



ACT
Government

VolunteeringACT
an inclusive Canberra

2024-2034

ACT Volunteering Strategy



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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The ACT Government and Volunteering ACT acknowledge the Ngunnawal people as traditional custodians of the ACT and recognises any other people or families with connection to the lands of the ACT and region. We acknowledge and respect their continuing culture and the contribution they make to the life of this city and this region.





MINISTER'S FOREWORD

We want Canberra to be a place where volunteering thrives, and all volunteers feel recognised and supported.

Canberrans are no strangers to volunteering. Our city's diverse network of volunteers contribute to building a more vibrant, healthy, resilient and socially connected community. Every week, hundreds of people generously give their time to help or empower others whether that be in aged care, disability, community services, environment, the arts, health, education, emergency services, recreation or sport.

The ACT Volunteering Strategy 2024-2034 (the 'Strategy') is the first strategy for volunteering in the ACT and builds on the previous *ACT Volunteering Statement and Action Plan 2018-2021*. It has been co-designed with VolunteeringACT and reflects a joint, whole-of-government and community sector commitment to supporting the volunteering ecosystem and encouraging volunteering activities across the Territory.

The Strategy aligns with the *National Strategy for Volunteering* and sets out our commitment to volunteering for the next ten years. It provides a local framework for implementing actions across three key focus areas of: 1. Individual potential and volunteer experience; 2. Community and social impact; and 3. Conditions for volunteering to thrive.

I would like to acknowledge the efforts and commitment of our partners VolunteeringACT for their work on the Strategy and their ongoing representation and support of the volunteering sector. The ACT Government is committed to working in partnership with the community to achieve outcomes and the process of developing this strategy is a great example of what can be achieved when we all genuinely come to the table willing to collaboratively design a solution. We look forward to continuing our partnership and making sure volunteering remains at the heart of our community.

Thank you also to all our volunteers, who so freely give their time, and make our city a better place in which to live.

Emma Davidson MLA

**Minister for Community Services,
Seniors and Veterans**

CHAIR AND CEO'S FOREWORD

VolunteeringACT is proud of our region's long history of consistently high levels of participation in volunteering. We want to see this trend continue and ensure that anyone who wishes to volunteer is easily able to do so, and feels safe, supported, and valued for their efforts.

Canberra's volunteers make a vital ongoing contribution to our city and surrounding region, generously giving their time and sharing their knowledge and skills to help or empower others through a range of initiatives. Volunteering underpins and enhances the lives of Canberrans in so many ways, helping to foster quality of life and enable greater social inclusion, participation, and connections across communities. Volunteering also makes a huge financial contribution via flow on effects within the ACT economy.

The ACT Volunteering Strategy 2024-2034 is informed by community expertise and insights from the *The State of Volunteering in the ACT Research Report (2024)*. It sets out a bold and ambitious vision for the ACT's volunteering sector over the next ten years. It reflects everything we have heard from listening to and gathering feedback from volunteers, volunteer managers, volunteer-involving organisations and other key stakeholders over the past few years. The Strategy will act as our roadmap to support the progression of key objectives outlined in the *National Strategy for Volunteering*, in line with the priorities and solutions we know are needed to meet the needs of our community.

We would like to acknowledge the support of Minister Davidson and our ACT Government partners in the Community Services Directorate who have worked in close collaboration with VolunteeringACT to help bring the Strategy together. We also give special recognition to the members of our *ACT Volunteering Strategy Advisory Group (VSAG)*, who have contributed countless hours of their time alongside their regular busy roles to provide us with valuable frontline insights and without whom, we would not have been able to achieve this milestone.

Finally, we wish to thank all the volunteers, VolunteeringACT members and other organisations in our networks, the VolunteeringACT Board and team who have all contributed to and supported this Strategy journey, and for everything they do for our fellow Canberrans and the life of our region.

Robyn Hendry and Jean Giese
VolunteeringACT Chair and CEO



PURPOSE

The *ACT Volunteering Strategy* provides a roadmap for the ACT Government's partnership with VolunteeringACT to:

- Realise the ACT's shared objectives with the [National Strategy for Volunteering](#)¹
- Support safe, inclusive, ethical and sustainable volunteering in the Canberra Region.
- Fully recognise, value and celebrate the contributions of the ACT's volunteer workforce.

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering plays a vital role in the ACT and contributes to building healthier and more resilient individuals, communities and natural environments. Volunteering is defined by Volunteering Australia as "time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain."² Historically, the ACT has enjoyed the highest levels of formal and informal³ volunteering participation in the country.⁴ Recent data suggests that 75% of people over 15 years of age in the ACT contributed to their community as a volunteer (either formally or informally) in 2023.⁵ Volunteering activities yield significant social, cultural and economic benefits to our region, with an estimated annual value to the ACT of \$14.1 billion.⁶

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- 1 *Volunteering Australia (2023) [National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033](#)*
 - 2 *Volunteering Australia (2024) [Definition of Volunteering](#)*
 - 3 'Formal' volunteering refers to volunteering that takes place within an organisation or group. 'Informal' volunteering refers to unpaid help that occurs outside of a formal organisation (excluding help provided to members of one's own household or family).
 - 4 *Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021) [General Social Survey: Summary Results, Table 6.1.](#)*
 - 5 *VolunteeringACT (2024) [The State of Volunteering in the ACT Report 2024.](#)*
 - 6 *VolunteeringACT (2024) [The State of Volunteering in the ACT Report 2024.](#)*

There are thousands of volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) in the Canberra Region operating within areas such as sport and recreation, health, education, environment, arts, tourism, major events, emergency services, and community services. In addition, the city benefits from vital services and programs delivered by the ACT Government and Australian Government that rely on the skilled contribution of volunteers. Currently there are thousands of volunteers across the ACT public service supporting the delivery of a range of activities across ACT schools, hospitals, libraries, courts, parks, and gardens, as well as providing vital support to the ACT's emergency response and helping to staff major drawcard events such as the annual National Multicultural Festival, Floriade and Enlighten. As the nation's capital, ACT volunteers are also at the forefront of welcoming visitors to Canberra throughout the year, ensuring the smooth running of our many national and other cultural institutions, and providing people with a quality visitor experience to our region.

THE STRATEGIC CONTEXT

The first *ACT Volunteering Statement* ('the Statement') was launched in late 2011 with four key principles: that volunteering in the ACT is recognised, valuable, diverse, and supported. It was refreshed in 2017 reflecting changes in the sector with a view to adopting a whole of government approach to volunteering in the Territory. The Statement was updated again in 2018 to include the *ACT Volunteering Action Plan 2018–2021*, which was developed through an extensive consultation process with hundreds of everyday Canberrans and community organisations. *The Action Plan 2018–2021* set out initiatives under the four key principles of the Statement and a whole-of-government and community approach to supporting volunteers and VIOs. This Statement and Action Plan expired in December 2021.

The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023–2033) was released in early 2023. This document provides a strategic framework to enable safe, supported, and sustainable volunteering in Australia over the next 10 years. It incorporates a national vision, three key focus areas, 11 strategic objectives and a timeline for phased implementation. All state and territory governments are developing a local response for progression of National recommendations and actions. It is expected that the National Strategy will also drive future investment in volunteering from the Australian Government.

The volunteering landscape has shifted significantly over the past three years, presenting new challenges to VIOs and volunteers. Many VIOs have had to adapt service design and delivery in response to economic uncertainty, COVID disruptions, post-COVID shocks, and extreme weather events. These factors have had compounding impacts on demand for volunteer-provided essential services, our collective capacity to sustain emergency responses, and how we strengthen our volunteer-led activities in sport and recreation, health, education, environment, arts, tourism, major events, emergency services, libraries, and community services – all of which are vital to social recovery and future flourishing of our environment and economy.

VIOs are increasingly having to operate more flexibly, including expanding online service delivery mechanisms, requiring them to invest in infrastructure changes, adapt recruitment and onboarding processes and to further upskill volunteer managers and volunteers.⁷ They must also consider creating more options to involve volunteers, as evidence suggests greater numbers of people are engaging with more informal or fluid models of volunteering, rather than traditionally organised and managed volunteering models and programs⁸.

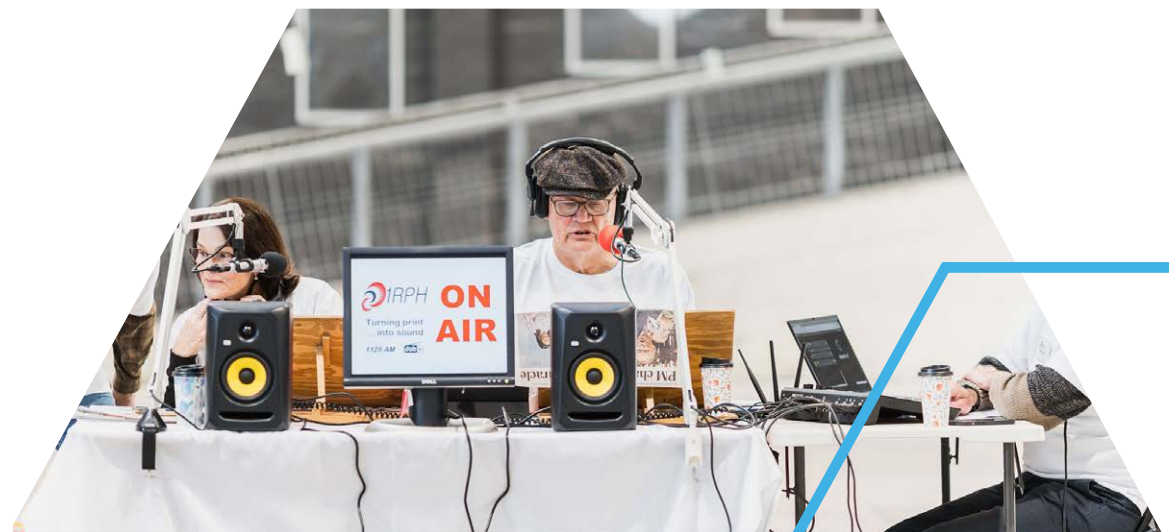
The ACT Volunteering Strategy provides a clear roadmap for our region to respond to shifting sector priorities and needs, achieve National Strategy objectives in line with ACT priorities, and foster an inclusive, ethical, and sustainable ACT volunteering ecosystem

⁷ Centre for Social Impact (2021) [Pulse of the for-purpose sector Final Report: Wave 2](#)

⁸ Volunteering Australia (2023) [National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033](#)

A LOCAL STRATEGY IS NEEDED TO:

- Achieve the strategic objectives of the National Strategy in alignment with ACT priorities.
- Establish a shared understanding of volunteering in the ACT and its value to the region across key stakeholder groups.
- Ensure shared ownership and oversight across Government and the community.
- Provide a clear strategic direction for the future of volunteering in the ACT and drive investment to achieve longer-term outcomes.
- Keep track of and agree how best to respond to the immediate and evolving needs of the ACT volunteering ecosystem.
- Ensure volunteering is connected to ACT decision making structures, while also remaining a grassroots and responsive activity.
- Ensure that ACT VIOs have the capacity and capability to offer ethical, safe, inclusive, and sustainable volunteering experiences.
- Embed consistency around common volunteer management and program delivery practices, with flexibility to tailor support and solutions to the different needs of each volunteering sub-sector as required. For example, volunteering in social recovery scenarios is very different to regular and ongoing volunteering and needs to be responsive.



DEVELOPING THE ACT STRATEGY

The previous *ACT Volunteering Statement and Action Plan 2018–2021* expired in December 2021. Since then, VolunteeringACT has worked closely alongside the ACT Government, led by the Community Services Directorate (CSD), to develop the new *ACT Volunteering Strategy*. The co-design process has involved extensive engagement with a wide range of stakeholders over the past three years to understand the key issues impacting the ACT volunteering sector, potential solutions and supports that are needed to facilitate safe, meaningful, inclusive and sustainable volunteering.

It also identified gaps in data collection and information sharing to inform future sector development. A comprehensive overview of what we heard from the sector during consultations and collaborations is provided in the [Listening Report: Canberra's Volunteering Landscape 2021–2023](#).

Consultation methods included workshops, surveys, and submissions and input was received from:

- Around 100 VolunteeringACT Member organisations.
- ACT specialist peak bodies and representative organisations.
- Volunteering peak bodies in all states and the Northern Territory.
- Volunteering Australia – the National Peak Body.
- ACT Government – including ACT Health, Canberra Health Services, Community Services Directorate, Chief Minister, Treasury and Economic Development Directorate, Education Directorate, Environment, Planning and Sustainable Development Directorate, Justice and Community Safety Directorate, Transport Canberra, and City Services.
- The Department of Social Services.

The State of Volunteering in the ACT Research Report (2024), and extensive stakeholder feedback have been used to inform the *ACT Volunteering Strategy's* overarching principles, focus areas, strategic outcomes, and key objectives. These will be used to guide the development of future action plans.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

The guiding principles underpinning this Strategy and its implementation are:

- **Respect** – Volunteers are respected, and volunteering is valued everywhere it takes place, in every way it takes place, and is inclusive.
- **Volunteer-centred** – The experiences and insights of volunteers remain at the centre of decision making.
- **Responsive** – Adapting and responding to changing sector needs.
- **Collaboration** – Utilising genuine co-design methods and sharing responsibility for oversight and delivery.

DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

This Strategy recognises the wide diversity of ACT volunteering sector roles and activities, and the different reasons people want to volunteer. The volunteering experience does not look the same for everyone, and people start wherever they are in their life, creating their own volunteering journey in a way that works for them, in their own time. There are many ways to volunteer, and this Strategy seeks to ensure volunteering in the ACT is accessible to people of all backgrounds, ages, and abilities, and inclusive of all cultures, genders, faiths, and identities.

The Strategy will need to consider and expand our understanding of long-established Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander approaches to supporting each other, and the many practices/traditions of culturally and linguistically diverse communities. The Strategy recognises that experts with lived experiences should and will have an ongoing voice in our Strategy's design and implementation to embed inclusive practice and genuine co-design principles at the heart of our collective decision making in the ACT.

OUR DEFINITION OF CO-DESIGN:

“Co-design is a process that brings people together around an issue or theme they all have an interest/stake in, where knowledge is shared, and the experiences of all participants are respected and valued. Wherever possible within co-design processes and conversations, all parties have equal power, decisions are discussed openly, and are made collectively.”

SHARED GOALS

This Strategy and the National Strategy for Volunteering share the following key goals:

1. Improve volunteering experiences.
2. Widen the understanding of volunteering.
3. Expand recognition for volunteering and the value it delivers.
4. Enable a community led approach and explore strategic and sustainable solutions to address identified needs.

FOCUS AREAS

The ACT Volunteering Strategy is informed by the three focus areas of the National Strategy for Volunteering, providing a strong two-way link and opportunities for reciprocal learning to achieve national and ACT priorities, objectives, and outcomes. Under each focus area ACT-specific strategic outcomes to be achieved over the life of the Strategy have been identified. More detailed plans will be co-designed with key stakeholders to support implementation.

National Focus Area 1: Individual potential and volunteer experience

This focus area aims to ensure that volunteering is safe, inclusive, accessible, meaningful and not exploitative. People of all demographics and backgrounds should be able to volunteer and volunteering should offer personal and social enrichment. Objectives under this focus area could include raising awareness of volunteering benefits and opportunities, addressing the ongoing impacts of a rapidly changing volunteering landscape, building the capacity of VIOs to offer inclusive and safe volunteer experiences, and seeking to better understand the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteering context.

ACT Strategic Outcome 1.1: More ACT community members are engaged in meaningful and enjoyable volunteering in a way that works for them.

ACT Strategic Outcome 1.2: ACT volunteers are free from exploitation, and their participation in volunteering does not result in direct financial loss.

ACT Strategic Outcome 1.3: ACT volunteers feel safe and supported in their roles and volunteering environment.



National Focus Area 2: Community and Social Impact

This focus area aims to ensure that the diversity and impact of volunteering is articulated and celebrated. Volunteering should be understood and respected in all its forms and recognised as having inherent value to individuals and society. Objectives under this focus area may include expansion of volunteer recognition mechanisms, improvements to data collection and information sharing and implementation of marketing and communication campaigns.

ACT Strategic Outcome 2.1: The ACT volunteer workforce is seen and heard, valued, and fully recognised for the far-reaching positive impacts of volunteering.

ACT Strategic Outcome 2.2: Volunteering stories, experiences and impacts are well-documented and widely shared across communities, to improve how we highlight and celebrate them.

National Focus Area 3: Conditions for Volunteering to Thrive

This focus area aims to ensure that the right conditions are in place for volunteering to be effective and sustainable. VIOs should be supported to attract, engage, manage, and retain volunteers. Objectives under this focus area may include advocacy for greater recognition of volunteering, expansion of information sharing, networking and reciprocal learning mechanisms and approaches.

ACT Strategic Outcome 3.1: The importance of volunteers, volunteer managers and VIOs is considered in relevant ACT Government strategic planning, service design and delivery.

ACT Strategic Outcome 3.2: ACT Volunteers and VIOs have strong links with each other, collaborate well, and regularly share good practice.

IMPLEMENTATION

Volunteering is an activity that cuts across and supports numerous sectors, including core aspects of Australian Government and ACT Government portfolios. Achieving the vision for volunteering in the ACT requires a cross-sector, whole-of-community, and whole-of-government approach to implementation.

The Community Services Directorate (CSD) and VolunteeringACT will work together to implement the Strategy and its Action Plans. CSD will coordinate implementation across ACT Government directorates. VolunteeringACT will work across the volunteering sector and maintain buy-in from VIOs for a cross-sector implementation approach, comprising of representatives from a range of volunteering sub-sectors.

Action Plans

The action plans describe the work and the commitments to support the focus areas of the Strategy and improve the volunteering landscape in the ACT. There will be three action plans over the 10 years. Plans will list actions to be taken under each focus area and include who is responsible for each action. The First Action Plan will begin in 2024 and be completed in 2027 and draws on the findings of the extensive co-design process undertaken between 2021 and 2023.

Future action plans will be guided by the implementation of the *National Strategy for Volunteering* and ongoing consultation with the volunteering ecosystem and broader community.

CSD will lead the coordination of reporting at the conclusion of each Action Plan, supported by VolunteeringACT. Each ACT Government directorate will contribute to an annual Ministerial Statement or update that will be tabled in the Legislative Assembly by the relevant Minister responsible for Volunteering.



Governance, reporting and evaluation

The Strategy will be governed in partnership between the ACT Government, VolunteeringACT and the volunteering community. Progress of action plans will be reviewed and reported annually to the Minister responsible for volunteering. To inform these progress reports a workshop will be held annually to monitor progress including implementation and development of future action plans. These will be attended by key stakeholders including VIOs, volunteers, and ACT Government directorates. CSD will lead the coordination of reporting supported by VolunteeringACT. These reviews will be made publicly available so the ACT community can also monitor progress.

An ACT Volunteering Strategic Advisory Group comprising of community, ACT Government and Australian Government partners will guide VolunteeringACT's implementation of actions.

A Monitoring and Evaluation Framework will be developed to measure, track, and report on progress against the Strategy's key objectives and outcomes. This will ensure efforts under the Strategy align with outcomes and inform continuous improvement.

Ongoing sector engagement

Ongoing and meaningful engagement with volunteers, VIOs, relevant ACT peak body organisations, and government agencies is an essential element of our implementation approach.

VolunteeringACT and the ACT Government are committed to transparency and conducting genuine co-design activities. Wherever possible, equal decision-making power will be afforded to all parties. Our principles of engagement are to have clarity of purpose, to be inclusive, to establish equitable partnerships, show respect and build trust.

TERMINOLOGY

Terms used in the *ACT Volunteering Strategy* and what we mean by them:

Volunteers: Those who give their time willingly for the common good and without financial gain.

Volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.

Formal volunteering: Volunteering that takes place within an organisation or group (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.

Informal volunteering: Volunteering that takes place outside the context of a formal organisation or group. This includes assisting people in the community, excluding one's own family members. Examples include - looking after property, or pets; providing home or personal assistance; or giving someone professional advice.

ACT Volunteering Ecosystem: A network of people in the ACT who are involved in or connected to volunteering in some way, including helping others to understand, recognise and support volunteering to thrive in our region. They may be doing this as individuals or as part of an organisation, group, institute, or agency.



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