

Introduction

Volunteering Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Treasury as they prepare the 2019-20 Federal Budget.

Volunteering is at the centre of Australia's national identity, with 31 per cent of the population engaging in formal volunteering activities and programs.ⁱ Research demonstrates that volunteering yields a 450 per cent return for every dollar invested.ⁱⁱ Nationally this is an estimated annual economic and social contribution of \$290 billion.ⁱⁱⁱ

Volunteering doesn't just represent one sector or organisation, it extends across all areas of society. From the arts, education, emergency services, sports and environment to health, community welfare, aged care and disability; volunteering has woven itself into the fabric of everyday life, and Australian society is increasingly dependent on volunteering activities and programs.

Volunteering Australia defines volunteering as "time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain." While volunteers donate their time willingly, their contribution is not free.^{iv} There are operational costs associated with delivering volunteering programs and this requires resource allocation, consideration of volunteering in policymaking, grants and funding, and investment. There is also little understanding of the critical role undertaken by managers of volunteers in the recruitment, induction, training, support and management of volunteers, and this expertise requires investment.

While we acknowledge the Government's existing contributions to the sector, Volunteering Australia highlights the Federal Government needs to support the investment of volunteering in all areas of policy, programming and service delivery. This is critical to assist Volunteer Involving Organisations, Volunteering Support Services, and volunteers, to continue to engage effectively and meaningfully in all areas of Australian society.

In this submission Volunteering Australia identifies ways in which the Government can invest in the volunteering sector, to provide security for the sector and grow a culture of giving in Australia.

Summary of Proposed Budget Measures

The proposals put forward by Volunteering Australia in this Budget submission are the result of ongoing consultation with volunteers, managers of volunteers, Volunteer Involving Organisations, Volunteering Support Services, our State and Territory peak partners and civil society.

- 1) **A restoration of the Volunteer Grants funding to 2010 levels at \$21 million p.a. (currently \$10 million p.a.)**
- 2) **Five-year funding contracts for community sector funding (with the application of indexation) to ensure fiscal certainty for volunteer programs**
- 3) **Designated funding for Volunteering Support Services post-2021, with assurances that the funding will include indexation**
- 4) **Allocation of \$250,000 to support Volunteering Australia to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of Australia's volunteers through National Volunteer Week**
- 5)
 - i) **Investment of \$450,000 in the national online volunteering recruitment platform GoVolunteer and \$100,000 p.a. for ongoing maintenance**
 - ii) **Funding of \$35,000 to develop an 'API' to automatically connect the Volunteer Management Database VIKTOR to DEX and remove duplicate reporting and improve sector efficiencies**
- 6) **Allocation of \$5 million toward Volunteering Support Services and digital solutions as part of pre-employment programs**
- 7) **Invest in schools and Volunteer Involving Organisations to create and manage structured volunteering programs for young people**
- 8) **Invest \$3 million in a national campaign to support and boost volunteer numbers, particularly in the high-demand community services**

Volunteering Australia Response

1. A restoration of the Volunteer Grants funding to 2010 levels at \$21 million p.a. (current \$10 million p.a.)

Volunteer Grants are aimed at supporting the efforts of Australia's volunteers. Grants of between \$1,000 and \$5,000 are provided to organisations and community groups to assist their volunteers to purchase equipment, for training or fundraising. However, in the last decade the sector has seen an ongoing reduction to Volunteer Grants. While \$21 million was allocated to Volunteer Grants in 2010, this was reduced to \$16 million in 2011-13, \$20 million in 2015 (a combined 2014-15 round), and then \$10 million in 2016. This represents an overall reduction of 52.3%.^v

There has been \$19,990,000 million allocated to Volunteer Grants in 2018-19, which represents a combined allocation of \$10 million from the 2017-18 period (which was not administered) and \$9,990,000 million for the 2018-19 period. This represents a reduction of \$10,000 in real terms.

Volunteering Australia calls for the restoration of Volunteer Grants funding to 2010 levels at \$21 million per year, which will foster volunteering, encourage current volunteers to continue volunteering and support Volunteer Involving Organisations to engage new volunteers.

2. Five-year funding contracts for community sector funding (with the application of indexation) to ensure fiscal certainty for volunteer programs

Volunteering Australia stresses that short-term funding cycles are common within the community sector. Short-term grants and funding do not allow for the strategic workforce planning that is required to operate and deliver successful programming. Longer-term, ongoing funding is essential to build stability, retain high quality staff and ensure valuable outcomes within the sector.

The volunteering sector experiences many challenges due to short-term funding, funding uncertainty, and competitive grants programs. This puts an enormous strain on the sector, with many community sector organisations asked to increase their operational output, with a critical lack of funding and resources.

Long-term funding supports the capacity of Volunteer Involving Organisations to engage volunteers. There is a common misconception that involving volunteers is free. Very often volunteer labour is not accounted for in grants and funding. Volunteer Involving Organisations encounter reasonable expenses with the induction, training, management, resources and ongoing support of volunteers. There are also administrative overheads, such as insurance and reimbursement that organisations need to account for. It is important to acknowledge that volunteering requires considerable leadership and continued investment to ensure safe and effective volunteering. This is provided by managers of volunteers.

"One issue is the ability to increase grant and funding opportunities to drive innovation for the attraction, recruitment and experience of the volunteer journey."^{vi}

In fact, the limitations enforced by short-term grants were recognised by the Government in their response to the *Senate Community Affairs References Committee Report*, which agreed that grant terms offered by the Department of Social Services should ideally be five-years in length in order to "allow community organisations to better undertake long-term business planning and provide consistency of services"^{vii} and ensure that "community organisations are able to dedicate more resources to service delivery, rather than administrative processes, in turn providing valuable support to vulnerable Australians"^{viii}

Volunteering Australia recently surveyed the sector, with the majority of respondents stressing that funding periods should be five years in length. Respondents highlighted that this would allow services and programs to plan, assessments to take place, as well as ensure certainty for both service recipients and to attract and retain quality staff. The longer contracts would also mean more time spent on developing and delivering services, as opposed to preparing funding applications.

Volunteering Australia reiterates our recommendation for five-year funding contracts to ensure fiscal certainty for the sector, allow for workforce planning, strengthen outcomes and build resources and structural capacity. We

also recommend that there should be the application of indexation to all grant funding which would ensure that community sector programs and services do not see funding cuts due to the lack of indexation. We also recommend that there is no application of the efficiency dividend to community sector funding, which when passed on, means that programs and services are on the receiving end of the shortfall.

3. Designated funding for Volunteering Support Services post-2021, with assurances that the funding will include indexation

Volunteering Support Services are place-based services that provide the critical infrastructure required for safe, effective and sustainable volunteering. These services are responsible for the promotion, resourcing and support of volunteering in local communities, and assist thousands of organisations across the country to recruit, retain and manage their volunteers.

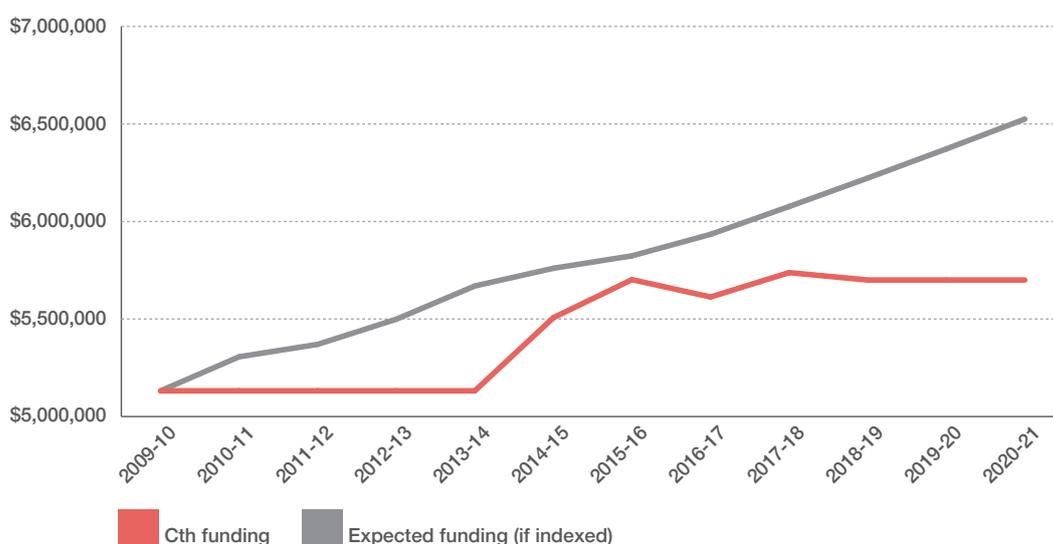
In 2017, Volunteering Support Services enabled nearly 12.3 million volunteer hours. This volunteering is worth \$477.5 million and would not have occurred without the engagement of Volunteering Support Services. It is vital to note that Volunteering Support Services would not exist without the \$5.7 million per year investment from the Commonwealth. This represents a return on investment of \$83 for every dollar invested by the Commonwealth.

Volunteering Australia highlights the huge impact on sector support, if Volunteering Support Services are not a priority funding area. The operational cost of engaging volunteers must be accounted for within policies and programs. Organisations encounter significant costs with the training and management of volunteers, but many times these costs are not factored into funding structures.

While Volunteering Support Services have received an allocation of \$19.95 million for the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) over three and a half years from 1 January 2018 through to 30 June 2021, the future of these services remains in doubt.^{ix}

The federal government has undertaken a review of Volunteering Support Services to identify a best practice model for volunteer management, with the review supposed to be handed down in June 2018. The sector is still awaiting the outcome of the review.

In addition, since 2009, funding for the program has reduced by \$829,770 or 14.5 per cent in real terms due to an inability to keep pace with indexation. While funding has remained constant over the past few years, no indexation has been applied to the program. Economic modelling shows that if indexation is applied the level of funding for the Volunteer Management Program is expected to naturally increase.



Australian Government funding for Volunteering Support Services matched with expected funding (if indexed)^x

Volunteering Australia calls on the Government to ensure funding indexation for the Volunteer Management Activity, with previous iterations of the program also receiving no indexation. We also recommend that there is designated funding for Volunteering Support Services post-2021.

4. Allocation of resources and funding for National Volunteer Week at \$250,000 p.a., to support Volunteering Australia to acknowledge and celebrate the contributions of Australia's volunteers

National Volunteer Week (NVW) is the annual celebration of our nation's volunteers, and a time to acknowledge the generous contributions they make to society. For one week in May, thousands of events are held across the country to say thank you to the 6 million formal volunteers and millions of informal volunteers who give their time to strengthen our communities. The week-long celebration includes open days, award ceremonies, picnics, forums and training sessions.

Despite volunteering being a cross-portfolio activity, with impact in communities across Australia, National Volunteer Week currently receives no Commonwealth support. All promotions, marketing, communications and merchandising relating to National Volunteer Week are conducted within current staffing capacity and limited existing resources. Similar events hosted by other national peak bodies receive federal funding and support to carry out their activities. Volunteering Australia estimates that the cost of supporting this national week to be \$250,000 p.a.

5. i) Investment of \$450,000 in the national online volunteering recruitment platform GoVolunteer and \$100,000 p.a. for ongoing maintenance

GoVolunteer is an initiative of Volunteering Australia, that aims to match people interested in volunteering with an appropriate volunteering opportunity, using a national database. GoVolunteer and the GoVolunteer app have a number of functions including:

- The ability to search for volunteering opportunities
- Show volunteer opportunities by geographic region
- Quickly express interest using information on the user's Volunteer Profile

Volunteering Australia's national database of volunteering opportunities, GoVolunteer, combined with SEEK Volunteer, retains the market share of volunteer opportunities in Australia at 89 per cent. It is used by over 8,000 Volunteer Involving Organisations nationally and the data it holds is shared with a number of partner websites including SEEK Volunteer, resulting in exposure to over 2 million people per year and 140,000 expressions of interest in volunteering opportunities to Volunteer Involving Organisations from potential volunteers. The digital platform is used by volunteers, Volunteer Involving Organisations and Volunteering Support Services.

GoVolunteer has serviced the needs of the volunteering sector for 19 years and is strongly supported by Volunteering Australia and all State and Territory volunteering peak bodies. The platform also holds a significant amount of volunteering related data and statistics which is critical for policies and programming. However, as the sector evolves and grows, the platform, backend database and the app require enhancements and ongoing maintenance to remain relevant and useful to users.

Volunteering Australia is cognisant of access and equity issues associated with digital modes of recruitment and referral systems, and the need to enhance the systems to ensure functionality is up to date with user expectations. We are seeking priority funding to ensure disadvantaged communities and the broader Australian public are not left behind through a failure to maintain adequate systems.

Volunteering WA, the Western Australian State peak body for volunteering, has operated the support helpdesk for GoVolunteer for over 10 years and overseen upgrades and system enhancements. Volunteering WA has longstanding relationships with software developers, as well as a strong degree of in-house technical knowledge. However, additional resourcing for the helpdesk to service client needs is vital to address growing demand in online volunteering recruitment. Volunteering Australia estimates the cost of system enhancements to the platform, backend database and the app to be approximately \$450,000, with ongoing maintenance costing approximately \$100,000 p.a.

5. ii) Funding of \$35,000 to develop an 'API' to automatically connect the Volunteer Management Database VIKTOR to DEX and remove duplicative reporting and improve sector efficiencies

Volunteering Support Services are currently funded under the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA). As of the 1 January 2018, under their new funding arrangement, these services have been required to collect data under the Data Exchange system or DEX. There was no consultation with the sector on whether DEX was fit-for-purpose across certain Government activities.

While DEX is a client focused system, there is a disconnect with gathering data through DEX as volunteers are not clients. Organisations are currently compelled to collect data through DEX due to their funding agreements. The sector is very supportive of collecting data, and already collect data as part of their work, but stress that any data collection should be purpose-driven, accurate, reflective of the services being provided by these organisations and should not increase or duplicate the administrative and red tape burden on organisations that are already stretched. Volunteering Australia highlights that there has been acknowledgement from the Department that DEX currently does not match with the way these services operate.

The data collected through DEX is used by the Department, Ministers and other funding bodies to make decisions in relation to funding. Volunteering Australia is very concerned that the current data being collected is not fit-for-purpose and could have an adverse effect on current or future decisions. Adding to the concern is that the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) is in the middle of a review by the Government.

Volunteering Australia recommends that there is funding to align our systems to provide quality, streamlined and useful data to inform policy decisions. We call for an allocation of \$35,000 to align the Volunteer Management Database VIKTOR so that it is compatible with DEX, to eliminate duplicative reporting and allow for automatic processing. We also recommend that there is bridging funding for organisations funded under the Volunteer Management Activity as they transition to DEX.

6. Allocation of \$5 million toward Volunteering Support Services and digital solutions as part of pre-employment programs

Volunteering Australia stresses that the goal of the social security system should be to support people experiencing financial hardship. The reality is quite different with the current mutual obligation system having a high rate of non-compliance, with jobseekers under the compulsion to apply for jobs they would ordinarily not apply for, or accept, just to meet an activity requirement.

In our view, the current system does not sufficiently address joblessness, undermines positive employment outcomes and does not address the needs of certain groups, particularly those who are long-term unemployed. This was reiterated in the Government's report, 'I Want To Work', which highlighted the current "compliance-focused" nature of the employment services system, as opposed to being "help-focused", and genuinely looking at assisting unemployed people back into the workforce.^{xi}

Volunteering Australia emphasises that volunteering is a pathway to employment by increasing workforce participation and connecting people to career paths that are better paid and more stable.^{xii} Recent SEEK Volunteer research found that:

- 95 per cent of employers believed that volunteering can be a credible way of gaining real-work experience to add to your resume;
- 85 per cent of recruiters believe that volunteering is just as credible as paid work as long as it is relevant to the role or industry the person works in; and
- 92 per cent of employers said that relevant volunteer experience gives candidates an advantage in job interviews.^{xiii}

Volunteering can be particularly valuable in assisting jobseekers from disadvantaged backgrounds to engage with the workforce and build key employable skills. This is significant given older people, culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people, or people with disability, can face multiple barriers to finding paid employment, such as discrimination, and are often excluded from the labour market.

We stress that the Government should look at investing in programs and services that facilitate volunteering as a pathway to paid employment. This includes appropriate financing for Volunteering Support Services to place participants as part of their requirements and in the existing volunteer platform GoVolunteer, to match people with appropriate volunteer roles.

With transitions to a more digital employment system, there are technological solutions to enable and encourage potential jobseekers to volunteer. For example, the 'Volunteering E-portfolio' allows volunteers to access an automated skills record of their volunteering experiences; a portfolio that can then be used by jobseekers to demonstrate the suite of skills they have gained as volunteers and a transcript of hours volunteered verified by Volunteer Involving Organisations. This service will facilitate skills recognition of volunteering and will assist jobseekers in a tangible way.

In addition, Volunteering Support Services frequently use their local knowledge to assist mutual obligation participants to find a volunteer role with pre-approved Volunteer Involving Organisations. However, this interaction is done completely within the existing resources and funding of the Volunteering Support Services. In short, these organisations are not funded to carry out this function.

Volunteering Australia recommends there is a redesign of the welfare to work system that will remove the punitive compliance framework. We also recommend that Volunteering Support Services are resourced and funded for the role they play in supporting employment outcomes.

7. Invest in schools and Volunteer Involving Organisations to create and manage structured volunteering programs for young people

The *Report of the Review To Achieve Educational Excellence in Australian Schools*, made recommendations on "strengthening school-community engagement to enrich student learning through the establishment of mechanisms to facilitate quality partnerships, including engagement in mentoring, volunteering and extra-curricular activities, between schools, employers, members of the community, community organisations and tertiary institutions."^{xiv} Volunteering Australia provided a response to the review and was pleased to see this recommendation included.^{xv}

Volunteering Australia recommends a partnership approach on the development of volunteering programs in schools. Volunteering Australia and the State/Territory volunteering peak bodies have the professional expertise to facilitate community engagement, advise schools on program development and collaboratively engage with governments.

In 2017, as part of South Australia's Volunteering Strategy, the South Australian Government committed to foster a culture of giving through the Australian Curriculum. The South Australian Government has been working in partnership with the South Australian volunteering peak body, Volunteering SA&NT, to encourage young people to "feel a sense of belonging", "contribute to social and economic life", and "influence the decisions that affect them."^{xvi}

While volunteering can improve educational outcomes for young people and prepare them for success, it is not free and requires investment. The Government must equip all schools and students with the appropriate resources to create and manage structured volunteering programs and must support teachers through training. Volunteering Australia also highlights that it is vital that schools and teachers are not expected to create and manage structured volunteering programs from within their existing resources. It is essential that there is recurrent, needs-based funding for Australian schools and teachers to support students personal and professional development. Volunteering Australia estimates the cost of this to be \$25 million.

8. Invest \$3 million in a national campaign to support and boost volunteer numbers, particularly in the high-demand community services

Findings from Volunteering Australia's 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia report indicate that volunteers are deterred by factors such as personal expense, red tape, and a lack of flexibility.^{xvii} The report also identified numerous barriers to attracting and retaining volunteers, with 86 per cent of Volunteer Involving Organisations struggling to attract the volunteers they required for adequate operations.^{xviii}

Volunteers play a crucial role in the delivery of community and emergency services, with the recent *Public Trust and Confidence in Australian Charities Report* also stressing that "while more individuals are volunteering or are in contact with charities, they are volunteering their time less frequently."^{xix} While a decline in volunteers has an impact across

all Australian communities, the effects are felt more acutely in regional areas, where communities are reliant on volunteers to provide essential supports and services.

Therefore, Volunteering Australia is calling for a national marketing and promotions strategy to boost volunteerism in Australia, particularly in areas, services and sectors with the highest un-met need and current areas of growth. As volunteering is a cross-portfolio initiative, Volunteering Australia calls for a partnership approach to promotions. The strategy should link volunteering resources to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. The Government should collaboratively explore measures to encourage more Australians to volunteer in high-demand community services, such as disability support, the NDIS, aged care, mental health and emergency services.

Conclusion

Volunteering Australia thanks the Treasury for the opportunity to provide a submission to the 2019-20 Budget. We stress that targeted investment in the volunteering sector is an opportunity to amplify the positive work being carried out to support key Government priorities and to grow a culture of giving in Australia.

We look forward to working with the Government to ensure that the social, economic and cultural contributions of the volunteering sector is acknowledged and supported, through ongoing funding, recognising the value of volunteering as a cross-portfolio activity, and the vital role of volunteering in high quality service delivery.

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

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. We work 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.

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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.

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