



United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)
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Volunteering Australia Contacts

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About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering. We work to advance volunteering in the Australian community.

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

We work collectively with the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies to deliver national, state/territory and local volunteering programs and initiatives in accordance with the Government's priorities.

As the primary link between the volunteering sector and federal government, Volunteering Australia provides feedback into key decision making. All feedback is informed by research, evidence and consultation with the volunteering sector.

Introduction

Volunteering Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee on the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)*.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) build on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), incorporating the UN's wider sustainable development agenda. The agenda was established following consultation with both developed and developing nations, with the SDGs 2030 Agenda placing a greater responsibility on developed nations to assist vulnerable countries to achieve the targets of the SDGs. Central to the SDG commitment is that no one should be left behind.ⁱ

Volunteers are indispensable to achieving the goals of the SDGs, and Volunteering Australia is committed to advancing the goals. In Australia, volunteering is at the centre of Australia's national identity, with 5.8 million Australians or 31 per cent of the population engaging in volunteering, making an estimated annual economic and social contribution of \$290 billion.ⁱⁱⁱⁱ

The 2030 Agenda recognises that volunteers are "essential stakeholders to achieving and supporting all 17 SDGs. Volunteers effectively facilitate all Sustainable Development Goals by raising awareness, inspiring or engaging in grassroots efforts."^{iv}

In this submission Volunteering Australia outlines the cause, effect and awareness of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in Australia, the need for an integrated approach to the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, and the essential role of volunteering to achieve the goals.

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Volunteering Australia Response

The understanding and awareness of the SDG across the Australian Government and in the wider Australian community

The 2030 Agenda and the SDGs provide a universal framework for sustainable development, and Australia, along with 192 other countries have committed to them. However, the 2017 Global SDG Index ranked Australia 26th in global ranking on SDG performance, dropping 6 places from 20th in 2016.^v In our view, this is reflective of the overall lack of awareness, understanding and integration of the SDGs domestically.

Volunteering Australia highlights that many organisations, members of the community and government programs are doing some remarkable work, but there is a lack of understanding on how to make existing programs and frameworks scalable to the goals. There is a need to “help localise the agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable actions.”^{vi}

Additional awareness of the 2030 Agenda presents an opportunity toward successful implementation and outcomes. In Australia, volunteering extends across all sectors in society including the arts, education, emergency services, sports, environment, health, aged care and disability, community welfare, the private sector, academia and other vital community programs. Volunteering Australia identifies that for Australia’s (almost) 6 million active formal volunteers, who are engaged across diverse sectors around the country, greater understanding on the purpose and importance of the goals is necessary.

This was highlighted at the 2017 cross-sector forum on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (facilitated by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)), where there was overwhelming consensus from civil society representatives and the private sector of a lack of awareness and understanding of the goals, their purpose, strength, and the opportunities they present in the wider Australian community. While the Forum provided a good opportunity to contribute feedback to Australia’s first VNR, there was agreement that not enough emphasis has been placed on awareness raising of the SDGs to-date.

Volunteering Australia also emphasises that despite Australia’s Voluntary National Review (VNR) focusing on Australia achieving the 2030 agenda, and how the SDGs will be integrated and implemented domestically, there has been limited emphasis on *domestic* awareness raising, engagement on the SDGs at a grassroots level, and promotions to-date.

However, there have been opportunities to collaborate, synthesise, engage and discuss additional opportunities for awareness raising with sector-partners. The Australian SDGs Summit, co-convened by the Global Compact Network Australia, UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network, Australian Council for International Development and Australian Council for Social Service, provided a constructive opportunity to showcase the range of activities being undertaken by stakeholders to the SDGs, highlighting the significance of Australian engagement with the 2030 Agenda.

Volunteering Australia stresses that the volunteering experience has the potential to transform and impact the volunteer as much as the people they work for, allowing volunteers to also become active advocates of the goals. This was reiterated by Motivation Australia Development Organisation, who highlighted that “not only do our volunteers become direct contributors to development projects, they also often become advocates for inclusive and sustainable development and in turn, increase progress toward the SDGs.”^{vii}

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The potential costs, benefits and opportunities for Australia in the domestic implementation of the SDG

There are a number of costs, benefits and opportunities associated with the domestic implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. Volunteering Australia recommends a national marketing and promotions strategy on the 2030 Agenda, to provide a nationally consistent approach to awareness raising of the goals and the opportunities they present. The Strategy should seek to show the cross-sector nature and interconnectedness of the goals, to strengthen their implementation across the community.

Volunteers encompass 2.97 million members of the charitable sector workforce, compared to one million paid staff members.^{viii} Volunteering Australia stresses that supporting resources, tools and promotional material should be produced to assist organisations to promote and implement the SDGs at a grassroots level. Education and training material, webinars and online resources should also be developed to assist with the domestic implementation of the SDGs. It is vital that any education, training and resource material convey the interconnectedness of the goals and support an understanding that the goals present an opportunity to align existing work, business plans and programs with the goals, rather than encouraging the reinvention of existing material.

In fact, Volunteering Australia is currently in the process of producing a guide to highlight the important role that volunteering can make toward the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. The Guide will provide practical guidelines for how to use volunteerism as a means of implementation for the SDGs at the local, national and global level. The guide will provide a real-world direction on how Volunteer Involving Organisations can accelerate their contributions, as well as measure and record their progress against the goals. It will also allow organisations to use their work against the goals as leverage for additional support and more diverse volunteer recruitment.

Volunteering Australia also recommends the development of a research agenda to explore the monitoring and measurement of the goals. Measurement to-date has focused on the implementation of the 2030 agenda, rather than on outcomes. There is significant value in measuring the impact and outcomes following the implementation of the 2030 agenda. It is important that we draw on lessons learned from recent approaches for impact and evaluation.^{ix}

Better-quality data collection will also enhance the monitoring and measurement of programs and activities against the SDGs and support performance indicators. At the recent Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development (APFSD), the Australian delegate to the Forum discussed ways in which Australia can strengthen the implementation of the 2030 Agenda through the lens of the Voluntary National Reviews. The Australian delegate reiterated that a lack of reliable data for all SDG indicators was a hindrance to the capacity of monitoring and reporting on the implementation of the SDGs. A suggestion was to customise the indicators to country needs and capacities rather than having a broad monitoring and evaluation process on reporting (this would include at the grassroots level). Volunteering Australia recommends that there is an investment in data collection and reporting on all SDG indicators.

What governance structures and accountability measures are required at the national, state and local levels of government to ensure an integrated approach to implementing the SDG that is both meaningful and achieves real outcomes

At present, primary responsibility for the SDGs is housed by the DFAT. SDG 17 encourages a partnership approach to the development and implementation of the SDGs. Given this, a coordinated approach is

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required at Federal, State/Territory, and local levels of Government to ensure an integrated approach to the implementation of the SDGs. In addition, it is essential that there is a cross-sector, partnership approach to implementing the SDGs to achieve tangible outcomes. This would be between civil society, the private sector, government, multilateral institutions, academia and the wider Australian community. The recent Australian SDGs Summit provided a significant moment that brought together leading decision makers, academics and policy leaders from across the sectors to explore the development, awareness and implementation of the SDGs in Australia.

Volunteering Australia highlights that while primary responsibility lies with the DFAT, there is a fragmented approach on delivering on each SDG, which is evident through separate departmental responsibility and accountability allocated for each of the goals. The intersections of each goal require interventions in thinking to move beyond agency-centric views, and a transformation of departmental silos. The allocation of individual departmental responsibility and accountability of the goals impedes efforts to interpret them in a transformative and interconnected way. Many federal government departments are working across multiple goals, in the same way that state government portfolios, and local governments are addressing more than one goal. This singular view obstructs the process toward implementation, measurement and monitoring.

Volunteering Australia also outlines that with an activity such as volunteering, that extends across all 17 SDGs, it has been complex to find a coordinated approach on the SDGs by all levels of government. However, it has been promising to see that there is recognition that SDGs are a shared agenda by the DFAT, and we have appreciated liaising with them as the sole point of contact on the 2030 Agenda.

Volunteering Australia emphasises that accountability measures at all levels of Government and within funding structures is largely absent, with no reporting obligations on the goals to primary funders, mandatory reporting and linkages with existing workplans, activities or programs. It is vital that local, State/Territory and Federal Governments work together to update reporting processes across jurisdictions and align existing processes to include the 2030 Agenda.

In Australia, volunteering doesn't just represent one sector or organisation, but extends to all areas across society, and all government portfolios. It is critical to the delivery of the Australian Government's priorities of building strong and resilient communities, by encouraging economic participation, mitigating isolation and loneliness, and increasing social inclusion, community resilience, participation and social cohesion. Given that volunteering is a diverse, cross-sector activity, it is vital that there is an integrated approach to the monitoring, reporting and implementation of the SDGs so that Australia can achieve meaningful outcomes.

The volunteering sector is largely built on those who give their "time willingly."^x It is vital that more is done to reach those volunteers that are realising the goals outside of organisations and formal programs and build linkages, monitor them, measure the outcomes and capture the data.

How can performance against the SDG be monitored and communicated in a way that engages government, businesses and the public, and allows effective review of Australia's performance by civil society

An integrated approach is required to adequately monitor and measure performance against the goals. This is to reflect that most activities cut across more than one goal. The best way to measure the goals is to view them in terms of how individuals are engaging with them on a day-to-day basis.

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Volunteering can be used as an effective case study to demonstrate this. For example, the Australian Red Cross Migration Support Program Women's group meets monthly to provide a social avenue for women who are seeking asylum. The women's group is entirely volunteer run, and has a powerful impact on the health and wellbeing of the women. Because of the program, many participants have increased their confidence, built skills, participate in the local economy, engaged in further training or employment, and found a passion for volunteering. This program extends across SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 8 (decent work and economic growth).^{xi}

Another example is the work that Volunteering Australia is undertaking on SDG 17 - partnerships for the goals. As the national peak body for volunteering in Australia, we are actively engaged in raising awareness of the goals, collaborating with the State/Territory peak bodies, our sector partners, and developing the resource guide. By doing so, this strengthens the implementation of all the goals. Volunteering Australia will continue to work collaboratively with the Australian Government on the implementation of the SDGs.

The SDGs also provide an opportunity to monitor the performance of Australian volunteering programs domestically and internationally. The multi-stakeholder collaborative partnership between the community of Oodnadatta, Volunteering SA&NT, its Aboriginal Reference Group, Australian Volunteers International (AVI), philanthropic donors, and State and Federal Governments demonstrates a successful community-based program across a number of indicators. This Aboriginal youth-led volunteer program has improved the literacy in school children, developed cultural competency, increased the confidence and skills of volunteers, and allowed for enhanced community ownership and partnership.^{xii}

To measure volunteering and the subsequent performance, there must also be measurement of the systems in place that support it, the social return on investment, social impact, social capital, the number of volunteers engaged, and how it is reflected within the goals. However, at present there is limited data being captured on volunteering in Australia, and this has been reflected in the literature.

Examples of best practice in how other countries are implementing the SDG from which Australia could learn

The High Level Political Forum (HLPF) was established by the UN General Assembly Resolution in 2013, and has the central role in overseeing follow-up and review of the Sustainable Development Goals at the global level. Every year, countries are invited to present on developmental progress.

Among the 44 Member States that submitted their Reviews at the HLPF2017, 17 countries highlighted the contribution of volunteering in their Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs). Denmark, Jordan, Cyprus, Portugal, and Malaysia cited volunteering in their reports as a means of implementation for the 2030 Agenda, with a key element being youth volunteering to enhance participation and social inclusion.^{xiii} Costa Rica highlighted corporate volunteerism as one of the means to achieve SDG 12 on sustainable consumption and production, while Belgium noted that sending volunteers abroad can facilitate knowledge and exchange.^{xiv}

The 2030 Agenda recognises volunteerism for both its crosscutting and innovative role in encouraging new and constructive interactions between government and citizens.^{xv} In fact, the UN Secretary-General summarised in his Synthesis Report on the post-2015 Agenda, *The Road to Dignity by 2030*:

As we seek to build capacities and to help the new agenda to take root, volunteerism can be another powerful and cross-cutting means of implementation. Volunteerism can help to expand and mobilize constituencies, and to engage people in national planning and implementation for the Sustainable

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Development Goals. And volunteer groups can help to localize the new agenda by providing new spaces of interaction between governments and people for concrete and scalable actions.^{xvi}

Volunteerism strengthens civic engagement, safeguards social inclusion, deepens solidarity and solidifies ownership of development results.^{xvii}

The UN General Assembly also acknowledged in its Plan of Action for 2016-2030 that volunteering must be integrated in “peace and development policies and programmes through a strategic and collective long-term approach that is consistent with the efforts to implement the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda.”^{xviii} The General Assembly recognised UN Volunteers as the appropriate UN entity to support the Plan of Actions implementation.

Volunteering Australia emphasises that with volunteerism so central to achieving the SDGs, Australia has a crucial opportunity to engage volunteers both domestically and regionally (internationally) to implement the goals and achieve tangible outcomes. As the national peak body, Volunteering Australia can play a central role in all conversations relating to the implementation of the SDGs in Australia. The Australian volunteering sector is made up of a network of relationships between Volunteering Australia, State and Territory peak bodies, volunteers, Volunteer Involving Organisations, and Volunteering Support Services, all working for the collective viability and recognition of volunteering in Australia. It is integral to engage the voices of volunteering, who are well recognised as the indispensable group to practically contribute to the implementation of the goals.

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Recommendations

- Volunteering Australia recommends a national marketing and promotions strategy on the 2030 Agenda, to raise awareness of the goals and the opportunities they present. The Strategy should show the cross-sector nature and interconnectedness of the goals, to strengthen their implementation across the community.
- Supporting resources, tools and promotional material to assist organisations with the promotion and implementation of the goals.
- Education and training material, webinars and online resources should also be developed to assist with the domestic implementation of the SDGs.
- A research agenda to explore the monitoring and measurement of the goals.
- Measurement of the impact and outcomes, following the implementation of the 2030 Agenda.
- Investment in data collection and reporting on SDG indicators.
- A cross-sector, partnership approach to implementing the SDGs to achieve tangible outcomes.
- Accountability measures, including reporting obligations, at all levels of Government and within funding structures.
- An integrated approach to monitoring, reporting and implementation of the SDGs and volunteering.
- The Government continue to work in partnership with Volunteering Australia on the implementation of the SDGs.

Conclusion

Volunteering Australia thanks the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee for the opportunity to provide a response on the Inquiry into the *United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG)*.

Volunteering Australia stresses that volunteering is fundamental to achieving the 2030 Agenda. As a key stakeholder, the volunteering sector will continue to work collaboratively with the Australian Government to achieve the goals. We identify that to achieve success, it is vital that there is greater awareness in the Australian community on the 2030 Agenda, and additional support to promote, implement and monitor the goals.

Volunteering Australia would welcome further opportunity to consult or expand on any of the points raised in this submission.

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Authorisation

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



Ms Adrienne Picone

Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

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

Glossary

VA	Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering in Australia. It works collectively with the peaks to deliver national, state and local volunteering programs and initiatives.
VIO	Volunteer Involving Organisations are organisations that engage volunteers as part of their workforce.
VSS	Volunteering Support Services (also known as Volunteer Resource Centres or Volunteer Support Organisations) provide place-based volunteer support services to volunteers and VIOs in their locality.

ⁱ United Nations (2018), The Sustainable Development Agenda, <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/development-agenda/>

ⁱⁱ Flinders University (31 October 2014) 'Volunteering worth \$290 billion a year', <https://indaily.com.au/news/2014/10/31/volunteering-worth-290-billion-year/>.

ⁱⁱⁱ Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) 'General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014', available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0>.

^{iv} UNVolunteers (2018), Volunteerism and the Global Goals, <https://www.unv.org/volunteerism/volunteerism-and-global-goals>

^v SDG Index (2017), SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2017, Global Responsibilities, International spillovers in achieving the goals, <http://sdgindex.org/assets/files/2017/2017-SDG-Index-and-Dashboards-Report--regions.pdf>

^{vi} Devereux, Peter; Paull, Megan; Hawkes, Martine and Georgeou, Nichole (2017), Volunteering and the UN sustainable development goals: Finding common ground between national and international volunteering

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agendas, Third Sector Review, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2017: 209-234,

<https://search.informit.com.au/documentSummary;dn=813141309467783;res=IELHS>

^{vii} Motivation Australia Development Organisation inc (2018), Case Study for VNR, Volunteer's contributions to SDGs

^{viii} ACNC (2017), Australian Charities Report 2016, <http://australiancharities.acnc.gov.au/>

^{ix} Japan IVCO discussion paper

^x Volunteering Australia (2015) 'Definition of Volunteering', <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy-andbestpractise/definition-of-volunteering/>

^{xi} Australian Red Cross (2018), Case study for VNR, Red Cross Migration Support Program

^{xii} Volunteering SA&NT (2018), Case study for VNR, Aboriginal Volunteer Program

^{xiii} United Nations Volunteers (2018), State of the World's Volunteerism 2018, <https://www.unv.org/swvr>

^{xiv} United Nations Volunteers (2018), State of the World's Volunteerism 2018, <https://www.unv.org/swvr>

^{xv} United Nations General Assembly (2014). The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet: synthesis report of the Secretary General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. New York, United Nations: 34,

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/post2015/synthesisreport>,

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/700&Lang=E

^{xvi} UNVolunteers (2018), Volunteerism and the Global Goals, <https://www.unv.org/volunteerism/volunteerism-and-global-goals>

^{xvii} United Nations General Assembly (2014). The road to dignity by 2030: ending poverty, transforming all lives and protecting the planet: synthesis report of the Secretary General on the post-2015 sustainable development agenda. New York, United Nations: 34,

<https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/majorgroups/post2015/synthesisreport>,

http://www.un.org/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/69/700&Lang=E

^{xviii} UNVolunteers (2018), Volunteerism and the Global Goals, <https://www.unv.org/volunteerism/volunteerism-and-global-goals>