



Independent Review of the Australian Public Service  
Australian Government  
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Volunteering Australia Contacts

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### About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering. We work to advance volunteering in the Australian community.

Volunteering Australia's vision is to promote strong, connected communities through volunteering. Our mission is to lead, strengthen, promote and celebrate volunteering in Australia.

We work collectively with the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies to deliver national, state/territory and local volunteering programs and initiatives in accordance with the Government's priorities.

As the primary link between the volunteering sector and federal government, Volunteering Australia provides feedback into key decision making. All feedback is informed by research, evidence and consultation with the volunteering sector.

### Introduction

Volunteering Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide a submission to the Australian Government on the Independent Review of the Australian Public Service.

Volunteering is at the centre of Australia's national identity, with 5.8 million Australians or 31 per cent of the population engaging in volunteering activities. Volunteering is an activity with the highest multiplier effect of any government spending. Research demonstrates that volunteering yields a 450% return for every dollar invested. Nationally this is an estimated annual economic and social contribution of \$290 billion.<sup>i</sup>

From the arts, education, emergency services, sports, environment, health, aged care, disability, and community welfare; volunteering is woven across various government portfolios and programs.

Volunteering is also critical to the delivery of the Australian Government's priorities of building strong and resilient communities, by encouraging economic participation, mitigating isolation and loneliness, and increasing social inclusion, community resilience, participation and social cohesion.

In this submission, Volunteering Australia highlights four main areas for improvement for the Australian Public Service:

- A strengthened focus on whole of government approaches and cross-sectoral collaboration;
- Recognition of volunteering by the APS;
- The adoption of Volunteering Australia's definition of volunteering across all government departments; and
- Increased transparency in government tender processes.

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### Volunteering Australia Response

#### Whole of Government Approach and Cross-Sectoral Collaboration

The current nature of the public service is not effective for activities such as volunteering, which work and intersect across multiple portfolios. This was also highlighted in the *Australia 2030: Prosperity through Innovation report*, which states that, “...the public sector should be designed to work across portfolios”<sup>ii</sup>

An example of this was highlighted in Volunteering Australia’s submission on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), where we emphasised that while primary responsibility for the SDGs sits with the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, there is a fragmented approach to delivering on each of the goals. This is evident through separate departmental responsibility and accountability allocated for each of the goals. The intersections of each goal require interventions in thinking to move beyond agency-centric views, and require a transformation to reduce departmental silos. The allocation of individual departmental responsibility and accountability for the goals impedes efforts to interpret them in a transformative and interconnected way. Many federal government departments are working across multiple goals, in the same way that state government portfolios, and local governments are addressing more than one goal. This singular view obstructs the process toward implementation, measurement and monitoring.<sup>iii</sup>

Given that volunteering is a diverse, cross-sector activity, it is vital that there is an integrated approach to achieving the SDGs. Volunteering Australia outlined that an activity such as volunteering extends across all 17 SDGs, and has therefore found it difficult to find a coordinated approach to achieving the SDGs within the Australian Public Service. By employing a whole of government approach and transforming to reduce departmental silos, it will allow for improved communication, resource allocation and better outcomes.

The Australian Public Service also needs to evolve and transform in the way it works with civil society and the wider community in order to tackle complex, multi-sectoral challenges. In fact, the *Australia 2030 report* also stresses that the public sector needs to “have the capability (including skills, culture, technical ability and collaborative methods) to work effectively as a whole, and in cooperation with other organisations in the economy, to deliver the innovative services and policy required by business and the public in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.”<sup>iv</sup> While we acknowledge the public sector does have advisory groups within particular portfolios and activities, there needs to be “much more horizontal and cross-sectoral collaboration.”<sup>v</sup>

As a national peak body, Volunteering Australia plays a leadership role in the sector by advocating effectively to support and advance volunteering in Australia. The Australian Public Service needs to proactively work to consult widely, and harness the networks they have, including with national peak bodies and their memberships, as well as engage in meaningful and diverse consultation. This includes better coordination, consultation and collaboration with the community, charities and not-for-profit sector.

#### Recognition of Volunteering by Australian Public Service

Australian charities are reliant on the efforts of volunteers, encompassing 2.97 million members of the charitable sector workforce, compared to one million paid staff members.<sup>vi</sup> The Giving Australia 2016 report on non-profits and volunteering found that 62.3 per cent of organisations in the not-for-profit sector actively recruited volunteers.<sup>vii</sup>

Volunteering provides a crucial entry point into the workforce, and can be valuable in assisting many people, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, to engage with the workforce and build key employable skills. Volunteering can increase workforce participation, and connect people to career paths that are better paid and more stable.<sup>viii</sup>

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Volunteering is also a form of civic participation that creates ‘bridging networks’, and generates positive social practices that strengthens communities by fostering positive social norms, spreads information and innovation, and provides mechanisms for collective problem solving.<sup>ix</sup>

While volunteers donate their “time willingly”<sup>x</sup>, the operational cost of delivering innovative and agile volunteering programs that are responsive to the needs of Australian society is increasing, and requires investment. Organisations encounter reasonable expenses with the induction, training, management, resources and ongoing support of volunteers. There are also administrative overheads, such as insurance, that organisations need to account for. It is essential that the volunteer workforce is accounted for by the Australian Public Service.

Ongoing Government funding is essential to guarantee that there is recognition of the numerous social, cultural and economic contributions of volunteering, for identifying priority funding areas and for specifying need for volunteering. It will also enable an accurate assessment of funding needs with respect to grants for volunteer programs, including determining infrastructure needs and service delivery strategies.

### Definition of Volunteering and Data Collection

There is inconsistency with the definition of volunteering used by each of the government departments, as well as the consideration of the evolution of volunteering. Volunteering Australia has repeatedly called for a nationally consistent standard when referring to volunteering, in line with our definition of volunteering.

“Time willingly given, for the common good and without financial gain”<sup>xi</sup>

The adoption of a single definition is critical to ensuring accurate and consistent data that is comparable across each government department, and a robust dataset is essential to policy, workforce planning and service provision.

It is essential we effectively capture data on volunteering, including barriers to volunteering, for robust reporting, and to assist Volunteer Involving Organisations, Volunteering Support Services, organisations and businesses who engage volunteers to evolve and to better plan for their workforces.

### Government Contracts and Tenders

There needs to be a more transparent and equitable process with government procurement processes across the board. Community sector organisations are often overlooked in these processes, in favour of larger private sector companies or consultants, despite having extensive subject-matter expertise, grassroots knowledge and community linkages.

It is important to acknowledge that community sector organisations continue to provide subject-matter expertise to these processes, despite often being excluded from the tendering process in various ways. For example, many community organisations experience a lack of resources, which affects their ability to complete funding applications that have tight timeframes. A lack of transparency is further exacerbated where tendering processes exclude community sector organisations from being considered, invited to apply or “tapped on the shoulder”. Increased transparency within the Australian Public Service should consider the breadth of organisations who may be able to deliver on government priorities, and who may operate other services/programs in a community-based setting.

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### Recommendations

- Employ a whole of government approach and move beyond agency-centric views to reduce departmental silos
- Transform the way the Australian Public Service approaches consultation and engages in cross-sectoral collaboration
- Recognise the value of volunteering and that the Australian Public Service needs to account for the volunteer workforce as a priority funding area
- Adopt a nationally consistent, single definition of volunteering across the Australian Public Service
- Implement a more transparent and equitable process in government tendering that considers the breadth of organisations who can deliver on government priorities

### Conclusion

Volunteering Australia thanks the Independent Panel for the opportunity to provide a response on this Review.

Volunteering Australia is committed to growing a culture of giving in Australia. Public policy plays a vital role in creating and supporting volunteering initiatives. Volunteering can also be adversely affected by public policy that is indifferent to the concerns of volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations. We believe a strong, diverse, functional and independent Australian Public Service is integral to responding to emerging challenges, generating public policy and driving innovative programming.

We look forward to working with the Australian Public Service to ensure that the social, economic and cultural contributions of the volunteering sector is acknowledged and supported, through ongoing funding, recognising the value of volunteering as a pathway to employment, and the vital role of volunteering in high quality service delivery.

Volunteering Australia would welcome further opportunity to consult or expand on any of the issues raised in this submission.

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### Authorisation

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



**Ms Adrienne Picone**

Chief Executive Officer

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### Endorsements

This submission has been endorsed by the seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies.

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### Glossary

- VA** Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering in Australia. It works collectively with the peaks to deliver national, state and local volunteering programs and initiatives.
- VIO** Volunteer Involving Organisations are organisations that engage volunteers as part of their workforce.
- VSS** Volunteering Support Services (also known as Volunteer Resource Centres or Volunteer Support Organisations) provide place-based volunteer support services to volunteers and VIOs in their locality.

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<sup>i</sup> Flinders University (31 October 2014) 'Volunteering worth \$290 billion a year', <http://blogs.flinders.edu.au/flinders-news/2014/10/31/volunteering-worth-290-billion-a-year>

<sup>ii</sup> Innovation and Science Australia (2017), Australia 2030: Prosperity through Innovation, Australian Government, <https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/g/files/net3906/f/May%202018/document/pdf/australia-2030-prosperity-through-innovation-full-report.pdf>

<sup>iii</sup> Volunteering Australia (2018), Response on the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), [https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files\\_mf/1522901880ResponseontheUnitedNationsSustainableDevelopmentGoalsSDG.pdf](https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1522901880ResponseontheUnitedNationsSustainableDevelopmentGoalsSDG.pdf)

<sup>iv</sup> Innovation and Science Australia (2017), Australia 2030: Prosperity through Innovation, Australian Government, <https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/g/files/net3906/f/May%202018/document/pdf/australia-2030-prosperity-through-innovation-full-report.pdf>

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<sup>v</sup> Innovation and Science Australia (2017), Australia 2030: Prosperity through Innovation, Australian Government, <https://www.industry.gov.au/sites/g/files/net3906/f/May%202018/document/pdf/australia-2030-prosperity-through-innovation-full-report.pdf>

<sup>vi</sup> ACNC (2017), Australian Charities Report 2016, <http://www.acnc.gov.au/ACNC/Publications/Reports/CharityReport2016.aspx>

<sup>vii</sup> Giving Australia (2016), Giving and volunteering: the non-profit perspective, [https://www.communitybusinesspartnership.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/nonprofit\\_report\\_final\\_4dec17.pdf](https://www.communitybusinesspartnership.gov.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/nonprofit_report_final_4dec17.pdf).

<sup>viii</sup> Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria, op. cit., p17.

<sup>ix</sup> Victorian Government (2011), Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria: Framework and Evidence, Department of Planning and Community Development, 2011, p10-11.

<sup>x</sup> Volunteering Australia (2015) 'Definition of Volunteering', <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy-and-best-practise/definition-of-volunteering/>.

<sup>xi</sup> Volunteering Australia (2015), Definition of Volunteering, <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy-andbest-practise/definition-of-volunteering/>