



Considerations for the future of the Volunteer Management Activity:
Submission to DSS consultation

April 2020

Considerations for the future of the Volunteer Management Activity

Introduction

This submission is provided by Volunteering Australia in response to the Discussion Paper “Considerations for the future of the Volunteer Management Activity” released by the Department of Social Services (DSS) on 13 February 2020.

This submission provides our response to the proposed aims and principles of redesign and the specific discussion questions.

About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia’s vision is to promote strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

Response to proposed aims and principles of redesign

The proposed aim of the redesigned VMA is “to encourage and support Volunteer Involving Organisations to support volunteers to participate in volunteering opportunities. Volunteer Management involves the delivery of volunteering support services to people who lead and manage volunteers, such as improving access to volunteering information, training, resources and building effective volunteering practices”.

The key principles of redesign are:

1. Constitutional validity
2. Efficiency of service delivery and effective use of resources
3. Reduced duplication of cross jurisdictional efforts and funding
4. Best value for funding available

Volunteering Australia is supportive of the proposed aims and principles of redesign for the VMA and supports the focus on capacity-building across the sector.

Responses to specific discussion questions

The first set of questions is:

- *Within the current funding envelope (approximately \$18.8 million, excluding GST, over three and a half years), what do you think should be the Australian Government’s focus in volunteer management?*
- *Is this focus different to state and territory governments?*

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- *How could the Australian Government work across all levels of government to align efforts, ensure consistency, and minimise the risk of duplication in effort and funding to better support volunteer management in Australia?*

Volunteering Australia has previously¹ called upon the Federal Government to co-design a National Volunteering Statement with the volunteering sector. A whole-of-government Volunteering Statement is a clear step towards a more comprehensive and strategic approach to supporting the volunteer workforce. By showing strong leadership and articulating a vision for the volunteering sector, a Volunteering Statement will help guide departmental action and investments over the long term.

We have proposed that a National Volunteering Statement would include:

- Formal recognition of the enormous contribution that volunteers make to our organisations, communities, economies and government programs. This should incorporate whole-of-government support (including from other government Ministers and Departments) for volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations that deliver services and programs, promoting greater consistency and alignment between government departments.
- The principles underlying the Government's commitment to support and enable the volunteering sector.
- A commitment to ensuring the long-term sustainability of the volunteering workforce and supporting the sector through major transitions (such as sector reforms led by government, as in the aged care and disability sectors, or demographic shifts and the changing nature of work).

The idea canvassed in the VMA Discussion Paper to establish A National Volunteer Management Statement, which outlines strategic objectives for volunteer management with a set of key action items across Australian and State and Territory Governments, would be welcome but difficult to achieve in a meaningful way without the wider consideration of the role of volunteers and their contribution (which would be included in a broader National Volunteering Statement).

Greater leadership and investment are needed from the Federal Government in relation to volunteering. Specific types of volunteer management, such as emergency volunteering, need to be considered within this broader framework.

Further consideration is needed to the question of how the focus of the Federal Governments role should be different to state and territory governments, and this needs to be undertaken in collaboration with the different governments. However, the suggested Federal focus on capacity building across the sector and the nation is appropriate.

The second set of questions is:

¹ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy/submissions/#85-submissions-2019>

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- *On what basis could the Australian Government select a limited number of providers?*
- *How could selected providers ensure national coverage and leverage the capability of the sector, including Volunteer Involving Organisations?*

The proposed shift to capacity-building and the revised aim of VMA should shape the selection of providers. This means investing in those organisations, which includes the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies, which are able to contribute to capacity development (through volunteer management accreditation and training), training materials and other resources, and the promotion of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement.

Alongside this, investment in key technology platforms, such as VIKTOR and VIRA, is imperative. This is considered further below.

The third set of questions is:

- *How could the Australian Government ensure the accessibility of volunteering support services, for example, for people with disability or culturally and linguistically diverse Australians, through an online approach?*
- *How could an online volunteer management service delivery model operate?*
- *Given that VIKTOR is used widely across the sector, how could VIKTOR (or an alternative database) be adapted to reflect the changing needs of the sector? Is VIKTOR an appropriate option to support an online approach? What would be the role of VIRA?*

A well-resourced and comprehensive on-line approach should help improve accessibility across the population. For example, this means ensuring that on-line resources are accessible to and focused on the needs of different groups.

A sustained focus on diversity and inclusion of volunteers is needed. This involves overcoming a wide range of individual and structural barriers, including the challenges of internet coverage in regional and remote areas. Place-based volunteer centres will still be needed.

Volunteering Australia is establishing an online Volunteering Resource Hub ('Resource Hub') that will house a collection of current best practice resources, research and information for use by Volunteer Involving Organisations, Volunteering Support Services, policy makers, researchers and other stakeholders with an interest in volunteering and volunteer management.

The Volunteering Resource Hub will be a centralised repository of best practice resources, which will assist to promote nationally consistent, best practice in volunteering. The Resource Hub is not designed to duplicate information already available, but rather bring together a suite of resources that are aligned with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement to be used by the volunteering sector. Following its launch this year, additional funding for ongoing maintenance and improvements will ensure the volunteering sector leverages the maximum benefits from the Resource Hub. Volunteering Australia is well placed to continue to lead, oversee and manage the Resource Hub.

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It will also be important to draw on wider expertise in supporting volunteer management. For example, Justice Connect's Not-for-profit Law service is good way to provide support in relation to legal issues that arise across Volunteer Support Services and Volunteer Involving Organisations.

VIKTOR and VIRA are the preferred platforms across the volunteering network. As with all technological platforms, both require ongoing investment to ensure they remain up to the task. As the sector evolves and grows, enhancements are required to ensure functionality is up to date with user expectations. In addition, ongoing maintenance is required to remain relevant and useful to users.

The fourth set of questions is:

- *How could the Australian Government better measure the outcomes and successes of a future VMA program?*
- *What could be the key short-term (up to 12 months), medium-term (12 months to 5 years) and long-term (over 5 years) indicators of success?*

A guiding principle of the evaluation of the revised VMA should be that oversight and reporting is commensurate with the level of investment. Further development is needed to determine what the short-term, medium-term and long-term indicators of success should be. Success indicators should be closely aligned with the new aims of VMA. The evaluation framework should be co-designed with the sector, drawing on best practice in evaluating social outcomes.

Volunteering Australia is well placed to lead the evaluation development of the revised VMA.

Summary and next steps

In summary, Volunteering Australia:

- Supports the revised aim for the VMA and of the key principles for redesign, and that the Commonwealth Government's focus in volunteer management should be on capacity-building.
- Recommends that a whole-of-government National Volunteering Statement is needed, which considers volunteer management in the wider context of volunteer recognition and the sustainability of the volunteer workforce
- Recommends sustained investment in the technology platforms that support volunteering and volunteer management
- Recommends sustained investment in the Volunteering Resources Hub to ensure the volunteering sector leverages the maximum benefits from the Hub.
- Recommends that Volunteering Australia should lead the development of the Evaluation Framework for the new VMA and its success indicators.
- Supports the recommendation to co-design the new VMA program with the volunteering sectors as the details are developed and welcomes further engagement with the Department of Social Services in the coming months

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Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.



Ms Adrienne Picone
Chief Executive Officer

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