



## 2022-23 ACT Budget Submission

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### VolunteeringACT Contacts:

Jean Giese  
Chief Executive Officer  
e: [ceo@volunteeringact.org.au](mailto:ceo@volunteeringact.org.au)  
p: 02 6251 4060

Cath Cook  
Sector Development Manager  
e: [cath@volunteeringact.org.au](mailto:cath@volunteeringact.org.au)  
p: 02 6251 4060

*VolunteeringACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the Canberra region. VolunteeringACT pays respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and their vital ongoing contribution to our lands.*

*VolunteeringACT acknowledges volunteers of all genders and sexualities, with all abilities and from all cultures. Their skills, expertise, and time are critical to delivering services and programs, and in making Canberra a better place to live. We also acknowledge the contribution of the volunteer involving organisations that contribute to the health and happiness of our community.*

### VolunteeringACT

02 6251 4060  
Level 2, 202 City Walk, Civic 2601  
PO Box 128, Civic Square, ACT 2601  
ABN 30 433 789 697

[volunteeringact.org.au](http://volunteeringact.org.au)

# Recommendations

VolunteeringACT makes the following recommendations for inclusion in the 2022-23 ACT Budget:

1. Funding to support the development of a Volunteering Strategy for the Canberra region that serves both the volunteering sector and Whole of Government, supports inclusion and sustainability, and builds community resilience.
2. Funding for a 12-month interim package of support to aid recovery of volunteering and re-engagement of volunteers, following the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

## Overview

Volunteers are the often-invisible workforce supporting a wide range of services and activities across society, but seldom feature within core strategic, financial, and workforce development planning. Volunteering has a strong presence within the community services sphere, but also occurs across other sectors including sports, the arts, education and skills, environment, emergency services, health, aged care, and disability. The volunteering sector has experienced an unprecedented amount of change and disruption over the past two years due to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period, the large-scale mobilisation of volunteers was at the heart of local and National COVID-19 responses, at a time when many other services with paid staff were stood down. However, significant numbers of organisations have also been grappling with the loss of regular volunteers, due to periods of lockdown and public health restrictions. This has occurred alongside an overall decline in formal volunteering and apparent rise in informal volunteering over the past few years. Recent research on the state of volunteering clearly demonstrates the sector has not yet recovered from the impacts of COVID-19 and significant support is required to understand and assist the sector in adapting to changes in the external environment, recover volunteering programs, re-engage volunteers they have lost, and attract new ones.

VolunteeringACT identifies two key aspects of the volunteering landscape requiring support and investment; 1) The need for a comprehensive, longer-term volunteering sector and Whole of Government Volunteering Strategy for the Canberra region and 2) A 12-month interim package of support to aid recovery of volunteering and re-engagement of volunteers, following the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

### What we know

Volunteering is a key determinant of social inclusion, participation, and connection. It is a proven pathway to both education and employment and can improve an individual's chances of

securing a job by 27 per cent.<sup>1</sup> Volunteering spans every aspect of Australian life, with 5.8 million Australians (pre-pandemic) engaged in formal volunteering.<sup>2</sup> These volunteers make an annual social and economic contribution of \$290 billion<sup>3</sup> and in the ACT, which has historically enjoyed high levels of volunteering, this contribution is estimated to be \$1.5 billion to the ACT economy every year<sup>4</sup>. The volunteer workforce underpins delivery of a wide range of key services across multiple portfolios, across every age and demographic group, and their activities actively support core outcomes across all 12 domains of the ACT Health and Wellbeing Framework – with specific references to volunteering within the wellbeing domain outcome indicators for Time and Social Connection<sup>5</sup>. Research demonstrates that for every \$1 invested in volunteering there is a \$4.50 return to the community.<sup>6</sup>

The impact of COVID-19 on the volunteering sector has been significant. The ANU Centre for Social Research and Methods compared data collected in 2019, 2020 and 2021 to assess the impact of the pandemic on volunteering. The data shows that the number of people volunteering in the ACT decreased dramatically during the pandemic, from 30 percent in late 2019 to 24.8 as of April 2021.<sup>7</sup> Early findings from the *Volunteering in Australia* research project demonstrate that in the 12 months preceding the April 2022 survey, 26.7% of adults volunteered in Australia, much lower than the pre-COVID levels when 36% of adults were estimated to have volunteered, with many not yet returned to volunteering at all.<sup>8</sup>

The report commissioned by the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy Steering Group and ACT Government, *Counting the Costs: Sustainable funding for the ACT Community Services Sector*, presents strong evidence that historically, the full costs of running community services have been hidden and that sustainable funding for community organisations needs to be better planned for. The Service Costing Survey, completed by leaders of 88 organisations showed that major streams of ACT funding are leaving essential employment costs unfunded with only 25% adequately funded to manage volunteers.<sup>9</sup> A concerning finding is that almost 2 in 5 organisations (38%) reported using volunteers because of lack of funds to pay employees, presenting concerning possible risk and safety issues.<sup>10</sup>

## **Proposal – development and implementation of a longer-term Volunteering Strategy for the Canberra region that serves Whole of Government and the volunteering sector:**

**Investment required: \$150,000 in FY22/23 and \$100,000 for implementation over the lifecycle of the Strategy. (Total \$250,000 investment)**

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<sup>1</sup> Spera, C., Ghertner, R., Nerino, A., & DiTommaso, A. (2013). [Volunteering as a pathway to employment: Does volunteering increase odds of finding a job for the out of work?](#) Office of Research & Evaluation, Corporation for National & Community Service

<sup>2</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) 'General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014

<sup>3</sup> Flinders University (31 October 2014) [Volunteering worth \\$290 billion a year - InDaily](#)

<sup>4</sup> Australian Bureau of Statistics (2015) *General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2014*, available online at <http://www.abs.gov.au/ausstats/abs@.nsf/mf/4159.0>.

<sup>5</sup> [Explore wellbeing data - ACT Wellbeing Framework](#)

<sup>6</sup> Volunteering Western Australia (May 2015) *The Economic, Social, and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia*, available online at [vwa-report-book\\_web.pdf \(volunteeringwa.org.au\)](#)

<sup>7</sup> Nicholas Biddle and Mathew Gray, [Volunteering during the COVID-19 pandemic - April 2021.pdf \(anu.edu.au\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> [Volunteering-in-Australia-Research-Early-Insights-from-the-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf \(volunteeringstrategy.org.au\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> Cortis, N., Blaxland, M. and Adamson, E. (2021). *Counting the Costs: Sustainable funding for the ACT community services sector*. Sydney: UNSW Social Policy Research Centre.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

[The ACT Volunteering Statement 2018-2021](#) expired last year and at present, there is no clear replacement strategy to guide support and investment in the local volunteering landscape for 2022 onwards. Current partnership work between VolunteeringACT and ACT Government is ongoing to co-design an interim 12-month action plan (currently with the Community Services Directorate [CSD] for final approval), to target some immediate support for volunteering recovery and allow enough time for meaningful consultation to develop a longer-term strategy to commence from 2023. However, this initial work is occurring out of VolunteeringACT and CSD existing resources, and additional funding is required beyond 30 June 2022 to support the extensive consultation and engagement process required to successfully develop the new strategy and provide the interim package of support to organisations that is needed.

The volunteering landscape has also shifted significantly over the past two years, presenting new challenges for volunteer involving organisations to respond and adapt to. For many organisations, service design and delivery have been recast in response to COVID-19, including a significant uplift in online service delivery that in turn may require infrastructure changes and upskilling of staff and volunteers.<sup>11</sup>

Evidence also suggests that greater numbers of people are engaging with more informal or fluid models of volunteering, rather than traditional volunteering models or programs. VolunteeringACT has undertaken some preliminary research earlier this year into informal volunteering in the ACT using existing resources, but any new Strategy development must include resourcing for greater consultation and engagement to reach out to those groups and individuals to understand what support/resourcing is needed to respond to this trend.

Due to the strong existing networks within the volunteering sector and effective working relationships fostered by VolunteeringACT with government officers, this proposal already has a robust and cost neutral established partnership foundation to build on to achieve successful implementation and realisation of core outcomes.

Expected Outcomes and Benefits:

- An improved strategic approach to volunteer workforce planning and development that can be applied across Whole of Government and the broader volunteering sector.
- Greater visibility of volunteering and understanding of the importance of volunteers, and the social and economic value of their contributions across the region, including Government portfolios.

## **Alignment with the current National context**

Volunteering Australia is currently developing the National Strategy for Volunteering, which will be designed and owned by the volunteering ecosystem and provide a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. Development of a Strategy for the Canberra region at the same time presents further synergies and the opportunity for reciprocal learning.

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<sup>11</sup> [\\*final\\_report\\_pulse\\_of\\_the\\_for-purpose\\_sector\\_wave\\_2.pdf \(csi.edu.au\)](#).

## **Proposal – 12-month action plan and interim package of support to aid volunteering recovery and re-engagement.**

**Total investment required \$70,000 (split between two projects below)**

As the volunteering peak body, VolunteeringACT is a subject matter expert with strong relationships and networks, therefore is uniquely placed to facilitate and coordinate targeted projects which will be highly practical, aim to reduce barriers to volunteering, and raise awareness of benefits of volunteering and local volunteering opportunities. This package should have two elements as follows:

### **Practical assistance for volunteer-involving organisations to reduce financial barriers to accessing training and tailored support around volunteer onboarding, inducting and core capabilities.**

**Investment required: \$50,000**

The recovery of volunteering activities is an integral part of an effective recovery from COVID-19 in our region. Feedback from National and local networks and conversations with our Members confirm a widespread trend where organisations are struggling to re-engage volunteers they once had and attract new ones. One of the best ways to attract volunteers, is to be able to offer them a comprehensive on-boarding and induction process, with a structured training program in their first few months to cover all the basics and essentials they need to know for a safe and positive volunteering experience.

Organisations have fed back that one of the biggest cost burdens they face – particularly for smaller organisations and those that are entirely volunteer run - is properly resourcing the onboarding and induction process, and core competencies training in line with National Standards for volunteering when they first recruit them. Similarly, as many organisations do not have enough funding to properly support volunteer management, they often do not have a budget to send their volunteer managers on all the core areas of training that would be required for best practice.

We are seeking an investment of \$50,000 to deliver a scholarship program for volunteer involving organisations in the region who are unable to afford our training and consulting services. We will provide a simple application process and select organisations most in need of this tailored support.

## **2) Funding for a Canberra region targeted Marketing and Communications campaign to re-invigorate volunteering.**

**Investment required: \$20,000**

This campaign will assist organisations with effective and targeted messaging to promote volunteering opportunities, help address any COVID-19 safety/risk concerns people may have about returning to volunteering and re-invigorate the volunteering experience for Canberrans.

In the Canberra region, many VIOs do not have dedicated funding or room in their budgets to undertake good quality and effective marketing and communications activities. A high number of community organisations and groups in our region are completely volunteer run, with no paid staff, and the level of marketing and communications skills required to run creative campaigns and achieve the necessary outcomes in attracting volunteers is extremely challenging.

For a relatively small investment, thousands of organisations that currently make up the Canberra region volunteering sector can benefit from vital marketing and communications expertise that they would otherwise not be able to afford. This can be achieved via engaging VolunteeringACT to lead a partnership approach and coordinate across its existing networks to understand what messaging is needed, commission a creative agency to undertake the campaign design and work with ACT Government to lever their existing communications and engagement mechanisms and teams across directorates to also coordinate an effective Whole of Government campaign.

#### Expected Outcomes and Benefits:

- The delivery of tailored support to organisations most in need via scholarships which enable volunteering recovery and support safe volunteer practice.
- A cohesive communications approach to promoting and re-invigorating volunteering, delivered over a defined timeframe, with wide reach across existing and new cohorts.
- Increased awareness of the benefits of volunteering, local volunteering opportunities, and improved knowledge around volunteering safety and risk, including tailored COVID safe advice/information that may be required for improving confidence.
- A clear demonstration of ACT Government investment in and support for volunteers and recognition for all they have done to support our region during the pandemic.
- The opportunity to link with new communications and launch activities required for the new Canberra region Volunteering Strategy, providing added value.

*NB: All projects will be supported through the involvement of volunteers, contributing an estimated conservative amount of \$50,000 of in-kind support.*

## About VolunteeringACT

VolunteeringACT is the peak body for volunteering and community information in the Canberra region, as well as being a service provider of programs for people experiencing disadvantage and isolation, people with disability, and people needing support for mental wellness. Our purpose is to foster quality of life and an inclusive Canberra by enabling participation and connection. Through our activities we improve inclusivity, enable sustainable volunteering, and create a more resilient Canberra community.

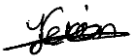
VolunteeringACT connects people to volunteering opportunities; supports volunteer involving organisations with training, advice, and volunteer recruitment; makes sure information on services and supports is easily accessible to everyone through our Community Information services; supports people experiencing disadvantage; and provides programs to help people reconnect with their community and access supported volunteering roles.

VolunteeringACT is a people driven, service-focused organisation that represents the interests of 185 members, advocates for and supports volunteers, and engages with the broader Canberra community. This submission is informed by our experience of liaising with and supporting the sector throughout the impacts of COVID-19 and regularly consultation with stakeholders to understand what assistance is needed and what will have the most effective and fastest impact.

VolunteeringACT is part of the National Network of Volunteering Peak Bodies in Australia.

## Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of VolunteeringACT.



Ms Jean Giese  
Chief Executive Officer

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