

Support local communities: The urgent need for place-based volunteering infrastructure

Volunteering Victoria, the state peak body for volunteering is calling for investment in Victoria's place-based volunteering infrastructure including the existing network of place-based Volunteer Support Services (VSSs). A long-term, sustainable funding model is required to strengthen local volunteering communities and community-informed responses to place-based volunteering needs.

VSSs are a primary component of Victoria's volunteer infrastructure and have invaluable knowledge of and partnerships with their local communities. They are uniquely positioned to provide place-based volunteering support to local volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs). The Victorian Volunteer Strategy (VVS) articulates place-based approaches as a critical enabler to achieving the goals of the strategy. Indeed, VSSs are explicitly listed as key players in achieving the aims of the strategy and are intrinsically connected to all five goals through their history of delivering services and programs that directly address the priority outcomes. The VVS clearly articulates their role in achieving several of these outcomes. However, VSSs are not currently funded to deliver on these outcomes and are currently at risk of closure due to limited funding arrangements that have narrowed the scope of their service delivery.

Local, place-based, and community-led approaches are universally recognised as the critical means to meet the myriad of social, economic, and health challenges being faced by local communities.^{1 2 3} This is particularly important for regional and rural communities, which face unique challenges related to distance and limited infrastructure. Place-based approaches are endorsed by the Victorian Department of Premier and Cabinet in their 'Framework for Place-Based Approaches'⁴ and explicitly articulated as a priority in the VVS.

Internationally, investment in local volunteer infrastructure (namely VSSs) has consistently contributed to the growth of thriving volunteer cultures and establishing volunteering as an activity of social and political importance.⁵ This is supported by the United Nations, which identifies that "prioritising a functional, appropriate, and inclusive volunteering infrastructure is needed to offer opportunities to all citizens to become agents of change and drivers of their own development."⁶ Under the model of [Volunteering Infrastructure for Empowered Volunteerism](#),⁷ government strategies and policies create an enabling environment. Yet, this is insufficient without organisational structures and implementation capacities that allow for such strategies to be operationalised. Investment in volunteering infrastructure is also identified as crucial to achieving greater inclusion and diversity within volunteering.

1 [Do place based approaches hold the key to unlocking potential in Australian communities?](#) Centre for Public Impact. 2019.

2 Baker, S. [A scoping review of place-based approaches to community engagement and support](#). Cardiff: Welsh Government. 2022.

3 Muir, L. [Whose plan is it? The importance of place](#), 2021. Australian Journal of Emergency Management, 4, 54.

4 [A Framework for Place Based Approaches](#). Victorian State Government. 2020.

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

6 [Global Trends in Volunteering Infrastructure](#). United Nations. 2018.

7 [Global Trends in Volunteering Infrastructure](#). United Nations. 2018.



“A strong volunteering infrastructure is needed to ensure that volunteerism contributes to the inclusion of all, and particularly of marginalized people.”⁸

– Global Trends in Volunteering Infrastructure, United Nations.

The benefits of 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, young people, low socio-economic communities, rural and regional communities, and First Nations peoples
- » Timely investment in existing infrastructure to support community recovery and promote collective wellbeing
- » Equitable geographical service delivery coverage and increased support for disadvantaged communities
- » Improved alignment of place-based service delivery infrastructure to government priorities and the priority outcomes of the VVS
- » Excellent return on economic investment⁹

The United Nations explicitly state that volunteer infrastructure, the critical means by which to maximise the impact of volunteering, does not receive the attention or investment it needs.¹⁰ Without state government funding, the current network of VSSs cannot continue to operate, much less participate in their expected role within the VVS. Allowing these services to disband is a lost opportunity to harness the existing knowledge of, and connections with, local communities. It would also represent a false economy, as the costs to the government would be far greater to re-establish new models of service delivery.

Volunteering Victoria recommends funding that specially enables VSSs to:

- » Deliver local, place-based volunteering support to volunteers and local VIOs
- » Provide volunteer placement and matching for local communities
- » Facilitate pathways from volunteering to employment
- » Provide volunteering resources, advice, and support
- » Meet the priority outcomes of the VVS

The government has an opportunity to commit to state-wide, place-based support for volunteers and VIOs via the established infrastructure of VSSs. Innovative investment in these services will support Victoria to become a world-leader in developing an inclusive, empowered, and resilient local volunteering culture that promotes the wellbeing of the community.

⁸ [Global Trends in Volunteering Infrastructure](#). United Nations. 2018.

⁹ 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.

¹⁰ [Global Trends in Volunteering Infrastructure](#). United Nations. 2018.