



Submission to the Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business inquiry

April 2021

Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians

Overview

- Indigenous Australians face multiple barriers to economic participation and a multi-faceted approach is needed to advance their economic inclusion. Volunteering can help provide a pathway to paid employment and has a role in progressing Indigenous economic inclusion.
- The current redesign of the Australian Government’s Volunteer Management Activity (VMA)¹ includes a new focus on working with Indigenous Australians to empower their further participation in volunteering. As the National and State and Territory peak volunteering bodies, we are working closely with the Australian Government to progress this objective.
- A foundational consideration is to recognise and better understand the nature of ‘volunteering’ amongst Indigenous Australians. The breadth and value of both ‘formal’ and ‘informal’ volunteering² activity needs to be acknowledged. Barriers to formal volunteering need to be better understood and strategies developed with Indigenous Australians to overcome these barriers.

Introduction

About the inquiry

The Minister for Indigenous Australians, the Hon Ken Wyatt MP, has asked the Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs³ to inquire into and report on opportunities for employment and economic development for Indigenous Australians.

About this submission

We welcome the opportunity to provide a submission to the inquiry. This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies.

Our contribution

Volunteering and economic inclusion

Indigenous Australians face multiple barriers to economic inclusion, ranging from racism and prejudice through to poorer educational and health outcomes. This means that improving opportunities for employment and economic development for Indigenous Australians will require a multi-faceted strategy.

¹ [Volunteer Management Activity Summary | Department of Social Services, Australian Government \(dss.gov.au\)](https://www.dss.gov.au)

² ‘Formal’ volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations. ‘Informal’ volunteering takes place outside of an organisational context.

³ [Pathways and Participation Opportunities for Indigenous Australians in Employment and Business – Parliament of Australia \(aph.gov.au\)](https://www.aph.gov.au)

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Volunteering can form part of an economic inclusion strategy. Research evidence⁴ demonstrates that volunteering can act as a pathway to paid employment, through enabling volunteers to develop skills, experience and confidence and signalling to employers that these capabilities can be translated into paid work.

Volunteering by Indigenous peoples

However, it is important to appreciate that many Indigenous people and communities perceive volunteering differently to non-Indigenous people⁵. Volunteering is often more fluid, local and responsive to community needs, rather than structured, targeted and regular.

Indigenous Australians also face structural disadvantages that have an impact on their ability to participate in 'formal' volunteering (volunteering through an organisation). Mainstream volunteering programs are typically not tailored for specific needs and aspirations that Indigenous people might have.

What more can be done

Volunteering Australia and the State and Territory peak volunteering bodies are seeking to redress these barriers to volunteering through our policy and advocacy work and through working with volunteer involving organisation to support the adoption of volunteering practices that are culturally aware and safe for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

In the current redesign of the Volunteer Management Activity⁶, we are working with the Australian Government to build the capacity of volunteer involving organisations to break down barriers for 'priority groups', which includes Indigenous Australians.

Conclusion

Given the breadth of barriers that Indigenous Australians face to economic inclusion, a multi-faceted strategy is needed which includes addressing structural disadvantages.

Volunteering activity can provide a pathway to paid employment and has a role to play in progressing employment and economic inclusion. However, further effort is needed to open up more volunteering opportunities to Indigenous Australians. We will continue to work with the Australian Government on the redesign of the Volunteer Management Activity and with Indigenous Australians to breakdown barriers to their engagement in volunteering activity.

⁴ See for example,

https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf

⁵ See research in https://www.communitybusinesspartnership.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/giving_and_volunteering_in_cald_and_indigenous_communities.pdf

⁶ <https://www.dss.gov.au/communities-and-vulnerable-people-programs-services-volunteer-management/volunteer-management-activity-summary>

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Annex: Terms of Reference

The House Standing Committee on Indigenous Affairs will inquire into and report on opportunities for employment and economic development for Indigenous Australians.

The Inquiry will identify existing and future pathways for employment and the opportunities for Indigenous business enterprises. It will also identify barriers that may impede employment and business opportunities for Indigenous Australians.

The scope of the Inquiry includes, but is not limited to:

- Employment pathways available to Indigenous Australians;
- Barriers to employment for Indigenous Australians, including access to employment and training;
- Government employment programs and opportunities to build upon effective initiatives;
- Identify gaps and opportunities in the workforce and future growth sectors that could result in employment and enterprise options for Indigenous Australians;
- The experience of successful enterprises initiated and owned by Indigenous Australians; and
- The involvement of Government departments and agencies in facilitating business opportunities for Indigenous Australians.

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Authorisation

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



Mr Mark Pearce
Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This position statement has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.



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

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