



Volunteering Victoria Submission

Not-for-Profit Sector Development Blueprint Issues Paper

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Volunteering Victoria

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Introduction

Volunteering Victoria welcomes the [Not-for-Profit Sector Development Blueprint Issues Paper](#) (Issues Paper) which focuses on the 60,000 charities that are regulated through the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC).

Volunteering Victoria has contributed to and endorses Volunteering Australia's submission to the Issues Paper and would also like to highlight and direct the Not-for-Profit (NFP) Sector Expert Reference Panel to the following Volunteering Victoria submissions which will be relevant to any blueprint for the NFP sector in Australia:

- [Submission to 'A stronger more diverse community sector'](#)
- [Submission to Multicultural Framework Review](#)
- [Submission to Productivity Commission Philanthropy Inquiry](#)

Volunteering is a significant and essential part of community building and wellbeing:

- Fostering and advancing a successful, resilient, and more independent society;
- Contributing to building a more tolerant and respectful society in Australia;
- Supporting community building and upliftment;
- Providing pathways to employment and economic involvement;
- Supporting integration and social connection for and well-being of communities;
- Strengthening public understanding of diversity, multiculturalism, and the importance of community; and
- Supporting a cohesive and inclusive society, fostering a powerful sense of belonging to a place and community.

About Volunteering Victoria

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering. We are a member-based organisation with [individual and organisational members](#) from all sectors and places in Victoria and we advocate for, advise, and facilitate an inclusive and thriving volunteering culture across the state for members and non-members alike. Our strategic goal is to ensure volunteering and community building is appealing and accessible to ALL Victorians.

Volunteering Victoria is deeply committed to place-based approaches when doing what we do. This include delivering our largest program, the [Volunteer Management Activity](#)¹. This program has developed new digital resources and insights into improving access to volunteering and mitigating structural barriers for target cohorts. This experience, and the collective experience

¹ <https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>. See also the Volunteering Victoria VMA Highlights document on *Breaking Down Barriers and Building Sector Capacity* - https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/VMA-Highlights-Year-1_2023.pdf

drawn from projects by our members, affirms that volunteering is an essential wellbeing activity that is central to the lives of diverse communities across Australia.

Key Points in response to the issues paper:

1. Volunteering is both a critical and unique form of philanthropic giving that requires equal and specific consideration, research and planning in policy development and initiatives aimed at strengthening the not-for profit sector.
 - a. Funding and appropriately resourcing both the soft and hard infrastructure are necessary to 'activate' the full potential of community. The wraparound supports - people power - are as important to fund as the 'hard' infrastructure such as buildings.
 - b. There is a compelling case for providing sustained, long-term funding to support community organizations to develop programs that are well-designed, accessible, inclusive, and promote diversity and effective resource management over the long term. For a sector which grapples with some of the most complex economic and social development issues there is the constant pressure of short-term funding, funding restricted to programmatic outcomes and lack of investment in the long-term infrastructure or staff retention, particularly in place, that supports impactful mission outcomes, particularly where it involves volunteers

We would note that this approach, which is readily adopted by governments and the private sector when investing in industry capabilities, ensures stable investments that enable businesses to thrive over the long haul. However, regrettably, this logical approach has often not been extended to the non-profit sector,
2. There is an entire ecosystem of Not-for-Profit organisations that are not registered with the ACNC, many of them are nonetheless critical to community. All of these organisations rely – some entirely – on volunteers and should be included within the ambit of the NFP Sector Development Blueprint.
3. Volunteering is the core of the NFP sector and should be a central focus of the priorities and principles developed under the Issues Paper.
 - a. A significant majority of Not-for-Profits rely exclusively on volunteers for governance and the growing responsibilities (regulatory, fiduciary, risk management) on them are onerous.
 - b. Many also hold significant role for volunteers in mission delivery, back-end administration or fundraising.
 - c. A critical question to explore is what direct and or unintended effect will the recommendations within the NFP Blueprint have on the participation, workload and retention of volunteers?

This is especially critical given the current challenges for those who rely on volunteers in the post-pandemic environment, with declining participation and availability.

4. The NFP Sector Development Blueprint is an opportunity to ensure that equal and specific consideration is given to strengthen and support volunteering in a multicultural context. Research and planning in regulation and policy development as well as initiatives is required to ensure that all aspects and forms of volunteering are made more visible and resourced:
 - a. Multicultural volunteering can and does look different to traditional concepts of formal and informal volunteering. Voluntary contribution may be less formal in nature, viewed rather as community obligation, an act of service or religious duty.
 - b. Recognise the importance of multicultural volunteering in building inclusive, cohesive, and resilient societies;
 - c. Consider current research and support further research and data collection into volunteering in a multicultural context; and
 - d. Support the identification of systemic barriers and mindsets about volunteerism that prevent people from multicultural communities from fully participating in Australian society.
5. There is no shortage of evidence and experience that community building is necessarily community led. To build communities that are strong, more diverse, and independent, it is critical that governments and regulators orientate their activities to work with the NFP sector through partnerships and funding that appropriately and adequately address what the sector actually needs.
 - a. Meaningful partnerships require listening, supporting and resourcing the solutions identified by and with communities on an ongoing basis. Establishing the most effective methods for involving community to build partnerships and subsequent feedback loops must be a priority
 - b. The diverse voices and needs of volunteers, particularly those of local and diverse volunteers outside institutional settings are often under-resourced (and under-reported).
6. Volunteering involves local individuals and groups contributing their time, skills, and effort to support their communities and address local area issues and needs. This uniquely allows for the development of local, place-based initiatives and solutions, valuing and prioritising lived experience and community-led responses. Strengthening place-based volunteer programs and support services (such as volunteer resource centres) not just defaulting to centralised and/or web-based supports will grow individuals' communities' capacity to address social challenges by activating their agency and resourcefulness.
 - e. The multitude of community organisations and their volunteer workforces are by their very nature deeply embedded into community and offer the greatest opportunity to build capacity to deliver quality programs for sustained impact.

- f. The voices of certain segments of communities must be supported to be escalated to policymakers and decision-makers. Coordination of voices, capturing of communities' needs, require effort and resourcing in place, in community.
- g. Acknowledge the role of volunteering in not just supporting charities to deliver services but also in *leading* community action, especially where social change occurs.

The NFP Sector Development Blueprint is an important opportunity to review the complex issues and entrenched systemic inequities encountered by volunteer-led community organisations and the volunteers, and to provide clear recommendations to redress the underserved and underappreciated community voluntary contribution in the giving landscape. Significant work must be pursued to ensure that all aspects and forms of volunteering are made more visible and adequately supported and resourced.

Volunteering activity, in all its forms, brings about social and economic outcomes, including employment, wellbeing, social connection, belonging, an active citizenry and vibrant democracy.

We welcome the opportunity to discuss our recommendations with you further.

Yours sincerely

Geoff Sharp
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Volunteering Victoria