

NSW VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY





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MINISTER'S INTRODUCTION

Volunteering underpins our society, binds us together and contributes to strengthening and sustaining our communities. In NSW, over two million people regularly volunteer and, according to the most recent data available, they contribute more than 241 million volunteer hours a year. Volunteers patrol our beaches, ensure that children and adults can play their preferred sports, support teachers and learning in classrooms, support older people in their homes, keep our museums and historic sites open, regenerate our bushland and, in times of crisis, provide emergency services.

Volunteering is a gift for the community, by the community. It is therefore appropriate that the NSW Volunteering Strategy was developed through wide-ranging community consultation. Workshops were held in Sydney and regional NSW, with over 400 volunteers, organisations and special interest groups. Participants emphasised the need for government to develop new strategies, both to increase diversity and the number of volunteers. Participants argued that volunteering is sometimes undervalued and training – for both volunteers and managers – should be more broadly available. Organisations are also looking for new ways to sustain the volunteer workforce and leverage social media.

The NSW Government is well aware of the benefits that volunteering delivers and in its ten-year plan, NSW 2021: a Plan to Make NSW Number One, has identified three goals for the sector. The first aims to make it easier for people to become involved through implementing the NSW Volunteering Strategy which will drive improved information and support and promote greater recognition of volunteer effort.

The second goal recognises the critical role volunteers play in conserving our natural environment, and aims to 'increase opportunities for people to look after their own neighbourhoods and environments'.

The third goal sets out to ensure that NSW is ready to deal with major emergencies and natural disasters by mobilising communities through such organisations



as the NSW Rural Fire Service, and by providing more volunteer training programs, particularly cadet schemes.

These goals have informed development of the NSW Volunteering Strategy which, like NSW 2021, commits the State Government to increasing the numbers of people involved in formal volunteering, to diversifying the sector and to providing more support.

Volunteering is a cornerstone of civic life and volunteers are the soul of our society. A vibrant, growing and sustainable volunteer environment is fundamental to community building. A participant in one of our community consultations summed up what I am sure we would all wish for the future of volunteering: that by 2021 volunteering will become 'the great role' for people in NSW.

As the Minister for Citizenship and Communities, I am delighted to join with the Premier in releasing the first NSW Volunteering Strategy. It is my hope that this Strategy will support those already volunteering and encourage more volunteers; that it will deepen our understanding of the benefits of volunteering and raise its profile; and that it will promote and encourage new forms of volunteering and community participation.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Victor Dominello'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a small star-like mark above the 'i'.

The Hon Victor Dominello MP
Minister for Citizenship and Communities
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs



AN ACTION PLAN FOR VOLUNTEERING IN NSW

2011 marked the 10th anniversary of the United Nations International Year of Volunteers, an event that highlighted the contribution volunteers make to building stronger communities.

In developing a NSW Volunteering Strategy, it has been vital to recognise the nature, achievements and complexity of this sector. While much volunteering traditionally takes place without the involvement of government, there is a definite role that government can play, supporting and developing networks, highlighting good ideas and providing leadership, tools and resources.

‘Volunteering ... without it, this country would absolutely come to a standstill’

Volunteer Manager, Hurstville

Despite its diversity, the volunteering community has identified several common concerns.

In some areas the demand for services is increasing just as volunteer numbers are declining. Some organisations lack effective volunteer management. Others identify the need for better trained volunteers and express uncertainty about how to engage with the opportunities offered by new technologies. Many are concerned about how best to recognise the work volunteers do in the broader community.

This consultation process has enriched our understanding of the challenges and opportunities facing the sector. Seven ‘themes’ identified in our earlier Volunteering Strategy Discussion Paper have now been consolidated into five directions and provide a framework for the Strategy. In the following pages, each is addressed in turn, setting out specific actions the government is taking to achieve these directions.

These are:

- Making it easier to volunteer
- Broadening the volunteering base
- Volunteering as a pathway to employment
- Improving recognition and support for workplace volunteering
- Valuing volunteers and celebrating their contributions

Case-study examples are also included to showcase innovation relevant to each direction.

The strategy concludes with a snapshot of the volunteer sector today.

Many challenges lie ahead for volunteers in NSW, yet the opportunity exists for the NSW Government to build new partnerships that will enhance, revitalise and strengthen volunteering in this state.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 1

MAKING IT EASIER TO VOLUNTEER

From our community consultation, it is clear that, in some sectors, changing patterns of work and family life are making it difficult for volunteers to devote significant blocks of time. As one participant put it, 'never again will we be able to rely on people turning up every Tuesday, because people want to do so many different things.'

Skilled volunteers and managers enable organisations to deliver effective services. However, it can be difficult for them to get the necessary training. It can also at times be difficult to organise appropriate volunteer protection, insurance, risk management and other requirements.

For these reasons, the government plans to work with organisations to make it easier to volunteer and to ensure that those who do so are retained. It will encourage increased flexibility in volunteering opportunities to make it simpler to combine 'doing good' with other life priorities. We have redeveloped the government volunteering web site to include information and links relating to volunteering programs and opportunities within government, examples of good practice, training and recent research. Information will be provided in a range of languages and formats, with the aim of making volunteering accessible to all. By serving as a gateway to resources already available on the web, the portal will ensure that information is easier to find and avoid duplication.

Government will also work with the sector and other state departments to ensure that regulatory requirements are as clear and simple as possible. Working With Children Checks and National Criminal Record History Checks are important for those who deal directly, and in an unsupervised environment, with vulnerable members of our community. Some work has already occurred in this area, for example Ageing, Disability and Home Care (a division of the Department of Family and Community Services) currently provides its 400 disability non-government organisations with an affordable criminal record check service through

NSW Businesslink. The NSW Government will regularise the cost of National Criminal Record History Checks undertaken by NSW Police for volunteers, in certain circumstances where there is a statutory requirement for such checks to be undertaken.

'Bill Gates can't buy what I get from volunteering'

Volunteer, Albury

Anecdotal evidence suggests that organisations with clear training pathways, leading to recognised qualifications, are most successful at recruiting volunteers, particularly among young people. Because training is of critical importance to the long-term vitality of volunteering, government will look for opportunities to support existing programs and develop new online training resources.

NEW INITIATIVES

1.1

Provide support and information to people wanting to volunteer, and for those who already are volunteers, by:

- Enhancing the government's web portal for volunteers in NSW (volunteering.nsw.gov.au). This will make it easier to find out about volunteering programs and opportunities across government and provide links to volunteer centres and peak bodies. The portal will include hyperlinks, fact sheets, case studies and links to research.
- Producing print materials for volunteers without access to internet services.
- Provide funding to the Centre for Volunteering to initiate work on improving recognition of the rights of volunteers, and supporting development of a national discussion on this issue.

1.2

Recognise that volunteer organisations and managers require support and information, particularly to ensure that once people volunteer, they are retained by their organisations, by:

- Developing resources for the web portal specifically targeted at volunteer managers and volunteer-engaging organisations. These will include fact sheets, templates, case studies and links to research, including sector-specific research.

1.3

Work with the sector and government agencies to make it easier for individuals and organisations to meet regulatory requirements, by:

- Exploring opportunities to streamline regulatory, reporting and compliance requirements.
- Introduce regularised prices for National Criminal History Record Checks for NSW volunteers, where existing legislation, regulations, or NSW Government agency funding agreements require that they be undertaken.
- Providing expert advice on regulatory requirements and risk management for the use of volunteer-led community organisations.
- Developing plain-English resources to support community organisations in meeting compliance responsibilities.

1.4

Support the training needs of volunteers and volunteer managers, by:

- Supporting the delivery of training to volunteer managers across Sydney and regional NSW to assist in the implementation of professional volunteer co-ordination policies and procedures.
- Building partnerships with organisations to encourage sharing of training resources.



CASE STUDIES

Showcasing innovation in making it easier to volunteer

Engaging, supporting and managing volunteers

The Ministry for Health recognises the critical role that volunteers play in maximising health care experiences for patients and clients. In 2011, the Ministry launched NSW Health: a Framework for Engaging, Supporting and Managing Volunteers which provides advice, support materials and template codes of conduct to help health service managers to better involve volunteers in their programs.

Reducing red tape

Significant funding for the not-for-profit sector is administered through the Departments of Family and Community Services (FACS) and the Ministry for Health. Since 2009, both have been making it easier for organisations to meet their regulatory and administrative requirements. Achievements include the standardisation of insurance requirements, streamlining of compliance monitoring and improved information sharing. FACS has also made it simpler to apply for, manage and acquit funds.

Providing training opportunities and guidance

The Albury Wodonga Volunteer Referral Bureau recognised that many organisations faced the same volunteer management issues and, in response, developed Way2Go. Addressing each step in the management process, the toolkit adheres to Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteering and demonstrates how easily these can be applied in the workplace. The toolkit aims to increase an organisation's capacity to accept and manage volunteers and to enhance its programs.

Working with Aboriginal communities

Indigenous Community Volunteers (ICV) works in partnership with Aboriginal communities. ICV volunteers Pat and John Cassidy recently developed a new education program for the 10,000 NSW school students who visit Muru Mittigar ('Pathway to Friends' in the Darug language), the Aboriginal Education Centre in Castlereagh, each year. The Darug are the traditional owners of the land where the centre is located, and the education program emphasises their history and culture.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 2

BROADENING THE VOLUNTEERING BASE

Many organisations have adopted strategies to attract new volunteers to traditional activities. However, more can be done to recognise and harness the participation of younger people, Aboriginal people, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities, and people with disabilities. Consultation participants argued that words such as volunteer and volunteering do not adequately represent the time and effort that many people give to their communities. Younger people in particular called for new ways to describe their community engagement and participation. Government can assist by improving understanding of the diverse ways in which people support their communities, both formally and informally.

*'If you can do the job you're welcome ...
volunteering is for everyone'*

Meals on Wheels Volunteer, Bathurst

There is a role for government in providing information about volunteering and in making resources more widely available. Government can also support community involvement and participation through the use of digital media and technology. These offer new and exciting ways for people to volunteer and hold the prospect of breaking down the barriers of access and time. Young people in particular are keen to see social media being fully utilised.

Changing work and family life patterns are putting pressure on the sector to innovate. The Commonwealth Government's recent volunteering consultation also found strong evidence of a need for new models. Asked how they would like to volunteer in the future, 47.7% of respondents stated that they would like to participate

in a range of short-term projects, 43% that they would like to volunteer at home or online, while 25.1% wanted to volunteer with their families.¹ Organisations should be encouraged to respond to these trends by adopting more flexible practices and looking at new forms of volunteering, including episodic and project-based volunteering, family volunteering and e-volunteering.

NEW INITIATIVES

2.1

Partner with the volunteer sector to raise the profile of volunteering in the broader community, by:

- Launching an annual competition for students to develop a media campaign aimed at increasing volunteering.
- Providing a National Volunteer Week Media Toolkit for small and medium size volunteer organisations to help them raise their profile in the local community. The toolkit will increase interest in this national event which is held in May each year.

2.2

Work with the volunteer sector to capitalise on new opportunities created by digital media and technology, by:

- Hosting workshops for volunteer organisations in the use of social media.
- Providing targeted grants to local community organisations to support initiatives in using digital media and technology to attract and retain volunteers.
- Developing an online social media toolkit that will provide guidance, advice and examples of best practice.

2.3

Support the sector to increase its capacity to recruit diverse volunteers, making volunteering accessible to all, by:

- Working with education and training organisations to provide flexible, tailored training packages to help foster cultural diversity among volunteers.
- Raising awareness of the diversity of volunteering opportunities.
- The government web portal will feature Google translator to improve ease of access to information in many languages.
- Supporting and promoting the work of emergency services organisations in increasing volunteering among Aboriginal people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse communities and in encouraging the involvement of women in non-traditional roles.
- Encouraging young people, and employers, to recognise the value of skills acquired through volunteering.

2.4

Recognise and promote the contribution that many people make to their communities through informal volunteering, by:

- Supporting research to better document the contribution informal volunteers make to community building in NSW.
- Promoting case studies demonstrating the diversity of informal volunteering.

2.5

Encourage organisations to look at new forms of volunteering, by:

- Promoting models for new forms of volunteering.
- Strengthening the capacity of volunteer organisations by supporting them to review their operations and identify new and flexible options that are attractive to a broader cross-section of the community.

2.6

Strengthen the capacity of volunteer centres to encourage community building and support local initiatives to improve and protect neighbourhoods, by:

- Helping volunteer centre coordinators to become better connected and better able to share good practice.
- Undertaking an analysis of the distribution of centres across NSW and considering options for strengthening government support.

CASE STUDIES

Showcasing innovation in broadening the volunteering base and encouraging new ventures

Creating online opportunities

The Australian Museum is using e-volunteering to attract new types of volunteers and build its knowledge base. In collaboration with the Atlas of Living Australia, the Museum has developed the 'Online Volunteer Portal' (<http://volunteer.ala.org.au>) to assist volunteers to transcribe and interpret collection materials and input this into a database. A new pool of volunteers is now working from home, contributing their time when they like and producing a significantly enhanced collection database.

Building stronger communities

With the support of the Commonwealth Department of Immigration and Citizenship, Girl Guides has been working to break down barriers preventing culturally diverse community members from joining. Local businesses help recruit volunteer leaders, a more inclusive long-sleeved uniform option has been introduced and Guide Units have been established at Greenacre, Strathfield and Raby. Altogether some 80 girls from culturally diverse backgrounds have joined the Guides and taken part in the Harmony Day Garden Party, a community art project at Mount Annan Botanic Gardens and a bush camp.

Encouraging diversity

Recognising that skilled volunteers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds can have difficulty finding appropriate volunteering positions, the Community Relations Commission partnered

with the NSW Centre for Volunteering and the City of Sydney to develop a Skilled Diversity Project report aimed at assisting organisations to make better use of volunteers.

Broadening the base of Emergency Services volunteers

Emergency Services recognise the importance of involving Aboriginal people and people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities as volunteers. The State Emergency Services (SES), for example, has partnered with Adult and Community Education to deliver the Diversity in Volunteering Program. To date, 100 Aboriginal people and 25 people from CALD communities have participated and 50 SES members have received cultural awareness training to equip them to work with these new volunteers.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 3

VOLUNTEERING AS A PATHWAY TO EMPLOYMENT

It was often noted throughout the consultation process that volunteering can be a springboard, helping unemployed and under-employed people improve their employment prospects by increasing their self-confidence and developing new skills and knowledge. Volunteering can also provide valuable practical experience for school students, for those undertaking training and for those at university.

The consultation also highlighted challenges to the definition of 'volunteer' with the emergence of the 'mandatory' volunteer. Programs such as Work and Development Orders and the Commonwealth Government's Job Start Allowance provide financial benefits to participants engaged in formal volunteering or other community service.

'Introducing a spirit of volunteering to disengaged kids is important ... shows how much they are needed in the community ... often they don't feel needed'

Young Volunteer, Armidale

Many consultation participants also emphasised that volunteers should not be used as replacements for paid staff. There have been instances where school aged students or school leavers have been used by businesses as 'volunteers' when in fact they were undertaking an apprentice or trainee role, without receiving payment for the work undertaken. Such arrangements are illegal and may expose relevant employers to legal action.

More can be done to recognise the skills developed through legitimate volunteering. Government will work

with the sector to support 'volunteer ready' training programs and raise the profile of the skills gained through volunteering by encouraging employers to value volunteering experience when engaging new staff.

NEW INITIATIVES

3.1

Support access to training to provide people new to volunteering with basic skills in areas such as occupational health and safety, communication and teamwork, by:

- Working with the sector and training providers to investigate online delivery of 'volunteer ready' training.
- Working with government agencies to encourage plain-English information about regulatory responsibilities for volunteers and organisations.

3.2

Improve recognition of the skills gained through volunteering, by:

- Identifying opportunities to develop skills recognition programs for the volunteer sector, to support pathways to further training, education and employment.

3.3

Help young people demonstrate evidence of their community participation to future employers, by:

- Developing a volunteer log book to enable young people to document their volunteering efforts.
- Encouraging employers to recognise the value of volunteer experience when engaging new staff.

CASE STUDIES

Showcasing innovation in volunteering as a pathway to employment

Promoting volunteering among school students

Over 70% of eligible public schools have participated in the NSW Premier's Student Volunteering Awards program. This encouraged students in years 9 and 10 to volunteer in the school and community, promoting civic pride and contributing to strengthening communities. In 2011, some 7,000 students completed 180,000 hours of volunteering in areas such as assisting older people, and working on community and conservation projects and in emergency services.

Recognising skills gained in volunteering

In 2010 and 2011, the Federation of Parents and Citizens Associations, realising that their volunteers gain important skills through committee work, fundraising and generally helping out at schools, partnered with the Commonwealth Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations and the NSW Department of Education and Communities, to develop a pilot skills recognition model. Called 'Discuss, Display, Do', the program interviewed Parents and Citizen Association volunteers, identified their skills level and, where appropriate, encouraged further training. Altogether some 150 people were assessed with the majority gaining certification in areas such as Safe Food Handling, Business Management and Event Coordination.

Leadership skills and pre-professional experience for tertiary volunteers

The University of New England offers students an award program which provides personal and professional development through volunteering. The New England Award encourages students to participate in extra-curricular learning and training within their communities, and then reflect on the skills and attributes acquired or enhanced by the experience. Participating students may become community mentors in schools through the Department of Education and Communities.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 4

IMPROVING RECOGNITION AND SUPPORT FOR WORKPLACE VOLUNTEERING

A growing number of people are keen to volunteer through work-based programs. Work-sponsored or corporate volunteering is increasing. One in three respondents to the Commonwealth Government's volunteering consultation said they would like to participate in volunteering through their place of employment.² Recent research has also shown that volunteering contributes to increasing retention rates and decreasing time lost through sick leave.³

The consultation process for the NSW Volunteering Strategy revealed that the sector recognises the value and potential of corporate volunteering. However, there is a need to increase mutual understanding between business and volunteer organisations so there are clear and realistic expectations on both sides. There are opportunities for the NSW Government to work with both sectors to promote closer cooperation.

'The satisfaction of knowing you are doing it for a good cause'

Volunteer, Coffs Harbour

NEW INITIATIVES

4.1 Partner with the corporate sector to promote the benefits of volunteering, by:

- Developing resources to support community groups and businesses to establish corporate volunteering programs.
- Promoting the range of corporate volunteering options.

- Working to increase the number of public sector employees involved in volunteering by promoting the value of volunteering to staff, including linkages with not-for-profit organisations seeking skilled volunteers.

4.2

Increase understanding of the contribution the corporate sector makes through promoting best practice and recognising excellence, by:

- Promoting examples of best practice in workplace volunteering.
- Improving the evidence base through supporting research into corporate volunteering.
- In partnership with corporate volunteering 'champions', convene a forum to raise the profile of work being done in the sector, and encourage greater participation.
- Recognising and supporting the contribution that government agencies and businesses make when they release employees to volunteer in times of crisis for response and recovery activities.
- Working with the NSW Centre for Volunteering to raise the profile of the NSW Volunteer of the Year Award, including the Corporate Volunteer category.



CASE STUDIES

Showcasing innovation in improving recognition and support for work-place volunteering

Children's Guardian's support for the Breakfast Club

Under the Children's Guardian 'Kid's Time Policy', their staff are encouraged to maintain an active connection with children and young people by volunteering. Over a third of staff volunteers for the Breakfast Club at La Perouse Primary School. Run by the YWCA, this provides students with a free breakfast every school day and has proved a great success. The kids enjoy a healthy breakfast and the volunteers enjoy 'getting out of the office' and giving something back to the community.

Supporting staff to volunteer

The National Australia Bank has been supporting an employee volunteer program since 1998. The bank offers staff a minimum of 16 hours volunteering time per year (with no maximum). Last financial year, 41.3% volunteered, contributing 15,839 days to the community in a wide range of programs, from cooking meals and planting trees to skills-based volunteering, such as strategic assistance and mentoring. Altogether some 400 community groups have been supported and the success of the program is evident in the almost 50% growth in numbers of staff participating between 2009/10 and 2010/11.

Corporate volunteers improving community facilities

With over 12 million visitors a year, Centennial Parklands is one of the most popular open spaces in Australia. Corporate volunteers have been working with parklands staff to eradicate European carp from the ponds system. In the last financial year over 100 corporate volunteers contributed more than 1000 hours to the parklands, making a significant contribution to the total of over 10 tonnes of European carp removed from the ponds since the program began.



STRATEGIC DIRECTION 5

VALUING VOLUNTEERS AND CELEBRATING THEIR CONTRIBUTIONS

Across NSW, volunteer centres, local and state governments and special interest groups and organisations offer different forms of recognition. For example, each year the NSW Centre for Volunteering hosts the Volunteer of the Year Award. However, some volunteers feel that their efforts are not being fully appreciated. In the 2009 National Survey of Volunteering Issues by Volunteering Australia, one in three respondents said they had not received 'recognition or appreciation for doing good work' in the previous month.⁴

Volunteers must be appropriately valued and celebrated. However, there seems no one 'solution' to this problem, 'Every volunteer wants to be valued differently and it requires a lot to get that balance right'. A number of ideas have been put forward. In the UK, New Zealand and Israel, 'timebanking' projects have proved a successful means of recognising and rewarding individual volunteers while at the same time building social capital and strengthening a sense of community (see case study on page 21).

National Volunteer Week also offers an occasion to recognise and appreciate the work of volunteers. But more could be done to harness the opportunities this affords, particularly at the local level.

The consultation process highlighted the need to recognise the work of volunteers 'behind the scenes', particularly on committees and boards of management. Australia-wide it is estimated that 95% of all not-for-profits are entirely volunteer-run.⁵ Governance training and mentoring are critical to the sustainability of such organisations and government will partner with them to identify the best means of recognising and supporting their role.

Underpinning these initiatives, and the strategy as a whole, is a focus on research, on improving understanding of volunteers, and volunteer organisations, in NSW.

NEW INITIATIVES

5.1

Partner with volunteer organisations, local government, other government agencies and the private sector to deliver a volunteer recognition scheme, by:

- Developing 'timebanking' schemes in selected locations in NSW. 'Timebanking' seeks to develop a culture of mutual support by rewarding local volunteer effort with 'time credits'.

5.2

Support and encourage volunteers in their governance roles, by:

- Promoting volunteer governance in award and recognition programs.
- Supporting online delivery of good governance training.

5.3

Improve our understanding of the volunteer sector so as to better recognise the extent of the contribution that volunteers make to NSW, by:

- Partnering with universities to develop and deliver a Five Year Research Plan.

5.4

Raise the profile of the NSW Volunteer of the Year Award and National Volunteer Week, particularly in regional NSW, by:

- Working with the NSW Centre for Volunteering to raise the profile of the Award and increase its presence across NSW.
- Identifying opportunities to raise the profile of National Volunteer Week in NSW, particularly among key population groups such as young people.

CASE STUDIES

Showcasing innovation in valuing volunteers and celebrating their contributions

Investing in good governance

Recognising the extent to which not-for-profits are managed by volunteer-run committees and boards, Ageing, Disability and Home Care (ADHC) has produced a Good Governance program to develop knowledge and board management skills. The program is based on Sport and Recreation's 'It's Your Business' resource and National Disability Services NSW has been engaged to coordinate the program's implementation, which is open to all services funded by ADHC.

Community building through timebanking

Timebanking is a way for individuals and groups to help each other by *depositing time* and spending their time credits when they need services. One hour contributed equals one hour of time credit. With some models, members use their 'credits' to access a range of cultural, sporting or educational opportunities. Others permit the trading of services or resources between local groups, or let individuals 'transfer' their credits to those in greater need.

Timebanking schemes are in operation all over the world, including the UK, USA, Israel and New Zealand. A common characteristic is that they attract people who would not normally volunteer. A recent UK study found that, as compared with traditional volunteering, nearly four times as many low income earners are participating in timebanking volunteering and they are almost twice as likely to be unemployed.⁶

Rewarding skilled volunteering

For over 20 years, the Westpac Group has been encouraging and rewarding employees who volunteer. Almost two out of every three staff members participate in community volunteering or fundraising. Each year, outstanding individual and team efforts are recognised by the 'CEO Award', which donates \$10,000 to the winner's community organisation. In 2010, the winning team came from Production & Operations Risk. Members contributed 250 hours of their own time to build technical, operational and fundraising capacity at Plan International Australia.

Recognising outstanding achievements

Surf Life Saving NSW has a well-established model for recognising and rewarding volunteers. At the annual Surf Life Saving Awards of Excellence the organisation celebrates the achievements of volunteers. Clubs and then branches nominate individuals from across the organisation, for various award categories including administration, patrolling, training and assessment, competition and junior development. These nominations go to the state awards and from there to the Australia-wide awards. At each level, individual achievements – and the work of their clubs and branches – are promoted.



A SNAPSHOT OF VOLUNTEERING TODAY

The people of NSW have been volunteering both formally, through structured organisations, and informally, through family and friendship networks, for hundreds of years. We have a rich history of volunteering that is integral to our way of life and makes a significant contribution to our cultural, political, social and economic lives. Each day thousands of volunteers put their hands up and reach out to where the need arises, both in our cities and especially in regional and rural NSW.

This overview draws from available statistical data to briefly sketch the diversity, achievements and challenges of volunteering today. It will assist those involved in the sector to understand the complexity and breadth of the volunteer experience.

A volunteer is someone who willingly offers their time, service and/or skill without payment.

Formal volunteering is defined as 'unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group'.⁷ It is generally only this type of volunteering that is reflected in research and statistical data.

WHAT IS VOLUNTEERING?

Volunteering is offering time, service and/or skill without payment. It is generally divided into two categories: formal volunteering, which occurs through a structured organisation or group, and informal volunteering, which occurs outside such groups, for example, caring for relatives or neighbours, or helping out individually during a crisis such as the 2011 floods. Research and data on volunteering largely includes only formal volunteering.

Most volunteering occurs within the large and diverse not-for-profit sector. Across Australia, this includes some 59,000 organisations from major and economically significant bodies such as the Australian Red Cross,

St Vincent de Paul and Greenpeace to over 500,000 small, local community groups in the areas of social services, culture, sport, recreation and religion. Around 84% of all volunteers – over 4.6 million people – work with these organisations and contribute the equivalent wage value of \$15 billion to the Australian economy.⁸

Volunteering rates in NSW have been steadily increasing since the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) published its first full-length report on volunteering in 1996. According to the latest ABS data available, 2.01 million people in NSW aged 18 and older formally volunteered their time to an organisation in 2010. This is up from 1.67 million in 2006, and reflects an overall rise in the volunteering rate to 36.2% of the Australian population.⁹



TABLE 1 NSW VOLUNTEER RATE FROM 2002 TO 2010

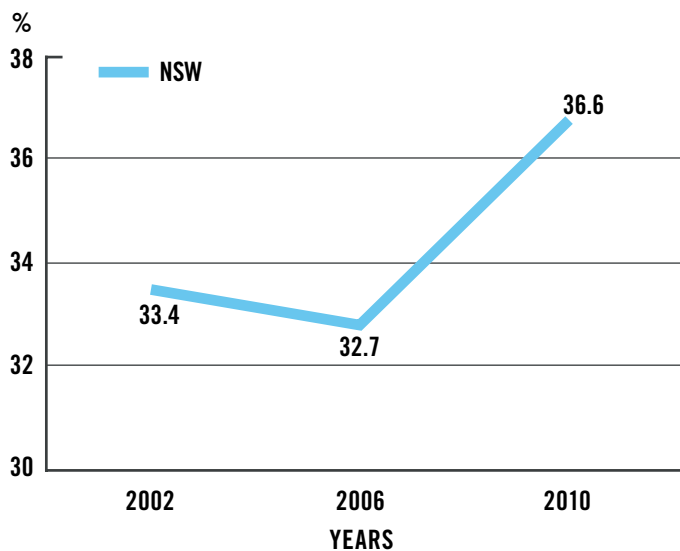
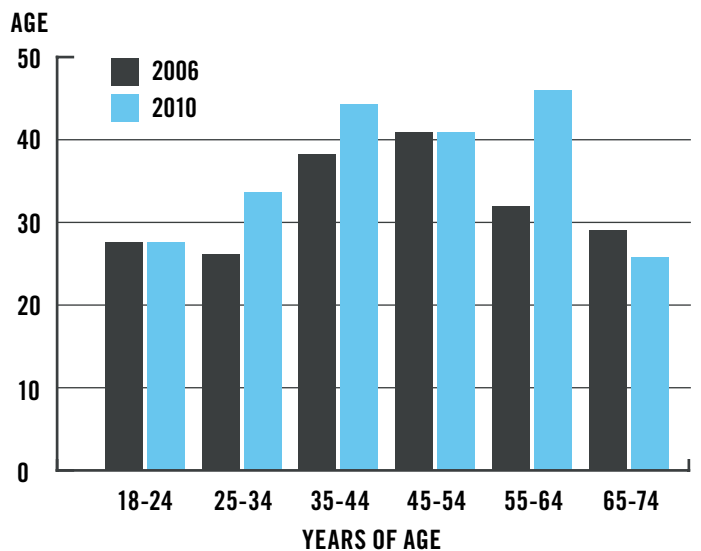


TABLE 2 NSW VOLUNTEER RATE BY AGE



WHO VOLUNTEERS?

Volunteers are as diverse as the roles they perform, although some groups are more likely to be involved in formal volunteering than others. For example, drawing on available statistics, a volunteer would more likely be a woman than a man, be aged 45 to 54 years, be in a couple relationship with dependent children, have been born in Australia and be living outside a major capital city.¹⁰ Other factors associated with above average rates of volunteering include health, level of education and income. This is also reflected in many international studies, which show that people with greater social and other resources are more likely to become volunteers.¹¹

In 2002, a national survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders estimated a volunteering rate of 28% across Australia's Aboriginal population, with a slightly higher rate (32%) in urban areas.¹² As in other parts of the world, volunteering within Aboriginal communities is probably much higher but is not captured in statistics, which measure only formal volunteering. These figures highlight the need for more inclusive and culturally sensitive methods of measuring and evaluating volunteering, and also the need for more socially and culturally inclusive strategies to support volunteering among those groups with limited access to the kinds of resources that enable and encourage volunteering.¹³

TABLE 3 VOLUNTEER RATES IN NSW BY TYPE

Type of Organisation*	Participation rate %
Sport and Physical Recreation	33.3
Religious	27.0
Welfare/Community	21.6
Parenting/Children and Youth	15.2
Education and Training	15.1
Other	14.6
Health	8.1
Emergency Services	7.6
Arts/Heritage	6.4
Environment	5.2
Animal Welfare	4.8
Business/Professional/Union	4.7

*respondents were able to nominate more than one organisation

MOTIVATIONS

Research tells us that people volunteer for a range of reasons, both altruistic and personal. While the most commonly stated reason is to help others or the community, other motivations include for personal satisfaction or social contact, to learn new skills or gain work experience, or to identify with an organisation's goals.¹⁴ The particular mix or strength of these motivations has been found to vary among different groups. For example, 'helping the community' is rated more highly as a reason for volunteering among older people (65–74 year olds) and 'personal/family involvement' by 35–44 year olds. 'Helping others in the community' and 'personal satisfaction' was slightly more important for females than males. 'Personal satisfaction', and 'to do something worthwhile' were more important for people who were not in paid employment.¹⁵

Research also suggests that parents can play an important part in role modelling volunteering for their children, with the volunteer rate among people whose parents had done voluntary work twice that of those whose parents had not.¹⁶

BENEFITS

The benefits of volunteering are many. It delivers services that otherwise would not be provided or would be more expensive. It contributes to the well-being, unity and at times resilience of communities. This is most notable through our emergency service volunteers who are at the forefront of many natural disasters such as bushfires and floods.

For an organisation using volunteers, it can complement and expand the work of paid staff, broaden the skill mix and improve morale and performance. Volunteering can also help build the organisation's profile, credibility and relationship with stakeholders and the community. By helping others, volunteers also gain many benefits: satisfaction and affirmation, self-esteem, social interactions and friendships, personal growth and development, physical and career benefits¹⁷, all of which contribute to developing well being and social capital.

BARRIERS TO VOLUNTEERING

Research also tells us something of the reasons why people do not volunteer. In the United States, a major study identified three main barriers: lack of time, lack of interest and ill health.¹⁸ An Australian study focusing on older people suggests that perceived barriers to volunteering also include negative perceptions of volunteer activities, fear of encountering 'ageism', and concerns about increasing regulations, such as security, risk and insurance requirements.¹⁹ However, there is currently not enough Australian data on barriers to volunteering and further research is required.



RECENT TRENDS

Like most aspects of life, the world of volunteering is transforming under the impact of globalisation, new technologies and social media (to name a few). In NSW other significant trends include a generational shift in volunteering styles and preferences, as older volunteers, often with an ongoing commitment to a particular organisation, are replaced by younger volunteers who are more interested in episodic volunteering, online volunteering and international volunteering. Other broader issues of recruitment, retention and management of volunteers across the sector will continue to dominate discussions as will the issue of protection of volunteers in the workplace.

Organisations using volunteers are faced with a double challenge: to create new volunteer opportunities that align with these changes, but also to provide ongoing services for clients. Some recent trends gaining popularity as they combine volunteering with other life demands include:

- **Corporate volunteering** with employers supporting employees by giving leave for volunteering or by organising volunteer opportunities.
- **Family volunteering** where family groups can volunteer together to combine volunteering with family needs such as spending time together and passing on positive community values.
- **Voluntourism** (volunteer tourism) which combines volunteering and leisure tourism. It usually targets developing countries (but not exclusively) and is attracting mainly young adults.
- **On-line volunteering** (also known as e-volunteering or virtual volunteering) when people provide services or work that can be sent via the internet.
- **Volunteer dating** where people can combine volunteering with the possibility of finding love.

- **Timebanking** which allows people to register the hours they help others to receive services from members on an hour-for-hour basis.

Although more Australians are volunteering than ever before, albeit for less time, certain traditional sites of volunteering, especially social welfare and emergency services have seen reductions in time commitments. This is particularly the case in many long-standing sites of volunteering such as Meals-on-Wheels and some of the service organisations such as Lions Australia and Rotary Australia. Similarly in emergency services, the demand for volunteers is accompanied by volunteer management, recruitment and retention challenges. Despite the importance of volunteering to our community, the irregularity of data on volunteering in Australia, and its absence from Australia's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) calculations contributes to a degree of 'invisibility' for volunteering.

Many challenges lie ahead for volunteers in NSW as we enter the second decade of the 21st century. Yet the opportunity is here for the NSW Government to work in partnership with the volunteering community to strengthen and support volunteering and volunteers.

Authors: Oppenheimer, M., and Haski-Leventhal, D.

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