

# VOLUNTEERING *and* CONTACT ACT

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## Volunteering and Contact ACT

### 2018-19 Budget Consultation

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## Overview

Volunteering and Contact ACT (VCA) welcomes the opportunity to provide input to the ACT Government's 2018-19 Budget Consultation process.

VCA is the peak body for volunteering and community information in the Canberra Region. VCA has a vision of an engaged community, enriched by volunteering, participation and knowledge. Through our services and programs, we foster community networks and undertake research, advocacy, projects, training, and events.

VCA is a people driven, service-focused organisation that represents the interests of 176 members. This submission is informed by member feedback, and the priorities they identified for the 2018-19 budget.

## Background Information

Volunteering spans every aspect of Australian life, with an estimated 43.7 per cent of adult Australians volunteering each year.<sup>i</sup> These volunteers gave a total of 932 million hours in 2015-16, at an economic worth of over \$31 billion.<sup>ii</sup> Here in the ACT nearly four in ten people volunteer, contributing an estimated \$1.5 billion to the ACT economy annually.<sup>iii</sup>

For every \$1 invested in volunteering there is a \$4.50 return to the community.<sup>iv</sup> Economically, the return on investment in volunteering is exponential over time, and delivers tangible outcomes that government and private sector services would not be able to achieve in isolation. Proper resourcing for volunteer involvement has the potential to deliver outcomes across all areas of strategic priority for the ACT Government. This includes addressing inequality, and contributing to sustainable, long-term economic growth.

In addition to the economic benefits generated by volunteering, it also delivers significant social and cultural benefits. Volunteers play a pivotal role in creating connected, diverse, and inclusive communities. With the highest rate of volunteering in the country, the ACT benefits tremendously from the work of volunteers who contribute to the health and happiness of the Canberra community.

## Budget Submission

VCA's member consultations and subsequent research identified several key themes for investment in both the volunteering and community information spaces. These themes are outlined below:

### *Access to Education and Training*

Under resourcing for volunteer involving organisations affects their ability to access essential training for both volunteers and managers of volunteers. Nationally, 94 per cent of non-profit organisations involve volunteers<sup>v</sup>, and 57 per cent of staff in volunteer involving organisations are unpaid.<sup>vi</sup> The *Giving Australia 2016* report identified that a dedicated volunteer manager was found to be the most useful resource for volunteer recruitment. Yet, the State of the Community Service Sector in the ACT 2016 report, commissioned by ACTCOSS, found that only one in three organisations had a

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dedicated volunteer manager. Further, almost half of respondents agreed that it is becoming harder to recruit volunteers.

Despite the ACT having the highest rate of volunteerism in the country, it is imperative that the region does not become complacent with this good fortune. The ageing population, combined with an increasingly insecure workforce, will likely see a significant cohort of the ACT's volunteer population retire, without new talent to replace them. Any reduction in the current volunteer workforce in the Region would have significant repercussions for programs and services. This would likely increase levels of social isolation, and increase the demand for government services. Further, significant social, cultural, and economic capital would be lost through a reduction of the volunteer workforce. Such a loss could not be supplemented by paid workers, and the gap would have a disproportionate and potentially catastrophic effect on Canberra's most vulnerable people.

One of the resounding pieces of feedback VCA received through its consultations is the need for access to robust training to upskill the volunteering workforce. VCA currently provides such training, but cost remains a barrier for many organisations. Investment in training for managers of volunteers would assist with solving other challenges, such as difficulties with recruiting and retaining volunteers. Further, training would assist with standardising volunteer management practices across organisations, leading to increased collaboration, and better experiences for volunteers.

Increased investment in training for volunteers would also be hugely beneficial. As identified above, in many organisations there are more volunteers than paid staff. In some organisations this ratio can be as high as one paid staff to every one hundred or more volunteers. Investment in volunteer training would ensure that such organisations can operate effectively and efficiently. Further, such training would contribute to succession planning by minimising key person risk, and ensure cross-pollination of knowledge between paid staff and volunteers.

Upskilling volunteers will have long-term benefits for the whole community, especially where volunteers give their time to multiple organisations. For example, in 2016 VCA partnered with St John's Ambulance Australia ACT to deliver free First Aid and CPR training to volunteers. This training not only upskilled the volunteer workforce in the Canberra Region, but provided over 200 individuals with important, life-saving skills and knowledge. Investments such as this have a multitude of benefits that extend beyond the immediate work a volunteer may be doing for a specific organisation.

VCA recommends the ACT Government explores other partnerships that enable professional skills and knowledge to be imparted on volunteers and managers of volunteers alike. This aligns strategically with Government priorities as volunteering is a proven pathway to employment, and upskilling the volunteer workforce would directly contribute to both the creation of local jobs, and ensuring prospective candidates are appropriately skilled, experienced, and job-ready.

## *Streamlining Processes to Support Volunteer Involvement*

One of the key areas for improvement in the volunteering sector, identified through VCA's member consultations, was reducing red tape and double handling. In response to this VCA proposes the introduction of a 'Volunteer Passport' to streamline recruitment and onboarding processes for volunteers in the Canberra Region. Many organisations find it extremely difficult to navigate the complex landscape of

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volunteering, and understand their legislative and other requirements when it comes to volunteering. The creation of a Volunteer Passport, that centralises basic screening processes and provides baseline training for prospective volunteers, would ensure a more consistent introduction to volunteering.

VCA, as subject-matter experts in volunteering and volunteer involvement, would be best placed to administer such a system. Organisations could be assured that any volunteer who has been inducted into volunteering by VCA would have a rudimentary understanding of their rights and responsibilities. This would reduce the burden on organisations to include this in their own training, and provide assurance that volunteers referred to their programs are across the fundamentals of volunteering.

Finally, this system would increase the efficacy of the volunteering sector in the Canberra Region by ensuring that baseline training for all volunteers is consistent, regardless of the role or program they are volunteering for. The system would ensure that volunteers are fully aware of their rights and responsibilities, including being across legislation such as the *Work, Health and Safety Act 2011* (Cth) and the *Working with Vulnerable People (Background Checking) Act 2011* (ACT).

VCA is of the view that such a system would generate significant savings for the ACT Government and for volunteer involving organisations over the long-term by reducing duplication of effort and double-handling. Additionally, it would enhance the experience of volunteers and potentially create pathways for volunteers to give their time to multiple organisations without having to go through multiple induction processes. This 'shared economy' of volunteers could address issues with volunteer recruitment, and ensure that volunteer effort is channelled in a way that generates maximum impact.

## *ACT Volunteering Statement*

In May 2017, the ACT Government launched the ACT Volunteering Statement. The Statement sets out a whole of government and whole of community approach to support volunteering in the Canberra Region. Work is currently underway to develop an associated Action Plan. For the Action Plan to make a demonstrable difference to volunteerism in the Canberra Region it must be accompanied with adequate resourcing to support existing programs, and bring new initiatives to life.

VCA recommends that the Action Plan, like the Statement, should be based on community consultations and should reflect a holistic view of the future of volunteering. This should include identifying what resourcing is required to ensure that volunteering remains safe, supported, and sustainable.

## *Volunteer Incentives and Reimbursement for Out-of-Pocket Expenses*

One of the final themes identified in our consultations was that many organisations faced significant expenses to involve volunteers, and oftentimes these expenses were being passed on to the volunteer themselves. For example, the cost of uniforms and parking remain a significant expense for organisations and their volunteers. Organisations who incur these costs have suggested that access to a centralised reimbursement scheme, potentially administered by VCA, would allow them to provide necessary equipment and clothing to their volunteers. Whilst most volunteers are motivated altruistically to give back to their community, there needs to be some incentives in place to ensure that they are not worse off as a result of giving their time.

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VCA also recommends a review of the ACT Government's volunteer parking permit scheme. Whilst the scheme is a great way for community organisations to cover the cost of volunteer parking in ACT Government carparks, it currently provides that an organisation must be a 'community organisation' to apply. This has created issues for volunteering programs that sit within government, who have had difficulty accessing the scheme for their volunteers. Amending the criteria of the volunteer parking permit system to broaden its scope would be budget neutral, but would pass on significant savings to organisations who currently bear the cost of parking for their volunteers.

## *Access to Reliable Information*

Canberra is a city with a vibrant multicultural community, and is experiencing considerable population growth. VCA's role as the peak body for community information enables pathways for people of diverse background to access information on, and participate in, events and services in the Canberra community. One significant area for improvement is the accessibility of information for people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, and people who speak English as a second language. VCA's consultations with member organisations, and with government agencies, found that there is a significant gap in the number and range of resources available in multiple languages.

VCA recommends that the ACT Government consider how volunteers may support a project to make community and government information more accessible through the translation of written materials into multiple languages. This would assist with addressing inequality in the Region, by reducing the digital divide often experienced by people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Further investment could be made in targeting information to specific cohorts, and/or specific regions in Canberra, to ensure that access to reliable information continues to support the city's inhabitants. Such an initiative would encourage the full participation of all people, including migrants and people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds, in our community's social, economic, and cultural life. This project could be budget neutral if proper consideration is given to how VCA and the ACT Government could leverage existing resources.

## *Alignment with ACT Government Strategic Priorities*

The information and recommendations within this submission are focused on participation, and neatly align with core ACT Government priorities. Volunteering is a true community builder, and when properly resourced has the potential to generate outcomes and effect change in key areas of concern. For example, addressing inequality and disadvantage relies on community sector organisations, and their volunteer workforce. Further, as a proven pathway to employment, volunteering contributes to the creation of local jobs and long-term economic growth and prosperity.

Volunteers play a crucial role in advancing government objectives across all portfolios, including emergency services, health, sport and recreation, environment, events, and arts and culture. Across the whole Canberra community, volunteers play a vital role in delivering quality and efficient services. Further investment in volunteering in the Canberra Region will generate benefits to a broad spectrum of organisations, their volunteers, and their service users. As outlined above, no other industry can generate the return on investment that can be achieved through volunteering when it is adequately resourced and supported.

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VCA would like to acknowledge that it receives considerable support, including funding, from the ACT Government. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the ACT Government, our members, and other partners, to advance volunteering and community information in the Canberra Region. VCA welcomes the opportunity to provide further information and evidence to support the recommendations in this submission.

## *Recommendations:*

1. That the ACT Government funds an education and training initiative for volunteers and volunteer managers, to upskill the volunteering workforce in the Canberra Region.
2. That the ACT Government considers investing in infrastructure and support to make efficiencies through the centralisation of volunteer recruitment and onboarding processes.
3. That the ACT Government commits to developing a long-term Action Plan to accompany the ACT Volunteering Statement.
4. That the ACT Government review its volunteer parking permit scheme to ensure access is equitable to all volunteer involving organisations.
5. That the ACT Government considers what fiscal support could be provided to organisations to provide essential equipment and materials to volunteers, such as uniforms, personal protective equipment, and reimbursement for other out-of-pocket expenses.
6. That the ACT Government considers a translation project to increase access to information and resources for people from culturally and/or linguistically diverse backgrounds.

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<sup>i</sup> The Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies (ACNPS), Centre for Social Impact (CSI) Swinburne and the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs (December 2016) *Giving Australia 2016*, available online at <http://www.communitybusinesspartnership.gov.au/about/research-projects/>

<sup>ii</sup> Volunteering Western Australia (May 2015) *The Economic, Social, and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia*, available online at [https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa\\_report%20book\\_web.pdf](https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa_report%20book_web.pdf)

<sup>iii</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>iv</sup> Volunteering Western Australia (May 2015) *The Economic, Social, and Cultural Value of Volunteering to Western Australia*, available online at [https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa\\_report%20book\\_web.pdf](https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa_report%20book_web.pdf)

<sup>v</sup> The Australian Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies (ACNPS), Centre for Social Impact (CSI) Swinburne and the Centre for Corporate Public Affairs (December 2016) *Giving Australia 2016*, available online at <http://www.communitybusinesspartnership.gov.au/about/research-projects/>

<sup>vi</sup> Volunteering Australia and PWC (April 2016) *State of Volunteering in Australia*, available online at <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/State-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-full-report.pdf>.