



National Sports Plan
Australian Sports Commission
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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.

Introduction

Volunteering Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the Australian Sports Commission on a National Sports Plan.

The development of the Plan is a key Government priority, and seeks to identify how to maximise the participation of Australians in sport, reduce barriers to participation, improve health and wellbeing through physical activity, and respond to governance and sporting infrastructure issues. The National Sports Plan aims to guide the future priorities and approaches of the Australian sporting sector for the long-term.

Volunteering Australia believes that a National Sport Plan needs to acknowledge volunteering as a key pillar for sporting activity in Australia, and develop mechanisms to facilitate and enhance its contribution.

The motivations that ensure that volunteers contribute to sporting activities are varied and the reasons that reduce participation and motivation require management, planning and strategy. Developing a National Sports Plan provides opportunities to consider these aspects on a broad scale and invest in frameworks to support the critical volunteer resource.

The volunteering sector plays a crucial role in the sporting sector, and it is vital that there is ample consideration of the sectors contributions in all policy, workforce planning, and in the delivery of innovative, and agile service provision.

Volunteering Australia's response specifically outlines the economic, social, health, and cultural benefits of volunteering to the sporting sector, as well as the need for a sustained investment into the volunteering sector by the Australian Government to ensure long-term benefits.

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Volunteering Australia Response

Economic Benefits of Volunteering

Australia has a long and proud history of participation in sport, that creates significant economic benefits for the nation. In Australia, “8.4 million adults and 3 million children participate in sport every year, while 8 million attend live sport events every year.”ⁱ

The *Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport 2017* highlighted that, “the economic contribution (of the sector) is equivalent to 2-3 % of GDP, employing more than 220,000 people and attracting 1.8 million volunteers.”ⁱⁱ The sporting sector is Australia’s largest for volunteer contributions.

Volunteers are engaged in 158 million hours of sport each year. This is the equivalent in time of nearly 90,000 additional full time jobs and \$3 billion in economic value. The direct economic, productivity and volunteer benefits from sport creates a total economic value of approximately \$50 billion annually. This contributes \$83 billion to Australia annually.ⁱⁱⁱ

The Australian Sports Commission has a role to play in influencing key industrial and economic structures, and facilitating sporting and volunteering participation. With the Australian workforce transitioning to one that is highly casualised, and moving toward more insecure, contract-based employment, individuals report having less time, resources, and risk appetite to spend on recreational pursuits such as sport and volunteering. We recommend that the Government must work with the volunteering sector to find structural solutions to address economic pressures, to encourage people to volunteer in the sport and recreation sector, given the profound economic contribution it provides.

Volunteer Engagement in the Sporting Sector

Sport in Australia is delivered in large part through the efforts of volunteers. In 2010, the sport and physical recreation sector attracted the largest number of volunteers (2.3 million people).^{iv} The Australia Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2014 General Social Survey revealed the most common types of organisations for which people volunteer are those relating to sport and physical recreation at 31 per cent.^v Sporting and recreational organisations also have the highest hours of volunteer involvement at 157.5 million hours, compared with religious organisations 147.6 million hours and welfare/community 141.1 million hours.

Despite this, formal volunteer participation in Australia is declining, with 31 per cent of Australians in 2014 participating in volunteering compared to 36% in 2010.^{vi} This shift to informal or more episodic forms of volunteering, along with under-reporting, poses a huge risk to sectors reliant on volunteering, such as sports.

Volunteering Australia’s *State of Volunteering in Australia 2016* report highlighted the rise in the number of people who identified as informal volunteers. There were 29 per cent of respondents who indicated they were informal volunteers, assisting in sports clubs or teams. When asked “what sector would you be most interested in volunteering for in the future?”, only 14.7 per cent of respondents indicated sport and 12.8 per cent indicated recreation – the fifth-lowest and third-lowest responses respectively, out of twenty-two possible options.^{vii}

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Evidence indicates that people are time-poor, and this affects the level of engagement with sport. This is increasingly evident in families with older children, as people in couple families with children under 15 years are more likely to volunteer (23 per cent), than other types of families (11-14 per cent).^{viii} This poses a huge challenge to traditional local club models, who have not forecasted or anticipated for changes in the volunteering landscape, and jeopardises the social cohesion they cultivate.

Anecdotally we are aware that parents and past players are becoming less interested in volunteering in sport and recreation, citing a lack of time to engage in the sector. Data indicates 75 per cent of Australians feel rushed or pressured for time.^{ix} Many parents have also expressed that they view the contribution of membership fees as their contribution to clubs or sporting teams.

Strategies developed by and for the sport and recreation sector very often focus on parents or family members to fill volunteer roles. This was also highlighted in the Australia Sport Commission report *'Too Few; Too Much: a report into the delivery of Australian softball'*, where there are excessive time demands on volunteers, however, Australian softball is still increasingly reliant on volunteer contributions.^x

This reflects the broader volunteering sector, that is being asked to evolve and grow in the face of a national decrease in formal volunteer participation, coupled with an increase in demand for the services that volunteers provide.

Volunteering Australia recommends that the sector would benefit from the diversification of its pool of volunteers to include those who have knowledge of the sector, have a passion for the sport, or can give "time", irrespective of being a parent or relative of a participant.

With the increase in informal volunteering, particularly around major sporting events and at the community and club level, structures need to be administered to support informal volunteers, including through active, and ongoing recruitment. This was identified in Volunteering Australia's *State of Volunteering in Australia 2016* report, where 35 per cent of respondents indicated they would feel better supported if they had access to information and resources on informal volunteering arrangements, and over 33 per cent said more help was required to find informal volunteering opportunities. A further 43 per cent of respondents supported the notion of introducing an online platform aimed at finding informal volunteering opportunities.

Volunteering Australia recommends the Australia Sports Commission ensure there are mechanisms in place that address the decline in formal volunteering in the sporting sector, and addresses the growing rates of informal volunteering in community sport.

National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

It is the view of Volunteering Australia that a National Sports Plan should facilitate the skilling up of sports volunteers by providing guidance on existing volunteer standards, rights and responsibilities. We recommend this through Volunteering Australia's *National Standards for Volunteering Involvement*. This would help increase consistency of practice across sporting organisations, and provide additional certainty for both sporting bodies, organisations, local clubs, players, and volunteers, on how individuals and services will interact and manifest.

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The *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement* have been developed in consultation with the volunteering sector to support the involvement of volunteers and act as a resource for Volunteer Involving Organisations. The Standards are a best-practice framework for volunteer management, covering eight fundamental areas of volunteer involvement. The Standards encourage organisations to consider the role of volunteers within their organisations, and the impact that effective volunteer involvement can have on achieving both strategic and operational goals.

The guidelines provided by the Standards state that volunteers should be given information about how to make a complaint or raise a concern within an organisation and to relevant external bodies. They advise that grievances from volunteers should be managed consistently, transparently, equitably and in line with the principles of natural justice.

Volunteering Australia recommends the use of the *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement* as a best-practice guide for volunteer participation in the sporting sector.

Governance and Sporting Infrastructure

The sporting sector is heavily reliant on volunteers, which means there can be a lack of professional and consistent volunteer management systems and frameworks. The result is a range of structural issues within the sector. Fragmentation, complex clubs and codes, federated governance structures in sport, a shortage of key skills, and a lack of access to up-to-date technology can cause several issues for the sports sector.

The lack of professional leadership and management can very often mean:

- Clubs are unable to anticipate for changes in the volunteering landscape
- The needs of an organisations are rarely identified in a formal way, so skills of volunteers are rarely matched and deployed appropriately to suit need
- The recruitment of new volunteers occurs organically and informally, leading to a smaller, less diverse pool of volunteers
- Formal structures to report issues or concerns don't exist, resulting in volunteers leaving their post

The demographic changes in sporting organisations has a direct impact on participation rates, affecting volunteer numbers, and impacting on the operational and financial viability of both the individual organisation and the sector more broadly.

There are also issues with the commercialisation of many local institutions, with less of a reliance on volunteers, and more of a focus on highly skilled, paid staff.

Volunteering Australia recommends additional support and investment in the volunteering sector to build formalised structures for leadership and the management of volunteers. This will empower clubs to employ new volunteers, encourage the recruitment of volunteers, and allow for a more inclusive, and effective sporting sector. It would give potential volunteers the opportunity to utilise their skills to appropriately fill key gaps, and allow them an opportunity to engage, and build relationships. Volunteering Australia also recommends that there is transparency, effective oversight, collaboration, and ongoing governance review to strengthen accountability.

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Health and Wellbeing

Inactivity and obesity are on the rise in Australia, with over 50 per cent of adults living sedentary or low activity lifestyles, while two-thirds of adults and one-quarter of children are either overweight or obese. Sport is also being marginalised within schools, with fewer hours being spent on sport and physical education, because of fewer trained teachers. At the current rate, Australians are at real risk of transitioning to a nation of passive sport consumers.^{xi}

Increasing volunteering in sport encourages volunteers to become more active and become participants themselves. Sporting bodies have the capacity to engage with health bodies, the not-for-profit sector, universities, and Government to promote the benefits of sport and recreation, and volunteering in the sporting sector.

Volunteering in the sporting sector also contributes numerous benefits to health and wellbeing, improves outcomes in core academic fields for children, teaches life skills, and is a rich source of social capital.

The impact of sport on the mental health of those who engage in the sporting sector, at community, club, and elite sporting level has also been highlighted recently. Engaging our elite athletes in volunteering to promote the mental and social benefits of sport to the Australia public at all levels of the community may build better community resilience.

Market Segmentation from the Australian Sports Commission in 2014, revealed that at that time there were 34 per cent of sports club volunteers in the segment^{xii}, and of those who did not volunteer, 45 per cent of the segment would volunteer in the future.^{xiii} For those who were community committed volunteers, they engaged in volunteering for social reasons, enjoyment, and a sense of identity and commitment to the organisations future. However, of those who did volunteer, a primary factor for voluntary retention was that they needed to continue to feel valued in the role.^{xiv}

Volunteering Australia recommends that the Australia Sports Commission work with the volunteering sector to promote the social, mental, health and lifestyle benefits of volunteering in sport, as well as active collaboration with the volunteering sector to promote the benefits of this.

Diversity in the Sporting Sector

Volunteering Australia is acutely aware that diversity in the sporting sector, and in relation to volunteer engagement, presents an area requiring improvement, and an opportunity for the Commission.

Volunteering is crucial in delivering strong and resilient communities, mitigating isolation and loneliness, encouraging economic participation, and increasing social inclusion, community participation and cohesion.

However, the sporting sector can greatly benefit from diversifying, and improving its access and equity. For example, the sector has opportunities to:

- Encourage female participation in sport and recreation
- Assist Indigenous communities to close the gap

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- Support the social inclusion of migrants (including new arrivals), and encourage them with making friends, by becoming part of the community
- Support the settlement of refugees, including learning English, assisting them to become part of a community, and make new friends
- Alter community perceptions of people with disability, and provide an opportunity for people with disability to become more engaged with the community
- Provide connections for older Australians, and mitigate isolation
- Foster community engagement for those with mental health issues

According to the *Victorian Gender Equality Strategy* released in 2016, while women account for majority of the overall volunteer workforce at 32.5 per cent, compared to 28.2 per cent; the only two sectors where this is not the case are the emergency services, and sport and recreation.^{xv} Overall, 15 per cent or 1.2 million men volunteered in sport and recreation in 2014, compared to 12 per cent or 1 million women.^{xvi}

In Victoria, only 17.5 per cent of people who do not speak English currently participate in sport in Victoria. Sport can play an integral role in connecting people in local communities, allowing people to stay active, and improve language skills. It can also encourage community members to volunteer, and provides an important step toward improving multicultural engagement in sport.^{xvii}

It is also the view of Volunteering Australia that the sporting sector needs to draw on a more diverse pool of volunteers than parents and past players. Collaboration across not just the sporting sector, but with those from other sectors, is essential to ensuring a greater breadth of volunteers.

A sport volunteer could be:

- Someone who has recently moved to a new area and is looking to establish connections or friendships
- Has an injury or a disability that precludes them from playing sport, but is a fan, passionate or knowledgeable about the sport and wants to be involved in some way (i.e. canteen or committee member)
- Studying in a field related to sport, recreation, youth or community affairs and is looking for professional development opportunities by volunteering
- Wants to give back to the community^{xviii}

Volunteering Australia recommends the Australian Sports Commission make the sporting sector more accessible and equitable for diverse groups, including women, migrants and people with disability, to engage and volunteer in sports at the local (club), state and national level. We also recommend working with the community sector to implement strategies to expand the participation rates of these under-represented groups.

Investment in Volunteering

The Australian Sports Commission's 2014 Market Segmentation emphasised that "without volunteers, sport in Australia could not survive." The same Market Segmentation also highlighted the need to develop effective volunteer recruitment and retention strategies given the reliance on volunteers in the sporting sector.^{xix}

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These findings emphasise the need for ongoing investment in the volunteering sector given the social, cultural and economic contributions it provides. While volunteering is “time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain”^{xx}, volunteering comes at significant cost to Volunteering Support Services and Volunteer Involving Organisations. The operational cost of delivering quality, innovative, and agile volunteering programs that respond to the needs of society is steadily increasing, and requires investment.

Volunteering Australia’s *2016 State of Volunteering in Australia* report outlined that “Volunteer Involving Organisations generally lack resources both human and financial.”^{xxi} The report also identified that 86% of Volunteer Involving Organisations need more volunteers. While, 30 per cent of organisations were unable to engage suitable candidates.^{xxii}

In relation to major sporting events, the Government needs to financially support volunteer engagement and invest funding to attract a diverse pool of volunteers to engage. The Government needs to acknowledge the value of volunteering in administering such events. Major sporting events are important for collective community spirit, aiding social inclusion and building connections. Participating in these events, particularly through volunteering, brings the community together, increases community wellbeing and social capital, which produces economic benefits for the nation.

Volunteering Australia emphasises that there must be adequate support and investment to assist Volunteer Involving Organisations, Volunteering Support Services, and volunteers to continue to engage in the sporting sector.

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Summary of Recommendations

- We recommend that the Government must work with the volunteering sector to find structural solutions to address economic pressures, to encourage people to volunteer in the sport and recreation sector.
- Volunteering Australia recommends the diversification of the pool of volunteers in the sporting sector to include those who have knowledge of the sector, have a passion for the sport, or can give “time”, irrespective of being a parent or relative of a participant.
- We recommend that the Australia Sports Commission ensure there are mechanisms in place that address the decline in formal volunteering in the sporting sector, and address the growing informal volunteering in community sport.
- Additional support and investment in the volunteering sector to build formalised structures for leadership and the management of volunteers.
- Volunteering Australia recommends that there is transparency, effective oversight, collaboration, and ongoing governance review to strengthen accountability.
- The use of the *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement* as a best-practice guide for volunteer participation in the sporting sector.
- Volunteering Australia recommends that the Australia Sports Commission work with the volunteering sector to promote the health and lifestyle benefits of volunteering in sport.
- Volunteering Australia recommends the Australian Sports Commission make the sporting sector more accessible and equitable for diverse groups, including women, migrants and people with disability, to engage and volunteer in sports at the local (club), state and national level.
- We also recommend working with the community sector to implement strategies to expand the participation rates of these under-represented groups.
- Volunteering Australia emphasises that there must be adequate support and investment to assist Volunteer Involving Organisations, Volunteering Support Services, and volunteers to continue to engage in the sporting sector.

Conclusion

Volunteering Australia appreciates the opportunity to provide feedback to the Australian Sports Commission on a National Sports Plan.

It is the view of Volunteering Australia that it is critical to consider the economic, social, cultural and health contributions of the volunteering sector when considering the future priorities of the sporting sector. Volunteering Australia suggests that a National Sports Plan must consider the involvement of the volunteering sector.

The volunteering sector plays a critical role in the sporting sector, and it is vital that there is adequate consideration of volunteering in policy and planning, workforce planning, and the delivery of long-term, innovative, and agile service provision.

Volunteering Australia would welcome further opportunities to consult on or expand on recommendations raised in this response.

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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.
- VIOs** Volunteer-involving organisations are organisations that utilise volunteers as part of their workforce.
- VSSs** Volunteer 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 Australian Sports Commission, Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport 2017, Executive Summary, p4.

ⁱⁱ Australian Sports Commission, Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport 2017, Executive Summary, p4.

ⁱⁱⁱ Volunteering Australia (2015) 'Are time poor Australians abandoning volunteering?', <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/2015/07/are-time-poor-australians-abandoning-volunteering/>.

^{iv} Australian Bureau of Statistics (2010), General Social Survey, as published in Australian Bureau of Statistics, Volunteers in Sport, Australia, 2010 (cat. no. 4440.0.55.001).

^v ABS General Social Survey (2014), Summary Results, Australia.

^{vi} Volunteering Australia (2015) 'Are time poor Australians abandoning volunteering?', <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/2015/07/are-time-poor-australians-abandoning-volunteering/>.

^{vii} Volunteering Australia and PwC (2016) 'State of Volunteering in Australia', <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf>.

^{viii} ABS (2014), General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia.

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- ^{ix} Volunteering Australia (2015) 'Are time poor Australians abandoning volunteering?', <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Media-Release-ABS-General-Social-Survey.pdf>
- ^x Innovation and Best Practice Unit, Australian Sports Commission (2008) 'Too Few; Too Much: a report into the delivery of Australian softball', https://www.clearinghouseforsport.gov.au/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/563189/Two_few.pdf.
- ^{xi} Australian Sports Commission, Intergenerational Review of Australian Sport 2017, Executive Summary, p4.
- ^{xii} Australian Sports Commission (2014), Volunteers Segment Profile, Community Committed, National Sport Research.
- ^{xiii} Australian Sports Commission (2014), Non-Volunteers Segment Profile, Well Intentioned, National Sport Research.
- ^{xiv} Australian Sports Commission (2014), Volunteers Segment Profile, Community Committed, National Sport Research.
- ^{xv} Volunteering Victoria (2016) 'Submission to the Women and Royal Commission Branch – Department of Premier and Cabinet, in response to A Victorian Gender Equality Strategy Consultation Paper', <http://volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/10/Gender-Equality-Submission.pdf>.
- ^{xvi} Volunteering Victoria (2016) 'Key facts and stats about volunteering in Victoria', <http://volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/05/Facts-and-Stats-August-2016.pdf>.
- ^{xvii} Volunteering Victoria (2016), 'Valuing Sport and Recreation', p5.
- ^{xviii} Volunteering Victoria (2016), 'Valuing Sport and Recreation', p4.
- ^{xix} Australian Sports Commission (2014), Volunteers Marketing Segmentation Overview, p1.
- ^{xx} Volunteering Australia (2015) 'Definition of Volunteering', <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy-andbest-practise/definition-of-volunteering/>.
- ^{xxi} Volunteering Australia and PwC (2016) 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf>, pix.
- ^{xxii} Volunteering Australia and PwC (2016) 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf>, pix.