



For a Strong, Resilient and Inclusive Volunteering Sector:

The Volunteering Victoria submission to
the Victorian State Budget 2022–2023

TO: Victoria State Government

FROM: Volunteering Victoria

DATE: December 2021

STATUS: Final

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.

1. ABOUT US

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering in Victoria. Our work has a strong focus on advocacy, sector development and the promotion of meaningful and purposeful volunteering. Our role is to lead the growth of a collaborative, sustainable, thriving volunteering community and movement in Victoria. We promote a volunteering culture that is inclusive, diverse, accessible, and respected.

Volunteering Victoria firmly believe that resilient communities are built on the contribution of empowered and active Victorians from every walk of life. Our more than 400 members reflect the diversity of the volunteering sector and range from small organisations entirely run by volunteers to organisations involving tens of thousands of volunteers and staff.

Our members are from all community sectors including social services, sport and recreation, community development, CALD community services, emergency services, legal, health, animal welfare, creative industries, tourism, government, environment and wildlife, education and training, corporate, and employment services. Our diverse membership and long-standing partnerships are the source of our strength and credibility as a peak body. Volunteering Victoria represents and works alongside hundreds of sector professionals within Volunteer Support Services (VSSs) and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), and thousands of volunteers across the state to promote, value, and support effective volunteering.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Volunteering Victoria is pleased to provide this submission to the Victorian Government, in preparation for the 2022-2023 budget, including:

- » Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH).
- » Emergency Management Victoria (EMV).
- » Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV).
- » Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR).

Key Principles

1. Victorian Government agencies work alongside Volunteering Victoria to ensure that volunteering is recognised and funded as a key mechanism contributing to community resilience.
2. Victorian Government commits to the development and strengthening of local and regional communities through volunteering, and increased volunteering participation across the state.
3. Victorian Government supports initiatives that contribute to making volunteering equitable, accessible, diverse, and inclusive, to encourage the participation of all Victorians.

Summary of funding recommendations

Volunteering is key to community resilience	
Community Resilience funding plan	\$500K p.a. over 4 years
Victorian Volunteer Passport	\$125K p.a. over 2 years
Volunteer COVID-19 Recovery fund	\$3M over 1 year
Volunteering strengthens local communities	
Peak body funding	\$400K p.a. over 4 years
Community volunteering education and awareness campaign	\$100K over 1 year
Funding for place-based volunteer infrastructure	\$1M p.a. over 4 years
Volunteering is for everyone (inclusion & diversity)	
State-Wide Volunteering Access and Inclusion Officer	\$125K p.a. over 4 years
Contestable fund to reduce the financial barriers to volunteering	\$1M p.a. over 4 years
Digital Inclusion package	\$150K p.a. over 4 years

Securing this funding is key to the vitality and sustainability of the Victorian volunteering sector in the coming years. The COVID-19 pandemic has had a devastating impact on local communities, VIOs, and volunteers. A lack of Victorian government support at this precarious juncture would compound the damage caused by COVID-19 and risk entrenching the downward trend in volunteering participation throughout the state.

3. SECTOR CONTEXT: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

Responding to urgent needs to ‘rebuild better’

The year ahead is significant. The ongoing COVID-19 public health crisis has had a dramatic impact on the volunteer sector and created unprecedented challenges within every Victorian community. However, this crisis also presents the Victorian Government with a unique opportunity to ‘rebuild better’ by creating “equal opportunities for all Victorians to live a safe, respected, and valued life”¹.

Volunteering Victoria recognises that community expertise and engagement are crucial to this recovery. Yet, above and beyond recovery, we seek to work alongside our members, partners, and local and Victorian Government, to regenerate and strengthen the volunteer sector and give Victorians the opportunity to thrive together. A healthy and vibrant volunteer sector is essential to delivering a better and brighter future for all Victorians. When meaningful connection is enhanced, increased wellbeing follows.

While Volunteering Victoria approaches the road ahead with resolute optimism, we first draw the Victorian Government’s attention to a set of sector needs that must urgently be addressed. Put simply, the volunteer sector is currently facing a set of existential threats that can be tackled by the Victorian Government through deliberate and long-term financial support:

- » A collapse in volunteering due to the crippling effect of COVID-19 and recent large-scale

¹ Department of Families, Fairness and Housing, [website](#), 2021.

emergencies².

- » A worrying and prevailing downward trend in volunteering participation prior to the pandemic and the ongoing exclusion of large cohorts of Victorians from volunteering³.
- » A funding crisis that jeopardises the vibrant network of under-resourced, place-based VSSs and VIOs' capacity to continue operating in a time of unprecedented demand for their services.

Volunteers and the organisations counting on them to fulfill their mission and services cannot be taken for granted.

Volunteer time is given willingly and without financial gain. However, assuming it will organically continue on a sustained basis without deliberate support threatens the viability of the sector. Should the current reduction in the rate of volunteering continue in Victoria in the coming years, numerous government and community services and programs will be detrimentally impacted, if not impossible to sustain.

Through this Victorian Government Budget submission, Volunteering Victoria offers recommendations and solutions to these challenges, with the goal of having the volunteer sector emerge revitalised and ready to tackle the enormous task of rebuilding communities throughout Victoria.

Sector opportunities abound

With an estimated 2.3 million volunteers across Victoria, volunteering is both ubiquitous and impactful. The State of Volunteering in Victoria Report (2020) found that volunteers contributed an average of 223.9 hours each in 2019 and that volunteering represented \$58.1 billion in value for the Victorian economy, or a net return of approximately \$3.70 on every dollar invested⁴.

However, the contribution of volunteering goes far beyond a simple financial valuation: “The extent of this (volunteering) contribution cannot be fully captured in financial statements, for at the heart of any public investment decision is this basic question: does the planned activity (volunteering) lead to a net increase in community wellbeing?”⁵ The answer to this question is an unequivocal yes.

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. Volunteering offers a broad range of health and wellbeing, social, educational, and economic benefits for individuals and communities.

In many ways, volunteering is the lifeblood of our communities. It is essential for the delivery of crucial state and local government services, and the effective functioning of the not-for-profit sector. The COVID-19 pandemic has illustrated their critical contribution with thousands of volunteers mobilised as part of the essential workforce at the height of the pandemic.

The Victorian Volunteer Strategy is a promising step in demonstrating the Victorian Government's commitment to Victoria's volunteers and the volunteer sector. **However, for the strategy to be effective and fulfil its aims, the Victorian Government needs to ensure that secure, appropriate investment is made in the sector's state-based volunteer organisations and support infrastructure.**

2 Over 2020 – 2021, volunteer participation dropped by half and volunteering hours declined by 64.1%. The scope of the impact of COVID-19 on the community sector is detailed in:

Our Community, [COVID-19 Community Sector Impact Survey, June 2021](#).

3 There has been a decline in the rate of formal volunteering from 36.2% in 2010 to 28.8% in 2019. There are also numerous under-represented cohorts in volunteering including people with a disability, members of CALD communities, and people with lower education level and socio-economic status. See: Volunteering Australia, [Key Volunteering Statistics](#), 2021.

4 Volunteering Victoria, [The State of Volunteering Victoria Report](#), 2020.

5 Idem, p.17.

Volunteering Victoria urges the Victorian Government to seize the current opportunity for meaningful change across Victoria by prioritising investment in the volunteer sector as a critical means of supporting Victorian community recovery and resilience. At Volunteering Victoria, we are committed to this vision of the future, and we look forward to working with the Victorian Government to make it a reality.

4. ALIGNMENT WITH GOVERNMENT PRIORITIES

All of Government Victorian Volunteer Strategy

The Victorian Government will soon finalise the Victorian Volunteer Strategy, formalising its acknowledgement and commitment to the value of volunteering to communities across the state. The strategy notably aims to strengthen place-based approaches and address the needs of a changing volunteering landscape.

Volunteering Victoria is fully supportive of the vision at the core of the strategy which aims to build resilience and support and empower the sector. Volunteering must provide pathways, be flexible and streamlined, recognised and celebrated, diverse, inclusive and accessible, and embrace and drive innovation. An understanding of the volunteering experience is needed to be able to improve it and enhance participation in the sector.

Department of Families, Fairness and Housing (DFFH)

DFFH works hard to create equal opportunities for all Victorians to live a safe, respected and valued life by focusing on child protection, housing, disability, prevention of family violence, multicultural affairs, LGBTIQ+ equality, veterans, women and youth. This work clearly intersects with the mission and role of Volunteering Victoria. Both share a vision where people can connect to and thrive within their communities. Investing in volunteering is a cost effective and efficient way of supporting the development of a sustainable and resilient volunteer workforce for the state.

Emergency Management Victoria (EMV)

EMV leads emergency management in Victoria by maximising the ability of the emergency management sector to work together and to strengthen the capacity of communities to plan for, withstand, respond to, and recover from emergencies. The synergy between EMV and Volunteering Victoria is clear with a joint focus on community involvement to build resilience in the face of emergencies and the opportunity to work closely together on the roll out and growth of the innovative weVolunteer program.

Bushfire Recovery Victoria (BRV)

BRV partners with government, regions and not-for-profit organisations to connect people and community with the support they need to recover after a major emergency. It provides strategic leadership on whole-of-government recovery activities, including disaster impact, needs analysis, and recovery planning and coordination. Given BRV's lead role in community recovery, it is an obvious partner for Volunteering Victoria to help make volunteering a key mechanism contributing to community resilience.

Department of Jobs, Precincts and Regions (DJPR)

DJPR provides policy advice, oversees legislation, and works with councils to support responsive and accountable local government services. Volunteers often represent a significant proportion of the local government workforce and of many other sectors. Councils are also on the front line of needing

to respond to surges in spontaneous volunteers. Volunteers and volunteering programs enhance the service delivery of local governments and enable empowered communities to respond to their own needs. Volunteering also aligns with the DJPR focus areas of employment, trade, and economic development and is identified as a clear pathway to employment. DJPR and Volunteering Victoria can work collaboratively to ensure that local government is supported to better respond to local needs for the greater good of communities across the state.

FUNDING RECOMMENDATIONS

5. VOLUNTEERING IS KEY TO COMMUNITY RESILIENCE

The COVID-19 crisis and recent natural disasters have greatly tested the capacity of communities to come together for the collective good and wellbeing of its members. Volunteers are at the forefront of delivering essential community responses and services during times of crisis, reflected in volunteer-led responses to the COVID-19 emergency.

EMV's Community Resilience Framework for Emergency Management (2017) describes community resilience as "the capacity of individuals, communities, institutions, businesses and systems to survive, adapt and thrive no matter what kind of chronic stresses and acute shocks they experience"⁶. Stresses include climate change, poverty, mental health, and unemployment, and the shocks include extreme acts, disease, extreme heat, and natural disasters. Communities still face a long path to recovery following COVID-19 stresses, and climate change modelling predicts increased extreme heat and natural disasters.

The draft Victorian Volunteer Strategy acknowledges volunteering as a key resource within emergency management and recovery planning. Volunteering Victoria similarly recognises the tremendous contribution volunteers can make in preparation for, during and after crises, but is also cognisant of the level of planning required to ensure the safety of volunteers, the public they seek to assist and the emergency management workforce⁷. This concern is reinforced in the Inspector-General for Emergency Management's Inquiry into the 2019-20 Victorian fire season: Phase 2 (2021) which found that there is "no system in place or defined lead agency to plan for and coordinate spontaneous volunteers"⁸.

"Spontaneous volunteers" is the term used to describe people who are motivated to help out in the aftermath of a disaster or emergency and want to assist with relief and recovery efforts. These are distinct from emergency management volunteers who are recruited, trained and managed by emergency management organisations.

6 Emergency Management Victoria, [Community Resilience Framework for Emergency Management](#), 2017, p. 12.

7 The growing interest in spontaneous volunteering is well documented through Emergency Management literature and volunteering statistics. Organisations can also get ISO 22319 accreditation in [Community resilience for planning the involvement of spontaneous volunteers](#).

8 Inspector-General for Emergency Management, [Inquiry into the 2019–20 Victorian fire season: Phase 2](#), p. 98.

Members of the Victorian Volunteer Support Network (VVSN) further identify the impact on, and required planning for volunteers responding to COVID-19:

“Volunteers have been key in COVID-19 community responses, acting as emergency responders and providing urgent services. Volunteers in this setting are exposed to risk, trauma, and potential long-term mental health impacts of being ‘front line’ emergency responders. There is a need for increased support, debriefing, and mental health first aid for these volunteers.”

Despite the uptake of spontaneous volunteering, the COVID-19 pandemic and extended lockdowns has seen ongoing volunteering participation drop by more than half. The decline in volunteer participation combined with additional COVID-19 safety procedures has placed enormous pressure on VIOs. There is a need to re-engage volunteers and support volunteer organisations to build community resilience.

Volunteering Victoria is committed to assisting the Victorian Government to develop sustainable solutions to identified gaps in the co-ordination of volunteering, and in building community resilience, through the following recommendations.

5.1 Community Resilience funding plan

Volunteering Victoria acknowledges the extensive program of work being undertaken by the Victorian Government to build community resilience and improve responses to natural disasters and other community shocks.

Volunteering Victoria is proud to partner with the Victorian Government in the building of community resilience and the coordination of spontaneous volunteers. The State Emergency Management Plan (SEMP) Roles and Responsibilities document, published in October 2021, nominates EMV and BRV as recovery lead agencies for coordination of spontaneous volunteers, with the Australian Red Cross and Volunteering Victoria as recovery support agencies. Volunteers are also a critical support in preparedness and relief, although there is no identification of this in the SEMP Roles and Responsibilities document.

weVolunteer is a Volunteering Victoria community recovery volunteering program for the whole of Victoria, funded initially through COVID-19 rapid response funding, but earmarked by DFFH as a program that would also assist in the coordination of spontaneous volunteers. weVolunteer provides a pool of community recovery volunteers, a Volunteer Passport to improve volunteer mobility where people are volunteering for more than one organisation, training for volunteers and VIOs to help them be better prepared for volunteering in, or following, an emergency, and an overall tool to manage the trend and demand from volunteers to be involved in place-based volunteering.

weVolunteer addresses a previous gap in volunteering by providing a way for people to volunteer when they are needed urgently and providing organisations with access to a pool of ready volunteers. It is also a working program that can improve spontaneous volunteer coordination.

Based on feedback from government agencies, Volunteering Victoria makes the following budget recommendations:

- » Volunteering Victoria is funded to continue the weVolunteer program and expand services to address emerging needs in volunteer coordination

- » Volunteering Victoria prepares a Community Resilience Volunteering Strategy in consultation with DFFH, EMV, BRV, and DPJR, covering all volunteering roles with the exception of first-responder volunteers, ie. preparedness, relief and recovery volunteering.
- » Victorian Government identifies a lead agency with which Volunteering Victoria can engage on preparedness, relief and recovery volunteering.
- » Victorian Government includes Volunteering Victoria on government decision-making and advisory panels involved in community relief and recovery.
- » Volunteering Victoria engages with local government to identify local volunteering coordination needs and is funded to design enhancements to weVolunteer.

Justification: weVolunteer is growing in popularity as Victoria emerges from the lockdowns of 2020 and 2021, with a broad range of organisations registered. While some councils are joining weVolunteer, there is still reluctance due to funding uncertainty. Local government has also indicated support of weVolunteer to assist with the coordination of spontaneous volunteers. The SEMP Roles and Responsibilities document indicates that the Recovery Lead Agencies are BRV and EMV. Volunteering Victoria is listed as a Recovery Support Agency. By retaining the current weVolunteer program model and expanding to accommodate spontaneous volunteering, weVolunteer will be able to continue to support the most urgent volunteering needs across Victoria.

Cost: \$500K p.a. over 4 years.

5.2 Victorian Volunteer Passport

Volunteering Victoria recommends a Victorian Volunteer Passport pilot project and feasibility study as part of the impending Victorian Volunteer Strategy. A Victorian Volunteer Passport aims to streamline the volunteering on-boarding process and improve the safety and mobility of volunteers. This will include the integration of formal government screening requirements for volunteers (including vaccination status, Police and Working with Children checks), and resources and e-learning modules for volunteers and VIOs.

The feasibility pilot project will adopt a whole-of-sector approach:

- » Volunteering Victoria will provide project management including engagement and co-design with the sector; additionally, ongoing minimal maintenance by [MyPass](#), who will be contracted to provide the passport technology.
- » Collaboration and co-design with VSSs and VIOs on e-learning modules and the basic requirements of the Volunteer Passport.
- » Integration with Service Victoria on relevant volunteering requirements and screening.
- » Pilot implementation and evaluation with VIOs and volunteers.

The platform will also be designed to provide data insights and inform research on volunteering through embedded reporting mechanisms. Additional built-in verification and training features will be available to VIOs at a minimal fee-for-service cost.

Justification: The Victorian Volunteer Passport initiative will reduce the administrative burden on VIOs and improve the engagement and mobility of volunteers by providing a free state-wide digital Volunteer Passport for all Victorian volunteers. The Volunteer Passport will facilitate mutual recognition by VIOs of the base level of volunteering training and certification. The project will be designed to be self-sustaining and require no further government investment beyond the 2-year pilot period.

Cost: \$125K p.a. over 2 years (non-recurring).

5.3 Volunteer COVID-19 Recovery fund

Volunteering Victoria recommends the Victorian Government provide a Volunteer COVID-19 Recovery fund to allow VIOs to manage COVID-19 Safe practices. Recent consultation with the sector identified key areas where Victorian VIOs require funding and support to manage the numerous extra measures required to ensure the safe return of volunteers:

- » Implementation of additional policies and procedures, notably COVID-19 Safe plans and QR Codes.
- » Development of clear messaging on the safe return of volunteers.
- » Legal and OHS support in returning to safe operations and risk management.
- » Enforcement of vaccine policies and management of non-vaccinated workforce and visitors.

VIOs with a high proportion of volunteers would be invited to apply to access COVID-19 recovery funding via a competitive process. This would enable them to re-establish their volunteer programs in a COVID-19 Safe environment. Funding allocation would be based on rigorous selection criteria and accessible only for approved activities including:

- » The provision of COVID-19 Safe training to returning volunteers.
- » The development and implementation of COVID-19-related volunteering policy and procedures.
- » The recruitment of contract/temporary staff to support the return of volunteers and adherence to COVID-19 Safe protocols.
- » The implementation of specific COVID-19 Safe re-engagement activities for volunteers.
- » The development of engagement and promotion measures to encourage, support and increase participation in volunteering.

The viability of volunteering programs and activities of numerous VIOs is currently at risk and this financial support would make a real difference across the sector. The community transport sector offers a stark example of the extra burden COVID-19 Safe practices impose on organisations.

Community Transport & Volunteering during COVID-19

The Community Transport sector provides crucial community services that rely on volunteer drivers and community organisers. This already under-resourced sector has had their services stretched during the COVID-19 pandemic as they attempt to provide increased support to communities with fewer volunteers. COVID-19 safety requirements have translated to extensive cleaning requirements and limitations on ride-sharing.

Marnie O'Loughlin, Manager of Transport Services at Eastern Volunteers identifies:

“With fewer volunteers and increased COVID-19 safety requirements, we are not able to deliver the same level of service to the community. There is nothing to fill the gap and it means vulnerable members of the community are missing out on essential services”

Justification: Organisations will need the support of the Victorian Government through access to further funding over the next 12 months to re-engage volunteers and ensure volunteer programs are COVID-19 Safe. We recommend supplementary funding to be provided through a rigorous competitive selection process administered by Volunteering Victoria.

Cost: \$3M over 1 year (non-recurring).

6. VOLUNTEERING STRENGTHENS LOCAL COMMUNITIES

Volunteering is crucial to building and strengthening local communities. Volunteers, volunteer groups and VIOs are responsible for delivering numerous government initiatives ranging from important roles in supporting health, education and social services to leading environmental and sustainability projects and initiatives.

However, engaging volunteers requires investment in volunteering infrastructure. Volunteering is not 'free' and VIOs can only attract, train, manage, and retain volunteers with expert guidance and support. Volunteer Managers require training, professional development and advice to maintain their volunteer programs, maximise the benefits of volunteering and reduce risks to organisations.

Local, place-based, community-led, and collaborative approaches are universally recognised as the critical means by which to meet the myriad of social, economic and health challenges being faced by local communities. This is particularly important for regional and rural communities who face unique challenges related to distance and infrastructure. Place-based approaches are endorsed by the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet in their 'Framework for Place-Based Approaches: The start of a conversation about working differently for better outcomes' (2020)⁹.

Victoria's VSSs are geographically diverse place-based services that provide localised support to volunteers and VIOs. However, many of these services are currently at risk of closure due to ad hoc and limited funding arrangements. The closure of VSSs would result in critical roles and services being lost, including volunteer placement and matching, facilitating pathways from volunteering to employment and providing resources, advice, and support.

Building and strengthening local communities requires genuine Victorian Government commitment to, and investment in place-based, collaborative approaches that acknowledge and prioritise the diversity of local community needs.

6.1 Peak body funding

Volunteering Victoria has a long history of successfully offering the infrastructure and support required to build the capacity and capability of VIOs and Volunteer Managers. This crucial work includes the provision of training, resources and advice; guidance on best practice and the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement; mentoring and continuing professional development programs; leadership and advocacy for the volunteer sector; and engagement support for VolPoll and online volunteer management platforms.

In the 2020 – 2021 financial year, Volunteering Victoria facilitated:

- » 36 in-house training workshops for organisations.
- » 13 public training workshops with 207 participants.
- » 8 Webinars with 342 views.
- » 20 mentoring partnerships.
- » 114 CPD participants and 10 partnerships for the delivery of the program.

These services attracted a 90% satisfaction rating (excellent/very good) from participants, providing the sector with essential knowledge and skills.

9 Victoria Government, [A Framework for Place Based Approaches](#), 2020.

Volunteering Victoria Training Participant Testimonial

“As a new volunteer coordinator, the training helped me build my skills and knowledge in the fundamentals of volunteer management. During the workshops, they gave some great examples and ideas from their wealth of personal experience, and brought the training group together with fun practical exercises that brought the concepts to life. From their training sessions, I’ve been able to review and rethink my approach as a Volunteer Manager, and feel more confident in implementing the National Standards and principles of best practice in my programs.”

In addition to these membership-based services, Volunteering Victoria provides general advice, support and connections to the public and volunteer organisations, a role that has increased as organisations seek advice on re-establishing volunteer programs following COVID-19 restrictions. Over the last financial year, Volunteering Victoria received approximately 1200 phone calls and over 1500 emails from organisations and the general public seeking specialist advice and referrals.

In its leadership capacity, Volunteering Victoria is able to respond to emerging challenges and trends in the volunteer sector. Recent examples have included advocating for the legal protection of volunteers, promoting the preferences and needs of emergent volunteering cohorts such as youth, and responding to the pressing issue of digital inclusion in the volunteer sector.

Justification: Ongoing, secure funding is required to sustain peak body services to the 423 members of Volunteering Victoria operating across more than 20 sectors, engaging tens of thousands of volunteers. Additional resourcing will enable Volunteering Victoria to assist the Victorian Government with the implementation of the Victorian Volunteer Strategy, expand its reach and proactively engage with sectors and organisations in need of increased support following the COVID-19 pandemic. Volunteering Victoria also seeks additional, time-specific funding to address the prominent issue of inclusion and diversity in the volunteer sector, including digital inclusion (see Recommendations 7.1 and 7.3).

Cost: \$400K p.a. over 4 years.

6.2 Community volunteering education and awareness campaign

Consultation with our members and the broader sector has identified a need for the Victorian Government to provide leadership and drive an education and awareness campaign on the value of community volunteering. The campaign would aim to support previous volunteers to re-engage and encourage the participation of new volunteers, including those from under-represented groups.

The proposed multimedia campaign would showcase examples of successful community volunteering from the perspective of volunteers and VIOs across a variety of sectors. The campaign would also provide an opportunity to raise awareness of diverse forms of volunteering, and community contribution that reflects inclusive and accessible volunteering. Recent examples in the volunteer sector include both Western Australia and Tasmania who have launched successful state-wide campaigns to engage local communities in volunteering.

Volunteering Tasmania: Be Connected. Be A Volunteer

Volunteering Tasmania recently launched its 'Be Connected. Be A Volunteer.' education campaign aimed at bringing awareness to the wide-reaching benefits of volunteering for individuals and communities. The campaign showcases stories of volunteering, including youth volunteering, highlighting how volunteering fosters community connection.

See the [Be Connected. Be a Volunteer.](#) campaign.



Justification: Education and awareness campaigns are an evidence-based strategy across diverse sectors, bringing attention to issues and promoting increased participation. They are also a proven method of promoting and increasing participation in volunteering. Educating the community on the benefits of volunteering has the potential to foster lifelong habits of active community participation, effecting long term social inclusion and civic engagement.

Cost: \$100K over 1 year.

6.3 Funding for place-based volunteer infrastructure

VSSs are a crucial element of Victoria's volunteer infrastructure that have invaluable knowledge and engagement with their local communities. They are uniquely positioned to provide local, place-based volunteering support to volunteers and local VIOs.

Internationally, investment in local volunteer infrastructure, namely volunteer centres, has consistently contributed to the growth of thriving volunteer cultures and establishing volunteering as an activity of social and political importance¹⁰.

The Victorian Government has a critical role to play in ensuring that VSSs can continue to deliver invaluable place-based services that address local community needs and contribute to their long-term resilience and connectedness. This approach holds a multitude of benefits for communities across the state, and directly support the priorities of the Victorian Government.

10 Van den Bos, Cees, [Using volunteer infrastructure to build civil society](#), 2014.

Benefits of Victorian-driven, place-based Volunteer Support Services

- » Improved community resilience through the ability to better coordinate local responses to disruptions and emergencies (such as bushfires and COVID-19).
- » Promotion of volunteering that is inclusive of local, diverse communities including LGBTIQ+ communities, established and emerging CALD communities, senior Victorians, youth, and lower socio-economic communities.
- » Timely investment in existing infrastructure to support COVID-19 community recovery.
- » Improved alignment of place-based service delivery infrastructure to Victorian Government priorities.
- » Equitable geographical service delivery coverage and increased support for disadvantaged communities.
- » Ability to achieve broader scope and greater impact of the Victoria Volunteer Strategy
- » Vital support to assist with barriers linked to digital exclusion.
- » Excellent return on economic investment¹¹.

Justification: The Victorian Government has an opportunity to commit to state-wide, place-based support for volunteers and VIOs via the established infrastructure of VSSs, which are embedded in local communities with strong networks of existing partnerships. Innovative investment in place-based volunteer infrastructure will support the Victorian Government to become a world-leader in developing an inclusive, local community volunteering culture.

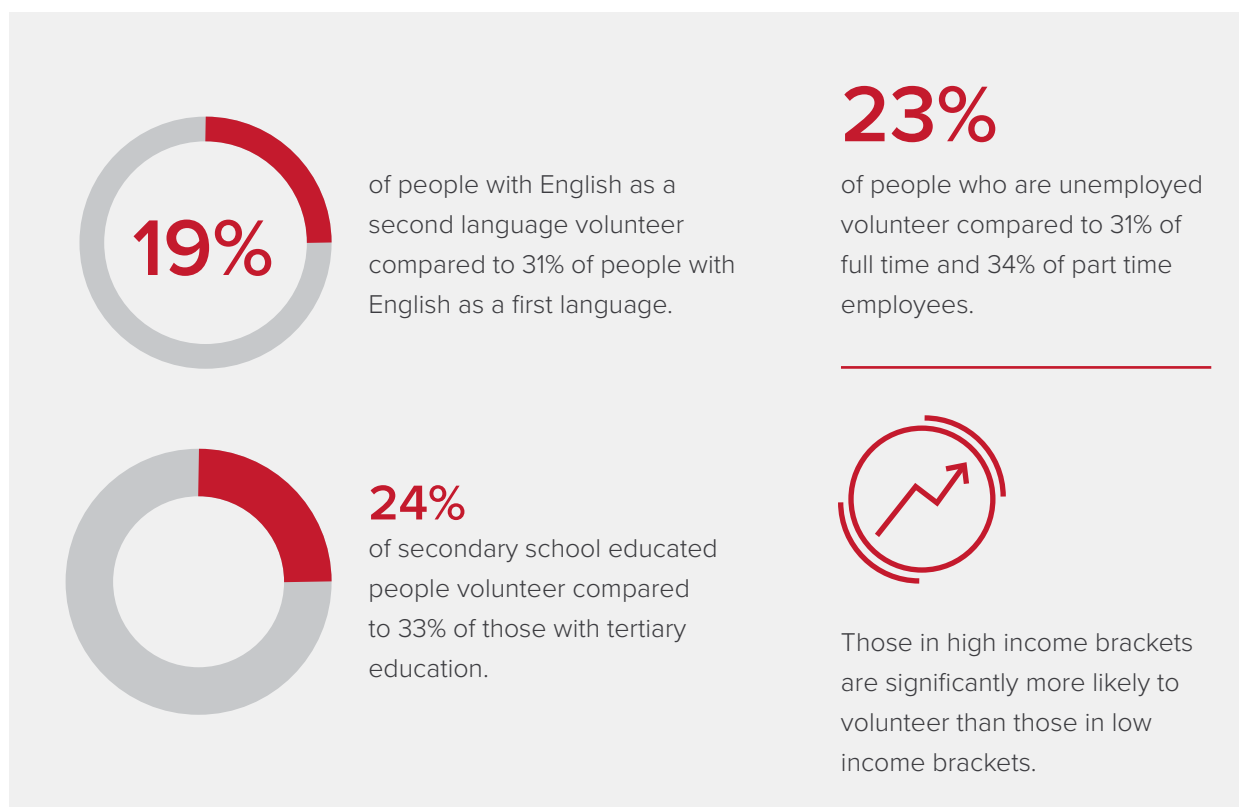
Cost: \$1M p.a. over 4 years.

¹¹ In 2019, the value of volunteering to Victoria was \$58.1 billion including \$19.4 billion it would cost to replace the labour contribution of volunteers. Volunteering provides a net return of \$3.70 for every dollar invested. See: Volunteering Victoria, [The State of Volunteering Victoria Report](#), 2020.

7. VOLUNTEERING IS FOR EVERYONE (INCLUSION & DIVERSITY)

The benefits of volunteering for individuals and communities are manifold. Those who volunteer report a greater life satisfaction, an enhanced sense of wellbeing, connection, meaning and purpose, and a positive impact on their physical and mental health. However, despite the universality of community giving across population groups, many cohorts are underrepresented in formal volunteering due to systemic disadvantages and social determinants.

Key volunteer demographics¹²



These statistics depict a concerning portrait 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.

The Department of Social Services five-year Volunteer Management Activity funding formally recognises the need to break down barriers to volunteering for people with disability, First Nations people and new migrants (less than five years in Australia). However, this narrow scope neglects the disadvantage and barriers experienced by many other Victorian communities which are underrepresented in volunteering.

12 Volunteering Australia, [Key Volunteering Statistics](#), 2021.

Wyndham City Council: Inclusion & Diversity in Volunteering

The local government area of Wyndham is one of the fastest growing municipalities in Australia with a vibrant and diverse local community. Almost half of Wyndham's community were born overseas, migrating from over 162 countries and there is a high proportion of young people and families. Volunteering rates in the area are lower than that of Greater Melbourne¹³.

Wyndham City Council's Volunteer Strategy 2019-2024 acknowledges this diversity and clearly articulates its importance to volunteering in their focus on 'being flexible and inclusive of diversity':

*"The Wyndham community is diverse and has different needs, interests and skills when it comes to volunteering. To grow volunteering we must cater to this diversity by having a broad range of options, being accessible and welcoming to all people, and being responsive to needs as they change over time"*¹⁴.

The increasingly far-reaching technological revolution also heightens the risk of a growing divide that will exacerbate exclusion by compounding social disadvantage and inequities. 2.5 million Australian are not online and less than 40% of people feel confident to keep up with technology changes¹⁵. Those who are digitally excluded have a significantly higher risk of suffering from loneliness, depression, and economic deprivation¹⁶. **Not surprisingly, communities facing digital barriers are also those who are under-represented in volunteering. Such inequity must be met by deliberate and ongoing efforts.**

Volunteering Victoria is committed to building a vibrant, strong volunteering community that is inclusive of all Victorians. We believe this vision is shared by the Victorian Government as reflected across the strategies and priorities of every government department including Premier and Cabinet¹⁷.

7.1 State-wide Volunteering Access and Inclusion Officer

While many VIOs want to engage diverse volunteers, there are cultural and organisational challenges to inclusivity for many Victorian communities.

Communities under-represented in volunteering that are not covered by other funding models include Victoria's large and thriving:

- » LGBTIQ+ communities.
- » Migrant and CALD communities post five years settlement.
- » Refugee and asylum seekers.
- » Youth and older adults.
- » Mental health consumers (who do not identify as having a disability).
- » Lower socio-economic communities.

13 Wyndham City Council, [Wyndham City Council Volunteer Strategy 2019-2024](#), 2019.

14 Idem, p.20.

15 Good Things Foundation Australia, [Get Online. Get Connected](#), July 2021.

16 Collective Wellbeing Carnegie UK, [The Role of Digital Exclusion in Social Exclusion](#), 2016.

17 Victorian Government, [Cultural Diversity Inclusion Strategy](#), 2019. or [Victorian. And Proud of It](#).

These communities contribute to the vibrant, diverse culture on which Victoria prides itself. Depriving them of the benefits of volunteering and community connection serves to reinforce existing disadvantages and discrimination.

We recommend the Victorian Government fund the creation of a State-Wide Volunteering Access and Inclusion Officer role within Volunteering Victoria. Volunteering Victoria will utilise this specialised role to work with VSSs, VIOs and other local community stakeholders to:

- » Develop a series of training opportunities, online materials and workshops aimed at providing organisations with the necessary tools to create inclusive environments.
- » Support and develop state-wide partnerships between the volunteer sector and community organisations.
- » Conduct research and promote best practice on access and inclusion in volunteering.
- » Increase our capacity to advise members and the wider sector on diversity and inclusion.

The Victorian Government has shown leadership in its commitment to access and inclusion. Volunteering Victoria calls on the Victorian Government to extend this commitment to the volunteer sector and work with Volunteering Victoria in developing a truly accessible and inclusive volunteering culture.

Justification: The creation of a genuine and sustainable, inclusive and accessible volunteering culture in Victoria requires strategic advocacy, leadership and partnerships. There are no existing resources within the sector to formally commit to this process. Funding for a state-wide role will enable Volunteering Victoria to purposefully implement practical measures to improve access and inclusion in the sector.

Cost: \$125K p.a. over 4 years.

7.2 Contestable fund to reduce the financial barriers to volunteering

The State of Volunteering in Victoria report (2020) highlights the out-of-pocket costs absorbed by individuals who volunteer. In 2019, volunteers reported spending an annual average of \$1,710 on their volunteering. Of these expenses, volunteers reported being reimbursed an average of \$212.65 (12.4%). On average, volunteers were out of pocket by \$1,497.11¹⁸.

While these costs may be affordable to those from middle and higher socio-economic groups, the out-of-pocket expenses of volunteering are highly problematic for marginalised and financially disadvantaged individuals. These individuals may be willing to devote their time to making a difference in their communities but are rarely able to absorb such costs. This significant barrier is likely to contribute to the under-representation of particular communities in volunteering. Volunteering and its myriad of benefits should be accessible to all Victorians.

Volunteering Victoria recommends establishing a competitive fund to help VIOs cover the out-of-pocket expenses of volunteering for volunteers from under-represented cohorts. Administered by Volunteering Victoria, VIOs would have to demonstrate that:

- » They are engaging volunteers from under-represented communities from the above list.
- » Their organisation and volunteer programs work with or provide services to marginalised or disadvantaged communities.
- » They have a formal process by which funds are transferred directly to volunteers.

18 Volunteering Victoria, [The State of Volunteering Victoria Report](#), 2020.

- » They can account for the out-of-pocket expenses of volunteers.

The South Australian Government, with advocacy from Volunteering SA&NT, have led the way in committing to funding to cover the cost of volunteering screening for all volunteers. The proposed funding would be an unprecedented step towards removing financial barriers to volunteering for disadvantaged Victorian communities.

Free volunteer screening checks for South Australians

In 2018, the South Australian Victorian Government followed through on their election commitment by allocating funding to pay for the screening checks required by volunteers, thereby addressing a key barrier to volunteering. The Minister for Human Services, the Honourable Michelle Lensink wrote:

“...government values the incredible dedication and hard work of volunteers and the selfless work they do helping the community – and this is why we made the decision to abolish all screening fees for volunteers...volunteers provide much needed care and support in our communities and many volunteer organisations are the life-blood of regional South Australia...”¹⁹”

Justification: Victorian Government should create a competitive fund for VIOs to support the participation of financially disadvantaged cohorts by reimbursing the full costs incurred through volunteering. This fund would go a long way to address a significant barrier to volunteering and enable under-represented communities to access the benefits of volunteering.

Cost: \$1M p.a. over 4 years.

7.3 Digital Inclusion package

Over the last 18 months, Victorians have seen their lives transformed by extended lockdowns and ongoing restrictions. For many Victorians, this has seen their work, study, and social lives largely move to technology-based online platforms. However, navigating this shift requires the access and skills to be digitally included in an increasingly online world. The Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance identifies that being digitally included means having accessible and affordable high-quality internet and appropriate digital devices, along with the ability and skills to navigate the internet and technology.

While the digital revolution provides the volunteering sector with tremendous opportunities for growth, the Victorian Government must ensure that the volunteering sector is equipped to combat systemic exclusion by addressing numerous issues linked to digital access, affordability, and ability. Overall, digital initiatives are not sufficient in and of themselves. Face-to-face services remain vital to meet local community needs and play their role as connectors for those who would otherwise be excluded.

¹⁹ Government of South Australia, [Media Release](#), 2018

Supporting communities on the path to digital inclusion

Victoria's strong network of Neighbourhood Houses is at the forefront of supporting local communities, often supporting people who are marginalised or experiencing social disadvantage. This community-development approach means Neighbourhood Houses have an important understanding of local community needs. Pangerang Community House in Wangaratta has seen firsthand the impact on regional communities of the shift to digital platforms and the need to provide greater support for volunteers and the broader community:

“The rollout of things like the Vic Services app for phone check ins, as well as downloading the “covid tick” has been incredibly detrimental to people with low level digital literacy. They’ve felt very stressed and excluded, it’s become a real barrier to participation in life. From our work with the community, we know that being online is the second step. Firstly, people need to feel comfortable with using and navigating their devices and only then can we progress to looking at simple online skills such as using applications, browsing websites, setting up an email, and online safety. In order to meet the growing demand for the community, we need to first help volunteers to better understand and develop digital skills and then teach them to work with other community members. We cannot do this without funding and support”.

–Tennille Hall, Pangerang Community House

Specifically, we call on the Victorian Government to:

- » Increase access to free Wi-Fi and affordable digital devices for those in low-income households. For example, enabling free internet access and computers in homes for all public housing tenants²⁰.
- » Support people with disabilities and older Victorians to be able to access appropriate equipment and technology that is best suited to their needs.
- » Provide services and support to bridge the marked divide in digital access for regional communities²¹.
- » Ensure the availability and accessibility of offline services for those who choose not to use digital services, who struggle to make the transition, or who fall through the gaps.
- » Provide increased funding and support to community service organisations to implement digital literacy training for service users and volunteers.

In addition to these systemic measures, Volunteering Victoria recommends funding for a digital

20 Australian Digital Inclusion Alliance, [A National Digital Inclusion Roadmap](#), 2021.

21 Australian Digital Inclusion Index, [Key Findings and Next Steps](#), 2021.

inclusion package that will enable Volunteering Victoria, in collaboration with place-based VSSs, to:

- » Create resources, fact sheets and videos for volunteers on accessing volunteering related digital platforms and developing digital literacy.
- » Develop guides to navigate online and digital volunteering roles and platforms.
- » Provide advice and support to VIOs on familiarising themselves with digital platforms and developing online volunteer opportunities.
- » Develop best practice guidelines on the provision of accessible volunteering support via both face-to-face and online formats.

Committing to digital inclusion in the volunteer sector extends the Victorian Government's commitment to providing digital skills training and complementary face-to-face support for unemployed Victorians in the 2020-2021 Victorian State Budget²², and their existing, innovative digital inclusion initiatives²³. It is crucial that volunteers be included across all these initiatives.

Justification: Volunteering Victoria and VSSs possess the expertise and connections required to build a more equitable volunteering sector where everyone has equal opportunity to participate. Supporting flexibility and adaptation of volunteers and VIOs to digital platforms and volunteer roles is critical to the future success of the sector.

Cost: \$150K p.a. over 4 years.

22 In the 2020-2021 Victorian State Budget, the Government allocated the following funds to key initiatives:
a. \$266 million in last budget to provide face to face support for job seekers; b. \$64 million to provide digital skills training to unemployed Victorians; c. \$626 million to Digital Futures Now Initiative to improve access and skills in regional Victoria. Volunteering Victoria strongly encourages the Government to ensure that volunteers are also included to allow them to benefit from improved digital skills. See: Victorian Government, [2021-2022 State Budget Papers](#), 2021.

23 Victorian Government, [Digital Innovation Futures Initiatives](#), 2021.

We would like to thank our members and the Victorian Volunteer Support Network for their consultation and contribution to this submission.



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