



The Centre for  
**Volunteering**

**2024-25 Federal  
Government Pre-budget  
Submission**

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## Introduction

The Centre for Volunteering (The Centre) is the peak body for volunteering in New South Wales. We receive both State and Federal Government funding, and our federal funding is primarily administered by the Department of Social Services (DSS) as part of the Volunteer Management Activity program. The Centre has also contributed to the pre-budget submission made by Volunteering Australia.

This submission makes recommendations to Treasury about funding for the volunteering ecosystem in the 2024-25 budget. Volunteering is an essential element of Australia's social and economic wellbeing that requires funding from all levels of Government to thrive and operates as a cross-portfolio issue in all areas of Australian society. COVID-19 has had a significant impact on volunteering activity across Australia, both in formal and informal settings, and recent data demonstrates that the sector is able to recover with support.<sup>1</sup> Volunteering makes substantial economic contributions at a state and federal level, it increases productivity and wellbeing, and in NSW in 2023, volunteering delivered a 550% return-on-investment.<sup>2</sup> There is also a substantial replacement cost to volunteering – \$39.7 billion in NSW for 2023 – that merits continued support for the sector.<sup>3</sup>

In light of these economic facts, it is essential for the ongoing wellbeing of the Australian community that volunteering is adequately supported and resourced. We provide recommendations that DSS continue funding the Volunteer Management Activity program for all volunteering peak bodies in Australia, while contributing additional funding to the programs outlined below.

## Budget Recommendations

### Volunteer Management Activity

The Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) is a program through which the state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies support and build capacity for volunteer-involving organisations. This is achieved through a range of programs including strategic planning and community consultation, bespoke volunteer management services, identification and removal of barriers for specified priority groups, and direct partnerships between the peak bodies and relevant volunteer-involving organisations to develop resources for the sector.

The work undertaken through the VMA program is an essential part of the activities of the state and territory peak bodies and underpins our ability to advocate for, support, and resource the wider volunteering sector. It enables effective collaboration and consultation with the sector to best understand what is needed and how it can best be achieved.

The Centre was pleased to see funding indexation for the VMA program included in the 2019-20 Federal budget, with a commitment to extend this to 2025 as part of the 2021-22 Budget. However, additional priority target groups were added to the program in 2023 without additional funding. At this time, when volunteering is being impacted by cost-of-living pressures and still recovering from COVID-19, it is essential that volunteering infrastructure is funded.

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<sup>1</sup> Muller, P., Hillier, B., Ijaz, M., and Morris, D., (2023) NSW State of Volunteering Report 2023. The Centre for Volunteering, Sydney. <https://www.volunteering.com.au/2023-state-of-volunteering-report/>

<sup>2</sup> For a more detailed economic analysis, see Muller et al., 2023, pp. 37-51. This report focuses on NSW but the data was collected across all Australian states in 2023 with comparable results in all states. Other state reports are in publication to be released in 2024.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, pp. 44-45.

We recommend that the 2024-25 Budget continues support the Volunteer Management Activity program, with a commitment to a further five-year program and ongoing funding past this point. This would involve a continuation of the current funding to each State/Territory volunteering peak (approximately \$6 million plus indexation) each year. Additional investment is required if volunteering is to thrive into the future, and this program is a vital contribution to supporting communities through volunteering and improving volunteer management across Australia.

Continued investment in the VMA program would amount to approximately \$6 million (plus indexation) per annum.

### Volunteering Cost-of-living relief

We support Volunteering Australia's call for additional funding to support cost-of-living relief for volunteering organisations. We recommend this funding be provided in the form of an expedited Volunteer Grants program, administered through the state and territory volunteering peak bodies, to support volunteer-involving organisations with cost-of-living pressures. These grants would help these organisations, especially smaller, volunteer-run organisations, to continue their vital work in their communities.

In addition to providing support to the volunteering ecosystem, such funding would demonstrate that the Commonwealth Government is committed to addressing cost-of-living issues through a range of methods. Recent data has demonstrated that significant costs are incurred by volunteer managers, with 11% of paid volunteer managers and 24.7% of unpaid volunteer managers personally incurring the costs of volunteering activities with their organisation.<sup>4</sup> Out of pocket costs for volunteers themselves have also increased recently, from \$1924 per annum in 2020 to \$3115.80 per annum in 2023.<sup>5</sup> In parallel, lack of time and cost of involvement were given as the most significant barriers to people either volunteering at all, or increasing their volunteering.<sup>6</sup> In light of this, increased financial support from all levels of government is needed to enable volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations to continue their important work in their communities as the cost-of-living crisis continues.

We recommend an increased investment of \$5 million per annum.

### Volunteering Data Infrastructure

Accurate and current research is an essential element of effective planning, advocacy, and policy-making in any area. It is also an integral element for advising government and meeting reporting requirements for the volunteering peak bodies. Though it is essential to the wellbeing of Australian society, volunteering is an area that is presently under researched and under resourced. At present, most state peak bodies have limited datasets on volunteering.

Public data is limited to that conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS), either through the General Social Survey (GSS) or the Census. While these datasets have an unparalleled reach across the Australian population, the data that they produce is not always an accurate picture of volunteering in Australia.<sup>7</sup> A significant reason behind this is related to the way it asks for information about volunteering; several pieces of research have noted the

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<sup>4</sup> Muller et al. 2023, p. 29.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 39.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, pp. 12-13.

<sup>7</sup> A full discussion of the problems with these datasets is beyond the scope of this submission. In short, the issues are that these datasets 1) do not properly contextualise their questions about volunteering for the public and 2) are based on one or two questions in the midst of much larger and broader surveys. Accordingly, the dataset produced has long been considered an inaccurate picture of the Australian volunteering sector, requiring an alternative to be developed.

differences in perspectives that people hold about what constitutes “volunteering”.<sup>8</sup> These datasets have consistently underestimated the prevalence of volunteering in the community.

Academic research on volunteering is useful to the sector but does not always align with its needs. For example, volunteering research produced by the Australian National University’s Centre for Social and Research Methods focuses only on smaller parts of the sector, such as the impact of COVID-19, or the implementation of the National Strategy for Volunteering. While these areas and initiatives do need to be fully understood, they do not give a consistent picture of the behaviours, needs, and development of the sector.

Consequently, the state and territory peak bodies must commission datasets and research from the private sector. While this process has a significant cost, it has successfully produced useful data in the form of the State of Volunteering Reports which have been conducted in every state across Australia. In 2023, this report was conducted by the Institute of Project Management in all states, producing the most in-depth and widest-reaching dataset (outside of the Census) on volunteering to date.

We recommend that Federal Government budgets that relate to volunteering include scope for the state and territory peak bodies to conduct research on the volunteering sector. This could be administered in the form of Volunteering Research Grants of up to \$20,000 per project to cover the costs of research, writing, and publication of reports. Funding should be considered a cross-portfolio matter, and these grants should be available in conjunction with funding from state and territory governments.

We recommend that this Research program is piloted in the 2024-25 budget in the form of five of these grants being made available for a total cost of \$100,000. If these grants are successful in producing useful research, the program could be expanded with scope to support longer-term research programs in future budgets.

## Conclusion

While there are a range of initiatives related to volunteering that require financial support, we have limited our submission to those most essential to volunteering and most relevant to the federal government. The most essential recommendation is that the Volunteer Management Activity program continues to be funded with a long-term commitment that allows effective and efficient forward planning. Providing funding for cost-of-living relief and volunteering research is also important for the continued wellbeing of volunteering in Australia.

## Authorisation

This submission is authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of the Centre for Volunteering.



Gemma Rygate

Chief Executive Officer

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<sup>8</sup> Muller, P. and Kling, R. (2022) NSW Multicultural Volunteering Report. Sydney: The Centre for Volunteering; Muller et al., 2023.

## About The Centre for Volunteering

The Centre for Volunteering (The Centre) is the peak body for volunteering in NSW, supporting and connecting people and organisations to enrich the community. We are a not-for-profit organisation with 50 years' experience providing leadership on volunteering in Australia. This involves playing a key role in advocacy, support services and sector development. We work with volunteers and a range of primarily not-for-profit organisations of varying scale, spanning all sectors. Additionally, we work with government organisations on corporate social responsibility and employee volunteering programs.

## The Centre for Volunteering Contacts

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