

Volunteering Victoria Submission to SV2030: A DECADE OF ACTION

TO:	Sustainability Victoria
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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

Volunteering Victoria acknowledges the Bunurong Boon Wurrung and Wurundjeri Woi Wurrung peoples, the traditional custodians of the land on which our office stands, and we pay our respects to them, their culture and their Elders past and present.

ABOUT VOLUNTEERING VICTORIA

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering, focusing on advocacy, sector development and the promotion of volunteering. We are a member-based organisation with over 400 individual and organisational members from all sectors and places around Victoria. Volunteering Victoria has a singular and specialised focus on volunteering. We see our role as leading the development of a collaborative, sustainable, thriving volunteering community and movement in Victoria. Our purpose is to promote and build a vibrant, strong volunteering community that is inclusive, respected, and sustainable.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Embed volunteering throughout Sustainability Victoria's strategy and policy.

Recommendation 2: Invest in volunteering infrastructure for the Sustainability sector.

Recommendation 3: Broaden the reach of SV2030 through place-based partnerships.

Recommendation 4: Promote Inclusion & Diversity in Sustainability volunteering.

Volunteering & the vision for Sustainability

Volunteering is an essential part of the social fabric of Victoria and is crucial to social connection, community cohesion and engaged, active people who can thrive within their communities. An estimated 2.3 million Victorians volunteer their time every year, contributing an average of 223.9 hours each. Volunteering represents \$58.1 billion in value for the Victorian economy, or a net return of approximately \$3.70 on every dollar invested¹. However, the contribution of volunteering cannot only be measured by its economic value.

Volunteering offers a broad range of health, wellbeing, social and educational benefits for individuals and communities. Inherent to volunteering is a sense of connection – community and social participation and connection to land and environment. Fostering connection contributes to thriving, healthy and resilient communities. Volunteering is therefore critical to working towards a sustainable future for all Victorians.

Sustainability Victoria's vision and strategy for the coming decade – SV2030 inherently involves individuals and communities volunteering their time for collective action in sustainability groups, programs, and activities. Yet, SV2030 does not overtly mention the role of volunteering or the invaluable contribution of volunteers that clearly aligns with its strategic aims and focus areas.

¹ [Volunteering Victoria, The State of Volunteering in Victoria Report, 2020](#)

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning (DELWP) has identified that volunteers are an essential part of the environment and sustainability workforce and programs². More than 100,000 volunteers are currently volunteering in and for the environment³. Their most recent ‘Volunteering Naturally’ report found that 63% of all environmental volunteering groups are focused on Sustainable Living⁴. DELWP’s Environmental Volunteering Plan aims to lift the number of volunteers to five million Victorians acting to protect the natural environment by 2037⁵.

The contribution of volunteers to build a sustainable future is also reflected in the Volunteering Victoria membership, which includes many sustainability and environmental organisations, in addition to the many members from Local Government Victoria, Neighbourhood House Victoria and other related sectors such as education and health.

Volunteering Victoria’s members in the Sustainability & Environmental sector:

Bayside Community Emergency Relief	Environment Education Victoria	Royal Botanic Gardens Victoria
Beyond Zero Emissions	FareShare	Second Bite
Bicycle Recycle Shed	Foodbank Victoria	St Kilda Mums
BluEarth Foundation	Habitat for Humanity	The Bushfire foundation
Castlemaine Maryborough Rail Trail	Keep Victoria Beautiful	The Footpath Library
Coastcare	Links Community Transport	Victoria SESVA
Conservation Volunteers Australia	Melbourne Community Toy Library	Victorian SES
Country Fire Authority	Parks Victoria	Zoos Victoria
DELWP	People Outdoors	

If volunteering is not explicitly acknowledged in strategy and policy, it is impossible to appropriately account for and resource this critical means to achieving the vision of Sustainability Victoria. SV2030 provides a valuable opportunity to acknowledge, value and invest in the contribution of volunteers and harness the collective power of volunteering. Volunteering Victoria looks forward to working with Sustainability Victoria to achieve a sustainable future for all Victorians.

Alignment with SV2030

Strategic vision and aims

SV2030 is a vibrant and exciting vision for a sustainable Victoria. Key strategies to achieve this vision include supporting Victorians to act on climate change, facilitating connection, funding and opportunities, and fostering collaborations and partnerships.

Volunteering is aligned with these aims by inherently fostering connection, and offering unique opportunities for collaboration, partnership, and investment. Victoria’s volunteers are already heavily involved in action on environment, climate change and sustainability. With investment, these efforts can be supported and strengthened, and the reach of volunteering expanded.

Resources: People

SV2030 identifies ‘People’ as one of four primary resources for achieving and operationalising its strategic vision. SV2030 extends upon Sustainability Victoria’s commitment to working with

2 [Department of Environment, Land and Water Planning, Volunteering Naturally, 2020](#)
 3 [Department of Environment, Land and Water Planning, Environmental Volunteering Plan, 2018](#)
 4 [Department of Environment, Land and Water Planning, Volunteering Naturally, 2020](#)
 5 [Department of Environment, Land and Water Planning, Environmental Volunteering Plan, 2018](#)

communities, with the aim of educating and activating a greater range of communities, fostering new partnerships, and promoting greater diversity and inclusion. Volunteering is universal to all communities, and volunteering organisations and support services are a key opportunity for partnership. Improving diversity and inclusion is a shared vision of Volunteering Victoria as we seek to make volunteering accessible to all Victorians.

Focus Area 3: Community Action: Place-based projects and programs

SV2030's Focus Area 3 – Community Action: Place-based projects and programs identifies that achieving a sustainable future requires collaboration with all communities to ensure each take a 'direct stake' in sustainability initiatives and maximise the far reaching environmental, social and health benefits of a sustainable future. Focus area 3 also acknowledges the need for place-based approaches to meet local community needs and harness collective action.

Volunteering IS community action and offers a concrete way for Victorians to act on climate change. Similarly, community action inherently involves communities volunteering their time and efforts for a greater good. Place-based approaches are best practice in volunteering, both locally and internationally, and are reflected in Victoria's current volunteering infrastructure in the form of place-based Volunteer Support Organisations (VSOs) that have strong connections and engagement with their communities.

“Volunteers are achieving a lot but it's often invisible. The lack of standardised data collection and analysis results in the vast majority of outcomes often going ‘under the radar’. Despite this, it is clear that volunteers are achieving substantial ecological, social and economic outcomes for the communities in which they operate”.

– Volunteering Naturally, DELWP

Recommendation 1: Embed volunteering throughout Sustainability Victoria's strategy and policy

SV2030 articulates an exciting and vibrant vision for a sustainable future for Victoria, with clear, evidence-based strategies and approaches for increasing community engagement and participation. The strategy also acknowledges that communities, from households to organisations and action groups, are key to meeting the aims of the strategy. The role of community is also acknowledged as pivotal at every level of the strategy, from planning initiatives to implementing programs and providing feedback. Community is furthermore essential to the functioning of a circular economy.

Community action and participation in sustainability initiatives and programs largely involve community members volunteering their time willingly for the common good and without financial gain. However, SV2030 fails to formally recognise the role of volunteering and acknowledge and value its essential contribution. This not only diminishes the role of volunteers but also fails to appropriately plan for this resource.

Embedding the role of volunteering in strategy and policy ensures it is recognised, considered, and resourced when planning initiatives and activities. Articulating the role of volunteering in SV2030 also paves the way for partnerships and collaboration with the volunteering sector. Volunteering Victoria is excited to work in partnership with Sustainability Victoria to ensure the role of volunteering is considered and prioritised in strategy, workforce planning and program design.

Recommendation 2: Invest in volunteering infrastructure for the Sustainability sector

Volunteers give their time without financial gain, however volunteering is not free and requires investment to recruit, train and retain volunteers and provide a meaningful volunteering experience. Volunteer managers, groups and programs also require training and support. DELWP has identified that environment and sustainability volunteers are ‘passionate but not predictable’ with volunteer participation fluctuating over time⁶. Formalising volunteering infrastructure can support the attraction and retention of volunteers to the sector.

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement ([the National Standards](#)) provide clear guidelines and benchmarks to support organisations to attract and manage volunteers, manage the risk and safety of engaging volunteers, and improve the overall volunteer experience. These processes also provide programs and organisations with greater insights into the demographics and patterns of volunteers and the opportunity to address barriers to involvement and improve retention.

Volunteering Victoria has a strong history of providing support, advice, resources, and training to volunteer organisations and managers on the National Standards and other volunteer management skills and issues. Place-based VSOs also provide training and support to local organisations in their communities.

Sustainability Victoria have an important role to play in resourcing and strengthening volunteer management by investing in staff to support sustainability volunteers, implement best practice training, and provide support for volunteer managers. With investment, Volunteering Victoria can support the development of this volunteering infrastructure that is required to grow and sustain a vibrant sustainability volunteering culture.

Recommendation 3: Broaden the reach of SV2030 through placed based partnerships

Acknowledging the role of volunteering in the sustainability sector provides Sustainability Victoria with significant opportunities for partnerships and collaboration with the volunteering sector, with access to a broad range of volunteer organisations and services. These connections and partnerships would enable the promotion of Sustainability Victoria’s initiatives and opportunities, and the potential of collaborating with existing VIOs to implement and deliver sustainability projects.

Victoria’s VSOs are placed-based organisations that provide support to volunteer programs and organisations. They complement the vision and focus areas of SV2030 in their place-based approach that aims to activate the collective power of communities, develop purposeful responses to local community needs and support volunteer programs, from grassroots advocacy programs and community initiatives to larger formal organisations.

The synergy between place-based VSOs and SV2030’s focus on working with communities and developing place-based approaches is an exciting opportunity to harness and capitalise on existing community knowledge and partnerships to broaden the range and reach of Sustainability Victoria’s goals and activities.

6 [Department of Environment, Land and Water Planning, Volunteering Naturally, 2020](#)

Recommendation 4: Promote Inclusion & Diversity in Sustainability volunteering

Volunteering Victoria has a strategic vision of fostering a diverse, inclusive, and accessible volunteering sector. Currently, many communities are under-represented in volunteering due to systemic disadvantages and social determinants including people from CALD communities, LGBTQI+ communities, youth and older adults, people living with disability and those from lower socio-economic communities. This confirms a concerning trend where the capacity to volunteer is too often driven by underlying privileges in the form of higher education levels and socio-economic status, professional and linguistic skills.

These issues are also reflected in environmental and sustainability volunteering trends. Volunteers tend to be from older age groups and with an under-representation of community members from diverse backgrounds. SV2030's focus on community action provides an opportunity to promote inclusive volunteering and give all Victorians the opportunity to experience the many benefits of community action and volunteering, while contributing to a sustainable future.

SV2030 acknowledges Victoria's Traditional Owners, their unique connection to country and the commitment to meaningfully engage with First Nations communities. We urge Sustainability Victoria to extend this commitment to ensure that Victoria's First Nations communities are genuine partners in the strategy for achieving a sustainable future, and that SV2030 prioritises First Nations communities' inherent knowledge and wisdom of living sustainably.

VOLUNTEERING VICTORIA'S RESPONSE TO SV2030: A DECADE OF ACTION SURVEY

Shared Vision

SV2030: A Decade of Action sets out our vision and our focus areas. How clearly does the document communicate what we are working towards?

Very clearly.

How clearly does the document show how we plan to work with you to achieve our vision?

Not very clearly.

Please provide feedback on any areas of the document that are unclear or difficult to understand.

The document clearly identifies the role of community in achieving the aims of SV2030 and acknowledges the essential role of community participation and community groups in its activities, thus alluding to voluntary contribution. However, it fails to clearly articulate that volunteering is inherent to these approaches and activities or acknowledge how volunteering can be supported and harnessed in Sustainability Victoria's vision, strategy and activities.

On page three we talk about our vision for Victoria. To what extent does this align with your/your organisation's vision for the future?

Very strong alignment.

For you, what are the highlights in SV2030: A Decade of Action's vision?

Volunteering Victoria sees the highlights of SV2030 as:

The acknowledgement of the contribution of people and community to sustainability; and prioritising place-based approaches.

From your/your organisation's perspective, is there anything missing?

As discussed above, the role of people, communities, connection, and harnessing collective community interest and action to further the aims and vision of SV2030 is clearly articulated. However, 'volunteering' and its value and contribution to each aspect of the strategy is not formally referenced. As the state peak body for volunteering, we know that volunteers are critical to the effectiveness of place-based action and that many of Sustainability Victoria's programs and activities rely on the contribution of communities volunteering their time and services.

The Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning has identified that volunteers are an essential part of their programs. Their most recent 'Volunteering Naturally' report found that 63% of all environmental volunteering groups are focused on Sustainable Living.

SV2030 provides a chance to acknowledge and value the contribution of volunteers and must seek to harness the collective power of volunteering to achieve a sustainable future.

Which three words best describe what you think about our vision?

- » Motivating
- » Possible
- » Exciting

Shared Strategy

SV2030: A Decade of Action outlines three key areas of focus: Investment and innovation, Behaviour change and education, and Community action. Do these three focus areas align with your areas of interest and/or your organisation's work?

Investment and innovation: Yes, to some extent

Behaviour change and education: Yes, to some extent

Community Action: Yes, definitely

From your/your organisation's perspective, are there any key focus areas missing?

No

The four resources that Sustainability Victoria will be working with to reach our 2030 vision are listed below. Please rank them in order from most to least important according to your view or that of your organisation.

1. People
2. Materials
3. Energy
4. Water

Shared Action

Under the three focus areas (Investment and innovation, Behaviour change and education and Community action) the document outlines a range of activities, actions and approaches SV will undertake to move towards the 2030 vision. To what extent do these activities and actions support you/your organisation's work and areas of interest?

Moderate support

From your perspective or your organisation's perspective, are there any other activities or approaches that we should consider including?

SV2030 would be strengthened by making a commitment to and investment in volunteering. This could include dedicated best practice volunteer management resources, standardised support and basic training for volunteers, and fostering diversity and accessibility within volunteering in the field of sustainability.

Furthermore, the focus on place-based approaches clearly aligns with meeting community volunteering needs and the existing volunteering infrastructure within Victoria that includes place-based Volunteer Support Organisations (VSOs). There are clear opportunities to form partnerships with these organisations to foster and strengthen the culture of volunteering in Sustainability and broaden the reach of place-based activities.

Would you/your organisation like to connect and engage with us as we work towards this 2030 vision? (If you answer 'yes' to this question, please supply your email address at the end of this survey so we can contact you for this purpose).

Yes, definitely

We say in SV2030: A Decade of Action, that we are keen to expand our visibility and reach. Do you have any suggestions on how we might do that and speak to new audiences or attract new partnerships?

As above, we view partnerships with Victoria's VSOs and volunteer involving organisations as a key method by which Sustainability Victoria can broaden its reach. Volunteering Victoria also has many member organisations in the sustainability and environmental sectors. We welcome the opportunity to promote the work of these organisations and Sustainability Victoria more generally via investment in a targeted campaign to attract and retain volunteers to the sector.

How would you like Sustainability Victoria to communicate our work and impact with you?

- » Digital events
- » Community forum
- » Email or newsletter
- » Social media
- » Media

What is your main sustainability focus – for you or your organisation?

Volunteering and place-based approaches.

Tell us how Sustainability Victoria can better work with you to achieve our 2030 vision

Sustainability Victoria can embed volunteering in all policy and strategy, and collaborate with Volunteering Victoria to ensure volunteering has a voice in the development of all programs and activities.

What do you think will be the main sustainability focus for you or your organisation in five to ten years' time?

Ensure that the required infrastructure is in place to harness the tremendous power of spontaneous volunteering.

Part 2: About you

Are you responding as...

A member of an organisation

Have you/your organisation engaged with us at all in the past couple of years?

No

Are you based in a metropolitan, regional or rural area?

Metropolitan