



2023-2024 ACT Budget Submission

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This submission has been authored by our Sector Development and Policy and Advocacy Team in collaboration with our Members.

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.

Recommendations

VolunteeringACT makes the following recommendations for inclusion in the 2023-2024 ACT Budget:

1. Funding to support the implementation of a joint ACT Government/Volunteering Sector five-year Volunteering Strategy and Investment Plan for the Canberra region that serves both the volunteering sector and whole of Government, promotes ethical and inclusive volunteering, and supports volunteering recovery and sustainability across communities.
2. Flexible project funding to be administered by VolunteeringACT and governed by a joint community/government advisory committee to support progression of volunteering priorities and solutions identified by stakeholders relating to volunteer engagement, deployment, training/development, data collection and evaluation of impacts/outcomes.

Overview

Volunteers are the often-invisible workforce supporting a wide range of ACT services and activities, but seldom feature within the ACT's core strategic, financial, and workforce development data collections or planning processes. The impact of their contribution to our region can be seen all around us and across all sectors every day. Volunteers keep the ACT's many sports clubs running, they respond in emergencies, support people with the life challenges they face, they serve on community organisation committees/boards, support educational engagement and achievements, guide thousands of visitors to get the best out of Canberra's national and local attractions, and help protect and preserve the Bush Capital's natural environment and heritage.

Volunteering delivers huge health and wellbeing benefits to Canberra's communities, via the important services volunteers help support, but also enhances the health and wellbeing of individuals giving their time. Volunteering strengthens social capital in our region – creating bonds between people, building bridges across diverse communities, and linking Canberrans to connections and opportunities they would not have without it. Volunteering underpins and enhances the lives of Canberrans in so many ways, including a huge contribution and flow on effect to the local economy, and is a vital part of the ACT's emerging Circular Economy¹.

The ACT has always enjoyed higher rates of volunteering in comparison to other States and Territories, but those rates have been declining since the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Research conducted in the past two years on the state of volunteering in Australia confirms this is a national trend, and that the volunteering sector has not yet fully recovered from the unprecedented amount of change and disruption due to impacts of COVID-19. This research has informed the development of a National Strategy for Volunteering, launched in February 2023, with strategic objectives against three core areas; *Individual Potential and the Volunteer Experience*, *Community and Social Impact*, and *Conditions for Volunteering to Thrive*.

This ACT Budget Submission is well aligned with National Strategy objectives and presents a comprehensive roadmap for how the ACT Government can respond to and implement them,

¹ [Draft ACT Circular Economy Strategy 2022-2025](#)

whilst also delivering on ACT priorities for the volunteering sector, and the many other ACT Government strategies underpinned by volunteering activities and outcomes.

Funding to support Implementation of a five-year ACT Volunteering Strategy and Investment Plan – Investment required \$100,000 per year.

Projects Fund - Investment required - \$50,000 per year.

Investment Required (per year)	Purpose	Expected Core Outcomes	Added Value
<p>1xFTE Senior Policy Officer - \$100,000 (Based on SCHADS Award Level 6)</p> <p>Flexible Projects Fund - \$50,000</p> <p>Total per year: \$150,000</p> <p>Total over five years: \$750,000</p>	<p>Senior Policy Officer: Project Management and to facilitate and report on ACT Volunteering Strategy Implementation and Investment Plan.</p> <p>Secretariat to the joint community/ government Advisory Committee that governs implementation of the Strategy.</p> <p>Projects Fund: A flexible fund that can be allocated according to priorities identified by stakeholders, complementary to resources available through the National Strategy for Volunteering (NSV).</p> <p>To be focused on the current volunteer context around recruitment, engagement, development, deployment, data collection and evaluation of impacts and outcomes.</p>	<p>Improved and streamlined approach to volunteer workforce strategic planning and investment across ACT non-government and government agencies.</p> <p>Effective Governance structure facilitates government, community, and business sector co-contribution to implementation of the Strategy in line with new ACT Government integrated strategic commissioning landscape.</p> <p>ACT Government has a timely and structured approach to NSV implementation, ahead of all other jurisdictions.</p> <p>Improved data collection, analysis, and reporting on the ACT's volunteering activities, impacts, and outcomes, expanding ACT Government's evidence of outcomes achievement against the ACT Wellbeing Framework and other ACT Core Strategies.</p> <p>Strengthening safe, ethical, and sustainable volunteering in the ACT and contributing to ACT</p>	<p>Leverage Peak Body expertise and relationships to maximise success of engagement in, implementation of, and additional resourcing for the ACT Strategy and Investment Plan.</p> <p>Involvement of volunteers, contributing an estimated conservative amount of \$50,000 of in-kind support.</p> <p>Further progression of the ACT's Circular Economy objectives via new and emerging VIOs already operating in this space.</p>

		Government policy and Work, Health and Safety objectives.	
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Investment for ACT Volunteering Strategy implementation during 2023-24 maximises opportunities for success and puts the ACT in a strong position to tap into any future Federal funding to support volunteering initiatives aligned with National priorities. Allocation of one full time staff member to drive engagement of key stakeholders, build partnerships, leverage national resources, monitor and report on implementation, facilitate specific projects and support governance of the Strategy will ensure quality of implementation and effective stakeholder engagement throughout. Locating the project manager in the volunteering peak body in the ACT (VolunteeringACT) will ensure the knowledge, expertise, networks, and national collaborations will be leveraged in ways that maximise efficiency and quality of delivery.

In addition to the above staffing cost, investment is required for specific projects needed to strengthen volunteering in 2023-2028. Community credibility of the Strategy will be reduced if there is no accompanying investment for activities that contribute to recovery, renewal, and growth of volunteering and there will be less ability to leverage match funding from federal government and philanthropic organisations. As the volunteering Peak Body, VolunteeringACT is perfectly positioned to administer a fund that will facilitate and coordinate targeted projects to support these aims. Priorities for project funding will be determined transparently by the Strategy’s joint ACT Government/Community governance structure, based on stakeholder feedback. VolunteeringACT will ensure accountability for project spending via the Strategy’s overall outcomes reporting process.

Amongst government, community, and business sectors there can be an outdated perception of volunteering in the ACT, with limited visibility and understanding of how it supports many different portfolio and service delivery areas. This inaccurate perception is difficult to shift due to a lack of comprehensive data on volunteering activities and impacts collected at jurisdictional level to capture its much wider contribution. For example, to date, there is currently no data on volunteering included under any section of the ACT Government’s Open Data Portal.² Investment in better collection of and use of accurate data about volunteering will ensure volunteer-involving organisations are better supported to collect high quality data on the reach and impact of volunteering programs, enable ACT Government to have greater line of sight of these impacts against local priorities, and link this evidence directly to progression of key outcomes in ACT Government Strategies and Plans, including the ACT Wellbeing Framework.

What we know About Volunteering in the ACT

Volunteering is a key determinant of social inclusion, participation, and connection and achieves important economic, social, and cultural outcomes. The ACT’s volunteer workforce underpins delivery of a wide range of key services across multiple sectors, 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 Connection³. Historically, the ACT has

² [ACT | Open Data | Open Data Portal](#)

³ [Explore wellbeing data - ACT Wellbeing Framework](#)

enjoyed the highest levels of formal and informal volunteering participation in the country⁴ and volunteering activities yield significant social and cultural benefits to our region, alongside an economic contribution (conservatively) estimated to be worth **\$1.5 billion** to the ACT economy every year.⁵

The ACT's volunteering landscape has shifted significantly over the past few years presenting new challenges to which volunteer-involving organisations, and volunteers themselves, need to respond and adapt. This requires a fresh strategic approach to supporting ethical, inclusive, and sustainable volunteering in the ACT. For many organisations, service design and delivery have been recast in response to economic uncertainty, COVID-19 disruptions, and extreme weather events. These factors have had compounding impacts on demand for volunteer provided essential services, at a time when many organisations are still grappling with the loss of regular volunteers that began at the height of the pandemic.

These shifts have occurred alongside an overall decline in formal volunteering⁶ and apparent rise in informal volunteering over the past few years. Recent research 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 2021.⁷ The same research also confirms that volunteering across all jurisdictions has not yet recovered from the impacts of COVID-19 and significant support is required to understand and assist the sector to recover volunteering programs, re-engage volunteers they have lost, and attract new volunteers.⁸

This Budget Proposal is evidence-informed by ongoing conversations and specific consultations with the ACT volunteering sector. VolunteeringACT has collated insights from volunteer-involving organisations over the past two years, to understand the issues facing the sector, including priorities needed for action and investment. The core issues, including risks and priorities are summarised in a Listening Report, endorsed by Minister Davidson, due for launch in early May 2023.

The Value of Investing in Strengthening and Supporting Volunteering

Investment in initiatives that support volunteering provide *clear value for money*, and demonstrate strong *social, cultural, and economic returns* on that investment. Volunteering initiatives in the ACT often operate with modest budgets yet generate a great amount of added value via their contribution to achieving economic, social and wellbeing outcomes, via thousands of hours of time willingly given.

For example, in 2020 the equivalent wage value of environmental volunteering in the ACT was calculated, and estimated to be **over \$21.5m**, via delivery of **85,657 hours of on-ground environmental work; 69,268 hours for citizen science, 121,935 hours for wildlife management, and 30,158 hours for administration**.⁹ As an example, in 2021-2022, data provided to VolunteeringACT from the ACT Rural Fire Service (RFS) and State Emergency Services (SES) shows that **volunteers delivered 54,234 hours of vital emergency response**

⁴ Table 6.1 [General Social Survey: Summary Results, Australia, 2020 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

⁵ 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>.

⁶ [The Decline of Formal Volunteering in Australia \(2001–2020\): Insights from the HILDA Survey](#)

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

⁸ *ibid.*

⁹ [Values of Volunteering in the ACT - ACT Enviro Volunteers](#)

services, with an equivalent National Minimum Wage value of \$1,159,523 (a very conservative wage value estimate). In 2019, **over 130,000 volunteer hours were logged across 93 ACT Parent and Citizen Associations**, via delivery of hundreds of community events, working bees and direct services provided to families and children. These activities **improved community connections, supported 38 healthy and affordable school canteens, provided nine after care school services to around 1500 students, ran 50 low-cost uniform shops and generated around \$1.3m in donations to add to school resources.**¹⁰

Historically, Australia's commitment to volunteering and individuals actively getting involved to support others in their community can be traced back tens of thousands of years within Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultural norms and has since evolved over the years through our colonial past, through Federation, and more recently through migration and the multicultural landscape of Australia today. This is framed as the 'Australian way of volunteering', which perfectly encapsulates our uniqueness as a nation within the volunteering context.¹¹

Volunteering, when understood as including cultural obligation and reciprocity – is embedded in the everyday cultural lives of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, people from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities and people from communities that experience discrimination, stigma, and exclusion. It is especially important that we learn from First Nations and CALD communities and this long history of giving their time willingly to support their communities, particularly in relation to supporting First Nations self-determination. This also presents an opportunity to improve our understanding around what we currently categorise as more 'informal' models of volunteering. Investing in volunteering presents a timely opportunity for greater visibility and recognition of this vast community contribution to human, economic and environment flourishing that has always occurred in our region, but for too long has been under recognised.

There is a strong connection between volunteering and better overall health and wellbeing, often with the dual impact of improving the wellbeing of people undertaking volunteering, as well as volunteering activities contributing to and enhancing service delivery that improves the wellbeing of others. Volunteering has been found to help individuals develop stronger social networks and interpersonal relationships, improve self-esteem, relieve stress, alleviate symptoms of depression, and help with mental health recovery.¹² This important link is reflected in the **ACT Wellbeing Framework**, within the **Social Connection** and **Time** domains, with volunteering used as a key indicator of Canberrans being connected with family, friends, and community, and having the time to live life well.¹³ However, the current data collection process does not accurately reflect the full extent of volunteering activity across the ACT, as there are many existing and emerging volunteer-involving organisations who are not visible or known to ACT Government and are therefore missing from this collection. Including investment in an ACT volunteering data framework as an integral part of implementing an ACT Volunteering Strategy offers a robust and relatively low-cost solution to this problem.

The ACT Government is also currently missing out on a vast amount of volunteering data and evidence of impact relating to several other Wellbeing Domains and objectives within other key ACT Strategies. Volunteer programs are often at the forefront of the ACT's core

¹⁰ [Get involved in your school's P&C! \(actparents.org.au\)](https://actparents.org.au)

¹¹ [VRP The-Seven-Waves-of-Volunteering-in-Australia-a-brief-history..pdf \(volunteeringstrategy.org.au\)](https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au)

¹² [Benefits of volunteering | healthdirect](#) and [Purposeful activity - volunteering | Head to Health](#)

¹³ [Explore overall wellbeing - ACT Wellbeing Framework](#)

support services to individuals and communities, providing interaction via different one to one and/or group mechanisms such as education programs, befriending or volunteer mentoring with extremely effective results. For example, the ***Mentoring Young Men Program – ‘Bro-Gram’ operated by Menslink***, pairs volunteer male mentors of all ages and backgrounds with young males aged 10-16 needing a constructive influence in their lives, to benefit from the support and friendship a mentor provides. Following engagement in the program, feedback from parents shows that **80% report positive/very positive impacts** on their sons’ **confidence and self-esteem**, **71% report positive/very positive impacts** on their sons’ **willingness to seek support** and **86% report positive/very positive impacts** on their sons’ **relationship with peers and family**.¹⁴

Volunteering is also a proven pathway to both education and employment, via alternative learning pathways for students of all ages, and opportunities for people to gain vital workplace experience and build confidence to become job ready, and increase their chances of obtaining meaningful, long-term employment or to re-enter the workplace again after a long absence. **Research demonstrates that participation in volunteering can improve an individual’s chances of gaining employment by 27 per cent**.¹⁵ Volunteering also enhances vocational learning opportunities for children in schools and offers a more inclusive way of achieving education and career/employment goals at any age, supporting lifelong learning and career progression. Feedback from organisations working with people with disability confirms how vital volunteering pathways are for improving their life chances, with many disabilities regularly perceived as equating to ‘non-ability’ in relation to work, often resulting in them being funnelled into low/unskilled and low paid employment.

For example, VolunteeringACT leads the delivery of the ***Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment Program*** operating across **Tasmania, NSW, and the ACT**. This program has a working relationship with Department of Employment Service Providers to facilitate inclusive volunteering opportunities for people with disability and a proven track record of delivering positive and sustainable volunteering outcomes for them. The program offers a holistic, human-centred approach with time spent on understanding an individual’s circumstances, intersecting issues, and ways to address all relevant factors that may be causing barriers. Solutions are built with and around an individual participant, and the longer-term outcomes are more sustainable, with **high rates of participants sticking with the program, and of them going on to secure paid employment**.¹⁶

The Need for Investment in 2023-2024

The ACT Government relies on a viable and responsive volunteering ecosystem to deliver on social, economic, and environmental policy and service delivery priorities. The previous strategic agenda and priorities for action for volunteering in the ACT were outlined in **[The ACT Volunteering Statement 2018-2021](#)**, but there has been no replacement since it expired in December 2021 and no further investment/allocation of funding to develop something new via the ACT Budget process in the past few years. Funding an ACT Volunteering Strategy and Investment Plan 2023-2028 will ensure alignment of the strategy, investment, and future

¹⁴ [Menslink-ImpactSurvey-Report-2022.pdf](#)

¹⁵ 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 and Community Service.

¹⁶ <https://www.volunteeringact.org.au/inclusive-volunteering-program/>

development of volunteering across government, community, and the business sector, all of whom contribute to the capacity and capability of volunteering in our community. It will also align with the National volunteering landscape and presents the opportunity for the ACT to lead other jurisdictions via National Strategy implementation and reciprocal learning.

VolunteeringACT has already invested in additional policy resources to support important co-design processes to help progress ACT Strategy development, and engagement from the sector is high. However, more resourcing is required for implementation, data collection, and monitoring and evaluation requirements to maintain this strong engagement and ensure the Strategy is enshrined and governed as a joint ACT Government/Volunteering Sector initiative.

VolunteeringACT has secured strong buy-in from ACT volunteer-involving organisations and government partners for a cross-sector implementation approach, underpinned by a co-designed governance structure comprising of NGO, ACT Government and Federal Government representatives from a range of volunteering sub-sectors and portfolios. Therefore, this budget proposal already has a robust foundation to build on to achieve a successful implementation and realisation of core outcomes.

About VolunteeringACT

Volunteering and Contact ACT Ltd (trading as VolunteeringACT) is the Peak Body for volunteering and provides community information services in the Canberra region. We also deliver programs for people experiencing disadvantage and isolation, people with disability, and people needing support for mental wellness. VolunteeringACT has a vision of an inclusive Canberra, and a mission to foster inclusion by enabling participation and connection.

VolunteeringACT values collaboration, diversity, equity, innovation, integrity, and participation. VolunteeringACT is a people driven, service-focused organisation that represents the interests of over 190 members, advocates for and supports volunteers, and engages with the broader Canberra community. Through our activities, we improve inclusivity, enable sustainable volunteering, and create a more resilient Canberra community.

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

This submission has been made as part of our commitment to ensuring the perspectives and expertise of volunteers, volunteer involving organisations and volunteer leaders informs development of public policy and contributes to achievement of positive social, economic, and environmental outcomes.

Authorisation

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

Ms Jean Giese
Chief Executive Officer
