



National Volunteering Strategy Consultation Paper

This consultation paper seeks community views on the development of a National Volunteering Strategy.

Volunteers play a critical role in community life in Australia and make a significant social and economic contribution.

The Australian Government is committed to supporting volunteers and encouraging Australians from all walks of life to participate in their communities through volunteering.

A National Volunteering Vision and Strategy will set out the Australian Government's vision for volunteering over the next 10 years. The Strategy will provide a framework for the development and implementation of government policy which encourages a responsive and supportive volunteering environment.

The strategy will be released to mark the 10 year anniversary of the United Nations International Year of Volunteers celebrated in 2001.

This consultation paper raises a number of key questions about how a strategy can best support volunteering into the future.

Why do we need a National Volunteering Strategy?

Volunteers are so integral to the way our communities operate - it is hard to imagine life without them. "Australia is a nation of volunteers"¹. The history of volunteering in Australia shows how they have contributed to shaping this nation.

More than 5.2 million Australians volunteer. This number has grown steadily over the past decades.

For many individuals, volunteering is a way to connect with local, national and international communities. For others, it is a pathway to personal and skills development.

¹ 'The Australian way of Volunteering' from Melanie Oppenheimer's *Volunteering, why we can't survive without it*, UNSW Press Sydney 2008

For the communities they serve, volunteers ensure that sport, culture and arts thrive, the environment is protected, communities can recover from the disruption that natural disasters bring and vulnerable members of society are nurtured and supported.

We want to ensure that the number of volunteers continues to grow even in the face of changing community norms, an ageing population and emerging technology.

The nature of volunteering in Australia is changing and we need to be able to respond to emerging trends and needs.

A National Volunteering Strategy will:

- articulate a vision for volunteering over the next 10 years that is distinctly Australian, reflecting our unique geography, multicultural make-up and way of life;
- identify where barriers prevent volunteers from participating as much as they would wish to;
- promote opportunities to engage those least likely to volunteer;
- set down a framework to support government decision making and policy development over the next decade; and
- encourage community dialogue about the future of volunteering in Australia.

What will a National Volunteering Strategy achieve?

A National Volunteering Strategy will aim to contribute to ***an Australian community that is inclusive and supports a vibrant cultural life***

The strategy will seek to achieve this objective by supporting initiatives to:

- **engage** new volunteers;
- **respond to emergencies** and build **community resilience** in the face of challenges;
- address **protection, risk management** and **training** issues for volunteers;
- respond to **emerging trends** and issues; and
- **recognise, support and value** volunteers.

Governments at the national, state and local level provide significant support for volunteering through their current programs. A National Volunteering Strategy will bring together these important activities within a single national framework and highlight the intersection with other government policy agendas such as *Active Ageing; Australian Sport: the pathway to success; A Healthy and Active Australia; Creative Communities; Caring for our Country* and *A Stronger and Fairer Australia*.

Questions for consideration:

- 1) How can governments, community and corporate organisations best support volunteers?

Engaging Volunteers

Our many volunteers engage in diverse volunteering activities and increase wellbeing across our society, creating more inclusive communities.

Around one-third of Australian adults volunteer their time, skills and labour through organisations². Many people also take part in a range of volunteering activities in informal settings. Volunteers have a significant influence on the character and culture of our nation.

Volunteers are motivated by a range of factors, often simply wanting to 'give something back' to their communities. But it is a two-way street. Participation in volunteering often increases an individual's own level of wellbeing. This in turn contributes to the cohesiveness and vibrancy of the communities in which we all live.

While more people are volunteering across most sectors, average hours of voluntary activities are declining. Volunteering in sport and recreation activities is increasing, but fewer people are volunteering their time in the social welfare sector.

Some people may feel that they are not able to volunteer, for a range of reasons including:

- out-of-pocket expenses sometimes associated with volunteering, such as petrol costs;
- not always feeling welcomed or accepted in existing communities of volunteers;
- young people may feel alienated from traditional models of volunteering; and
- busy lives and competing priorities restrict some people's capacity to commit to regular participation.

Volunteer-based organisations also experience barriers to engaging and supporting volunteers. These include:

- the need for additional support to cater to the particular needs of some volunteers; and
- access to training and professional development to enable them to manage and support more volunteers.

The National Volunteering Strategy presents an opportunity for us to rethink how we can help people to overcome barriers to participation in volunteering activities and grow the number of volunteers across all sectors.

All Australians who want to take a more active role in their communities should have the opportunity to participate and share in the benefits of volunteering. These benefits include an increased sense of achievement and wellbeing, connection with their community and personal and skills development.

² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *Voluntary Work Australia*

A National Volunteering Strategy would aim to encourage and enable participation in volunteering by all people in the community.

Input on the following questions will help us to shape the strategy.

Questions for consideration:

- 2) How can governments and the community work together to encourage more people to volunteer?
- 3) How can people with a range of needs and from different backgrounds be better supported to become volunteers?

Supporting emergency management volunteers and building resilient communities

Our 500,000 emergency management volunteers play a vital role in times of crisis and disaster.

The Australian community has shown itself to be incredibly generous with many thousands offering their time when disaster strikes. This generous spirit is greatly valued. In order for this contribution to make a real difference it is important that volunteers are trained appropriately for their own safety and the safety of the communities they are serving. This often means that volunteers need to get involved in their local volunteer emergency services well before the onset of disaster and crisis.

A key challenge for volunteer organisations is ensuring that volunteers are in the right place at the right time with the right skills. There are a broad range of scenarios that could threaten the Australian community such as natural disasters and other crisis situations. In these situations we need a large pool of highly skilled and professional people to call on who can be quickly deployed to respond to the immediate and longer term needs. This requires high levels of planning, preparedness, appropriate training and early engagement.

Technology will also play an increasingly critical role in preparing and mobilising the volunteer community in the future.

Questions for consideration:

- 4) How can we best sustain and grow the pool of skilled volunteers in the emergency management sector?

Training and protecting volunteers from risk

Volunteering activities should be safe for both volunteers and the communities they serve.

No one likes to deal with unnecessary red tape. However, volunteers need to be well led and properly managed and appropriate management and supervisory structures are critical to protect volunteers. Compliance with necessary insurance, occupational health and safety and appropriate police or working with children checks makes sure that volunteering activities are safe and supported.

Volunteers, as with paid staff, are also increasingly expected to have appropriate skills to fulfill their responsibilities. Volunteers need access to development opportunities to ensure they can effectively contribute in their volunteering capacity as well as build personal and professional skills that will be of value to them in other aspects of their lives.

Questions for consideration:

- 5) How can volunteer-based organisations be supported to comply with regulations designed to protect volunteers and the community?
- 6) How can governments work towards better alignment and cooperation to support volunteering efforts and, at the same time, reduce red tape without compromising safety?

Emerging trends

Emerging technology is providing new opportunities for volunteering to overcome time, geographic and physical limitations. Activities including virtual volunteering, online training and social networking have significant implications for the volunteering landscape and will continue to evolve over coming years.

An ageing population and changing patterns of volunteering pose an additional challenge for organisations to recruit and retain volunteers. Individual motivations and approaches to volunteering are also changing with an increase in volunteers who favour short term or project based activities as opposed to a regular ongoing commitment. Volunteers are also more likely to be geographically mobile, for example 'grey nomads' and relief crews from across Australia who volunteer in emergency and disaster situations.

People who volunteer in multiple organisations may find it difficult to consistently capture and document volunteering effort over time. Needing to document and validate skills, qualifications and current police and working with children checks each time they commence in a new volunteering role can be an administrative and cost burden for the volunteers and the organisations they support.

New models of volunteering such as family volunteering and virtual volunteering and fundraising, create new challenges in how we manage risk and liability issues.

Ensuring that the volunteering community has capacity to respond to these and other emerging opportunities and challenges is an important component of the National Volunteering Strategy.

Questions for consideration:

- 7) How can government, community and corporate Australia best respond to this changing volunteering environment?

Recognising the contribution

Volunteers are often the quiet achievers. Many of us take for granted their valuable work.

We need to recognise and celebrate volunteers. Their stories need to be told. Recognition needs to be incorporated in volunteer management practice and be reflected in codes of conduct, standards and guidelines.

Questions for consideration

- 8) How can governments and communities best recognise and celebrate the contribution of all volunteers?

Providing Your Feedback

You can tell us what you think about the issues raised in this consultation paper and the proposed approach for the National Volunteering Strategy by:

- Email: AustralianNVS@fahcsia.gov.au
- Post: Att: National Volunteering Strategy
Community Investment Branch
FaHCSIA
PO Box 7576
Canberra Business Centre ACT 2610
- or through the Ning website at: volunteering2021@ning.com

The **closing date** for responses is **Wednesday 30 June 2010**.