteer" appears in the same acts which support all employee workers'.

*Organisational respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

An accident that occurred in April 2009 involving GREAT Community Transport Inc. (GCT) illustrates a number of issues relating to the protection of volunteers through legislation and policy.

*Oppenheimer et al. 2011*

<sup>8</sup> <http://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/Legislation/volunteers/Pages/Volunteers.aspx?Legislation/volunteers/Pages/Volunteers.aspx>

## 4 Australia’s National Agenda on Volunteering

The experience of using legislative change to ensure volunteers are protected has proven to be a double-edged sword. It is a strategy that needs to be adopted with consideration to unintended consequences. The most significant dilemma that has emerged in advocating and working toward rights and protections for volunteers under legislation is that this approach can and does bring concomitant responsibilities and risks of liability. Protection of volunteers through national model workplace and health safety legislation is a case in point which has highlighted the concern volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations experience about increased responsibility and accountability.

**‘In some ways there are sections of legislation that offer ‘protections’ and working arrangements and that is something easier to deliver’.**

*Interview participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

The tension between rights and responsibilities, including the willingness and capacity to carry out and be held accountable for responsibilities that go along with rights, needs to be addressed as part of seeking legislative protection for volunteers.

### Table 2. Strategic Objective 2

Ensure that volunteers have legal status and are afforded protection through every piece of legislation and public policy that affects them and their work.

OUTCOME	STATUS	INDICATORS OF PROGRESS
State governments specifically include volunteer protection in the relevant Occupational Health and Safety Act(s).	In progress	The Model Work Health and Safety enactment at the start of 2012 and implemented by a number of states.
The Equal Opportunity Acts around Australia overtly protect the rights of all volunteers, as with paid workers, to be ‘employed’ in accordance with non-discriminatory practices.	In progress	Equal Opportunity Acts overtly protect the rights of volunteers in some states and territories only.
Worker’s compensation legislation around Australia is consistent in the level of compensation offered to volunteers injured in the course of their voluntary work.	Not achieved	Volunteers are not covered by Workers’ Compensation across all states and territories. Volunteer-involving organisations are required to provide personal accident insurance.
Anti-discrimination Acts explicitly mention volunteers.	In progress	Inquiry into the proposal to consolidate Commonwealth Anti-Discrimination Laws being held in 2012.
An intergovernmental working group that identifies all of the relevant existing legislation across all jurisdictions and a methodology to address the process of legislative change and amendments.	Not achieved	There is no such intergovernmental working group. Various structures have had, or have, the potential to undertake this function or to influence this outcome to varying degrees for the volunteering sector: COAG, the Not-for-Profit Reform Council, IYV+10 Advisory Group and the national regulator for the not-for-profit sector (ACNC).

■ Achieved     
 ■ In progress     
 ■ Not achieved

#### 4.2.3 Strategic Objective 3

**Ensure that all new legislation, by-laws and public policies, developed at any level of government, which may affect volunteers and their work, works only to facilitate and sustain volunteering.**

Volunteer peak bodies and organisations have largely represented the impact on volunteers and volunteering of a diverse range of legislation through written and verbal submissions to formal inquiries and consultations

The outcome to provide Volunteer Impact Statements on legislation or public policy likely to affect volunteers has been limited. Realising this objective relies on having an effective central volunteer policy coordination mechanism within Commonwealth and state governments and adequate capacity within the sector to respond effectively to externally driven processes and timelines.

The establishment of the **Office for the Not-for-Profit Sector** within the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet is a positive move in this direction. Similar central policy coordination capacity needs to be expanded to all state and territory jurisdictions.

The capacity of the sector to provide both voluntary and paid resources to respond in a timely and effective manner remains a significant challenge. The establishment of **Community Councils of Advice**<sup>9</sup> supported by a network of research and policy officers within national and state peak bodies requires substantial resources.

<sup>9</sup> Community Councils of Advice (CCA) are a mechanism for consulting with and inviting input about major issues and policy directions from the community. Volunteering Tasmania has established a Social Policy Advisory Council comprising people who reflect the diversity of the community and volunteering. The Council is a voluntary consultative group that influences social policy positions on volunteering.

## 4 Australia’s National Agenda on Volunteering

### Options For Further Progress:

Advocacy about legislative change that:

- a) balances the protection of volunteers with the responsibilities owed by volunteers;
- b) takes a proportional approach to liability and the measures through which volunteers are held accountable for carrying out their duties;
- c) gives due consideration to how volunteer-involving organisations will be supported to meet proposed changes in legislative requirements, i.e. their capacity to provide the protections being advocated.

Working through the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) and the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profit Commission (ACNC) advocate for background checks to become transferrable across jurisdictions.

Introduction of legislation requiring volunteer-involving organisations to provide adequate and appropriate insurance protection for volunteers.

Development of national government sponsored insurance scheme for volunteer-involving organisations.

Development of a model process for consultation about the impact of proposed Commonwealth, state and local legislation with national and state peak bodies in volunteering.

*‘I firmly believe we need to arrive to a point that we have an award for volunteers that fits with all labour – a voluntary award that follows the same principles as any labour, for example that sets the number of hours a volunteer can be expected to work. We have now moved into an era where every volunteer has worked, will work, or does work – so volunteers get their frame of reference from labor laws. It follows the same logic, it gives people the opportunity to understand the logic’.*

*‘It doesn’t need to be as binding as an award, but it needs to be a collective intelligence. People ask “where do I look for this [information]?”...Give the industry a guiding framework that equips them to engage volunteers, not stifle them’.*

*Interview participant Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

### Table 3. Strategic Objective 3

Ensure that all new legislation, by-laws, and public policies, developed at any level of government, which may affect volunteers and their work, works only to facilitate and sustain volunteering.

OUTCOME	STATUS	INDICATORS OF PROGRESS
Governments and policy-makers both commit and subscribe to the Principles of Volunteering.	In progress	The Commonwealth Government has developed a National Volunteering Strategy. Volunteering strategies or policies have been developed by states and territories.
A guarantee from governments in all jurisdictions, to the volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations of Australia, that legislation or policy will not be implemented that has the potential to weaken the community activity of volunteering: this guarantee is ensured by consulting with the sector.	Not achieved	There is currently no guarantee and this outcome depends on advocacy by national and state peak bodies in volunteering.
Volunteer peak bodies provide a Volunteer Impact Statement for any legislation or public policy likely to affect volunteers or volunteering.	Not achieved	Volunteer Impact Statements have not been developed.
Volunteer-involving organisations work with the peak bodies to ensure that responses to government policy or proposed legislation are informed and capture diverse viewpoints.	In progress	Submissions on legislative and policy developments likely affect volunteers or volunteering have been made by Volunteering Australia and state volunteering peak bodies.

● Achieved     
 ● In progress     
 ● Not achieved

#### 4.2.4 Strategic Objective 4

**Acknowledge that the activity of volunteering is not without cost and develop means by which Australian volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are supported and funded to provide valuable services.**

Access to affordable **personal accident and public liability insurance** was a key outcome under this objective. A range of strategies has been implemented and progress has been made toward this outcome. However, the complexity and financial cost of public liability insurance continue to be issues for volunteer-involving organisations.

From 2002, Australian governments worked to reform **Civil Liability legislation by capping liabilities**. Following this, public liability insurance premiums fell by 27 per cent in the 5 years to 2008 (Productivity Commission 2010, p. 256).

In addition **group purchases of insurance** have been arranged through peak bodies and government departments. The Productivity Commission (2010) noted this collective approach has enabled local, smaller not-for-profit organisations to benefit from economies of scale and reduce administrative overheads.

## 4 Australia's National Agenda on Volunteering

Some policies still preclude coverage for certain age groups – particularly younger and older volunteers where risk is considered to increase according to the age of volunteers. Often, the consequence is restrictions to the involvement of willing younger and older volunteers whose age falls outside the policy coverage.

Adequate and appropriate insurance cover for volunteers was one of the top three issues most frequently mentioned by volunteers as needing the most urgent attention to ensure their protection (Volunteering Australia 2011a).

Reducing the financial impact of **out-of-pocket expenses** for volunteers was also an outcome on the National Agenda on Volunteering.

In 2007, the Cost of Volunteering Taskforce identified six options government might consider when addressing the escalating issue of volunteer expenses. Volunteers incur costs in transport (petrol, vehicle costs, public transport), telephone, safety equipment and clothing (including uniforms and their maintenance), and training. Volunteer contributions after reimbursements are significant. In emergency services, the average direct financial cost per volunteer was \$544 and \$406 for in-kind contribution per annum (King et al. 2006).

Reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses is a complex issue. In 2011, nearly half of volunteer survey respondents said they had been reimbursed for expenses. It is significant that not all volunteers incur out-of-pocket expenses – in fact 25% did not. Secondly, not all volunteers who do incur these expenses want or elect to be reimbursed. A range of reasons were given for non-reimbursement – it not being offered; the volunteer not having given thought to seeking it; a personal choice not to pursue or claim it; an awareness that the organisation's funds are tight; and an acceptance that out-of-pocket expenses are part of volunteering (Volunteering Australia 2011a).

In 2008 the Volunteer Grants program administered by the Federal Government was expanded to include a category to support fuel reimbursement, including volunteers use of their cars to transport others to activities, deliver food and assist people in need. The original one off allocation of \$5m per annum for three years has now lapsed; however fuel reimbursement can still be accessed from the core funding pool available.

The *National Agenda on Volunteering* called for government, business and philanthropic funders to recognise **volunteer management as a necessary and legitimate overhead expense** and to acknowledge this in their funding guidelines. The capacity for organisations to include allocations for volunteer management in their annual budget is dependent on:

- this outcome being embedded in organisational policy;

- an ability to access resources for funding professional management, both externally through government grants and philanthropic trusts, and internally from revenue raised by the organisation.

Resourcing of volunteering management was investigated in the *National Survey of Volunteering Issues* in 2011. Sixty five percent of survey respondents reported their organisation includes a component for the **recruitment and management of volunteering in the annual budget**. Those organisations that did not include a component for the recruitment and management of volunteering in the annual budget gave the following reasons: not having thought about it; volunteer management being incorporated in general operating costs or staff costs in the organisational budget; and lack of support of management.

Where federal or state government funding had been received in the last 12 months, the majority of respondents said the contracts for this funding did not specify outcomes for volunteering management (Volunteering Australia 2011a).

In the same survey, the majority of *volunteer-involving organisations agreed/strongly agreed* that most:

- philanthropic trusts recognise volunteer management as a genuine expense in funding;
- corporate sponsors recognise and provide support for volunteer projects of all sizes;
- companies with whom their organisation has contact know how to work effectively with the not-for-profit sector.

However, the majority *disagreed/strongly disagreed* that most corporate sponsors recognise and provide support for the infrastructure required by not-for-profit organisations to involve volunteers (Volunteering Australia 2011a).

The establishment and **work of the Australasian Association of Managers of Volunteers (AAMoV)** has contributed to increasing knowledge and awareness about the **importance of skilled coordination and management of volunteers**. This knowledge has resulted in initiatives such as investment in scholarships and other financial support for training of volunteer managers.

In some cases the limitations placed on funding for volunteer management within government contracts with not-for-profit service providers mitigate against this outcome. In addition, guidelines for grant applications to trusts and foundations generally exclude funding of infrastructure costs.

**Adequate funding for volunteer management** remains one of the most significant unmet outcomes of the *National Agenda on Volunteering*. It remains a priority for the sustainability and growth of volunteering in Australia.

'I now have a very small income and expenses are difficult for me. When I volunteer some expenses are difficult to evaluate. Petrol of course... but it's the other little transient, not very noticeable things like a cup of coffee between friends to help make a difference, and so on'.

*Volunteer respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

'I have not expected to be reimbursed for fuel costs (this is my only expense) as I consider this is part of my contribution to the cause. However, this may change when I retire and rely on a pension'.

'The set up to get reimbursed is hard to access'.

*Volunteer respondents, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

'Funding is our single biggest issue. We need to be able to access funding to enable better training, support and management of volunteers'.

*Organisational respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

## 4 Australia’s National Agenda on Volunteering

When asked what would make the most significant difference to their organisational capacity to involve volunteers, allocation of resources from funders or donors specifically tied to recruiting and managing volunteers was most frequently cited. In 2011 it was most frequently cited in the three ‘most important factors’ to make it easier to involve volunteers (Volunteering Australia 2010, 2011a).

**‘Reimbursement levels have remained the same for many years and do not reflect the cost to the volunteer. While we state that it should not cost a volunteer money to assist our organisation, the reimbursement is not realistic. More funding is required’.**

*Organisational respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

### Options For Further Progress:

Analysis of the average unit cost of involving and managing volunteers to provide the basis for advocacy to government, philanthropy and the corporate sector for resources to meet this organisational cost.

Change to legislative provisions that create, or inadvertently allow, barriers to volunteer-involving organisations obtaining appropriate volunteer insurance.

Negotiations with the insurance industry about the proportionality of costs of insurance premiums relative to real risk.

Development of a policy about how the cost of involving and managing volunteers is funded, and by whom.

### Table 4. Strategic Objective 4

Acknowledge that the activity of volunteering is not without cost and develop means by which Australian volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are supported and funded to provide valuable services.

OUTCOME	STATUS	INDICATORS OF PROGRESS
Access to affordable and adequate volunteer and public liability insurance for volunteer-involving organisations.	In progress	Reform of Civil Liability legislation by capping. Group purchases of insurance arranged through peak bodies and government departments.
Volunteer out-of-pocket expenses dealt with under the taxation system, any anomalies identified and resolved and some equitable means of providing relief for those outside the tax system is found.	Not achieved	Recommend reviewing the appropriateness of this outcome. There is provision for specific types out-of-pocket expenses under the Commonwealth Volunteer Grants program.
Travel concessions for volunteers travelling to and from their volunteer workplace.	Not achieved	Concessions on public transport are limited. Volunteer Grants can be used to reimburse fuel (use of volunteer’s personal vehicle).
Volunteer-involving organisations have adequate allocations for volunteer management in their annual budget.	Not achieved	65% of organisations report building a specific component for volunteering into their budget.
Government, when funding service providers that rely on volunteers, explicitly requires and provides for an adequate budget allocation for volunteer involvement, management, recognition and reimbursement.	Not achieved	Lack of allocation for volunteer management in government grants is a major barrier. The inclusion of outcomes for volunteering is not common in contracts for federal or state government grants.
Volunteer-involving organisations and funding providers, e.g. governments, businesses and trusts, recognise volunteer management as a genuine and necessary expense item in funding submissions and funding allocations.	In progress	Availability of the national Volunteer Grants program. Inclusion of a component for volunteer management in organisations’ budgets.

■ Achieved     
 ■ In progress     
 ■ Not achieved

## 4 Australia's National Agenda on Volunteering

### 4.2.5 Strategic Objective 5

**Ensure excellence in all levels of volunteer involvement and volunteer management in order to encourage, protect and enhance the work of volunteers.**

Australia had made considerable progress in response to the call for accredited training for volunteers and managers as a key outcome of the *National Agenda on Volunteering*.

As an initiative of the International Year of Volunteers in 2001 the Commonwealth Government supported the establishment of the **National Volunteer Skills Centre** to develop an extensive range of resources for volunteers and volunteer managers including:

- Nationally recognised qualifications for volunteers and volunteer managers;
- Free training resources and materials for volunteers, trainers and managers of volunteers;
- Best practice tips and advice for not-for-profit organisations and volunteers;
- An online training calendar to promote workshops, seminars and conferences.

The legacy of this period of intensive development is evidenced by **accredited training specific to volunteers and volunteer managers and coordinators** now incorporated into the national training package for community services. Australia is recognised internationally as a leader in this area.

Whilst Australia has an abundance of quality training resources the greatest barrier remains access to training.

The Federal Government's consultations for the *National Volunteering Strategy* showed over one third of respondents considered a perceived lack of necessary skills as a reason people do not volunteer. This barrier was most apparent for the emergency services sector (Australian Government 2011c, p. 20).

Volunteering Australia (2011) found that training had provided the majority of volunteers (78.9%) with the necessary skills for their role, whereas 17.2% had experienced difficulty accessing training.

Volunteers indicated the availability of more relevant training (41.6%), relevant training being available closer to home or work (27.2%) and access to online training (21.8%) would make it easier to access training.

Managers/coordinators in approximately 12% of organisations had difficulty accessing training in leadership and/or management and coordination of volunteers.

This finding is echoed in the Tasmanian State of Volunteering report which found that 'while training for volunteers is (at least partly) provided in 90% of organisations, training for managers for volunteers is (at least partly) provided in only 58% of organisations' (Webb 2010, p. 4).

The Federal Government's consultations in 2010 for the *National Volunteering Strategy* identified the cost of training as a barrier to access for training for volunteers. Almost 60% of respondents indicated that costs associated with training are a central barrier to volunteer-involving organisations using more volunteers (Australian Government 2011c, p. 20).

In the National Survey of Volunteering Issues, the majority of organisational respondents cited funding the organisation to provide the training as a way to overcome this barrier (Volunteering Australia 2011).

Learning and development also encompass opportunities for reflection. The role of reflection in learning has been discussed in the context of service learning and corporate volunteering. Dunin (2011) incorporates meaningful reflection in her leadership of volunteers across Australia and discusses its value to volunteers' ongoing learning and development, its role in closing the gap between the way paid and voluntary workers are resourced and supported, potential barriers to reflection, and processes to enable this experience for and with volunteers.

The progressive uptake of **The National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations** is a key indicator of success towards meeting this objective.

Resources and tools that support organisations with the implementation of the standards have been developed and most state and territory peak bodies and many regional and local volunteer resource centres provide consultancy and training for Not-for-Profits that implement the standards. The standards have been adapted in several publications commissioned by government.

Volunteering Australia has investigated the extent of uptake and the perceived value to the sector of the standards (2010). The Standards have value to organisational capacity. Revision of the standards and additional tools that facilitate their interpretation are needed in moving forward. There is support for an accreditation model to recognise and acknowledge quality achievement, support implementation of the standards and promote consistency of training.

*'I am witness to great forms of volunteer leadership within mine (sic) and other organisations all the time – when volunteers are given a job to do and they understand the relevance of this job – they will always perform at their peak. Any form of volunteering is a form of leadership within the community which in turn encourages more leadership and volunteering'.*

*Organisational respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

**A case in point:**

**Camp Quality is able to have a huge impact on the lives of children living with cancer and their families thanks to the dedication, talent and passion of its 85 staff and 2,500 volunteers. The organisation passionately believes in investing, developing and recognising its volunteers.**

**Each volunteer completes a national training program developed by Camp Quality to ensure consistency and equity of care and a sound understanding of our vision and mission.**

**The relationship with volunteers is supported by open, ongoing communication and a quarterly national volunteer newsletter.**

**Camp Quality recognises volunteer effort through an annual national award and recognition awards that are made at various intervals of service.**

**In 2011 over 70 Volunteer Camp Leaders from across Australia were flown to Sydney to participate in the Camp Leader Conference where the results of the Camp Quality Family Research Project were shared and workshops enabled valuable input into the direction of program development.**

**Camp Leaders were invited to be a part of interstate project-committees giving them the opportunity for significant input into direct improvements to the programs in their location.**

**In July 2012, a National Volunteer Advisor will be dedicated to lead the volunteer strategy and development as part of the Human Resource Team.**

*Acknowledgement: This case study was provided by and is used with the permission of Camp Quality*

## 4 Australia’s National Agenda on Volunteering

### Options For Further Progress:

Review of the accessibility of relevant face-to-face training and online training in the context of identified needs of volunteers and managers of volunteers in metropolitan, regional, rural and remote areas.

Establishment of a supplementary grant program for volunteer training targeted to volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

Review of the National Standards for Not-for-Profit Organisations Involving Volunteers and development of a model of accreditation.

**‘Encourage more managers to share what they are doing – acknowledge the good ideas they have and not be so modest about their achievements’.**

*Organisational respondent. National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

### Table 5. Strategic Objective 5

Ensure excellence in all levels of volunteer involvement and volunteer management in order to encourage, protect and enhance the work of volunteers.

OUTCOME	STATUS	INDICATORS OF PROGRESS
Volunteer-involving organisations comply with the National Standards for Involving Volunteers and other industry standards that impact on volunteers and their work.		Rates between 50–80% of implementation of the National Standards were reported in the National Survey of Volunteering Issues by organisational respondents between 2009 and 2011.
Volunteer-involving organisations recognise that volunteers require and deserve training.		Training is available to and has been accessed by the majority of volunteers. However, a significant proportion of volunteers report having difficulty accessing training (17% in 2011).
Standardised volunteer training by industry type.		Entry-level or additional specialist training is provided by employers through customised training and professional development that is provided by Registered Training Organisations and industry consultants.
Portable training to reduce unnecessary repetition and duplication for volunteers.		Since the International Year of Volunteers, a suite of accredited, portable training has been developed in Australia.
A national skills register to ensure recognition of previous training and skills.		There is a system of recognition of prior learning (RPL) for volunteers. However, a national skills register across all sectors has not been developed.
Government funding for volunteer training.		The national Volunteer Grant Program administered by FaHCSIA can be used by organisations towards the costs of training courses for volunteers. However, there are significant shortfalls in the cost of and funding available for training.
A uniform, affordable and effective national system for pre-employment reference checking (e.g. police checks).		Improvements have been achieved in some state systems. The need for portability between organisations and jurisdictions continues to be raised. A national system would achieve consistency and portability.
A positive image of volunteering portrayed through the media.		Records of media coverage about volunteers and volunteering indicate that with few exceptions, the image portrayed about volunteers in print and electronic coverage is very positive.
National youth strategies to ensure that young people are provided with the types of volunteer activities they seek.		The National Strategy for Young Australians promotes young people’s participation in volunteering.
Volunteer-involving organisations respect the rights of volunteers.		Volunteering Australia, State Volunteering Centres and Volunteer Resource Centres have developed charters or other documents articulating rights. The rights of volunteers and access to grievance procedures are part of the National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations. Data about the extent to which rights are upheld and the incidence of breaches of volunteer rights that have not been resolved at the organisational level is unknown.

## 4 Australia’s National Agenda on Volunteering

Strategic Objective 5 continued

OUTCOME	STATUS	INDICATORS OF PROGRESS
Shared resources for recruitment, such as online recruitment sites.	In progress	Establishment of GoVolunteer in 2001. Second generation of GoVolunteer is in progress. Development of state-based online recruitment sites.
Standards of excellence in volunteer referral services.	Not achieved	Initial work undertaken by Volunteering Australia in 2004/05.
Trained managers of volunteers.	In progress	The majority of managers of volunteers have access to training. However, in 2011, 12% reported having difficulty accessing the training they need.
Training packages for managers of volunteers.	Achieved	Accredited training is available for managers of volunteers in Australia: Certificate IV in Volunteer Program Coordination; Diploma of Volunteer Program Management; and Advanced Diploma of Volunteer Program Management.
A small number of tertiary courses in a range of disciplines have been identified that include a subject or unit on volunteering	In progress	A small number of tertiary courses in a range of disciplines have been identified that include a subject or unit on volunteering
Competency standards for volunteer management training to ensure a level of competence and a career path for managers of volunteers.	In progress	The competencies on which the nationally accredited training courses for volunteer management are articulated and enable career progression

■ Achieved    
 ■ In progress    
 ■ Not achieved

### 4.2.6 Strategic Objective 6

**Ensure that volunteering is a potent, dynamic and unifying social force for community benefit by acknowledging and accepting that it is a diverse and evolving activity.**

There are ongoing indications of progress towards this strategic objective.

The following story is one illustration of the dynamic nature of volunteering in this country and its capacity to facilitate change and unify people who have different backgrounds, perspectives, strengths and needs.

*‘I had a volunteer support role at a community centre with over 100 volunteers, located in an area of high disadvantage. Seventy-five per cent of the volunteers [were] aged over 60 years old and while most were very experienced in their roles, there was reluctance from them to share their skills with others. Consequently there were few places available for youth or migrants wishing to increase their skills.*

*I set about trying to change this by starting a volunteer mentoring system, whereby one volunteer with very good customer service skills was asked to mentor a young person. Over a short period of time the plan grew into many volunteers mentoring others in the community’.*

**Volunteering Australia (2011a)**

### Approaching Volunteering In Diverse Ways

The importance of adopting **inclusive and flexible strategies** to grow the volunteer base in Australia was a main finding of the consultations for Australia’s *National Volunteering Strategy*. Whilst there is still much to be done in this area, there is significant progress and evidence of innovation that is contributing to our response to trends in volunteering in Australia.

Volunteering Australia’s 2011 national survey identified one in two organisations had introduced new ways of offering volunteering in the past 12 months. The most common way they had done this was by **introducing greater flexibility to when people could volunteer**. Nearly 40% said their organisation had introduced opportunities for **skilled volunteering and group/team volunteering** (2011a, p. 24).

Established and emerging scholars, peak bodies and other organisations are contributing to research about what works and developing diverse, flexible approaches to volunteering in Australia.

Drawing on its experience of major natural disasters Volunteering Queensland has established the Community Response to Extreme Weather (CREW), developed strategies and resources to build community resilience and made submissions about ways to strengthen the way people who volunteer spontaneously in response to disasters are engaged, managed and supported.

**‘Those volunteer-involving organisations who have these resources are able to attract younger volunteers, older, CALD etc volunteers in ways that are meaningful to each cohort. It usually is through a combination of offering more flexible roles/responsibilities, proficiently using social networking, better affirmation/acknowledgment/training and ensuring the roles are meaningful to the particular cohort. All this requires realistic ongoing time and resources’.**

**‘Some things have worked, some things haven’t. That’s OK. It creates the belief that different approaches can work. In the process we have tapped new sources of volunteers’.**

*Organisational respondents, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

**‘Organisations need to be less competitive to obtain volunteers. If I volunteer for you one week, I want the flexibility to volunteer for a different organisation next week, as this time may fit better with my employment/family commitments. I want to be thanked at the end of my shift at volunteering. It is not a hard word to say’.**

*Volunteer respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

## 4 Australia's National Agenda on Volunteering

### Skilled Volunteers

Recent research indicates skilled volunteering is a young and under-resourced area of the volunteering sector facing growing demands and increasing expectations from government not-for-profit organisations and the community at large.

A number of ways to develop and strengthen skilled volunteering were identified from the perspective of volunteers, not-for-profit organisations, placement agencies and the skilled volunteering sector more broadly. Of particular note is the need to clarify or define what is meant by skilled volunteering, raising its profile, building the evidence base about the performance of the skilled volunteering sector, and having systems that ensure the volunteer/client relationship is mutually effective, constructive and beneficial (Davidson Consulting 2011, pp. 17-18).

The Centre for Volunteering NSW has developed processes and resources to strengthen not-for-profit organisations' capacity to involve skilled volunteering from culturally diverse backgrounds and to increase opportunities for highly skilled, culturally diverse volunteers to gain paid employment (Frew and Roland-Lai 2011).

### Corporate Sector Involvement

Not-for-profit organisations and companies are investing their joint efforts in volunteering for community benefit in Australia.

There are also strategic business benefits of volunteering and personal and professional benefits for employees (Deloitte 2011).

In the *National Survey of Volunteering Issues* the majority of organisations that had involved corporate employee volunteers said it had been of value. The survey also found a large proportion of volunteer-involving organisations had not involved corporate employee volunteers (Volunteering Australia 2011a, 2010).

Some points of difference in needs and expectations may need to be bridged to strengthen the potential for successful partnering. For example, the not-for-profit sector's general preference is for developing long-term relationships with companies while many companies prefer a combination of short and long-term partnerships with more than one not-for-profit organisation.

Factors that contribute to the success of employee volunteering have been identified from the corporate and not-for-profit sector's perspective, including the availability of internal resources dedicated to coordinating and managing corporate volunteering effort (ibid).

### Engaging Young People

As discussed previously, the way Australia engages young people in volunteering is evolving.

Through its research, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria has recommended youth-friendly information and resources available in print and online, development and support of a community of young volunteers, and continued capacity building of community organisations and groups to be able to create meaningful volunteering opportunities for a range of young people (Wynne 2011).

Organisations can create willing young volunteers by making roles accessible, speaking the language of 'Generation Y', using websites and social networking effectively and targeting recruitment. Meaningful roles can be created where there is a greater understanding of motivations, what is asked of roles and their benefits, thinking beyond boundaries around types of activities and effective leadership for young volunteers (Moffat 2011).

Volunteering Queensland has worked with young volunteers and youth-led organisations on ways to move beyond traditional practices in relation to young people as volunteers (Gregor and Geale 2011).

Volunteering ACT continues to actively connect 12- to 15-year-old students at risk of disengaging from education with volunteering employer mentors. Broadly representative of labour market sectors, these volunteer business mentors offer volunteer students hands-on, real-life opportunities in the workplace. The placements act as catalysts for young people to see the relevance of school and the benefits of training for a qualification to enable their career and life goals.

**'Through offering hands-on/ makeover-type volunteering the corporate community has embraced the opportunity to the benefit of the not-for-profit sector. It has appealed as much if not more than the business expertise aspect.'**

*Organisational respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

**'Some employers are not supportive when an employee is required to attend an emergency situation during normal working hours. They need to be educated about the value of their employee to the broader community and be aware of their role supporting their employee by not docking his salary or forcing him to deduct annual leave.'**

*Volunteer respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

#### Case in point:

**The community and corporate partnership between NAB and Jesuit Social Services illustrates the different ways the not for profit and corporate sectors are working together to improve social economic opportunities with and for local communities**

*See case study (Volunteering Australia 2011b, p.37)*

**'We have a different way of working with young people. We are not insisting the management paradigm based in structure, control, regulations and timetables. We allow them to decide what to do and we give advice only when asked to do so. We lead by example.'**

*Organisational respondent, National Survey of Volunteering Issues, 2011*

## 4 Australia's National Agenda on Volunteering

### **Engaging Older People**

Since the International Year of Volunteers in 2001, opportunities for volunteer participation by senior Australians have evolved through initiatives such as the Grey Nomads and Golden Gurus.

Researchers have and continue to contribute to our understanding of what motivates older Australians to volunteer, barriers to their participation in volunteering, and models of offering volunteering that enable their participation volunteer (e.g. Warburton et al 2007).

Transformation of practice is occurring through thought leaders, state peak bodies, volunteer-involving organisations and communities. An example is Volunteering Tasmania's evidenced-informed approach to investigate the implications of the ageing population in Tasmania, what actions volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers can take to respond to these changes positively, and ways they can be supported in their efforts (Volunteering Tasmania 2012, p. 3).

### **Volunteering Through Places Of Learning**

Volunteering as a requirement of study, or 'service learning', is increasingly part of the curriculum of university courses. Innovations such as Volunteering Western Australia's collaboration with universities to manage 'on-campus student volunteer hubs, and student learning electives offered by Griffith University<sup>10</sup> and the University of South Australia<sup>11</sup> are some examples of educational institutes incorporating volunteering as a learning strategy for their students.

Strengthening of volunteering awareness programs and volunteering opportunities in educational institutions is recommended as a strategy for engaging young people in volunteering (Wynne 2011, p. 11).

### **Virtual Volunteering**

Approximately 15% of organisations report using virtual volunteering through social media or from home (Volunteering Australia 2011a). Dragisic (2010, p. 1) argues that the practice of online volunteering fits with the concept of digital engagement but is under-utilised because it is not seen as being distinct from more traditional methods.

### **Effective Promotion Of Volunteering**

Whilst progress is being made toward understanding and developing relevant ways to engage with and promote volunteering across diverse community groups through the efforts of researchers, volunteer and other peak bodies, there is more work to be done in this area.

In its report of the consultation for the National Volunteering Strategy the Australian Government found that, 'Governments and community need to better promote volunteering as a positive avenue for community contribution, as well as specific opportunities for volunteer participation. Promotional activities need to target a diverse cross-section of the community, such as culturally and linguistically diverse communities and young people' (Australian Government 2011c).

#### **Options For Further Progress:**

Strengthening of volunteering awareness programs and volunteering opportunities in educational institutions.

Designing and using promotional activities that target a diverse cross-section of the community.

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.griffith.edu.au/gihe/resources-support/service-learning>

<sup>11</sup> <http://www.unisa.edu.au/academicdevelopment/engagement/service.asp>

## 4 Australia's National Agenda on Volunteering

### Table 6. Strategic Objective 6

Ensure that volunteering is a potent, dynamic and unifying social force for community benefit by acknowledging and accepting that it is a diverse and evolving activity.

OUTCOME	STATUS	INDICATORS OF PROGRESS
Volunteer-involving organisations have strategies in place to involve young people including: redesigned job roles; short-term projects; group volunteering; and ensuring that the needs, aspirations and motivations of young volunteers are accepted as valid.	In progress	Volunteering Australia has developed a practice guide. A set of practical tools for organisations to engage young volunteers will be developed by Volunteering Queensland. Volunteering is on the agenda of youth peak bodies e.g. YACVIC.
The concept of corporate volunteering is widely accepted and encouraged as a legitimate way in which skills are transferred from the business sector to the voluntary sector for the benefit of the community.	In progress	Development of employee volunteering programs. Approximately one in three not-for-profit organisations participate in these programs according to the National Survey of Volunteering Issues.
Volunteer-involving organisations have strategies in place to remove barriers to the involvement of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.	In progress	A range of tools and resources to support organisations achieve this outcome have been developed by state government offices of volunteers, and volunteer peak bodies. The National Volunteering Strategy identified the need to strengthen strategies used to engage with culturally and linguistically diverse communities.
Organisations have strategies in place to address gender imbalance.	In progress	Development of policies forms part of the National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations. Data from the ABS of volunteer participation indicates a balanced representation of both genders.
The community work and support network of Indigenous Australians are recognised as valuable variations to the more formal activities typically accepted as volunteering.	In progress	Volunteering Australia has commenced work on reviewing the current definition of formal volunteering which enable greater recognition of the variations to formal activities typically accepted as volunteering.
Travel concessions for volunteers travelling to and from their volunteer workplace.	In progress	Concessions on public transport are limited. Volunteer Grants can be used to reimburse fuel (use of volunteer's personal vehicle).
Innovative forms of online volunteering opportunities are available to volunteers isolated through disability or locality or restricted by paid employment to volunteering outside business hours.	In progress	State governments and community organisations are providing information about and promoting online volunteering. Introduction of online volunteering by organisations alongside traditional forms of volunteering. Emergence of micro-volunteering organisations.
Innovative forms of volunteering opportunities to address complex social problems.	In progress	Emergence of flexible models of volunteering. Community and business partnerships addressing social inclusion.

■ Achieved
 ■ In progress
 ■ Not achieved

# 5

## Looking Forward

### So What Of The Roadmap Ahead?

#### The key strategic drivers of volunteering in the immediate future include:

- that volunteering is happening within a dynamic social and physical environment including demographic and technological changes;
- the impact of climate change and an increasing incidence of national disasters;
- economic uncertainty;
- the increased involvement of government, corporate and educational institutions.

We also need to fully understand that volunteering in Australia is taking place in the context of national policy reform within the third sector, through a new definition of charities, the establishment of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission, and reform of governance arrangements. This wave of change comes with great opportunity to provide input into these reforms, and a responsibility to influence the outcome.

#### To influence this change we need to be asking and responding to fundamental questions.

1. What rights should volunteers expect to have in civil society and what is needed for these to be properly upheld?
2. What economic contribution should volunteering be expected to make – should its contribution to civil society be sufficient?
3. How can we develop a greater reciprocal relationship between government and the volunteering sector?
4. With the increased involvement of third parties including government, the corporate sector and educational institutions in volunteering, what do we see the role and contribution of these parties in civil society?
5. What might leadership in a civil society look like in the next 5 years? And how do we get there?
6. How we will define volunteering in a way that resonates with all subcultures of society while staying true to the principles and definitions of volunteering, or do these also need to change to meet contemporary needs?

In the next sections we consider the issues raised in questions 1 and 6.

### 5.1 Reflecting On Volunteering Australia's Definition

*'Formal volunteering is an activity which takes place through not-for-profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:*

- *to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer;*
- *of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;*
- *for no financial payment; and*
- *in designated volunteer positions only'.*

*Volunteering Australia.*

As part of the development of this report and to provide the groundwork for the review of Volunteering Australia's foundation documents we asked a selected but diverse group of key informants for their views (see Appendix 1) about:

- How well the current definition of volunteering adopted by Volunteering Australia in the 1990s serves us now.
- What changes, if any, are needed in how we define volunteering.

*'It is clear that there is a story to be told. There is a role in defining volunteering but beyond that there are individual stories, and they will be a millionfold.'*

*Focus group participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

*'The definition is important to being able to communicate about volunteering in a shared way.'*

*'Volunteering is about the community owning social and economic challenges.'*

*'Volunteering is not just someone doing something for free – it's about meeting community needs in an organized, coordinated way.'*

*'People change their role every day from parent to employee to helping a neighbour. People's lives are really rich. Definitions need to keep up with this richness. Boundaries are an important part of definition.'*

*Interview and focus group participants, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

## 5 Looking Forward

It is timely to reconsider how Volunteering Australia defines volunteering for a number of reasons.

The definition was developed more than a decade ago in a particular social, economic and historical context. We want to be confident that the way we understand, discuss and support volunteering serves us well in the coming years.

The definition of volunteering adopted by Volunteering Australia is challenged by the opportunities and dilemmas in practice, for example, volunteering as a participation requirement of income support, volunteering in the for-profit sector, and the increasing involvement of volunteers in organisations during economic downturns.

The way volunteering is seen and described is being contested in Australia and internationally.

Volunteering is an integral part of work in our society, yet the idea that volunteers are workers is relatively new. Secondly, the concept of work is changing. Deregulation, globalisation and the casualisation of labour impacts on how we view and experience work (Oppenheimer 2002; 2008, p. 7; 2010; 2011; Oppenheimer with Edwards 2011).

The UN Volunteers highlights the complexity and richness of volunteering and the merit in exploring it more deeply.

*'The many and varied categorizations of volunteerism pose serious challenges for assessing the size and extent of volunteerism and contribute to the misperceptions that surround volunteering. They do, however, reflect the richness and very broad based nature of volunteer action...'*

*A proper understanding of the universality of volunteerism requires that the fog enveloping volunteers' action be dispersed to reveal the true extent of its contours'. (Leigh 2011, p. 8)*

The contours of volunteering are being tested in Australia. Definitions that differ in significant ways to the current definition of Volunteering Australia have been developed and adopted at different levels and by different institutions in our nation, for example, by state governments and state peak bodies in volunteering.

In its commitment to supporting volunteering in Western Australia, the Government of Western Australia (2011) stated:

*'It is no longer useful to ascribe a single definition to volunteering. The contemporary parameters of what now constitutes volunteering are broad and growing broader every year. Volunteering is better understood by outlining its characteristics'.*

The characteristics it outlines include informal volunteering activities undertaken outside of an organisation. The document discusses the sense of reciprocity of some communities and groups

that mean volunteering is seen as an intrinsic part of belonging rather than a discrete or unique activity. This approach to the question 'what is volunteering' represents a departure from the current definition of Volunteering Australia.

In light of each of these developments, Volunteering Australia is reviewing its foundation documents. These documents articulate how we see and express volunteering in Australia (the definition), the principles which underlie its expression, a shared understanding of the rights and responsibilities held by people involved in volunteering, and the model code of practice and standards through which volunteering is expressed.

The consultation undertaken to date has highlighted areas of agreement about the purpose of a definition as well as diverse, and sometimes contradicting, views about whether and how to change the current approach to defining volunteering.

These views range from strongly held positions about peak bodies in volunteering being the custodians of the definition that should not be changed lightly, to opinion of the definition being out-of-date and it not resonating with particular groups and their life experience.

For example, the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria recommends 'the development and use of a contemporary and relevant definition of volunteering that recognises the contribution of young people' (Wynne 2011, p. 31).

### 5.2 Areas Of Agreement

There appears to be broad-based agreement that:

- The current definition generally captures the essence of volunteering;
- There are aspects of the current definition that challenge and constrain volunteering in Australia;
- Having a clear and shared understanding about the parameters of what we see as being 'volunteering' is important;
- Clarity and a collective view of 'volunteering' are important and useful in considering and making decisions about the opportunities and challenges that present themselves in day-to-day practice, helping to frame the parameters for research and guiding macro and micro-level policy;
- The definition and principles of volunteering should contain provisions that discourage the exploitation of volunteers as free labour, particularly for the primary purpose of making profit. This expectation or requirement impacts on decisions about whether to maintain key elements of the current definition – in not-for-profit organisations, designated positions and for community benefit.

*'The definition describes something unique – you can question whether it is altruistic. However, it describes a unique human activity'.*

*'It has not been enabling. All I can say is that, broadly, it seems to be totally out of date. It seems narrow and not generous. The diversity of the circumstances in which people can undertake volunteering and why they volunteer is mindboggling. It [the definition] needs to be able to encompass the diversity of the volunteering experience that is growing. There is still room for fundamental principles that would generally but not entirely be captured by the definition. I don't like definitions that put barriers in the way. My preference is for a broader approach'.*

*Interview participants, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

*'For the volunteer, the definition comes into its own in relation to why and how they are engaged in what they are doing. It plays a big role when they are not treated well – when organisations don't reward volunteering or see it as a cheap option for labour'.*

*'We are the custodians of the definition and we shouldn't play with that lightly. The realities around it might change, but we need to keep the essence of what volunteering is'.*

*'I don't think the definition does serve us very well now. Frequently we have team discussions about who we should be working with. If we were being true to the definition, we wouldn't be working with certain organisations... Sometimes we have to say, well it doesn't fit with the definition of volunteering but we will extend our work to include it because it is a potential pathway to volunteering'.*

*Interview participants, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

## 5 Looking Forward

There is also general support for defining what is at the core of volunteering, honouring the integrity of this core and acknowledging that grey areas surround it. Opinions diverge when it comes to how to deal with experiences and practices that push the boundaries of the current definition.

### 5.3 Shades Of Grey

**'I am adamant about who we count as volunteers. My approach is fundamentally that it [volunteering] is not every Good Samaritan act. It is an act of a person undertaken free of charge through an intermediary. This [approach] gives us to starting points for the definition that aligns us to a body of policies across the country and internationally'.**

*Interview participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

**'How can you define free will? You can never determine a person's motivation. We can say that there has to be a choice in whether they volunteer'.**

*Interview participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

#### 5.3.1 Dealing With Third Parties

Third parties such as government, corporations and educational institutes have an important role in encouraging volunteering (Haski-Leventhal et al. 2009). Yet the current definition of volunteering does not acknowledge, or in some cases, easily accommodate their involvement.

The involvement of third parties, dilemmas this involvement raises and possible ways through these are discussed where relevant in relation to each of the key elements of the current definition.

#### 5.3.2 Of Free Will And Without Coercion

The UNV holds that the action of volunteering 'should be carried out according to an individual's own free will, and not as an obligation stipulated by law, contract or academic requirement.' It draws the line at 'mandatory volunteering' such as community service for custodial sentences for criminal offenders, although 'they can be positive, the seeds for future volunteering' (Leigh 2011, pp. 3-4).

Consultations about the definition of volunteering by Volunteering Australia for this report indicate the conviction that 'true' volunteering is about people freely choosing to give their time voluntarily continues to be held in Australia.

In some people's mind, having free will to volunteer is inextricably tied up with the motive/s for volunteering being altruistic. Others take a conceptual or practical approach into account illustrated in Diagram 1.

### Diagram 1 – Free Will



Whether and how we determine if there is free will and the complexity of human motives were raised. In practical terms, the decision to volunteer is often influenced by a range of factors, including familial expectations and peer pressure. Examples include the (generally positive) influence of family members who have a tradition of volunteering behaviour and the expectations of club membership.

Leaving aside ideas of pure 'free will', there are broadly held views that volunteering must involve having a choice and it should never involve coercion. Volunteering is not an activity that is imposed on a person to meet an obligation.

Activities that involve mutual obligation such as volunteering for income support have been and remain controversial in Australia. They challenge the notion of free will and the extent to which there is a choice involved in undertaking the activity referred to by third parties as 'volunteering'. These activities are considered legitimate forms of participation in society, but not volunteering per se. During the consultations for this report, 'community service' was suggested as a more appropriate and useful way to think about activities undertaken to meet participation requirements for the receipt of income support from government or as part of serving a criminal sentence.

## 5 Looking Forward

Volunteering to meet the requirements of school or university courses or 'service learning' was also considered a legitimate and valuable form of participation in community but one that challenges the central tenets of the way we conceptualise volunteering.

Volunteer Canada offers a useful approach for assessing whether particular activities are volunteering or other forms of social activity by considering these along a continuum that ranges from choice – incentive – coercion – obligation. It identifies compulsion as a key feature that distinguishes volunteering and mandatory community service.

*'By definition, mandatory community service involves substantial force applied from a source of power outside of the individual performing the service. It takes place not because the participant freely chooses to do the activity, but because he or she is compelled to do so by either threat or significant penalty or the threat of withdrawal of significant benefit' (Graff 2006, p. 6).*

### 5.3.3 Volunteering 'In Designated Positions'

The original underlying purpose of this element of the definition was for volunteers to have a place in the work of an organisation, make volunteers visible and reduce the risk of exploitation. The suggestion was made that it would be more useful to articulate this concept in terms of elements of good practice, for example the volunteer's role being clear, rather than being prescriptive about being in a designated position.

The proviso in Volunteering Australia's current definition that volunteering occurs in designated positions is appropriate and serves an important purpose in the context of formal volunteering through an organisation. However, its inclusion in the core definition of volunteering per se, negates the existence of volunteering that takes place in contexts outside organisations, i.e. in less formal settings or ways.

United Nations Volunteers takes a broader approach to its definition that reflects 'what we strongly believe to be the universal nature of volunteerism' (Leigh 2011, p. 4).

### 5.3.4 Informal Volunteering

Our consultation about Volunteering Australia's current definition of volunteering indicates a broad acknowledgement of informal volunteering – that it takes place and deserves to be recognised.

It was remarked on in relation to sports, emergency management, indigenous communities, and culturally and linguistically diverse communities, particularly those in the early phase of settlement.

Considerable sport activity in Australia occurs in informal ways and settings, particularly through the participation of mums and dads, e.g. coaching

kids and supporting the various activities that make it possible for a sports team or club to operate.

We are also now seeing more agile and intangible forms of volunteering through new and emergent groups. They may have some level of being 'formal' but are still at their embryonic stage.

The practice and recognition of informal volunteering was also discussed in cultural terms.

There is a strong emphasis on communal and community values within the culture of some communities. These features are seen in small rural communities, e.g. country women's groups, indigenous communities and non-English speaking immigrant communities, particularly those who are newly arrived.

Formal volunteering is more common among longstanding communities that have established structures to implement formal volunteering arrangements and processes.

Examples of informal volunteering, particularly in new and emerging communities include:

Settlement and welcoming activities, particularly in regional and rural areas in the first 12 months of settlement are sometimes done on an informal voluntary basis.

Community members who have bilingual skills are delivering English language classes and support informally. Whilst this practice does offer positive outcomes for the community, it also raises the issues of reimbursement for volunteers who are offering English language support. This practice is often in response to gaps in services, including the lack of classes tailored specifically for consumers from certain language groups.

*'When a volunteer has free choice it is seen as best practice, but a lot of research we see shows people being introduced to volunteering through employee volunteering programs or through schools. It can be beneficial to the community and themselves and they often continue volunteering in the future.'*

*Interview participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011.*

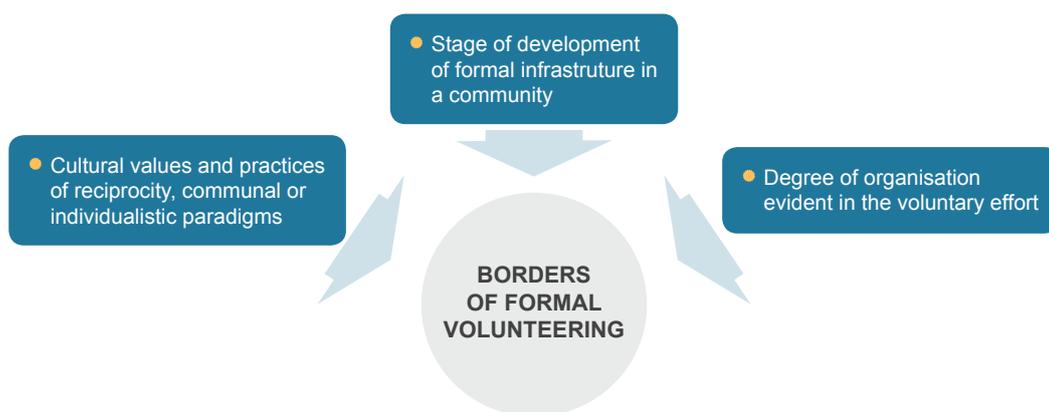
*'Where it becomes formal and in designated positions, we need that level of prescription in our business as it is part of the service to our members, but it shouldn't restrict the definition of volunteering generally... In our business formal volunteering is important, but we are only one part of the volunteering family.'*

*'There is a cultural element underlying the definition of what volunteering is and is not. We volunteer all the time for our community and it is not necessarily formal.'*

*Interview participants, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

## 5 Looking Forward

### Diagram 2 – Borders Of Informal Volunteering



'Formal volunteering is really important and is a positive thing. It is important for all people, including those from CALD backgrounds, to have purpose and engagement. We more often than not find that, in CALD communities, volunteering is informal and is motivated by altruism and cultural values, such as placing importance on community cohesion and the maintenance of cultural practices and respect, for example by volunteering in a capacity that involves welcoming newly arrived community members'.

*Interview participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

'Once there is a financial transaction, it complicates things. It changes the nature of the relationship'.

*Interview participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

The processes required as part of formal volunteering can be onerous and intimidating for small community organisations that rely on volunteers. A view was put that broadening the definition to include informal acts of volunteering would ease some of the pressures on organisations and enhance opportunities for prospective volunteers.

Formal and informal characteristics can sit alongside each other in the volunteering experience. For example, volunteering facilitated by Indigenous Community Volunteers occurs through formal organisations. However, the settings in which the volunteering takes place can be quite informal.

Recognition of informal volunteering requires a better understanding of its expression in our communities, including the breadth of activities and settings in which it occurs.

#### 5.3.5 For No Payment

*'Once there is a financial transaction it complicates things...It changes the nature of the relationship'.*

*Interview participant*

Practical examples were cited where the criteria that volunteering is 'for no financial payment' is being challenged in both not-for-profit and for-profit organisational settings. These examples included volunteer fire fighters being paid a substantial stipend, honorariums being granted to Board members and corporate employees being paid while volunteering, if not directly to volunteer.

Where do we draw the line about reimbursement? What reimbursement is clearly of out-of-pocket expenses and what borders on financial incentives that are well intended but not linked to direct reimbursement of expenses identified by receipts?

There are various views about whether activities undertaken by corporate employees for/on behalf of not-for-profit organisations on company time are volunteering in the true sense and, if it is, who is the volunteer?

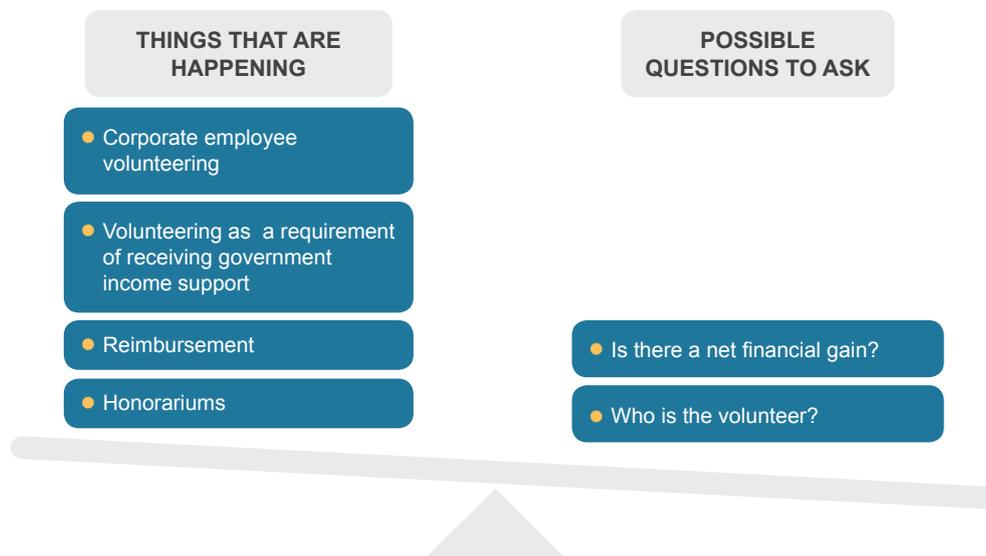
Some hold the view that since the corporate volunteer is receiving remuneration for the time they are volunteering, even though it is from the company not the not-for-profit organisation for whom they are volunteering, it is not volunteering in its true form.

Other considerations that could be taken into account include that:

- since the volunteering is undertaken by the employee at the employer's cost, the company, rather than the employee, is in fact the volunteer;
- the employee's financial status would remain the same whether they choose to volunteer through the company's program, or not.

## 5 Looking Forward

### Diagram 3 – Is Payment Involved?



The discussion of this element of volunteering in the State of the World’s Volunteerism Report may help to clarify conceptual and practical issues.

*‘Secondly, the action should not be undertaken primarily for financial reward. Some reimbursement for expenses or stipend-type payments, or payments in kind such as provision of meals and transport may be justified. Indeed, these kinds of payments are often regarded as good practice as they make opportunities for volunteer action more accessible and inclusive. Actions undertaken on full pay, such as when the volunteering takes place on company time, are also recognised as volunteerism, provided that the employee receives no additional financial incentive... The parameters of our definition of volunteering also include full-time volunteer placement programs, both domestic and international, which may pay allowances, normally calculated on the basis of local expenses (Leigh 2011, p. 4).*

#### 5.3.6 To Be Or Not To Be – The ‘For-Profit’ Dilemma

Volunteering is happening through organisations that are not in the traditional ‘not-for-profit’ basket.

Volunteering through government agencies and departments was generally accepted by participants in the consultation as a legitimate expression of volunteering, provided it meets the key elements of being undertaken without coercion, for no financial gain, and where it is of benefit to the community.

A potential conflict of interest for government agencies and departments involving volunteers in their programs was raised in the context of government being a regulator and policy maker for volunteering, and at the same time, a practitioner or agency that relies on volunteer effort.

Volunteering that does not sit neatly within the boundaries of ‘not-for-profit’ has diverse dimensions, encompassing corporate employees volunteering in not-for-profit organisations, volunteers undertaking roles in the business’s operation, e.g. private nursing homes involving local community volunteers to visit residents, corporations involving volunteers to support major sports events, and volunteering in organisations that fall outside the corporate and third sector

such emergency services and rural fire services under the auspice of government.

Whilst there is an argument about the motive of a for-profit entity using volunteers, does this necessarily mean volunteering that occurs under their auspice does not result in benefit to the community?

For some people this remains a grey area. Debate about whether the definition of volunteering can and should include for-profit entities circles around the nature of involvement of the volunteer in the for-profit entity, the relationship between the volunteer and the for-profit entity, who the primary beneficiary of the volunteering is, and the nature of the benefit, i.e. increasing profit, personal benefit to the volunteer, or benefit to the community.

Key considerations raised in Volunteering Australia’s consultations to delineate where to draw the boundaries of what volunteering is and is not included:

- was the primary purpose community benefit?;
- was it being used primarily to contribute to making profit?;
- did it contravene labour laws?

Diagram 4 illustrates the type of organisations through which volunteering is taking place.

**‘The most difficult for me is the statement that volunteering occurs in not-for-profit organisations only. A lot of volunteering I see is in public and commercial settings’.**

*Interview participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

**‘We need to broaden our mind about this. For example, if a person is in a hospital, whether it is a for-profit or not-for-profit, and is in need of social support, we want to support them. The person can appreciate the volunteer because the volunteer chooses to come in and is not paid. There are things that money can’t buy e.g. like a connection with community or another person’.**

*Interview participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

## 5 Looking Forward

### Diagram 4 – Who Is Involved In Volunteering?



As a point of reference and comparison, the ILO recognises volunteering that is done in all types of institutional settings, provided that it is unpaid, non-compulsory and for others outside one's own household. It does not make a judgment about the profit status of the setting in which it occurs.

**'The definition needs to highlight that it is a two-way thing. It's about what the volunteer gives and what the position offers him/her'.**

*Interview participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

#### 5.3.7 Who Benefits?

Doing something that benefits another, or others, beyond self or family remains a core component of how most people see volunteering.

Notwithstanding this external 'community' benefit, there was considerable discussion about the mutual benefit that is derived from the act of volunteering.

There was also recognition of the complexity of human beings and the diverse motives for volunteering. Secondly, volunteering that meets some of one's own needs does not mean the community cannot and does not benefit at the same time. This broader understanding of benefit captures cultural values of reciprocity, mutuality and communality.

#### 5.3.8 Additional Dimensions

An introductory statement about the pivotal role of volunteering to the development of social capital in Australia, its contribution to social inclusion and to health and well-being was considered essential to the definition of volunteering.

### 5.4 Principles Of Volunteering

A range of amendments to the principles of volunteering was suggested to reflect the points raised about the definition and rights (See Appendix 3).

Different views were expressed about whether the principles ought to underpin the definition or flow from it. Perhaps this is a matter of semantics.

A more challenging perspective presented was whether there is any value in having principles alongside definition and rights. As they currently stand, the principles tend to be aspirational statements. Some were considered repetitions of boundaries already expressed in the definition, thus making them redundant.

The language in which the principles are currently framed was also challenged. It was seen that the principles are framed in negative terms, i.e. what volunteering is not, they are very prescriptive and they reflect underlying assumptions that are questionable.

## 5 Looking Forward

### 5.5 Volunteer Rights

The discussion of rights internationally (Volunteering England 2009) and in Australia is complex.

Unlike paid staff, volunteers are not covered by awards or workplace agreements. Volunteers in Australia do have rights. Some are enshrined in legislation and some could be considered the moral obligations of an organisation involving volunteers.

With some suggested amendments (see Appendix 2), the consultation indicated that the rights promoted by Volunteering Australia are considered appropriate. Words used to describe these rights included 'comprehensive and fair' and 'fundamentally solid'.

To be meaningful, rights also need to be communicated, understood and upheld in practice.

Alongside general agreement that the rights promoted by Volunteering Australia are appropriate were some misgivings about how well rights are communicated to and understood by volunteers.

*'I don't think they are clearly known to volunteers, or society in general... By not having clarity, we are also confusing and not encouraging people to engage with volunteering'.*

The fact that few rights of volunteers are codified in law was identified as a key point of vulnerability in the exercise of rights.

Secondly, where the volunteer has the necessary information about his/her rights, what external mechanisms are available to address concerns or grievances he/she has not been able to have addressed within an organisation?

At the organisational level, the issue of upholding volunteer rights is better addressed when organisations are resourced effectively.

Possible approaches that were suggested for better understanding about and upholding of volunteer rights included:

- A national accreditation process;
- The existing National Standards;
- A commissioner or ombudsman who could act as an independent arbitrator;
- National legislation of volunteer rights;
- Recognitions of the value of volunteer work for society, recognising all citizens and the contexts in which they are working and naming what that means;
- An advocacy role by national and state peak bodies.

Caution was also expressed during the consultation about a rights-based culture leading to the creation and regulation of an 'industry'.

In summary, further discussion and agreement is needed about the purpose and status of volunteer rights, their enforceability, who arbitrates when things go wrong, and how we build the capacity of volunteers and organisations around the discussion and exercise of rights.

### 5.6 Where To From Here?

The purpose of the consultation was not to seek simple answers to the complex questions around the definition, rights and principles of volunteering. We believe that these issues deserve further reflection and extensive discussion.

The following propositions are presented as possible approaches to the definition, principles and rights of volunteers as we move into the second decade since the International Year of Volunteers. They are not statements of policy. The propositions are presented as a way of generating further discussion about a range of options, and ideas and arguments for other options that may be generated.

### 5.7 Propositions To Consider

#### 5.7.1 How We Conceptualise And Define Volunteering

1. Adopt a valid, globally accepted definition, such as the definition developed by the ILO.
2. Take a pluralistic approach to the definition of volunteering. Firstly articulate what volunteering is at the basic level and develop a second level of the definition that describes a spectrum of human activity that helps us to understand the diversity and complexity of volunteering.
3. See volunteering as one of many forms of participation in society and clearly delineate volunteering from other forms of participation, e.g. service learning, and community service.
4. Think about volunteering in the industrial relations context and be conscious of paid and volunteer work.
5. Reframe the element of 'of free will and without coercion' in terms of 'undertaken by choice and without coercion or obligation stipulated by law or contract'.
6. Include volunteering that takes place outside formal settings and organisations in the definition.
7. Reframe 'in designated positions' in terms of 'roles and expectations are articulated clearly and agreed to by everyone involved and affected by the volunteering effort'.

#### Volunteer Rights

As a volunteer you have the right:

- To work in a healthy and safe environment;
- To be interviewed and engaged in accordance with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation;
- To be adequately covered by insurance;
- To be given accurate and truthful information about the organisation for which you are working;
- To be reimbursed of out-of-pocket expenses;
- To be given a copy of the organisation's volunteer policy and any other policy that affects your work;
- Not to fill a position previously held by a paid worker;
- Not to do the work of paid staff during industrial disputes;
- To have a job description and agreed working hours;
- To have access to a grievance procedure;
- To be provided with orientation to the organisation;
- To have your confidential and personal information dealt with in accordance with the principles of the Privacy Act 1988;
- To be provided with sufficient training to do your job.

*Volunteering Australia*

**'Although there are legislative supports for volunteers in certain areas, there are really big gaps'.**

**'I don't think we do have the mechanisms to uphold rights. Things go wrong as part of being people and we need to have that supportive infrastructure'.**

**'For youth-led organisations, these are ideas of what we would want volunteers to have in the right environment, but if they are prescriptive, we might not get buy-in from organisations. It also creates a dynamic between the "haves" and "have-nots" among organisations in terms of their capacity'.**

**'I don't think volunteer rights have improved much at all. However there is more awareness that volunteers do have rights'.**

*Interview and focus groups participants, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011*

## 5 Looking Forward

8. Reframe 'for no payment' in terms of 'for no financial benefit that is gained as a direct result of volunteering'.
9. Delete the reference to 'not-for-profit' and reframe in terms of the purpose of the volunteering effort being 'primarily to serve the community or contribute to community benefit, not the creation of profit for the benefit of private or company interests'.

### 5.7.2 Rights Of Volunteers

1. Review which of the volunteer rights adopted by Volunteering Australia is enshrined in legislation, which is not, and whether legislative change is the best way to ensure the right can be protected.
2. Research and develop possible models for an independent body to hear, investigate and arbitrate breaches of volunteer rights that have not been able to be redressed at their source.
3. Retain the status quo.

There are moves to changes through regulatory means. One thing I would do is to use the new body that is coming out that is regulating organisations could work with volunteering peak bodies and designing mechanisms for when things go wrong.'

Interview participant, Volunteering Australia consultation, 2011



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# 7

## Appendices

### Appendix 1: Consultation Process And Participants

We acknowledge and thank the following people for their contribution.

#### Participants in focus groups and interviews about the definition, rights and principles of volunteering:

- Lynne Dalton, Centre for Volunteering NSW
- Tony Frew, Centre for Volunteering NSW
- Dr Kirsten Holmes, Curtin University
- Leonie Sanderson, Department of Communities, Queensland Government
- Jennie Gough, Federation of Ethnic Communities Council of Australia (FECCA)
- Peter Baynard-Smith, Foundation for Young Australians
- Professor Graham Cuskelly, Griffith University
- Emma Mulvaney, Indigenous Community Volunteers
- Ali Wass, Indigenous Community Volunteers
- Dr Debbie Haski-Leventhal, Macquarie University
- Natalie Howard, NAB
- Andrew Hamilton, Office for Volunteers, SA Government
- Stephen Carter, St Johns Ambulance of Australia
- Associate Professor Melanie Oppenheimer, University of New England
- Annette Maher, Phd candidate, University of New England
- Maureen Caine, Volunteering ACT
- Brendan Lynch, Volunteering Olympics
- Mark Creyton, Volunteering QLD
- Jelenko Dragisic, Volunteering QLD
- Jo Larkin, Volunteering SA & NT
- Evelyn O'Loughlin, Volunteering SA & NT
- Melinda McCleary, Volunteering Tasmania
- Adrienne Picone, Volunteering Tasmania
- Dianne Embry, Volunteering Victoria
- Katherine Koesasi, Volunteering Victoria

- Mara Basanovic, Volunteering WA
- Denise Bertilone, Volunteering WA
- Tracey Gamblin, Volunteering WA
- Jen Wyness, Volunteering WA
- Claire Wynne, Youth Affairs Council of Victoria

#### The draft report was available for public comment for one month. Comments were received from:

- Robert Wagner, Boroondara Volunteer Resource Centre
- Tegan Davies, Camp Quality
- Carla Granozio, Department of Communities, Queensland
- Jason Cummings, Greening Australia Capital Region
- Jo Dunin, Jesuit Social Services
- Associate Professor Stephen Warring, University of Technology Sydney
- Paul Lynch, President, Volunteering Australia
- Maureen Cane, Volunteering ACT
- Katherine Koesasi, Volunteering Victoria
- Maggie Wheeler

### Appendix 2: Comments About Specific Rights

#### To work in a healthy and safe environment (refer various Occupational Health and Safety Acts)

'It's still important to say volunteers have a right to be protected e.g. safe workplace'

#### To be interviewed and engaged in accordance with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation

#### To be adequately covered by insurance

#### To be given accurate and truthful information about the organisation for which you are working

#### To be reimbursed for out of pocket expenses

'Include reimbursed for agreed OPES. The organisation can agree not to reimburse'.

#### To be given a copy of the organisation's volunteer policy and any other policy that affects your work

## 7 Appendices

### **Not to fill a position previously held by a paid workers**

'There are situations where an organisation has been defunded – does that mean the organisation has no right to fill this as voluntary position? I suggest rephrasing this as "Not fill a position for which funding is available for a paid worker". In training sessions, organisations often ask, "How do I know whether this is a paid position or volunteering?" I tell them it's a policy decision of the organisation at a Board level about how they are going to distribute their funds'.

'Suggest rephrasing to "volunteering is not a threat to paid work". It only becomes an issue when for profits don't pay people when they can'.

### **Not to do the work of paid staff during industrial disputes**

#### **To have a job description and agreed working hours**

'People often ask, "how long can I use volunteers to for?" – it may be short and sharp or longer for an ongoing volunteer. The hours of volunteer work are relevant – if you are going to use volunteers for a long time and hours are full-time, then the person has to be incorporated as paid staff'.

'Agreed working hours are highly problematic. There is fluidity even in the training side of it'.

'Organisations aren't good at reviewing the work that needs to be done in the organisation. Job descriptions need to be reviewed as they often don't reflect the work actually being done, i.e. jobs evolve for both paid workers and volunteers'.

#### **To have access to a grievance procedure**

'We have had feedback regarding grievance procedures. A lot of volunteers don't know whether they have a procedure. Maybe that goes back to induction that covers rights'.

#### **To be provided with orientation to the organisation**

#### **To have your confidential and personal information dealt with in accordance with the principles of the Privacy Act 1988**

### **Appendix 3: Comments About Specific Principles**

#### **Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer**

'I'm not sure that volunteering always benefits the volunteer'.

'What is community? We need to try to understand what community is'.

### **Volunteer work is unpaid**

#### **Volunteering is always a matter of choice**

'Yes you have the choice to leave. In a small community people will wear a number of hats – their life revolves around rotating rosters so in effect they struggle with choice'.

'It's important, but not always by choice – sometimes people are pulled in to it by social networks or family'.

#### **Volunteering is not compulsorily undertaken to receive pensions or government allowances**

#### **Volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in activities of their community**

'Open to non-citizens also – need to broaden to reflect contemporary society'.

'There is something lacking in this statement. People feel they are supporting their community to prosper. People get a clear benefit from volunteering – it may be intangible, that they have achieved something, they are part of something important – recognition comes into it for most people. There is a difference between output and outcome – people are into the outcomes. Many people feel "This is something I should do to support my community", so it includes contribution not just participation'.

'Not sure this adds anything meaningful to the principles'.

#### **Volunteering is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs**

'Too prescriptive. Some people volunteer because they have a need, so I suggest changing to "volunteering may be a vehicle".'

#### **Volunteering is an activity performed in the not-for-profit sector only**

'Volunteering is not limited to not-for-profit organisations. Jobseekers are getting into volunteer positions that are within a profit-based organisation in the expectation of future job placement or for the purpose of Australian-based work experience'.

'Volunteering being performed in the not-for-profit sector only is not appropriate and comes back to the discussion we had about the definition. It can happen and possibly will happen more often in for-profits'.

'The main point is that the principles go back to the definition of non-profit. It doesn't mean non-government it means you don't make a profit/surplus and that means it includes state, federal and local government'.

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'Don't support the principle of volunteering being performed in the NFP sector only'.

'Volunteering is not limited to the not-for-profit sector and needs to be reflected in the principles'.

### **Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work**

#### **Volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers**

'I'd like to see some mention of the limited hours so that volunteer don't work 60 hours a week for one organisation. If the job is so demanding and necessary that it is full-time, you have to wonder whether it is a paid job. So, suggest including some general description about limited hours and that volunteer work is generally not full-time work'.

'Examples of grey areas between paid and volunteer work have been around for a long time. It is apparent when government funding comes into play in an organisation'.

'Regarding the statement that volunteering should not replace paid workers, I think that should be a principle but it does happen, particularly as an employment pathway. We have to be mindful of that. Perhaps there could be more recognition of how volunteer work can create opportunities for paid work'.

'Reframe to communicate the key point about not exploiting volunteers'.

### **Volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others**

'Not necessarily'.

### **Volunteering promotes human rights and equality**

#### **Other Comments**

'I suggest including the word "diversity" in the principles'.

'A lot of these principles seem to go back to volunteering in organisations and we need to cover people who volunteer outside organisations'.

'Suggest having principles that encompass the spirit of volunteering rather than prescribing what it is'.

'Query how akin to volunteering these principles really are'.

'The principles make some big assumptions – note that volunteering is not always exclusively motivated by altruism, e.g. a lot of people volunteer to get work'.

'Need fewer principles and more clarity'.

'I would like to see the principles starting with a recognition of the benefits of volunteering as the backbone of Australian society. There needs to be a strong statement at the start about how essential volunteering is to this country in the context of: social inclusion, social participation, services and wellbeing'.



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