



Pre-Budget Submission 2025-26

November 2024

Overview

This Pre-Budget Submission, drafted in partnership with the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies (VPBs), sets out the investment needed in the 2025-26 Budget for volunteering to thrive. It demonstrates how targeted, strategic investment in volunteering will enable the Australian Government to achieve key priorities.

Volunteering in Australia

Volunteering is vital to the nation's wellbeing but faces ongoing challenges. Australia's communities and lifestyle are underpinned by the contributions of volunteers. Volunteers are an essential workforce, spanning major sectors, including aged care and disability care; community welfare; sports and the arts; crisis preparedness, response, and recovery; and environmental sustainability and protection. More than six million people in Australia volunteer through organisations across the nation.¹ Millions more volunteer informally in their local communities, helping neighbours and strangers, especially in times of crisis and adversity.

However, a myriad of factors continues to critically impact the ability of Australians to volunteer. The COVID-19 pandemic hit formal volunteering (volunteering undertaken through an organisation or group) especially hard, and it has yet to fully recover.² Volunteering is not free, and the current cost-of-living pressures are adding significant barriers for participation. Over the long-term, formal volunteering has been in decline in Australia. As recently noted by the Productivity Commission, the formal volunteering rate fell from 36 per cent in 2010 to 25 per cent in 2020 and has yet to recover from the significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.³

The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-2033)

The Australian Government is a key enabling partner in the implementation of the National Strategy for Volunteering. The National Strategy for Volunteering was designed and is owned by all members of the volunteering ecosystem. Launched in February 2023, the National Strategy provides a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. It provides strategic direction for volunteering to be effective, inclusive and, importantly, sustainable.

Budget Recommendations

Our recommendations are:

1. Provide volunteering cost-of-living relief through an expanded volunteer grants program
2. Continue and increase funding for the Volunteer Management Activity
3. Invest in coordination and monitoring of the National Strategy for Volunteering
4. Invest in national peak body funding
5. Develop a national volunteer passport
6. Invest in child safe volunteering
7. Establish a Climate Change Volunteering Capacity Building Program.

¹ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>; Based on an estimated population of 25,422,788 people in Australia in the 2021 Census

² <https://csmr.cass.anu.edu.au/research/publications/ongoing-trends-volunteering-australian>

³ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/current/philanthropy/draft/philanthropy-draft.pdf>, 35

About this Submission

This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies. It builds on our ongoing policy and advocacy work in partnership with the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies and their extensive networks, and incorporates feedback from the Volunteering Australia 2024 Stakeholder Survey.

This Budget Submission has been provided to the Australian Government via the Treasury. It has also been provided to the Department of Social Services (the Minister for Social Services has lead responsibility for volunteering), the National Office for Child Safety in the Attorney General's Department, the National Emergency Management Agency, the Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water, and the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Introduction

Volunteering is critical to Government priorities

Volunteers play an essential role in many Australian Government priorities and we continue to provide comprehensive, evidence-based advice and support to Government in these priority areas. The ongoing work of Volunteering Australia and the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies (VPBs) is diverse and significant and supports the case for foundational investment in the volunteering ecosystem and its infrastructure. Ongoing policy work and on-the-ground sector support includes:

- Improving aged care and supporting health services
- Enhancing support for people with disability
- Responding during emergencies and improving disaster readiness, recovery and resilience
- Protecting the natural environment and acting on climate initiatives
- Strengthening charities and non-profits through initiatives such as the Not-for-Profit Sector Development Blueprint and Productivity Commission Philanthropy Inquiry
- Advancing First Nations justice and wellbeing
- Community and high-performance sport
- Supporting rural and regional communities
- Protecting mental health
- Ending loneliness
- Youth engagement and employment pathways
- Child safety.

Volunteering brings social, cultural, and economic benefits to the nation. As identified during the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering, volunteering is a workforce issue.⁴

While responsibility for volunteering at the Commonwealth level sits within the Department of Social Services, volunteers are involved across an array of sectors that fall within the remit of other

⁴ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-Discovery-Insights-Report.pdf>

Commonwealth Government portfolios. Volunteers involved in community services, welfare, and homelessness represent only one fifth of Australia's formal volunteers.⁵

Other large sub-sectors, such as sport and recreation, and religious, faith-based, and spiritual each engage over one million volunteers,⁶ and there are hundreds of thousands of volunteers in environmental charities, mental health, disability and emergency services, yet the government portfolios for these domains do not have explicit responsibilities for volunteering.

In acknowledgement of this, the Australian Government has indicated its support for a more cohesive and 'joined-up' approach to volunteering policy by leading action 14 – *scope a whole of Australian Government approach to volunteering* – through the National Strategy for Volunteering Action Plan 2024-2027.

In addition, the Australian Government's 2023 Budget Statement *Measuring What Matters* aims to provide a foundation for Australia's effort to "lift living standards, boost intergenerational mobility, and create more opportunities for more people."⁷ It recognises that traditional macroeconomic indicators do not provide a holistic view of community wellbeing.

Volunteering is a uniquely good indicator for community wellbeing as it captures social connectedness, physical and mental health, sense of purpose, and connection to place.⁸ Recognising this, formal and informal volunteering were included as measures of social cohesion in the *Measuring What Matters* framework.

This means measures to support volunteering are crucial to ensure the Federal Budget improves on the things that matter to Australians. To achieve this, investment in volunteering should be considered across portfolios, underpinned by robust strategic and financial planning processes to ensure volunteering is adequately resourced.

Implementing the National Strategy for Volunteering

Funded by the Department of Social Services and with development led by Volunteering Australia, the National Strategy for Volunteering is the culmination of a 12-month co-design process with individuals and organisations from across the volunteering ecosystem. This included state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies, volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, researchers and academics, volunteering support services, staff in local, state, and federal government departments, staff from companies with employee volunteering programs, enabling organisations, and members of the general public.

In August 2024, the first three-year Action Plan of the National Strategy was launched: Action Plan 2024-2027. It includes 22 actions from a range of stakeholders in the volunteering ecosystem, including peak bodies, government departments and agencies, and volunteer involving organisations.

⁵ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42

⁶ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42; estimates based on a population of 25,422,788 as reported in the 2021 Census

⁷ Commonwealth of Australia. (2022). *Measuring what matters*. Available online at <http://budget.gov.au/2022-23-october/content/bp1/index.htm>

⁸ Increasing the number of volunteers in Australia should be a natural outcome of the National Strategy for Volunteering if structural changes are achieved. Growing participation in volunteering cannot be progressed in isolation. Improving the volunteer experience and comprehensively valuing volunteering will pay dividends when it comes to increasing volunteer participation.

It also provides accessible opportunities for individuals and groups to contribute in a manner that suits their volunteer engagement and objectives.

The National Strategy for Volunteering sets out the desired outcomes for volunteering in Australia for the next decade. It provides a clear and compelling case, underpinned by robust data and evidence, for targeted and sufficient investment in volunteering and recognition of the role it plays in creating and maintaining thriving communities. Following the launch of the National Strategy for Volunteering in February 2023, a coordinated effort has seen stakeholders across the volunteering ecosystem considering how to collaborate on implementation.

The Australian Government is a key stakeholder in the volunteering ecosystem and an essential enabler of the National Strategy for Volunteering. Support has been received through funding to develop the National Strategy for Volunteering, as well as through government departments and agencies making commitments to implement the National Strategy Action Plan 2024-2027.

This Pre-Budget Submission sets out proposals for how the Australian Government can support the implementation of the National Strategy going forward.

Budget Recommendations

1. Provide volunteering cost-of-living relief through an expanded volunteer grants program

To help address cost-of-living pressures, the Australian Government should adapt and expand eligibility for the Volunteer Grants program to reach the broader community, better reflecting the true costs of volunteering and the barrier to participation they impose. It is recommended that the next round of Volunteer Grants is expedited, allocating increased funding to directly target the cost-of-living burden felt by volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

Investment: increase to \$6.5million per annum

It is recommended that the Volunteer Grants program is adapted to explicitly target cost-of-living pressures, with a commensurate increase in the amount of funding available. Adaptations made to the Volunteer Grants program could include:

- More categories of operational costs being eligible, including rent, necessary equipment and consumables, volunteer management salaries, licenses and certifications, insurance, and more forms of volunteer reimbursement
- Demonstrable, like-for-like increases in expenses to be made eligible. For example, allowing a volunteer involving organisation to apply Volunteer Grants funding to cover the increase in insurance premiums compared to their previous policy renewal, thereby removing that inflationary rise from their operating expenses

Across Australia, volunteers are at the frontline of community responses to multiple crises including isolation, hunger and homelessness. Volunteers, and the organisations they support, help many navigate the challenges imposed by increased cost-of-living pressures. The Productivity Commission *Future Foundations for Giving* report notes that organisations engaging volunteers can achieve “better and more valued outcomes at lower cost compared with government provision”.⁹ However, volunteers, managers of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations often face the same pressures as the individuals and communities they serve. This can simultaneously lead to lower participation of volunteers yet higher demand for volunteer services.

An expanded Volunteer Grants program would further demonstrate the Australian Government’s commitment to addressing negative cost-of living and inflationary impacts felt across Australian communities. By providing direct support to volunteers and organisations, this funding could efficiently strengthen Australians’ resilience, wellbeing, and connectedness while helping bolster volunteer participation and retention.

While the rate of inflation is falling, costs remain elevated. The Australian Bureau of Statistics reports that 2024 saw “the first time since December 2010 that increases in living costs for all household types were higher than the increase in the [Consumer Price Index]”.¹⁰ This follows previous increases in the cost-of-living experienced throughout 2022 and 2023. Cost-of-living and housing pressures increase the demand for many volunteer-driven services while also having a negative impact on the availability and capacity of volunteers. Since 2022, Australian households have seen declining disposable incomes,

⁹ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/philanthropy/report/philanthropy.pdf>, 5

¹⁰ <https://www.abs.gov.au/media-centre/media-releases/rises-living-costs-across-all-household-types>

having experienced the largest fall in the OECD.¹¹ While volunteering involves giving time freely for the common good, it is not without cost. Recent data from various State of Volunteering reports highlight the costs borne by volunteers. The State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report identifies that volunteers incur average expenses totalling \$15.57 per hour – triple the hourly cost reported in 2020.¹² With half of all registered charities being entirely volunteer-run, not all volunteers are able to seek reimbursement for costs incurred while volunteering.¹³ Volunteers face competing priorities for their time, and many are forced to reduce or discontinue their volunteering in light of these expenses. Similarly, volunteer involving organisations have incurred elevated costs to recruit, onboard and coordinate volunteers at the same time as experiencing increased demand for volunteer services.

Volunteer grants are an effective means of stimulating volunteering in local communities and supporting the adaptation of volunteering programs. The existing Volunteer Grants program has been recently supplemented by the Strong and Resilient Communities Community Support – Small Grants for Volunteer Involving Organisations. Both measures provide welcome relief to volunteer involving organisations, however, there remains an opportunity to adapt and expand the Volunteer Grants program to specifically target cost-of-living pressures and acknowledge the true cost of volunteering more broadly.

Both programs focus on building capacity, providing training and expanding the scope of volunteering activities. These are extremely valuable outcomes and should be continued, however there is a challenge when applicants have limited opportunity to apply grant funding to operational costs, volunteer reimbursements, professional volunteer management or increased expenses for necessary equipment and consumables. Volunteer involving organisations who are struggling to meet costs or demand may, paradoxically, have their capacity reduced if the work required to deliver new capacity-building initiatives takes focus away from daily operations. The *Future Foundations for Giving* report notes this challenge with a quote from a volunteer involving organisation:

“We don’t find that there’s a lot of wiggle room when we’re applying philanthropic funding to do anything that might be related to operational costs, and it often has to be about innovation rather than funding to do – continue to do and build on the good work that we’re doing. I think that for us is a real challenge.”¹⁴

The bigger picture on cost-of-living

Moving forward on cost-of-living, we endorse the recommendation of the Productivity Commission to explicitly consider the effects on volunteers when designing policies and programs. Ensuring that volunteers are not out-of-pocket for contributing their time, and for maintaining relevant qualifications, certifications, and worker screening checks, is essential to protecting the interests of volunteers. This is a key consideration in the National Strategy for Volunteering’s Strategic Objective 1.3: Ensuring Volunteering is Not Exploitative. In progressing this objective, the Australian Government should carefully consider ways to reduce out-of-pocket expenses for volunteers through the tax and transfer system.

¹¹ <https://www.afr.com/policy/economy/australia-s-fall-in-disposable-income-is-the-worst-in-the-world-20240822-p5k4ji>

¹² <https://volunteeringqld.org.au/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland/state-of-volunteering-in-queensland-2024-report/>

¹³ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-10th-edition>, 31

¹⁴ <https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/completed/philanthropy/report/philanthropy.pdf>, 61

While this was not recommended by the Productivity Commission in the *Future Foundations for Giving* report, in favour of “Government grants to support volunteering where there is a clearly identified need,” tax deductions for training costs incurred by volunteers in State Emergency and Rural Bushfire Services were recently recommended by the Select Committee on Australia’s Disaster Resilience.⁵

The merits of this proposal, and its potential beyond the emergency management context, should be considered in more detail in the future, alongside expanded direct funding of volunteering and volunteer management.

2. Continue and increase funding for the Volunteer Management Activity

The 2025-26 Budget should continue and increase funding for the Volunteer Management Activity with indexation into the forward estimates. We recommend that the Australian Government continues to fund, expand and support the Volunteer Management Activity, with a commitment to a further five-year program.

Investment: increase to \$7.2million plus indexation per annum

The Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) aims to increase opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their broader community through volunteering. The program focuses on the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies developing and implementing strategies to build the capacity of volunteer involving organisations, through online volunteer management services, and breaking down barriers to volunteering for identified priority groups. VMA’s recent successes are wide ranging across all states and territories from delivering national volunteering infrastructure, such as the refresh of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, to programs focused on cultural safety and connected communities.

A review of the Volunteer Management Activity was completed in 2021. From 1 July 2021, the Australian Government commenced the distribution of up to \$33.5 million (excluding GST) over five years under the new Volunteer Management Activity to state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies across Australia. The Volunteering Peak Bodies are partnering with other services to develop and support the revised program to increase and strengthen volunteer participation.

Volunteering Australia welcomed the inclusion of funding indexation for the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) in the 2019-20 Budget and remains committed to the program’s continuation. The 2021-22 Budget allocated funding for the Volunteer Management Activity at circa \$6 million p.a. plus indexation to 2024-25 (\$33.5 million over five years).¹⁵ However, additional priority target groups were added to the program in 2023 without additional funding. It is therefore imperative that further funding is allocated to enable effective engagement with the additional priority population cohorts.

It is vital, particularly at this time when volunteering is impacted by cost-of-living pressures, that investment in volunteering infrastructure is sustained and expanded.

Further, the Volunteer Management Activity funding stream should be increased to address acute and ongoing cost-of-living challenges for the volunteering ecosystem and to support the vital contributions of the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies to implement urgent, nationally significant changes. Feedback from the sector on the Government’s election commitment to a stronger, more diverse and independent community sector called on the Government to “support capacity building for community service organisations (CSOs) in grant management, data management, measurement

¹⁵ Note: not all S/Ts have Volunteer Support Services/Resource Centres and so did not receive additional funding that was introduced in 2023 (Tasmania and ACT).

and evaluation, reporting, sector leadership, finance, cybersecurity, digital and technology skills, and responding to climate change.”¹⁶

It also highlights the need for Government to provide financial support for the full cost of service delivery, including the costs of engaging volunteers.¹⁷ Delivering on this election commitment requires increased funding for volunteer involving organisations and the volunteering ecosystem overall. To avoid duplication, this should be delivered through an expanded Volunteer Management Activity funding stream.

3. Invest in coordination and monitoring of the National Strategy for Volunteering

Funding is sought for the coordination and monitoring of the National Strategy for Volunteering. This would support delivery of initiatives in the first three-year Action Plan, continued coordination of the strategy and assessment of the National Strategy’s progress and outcomes.

Investment: \$2million to fund initiatives over the first 3-year action plan

Launched in February 2023, the National Strategy provides a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. The National Strategy sets out the desired outcomes for volunteering in Australia for the next decade. It provides a clear and compelling case, underpinned by robust data and evidence, for targeted and sufficient investment in volunteering and celebration of the role it plays in creating thriving communities. The National Strategy was designed and is owned by members across the volunteering ecosystem.

The Australian Government has a key enabling role in ensuring the delivery of the National Strategy. The next stage of the delivery of the National Strategy is the implementation of the first three-year Action Plan: Action Plan 2024-2027. This document contains a suite of 22 actions co-designed to progress the National Strategy throughout its first Action Plan phase. Funding is sought to support the delivery and coordination of the National Strategy for Volunteering and enable collaboration across the volunteering ecosystem.

To ensure progress towards the National Strategy’s Strategic Objectives and the effective delivery of Action Plan 2024-2027, a coordination role is necessary. Throughout the Development and Establishment Phases, this role has been fulfilled by Volunteering Australia. Coordination activities are broad and would include:

- Governance: Providing secretariat to the Governance and Advisory bodies
- Monitoring and Evaluation: Tracking the delivery of the Action Plan through enacting the Monitoring and Evaluation Framework
- Awareness Raising: Continuing to build awareness and engagement with the National Strategy
- Communication: Ensure information relating to the implementation of the National Strategy is communicated across and beyond the volunteering ecosystem
- Supporting Participation: Encouraging others to implement the National Strategy and contribute to Action Plan 2024-2027
- Review and Development: Conducting the first review of the National Strategy and developing the second three-year Action Plan (based on the outcomes of the first).

¹⁶ <https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/summary-reportfinal23-april-2024.pdf>, 17

¹⁷ <https://engage.dss.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/summary-reportfinal23-april-2024.pdf>, 15

Without resourcing for a coordination role, the National Strategy risks stagnation and losing the momentum gained since its launch and the development of the first three-year Action Plan. To ensure the Vision of the National Strategy can be achieved, Volunteering Australia recommends funding ongoing coordination.

4. Invest in national peak body funding

The Australian Government should invest in national peak body funding for volunteering. This requires broadening the funding base for Volunteering Australia beyond the Department of Social Services, which has Commonwealth responsibility for volunteering, to other portfolios where intense advocacy, stakeholder access, evidence and advice at the national level are required to progress major reforms, sometimes over periods of months and years.

Investment: \$350k per annum per key portfolio partner

A national peak body with a policy remit as broad as Volunteering Australia requires commensurate resourcing to adequately support and represent the volunteering ecosystem. Volunteering Australia seeks enabling resourcing from portfolios, other than the Department of Social Services, where policy, advice, coordination and ecosystem access is protracted and complex.

A key strategic objective of the National Strategy for Volunteering is to work towards a whole of Government approach to volunteering policy, consideration and engagement. While the Department of Social Services has Commonwealth responsibility for volunteering and provides welcome peak body funding, volunteers are critical across an array of sectors that fall within other Commonwealth Government portfolios. There is an increasing need to improve the financial stability of the not-for-profit sector and to fund sector peaks to support policy research and related advocacy in priority areas as informed by their stakeholders, particularly where issues are cross-cutting. Short-term, project-based funding does not allow for organisational stability, growth and talent retention and, while helpful, it can divert energy away from core business and proactive advocacy.

Volunteers involved in community services, welfare, and homelessness represent only one fifth of Australia's formal volunteers. Other large sub-sectors, such as sport and recreation, and religious, faith-based, and spiritual each engage over one million volunteers,¹⁸ and there are hundreds of thousands of volunteers in environmental organisations,¹⁹ yet the government portfolios for these domains do not have explicit responsibilities for volunteering or clear funding mechanisms.

Data also reveals sizeable volunteer workforces in mental health (4.4 per cent of formal volunteers), aged care (8.8 per cent), and disability (4.7 per cent).²⁰ Based on estimates of the current Australian population, each of these sectors engage more than 300,000 volunteers. This means that key government initiatives, such as *A Matter of Care: Australia's Aged Care Workforce Strategy*, *Australia's Disability Strategy*, and the *National Mental Health Workforce Strategy*, need to plan for the involvement of volunteers and consider how underpinning initiatives will affect volunteering to avoid

¹⁸ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42; estimates based on a population of 25,422,788 as reported in the 2021 Census

¹⁹ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42; Estimate based on a population of 25,422,788 as reported in the 2021 Census. Note: no weighting of survey responses was applied in calculating this figure.

²⁰ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 43

unintended consequences to those volunteer workforces and sectors, and the people they aim to assist.

The private sector and non-Government sector also engage volunteers, and it is acknowledged that investment can also be sought from these sectors, however the magnitude and breadth of Australian Government policy at the national level means greater focus, including on dispersed funding at the whole-of-government level, is required in this space.

5. Develop a national volunteer passport

The Australian Government should fund the development of a national volunteer passport. This platform would aim to increase volunteer mobility and enable better planning through improved data collection. It should build on other initiatives at the national and state/territory level, using a scalable approach.

Investment: \$800K per annum to support the volunteering ecosystem to engage and coordinate

This measure was included in Volunteering Australia's 2024-25 Pre-Budget Submission. Some progress has been made, with work being undertaken by the National Emergency Management Agency (NEMA) and Volunteering Australia consulted. However, work has now slowed and we reinforce our continued support for a national volunteer passport.

The case for a national volunteer passport is clear: onboarding of volunteers is often delayed or complicated by duplicative training requirements and worker screening processes, which are often not portable between jurisdictions. This can be a significant burden for organisations, particularly national organisations that engage volunteers in multiple states and territories. Improved data management and portability of volunteer clearances and skills are needed to improve the onboarding experience, increase efficiency, and better plan for volunteer involvement.

Beyond development costs within Government, resourcing is also needed to facilitate coordination between different volunteer credentialing projects at both a federal and state/territory level as they are developed to avoid unintended consequences and ensure compatibility.

A national volunteer passport should also be developed in consideration of existing state and territory solutions in this space. These existing and emerging projects can assist at a foundational level towards a national solution. To achieve the desired portability and efficiencies, the national volunteering passport project should draw on state and territory platforms to ameliorate jurisdictional differences.

The National Strategy for Volunteering Action Plan 2024-2027 includes an action to develop a national volunteer passport, a national online platform that supports volunteer engagement by hosting personal details, credentials and volunteering contributions. This will promote efficiencies and alignment by providing a common platform for volunteers. Responsibility for this action is shared by relevant stakeholders across the volunteering ecosystem.²¹

The volunteer passport project would aim to:

- Establish a national volunteer register: create a centralised database where volunteers can register their worker screening checks, resumes, certifications and qualifications, emergency contacts, language capabilities, and other relevant information.

²¹ https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2024/08/NSV_Action-Plan-2024-2027.pdf

- Develop a volunteer passport and app: introduce a digital volunteer passport and mobile app.
- Improve mobility of volunteers: allow volunteers to upload and manage their details and experience and share these with registered volunteer involving organisations and other agencies at their discretion.

The national volunteer passport should be developed in consultation with the volunteering ecosystem, including Volunteering Australia and the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies, to ensure the passport meets the needs of the ecosystem and interfaces effectively with existing and emerging federal platforms and state and territory-based solutions.

6. Invest in child safe volunteering

The Australian Government should invest in the roll-out of the National Principles for Child Safe Organisations across the volunteering ecosystem; and list child safe volunteering in its next three-year action plan.

Investment: \$1.5million over three years

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations set out a nationally consistent approach to promoting a culture of child safety and wellbeing within organisations. The ten principles give effect to the child safe standards recommended by the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (Royal Commission) and bring attention to general child safety and wellbeing issues.²²

In 2022, 32.5 per cent of formal volunteers identified that their volunteering primarily aimed to assist children and youth.²³ This suggests that an estimated 2.2 million people may volunteer with children and young people in Australia.²⁴

Principle 7 emphasises the importance of information, ongoing education and training for staff and volunteers.²⁵

“Staff and volunteers build on their knowledge and skills and evidence-based practice tools through professional seminars and memberships, supervised peer discussions, team training days and access to research and publications. This ensures staff and volunteers develop awareness and insights into their attitudes towards children and young people, and have a contemporary understanding of child development, safety and wellbeing. They can identify indicators of child harm, respond effectively to children and young people and their families and support their colleagues.”²⁶

Volunteering Australia works closely with the National Office for Child Safety (NoCS) within the Attorney-General’s Department on this issue and through membership of its Child Safe Sectors Leadership Group and related fora. The importance of considering volunteering in the work of NoCS as it implements the principles should not be underestimated and Child Safe Volunteering should be listed as a separate action in the next three-year action plan.

²² https://www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au/sites/default/files/final_report_-_recommendations.pdf

²³ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 46

²⁴ Estimate based on a population of 25,422,788 as reported in the 2021 Census. Note: no weighting of survey responses was applied in calculating this figure.

²⁵ <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/system/files/2024-04/national-principles-for-child-safe-organisations.PDF>

²⁶ <https://www.childsafety.gov.au/system/files/2024-04/national-principles-for-child-safe-organisations.PDF>, 15

7. Establish a climate change volunteering capacity building program

The Australian Government should invest in foundational work to establish a national program which builds and connects environmental and climate change volunteering capacity.

Investment: a development fund of \$0.5million in 2025-26

This measure would inform the development of a national program which amplifies and connects participation in climate change volunteering specifically, with the aim of directly benefiting the environment and contributing to efforts to mitigate the global environmental threat of climate change.

2026 has been designated by the United Nations General Assembly as the International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development. Against this international backdrop, Australia is also bidding to host an Australia-Pacific COP²⁷ in 2026. Targeted, community-driven measures such as the proposed volunteering capacity building program can ensure these significant initiatives resonate and reach Australians communities, while also complementing the more substantial structural interventions required to achieve the Government's commitment of 43 per cent emissions reduction by 2030. This measure will help demonstrate the Australian Government's commitment to community-led environmental initiatives on climate change through more effectively engaging volunteers.

The challenges presented by climate change require critical investment in prevention, education and resilience measures. Volunteers can and will play a leading role in this effort. They are already the backbone of environmental protection and action in Australia. Volunteers are also at the heart of emergency response to climate-related extreme weather events for Australian communities, increasingly called on to react to the impacts of climate change and support community and environmental recovery. Climate change disproportionately affects low-income, vulnerable and minority groups and regional and remote communities, including First Nations' communities.

The time has come to invest in climate change volunteering activities that focus on prevention, restoration, education and recovery to boost Australia's environmental and climate-change actions at the community level.

The opportunity to better align and grow this segment of Australian volunteering is significant. The 2022 Volunteering in Australia research found that 7.0 per cent of formal volunteers (around 475,000 people) are engaged in 'Environment' organisations in Australia.²⁸ However, *interest* in volunteering for environmental organisations was very high among non-volunteers, with 23.0 per cent of those who did not volunteer indicating that they would be interested in doing so for environmental organisations in the future – the second highest of any volunteering cause.²⁹

²⁷ COP stands for Conference of the Parties which is an international climate meeting held each year by the United Nations.

²⁸ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 42; Estimate based on a population of 25,422,788 as reported in the 2021 Census. Note: no weighting of survey responses was applied in calculating this figure.

²⁹ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>, 43

The gap between action and interest continues to present a timely opportunity to engage and support not only current environmental volunteers and volunteer involving organisations, but to galvanise those with intent or interest in participating.

There are more than six million formal volunteers in Australia³⁰ and further work is needed to better understand the motivations, needs and barriers to environmental and climate change volunteering specifically.

The foundational phase of this measure would allow for targeted qualitative research to ascertain what is needed to support this segment of the volunteering ecosystem, to map the space and understand its complexities at a national level, with recommendations for next steps to leverage the untapped interest in environmental and climate change volunteering. The program would amplify and build on other volunteering pilots and programs currently underway.

Conclusion

This Pre-Budget submission sets out the investment needed in the 2025-26 Budget to chart the course for volunteering to thrive in the future. It demonstrates how targeted strategic investment in volunteering will enable the Government to meet its key priorities.

Our recommendations are:

1. Provide volunteering cost-of-living relief through an expanded volunteer grants program
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6. Invest in child safe volunteering
7. Establish a climate change volunteering capacity building program.

³⁰ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Key-Volunteering-Statistics-2022-Update.pdf>

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 mission is to support a thriving volunteering ecosystem in Australia by promoting and advocating for volunteering and providing leadership at a national level.

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