

The Centre for Volunteering – 2024-25 NSW Budget Analysis

On June 18, 2024, the Hon. Daniel Mookhey MLC, NSW Treasurer handed down the budget for the 2024-25 fiscal year. The full budget documents provided by the NSW Treasury can be found [here](#) and the summary provided by Treasury can be found [here](#). This analysis has been prepared from all budget documents but focuses on material from Budget Papers 1 and 2, particularly those relevant to the Department of Communities and Justice, where volunteering sits in the NSW Government as part of Community Inclusion.

The overall theme of the budget is providing a measured response to the difficult economic times that NSW currently faces. The treasurer notes that the state is still feeling the impacts of the 2020 bushfires and the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the ongoing cost of living crisis. Accordingly, the main focus areas of the budget are social programs in health, education, and housing, as well as cost of living relief measures. Some measures that will impact volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

Impact on Volunteering

Volunteering is included as one of the potential indicators of community wellbeing in the NSW Government's proposed [Performance and Wellbeing Framework](#). This framework will decide how the NSW Government measures the wellbeing of people in the State to inform their policy and decision making. Including volunteering as one of the potential measures is a great recognition of the value of volunteering and its importance to community cohesion.

Volunteers are also recognised in the section of the budget on emergency services, which notes that there are 71,114 Rural Fire Service (RFS) volunteers across 1982 brigades and 10,489 State Emergency Services (SES) volunteers across 261 units. Given the importance of disaster relief to this budget, this is a great recognition of the role that volunteers play in this area.

Some of the concessions that will impact volunteers:

- The Payroll tax measures note that wages paid to employees who are providing volunteer assistance to the RFS and SES are tax exempt (excluding wages paid as recreation leave, annual leave, long service leave, or sick leave).
- The Driver Knowledge test will be free for some learner drivers, including volunteers in the SES, RFS, and the NSW Volunteer Rescue Association.
- Volunteers are among those who are entitled to free Working with Children Checks under the Working with Children Check Concession.
- Volunteers are among those who receive free or discounted entry to national parks.

General Measures

- A \$7.1 billion capital investment in Communities and Justice from 2024-2028
 - \$19.9 million to continue messaging functionality for the RFS across the state.

- \$119.2 million invested in replacing SES vehicle, boat, and trailer fleet to help provide a timely response to communities.
- \$53.5 million to maintain critical communications for the SES.
- \$62.9 bn invested in improving transport in NSW between 2024-28
 - The 2023 State of Volunteering report shows that transport is a big barrier for volunteers. Transport expenses are in the top 3 expenses for volunteers and account for approximately 17% of annual expenses. Transport costs are also in the top 5 expenses for volunteer-involving organisations, accounting for 6.2% of costs. It is also given as a reason by 8.4% of volunteers as to why they are unable to volunteer more frequently, and by approximately 10% of people who do not currently volunteer as to why they are not volunteering. These upgrades, especially to public transport in regional NSW, will help volunteers better access opportunities to volunteer and reduce the costs of accessing these opportunities.
- Several funding initiatives to improve social and economic outcomes for regional NSW, including:
 - \$21 million to establish a modern and fit-for-purpose animal welfare framework with additional support for approved charitable organisations.
 - \$283.4 million to enhance digital connectivity and faster telecommunications for rural, remote, and regional NSW.
- \$2 billion for disaster relief and recovery programs funded through the Disaster Relief Account, including:
 - \$24.5 million for the Community Assets Program to repair, restore, and improve community infrastructure and support social recovery.

Our Plan

The Centre will continue to advocate for our members' needs and the needs of the volunteering sector in New South Wales and Australia.

The second 2023 State of Volunteering Report was published last year and is currently the most comprehensive study specifically on volunteers and volunteering in NSW. We are currently analysing the results from additional focus groups that were conducted in early 2024 to supplement the State of Volunteering data, with specific reference to the experiences of women in volunteering, volunteering and older persons, youth in volunteering, volunteering and sport, and Rural and Regional volunteering. This additional work will provide a further base from which we can advocate for the needs of volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations.

We will also make a submission to the Government to confirm that volunteering should be included in the proposed framework to measure performance and wellbeing. This will be in line with previous advocacy that we have done alongside other volunteering peak bodies to ensure that volunteering was included in the Commonwealth Measuring What Matters Framework.

We are grateful to our members and stakeholders who provide us with feedback and will continue to strive to present your needs to the Government.