

RESPONSE TO ABS INFORMATION PAPER

Census of Population and Housing: ABS Views on Content and Procedures 2006



Contact Details:

Name: Kylee Bates
Organisation: Volunteering Australia
Designation: Deputy CEO
Telephone: 03-9820 4100
Address: Suite 2, Level 3
11 Queens Road
Melbourne VIC 3004
E-mail: kylee@volunteeringaustralia.org

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Question 1:

Does this submission relate to a new topic, change to an existing topic, the deletion of a topic, some other aspect of the census?

This submission relates to a new topic.

Question 2:

What is the name of the topic?

The new topic is that of “unpaid work” as referred to on page 67 of the consultation document.

Question 3:

Define the topic and/or describe modifications you are proposing for the 2006 Census as precisely as possible.

Specifically, we are seeking the inclusion of a question on whether or not the household respondents undertake volunteer work and the frequency of this work.

The definition of volunteer work to be used should be consistent with that used in the Voluntary Work Survey (note: the definition should be reviewed prior to use in the next Voluntary Work Survey to ensure that it remains pertinent).

We accept that the inclusion of a question that captures volunteer data may need to be broader than just volunteer work, however, any question that relates generally to ‘unpaid work’ should also be able to capture specific data relating to volunteer work.

Question 4:

What topic(s) recommended to be included in the 2006 Census do you consider to be of low priority or for other reasons, should be excluded?

To accommodate the inclusion of a question on volunteering, we recommend that the following topics be excluded:

- Question 36 or 37 – it is not clear that both sets of data are essential.
- Question 43 – data on employment and unemployment levels is captured regularly through ABS and this level of data does not seem warranted for Census purposes.

Question 5a

For what specific purposes will the information from your proposed topic be used?

Please provide details of:

- *How specific studies or programs rely on this information*
- *Uses in policy-making, long-term planning, social and economic applications*

Indicate as clearly as possible the benefits that flow from the data.

Volunteering Australia has consulted with a number of academic researchers and our Network of state/territory volunteering centers and volunteer resource centres in order to identify the need for Census data on volunteering.

The ABS *Voluntary Work Survey 2000* shows that 4.4 million Australians (32% of the adult population) volunteer for not-for-profit organisations and has been calculated as being worth \$42 billion to the Australian economy (Ironmonger, 2000). Due to events such as the Sydney Olympics, the International Year of Volunteers 2001 and natural disasters such as bushfires, community focus on volunteering as an important activity has also increased.

These figures clearly demonstrate the nationally significant role that volunteering has in the economic, social and cultural life of the community and that it is integral to us as a society that values people and social stability. Without detailed information on the voluntary and unpaid work sectors our all social, economic and planning decisions do not fully take account of the important role that volunteering plays in society and social policy decisions will continue to focus principally on labour market contributions.

Indeed, government and academic interest in the critical role that volunteering plays in building social capital and community connectedness has expanded significantly. Increasingly, Government is looking to explore the relationships that exist between individuals' levels of economic *and* social participation. In this context, information on volunteering is as critical as the labour market data that is obtained through the census. The ABS is itself undertaking a considerable amount of work in the area of measuring social capital

In the 2001 Census, 12 separate questions were dedicated to identifying the respondents' labour market status while there were no questions aimed at identifying the respondents' level of social participation. Given the direction of Government policy (across all levels of Government) to give greater acknowledgement to the role that social participation plays in community and individual well-being (including increased levels of economic participation) this is a glaring omission from the Census.

Little concrete data is available about volunteering rates within and between individual areas and small area data in this area is important for both program and policy planning purposes.

Data on volunteering would be compared to other data such as:

- Labour force information – to consider the relationship between economic and social forms of participation across geographic areas and between communities.
- Socio-economic status (or ‘health’) of communities – as this is a key area of interest in identifying differences in levels of volunteering between communities.
- ‘Age’ of communities (for example, high population of young people / ageing population) -as this is an indicator whether volunteer base is likely to increase or decline over time.
- Rate of growth of communities (for example, new suburb) as this is indicative of the potential volunteer base and the need for services that could be provided by volunteers.

Census collection of volunteer data would enable:

- More accurate assessment of funding needs with respect to volunteer programs – a critical factor for government and social planners when determining volunteer infrastructure needs and service delivery strategies. Leading up to, and since, the International Year of Volunteers 2001 additional government funds have been targeted specifically at increasing and enhancing individuals’ levels of volunteering. Specific Commonwealth programs include the Voluntary Work Initiative, Volunteer Management Program, Stronger Families and Communities and Australians Working Together. However, some state and local Governments have also embarked on programs to facilitate greater volunteer involvement;
- Assessment of volunteer infrastructure needs in terms of new and outreach volunteer resource center services for the Commonwealth Voluntary Work Initiative, Australians Working Together and Volunteer Management Programs.
- Identification of priority funding areas, particularly when comparisons are made between metropolitan and rural and regional communities;
- Capture of volunteering information for groups not well represented in other ABS volunteer data, for example, individuals from indigenous or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds;

- Examination of volunteering rates across and within households to determine the existence of particular volunteering relationships – important for exploring issues associated with potential predictors of volunteering behaviour and health and well-being of individuals;
- Volunteer organisations to plan delivery of volunteer services using a reliable data source on both the number of existing volunteers and the number of potential ‘untapped’ volunteers located in particular geographic areas and communities;
- The identification of areas in which volunteer or volunteer organisation support services or funding is needed to facilitate and increase the levels of volunteer involvement and community engagement; and
- High growth areas to determine if the rate of volunteering in those areas is keeping pace with population growth and plan appropriate strategies for facilitating volunteer involvement if needed.

In addition, reliable data on volunteering figures at both the national and small area levels would assist in quantifying the economic value of volunteering within communities.

Question 5b

What output from the census would be required to support the uses you have described?

The output required from the Census to support these uses would be both publicly available tabulated data by geographic area, with the ability for researchers and policy-makers to access the Confidential Unit Record Files.

Question 6:

Are you aware of any classification changes that would be required if this particular topic were included?

No.

Question 7:

How, and with what other topic(s), will the information provided from the proposed topic be cross-classified?

Data obtained on volunteer work would be cross-classified against key demographic data such as age, gender, ethnicity, language spoken, education, labour-force status and income level as it is the differences between areas that will be key in ensuring the data’s usefulness.

Question 8:

At what geographical level (eg: collection district, statistical local area etc) do you require this information to be tabulated?

The data would need to be tabulated by statistical local area. While the smaller collection district data may be useful in many cases, the low number of dwellings, and therefore low number of respondents, in some areas presents an increased risk that the data in many areas cannot be provided at the collection district due to privacy considerations.

Question 9:

Where information on this topic is available from other sources, indicate in what ways these sources are inadequate for your requirements.

While both the Voluntary Work Survey and the Time Use Survey provide information about the overall levels of volunteer work, including the number of hours and types of organisations, it is inadequate for identifying the true extent of volunteering that takes place in small communities.

In many rural and regional communities volunteering is seen as a crucial factor in determining community survival. Knowledge of the number of volunteers located in particular geographic areas will assist in future planning of community sector services.

Question 10:

What would be the consequences for your organisation (or other users) if your submission for the 2006 Census is not successful?

In particular:

- *What activities could not take place or would be significantly reduced or degraded in quality?*
- *Would any additional costs be incurred by your organisation to collect substitute data? If so, please indicate the type of collection envisaged and its cost.*

Planning future service delivery strategies and development of new volunteer centres is restricted as high quality information is not available that will assist in determining service needs.

Both the volunteer sector and Government must rely on compilation of data from a range of sources that when drawn together may not provide an accurate picture of community requirements. The time and cost of sourcing and compiling this data can be significant.

Question 11:

Not applicable.