state of **volunteering** in VICTORIA

Executive Summary

volunteering VICTORIA

Key Findings

Volunteers

This section describes volunteering as it occurred in Victoria in the 12 months prior to August 2024, as reported in the survey of Victorian residents.

3.3 Million people volunteered (58.9% of the Victorian population aged 15+)

Hours volunteered

732.4 million Total hours volunteered

Average hours volunteered per person:

221.6 hours per year (18.5 hours per month)

332 Hours per year – Regional and remote volunteers

208 hours per year – Metro volunteers

Of Victorian volunteers:

22.1% volunteered formally only

30.4% volunteered both formally and informally in the community

47.5% volunteered informally only

23.6% Volunteered online or at home

22.5% of volunteers plan to be volunteering more in three years' time

Top 5 barriers to volunteering

46.1% Work or study

39.7% Family

32.1% Income/costs/expenses

20.2% Other social interests

14.7% Lack of transport

Top 5 volunteering motivations

62.0% To help others

48.7% Because I can

37.7% To use my skills and expertise

33.0% To give back to those who've helped me

23.9% To support or learn more about a cause

Top 3 recruitment channels

35.6% With family and friends

27.8% Social media

21.0% Google/searching online

Leaders of Volunteers

Profile of Leaders of Volunteers:

54.7 years Average age

12.8 years Average years of experience

Gender

23.8% Men

69.4% Women

2.1% Non binary

Role type

49.7% Paid

46.3% Unpaid

4.0% Both paid & unpaid

Key inclusion metrics

Percentage of Leaders of Volunteers who engage specific volunteer cohorts in their programs)

85.6% engage retirees

49.3% engage culturally and/or linguistically diverse volunteers

45.5% engage young people

55.5% engage people living with disability

57.9% of Leaders of Volunteers think they will still be managing volunteers with their organisation/group in three years

Volunteer-Involving Organisations

Organisation/Group Structure

29.8% Volunteers only

41.7% More volunteers

28.5% More paid staff

Top 3 methods to recruit volunteers

73.2% Family and friends*

63.2% Social media

48.3% Participants or service users

* of volunteers, participants or service users

Top 3 volunteer issues

78.0% Volunteer physical health and safety

75.2% Volunteer mental health and safety

68.4% Volunteer retention

Top 3 methods to retain volunteers

79.2% Personal relationship and team building

78.4% Public praise & acknowledge—ment

72.5% Volunteer training and development

Top 3 reasons people stop or reduce their volunteering with the organisation

20.1% Change to work or family circumstances

18.6% Too much paperwork / red tape

16.0% Burnout (over-volunteering)

70.9% of organisations predict they will need more volunteers in three years.

Contents

> ⓘ This publication is the extracted Executive Summary of the 2025 State of Volunteering Report. Primary research was conducted in 2024–2025, with analysis in 2025.
>
> More details, including complete statistics, analysis and methodology, can be found in the full report at volunteeringvictoria.org.au/VICSOVR-2025

The Changing State of Volunteering in Victoria

In 2024, **3.3 million Victorians volunteered**, contributing over **732 million hours** of unpaid service, a testament to the enduring strength of community life.

This report honours their contribution and provides the most detailed picture yet of how volunteering is evolving, and what must change to sustain it.

Volunteering is transforming

Led by new voices, new formats, and new motivations, it remains one of Victoria's greatest strengths. But our systems, structures, and funding models must adapt to support it.

A sector in transition

Over the past five years, volunteering in Victoria has undergone significant change. While headlines during the COVID-19 pandemic pointed to a sharp decline in participation, the story in 2024 is one of **remarkable recovery – but also transformation**.

In 2020, just **42.1%** of Victorians over 15 years of age reported volunteering – a low point given the COVID reality. By 2024, that figure had climbed to **58.9%**, representing **3.3 million** people across the state who gave their time to causes, organisations, neighbours and communities.

This recovery is not only encouraging – it is a powerful indicator of Victoria's deep civic spirit and social resilience.

Yet, when viewed nationally against the other State of Volunteering Reports, Victoria's volunteer participation rate is below the national rate of **64.3%**. If we matched the national average rate, we would have approximately **300,000 more volunteers**. In practical terms, that is an estimated **68 million hours of additional community service** that we are missing.

Importantly, the nature of volunteering has also shifted. Much of the recent growth has occurred not in traditional roles, but in informal and non-traditional settings.

At the same time, **formal volunteering has declined sharply**. Compared to 2020, there are now over **200,000 fewer formal volunteers** in Victoria. This is not an isolated finding – major national datasets including the Census, the General Social Survey (GSS), and successive State of Volunteering reports in multiple States since 2014 have all shown a consistent decline in formal volunteering participation. While many Victorians continue to give their time, they are choosing new models.

This shift is not a sign of disengagement – it is a sign that people's lives, motivations, and circumstances have changed.

Volunteering is still thriving, but it is doing so in ways that often fall outside of conventional structures.

That said if our systems of recognition, support, and funding continue to prioritise only traditional ways and models of volunteering we risk becoming a case study in not responding adequately to disruptive change at a population level.

The task ahead is not to restore volunteering to what it once was – but to recognise and support what it is becoming. The energy, willingness and care are all still here. The question is: will our institutions, practices, and strategies evolve to meet them?

Participation is rebounding, in new and expansive ways

Victorians have returned to volunteering in large numbers since 2020, but not in the same ways. Participation is increasingly taking place outside formal structures.

In 2024, nearly **half of all volunteers (47.5%) engaged informally**, outside of formal organisational structures. **Online volunteering** also expanded significantly, with almost **one in four volunteers (23.6%)** donating time remotely.

These trends reflect the growing appeal of flexible, self-directed forms of contribution – particularly among younger, culturally diverse, and regional communities.

This shift is not merely logistical – it reflects changing lifestyles, expectations, and values. People want to contribute, but they need options that fit their lives. Informal, cause-based, short-term, and flexible roles are proving more attractive than traditional long-term commitments.

The challenge ahead is to **recognise and support these new models**.

If volunteering is defined too narrowly, we risk missing a surge of civic energy already underway.

> "I help out whenever I can, it's not official, but it matters to my neighbours."

Volunteers are more purposeful and impact-focused

Today's volunteers are looking for roles that offer meaning, impact, and personal alignment.

The most common motivations included **helping others (62%), using skills (37.7%)**, and **giving back to those who have helped them (33%)**.

Young people in particular are highly engaged and highly motivated. They do more volunteering and have the highest participation rate of any age cohort, but they also seek roles that build confidence, develop skills, and offer a sense of purpose.

However, the infrastructure around recognition, support, and cost reimbursement has not kept pace. Most volunteers are not reimbursed for expenses, and many report a disconnect between their motivations and what organisations offer.

To retain and grow this contribution, organisations must rethink how they design and frame volunteer roles - **moving from an ask for help to an invitation to contribute and grow.**

> "I want to volunteer where it actually makes a difference, not just where there's a gap."

Let's make it easier to say "yes"

Despite high levels of interest in volunteering, many people still encounter barriers.

For current volunteers, common limitations include **work or study commitments (46.1%), cost (32%)**, and **transport (14.7%)**. For those not currently volunteering, **lack of confidence, not knowing how to get started, and lack of visible opportunities** were among the most frequently cited issues. Cost of living barriers and lack of reimbursement were repeated themes across the quantitative research.

Too often, the pathway into volunteering is unclear or too complex. Administrative burdens, background checks, and unclear expectations can deter otherwise willing contributors.

Making volunteering more accessible means more than outreach. It requires a full rethink of **how we recruit, onboard, and support people** to get involved.

> "It took me weeks to find a role that didn't need five forms and a police check."

Behind every volunteer is someone making it happen

Leaders of Volunteers are the unseen infrastructure behind much of the state's volunteering. They train, support, and coordinate the people who give their time. However, many are under-resourced and at risk of leaving the sector.

In 2024, less than 60% of volunteer leaders said they expected to still be in their role in three years. Many are older, unpaid, or managing programs without formal support. Volunteer-Involving Organisations in Victoria currently invest less than $6 per volunteer hour – well below the national average of $13.97/hour.

Ensuring a healthy volunteering system requires investment in the people who lead it.

That includes professional development, leadership pathways, and funding for the critical infrastructure of coordination and support. It was also clear from the research data that this reflects the financial challenges many Volunteer Involving Organisations are facing.

> "I love what I do, but I can't keep doing it without support – it's too much for one person"

Digital tools should strengthen, not replace connection

Technology is reshaping how people volunteer. Online and remote roles have increased significantly, especially among younger and culturally diverse communities. These options offer flexibility and accessibility – but they must not come at the cost of community connection.

Current digital tools often treat volunteers as a list to fill, rather than as people to engage. Systems are often clunky, computer (not phone) orientated, impersonal, or inaccessible to smaller organisations. The digital divide in rural and vulnerable communities is real and must be considered.

There is an opportunity to redesign digital volunteering tools, portals, platforms and interactions to **foster connection, reduce friction, and enhance accessibility**. Doing so could unlock wider participation and stronger retention.

> "People say their volunteering program is digital... what they mean is they have a Facebook page... ask any young person, Facebook is NOT social media."

Volunteers and volunteering looks different

Some of the strongest contributions to volunteering are coming from groups who have historically been underrepresented or undervalued.

Young people (15–24) now have the highest volunteering rate in the state, averaging more hours than any other age group. They are values-driven, digitally fluent, and eager to contribute – but often face barriers related to cost, burnout, and lack of fit.

Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) volunteers demonstrate exceptional participation (71%), often volunteering across multiple settings and for reasons rooted in culture, identity, and reciprocity. Yet they face significantly higher costs and more systemic barriers.

Volunteers with disability or mental health conditions give more hours on average and report high wellbeing benefits. Still, they also report experiencing the most barriers, particularly around access, confidence, and fatigue.

To sustain this shift, **we must treat these groups not as "marginal" but as central to the future of volunteering**. Inclusion must be built into role design, leadership, recognition, and access.

> "There's this idea that young people don't care. But I do care – I just don't know where I'm supposed to go."

> "I treat my volunteer work like it was paid employment… turning up on time, doing tasks that were expected of me."

Aligning with the National Strategy

The issues raised in this report do not stand alone. They echo and reinforce the priorities identified in the National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033.

https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au

That national framework calls for a volunteering ecosystem that is inclusive, well supported, and aligned to modern life. It highlights the need to value volunteers' contributions, strengthen leadership and infrastructure, and design volunteering experiences that reflect Australia's diversity and evolving expectations.

The evidence presented here affirms those national objectives: the shift to informal and digital volunteering, the desire for purpose-driven roles, the fragility of volunteer leadership, and the need for better recognition and investment are all part of a national pattern.

As Victoria reflects on the findings of this report, there is a clear opportunity to respond not in isolation, but in step with a national vision. By aligning policy, investment and practice with the direction set by the national strategy, Victoria can not only meet local challenges – it can help shape a stronger, more connected future for volunteering across Australia.

The way forward

Volunteering in Victoria is not in decline – it is in transition.

More than **3.3 million Victorians** gave their time in 2024, contributing over **732 million hours** to causes, communities, and people they care about. That generosity is one of the state's greatest assets. **Even at the minimum wage rate, that is nearly over $18 billion in donated time, and in many cases would require skills and abilities far in excess of the minimum wage. That is only a tiny fraction of what is given to the community every year.**

This report shows that while the desire to contribute remains strong, our systems and supports have not kept pace with the changing nature of volunteering.

The upside is significant. If Victoria lifted its participation rate to the current national average (64.3%), we would see nearly **half a million additional volunteers** across the state. That equates to an estimated **68 million more hours** of service every year – hours that could strengthen neighbourhood networks, fill gaps in essential services, improve community wellbeing, and drive social inclusion at a time when it's needed most.

Importantly, this is not a distant or unreachable goal. The intent to volunteer already exists. Among people who are not currently volunteering, **over one in five (21.8%)** say they plan to start within the next three years. A further **36.3% are unsure** – not unwilling, but unconvinced or unsure how to begin. This is a group that can be reached with the right combination of visibility, encouragement, and support.

Even among current volunteers, there is clear appetite to do more. **Nearly a quarter (22.5%)** say they intend to increase their involvement, and many others would give more if barriers such as cost, inflexible roles, or lack of recognition were addressed. In total, this points to a pool of over **one million Victorians** who are either ready to start volunteering or ready to give more – if the conditions are right.

This presents a once-in-a-generation opportunity to reshape the volunteering system in Victoria. To do so, we must move beyond a focus on participation rates alone and design for what volunteering is becoming: **more informal, more diverse, more digital, and more integrated with people's lives.**

The generosity is here.
The intent is here.
The future is already emerging.

What this all means

This all requires a **reset of "the system" to reflect how people live and give today** – recognising informal and episodic volunteering, investing in flexible and inclusive role design, and resourcing the infrastructure that makes volunteering possible.

It means **supporting those who lead volunteers** – not just through training and recognition, but with sustainable funding, succession planning, and wellbeing support.

It also means embracing **digital tools that connect rather than isolate,** and ensuring regional and smaller organisations have the capacity to engage in modern ways.

Perhaps most importantly, it means **reframing volunteering as a pathway**, not just an activity – as a way to build skills, find purpose, strengthen community, and foster belonging.

The evidence is clear: **the future of volunteering will be more flexible, inclusive, and digital.** To get there, we must invest in volunteer infrastructure, support diverse pathways into volunteering, and resource the people and systems that make it all possible. This work must be aligned not only with community needs, but also with the national strategy and shared goals across the country, so together we can all shift and adapt to the Future of Volunteering.

If we can do that, the future of volunteering in Victoria will not only be more sustainable; it will be more equitable, more inclusive, and more impactful than ever before.

Summary statistics: State of Volunteering in Victoria

	Participation Rate (% of cohort who volunteer)	Different Motives	Recruitment Channels	Barriers
Young Volunteers (15–24 years old)	69.4%	• No one else was doing it • Educational or government requirements • Career development	• Social media • Traditional media	• Work or study commitment • Income, costs and expenses • Lack of transport
Older Volunteers (65+)	50.1%	• Civic or community duty • To use my skills and experience • Because I can	I was a participant/ user who started volunteering	Other social interests
Rural and Regional Volunteers	53.3%	• Because I can • To use my skills and experience	I was a participant/ user who started volunteering	Family
Women	56.4%	• To help others • To use my skill and experience	Social media	• Work or study • Family • Lack of transport
CALD Volunteers	71.0%	• Education or government requirement • To contribute during a crisis • To support or to learn more about a cause	• SEEK Volunteer or online volunteer recruitment • Social media • Google/ searching online • Referral • Open days or events / walk-in • Volunteer resource centres	• Work or study • Family • Cultural practices • Lack of transport • Income, costs and expenses
Volunteers with Disability	53.6%	• To give back to those who have helped me • Because I can	• Open days or events / walk-in • I was a participant/ user who started volunteering	• Lack of transport • Income, costs and expenses
Volunteers with Mental Health condition	54.8%	• To help others • No one else was doing it • To contribute during a crisis • To support or to learn more about a cause	• Social media • Google/ searching online • Traditional media • Open days or events / walk-in • Volunteer resource centres	• Cultural practices • Lack of transport • Income, costs and expenses

	Intent to volunteer more in 3 years (% of current volunteers)	Average volunteer cost per year	Average hours volunteered annually	Cost per volunteering hour	Wellbeing (volunteers vs non-volunteers)
Young Volunteers (15–24 years old)	29.8 %	$4,390	272	$16.14	65 Vols 63 Non-Vols
Older Volunteers (65+)	5.5 %	$823	242	$3.40	78 Vols 68 Non-Vols
Rural and Regional Volunteers	20.9 %	$2,282	257	$8.88	69 Vols 63 Non-Vols
Women	25.7 %	$2,513	201	$12.50	70 Vols 63 Non-Vols
CALD Volunteers	25.8 %	$4,918	234	$21.02	70 Vols 62 Non Vols
Volunteers with Disability	23.0 %	$1,815	248	$7.32	61 Vols 47 Non-Vols
Volunteers with Mental Health condition	28.7 %	$3,626	233	$15.56	59 Vols 57 Non-Vols

2025
State of Volunteering Report

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