

2025

NSW State of Volunteering Report



The Centre for Volunteering acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation as the traditional owners of the land on which our office stands. We recognise the importance of their connection to place and community on these lands and pay our respects to Elders, past and present.



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Explanatory note: Where figures have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between totals and the sums of the component items. Proportions, ratios and other calculated figures shown in this report have been calculated using unrounded estimates and may be different from, but are more accurate than, calculations based on the rounded estimates.

Executive Summary

In 2025, 4.9 million people over the age of 15 gave time as a volunteer, contributing \$205.3 billion of value to the state of NSW. This report provides the latest data on volunteering in NSW and gives information on a range of characteristics of volunteering in 2025.

In 2025, the value of volunteering to NSW is \$205.3 billion and the replacement cost of volunteering is \$45.5 billion. The benefit–cost ratio is 5.6:1. For every dollar invested in volunteering \$5.60 is returned in measurable value.

In 2025, the average out-of-pocket cost of volunteering is \$15.45 per hour, up 5.2% from \$14.68 in 2023. The average cost to individual volunteers per year is \$4,200.00.

69.5% of the NSW population aged 15 and over volunteered in the past year.

NSW volunteers contributed **1.3 billion hours** of their time in 2025 with an average of 22.7 hours per month.

Volunteers volunteer for many reasons:

For the benefit of others:

- To help others
- Because I can
- To use my skills and experience
- To support or learn more about a cause
- To help during a crisis.

And for personal reasons:

- A sense of purpose
- To build friendships
- For enjoyment
- Social and community connections
- Learn new skills.

The State of Volunteering Report presents a detailed examination of the characteristics of volunteers and volunteer management in NSW. It highlights the strength of the volunteering sector, and the immense contribution of volunteering to the state.

IN 2025 NSW
VOLUNTEERS
CONTRIBUTED

1.3b
hours



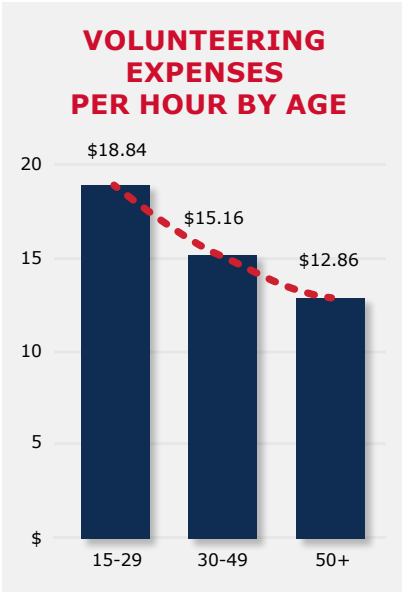
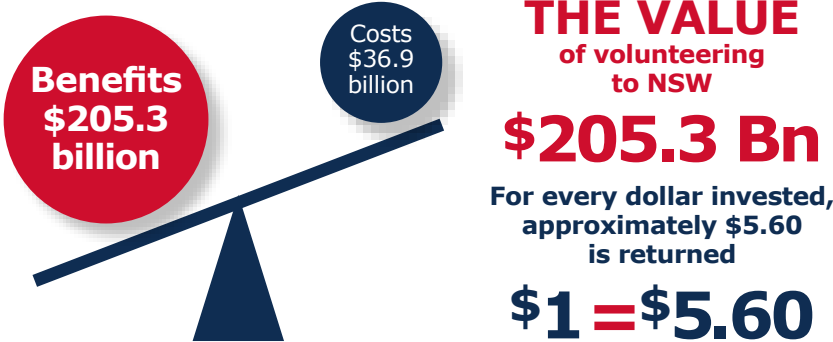
WITH AN
AVERAGE OF

22.7
hours

PER MONTH

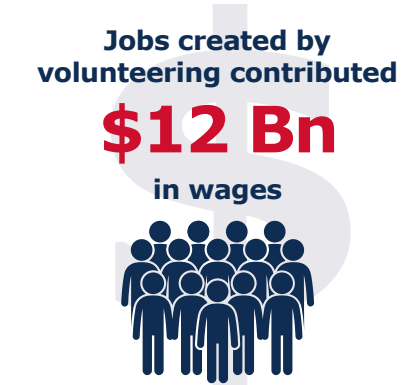
Key Findings

Costs and benefits of volunteering in NSW in 2025



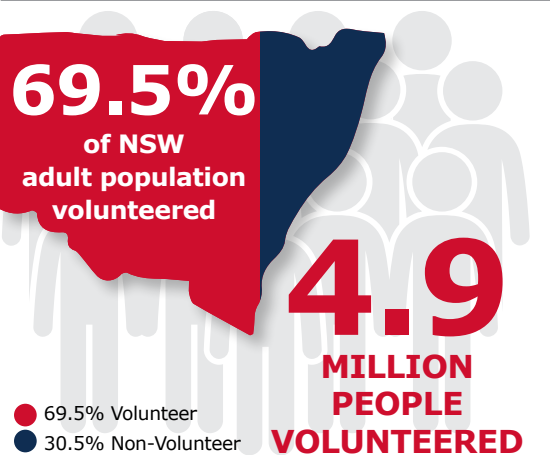
Non-volunteers attributed
58.2%

 **of community well-being**
to the impact of volunteering



Key Findings

Volunteers in NSW in 2025



TOP 5 VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS

For the benefit of others:

- 1 To help others
- 2 Because I can
- 3 To use my skills and experience
- 4 To support or learn more about a cause
- 5 To help during a crisis

TOP 5 VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS

For personal reasons:

- 1 A sense of purpose
- 2 To build friendships
- 3 For enjoyment
- 4 Social and community connections
- 5 Learn new skills



SOCIAL PREFERENCE

for Volunteering



27.4% on their own



33.5% with others

38.9% both



Key Findings

Volunteer management in NSW in 2025

INCLUSION AMONG LARGER VOLUNTEER-INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

	Percent of formal volunteer population	Inclusion rate in large organisations (50+ volunteers)
People aged over 65	17.0%	90.9%
People aged under 25	11.3%	71.9%
Non-heterosexual volunteers	12.7%	61.0%
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people	23.1%	61.9%
People living with disability	37.7%	64.4%

AVERAGE HOURS WORKED PER WEEK AS A VOLUNTEER MANAGER

	Paid volunteer managers	Unpaid volunteer managers
Paid hours per week as a volunteer manager	23.0	NA
Unpaid hours per week as a volunteer manager	4.3	11.8

TOP 3 CHANGES reported by volunteer managers



Volunteers
want more
flexible
hours



Corporate
volunteering
has
declined



In-person
activity returning
to pre-pandemic
rates

TOP 3 RECOGNITION METHODS



Public praise and
acknowledgement



Personal relationship
and team building



Volunteer training and
development

TOP 5 RECRUITMENT CHANNELS



Family and friends of
volunteers/participants



Social Media



On our Website



Participants/users
of services



Open days, information
sessions, open days

THE HON.
JODIE HARRISON MP

Message from the Minister



Volunteering is a powerful force for change. Woven into our daily lives, it is an integral part of our social fabric. Our State's volunteering sector is like no other, contributing enormously to our society in ways that most of us don't see, but all of us reap the benefits.

Our communities would not be what they are without the efforts of millions of volunteers. Volunteers make a difference in the most rural and remote parts of our state, along our coastline, and everywhere in between. Day in and day out, volunteers are there, in the background and on the frontline making things happen.

Volunteers make a difference in sport, cultural heritage, art, the environment, health, aged care, education, emergency services, social services and animal welfare. They hold our communities together in times of crisis, provide essential services, mentor and educate, nurture and empower others – and, most importantly, they foster connection and inspire.

The *2025 NSW State of Volunteering Report* highlights the scale, value and impact of our sector. With 4.9 million volunteers in New South Wales contributing 1.3 billion hours, worth \$205.3 billion to our State's wellbeing, the NSW volunteering sector is a powerhouse. In fact, the size of our sector makes it our State's biggest workforce – an essential workforce. Without the efforts of volunteers, our lives and our society would be less resilient, poorer and more isolated.

This report also shows that the sector is facing some challenges. Changes in technology, the long-term impacts of the pandemic and natural disasters, the cost-of-living, cost-of-volunteering and cost-of-operating pressures are being felt by volunteers and the sector.

That's why this research, conducted in collaboration with The Centre for Volunteering, is critical. It helps inform our decision-making. Importantly, it helps us understand how we can address challenges and support our sector.

Volunteering is crucial part of our State's ecosystem. The NSW Government is continuing to work, in partnership with the sector, to ensure it thrives.

We all share the vision articulated in our NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020–2030 that '*volunteering in NSW grows and is vibrant. Everyone can volunteer, more often, throughout life, and their contributions are celebrated*'.

I'm committed to continuing our strong collaboration because together we will rise to current and future challenges, further enhance our strengths, and make sure volunteers are recognised and celebrated for their contributions.

I look forward to the change we can generate by growing volunteering, making a difference. I commend this report to the sector.

The Hon. Jodie Harrison MP

Minister with responsibility for Volunteering
Minister for Women, Minister for Seniors and
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
and Sexual Assault.

GEMMA RYGATE

Message from the CEO



I am pleased to commend to the sector the third NSW State of Volunteering Report.

This report is a significant piece of research for the NSW Volunteering sector, building on the previous research that The Centre for Volunteering has published in 2021, 2022, 2023, and 2024. We are able to observe the changes in volunteering over the past five years, reinforcing the strength and resilience of volunteering in NSW.

Volunteering is time willingly given, for the common good and without financial gain and, in NSW, is undertaken for a variety of reasons. Volunteers want to help their communities, develop themselves, and connect with the people around them. Volunteering is an essential part of communities across the state and provides a range of social and economic benefits.

The report highlights that the economic impact of volunteering continues to grow, with volunteering contributing a benefit of \$205.3 billion to NSW. For every dollar invested in volunteering we see a return of \$5.60. The report notes that the costs of volunteering continue to increase, with the average cost to volunteers per hour increasing to \$15.45. These costs are even more pronounced for younger volunteers, with an average cost per hour of \$18.84 for volunteers aged 15-29, the highest of any age cohort. Time continues to be a significant barrier, and this report further explores what specific activities impact the time a person can give.

Despite these barriers, 4.9 million people in NSW volunteered in 2025, giving over 1.3 billion hours of their time to their communities. Volunteers continue to be optimistic about their future with over 75% of volunteers reporting that they intend to volunteer the same or more in three years' time. Encouragingly, nearly a quarter of non-volunteers reported that they also intend to begin volunteering in the next three years.

This research is a powerful reminder of how critical the volunteer workforce is to NSW. It highlights that volunteering is not free and that support is needed from government, business, and the broader community for volunteering to thrive. Several key findings show the significance of volunteering in NSW:

1. This report represents a drive for recognising the diversity of volunteers in NSW, and is the first of its kind to recognise how factors such as neurodiversity, gender diversity, and childcare access impact a person's volunteering. The Report also explores the accommodations that volunteer managers make for their volunteers.
2. The report highlights the hard work of Volunteer Managers that can often go unseen, such as the additional hours that they contribute as volunteers and the shadow costs of volunteer management that they often assume themselves.

3. The report examines the differing perceptions of issues for volunteers and volunteer managers, providing practical insights into what volunteers need and what motivates them, as well as what things make them stop volunteering. These insights will assist Volunteer Managers to improve their volunteer retention strategies.
4. The volunteering sector continues to constitute an enormous part of the NSW economy, being the largest workforce in NSW. The replacement cost of volunteering is \$45.5 billion, and volunteering contributes 2.4% of the NSW Gross State Product.

We thank the many individuals and organisations who have contributed to this report as members of the steering committee, as advisors, and those who have provided valuable survey information. You have shaped this research and ensured that it continues to be a robust and reliable source of data on volunteering in NSW

Thank you especially to the NSW Government for funding the project, and the Department of Communities and Justice for commissioning The Centre for Volunteering to undertake this research. This empirical evidence for the value and impact of volunteering is vital as an acknowledgement of the importance of volunteering to the state of NSW.

Gemma Rygate
CEO, The Centre for Volunteering

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GLOSSARY OF KEY TERMS

Barriers: Factors that prevent, limit, or discourage volunteer participation, including time constraints, financial costs, discrimination, lack of confidence, accessibility issues, and competing responsibilities.

Demographic: Population characteristics used to categorise and analyse groups, including age, gender, location, education level, income, employment status, cultural background, disability status, and caring responsibilities.

Formal volunteering: Volunteer activities conducted through or coordinated by an organisation, club, or group with defined structures, roles, and oversight.

Informal volunteering: Direct helping activities conducted outside organisational structures, such as assisting neighbours, providing spontaneous community support, or helping individuals without formal coordination.

Non-volunteer: A person who has not engaged in volunteer activities within the past twelve months, including both those who formerly volunteered and those who have never volunteered.

Recognition: Strategies and practices used to acknowledge, appreciate, and celebrate volunteer contributions, including public praise, awards, training opportunities, social events, and reimbursement of expenses.

Recruitment: The process and strategies used to attract, engage, and onboard new volunteers into volunteer roles or activities.

Registered volunteer: A term used in the Volunteer Manager survey to distinguish between formal and informal volunteers.

Retention: The ongoing engagement, support, and continuation of existing volunteers within their roles, including strategies to maintain volunteer commitment and prevent attrition.

Value of volunteering: The comprehensive economic, social, and personal worth generated by volunteer activities, including benefits to individuals, communities, organisations, and the broader economy.

Volunteer: A person who willingly gives their time for the common good without financial gain, excluding court-ordered service or work performed to receive government allowances.

Volunteer attrition: The process by which volunteers reduce their involvement, take breaks from, or permanently cease their volunteer activities.

Volunteer hours: The time contributed by volunteers to their service activities, including both direct service delivery and associated travel time.

Volunteer manager: A person who supervises, organises, coordinates, or oversees volunteers and volunteer programs, whether in a paid professional role or as a volunteer themselves.

Volunteer motivation: The underlying reasons, drivers, and personal factors that inspire individuals to begin and continue volunteering, including altruistic, social, skill-development, and personal fulfillment goals.

Volunteer participation rate: The proportion of a defined population actively engaged in volunteer activities within a specified time period.

Volunteering: The practice of willingly giving time for the common good without financial gain, encompassing both formal organisational involvement and informal community helping.

Acknowledgements

The Centre for Volunteering acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation as the traditional owners of the land on which our office stands. We recognise the importance of their connection to place and community on these lands and pay our respects to Elders, past and present.

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This report could not have been prepared without the significant contributions of the Project Steering Committee:

- Gemma Rygate – CEO, The Centre for Volunteering
- Kellie May – Manager, Volunteering, Department of Communities and Justice
- Tamsin Quinn – Deputy Chief Executive Officer, The Centre for Volunteering
- Ben Hillier – Director – Policy, Advocacy and Research, The Centre for Volunteering
- Rachel Rainbird – Director – Sector & Member Engagement, The Centre for Volunteering
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- Michael Brady – Musician and Educator, Self-Employed
- Chester Bendall – Deputy Chair, The Centre for Volunteering
- Heidi Froehling – Volunteer Development Manager, Girl Guides NSW/ACT
- Dr Saba Nabi OAM – Board Member, NSW Health, Multicultural NSW
- Susana Ng – Senior Social Programs Officer, Sydney City Council
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- Sharon Xabregas – Founder, Managing Director, SignHear
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The analysis and opinions presented in this report are primarily those of its author. While this document is published by The Centre for Volunteering, its publication does not necessarily imply endorsement or agreement with the views expressed herein by The Centre for Volunteering.

This report and related collateral can be found at www.volunteering.com.au

About the author

Paul Muller is the principal of QQ Research and author of the State of Volunteering Report series, first issued in 2014. With over 30 reports published in Australia and New Zealand, his work focuses on the economic and social value of public goods, including volunteering, sport, and the creative industries.

Paul has worked collaboratively with academics, industry, and government to pioneer innovative approaches to measuring value, and regularly shares his insights as a keynote speaker. He is particularly interested in challenging institutional assumptions and improving executive decision-making, and is passionate about mentoring the next generation of creative and critical thinkers.

Explanatory note

Where figures have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between totals and the sums of the component items. Proportions, ratios and other calculated figures shown in this report have been calculated using unrounded estimates and may be different from, but are more accurate than, calculations based on the rounded estimates.

Introduction

Commissioned by The Centre for Volunteering in collaboration with the NSW Government, the *2025 NSW State of Volunteering Report* provides an up-to-date picture of how people in NSW contribute their time and skills across the state.

The report measures the economic and social value of volunteering, captures the experiences and challenges of both volunteers and volunteer managers, and provides robust evidence to guide decision-making. As such, it serves as a practical resource for policymakers, community leaders, volunteer managers, and citizens alike.

Building on the 2021 and 2023 reports, this report also benefits from a range of community-led improvements, with clearer definitions, better recognition of informal volunteering, and more inclusive language, ensuring the findings are accurate and relevant to the way people actually volunteer.

At its heart, the *2025 NSW State of Volunteering Report* is a celebration of the enormous contribution volunteers make every day. It highlights their role in enriching their communities while offering practical insights to enable them to strengthen their systems of support. In doing so, it recognises both the human and policy dimensions of volunteering, positioning this report as a valuable tool for shaping a sustainable and thriving future for volunteering in NSW.

Methodology

To assess the State of Volunteering in NSW in 2025, two primary research projects were conducted through two complementary surveys in May and June 2025.

1. **Public Survey** – a representative survey of 2,528 NSW residents that examined formal and informal volunteering, motivations, barriers, impacts on work, intentions for future volunteering, and out-of-pocket costs.
2. **Volunteer Manager Survey** – a survey of 699 people responsible for leading or coordinating volunteers across a range of organisations. It explored organisational characteristics, recruitment and retention, expenditures, challenges, and future growth.

A feature of our approach is that the Public Survey makes it possible to study both volunteers and non-volunteers in the same way, which is rare in volunteer research. Volunteers are easy to reach through the ways they organise, but non-volunteers – the very group the sector most wants to engage – are harder to locate.

This method lets us see not only why people volunteer, but also why others do not, what might encourage them to start, and how their lives differ from those already volunteering. Comparing the two groups shows whether barriers are shared by everyone or fall more heavily on non-volunteers, giving valuable evidence for the sector.

Together, these surveys capture both community and organisational perspectives, providing a comprehensive view of the volunteering ecosystem in NSW and enabling an economic assessment of its value.

Measuring volunteering

Existing national measures of volunteering, such as the Census and the General Social Survey (GSS), have significant limitations. The Census uses a single broad question that many acknowledge underreports volunteering. The GSS is longer, places volunteering questions late in the survey, and often leads to incomplete or less accurate responses. As a result, volunteering is likely underestimated by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.

The State of Volunteering research, first conducted in 2014, has now been carried out in every state and territory across Australia, greatly improving our understanding of how the sector operates and how volunteers engage with it. In 2023, the research was conducted nationally for the first time, with more than 10,000 respondents, making it the largest dedicated volunteering study ever undertaken in the country.

While the project is primarily quantitative, it has since been complemented by over 500 hours of qualitative research, exploring the experiences of youth, older adults, women, sports, and rural and regional volunteers.

In this edition, a revised, domain-based framework has been developed to improve clarity and accuracy. It groups volunteering into eight domains (e.g., sport, education, community) and asks respondents to identify both formal and informal contributions in each. Testing in 2024 showed the new framework was reliable, especially for capturing informal and mixed types of volunteering.

The survey instrument has been further refined for NSW following consultation with a dedicated and diverse stakeholder reference group. Enhancements include clearer definitions, culturally relevant examples, inclusive language, recognition of episodic volunteering, and integration of travel time and costs. These refinements ensure the tool is both rigorous and responsive to the realities of volunteering across the state.

A more detailed write-up of the survey design process, sampling, and full statistical analysis can be found in the Appendix to this report.

Interpreting results

This report provides a comprehensive analysis of the survey data. It does not try to explain the reasons behind the survey results. For example, while the data shows that age influences whether someone volunteers, the study is descriptive rather than explanatory.

The findings are intended to prompt further reflection and discussion among stakeholders across the volunteering sector. These conversations can help build a more up-to-date and shared understanding of the volunteering landscape, its value to individuals and the community, and inform both strategic and financial decisions in the implementation of national, state, and organisation-level strategies.

SECTION 1: VOLUNTEERS

Table 1: Key findings about volunteers in NSW in 2025

	NSW 2025
Percentage of the population aged 15 and over who volunteer	69.5%
Total NSW residents aged 15 and over who volunteer	4.9 million
Average hours volunteered per month	22.7 hours
Total hours volunteered in NSW	1.3 billion
Formal volunteers <i>(as a percentage of volunteers)</i>	59.0%
Informal volunteers <i>(as a percentage of volunteers)</i>	84.9%
Percentage of volunteering done online or at home	23.8%
Top 5 volunteer motivations	1. A sense of purpose 2. To help others 3. Because I can 4. Friendships 5. For enjoyment
Top 3 recruitment channels	1. Family, friends, colleagues 2. Social media 3. Member/participant pathway
Social preference for volunteering	By myself – 27.4% With others – 38.9% Both – 33.5%
Top 3 time constraints on volunteering <i>(volunteers)</i>	1. Work or study 2. Family or caring duties 3. Income/costs/expenses
Top 3 time constraints on volunteering <i>(non-volunteers)</i>	1. Work or study 2. My health 3. Income/costs/expenses
Why people reduce or leave volunteering <i>(volunteers)</i>	1. Changes to work/study/family circumstances 2. Burnout (over-volunteering) 3. Travel requirements
Why people reduce or leave volunteering <i>(non-volunteers)</i>	1. Changes to work/study/family circumstances 2. Out of pocket costs 3. Loss of interest or connection
Volunteers who intend to volunteer more in 3 years' time	32.3%
Non-volunteers who intend to volunteer more in 3 years' time	23.0%

Volunteer participation

For the purposes of the Public Survey, this is how volunteering was defined.

Volunteering is defined here as "time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain." Volunteering is helping someone or something (even if you don't call it volunteering).

You do not receive money for this, but maybe someone pays for your food, travel or other costs. It includes volunteering organised by your employer or school.

It does not include work you do to receive a government allowance (like work for the dole) or as part of a court order (like community service). It does not include only helping your family or people living in your house.

An example that is volunteering: coaching your child's football team, because people outside your household and family also benefit. Another example is helping a neighbour mow their lawns or put their bins out.

An example that is not volunteering: helping your flatmate, cousin or sister with their homework.

Even if you did not think of it as volunteering, did you do any of the following in the last 12 months?

This definition aligns with the definition and subsequent guidance of Australia's volunteering peak bodies.

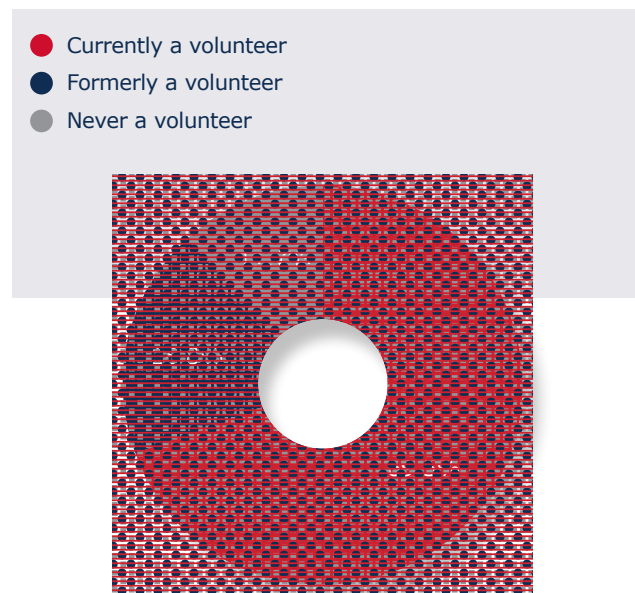
How many people volunteer?

The Public Survey revealed that **69.5% of NSW residents** aged 15 and over had volunteered in the past year.

This represents a total of **4.9 million volunteers**.

Figure 1 shows that another 18.8% reported volunteering previously, whereas 11.7% said they had never volunteered.

Figure 1: Percentage of NSW residents aged 15+ who volunteered in the last 12 months (n = 2,528)



The number of volunteers (69.5%) is higher than in 2023 (63.9%) but lower than in 2021 (75.9%). Because only three data points are available, it is not yet possible to determine whether volunteer rates are genuinely changing over time or simply fluctuating within a normal range.

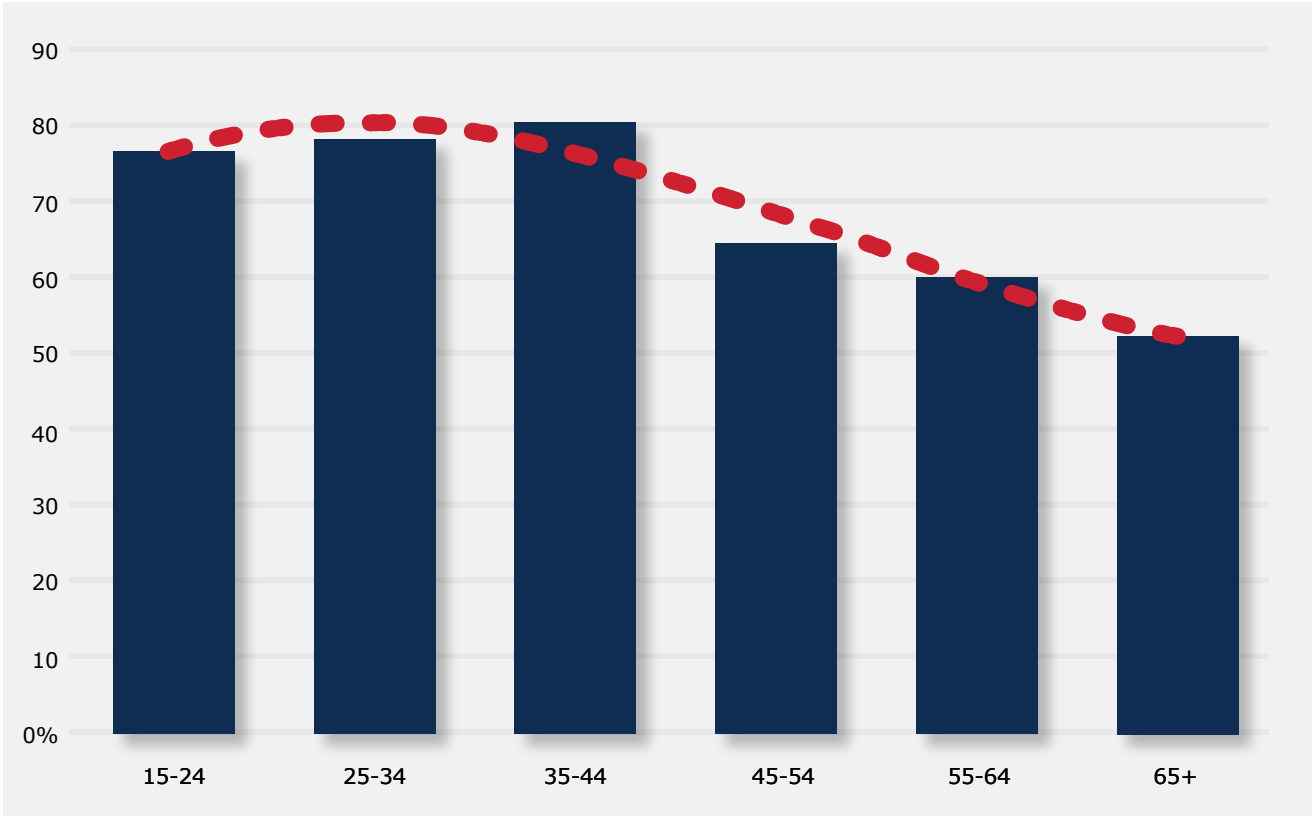
The number of volunteers in each age cohort is as follows:

- 15-24 years old: 844,900
- 25-34 years old: 995,300
- 35-44 years old: 961,200
- 45-54 years old: 675,500
- 55-64 years old: 582,900
- 65 years and over: 799,500

Volunteering by age group

The following observation was made regarding age and volunteering status, with the likelihood of a person being a volunteer decreasing as age increases.

Figure 2: Volunteering participation in NSW by age cohort

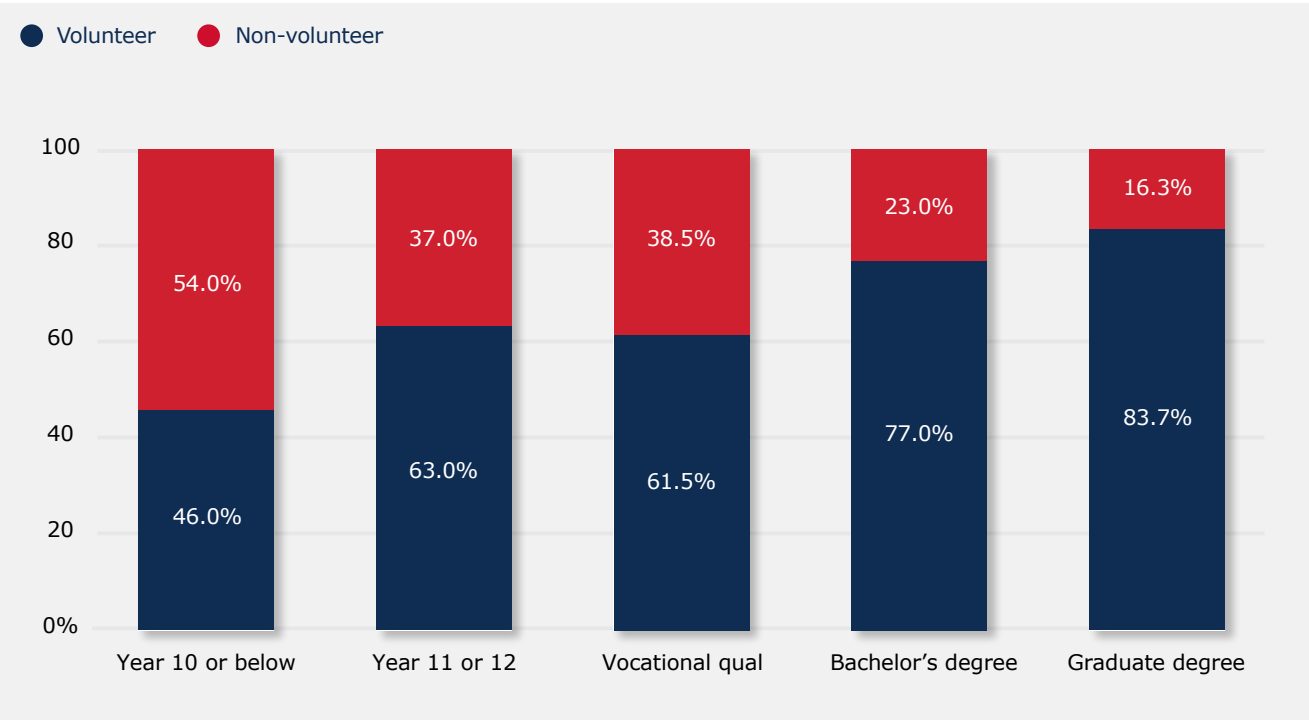


The red trendline overlaid on Figure 2 shows that the relationship between age and volunteering in NSW is not linear and that different stages of life correlate with different levels of volunteering.

Statistical analysis revealed that people were more likely to volunteer if they had higher education, were studying more hours, had caring responsibilities, higher income, or were younger. Gender, English language background, disability status, paid work hours, and location did not have a significant impact on volunteering rates.

Figure 3 shows the relationship between a person’s level of education and their volunteering.

Figure 3: Volunteering participation by level of educational attainment (n = 2,528)



How much time do volunteers give?

Volunteers gave an average of **196.1 hours per year**. This is equivalent to about **16.3 hours per month or 3.8 hours per week**. There is a large range in the times reported: some people volunteer just half an hour per year, while others put in over 2,000 hours. This shows that while some volunteers help out occasionally, others make it a major part of their lives.

Among volunteers, statistical analysis showed that people with disabilities gave the highest number of hours, followed by those with higher incomes, while women gave slightly fewer hours than men. Other factors had little impact on hours volunteered.

On average, volunteers spent a further **76.7 hours per year** getting to and from their volunteer work. That is about 6.4 hours per month or 1.5 hours per week on the road.

Statistical analysis showed that the more hours a person reported studying each week, the more travel time they reported. Other factors, including where they lived, had little effect.

When you add up the volunteering and travel times, the average volunteer spent about 272.8 hours per year on volunteer activities. That works out to 22.7 hours per month or 5.2 hours per week.

NSW residents aged 15 and over contributed **1.3 billion hours** of volunteer time in 2025.

How this compares

Self-reported volunteer time has fluctuated over recent surveys:

- **2025: 22.7 hours per month (5.2 hours per week)**
- 2023: 17.5 hours per month (4.0 hours per week)
- 2021: 25.0 hours per month (5.8 hours per week).

How people volunteer

Figure 4 shows that most people volunteered in sport, community, and neighbourhood activities, which had the highest recent involvement (around 40–43%). Education and culture saw moderate levels (about one-third are currently volunteering), while environment and emergency services attracted fewer volunteers as a percentage of the population (about 25–30%). Civic volunteering was lower again (22.1%), and otherwise unclassified volunteering in the “other” category was very small at 8.3%.

Figure 4: The ways in which people contribute to their community as volunteers (n = 2,528)

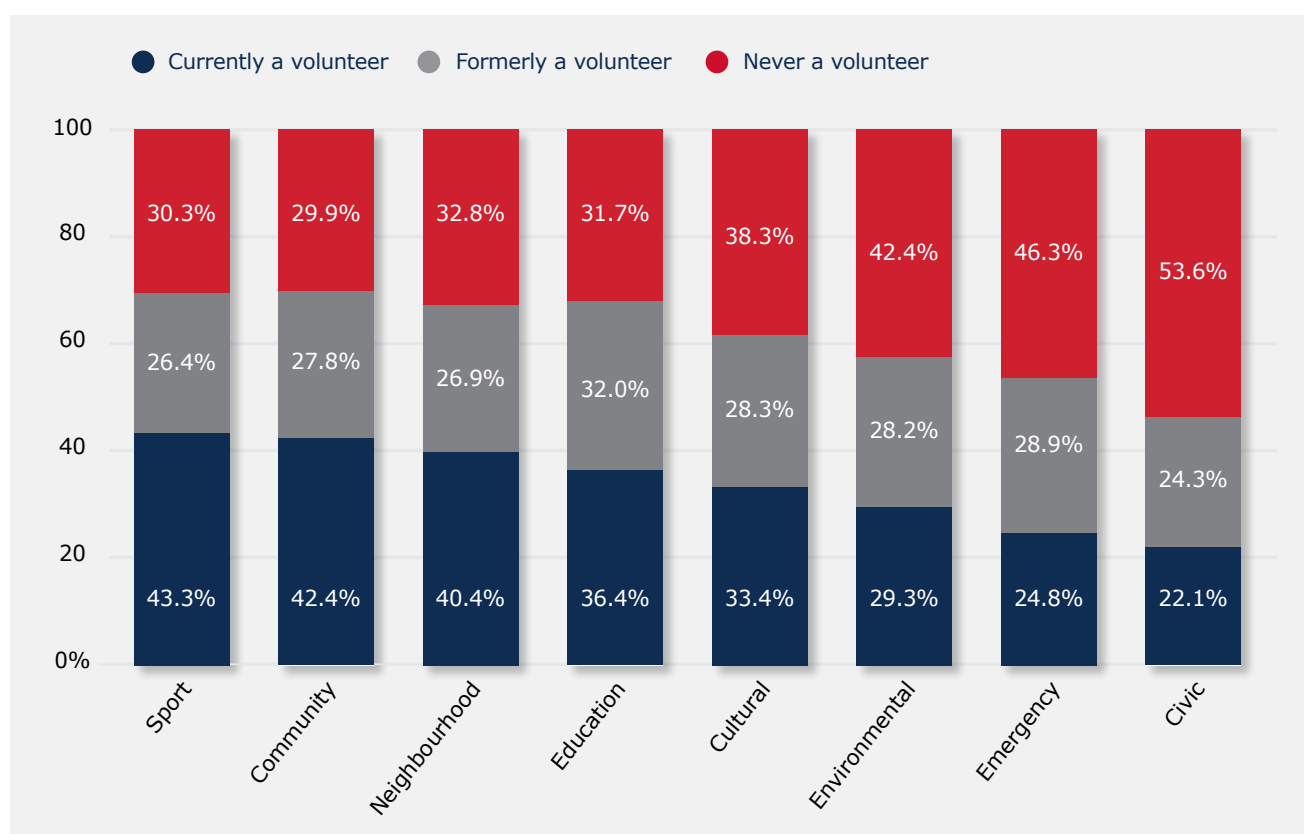


Table 2 shows that people gave different amounts of time depending on the type of volunteering. Community volunteering took the most time (an average of 102 hours a year), more than double civic activities, which had the lowest (49 hours). Sport, education, and neighbourhood volunteering each averaged around 74–76 hours, while cultural, environmental, and emergency services were lower (53–71 hours).

**Table 2: Annual volunteer hours by domain
(n = 1,679)**

Domain	Total Hours	Volunteer Hours	Travel Hours	Travel %
Total (all domains)	272.8	196.1	76.7	28.1%
Community	102.0	75.7	26.2	25.7%
Sport	76.5	55.0	21.5	28.1%
Education	76.1	55.2	20.9	27.5%
Neighbourhood	73.8	53.1	20.7	28.1%
Cultural	70.7	52.4	18.2	25.8%
Environmental	57.0	40.8	16.2	28.4%
Emergency	53.6	35.8	17.8	33.2%
Civic	49.0	34.9	14.0	28.7%

Travel made up a consistent share of this time across all areas – about a quarter to a third – showing that the main difference between domains came from the service hours, not the travel.

In general, the more popular types of volunteering by participation (community, sport, neighbourhood) also attracted more hours, while less common areas like civic work involved fewer hours.

Perhaps this is because people who volunteered more hours also spread their time across more types of volunteering. On average, volunteers were active in four of the nine domains (including "Other"). Low-hour volunteers reported engaging in about 2.5 domains, medium-hour volunteers 4.0, and high-hour volunteers 5.2.

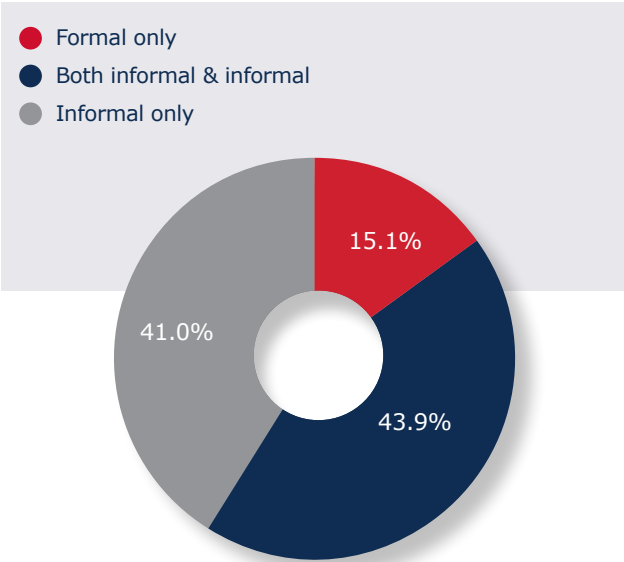
Formal versus informal volunteering

For each domain, Public Survey respondents were asked whether they volunteered:

- Yes, formally with an organisation, club or group
- Yes, informally helping out
- Not in the last 12 months, or
- Never.

This distinction made it possible to capture both structured volunteering (e.g. through clubs or groups) and more casual, direct ways of helping others, while also tracking patterns of non-participation.

Figure 5: Distribution of formal and informal volunteering (n = 1,758)



When looking at volunteering overall (Figure 5), just 15.1% of people volunteered only in formal roles, while almost half (43.9%) did both formal and informal activities. This means many people who volunteer formally in one area also help informally elsewhere, suggesting that the two approaches often go hand in hand rather than replacing each other.

The “Total” row in Table 2 shows the big picture for all volunteers (as in Figure 4), while each domain row shows the breakdown for just that group. Since volunteers often work across more than one domain, the domain-specific figures do not average neatly into the total.

Table 3: Distribution of volunteering type by domain (n = 1,758)

Domain	Formal only	Both formal & informal	Informal only	Total volunteers
Total (all domains)	15.1%	43.9%	41.0%	4.9m
Sport	39.3%	8.1%	52.5%	3.0m
Education	37.9%	6.9%	55.2%	2.5m
Culture	39.7%	7.5%	52.9%	2.3m
Community	35.2%	10.5%	54.4%	3.0m
Neighbourhood	22.6%	4.3%	73.1%	2.8m
Emergency	35.4%	5.9%	58.6%	1.7m
Environment	34.7%	5.3%	60.0%	2.0m
Civic	37.4%	5.4%	57.2%	1.5m

The results also show that formal and informal volunteering look quite different across domains. Neighbourhood volunteering was mostly informal, with nearly three-quarters of volunteers (73.1%) helping out casually rather than through an organisation. In contrast, sport, education, and culture showed higher rates of formal-only volunteering (around 38–40%), reflecting their more structured, organisation-based nature.

Table 4: Volunteering patterns over time

Year	Formal Only	Both	Informal Only	Volunteers as a % of the population
2021	10.2%	59.5%	30.3%	75.9%
2023	21.2%	36.1%	42.7%	63.9%
2025	15.1%	43.9%	41.0%	69.5%

Comparing results over time (Table 5) shows further shifts. In 2021, most volunteers (59.5%) were involved in both formal and informal roles. This dropped sharply in 2023 (36.1%) before recovering somewhat in 2025 (43.9%).

Hours volunteered

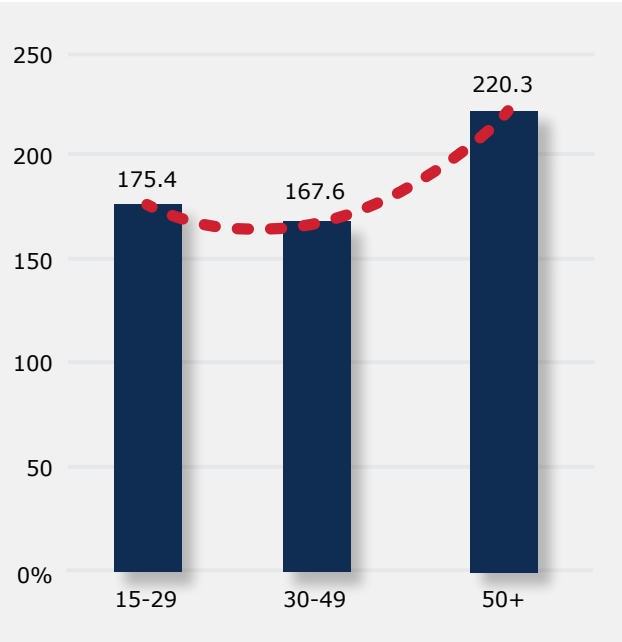
On average, volunteers reported giving **223.4 hours per year** through formal roles (about 18.6 hours per month, or 4.3 hours per week) and **172.0 hours** through informal activities (about 14.3 hours per month, or 3.3 hours per week).

Table 5: Average monthly volunteer hours over time

Year	Formal hours	Informal hours
2021	14.8	16.9
2023	14.2	17.5
2025	18.6	14.3

Statistical analysis revealed that age, disability, paid work hours, and caring responsibilities were the main predictors of formal volunteer hours. Older people and those with disabilities gave more time, while higher-paid work hours and caring duties were linked to fewer formal hours.

Figure 6: Average hours volunteered in 2025 by age (n = 1,685)



It is also important to note that adding the average hours of formal and informal volunteering together gives a misleading figure (395.4 hours per year). The true average across all volunteers was 196.1 hours. This is because many people do both types of volunteering, so simply adding averages double-counts their time.

A final statistical analysis looked at two things: who takes part in formal volunteering, and how many hours they give once involved.

Who volunteers formally

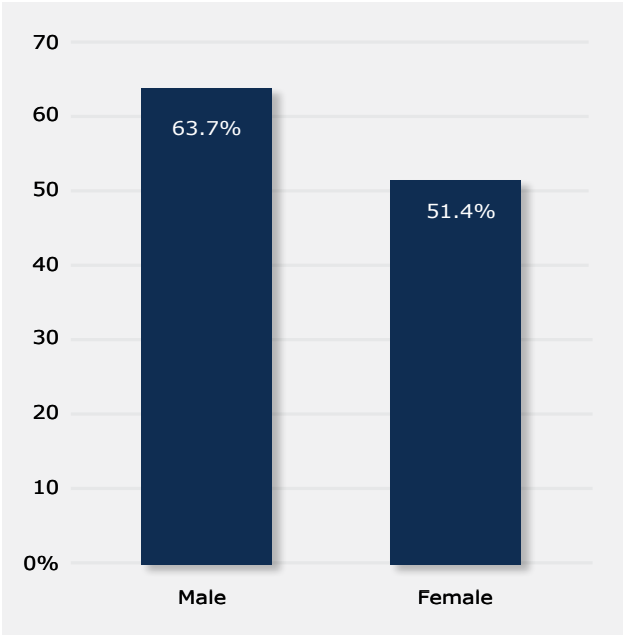
Statistical analysis showed that education was the strongest predictor of someone becoming a formal volunteer. Each step up in education made formal volunteering more likely.

People who were studying were also more likely to formally volunteer, as were people with caring responsibilities and people living with disability.

Age, household income, paid work hours, location and language background did not meaningfully change the likelihood of participating in formal volunteering.

Figure 7 demonstrates the differences in formal volunteering between men and women. 63.7% of men who volunteer are doing so formally, as are 51.4% of women. Note that this does not mean that women volunteer less, just that they are more evenly split between formal and informal volunteering.

Figure 7: Percentage of male and the percentage of female volunteers who volunteer formally (n = 1,703)



How much time they give

A different pattern emerged for hours. Older formal volunteers gave more time on average, while more time required for paid work reduced the hours people could give.

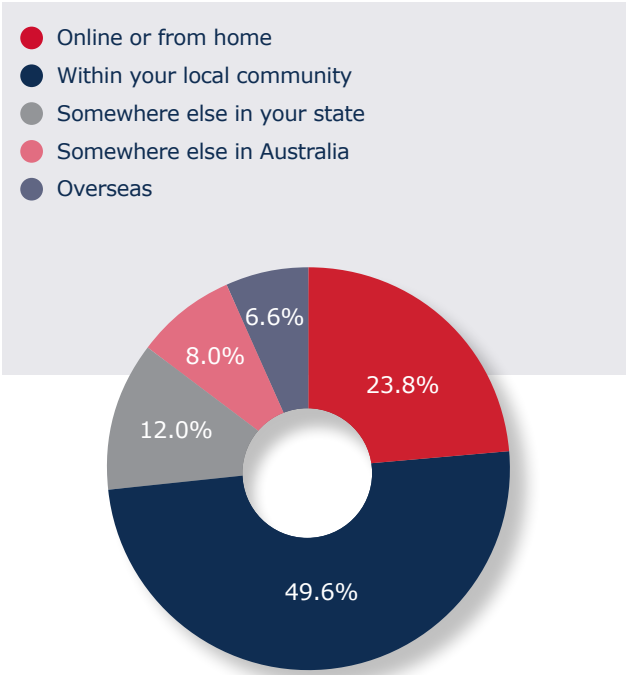
Disability showed a near-significant trend towards more hours among those who formally volunteer. Education, gender and study time did not affect hours once people were involved.

These results show that the factors associated with starting formal volunteering are not always the same as those linked to the amount of time people give once involved.

Where volunteers give their time

Figure 8 shows that on average, volunteers allocate their time as follows: 49.5% in their local community, 23.8% online or from home, 12.0% elsewhere in NSW, 8.0% interstate, and 6.6% overseas.

Figure 8: Where volunteers give their time (n = 1,758)



Taken together, nearly three-quarters of volunteering (73.3%) occurs locally or online, while just over a quarter (26.7%) occurs beyond these boundaries.

These allocations were first measured in 2023 and remain largely unchanged.

Table 6: Volunteer location changes over time

Location	2023	2025	Change
Online or from home	26.1%	23.8%	-2.3ppt
Local community	52.7%	49.5%	-3.2ppt
Rest of the state	10.6%	12.0%	+1.4ppt
Rest of Australia	4.7%	8.0%	+3.3ppt
Overseas	6.0%	6.6%	+0.6ppt

ppt = percentage points

Volunteer motivations

Earlier reports (2021 and 2023) used long lists of motivation categories to track why people volunteer, which was useful during COVID-19 and times of social change. In 2024, these categories were tested with different groups of volunteers, showing that some important differences were not being captured; for example, between building skills for now versus gaining work experience for later, or between helping others and finding one's own sense of purpose.

As a result, a new framework was developed for this report, grouping motivations into two broad types: **external motivations** (e.g. helping people, supporting causes, responding to crises, civic duty) and **personal motivations** (e.g. skills, social connection, fulfilment, career, enjoyment). This approach recognises that volunteering often fulfils both community needs and personal goals.

The 2025 results show helping others remains the top motivation (48.7%), but personal agency ("because I can") is almost as strong (47.7%), suggesting volunteers are driven by both giving back and self-empowerment.

Other common drivers include using existing skills (35.2%), supporting causes they care about (29.5%), and stepping up in times of crisis (24.2%). Civic duty (23.1%) and faith-based service (19.4%) also continue to play a role, while a smaller group (12.3%) volunteer simply because "no one else was doing it."

Figure 9: External motivations for volunteering
(n = 1,758)

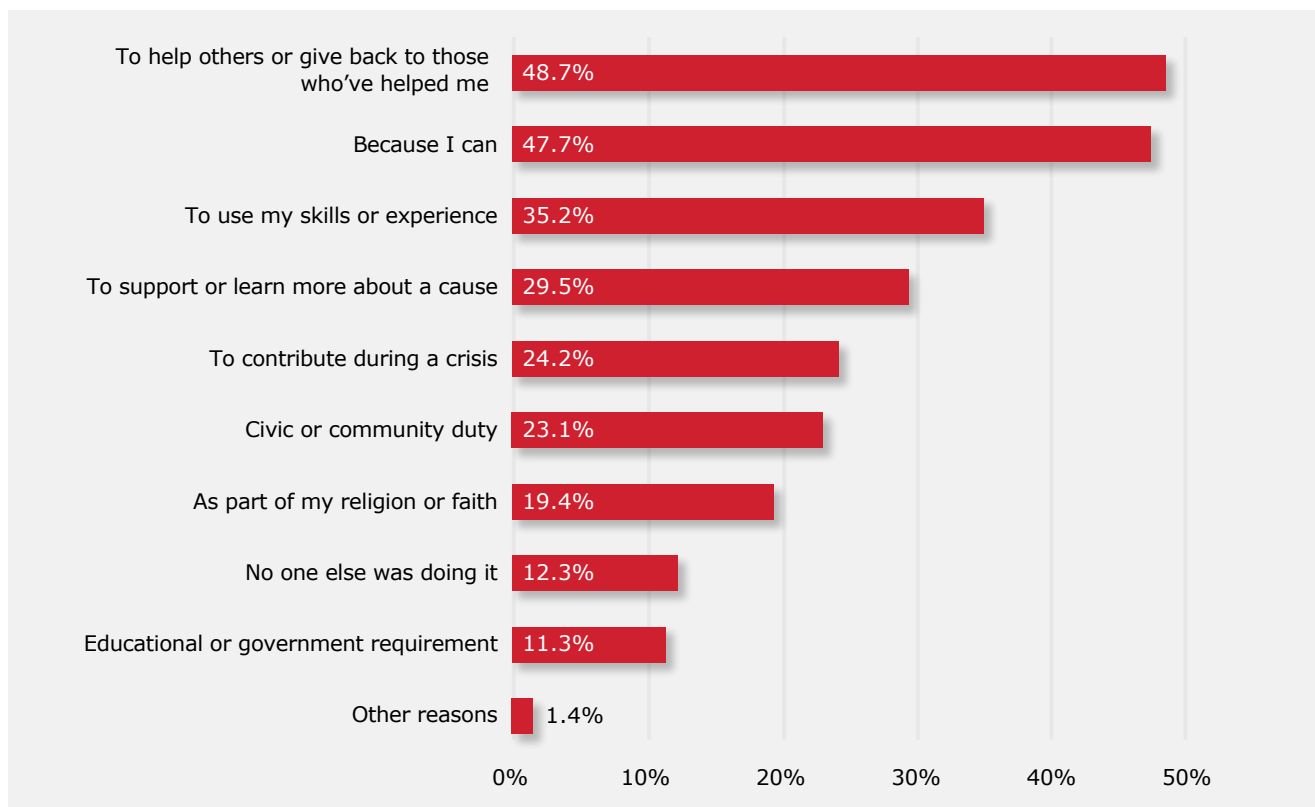
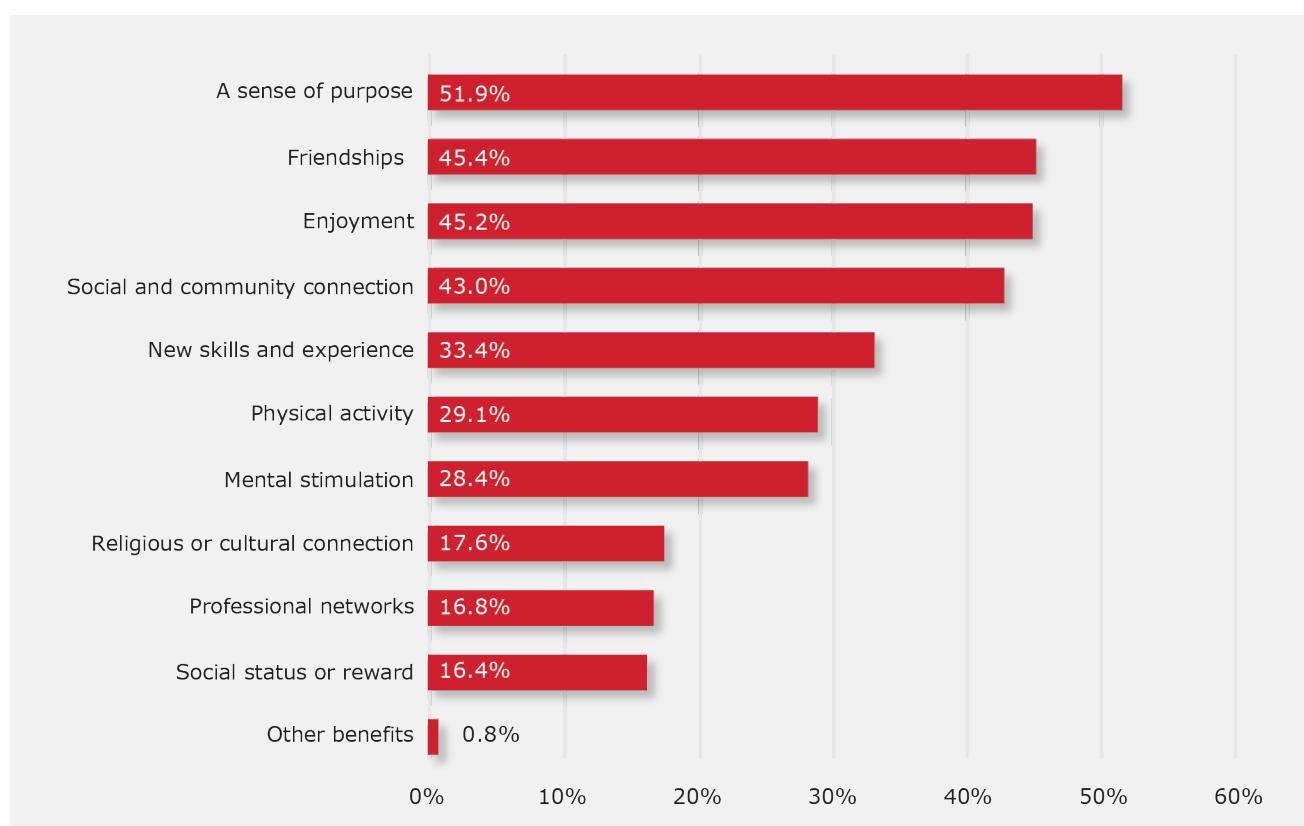


Figure 10: Personal development motivations for volunteering (n = 1,758)



The benefits reported by volunteers mirror these motivations. Many highlight personal fulfilment, with “a sense of purpose” (51.9%) the most common benefit. Social outcomes are also important, with nearly half reporting friendships (45.4%), enjoyment (45.2%), and a stronger sense of connection to community (43.0%).

Skill development (33.4%), physical activity (29.1%), and mental stimulation (28.4%) show that volunteering supports both personal growth and wellbeing. Professional networks (16.8%) and recognition (16.4%) matter to a smaller group, while religious or cultural connection (17.6%) confirms the continuing role of faith and tradition for some.

How this compares

Over the course of the three *State of Volunteering Reports*, helping others has consistently remained a leading motivator, but there have been clear shifts.

Skills-based motivations have grown stronger, showing that volunteers increasingly seek opportunities to apply and build their abilities. Active engagement – physical or mental – has also risen in importance, reflecting a desire to stay involved and stimulated.

Crisis response motivations have steadily increased, highlighting the role volunteers play in times of need. Enjoyment and social connection have become more visible too, suggesting volunteers are more likely to see and value the personal benefits of their contribution, not just the outcomes for others.

Taken together, the data indicates that while helping others remains central, motivations linked to personal development and wellbeing have become more prominent over the past five years.

Volunteer recruitment

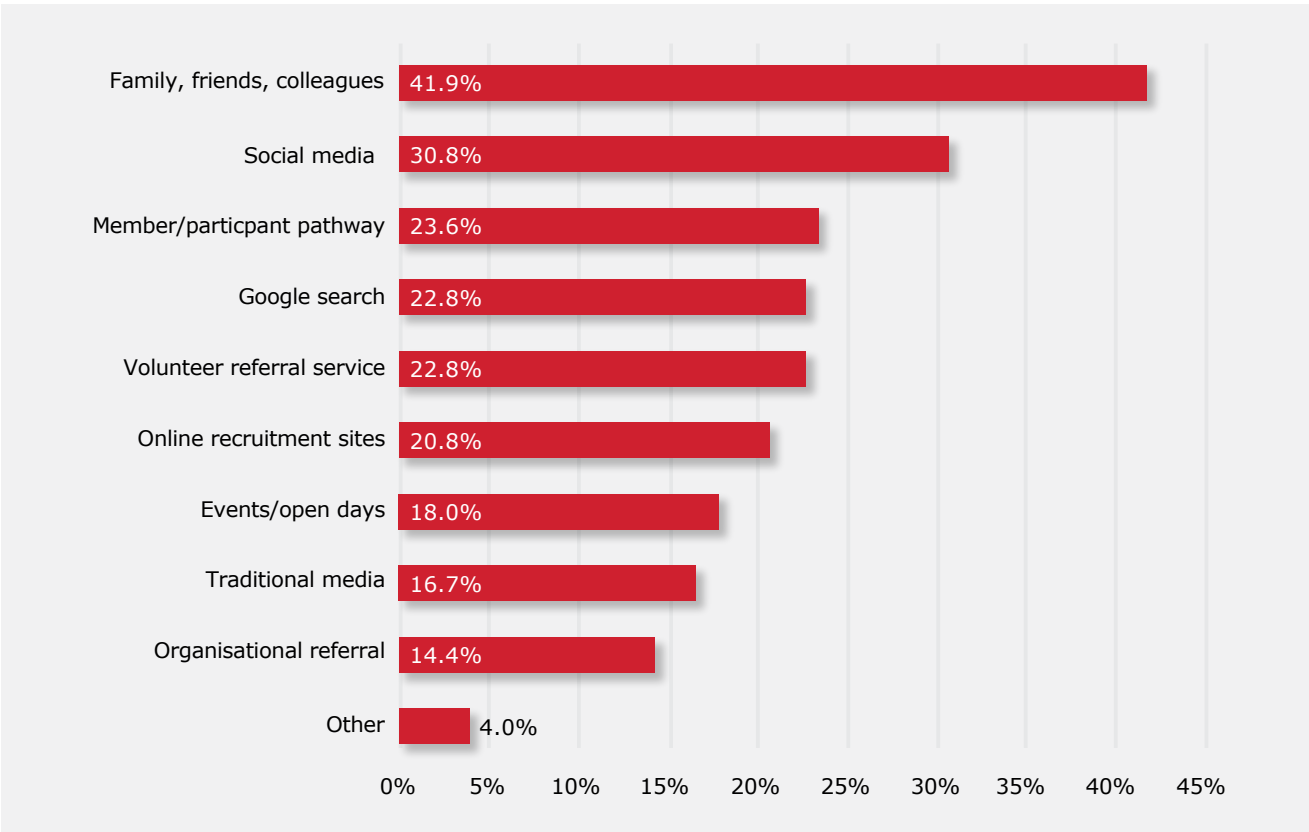
Volunteer recruitment pathways were first measured with volunteers in 2023, with “word of mouth” emerging as the main method. Subsequent research in 2024 showed that this category actually covered several different routes, each with different implications for how volunteers found roles versus how organisations promoted or filled roles.

In 2025, the framework was expanded to separate ‘word of mouth’ into two pathways. Being invited by family, friends, or colleagues was the most common path to volunteering (41.9%), while a new category captured people who moved from being participants or members to volunteering (23.6%).

Other pathways included social media (30.8%), online recruitment sites (20.8%), Google searches (22.8%), traditional media (16.7%), events or walk-ins (18.0%), volunteer referral services (22.8%), and referrals from other organisations (14.4%).

Statistical analysis suggests that volunteer-involving organisations should consider this information on how volunteers find positions and consider how their recruitment practices align with the ways that volunteers become involved in volunteering.

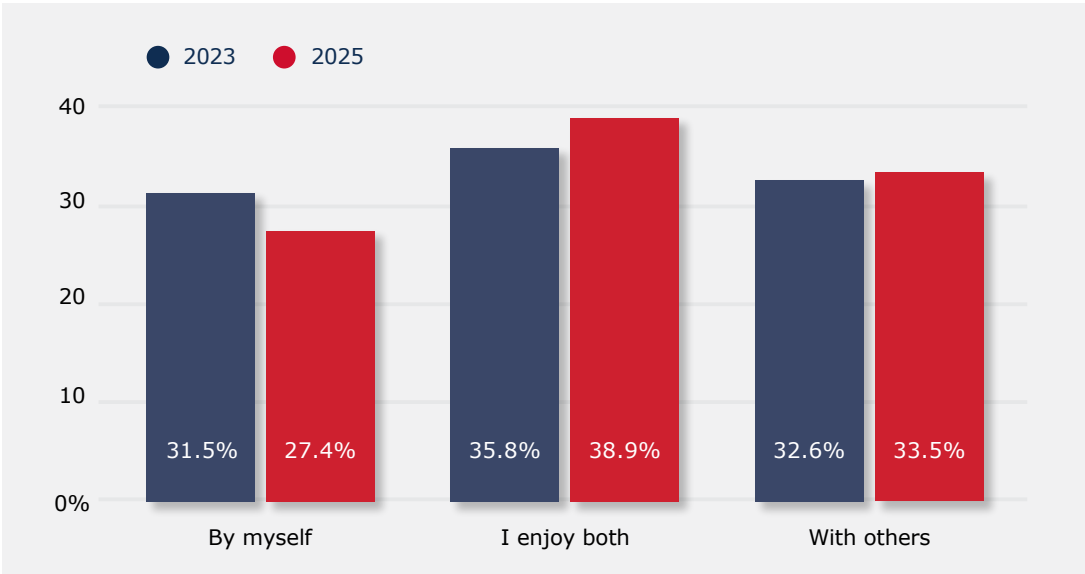
Figure 11: How volunteers find opportunities to volunteer (n = 1,758)



Social preference

Volunteers were asked whether they prefer to work by themselves, with others, or enjoy both equally. Figure 12 shows that the results were evenly split across all three options.

Figure 12: How people prefer to volunteer (n = 1,758)



In 2023, 35.8% said they enjoy both, 32.6% preferred working with others, and 31.3% preferred working alone. By 2025, preferences were largely unchanged: 38.9% enjoy both, 33.5% prefer working with others, and 27.4% prefer working alone.

These results suggest that social preferences in volunteering have remained diverse and relatively stable over the last few years, with no single approach dominating.

Barriers and constraints

From 2021 to 2025, the measurement of barriers to volunteering shifted from a simple list to a much more detailed framework. Early surveys highlighted time, cost, and health as key issues, while later research distinguished between practical constraints and exclusionary ones.

In this report, barriers are grouped into four domains: time capacity, discrimination, attrition factors, and ongoing participation constraints. This structure provides a clearer, more accurate picture of the challenges people face.

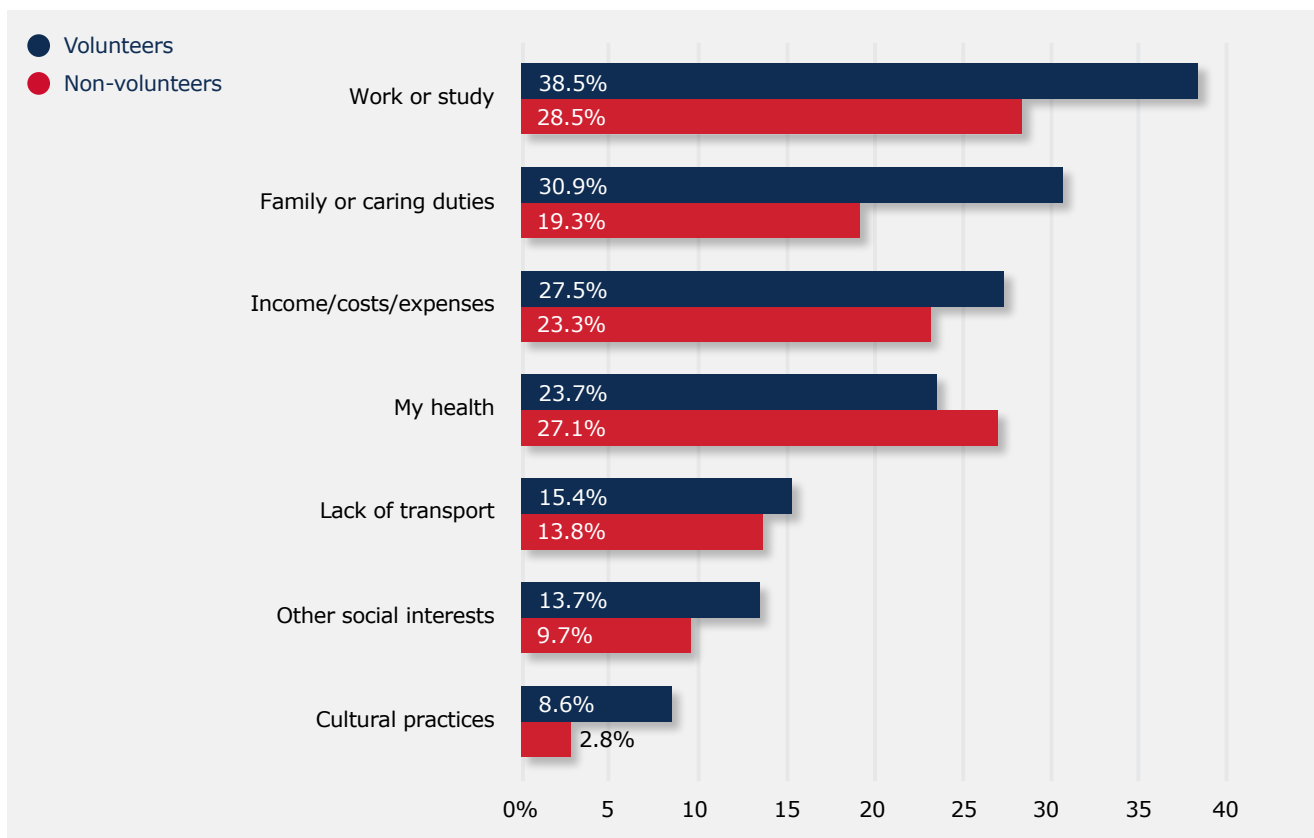
Time constraints

Time has consistently been the most common barrier to volunteering, though the balance between

volunteers and non-volunteers has shifted across survey periods. In 2021, 55.6% of volunteers and 41.2% of non-volunteers cited “no time (e.g., family/work/study commitments)” as a barrier. By 2023, this pattern had reversed, with 41.8% of volunteers and 62.6% of non-volunteers identifying time as their biggest barrier.

It was therefore important in this report to better understand what respondents actually meant when they referred to ‘time’, as the term could reflect different pressures and commitments across groups. Thus, the “no time” barrier from previous reports has been replaced with a wider range of categories, shown in Figure 13 alongside other factors that may limit a person’s ability to volunteer.

Figure 13: Factors that limit a person’s ability to volunteer (n = 2,528)



Work (including looking for work) and study commitments were the most common factor for volunteers (38.5%) compared to 28.5% of non-volunteers, while family and caring duties affected 30.9% of volunteers against 19.3% of non-volunteers.

Health barriers showed the opposite trend, being more common among non-volunteers (27.1%) than volunteers (23.7%). Income and cost barriers were similar across both groups (27.5% of volunteers, 23.3% of non-volunteers), as were transport limitations (15.4% versus 13.8%).

Other social interests were cited by 13.7% of volunteers and 9.7% of non-volunteers, while cultural practices affected 8.6% of volunteers compared to 2.8% of non-volunteers. A larger proportion of non-volunteers (28.7%) than volunteers (19.7%) reported that none of these factors limited them.

Exclusion and discrimination

This part of the study looked at whether people feel excluded or discriminated against when it comes to volunteering. Just over half of non-volunteers (53.4%) said that none of the listed reasons made it harder for them to volunteer, but only 36.6% of volunteers said the same.

There are several factors at play here that may influence this result. Firstly, as noted earlier, this report presents the data and the results of the survey to provide information to the NSW volunteering sector. It intentionally does not provide reasons as to why, and a detailed exploration of this is outside the scope of this quantitative research.

However, this is not to say that the volunteering sector has uniquely higher rates of exclusion and discrimination than the general population. While the rate overall rate of experiencing exclusion or discrimination is higher in this data than in other sources such as the General Social Survey (which reports 13% of individuals over 18 had experienced discrimination in 2020), many of the individual areas are either lower or on par with the statistics reported in the GSS (e.g. 26.1% of LBGTAQIA+ volunteers report experiencing discrimination vs 30% of LBGTAQIA+ people in the general population).

Secondly, these reports are self-reported and self-defined experiences of discrimination. The survey instrument asked *"Have you ever felt excluded or discriminated against while volunteering because of..."* and provided a list of characteristics that the respondent chose from. This is consistent with the methodology used in this report, but does not

necessarily align perfectly with other data sets such as the General Social Survey, meaning direct comparisons of the discrimination rates in these sources are not always appropriate. Note as well that the questions only asks if the experience of exclusion or discrimination occurred while volunteering; it does not specify who was doing the exclusion and/or discrimination be it another volunteer, a volunteer manager, a participant in a volunteering program, or a member of the public.

Intersectionality of characteristics is also a feature that may influence these results. Survey respondents may have multiple personal characteristics that were the basis for an experience of discrimination (e.g. they may be a woman who is neurodiverse from a CALD background). Similarly, location and domain may have impacted results in particular areas.

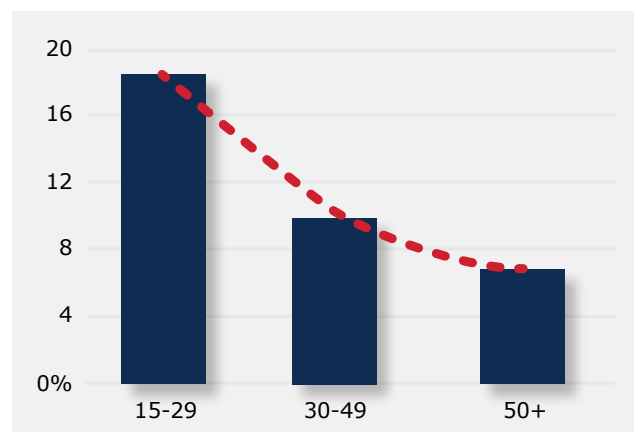
These considerations are not to invalidate or diminish the findings presented in this section, but to provide sufficient context for the reader to understand what is being presented. They also demonstrate that this is an area for future research to explore in more detail how discrimination in volunteering occurs. Discrimination and exclusion demonstrably occur in volunteering, as they unfortunately do in all areas of Australian society, and a full understanding of where and how this exclusion occurs is essential for the sector if it is to be reduced.

Age

Overall, 13.5% of volunteers said they had experienced age discrimination, compared to only 4.6% of non-volunteers, showing it is mainly an issue for those already involved in volunteering.

Figure 14 shows that younger people reported much higher levels of age-based exclusion or discrimination in volunteering than older groups.

Figure 14: Experiences of age exclusion or discrimination – volunteers and non-volunteers (n = 2,528)



The results also showed a clear downward trend: the younger the person, the more likely they were to report experiencing discrimination because of their age, challenging the common assumption that age discrimination mainly affects older people.

Gender

Gender discrimination was reported more often by volunteers (9.1%) than non-volunteers (2.0%), showing it is more commonly experienced by those already engaged in volunteering.

Rates were similar for men (6.5%) and women (6.9%), but far higher for non-binary individuals (15.2%), pointing to particular challenges for gender-diverse people in volunteering.

Although the non-binary sample was small, the difference was statistically significant, indicating that improving gender inclusivity may be an important consideration for volunteer programs.

Location

Location-based exclusion was more common among volunteers (8.2%) than non-volunteers (1.4%), suggesting it mostly affects people already involved in volunteering.

However, the rates were similar across cities, regional areas, and other locations, which means the issue is not about where people live – it is more likely related to things like transport, travel distance, or how easy it is to get to the volunteer role.

This suggests that both urban and regional volunteers face similar barriers, even if the reasons behind them are different.

Cultural and linguistic diversity

Ethnicity-based exclusion or discrimination was reported by 9.8% of volunteers compared to 2.7% of non-volunteers, showing it is more commonly experienced by those already engaged in volunteering. People from other nations or cultures (9.4%) and First Nations people (8.5%) reported the highest rates.

Among respondents with English as an additional language, 10.5% of volunteers reported language-related discrimination, compared to 3.4% of non-volunteers.

LGBTQIA+

Among LGBTQIA+ respondents, 26.1% of volunteers reported experiencing discrimination compared to 12.8% of non-volunteers, the largest gap across all categories. This means more than one in four LGBTQIA+ volunteers faced exclusion based on their

identity, suggesting that volunteer environments may not always provide inclusive spaces.

The higher rates among volunteers indicate that these barriers are most visible within volunteering contexts, making LGBTQIA+ inclusivity a relevant issue for retention and engagement.

Physical and mental health

Health-related exclusion or discrimination was more common among volunteers than non-volunteers, with 7.4% of volunteers reporting physical health discrimination and 7.6% reporting mental health discrimination, compared to 3.8% and 3.0% of non-volunteers.

This report marks the first time physical and mental health discrimination were measured separately, showing that disability-related barriers extend beyond physical access. It found that volunteers with disabilities were much more likely to report discrimination (12.7% for physical health, 10.5% for mental health) than those without disabilities (4.4% and 4.6%).

These results show that health-related exclusion is a challenge in volunteering, affecting people with both physical and mental health conditions at similar levels.

Neurodiversity

Neurodiversity-related discrimination was measured for the first time in 2025, encompassing conditions such as autism, ADHD, and dyslexia. Among respondents who self-identified as neurodivergent, 14.9% of volunteers reported experiencing exclusion or discrimination, compared to 18.8% of non-volunteers.

Unlike in other categories, non-volunteers reported equal or higher rates of discrimination, suggesting these barriers may prevent people from volunteering in the first place rather than arising during participation.

However, the sample sizes were very small, so the results should be interpreted with caution. Although these points highlight potential obstacles that may deter neurodivergent individuals from volunteering, further research is needed.

Carers

Discrimination or exclusion linked to caring duties showed only a small difference between volunteers and non-volunteers.

Among respondents who identified as carers, 7.1% of volunteers reported exclusion or discrimination compared to 4.9% of non-volunteers. This suggests

that caring responsibilities create barriers both to getting involved and to staying engaged, rather than being specific to volunteering contexts.

Unlike other barriers that are more prominent among active volunteers, caring duties appear to present ongoing challenges for people regardless of whether they currently volunteer.

Why it matters

Experiences of exclusion and discrimination matter because they directly reduce volunteer numbers. Almost one in three volunteers (29.6%) who faced discrimination said they had cut back or stopped volunteering because of it, compared to only 2.4% of non-volunteers. This shows a clear link between exclusion or discrimination and the loss of volunteer capacity in NSW.

Certain groups were more affected than others. LGBTQIA+ volunteers reported the highest rates of discrimination (26.1%), followed by younger volunteers (18.5% for ages 15–29) and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds. Across most categories, volunteers reported higher discrimination rates than non-volunteers, suggesting that exclusion often arises within volunteering more so than it is a barrier to getting involved.

This means making volunteer environments more

inclusive is not just the right thing to do – it is also critical for keeping people engaged. If addressed, these issues could both retain existing volunteers and attract underrepresented groups. That said, exclusion and discrimination are only part of the story, with other factors also driving people to step away from volunteering, which the next section explores.

Volunteer attrition

A large number of people reported reducing or stopping their volunteering. Around 39% of current volunteers and 56% of non-volunteers said they had recently cut back. For many, this did not mean quitting completely, but shifting their time elsewhere.

Discrimination is one reason, but not the main one. About 11% of volunteers in total reduced or stopped because of discrimination, while nearly 29% gave additional or other reasons. Among non-volunteers, only 1% stopped because of discrimination, but 16% said other reasons (also) played a part.

The most common reason across both groups was changes in work, study, or family life, affecting about 40% of both volunteers and non-volunteers.

Figure 15: Volunteer attrition factors that had a higher impact on volunteers than non-volunteers (n = 2,528)

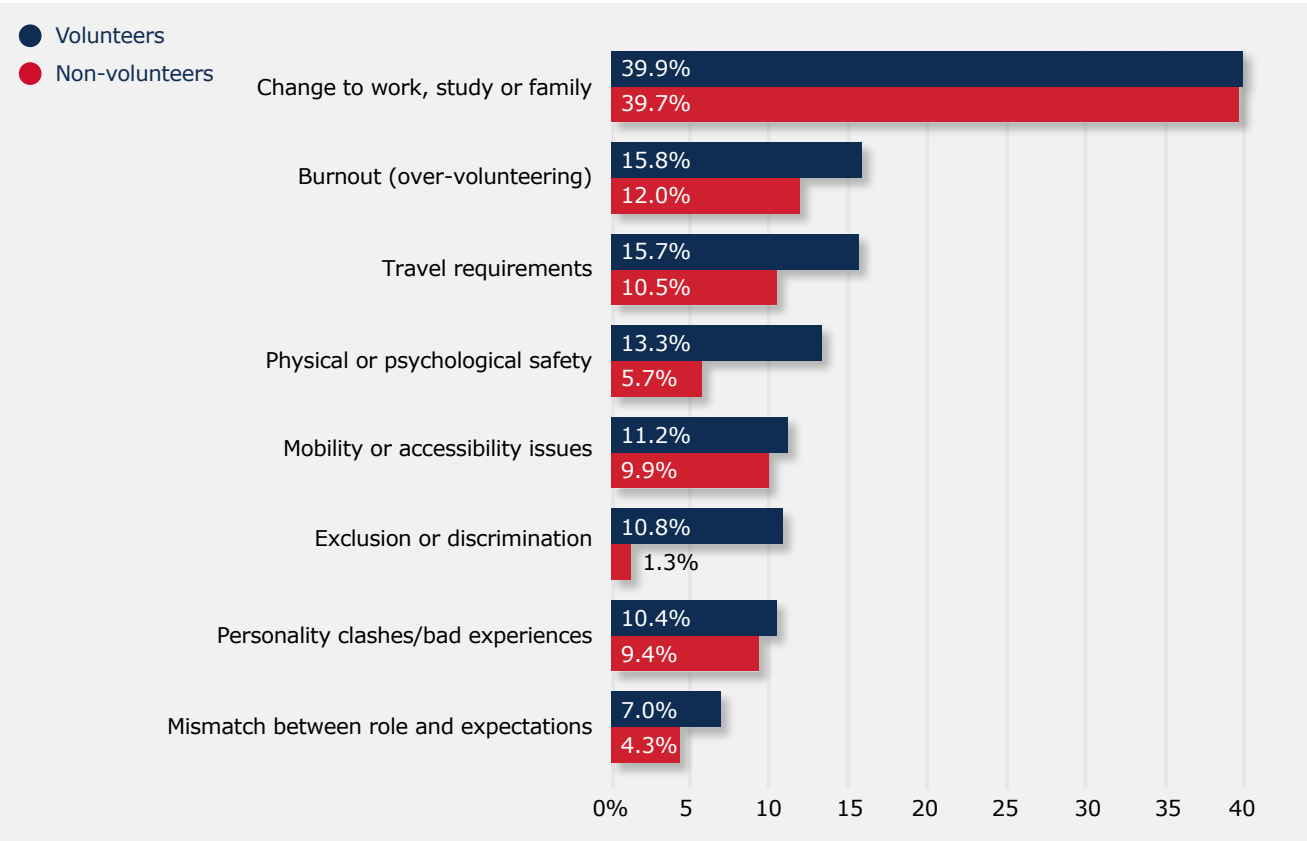
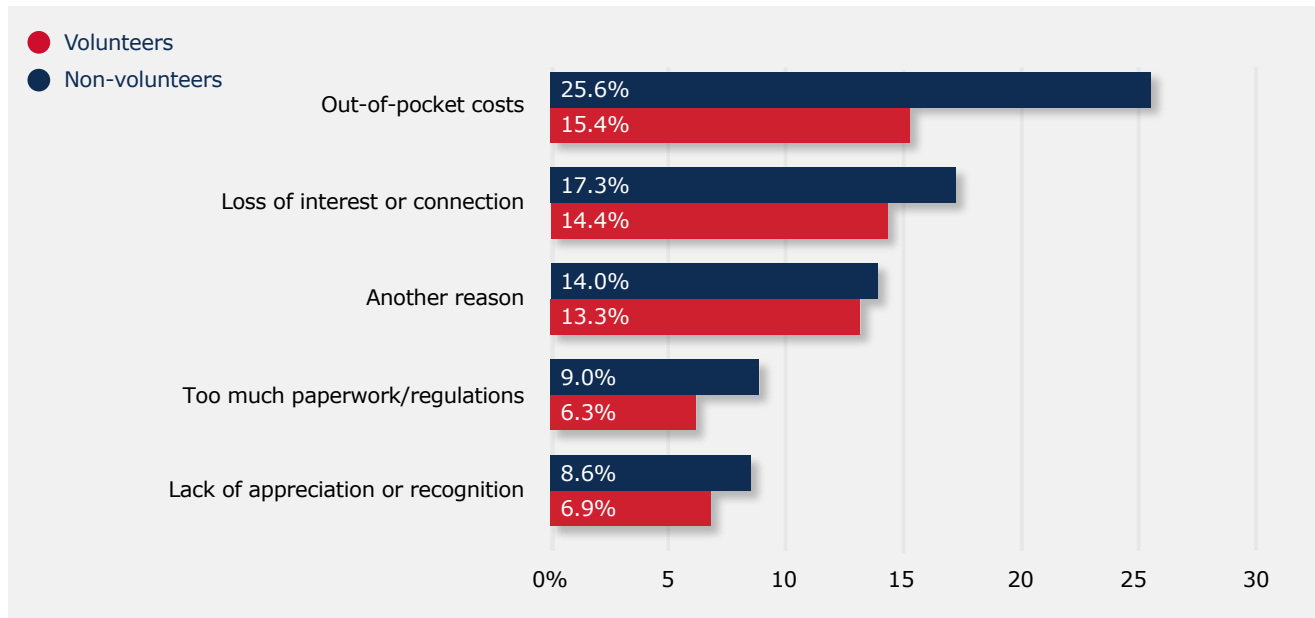


Figure 16: Volunteer attrition factors that had a higher impact on non-volunteers than volunteers (n = 2,528)



Excluding changes to work, study, or family, the challenges are different for current and former volunteers.

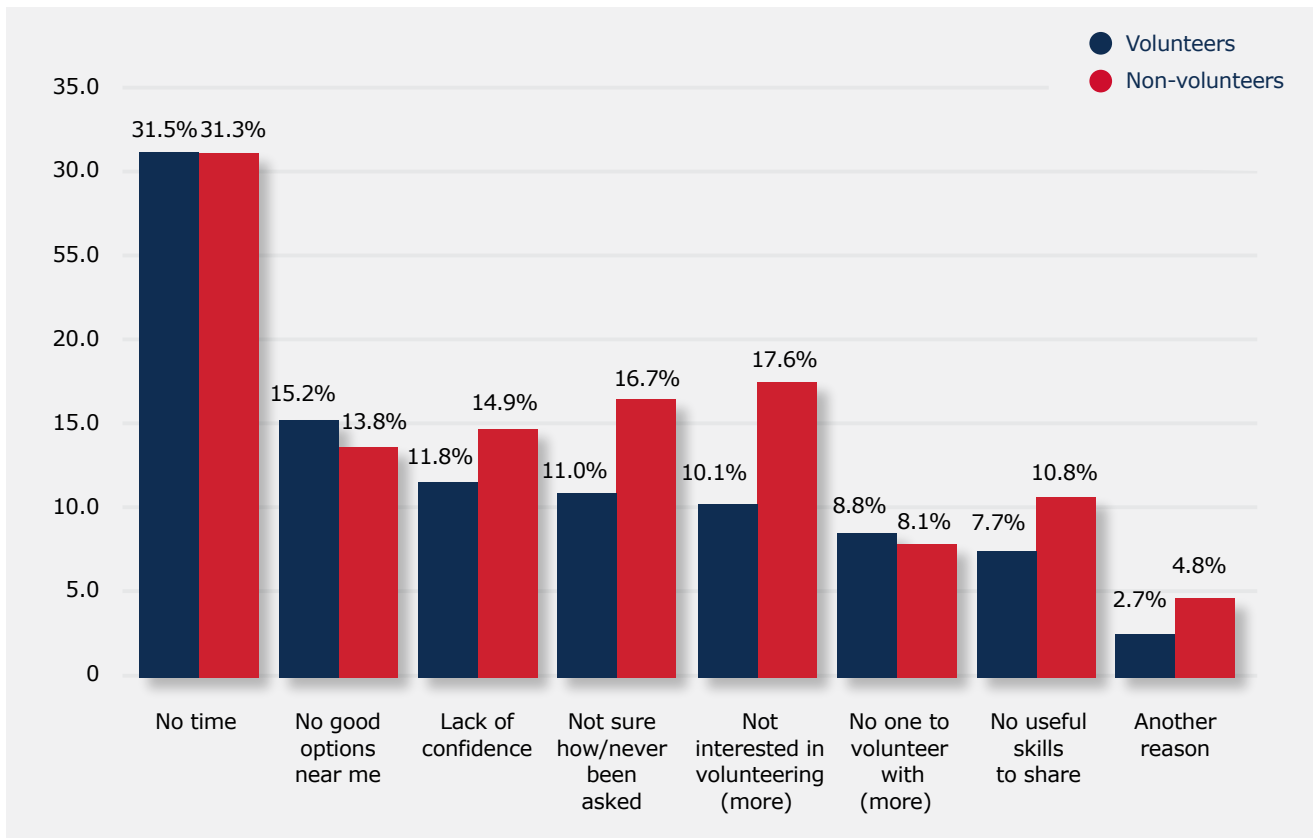
- For volunteers, the biggest issues were:
 1. Burnout (over-volunteering) – 16%
 2. Travel demands – 16%
 3. Out-of-pocket costs – 15%
 4. Losing interest or connection – 14%
 5. Safety concerns or other reasons – 13%
- For non-volunteers, the top barriers were:
 1. Out-of-pocket costs – 26%
 2. Loss of interest or connection – 17%
 3. Other reasons – 14%
 4. Burnout (over-volunteering) – 12%
 5. Travel demands – 11%

This shows clear differences: financial costs may be the biggest barrier stopping people from starting or returning to volunteering, while for current volunteers, the bigger risks are burnout and travel demands.

Other factors

Beyond basic capacity limits like health or family duties, there are other barriers that stop people from volunteering more, or from starting in the first place.

Figure 17: Other volunteer constraints – barriers to volunteering more (n = 2,528)



The biggest barrier for both groups is time, with about 31% of volunteers and non-volunteers saying they simply do not have enough of it. Unlike life changes that cause people to stop volunteering, this shows that time is an ongoing and universal challenge.

Other barriers differ between the two groups:

Non-volunteers are more likely to say they are not interested (18% vs 10% of volunteers), unsure how to get involved (17% vs 11%), lack confidence (15% vs 12%), or feel they lack useful skills (11% vs 8%).

Volunteers are slightly more affected by practical issues, like not having good options nearby (15% vs 14%).

Interestingly, a third of current volunteers (33%) said none of these things were a problem, compared to only a quarter of non-volunteers (25%). This suggests that once people are already connected to volunteering, they face fewer ongoing barriers.

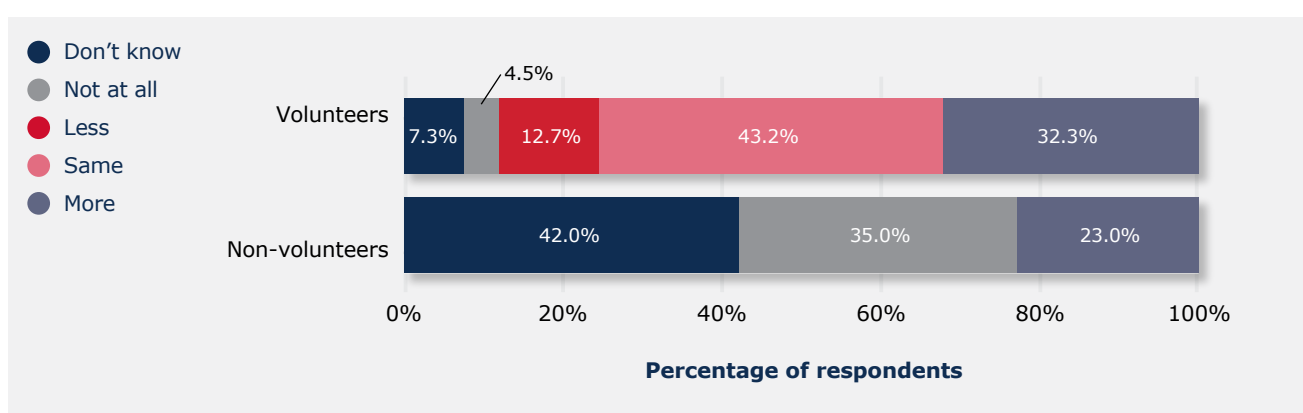
Overall, among other factors, non-volunteers are held back more by issues of interest, awareness, confidence, and skills, while current volunteers are more affected by operational challenges like where and how to get involved.

Future intent to volunteer

As of 2025, one-third of current volunteers (32.3%) expected to increase their involvement over the next three years, 43.2% planned to maintain the same level, and about one in five anticipated reducing or ceasing activity. Only 7.3% were uncertain.

Among non-volunteers, 23.0% intended to start volunteering, 35.0% expected to remain non-volunteers, and 42.0% were uncertain.

Figure 18: Future intent of NSW residents to volunteer (n = 2,528)



Looking across years, the share of volunteers intending to increase participation rose steadily from 24.7% in 2021 to 31.2% in 2023 and 32.3% in 2025, while intentions to reduce or stop remained stable. Non-volunteer intentions were more volatile, rising from 11.1% in 2021 to 27.2% in 2023 before dipping to 23.0% in 2025.

Persistent high uncertainty among non-volunteers suggests that future growth will depend less on those already inclined to volunteer and more on engaging this undecided group.

Volunteering optimism

Volunteering optimism describes how positive or negative people feel about their future involvement in volunteering. People who say they will “volunteer more” are classed as highly optimistic, those expecting to “stay the same” are moderately optimistic, while those who plan to “volunteer less” or “stop” are less optimistic.

Statistical analysis showed clear differences in which groups were more or less optimistic about their future volunteering. Older people and people living in regional or rural areas tended to be less optimistic.

By contrast, people with higher education, those working more paid hours, students, carers, and those with higher incomes were more optimistic about continuing or increasing their involvement.

Gender, disability status, and English as a second language background did not appear to make a difference once other factors were taken into account.

SECTION 2: VOLUNTEER MANAGERS

Table 7: Key findings about volunteers in NSW in 2025

	NSW 2025
Key inclusion metrics <i>(the percentage of volunteer managers that include these demographics in their programs)</i>	83.3% include volunteers aged 65+ 27.0% include volunteers aged under 18 48.2% include culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) volunteers 21.0% include online or remote volunteers
Top 3 recruitment channels	1. Family and friends of volunteers 2. Social media 3. Website
Why people reduce or leave volunteering <i>(as perceived by volunteer managers)</i>	Too much paperwork/red-tape
Who pays for volunteering programs <i>(Paid managers)</i>	The volunteer manager (direct) – 11.0% The volunteer manager (reimbursed) – 13.1% The organisation – 75.7%
Who pays for volunteering programs <i>(Unpaid managers)</i>	The volunteer manager (direct) – 24.7% The volunteer manager (reimbursed) – 18.1% The organisation – 57.2%
The 3 biggest changes of the last 2 years <i>(as perceived by volunteer managers)</i>	Volunteers need more training Volunteers want flexible hours Fewer board-level volunteers are available
Top 5 issues in volunteering <i>(as perceived by volunteer managers)</i>	1. Volunteer physical health and safety 2. Volunteer retention 3. Volunteer mental health and safety 4. Volunteer recruitment 5. Risk, insurance and legal requirements
AI utilisation	65.0% of general workforce 32.4% paid volunteer managers 16.6% unpaid volunteer managers
Volunteer managers who expect demand for volunteers to increase	69.1% (paid volunteer managers) 68.8% (unpaid volunteer managers)
Volunteer managers who are almost certain that more people will be volunteering with their organisation in 3 years' time	18.7% (paid volunteer managers) 8.5% (unpaid volunteer managers)
Volunteer managers who say they will be doing more with their organisation in 3 years' time	12.1% (paid volunteer managers) 17.4% (unpaid volunteer managers)

The 2025 Volunteer Manager Survey, run online in May and June 2025, received 699 valid responses from volunteer managers across NSW. While it used a non-probability sample, the large number of responses, along with comparisons to surveys from 2023 and 2021, provide confidence in the reliability of the results and allow for useful trend analysis over time.

Paid versus unpaid volunteer manager characteristics

In 2025, the analysis of the characteristics of responding volunteer managers switched from using *average* (mean) figures to *middle* (median) figures, because the data is very skewed – a small number of very large organisations manage thousands of volunteers, while most manage far fewer. Medians give a truer picture of a “typical” volunteer manager and are not distorted by these extremes – see the Methodology for a detailed explanation of this approach and its occasionally anomalous outcomes.

Table 8: Median responses to the Volunteer Manager Survey (n = 699)

	Paid volunteer managers	Unpaid volunteer managers
Registered volunteers managed in the last 12 months	70 volunteers	21.5 volunteers
Informal volunteers managed in the last 12 months	0 volunteers	5 volunteers
Net annual growth (volunteers)	8.6%	14.0%
Total registered volunteer hours	20 hours per week	20 hours per week
Total informal volunteer hours	2 hours per week	17 hours per week

The results show that paid volunteer managers typically oversee bigger programs: a median of 70 registered volunteers in the last year, compared to 21.5 for unpaid managers. However, unpaid managers reported higher annual growth in volunteer numbers (14% vs 8.6%). Both groups managed the same median hours of registered volunteering (20 hours per week), but unpaid managers coordinated far more informal volunteer time (17 hours vs 2 hours per week).

Given the high rate of informal volunteering generally in society, the low figures for informal volunteering among paid managers likely reflect that many of these contributions happen outside their formal systems, meaning they may not see or record them. Unpaid managers, on the other hand, appear to have greater visibility of informal volunteer work.

Table 9: Average hours worked per week as a volunteer manager (n = 699)

	Paid volunteer managers	Unpaid volunteer managers
Paid hours per week as a volunteer manager	23.0	NA
Unpaid hours per week as a volunteer manager	4.3	11.8

Paid managers also spent an average of 23.0 paid hours a week on their role, plus 4.3 hours of unpaid overtime – about 15.7% extra. Over a year, this adds up to almost 10 ‘bonus’ work weeks provided without pay, nearly double the national average for unpaid overtime. This means the real value of these roles is likely higher than it appears on paper.

Unpaid volunteer managers also contribute an average of 11.8 hours a week in their role, almost half the typical paid manager’s hours. This reflects a significant ongoing contribution from people who coordinate volunteers without receiving formal pay.

Volunteer inclusion

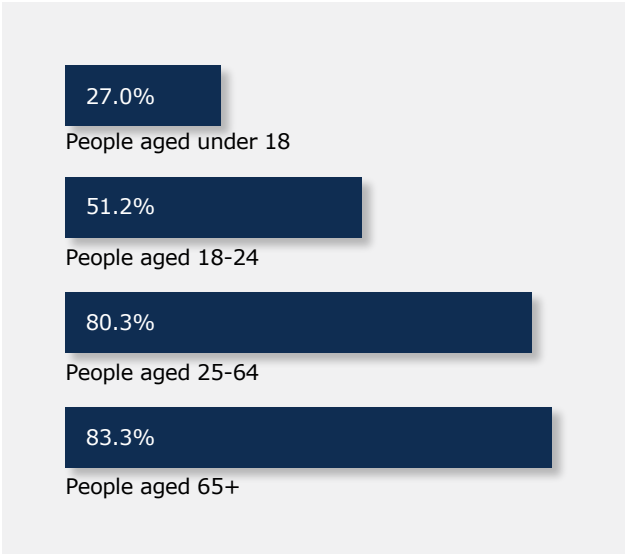
The 2025 survey shows that volunteer managers work with a wide range of people, but engagement varies by demographic group.

Figure 19: Volunteer inclusion by employment status (n = 699)



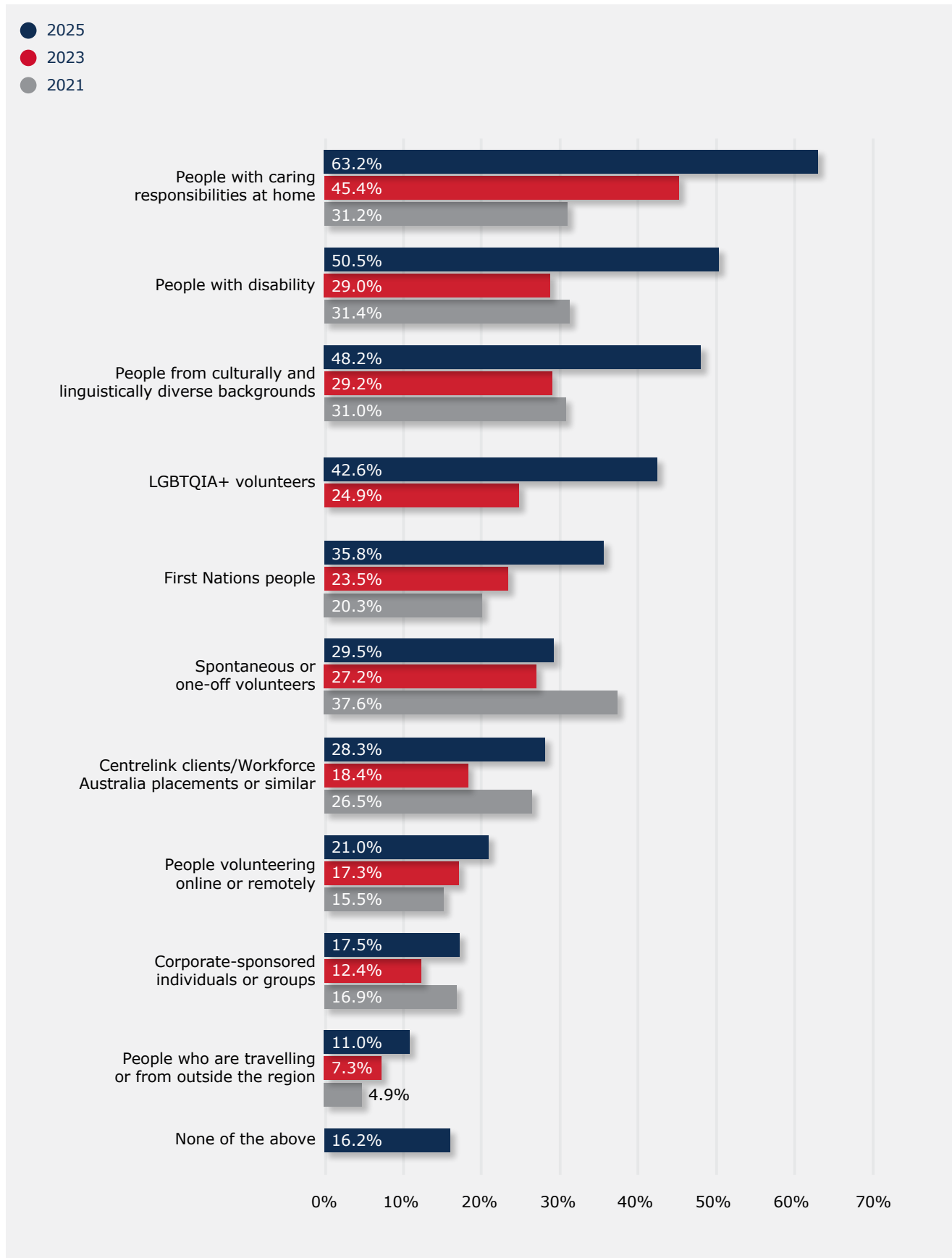
Managers most often work with people who are not in paid work (80.1%) or who work part-time (72.8%). Engagement with full-time workers is lower at 60.7%, though this has risen in the surveys from 50.8% in 2023 and 52.5% in 2021.

Figure 20: Volunteer inclusion by age (n = 699)



Engagement increases with age, with 83.3% of managers working with volunteers aged 65 and over, 80.3% with those aged 25–64, 51.2% with 18–24-year-olds, and 27.0% with under-18s.

This contrasts with broader participation data, where younger adults are more likely to volunteer, suggesting many of the formal programs that responded to our survey may not be attracting younger people. Over-65 engagement has increased since 2023 (68.4%) but is similar to 2021 (82.4%).

Figure 21: Volunteer inclusion by demographic traits

Since 2021, volunteer managers have reported notable increases in their awareness of the intersectional characteristics of their volunteers:

- People with caring responsibilities: 63.2% in 2025 (up from 45.4% in 2023 and 31.2% in 2021)
- People with disability: 50.5% (up from 29.0% in 2023 and 31.4% in 2021)
- Culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds: 48.2% (up from 29.2% in 2023 and 31.0% in 2021)
- First Nations people: 35.8% (up from 23.5% in 2023 and 20.3% in 2021)
- LGBTQIA+: 42.6% (up from 24.9% in 2023; no 2021 data)
- Remote/online volunteering: 21.0% (up from 17.3% in 2023 and 15.5% in 2021)
- Travelling/out-of-area: 11.0% (up from 7.3% in 2023 and 4.9% in 2021)

Overall, the 2025 data suggest stronger recognition of several underrepresented groups compared with past surveys, while also pointing to continuing gaps in engaging younger volunteers in their formal programs.

Equitable inclusion

The table below compares two measures of demographic representation in formal volunteering.

The first column is each group's share of the total formal volunteer population, based on population-level participation data. In other words, people aged 65 and over make up 17% of the population of formal volunteers.

The second column shows the proportion of large volunteer-involving organisations (defined here as those with 50 or more volunteers) whose volunteer managers report including members of that demographic in their programs. In other words, 91% of large volunteer-involving organisations report include people aged 65 and over as volunteers.

The difference between these two measures – shown in the final column – indicates the extent to which members of a demographic are present across large organisations relative to their overall prevalence in formal volunteering. The higher the difference, the better the rate of inclusion.

Table 10: Inclusion among larger volunteer-involving organisations (n = 331)

	Percent of formal volunteer population	Inclusion rate in large organisations (50+ volunteers)	Difference
People aged over 65	17.0%	90.9%	73.9 ppt
People aged under 25	11.3%	71.9%	60.6 ppt
Non-heterosexual volunteers	12.7%	61.0%	48.3 ppt
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people	23.1%	61.9%	38.9 ppt
People living with disability	37.7%	64.4%	26.6 ppt

ppt = percentage points

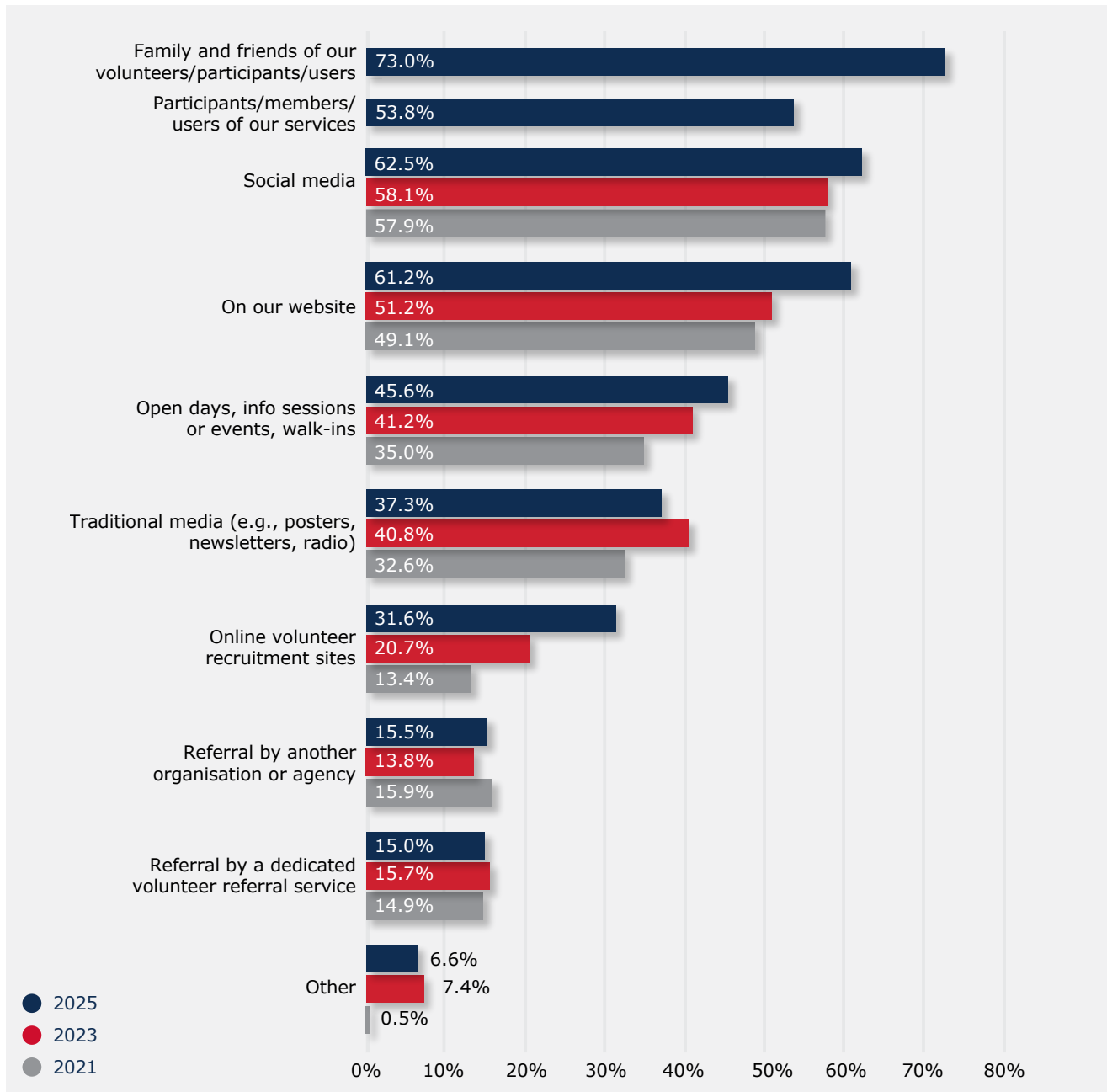
Demographics with smaller overall representation in the volunteering population – such as young people, older adults, and non-heterosexual volunteers – tend to be better distributed in these larger volunteer programs.

Meanwhile, demographics with higher population-level representation, such as people with disability and those from CALD backgrounds, show a more proportional distribution across volunteer-involving organisations.

Volunteer recruitment

Figure 22 shows that relationship-based recruitment remains the main way volunteer managers attract people.

Figure 22: Recruitment strategies utilised by responding volunteer managers



Digital channels continue to grow. Social media rose from 57.9% in 2021 to 62.5% in 2025, organisational websites from 49.1% to 61.2%, and online recruitment sites more than doubled from 13.4% to 31.6% – the biggest proportional jump.

Traditional media (posters, newsletters, radio) peaked at 40.8% in 2023 but fell to 37.3% in 2025, while

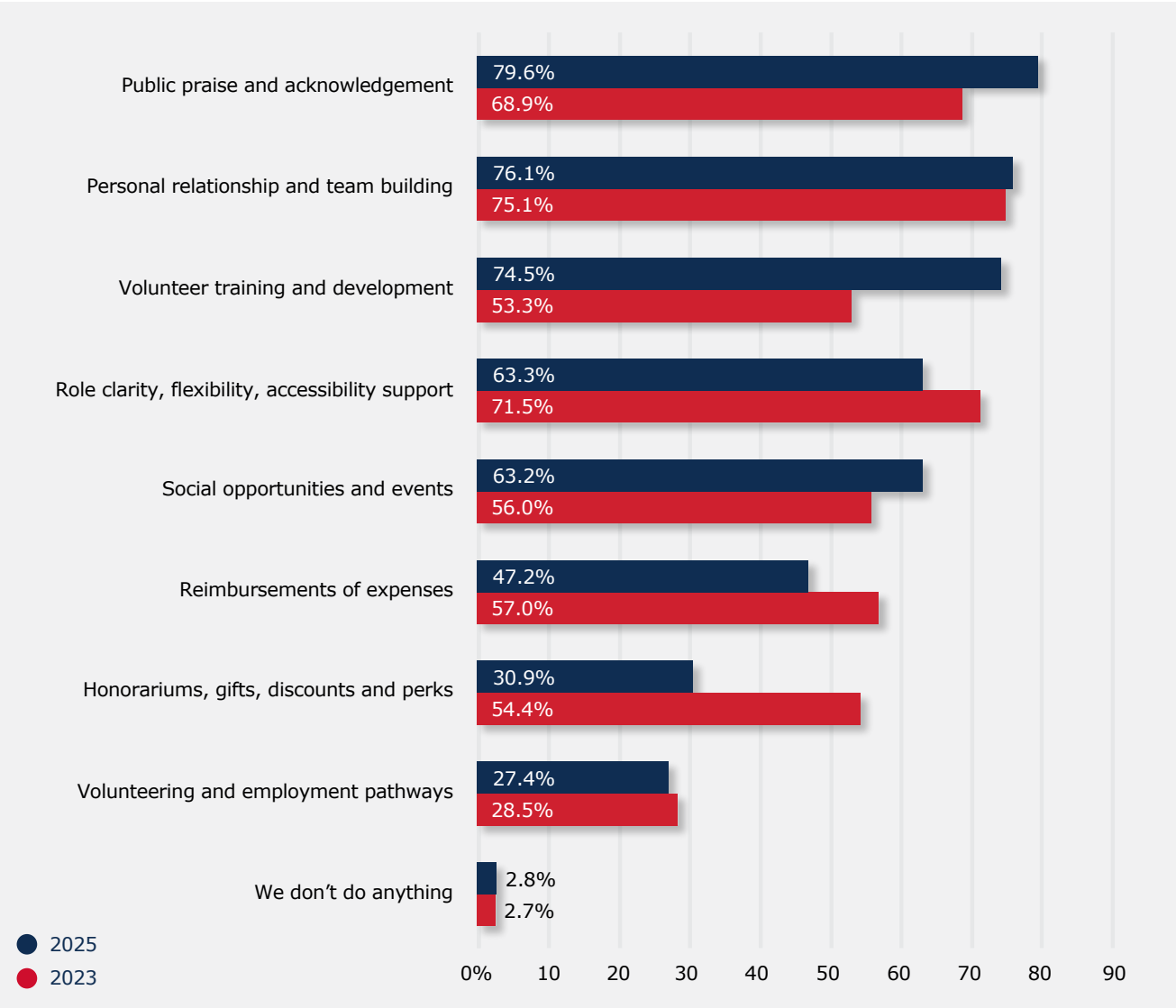
open days and events rose steadily from 35.0% in 2021 to 45.6% in 2025.

Formal referral systems stayed relatively stable: volunteer referral services at around 15% each year, and referrals from other agencies at about the same level. These remain useful but secondary channels compared to relationship-based and digital recruitment.

Volunteer recognition, engagement and retention

Almost all volunteer managers in both 2023 (97.3%) and 2025 (97.2%) used some form of recognition or retention strategy.

Figure 23: Methods used by volunteer managers to recognise, engage and retain volunteers



Public praise and acknowledgement were the most common approaches, growing from 68.9% in 2023 to 79.6% in 2025. Personal relationship and team-building activities stayed steady at around three-quarters of managers.

Some strategies showed bigger shifts. Volunteer training and development saw a sharp rise from 53.3% to 74.5%, while honorariums, gifts, discounts, and perks dropped from 54.4% to 30.9%. Social events rose from 56.0% to

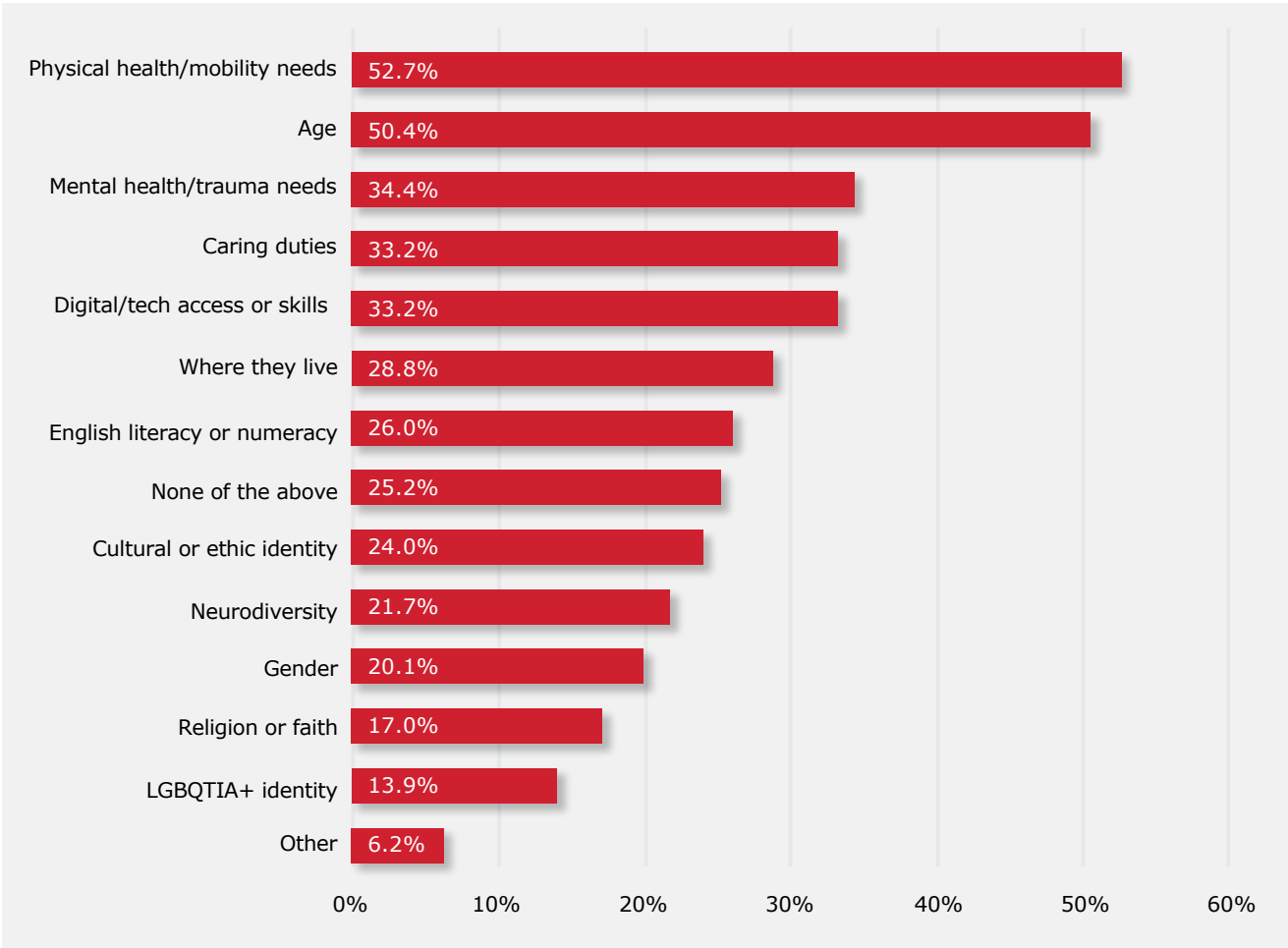
63.2%, while reimbursement of expenses fell from 57.0% to 47.2%.

Role clarity, flexibility, and accessibility support declined from 71.5% to 63.3%, while volunteering-to-employment pathways remained steady at about 28%.

Accommodating volunteers

In 2025, the survey asked for the first time how often volunteer managers make specific accommodations to better include and support volunteers with different needs or circumstances. These accommodations could involve changing roles, offering extra resources, providing flexible arrangements, or adapting communication to make volunteering more accessible.

Figure 24: Accommodations made by volunteer managers (n = 678)



The most common adjustments were for physical health and mobility (52.7%) and for age (50.4%), showing strong recognition of physical and life-stage needs. Around a third of managers made changes for mental health or trauma (34.4%), caring duties (33.2%), and technology access or skills (33.2%).

Fewer organisations adjusted for where volunteers live (28.8%), English literacy or numeracy (26.0%), cultural or ethnic identity (24.0%), neurodiversity (21.7%), gender (20.1%), religion or faith (17.0%), or LGBTQIA+ identity (13.9%).

A quarter of managers (25.2%) said they make no accommodations at all.

Looking at what volunteer managers say they do to support volunteers compared with what volunteers say they experience (reported in Section 1) shows some clear mismatches. In some areas, support lines up well with needs, but in others, the gaps are large.

For physical health, the match is fairly good: just over half of managers (52.7%) provide accommodations, while about one in ten volunteers with disabilities (11.2%) reported discrimination.

Age is similar – around half of managers (50.4%) provide accommodations, and 13.5% of volunteers overall reported age-related discrimination.

The biggest gap is for LGBTQIA+ volunteers. More than one in four (26.1%) reported discrimination, yet only about one in seven managers (13.9%) said they provide related accommodations.

For cultural and ethnic identity, alignment is better: one in four managers (24.0%) provide accommodations, while about one in ten volunteers (9.8%) reported discrimination. Gender support is slightly higher than reported discrimination (20.1% vs. 9.1%), although it is unclear the extent to which gender-diverse volunteers (who experience much higher rates of exclusion) are accounted for here.

In mental health, one in three managers (34.4%) offer accommodations, while one in ten volunteers with disabilities (10.4%) reported discrimination. Support for neurodivergent volunteers is emerging, with one in five managers (21.7%) offering accommodations, compared with about 15% of volunteers reporting discrimination.

As with the discussion of exclusion and discrimination in Section 1, several factors influence this discussion of accommodations and volunteer experience. Most notably, the respondents do not specify if the discrimination that they have experienced is something that can be addressed by an accommodation made

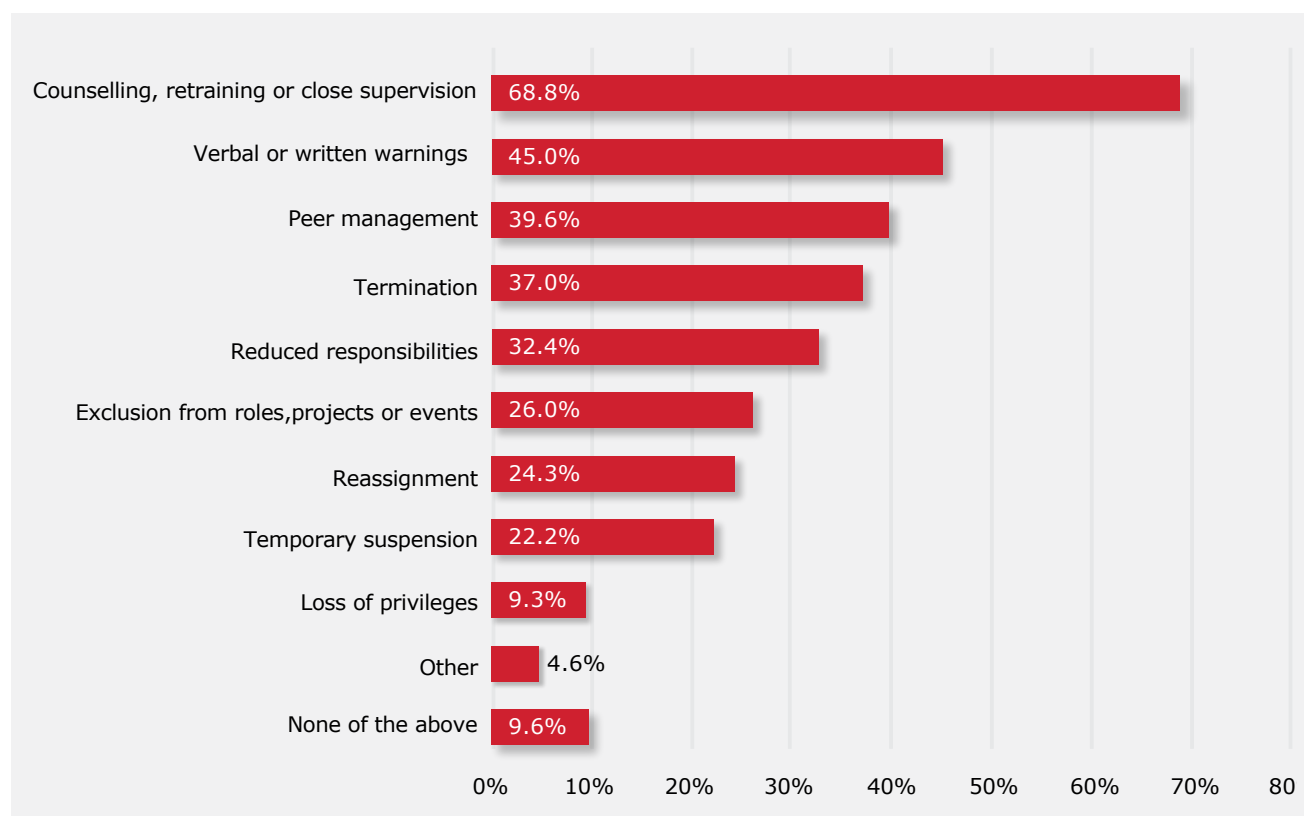
by a volunteer manager, or if it occurred while volunteering formally. The survey instruments also did not collect data on whether or not volunteers had disclosed the need for adjustments to a volunteer manager. Accommodations for volunteers is another significant area for future research to better understand the nuances of these complex issues.

However, this does not mean that there are no learnings for volunteer managers in this data. Importantly, one in four managers (25.2%) provide no accommodations at all. The biggest shortfalls in support are in areas where discrimination is highest – especially for LGBTQIA+ volunteers – showing that better targeted accommodations could help reduce people leaving volunteering because of experiences of exclusion or discrimination.

Managing concerning behaviour

In 2025, the survey asked for the first time how volunteer managers deal with issues such as poor performance, inappropriate conduct, ethical breaches, or repeated no-shows. Figure 25 provides the first clear picture of performance management interventions in the volunteering sector.

Figure 25: How volunteer managers manage concerning behaviour (n = 676)



The most common response was to offer support through counselling, retraining, or closer supervision, used by 68.8% of managers. This suggests most prefer to address problems by helping volunteers improve, rather than jumping straight to punitive action. Verbal or written warnings were given by 45.0% of managers, and 39.6% relied on peer-based approaches, showing that both formal and community-driven methods are common.

More serious actions were less frequent: 37.0% had terminated a volunteer, 32.4% had reduced responsibilities, and 26.0% had excluded someone from a specific role, project, or event. Reassignment to a different role was used by 24.3%, temporary suspension by 22.2%, and loss of privileges was the least common at 9.3%.

Around one in ten managers (9.6%) reported using none of these approaches, either because they had not encountered concerning behaviour or lacked formal processes, and 4.6% said they used other methods not listed. Overall, the results point to a stepped approach, starting with supportive interventions, moving through formal warnings and peer input, and using stronger consequences like suspension or termination only when needed.

Most pointed to changes in work or living circumstances (63.2% critical/known) and burnout from over-volunteering (41.3%) as the main drivers. Paperwork and red tape (37.0%), personality clashes or bad experiences (31.0%), and loss of interest or connection (31.0%) were also commonly recognised.

Other factors received far less attention. Less than one in five managers saw out-of-pocket costs, lack of appreciation, accessibility issues, or safety concerns as even a known issue, and discrimination ranked lowest, with nearly three-quarters of managers saying it was not an issue at all.

Reasons for leaving

In 2025, for the first time, volunteer managers were asked what they see as the biggest reasons volunteers stop or reduce their involvement.

Table 11: Volunteer manager perceptions of barriers to volunteering (n = 676)

Issue	Critical issue	Known issue	Minor issue	Not an issue
Change to work or living circumstances	17.6%	45.6%	24.5%	12.3%
Burnout (over-volunteering)	16.2%	25.1%	27.9%	30.8%
Too much paperwork / red tape	12.5%	24.5%	24.7%	38.4%
Personality clashes/bad experiences	9.4%	21.6%	39.1%	29.9%
Mismatch between role and expectations	7.1%	20.8%	37.9%	34.2%
Travel requirements	6.6%	19.7%	35.1%	38.5%
Loss of interest or connection (e.g., friends have left)	6.2%	24.8%	39.6%	29.4%
Out-of-pocket costs	5.7%	12.3%	22.7%	59.3%
Lack of appreciation or recognition	5.7%	12.9%	29.9%	51.5%
Accessibility issues	5.1%	15.3%	29.9%	49.8%
Discrimination (e.g., sexism, ableism, racism)	4.8%	4.0%	17.1%	74.1%
Safety concerns	4.5%	7.9%	25.6%	62.1%

Perceptions vs reality

When comparing what volunteer managers think drives people to stop volunteering with what departing volunteers actually say, Table 12 shows that clear gaps emerge. In several key areas, managers underestimate the problem, sometimes by more than half.

Table 12: Comparison of volunteer managers' and others' perceptions of barriers to volunteering

Issue	Critical issue for volunteer managers	Actual issue reported by volunteers	Net difference
Out-of-pocket costs	5.7%	17.4%	-3.0x
Safety concerns	4.5%	11.8%	-2.6x
Loss of interest or connection (e.g., friends have left)	6.2%	15.0%	-2.4x
Change to work or living circumstances	17.6%	39.9%	-2.3x
Travel requirements	6.6%	14.7%	-2.2x
Accessibility issues	5.1%	10.9%	-2.1x
Discrimination (e.g., sexism, ableism, racism)	4.8%	9.0%	-1.9x
Lack of appreciation or recognition	5.7%	7.2%	-1.3x
Personality clashes/bad experiences	9.4%	10.2%	-1.1x
Burnout (over-volunteering)	16.2%	15.1%	+1.1x
Mismatch between role and expectations	7.1%	6.5%	+1.1x
Too much paperwork / red tape	12.5%	6.8%	+1.8x

The biggest blind spot is out-of-pocket costs. Only 5.7% of managers see this as a critical issue, yet 17.4% of departing volunteers cite it as a reason for leaving – a three-fold underestimation.

Safety concerns are similarly downplayed (4.5% vs 11.8%), as are loss of interest or connection (6.2% vs 15.0%), changes to work or living circumstances (17.6% vs 39.9%), travel requirements (6.6% vs 14.7%), accessibility issues (5.1% vs 10.9%), and discrimination (4.8% vs 9.0%). These patterns suggest managers are often unaware of the scale of structural or financial barriers affecting volunteers.

Some factors are better understood. Lack of appreciation and personality clashes show only small differences between manager perception and volunteer experience, while burnout and role mismatch are slightly overestimated.

The one area where managers significantly overestimate a problem is paperwork/red tape. This is viewed as critical by 12.5% of managers but cited by only 6.8% of departing volunteers.

Overall, the results point to a need for better feedback channels so managers can more accurately understand – and address – the real reasons volunteers step away.

Sector change

The 2025 survey asked volunteer managers to reflect on how volunteering patterns have changed since 2023, providing a snapshot of where things are improving, declining, or staying the same.

Table 13: Perceptions of volunteering sector change since 2023 – increases (n = 635)

Change area	Less	About the same	More	Net difference
The amount of training volunteers need	3.9%	55.7%	40.3%	10.3x
Volunteers want flexible hours	4.4%	69.3%	26.3%	6.0x
The direct and indirect costs to volunteers	8.2%	66.1%	25.7%	3.1x
Volunteers are burning out	16.5%	58.0%	25.5%	1.5x

Table 13 shows that managers reported the biggest increase in training requirements, with four in ten saying volunteers now need more training, and only a few seeing a decrease.

Flexible hours were also in greater demand, with more than a quarter noticing volunteers asking for more flexible arrangements.

Smaller increases were seen in the costs volunteers face and in reported burnout, suggesting gradual rises in these pressures.

Table 14: Perceptions of volunteering sector change since 2023 – decreases (n = 635)

Change area	Less	About the same	More	Net difference
Board-level volunteers are available	26.6%	67.9%	5.5%	-4.8x
Hours people want to volunteer	34.6%	55.3%	10.1%	-3.4x
Organisations want to volunteer employees' time	23.0%	65.8%	11.2%	-2.1x
Volunteering is done online or from home	30.4%	54.5%	15.1%	-2.0x
Volunteers are claiming expenses	18.1%	72.8%	9.1%	-2.0x
Number of youth / young people who want to volunteer	32.8%	46.9%	20.3%	-1.6x
Number of people who want to volunteer	38.9%	36.4%	24.7%	-1.6x

The most noticeable decline was in board-level volunteer availability, with more managers saying it is harder to find governance volunteers now than two years ago (Table 14).

There was also a drop in the number of hours people are willing to give, and smaller decreases in corporate volunteering programs, online/home-based volunteering, expense claiming, and both youth engagement and overall interest in volunteering.

Perceptions of change

Most managers saw no change in expense claiming (73% said it was about the same), flexibility demands (69%), and costs to volunteers (66%).

By contrast, general interest in volunteering showed the most movement, with only 36% saying it had stayed the same, indicating this is a more highly volatile area across organisations.

Youth engagement also showed moderate volatility, with fewer than half reporting stability, while board-level volunteer availability was stable for just over two-thirds despite having the largest net decline.

Training needs, while showing the largest positive shift overall, were unchanged for more than half of organisations, suggesting that those who felt the change almost exclusively felt the need had increased.

Remote volunteering also sat in the middle, with just over half of managers saying it had remained steady.

Looking across the 2021, 2023, and 2025 surveys, only three areas showed a consistent direction of change.

The clearest and most sustained increase is in the recognition of the number of volunteers seeking flexible hours, which has grown in every survey over the past five years. In contrast, corporate volunteering has declined in all three surveys, although the drop has been smaller in the most recent iteration.

The perceived demand for online or home-based volunteering has followed a different path: it grew during the pandemic years, then fell back as more activity returned to in-person formats.

Issues in volunteer management

As in previous years, the 2025 survey asked volunteer managers to rate how important different challenges are to their work. These were grouped into three areas: volunteer-related issues (such as safety, retention, and recruitment), organisational issues (such as governance and funding), and external issues (such as regulation and technology).

Table 15: Volunteer-related issues and their relative importance to volunteer managers (n = 628)

Issue	Critically important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important at all / does not apply
Volunteer physical health and safety	81.2%	15.9%	1.6%	1.3%
Volunteer retention	79.6%	17.0%	2.9%	0.5%
Volunteer mental health and safety	78.0%	17.5%	3.0%	1.4%
Volunteer recruitment	73.2%	22.9%	2.9%	1.0%
Volunteer rights, responsibilities, protection and dispute management	67.0%	24.4%	7.0%	1.6%
Volunteer appreciation and recognition inside our organisation	64.6%	27.7%	7.0%	0.6%
Volunteer accessibility and inclusion	64.5%	26.6%	6.8%	2.1%
Volunteer administration and management	61.8%	31.7%	4.9%	1.6%
Appreciation and recognition of our volunteers by the community	49.0%	40.3%	9.1%	1.6%

Volunteer health and safety remains the clear top priority, with 81.2% of managers rating physical safety as critically important and 78.0% doing the same for mental health and safety.

Retaining volunteers is also a key focus (79.6% critical), followed closely by recruitment (73.2%). Managers also place strong importance on volunteer rights, responsibilities, and dispute management (67.0%), as well as appreciation and recognition inside their organisation (64.6%) and accessibility and inclusion (64.5%).

Administration and management matters are rated critical by 61.8% of managers, while community recognition of volunteers is less often seen as critical (49.0%), though almost all still see it as at least somewhat important.

Table 16: Organisation-related issues and their relative importance to volunteer managers (n = 621)

Issue	Critically important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important at all / does not apply
Organisational culture, diversity and equity	65.2%	27.7%	3.7%	3.4%
Financial viability/sustainability	63.4%	27.5%	5.6%	3.4%
Organisational governance	62.2%	30.8%	4.7%	2.4%
Project, program and change management	49.9%	39.0%	7.2%	3.9%
Access to volunteer management resources, tools, and templates	48.1%	37.2%	10.8%	3.9%
Impact measurement, evaluation and reporting	42.7%	39.3%	14.3%	3.7%
Access to necessary facilities and locations (e.g., sporting grounds, change rooms, rehearsal spaces)	42.5%	29.1%	14.2%	14.2%

Inside their organisations, managers are most concerned with organisational culture, diversity, and equity (65.2%), financial sustainability (63.4%), and governance (62.2%).

Other issues such as project and change management (49.9%), access to volunteer management resources and tools (48.1%), impact measurement (42.7%), and access to facilities (42.5%) are still important but are less often rated critical.

Access to facilities is also the most likely to be considered “not applicable,” reflecting the fact that not all volunteer programs rely on physical venues.

Table 17: External issues and their relative importance to volunteer managers (n = 618)

Issue	Critically important	Somewhat important	Not very important	Not important at all / does not apply
Risk, insurance and legal requirements	70.1%	25.4%	3.2%	1.3%
Access to funding, grants or sponsorship	66.5%	21.2%	7.1%	5.2%
Red tape and/or regulatory requirements	54.7%	35.0%	7.1%	3.2%
Engagement with government and policy	53.1%	35.8%	7.8%	3.4%
Technology, AI and digital disruption	31.4%	40.9%	21.0%	6.6%

Outside their organisations, the biggest concerns are risk, insurance, and legal requirements (70.1%) and access to funding, grants, and sponsorship (66.5%).

Regulatory requirements (54.7%) and engagement with government and policy (53.1%) are also significant, while technology, AI, and digital disruption rank lowest at 31.4% critical – but over 70% still see it as at least somewhat important.

Trends over time

Looking at the top five issues across the 2021, 2023, and 2025 surveys shows that priorities have been remarkably stable. Volunteer health and safety has held the top spot in all three years, with retention consistently second.

Recruitment, funding, risk management, organisational culture, and internal volunteer recognition also appear regularly in the top tier.

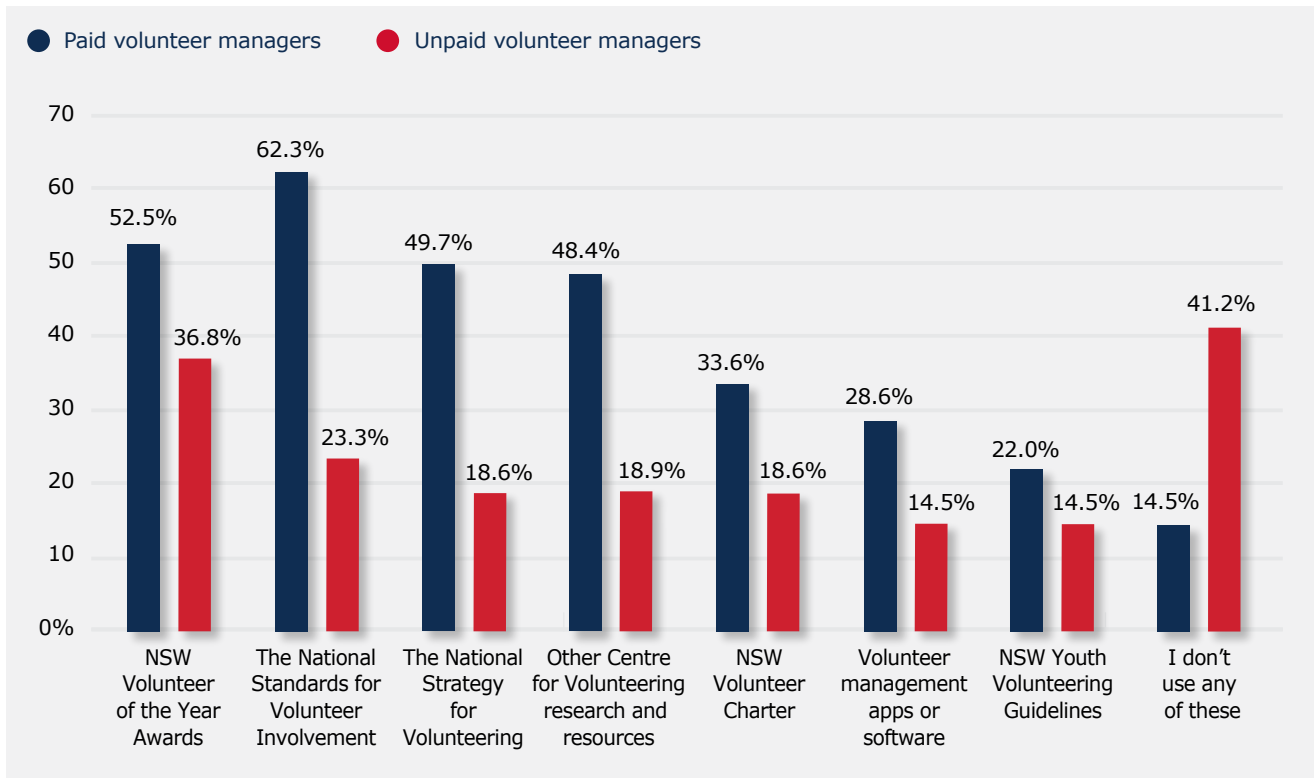
This suggests that the biggest challenges in volunteer management are long-standing and fundamental, rather than temporary responses to short-term changes in the sector.

Table 18: Top five volunteer manager issues over time

2025	2023	2021
Volunteer health and safety	Volunteer health and safety	Volunteer health and safety
Volunteer retention	Volunteer retention	Volunteer retention
Volunteer recruitment	Financial viability/sustainability	Volunteer recruitment
Risk, insurance and legal requirements	Access to funding, grants or sponsorship	Organisational culture, inclusion and diversity
Volunteer rights, responsibilities, protection and dispute management	Volunteer appreciation and recognition inside our organisation	Volunteer appreciation and recognition inside our organisation

Two areas do show clear directional movement over time – access to volunteer management resources, and technology, AI, and digital disruption (see Figures 26 & 27).

Access to volunteer management resources, tools, and templates has steadily risen in perceived importance – with 48.1% of volunteer managers considering it a critically important issue up from 33.5% in 2021 – reflecting growing recognition that volunteer management is a professional skillset that benefits from dedicated resources and structured approaches.

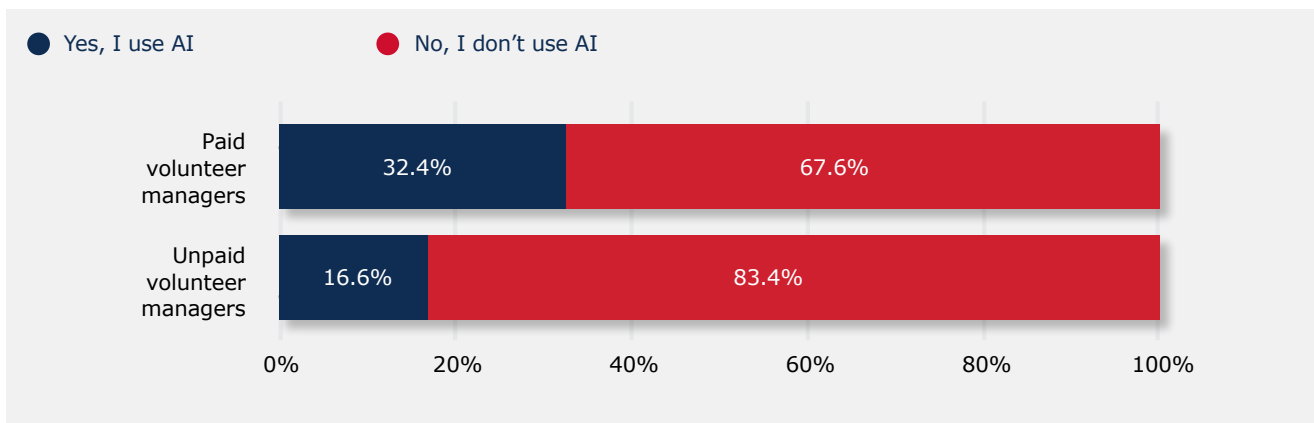
Figure 26: Selected resource utilisation by volunteer managers (n = 593)

In this respect, paid volunteer managers reported substantially higher usage rates across almost all listed resources compared to unpaid managers (Figure 26). The NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards were the most used resource overall, cited by 52.5% of paid managers versus 36.8% of unpaid managers.

Other highly used resources among paid managers included the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement (62.3% vs 23.3%), the National Strategy for Volunteering (49.7% vs 18.6%),

and other Centre for Volunteering research and resources (48.4% vs 18.9%).

On the other hand, the urgency around technology, AI, and digital disruption has fallen from 43.2% in 2021 to 31.4% in 2025, possibly because many organisations have already integrated digital tools into everyday operations or are focusing on other, more immediate priorities.

Figure 27: AI adoption among volunteer managers (n = 593)

To better understand this, Figure 27 shows that when it comes to artificial intelligence, paid volunteer managers were almost twice as likely to use AI in their work (32.4%) compared to unpaid managers (16.6%).

Figure 28 shows that, among AI users, the most common uses were stakeholder communications (71.5%), research (50.7%), program planning and delivery (41.7%), and reporting (39.6%). Some also used AI for grant writing (35.4%) and policy development (31.9%).

Figure 28: Artificial intelligence use in volunteer management (n = 147)

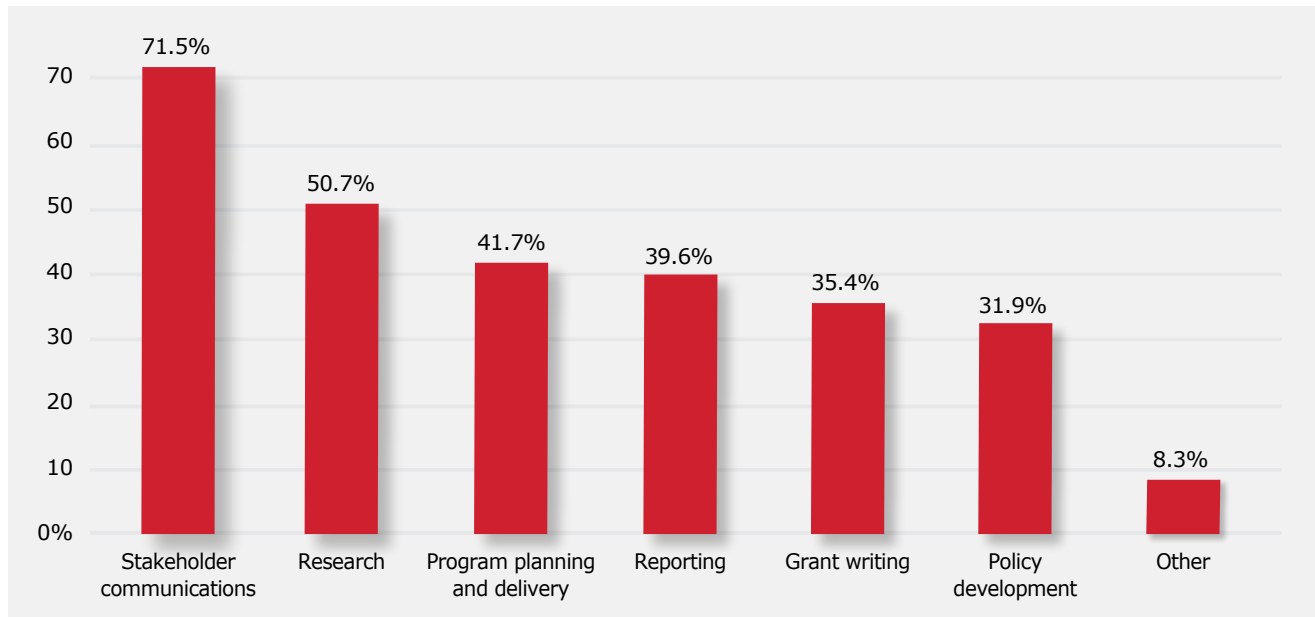
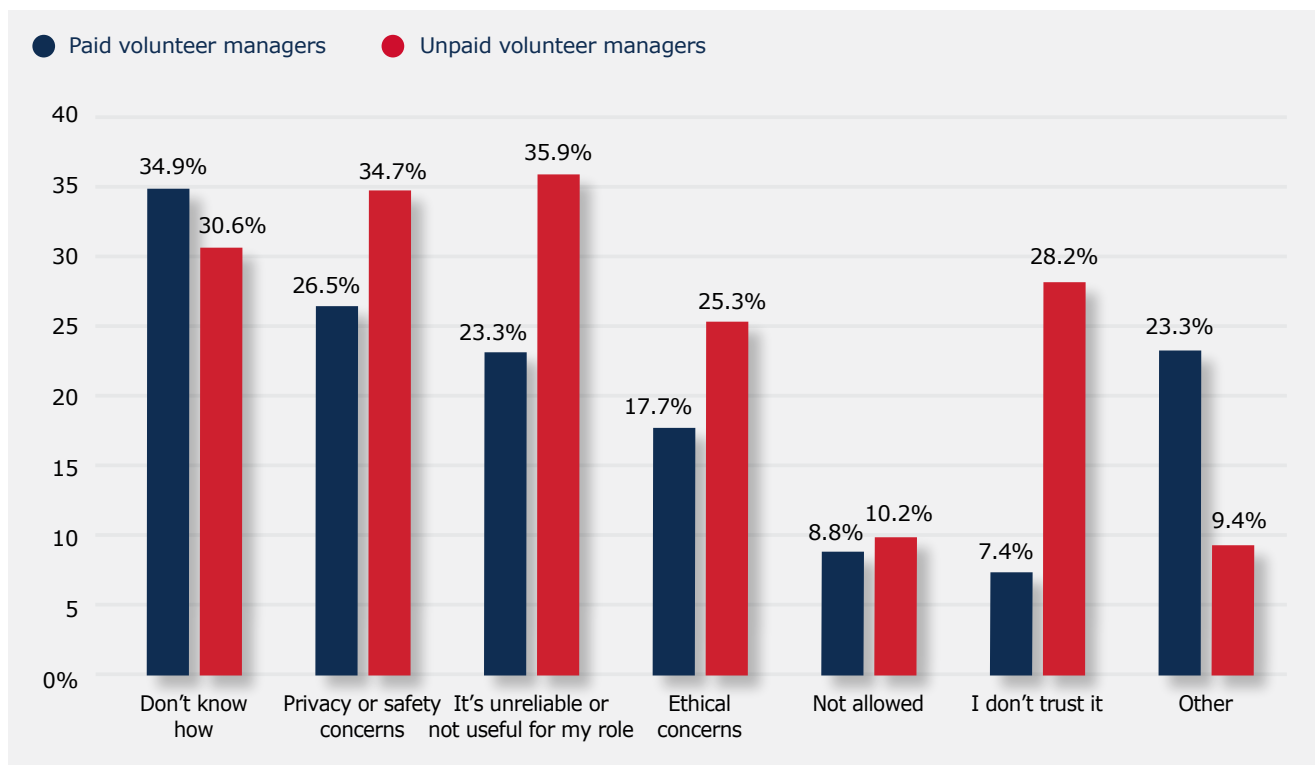


Figure 29: Barriers to AI adoption in volunteer management (n = 460)



Non-users cited different main barriers depending on whether they were paid or unpaid (Figure 29). Paid managers were most likely to report a lack of knowledge (34.9%), followed by concerns about privacy and safety (26.5%), and perceived unreliability (23.3%).

For unpaid managers, perceived unreliability was the leading barrier (35.9%), followed by concerns about privacy and safety (34.7%), and a lack of knowledge (30.6%). Distrust in AI was much more common among unpaid managers (28.2%) than paid ones (7.4%).

Compared with national workplace trends, the volunteering sector lags behind in AI adoption. A KPMG/University of Melbourne study¹ found that 63% of Australian workers intentionally use AI at work and 65% say their organisations use it – about double the rate seen among volunteer managers.

While this suggests slower uptake, the sector's cautious approach may reflect its focus on protecting volunteers and managing risk, given wider evidence of AI-related mistakes and policy breaches in other industries.

Getting help

Table 19 shows that when volunteer managers need support with challenges in their role, their go-to sources differ depending on whether they are paid or unpaid.

Paid managers are most likely to turn to their organisation – such as a supervisor – for help (37.4%), compared with 23.6% of unpaid managers. This may be because paid roles tend to have clearer reporting lines and access to formal professional development.

Unpaid managers, by contrast, rely more on their immediate networks. Over a quarter (26.6%) seek help from the volunteers they manage, compared with 15.6% of paid managers. They are also more likely to turn to other volunteer managers (24.3% vs 16.4%).

Paid managers also engage more often with peak or professional volunteer bodies (13.6% vs 6.7%) and are slightly more likely to use online resources (7.2% vs 5.1%). Both groups make relatively little use of family, friends or colleagues (8.9% unpaid vs 6.4% paid) or other sources of help, which remain minimal.

These patterns are almost identical to those seen in 2023, the first time this question was asked.

Table 19: Where volunteer managers seek help with managing volunteers (n = 618)

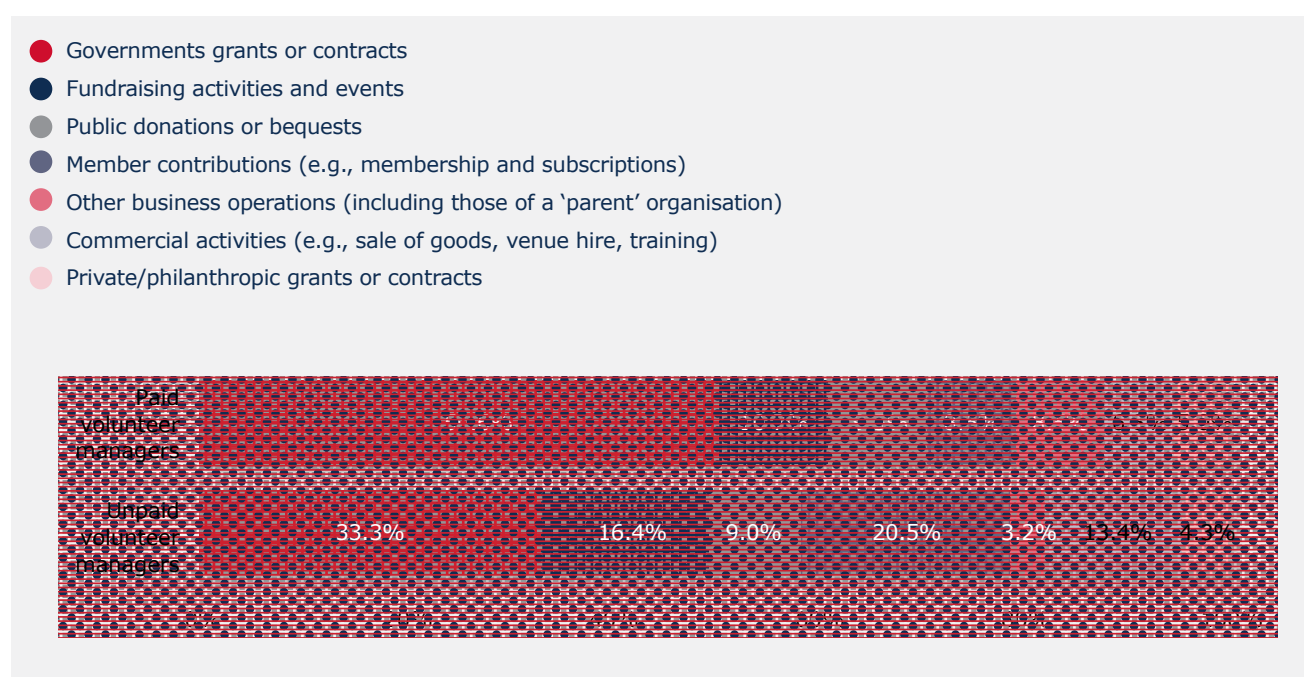
	Paid volunteer managers	Unpaid volunteer managers
The volunteers I manage	15.6%	26.6%
Fellow volunteer managers	16.4%	24.3%
The organisation I volunteer with/work for (e.g. my supervisor)	37.4%	23.6%
Family, friends and colleagues	6.4%	8.9%
Peak or professional volunteer bodies	13.6%	6.7%
The internet	7.2%	5.1%
Other sources of help	3.5%	4.8%

¹ KPMG, 2025, *Trust, Attitudes and Use of Artificial Intelligence: A Global Study 2025*

How organisations are funded

The Volunteer Manager Survey also looked at where organisations get their money from, comparing those that employ paid volunteer managers with those that rely on unpaid managers. The results, in Figure 30, show very different funding patterns that reflect the size and structure of the organisations.

Figure 30: How volunteer-involving organisations are funded (n = 592)



Government grants and contracts were the biggest funding source for organisations with paid volunteer managers, making up just over half of their income (50.6%). For organisations with unpaid managers, the figure was much lower at one-third (33.3%).

In contrast, organisations with unpaid managers leaned more heavily on community-based funding. Membership fees made up around one in five dollars of their income (20.5%), compared with less than one in ten (8.6%) for organisations with paid managers. Fundraising events and activities were also more common among unpaid manager organisations (16.4% vs 10.7%), as were commercial activities like sales and venue hire (13.4% vs 6.8%).

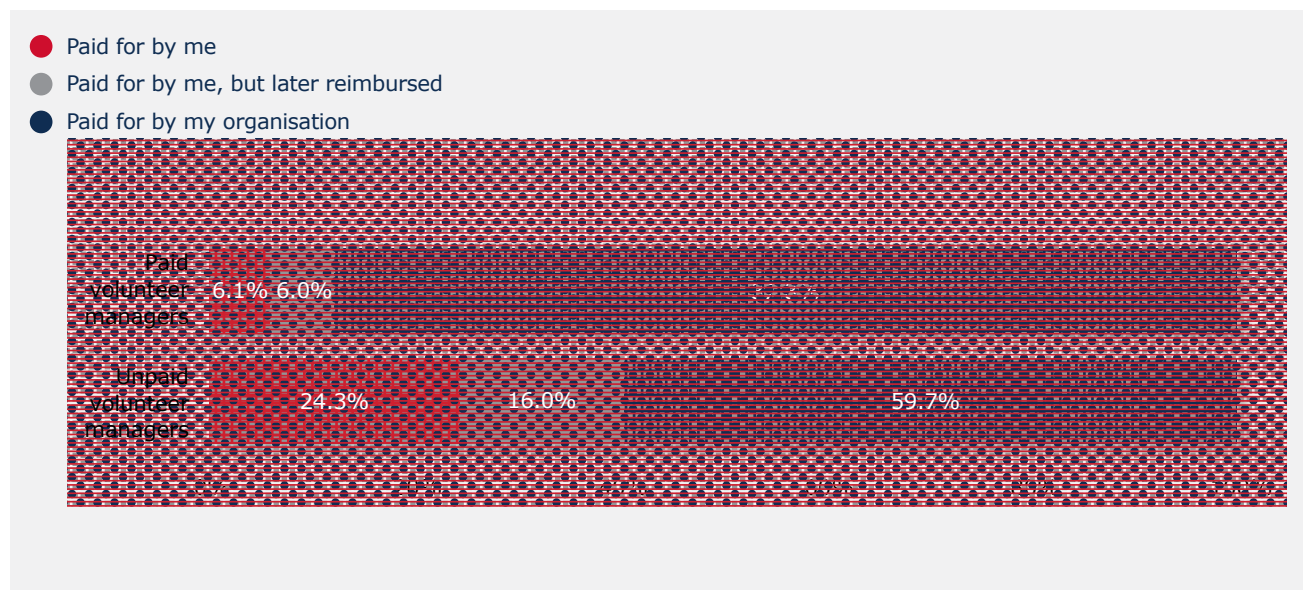
Other sources were more similar. Public donations and bequests were close (9.5% paid vs 9.0% unpaid), and private or philanthropic grants were low across both groups (5.0% paid vs 4.3% unpaid). Some organisations also received support from parent bodies or other business operations, though this was more common among paid manager organisations (8.5% vs 3.2%).

Overall, organisations with unpaid volunteer managers depend more directly on community contributions and fundraising, which can be less predictable. This may limit their ability to fund formal volunteer management roles, while organisations with more stable government support are better placed to employ paid managers.

The shadow cost of volunteer management

Figure 31 also reveals a large gap in who pays for volunteer management expenses, with unpaid managers far more likely to cover costs themselves.

Figure 31: The burden of expenses on volunteer managers (n = 483)



Paid volunteer managers had most expenses covered by their organisation (87.8%), compared with 59.7% for unpaid managers – a 28.1 percentage point difference. Almost a quarter (24.3%) of unpaid managers said they paid out-of-pocket with no reimbursement, compared with just 6.1% of paid managers.

Another 16.0% of unpaid managers paid costs upfront and were later reimbursed, compared with 6.0% of paid managers – meaning they not only covered the costs temporarily but also carried the financial risk until repayment.

Overall, 40.3% of unpaid managers had some form of personal financial impact, compared with only 12.1% of paid managers.

These personal costs represent a hidden “shadow” subsidy to the sector. They do not appear in organisational budgets but still represent real value – either as unreimbursed spending or as interest-free loans to organisations. This comes on top of the 11.8 hours per week of volunteered time (or 4.3 hours of unpaid overtime) that volunteer managers already give.

Relying on individuals’ personal finances to keep programs running can create unfair barriers, threaten the sustainability of volunteer programs, and mask the true cost of running them. Without recognising these shadow costs, funding models risk being built on unrealistic assumptions that depend on the goodwill and financial capacity of unpaid managers.

The magic wand

We asked volunteer managers what three changes they would make to volunteering if they had a magic wand. They gave 476 ideas. We used an AI tool (Claude Opus 4.1) to group the answers into themes. A full, manual check was not possible in this project but would be useful in future to confirm and refine the findings.

What came through most strongly were a few clear pressure points and some practical ways forward.

Recognition and value

- Volunteers and the people who manage them felt undervalued at community, government and organisational levels.
- Suggested fixes included tax concessions or discount cards for volunteers.
- Many called for volunteer management to be treated as a profession with proper pay and pathways.
- Several wanted a general shift so that volunteering is seen as a normal part of life.

Red tape and systems

- Screening and compliance (police checks, Working with Children checks and similar) were seen as repetitive and confusing across organisations.
- A common solution raised was a single "Volunteer Passport" to carry checks and credentials between organisations.
- Onboarding was often slow and paperwork-heavy, putting people off before they start.

People and participation

- Managers worried about an ageing volunteer base and trouble attracting younger people and those in mid-life with work and family commitments.
- Ideas included school and tertiary links, clearer career benefits, and far more flexible roles.
- Long, fixed commitments were seen as out of step with modern availability.

Resources and sustainability

- Many managers were juggling volunteer coordination alongside other full-time duties.
- Limited funding for training, development and recognition made retention harder.
- Gaps in basic infrastructure (spaces, transport, simple tech tools) added friction.

Culture and relationships

- Some volunteer managers felt treated as "less than" paid staff or given jobs others did not want.
- Managers wanted volunteers to have a voice in decisions that affect their work.
- Respect and partnership were recurring requests.

Evolving how people volunteer

- Strong interest in micro-volunteering, short projects and skills-based roles that link to professional development.
- Preference for a "belonging" story over a "helping" or charity frame – building community together.

Overall, managers described problems that were both structural (systems, funding, policy) and cultural (status, respect, belonging). Addressing them will take coordinated action from government, organisations and communities so volunteering remains welcoming, easy to join, and worth staying in.

A sustainable future?

The final survey question asked volunteer managers about their expectations for future volunteer demand, their confidence in meeting those needs, and their own plans to continue in their roles. The results, in Figure 32, show consistent expectations of rising demand.

Figure 32: Forecasts of demand for volunteers (n = 483)

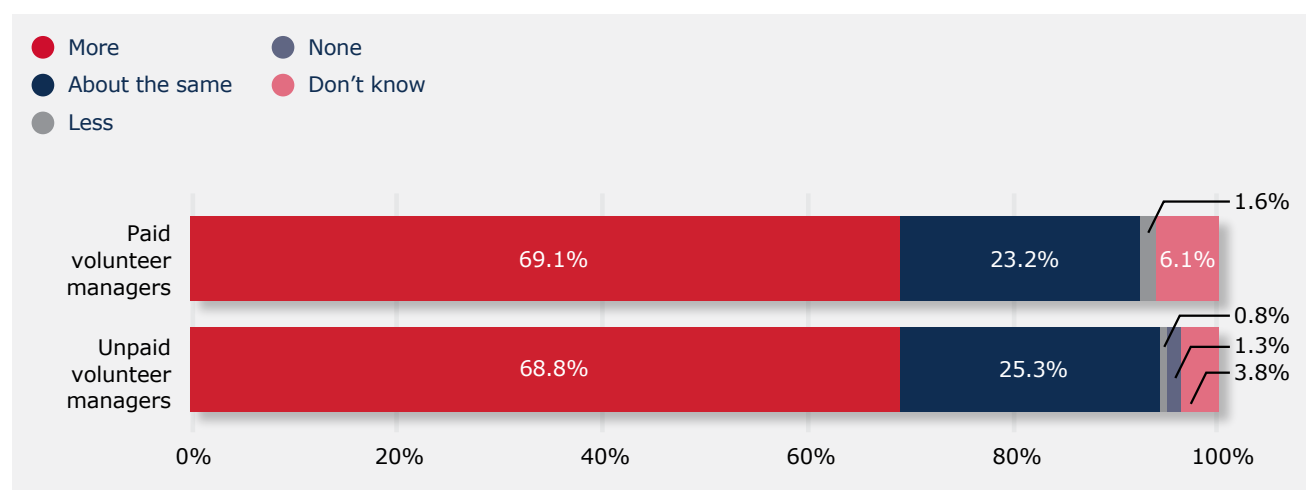
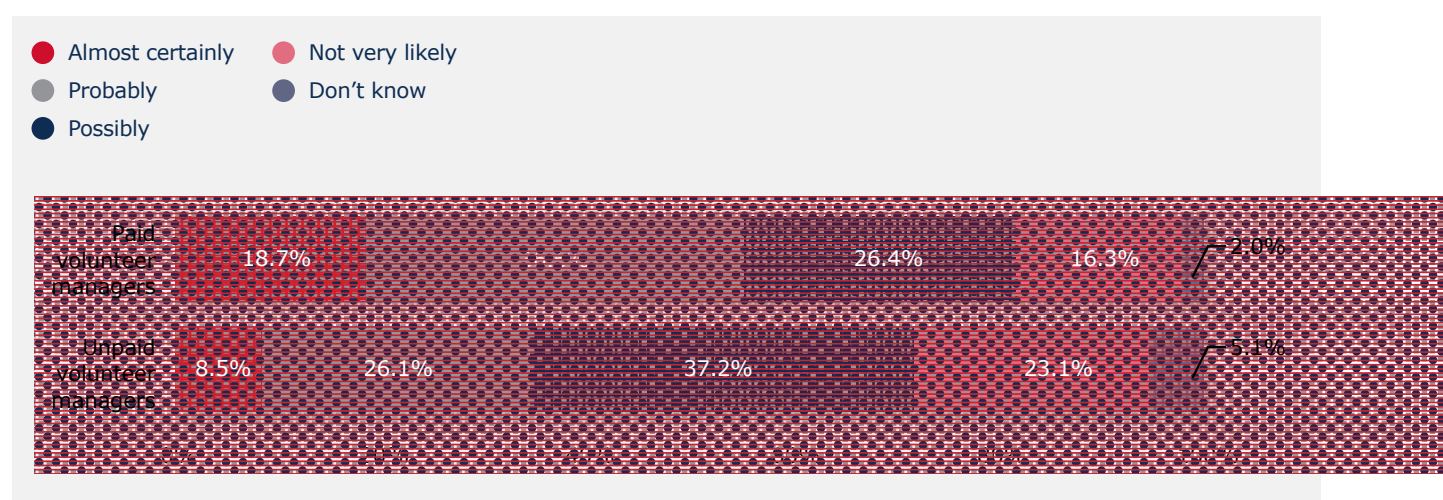


Figure 32 shows that almost seven in ten managers – 69.1% of paid and 68.8% of unpaid – expected to need more volunteers within three years. Very few expected demand to fall (1.6% paid, 0.8% unpaid), while around a quarter anticipated it would stay about the same.

This suggests most organisations expect growth or increased service delivery needs in the near future.

Figure 33: Forecasts of the supply of volunteers (n = 480)

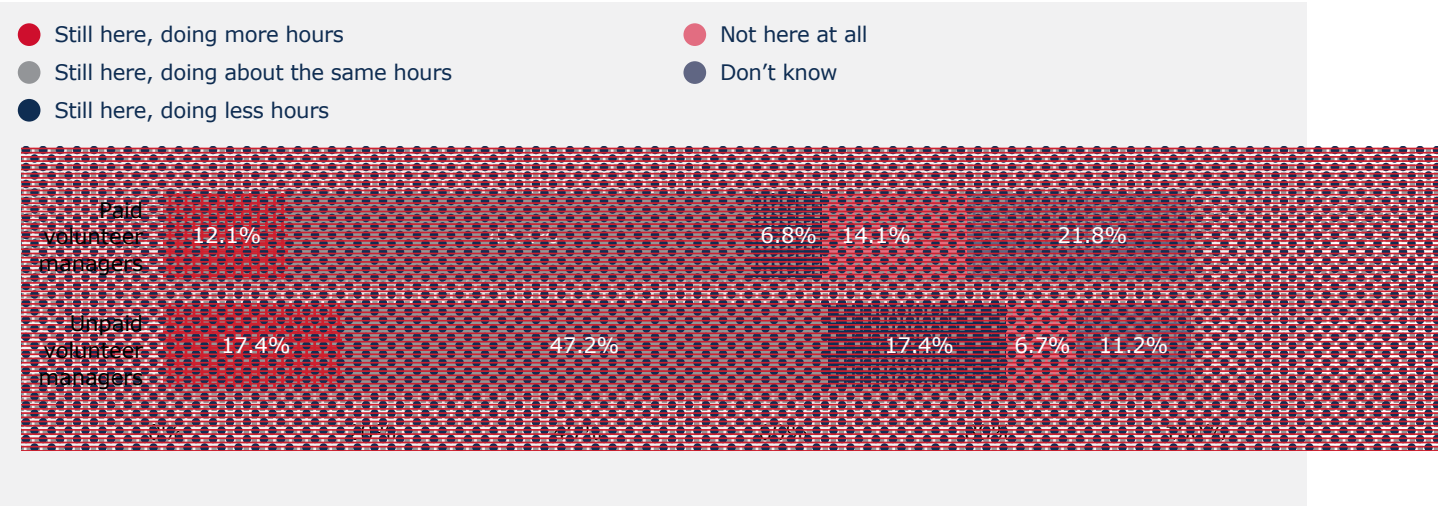


Despite similar expectations for demand, Figure 33 shows that confidence levels were very different. Over half of paid managers (55.3%) were confident they could “almost certainly” or “probably” get the volunteers they needed, compared with just 34.6% of unpaid managers.

Most unpaid managers (60.3%) thought they would “possibly” or “not very likely” meet demand, compared with 42.7% of paid managers. The least confident group – those saying “not very likely” – was higher among unpaid managers (23.1%) than paid (16.3%).

This points to bigger recruitment and retention challenges for unpaid managers, likely linked to fewer resources or less organisational support.

Figure 34: The intent to continue of volunteer managers (n = 384)



Finally, in 2025, 57.2% of paid managers planned to stay in their role at the same or higher hours, but only 12.1% wanted to increase their time, down sharply from 24.0% in 2023. Uncertainty about the future also rose from 15.4% to 21.8%. Departure rates stayed stable at around 14%.

Among unpaid managers, 64.6% planned to maintain or increase their hours, with 17.4% looking to give more time (a small drop from 19.3% in 2023). Those planning to reduce hours increased slightly from 16.2% to 17.4%, but uncertainty fell from 17.0% to 11.2%. Departure expectations dropped from 8.4% to 6.7%.

While both paid and unpaid managers expect demand for volunteers to grow, unpaid managers are far less confident about meeting that demand. Paid managers, meanwhile, are showing less willingness to increase their hours, which could affect capacity in the longer term.

Together, these trends point to a sector that will need to address both recruitment capability and manager retention if it is to meet future volunteer needs.

SECTION 3: VALUING VOLUNTEERING

Table 20: Key findings about the value of volunteering in NSW in 2025

	NSW 2025
Total benefits generated by volunteering in NSW	\$205.3 billion
Annual cost of volunteering in NSW	\$36.9 billion
Benefit : cost ratio	5.6:1
Average volunteer expenses per year	\$4200
Average volunteer expenses per hour	\$15.45
Average VIO expense per volunteer hour	\$4.80
Percentage share of total expenses	Volunteers – 91% (\$33.7 billion) VIOs – 9% (\$3.1 billion)
Productivity Premium	\$41.7 billion
Jobs created by volunteering-related spending	135,500
The contribution of volunteering expenditure to NSW Gross State Product	2.4%
Replacement cost of volunteering	\$45.5 billion
Percentage of community wellbeing attributed to volunteering by volunteers	54.2%
Percentage of community wellbeing attributed to volunteering by volunteers	58.2%
Net return on investment in volunteering	168.4 billion

Putting a value on volunteering can be a complex challenge, as it confers “value” in a range of ways socially, personally, and economically. These ways of understanding value are all legitimate, and are not exhaustive, and considering every potential value for volunteering is beyond the scope of this report. This section primarily approaches the value of volunteering with an economic framework that considers social and personal benefits but outputs the value of volunteering in a monetary sense.

Putting a dollar value on volunteering helps governments and organisations decide how to resource this support. It allows comparison between very different projects, enables transparent decision-making, and gives a defensible evidence base for investment.

Importantly, this approach recognises that non-monetary measures like community stories are equally important for showing the human impact.

In economics, a public good is something that everyone can benefit from, whether they contribute to it or not, and where one person’s use does not reduce its availability for others. Volunteering often works like this – for example, a volunteer fire brigade protects the whole community, not just those who volunteer. The challenge is that people can benefit without contributing, which risks under-supplying these activities unless there is some coordination, support, or incentive.

We take a conservative but comprehensive approach to valuing volunteering:

- Identify all distinct benefits, count each only once.
- Use proven economic methods and cautious assumptions to keep results credible.
- Value only benefits we can measure reliably, even if that means the total figure understates the real social value.

We measure four main benefits over 12 months:

1. Replacement cost of labour – what it would cost to pay people to do the work.
2. Productivity gains for employers – skills learned through volunteering improve workplace performance.
3. Economic stimulus from volunteer spending – local spending by volunteers boosts the economy.
4. Volunteer well-being – better health, social connections, life satisfaction.

We exclude direct benefits to recipients because they are harder to measure and can overlap with volunteer benefits, risking double-counting. This means our figure is likely to be an underestimate of the true value of volunteering, but one that is defensible for policy use.

We also look at the costs needed to create these benefits:

- Volunteers’ own out-of-pocket costs.
- Organisational costs to run volunteer programs.
- The opportunity cost of volunteers’ time and spending.

Comparing costs and benefits shows the efficiency of volunteering programs and creates a baseline for future policy and funding decisions.

The cost of volunteering

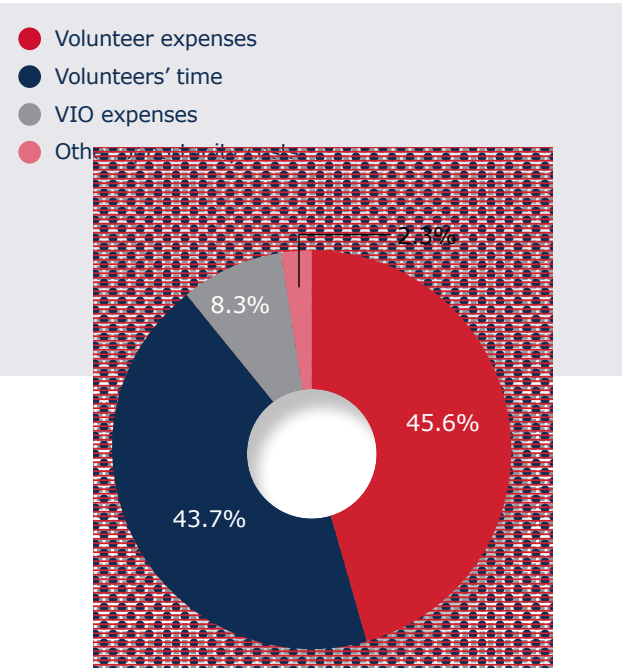
In 2025, volunteering in NSW was estimated to carry an annual cost of **\$36.9 billion**.

Of this, volunteers themselves contributed the vast majority – **around \$33.7 billion (91%)** – through \$16.8 billion in direct out-of-pocket expenses (such as transport, equipment, and training), plus \$16.1 billion in forgone earnings from the opportunity costs of their time and expenses.

Volunteer-involving organisations invested a further \$3.1 billion in program management, infrastructure, and support, while \$854.7 million represented the opportunity cost of funds directed to volunteering rather than other uses.

Figure 35 shows that the NSW volunteer sector is sustained by a co-investment model that is heavily reliant on the personal financial contributions of volunteers.

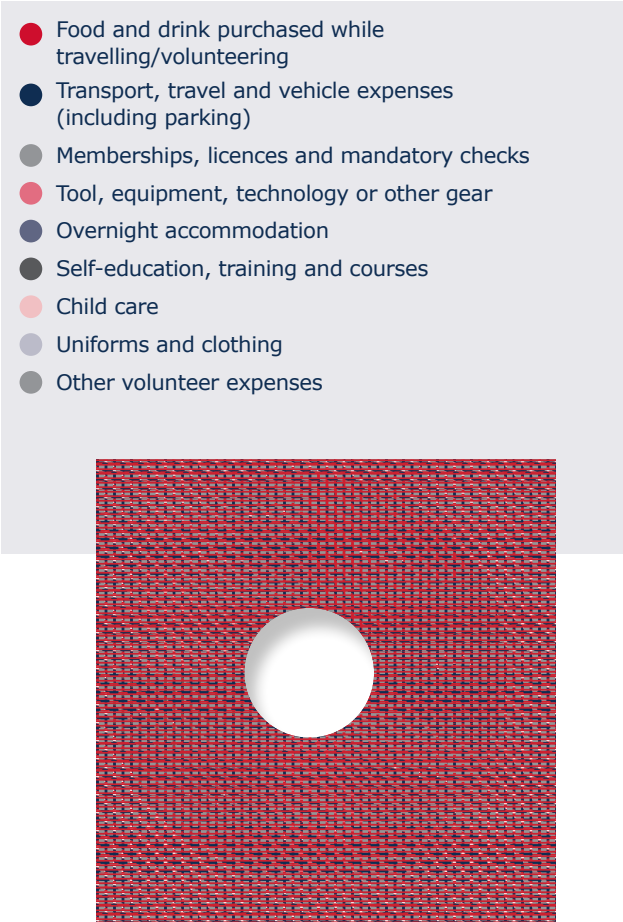
Figure 35: The cost burden of volunteering (n = 2,071)



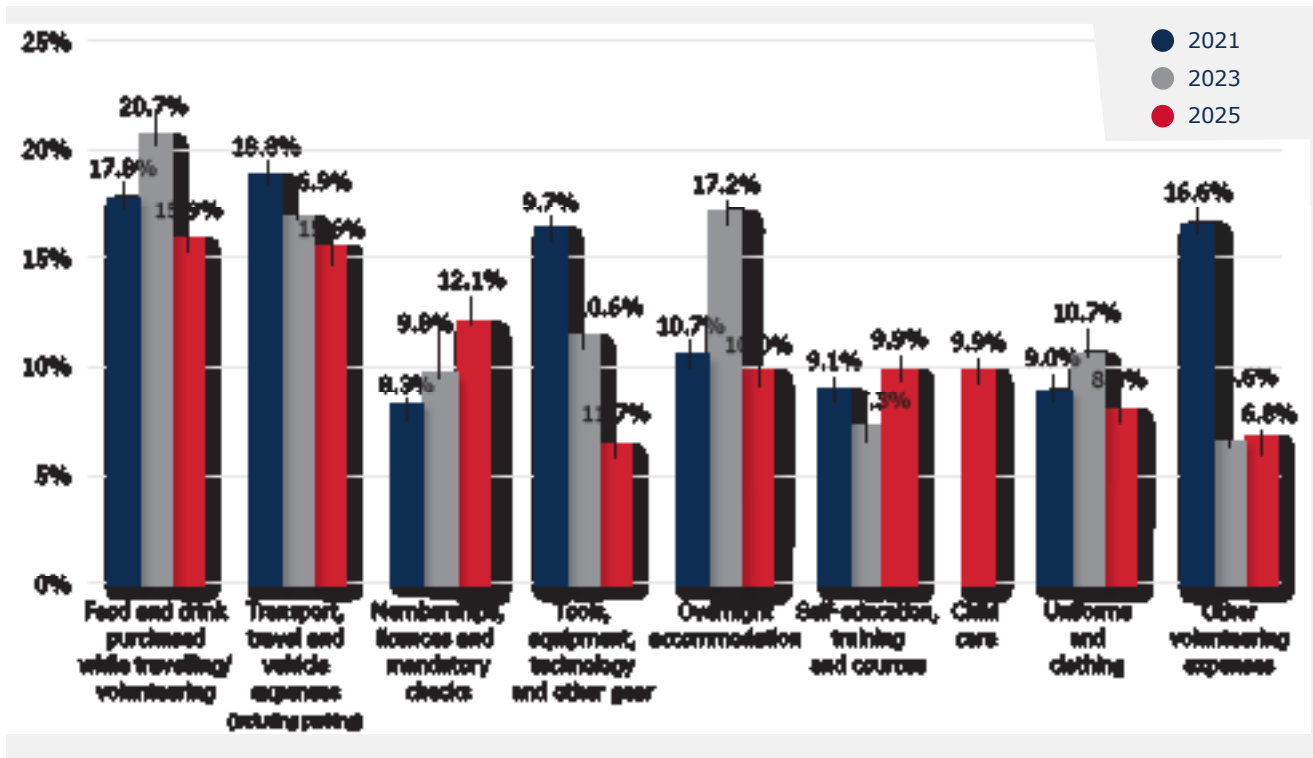
The direct cost to volunteers

In 2025, the Public Survey found that volunteers incur a wide range of personal expenses to support their service, with the largest proportions reporting costs for food and drink while volunteering (15.9%) and transport, travel, and vehicle expenses (15.6%).

Figure 36: Breakdown of volunteer expenses by category (n = 1,599)



Other common costs included memberships, licences, and mandatory checks (12.1%); tools, equipment, and technology (11.7%); overnight accommodation (10.0%); self-education and training (9.9%); and childcare (9.9%), which was measured as a separate category for the first time in 2025. Uniforms and clothing accounted for 8.0%, while other miscellaneous expenses made up 6.8%.

Figure 37: Breakdown of volunteer expenses over time

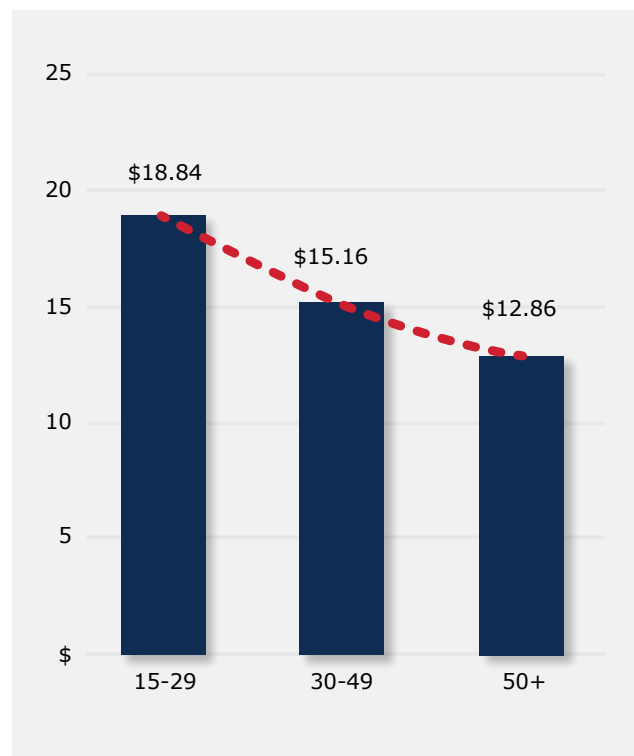
Comparison with 2021 and 2023 in Figure 37 shows that while food and travel costs have declined slightly from earlier peaks, expenses for memberships, licences, and equipment have increased.

The identification of childcare as its own category in 2025 reduced the size of the “other” expenses category, providing a clearer picture of where volunteers’ money is spent.

Costs per hour

In 2025, the average out-of-pocket cost of volunteering was **\$15.45 per hour**, up 5.2% from \$14.68 in 2023. This works out to an average of **\$4,200 per volunteer** in 2025.

Statistical analysis found that older volunteers tended to spend less per hour, with each additional year of age linked to a small reduction in cost (Figure 38). Those with caring responsibilities and those living with a disability also had lower costs per hour. In contrast, higher-income volunteers reported higher expenses per hour.

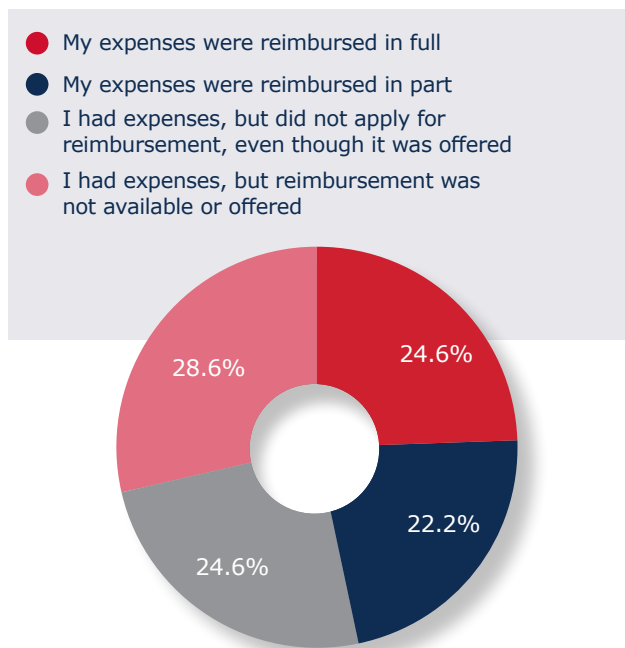
Figure 38: Volunteering expenses per hour by age (n = 1,599)

Other factors, such as gender, education, work and study commitments, location, and English as a second language background, did not significantly affect volunteer costs per hour.

Reimbursement

Figure 39 reveals that reimbursement for volunteer expenses showed wide variation.

Figure 39: The reimbursement of volunteer expenses (n = 1,755)



Among volunteers who reported costs, 24.6% received full reimbursement, 22.2% received partial reimbursement, and 28.6% had no reimbursement available at all. Another 24.6% did not apply for available reimbursement.

For those who did receive reimbursement, the average covered less than half of their expenses (46.6%), meaning most volunteers still paid a significant share out of pocket.

Population-level estimates

When applied to the broader NSW volunteer population, it is estimated that volunteers spent around \$23.5 billion on their activities in 2025.

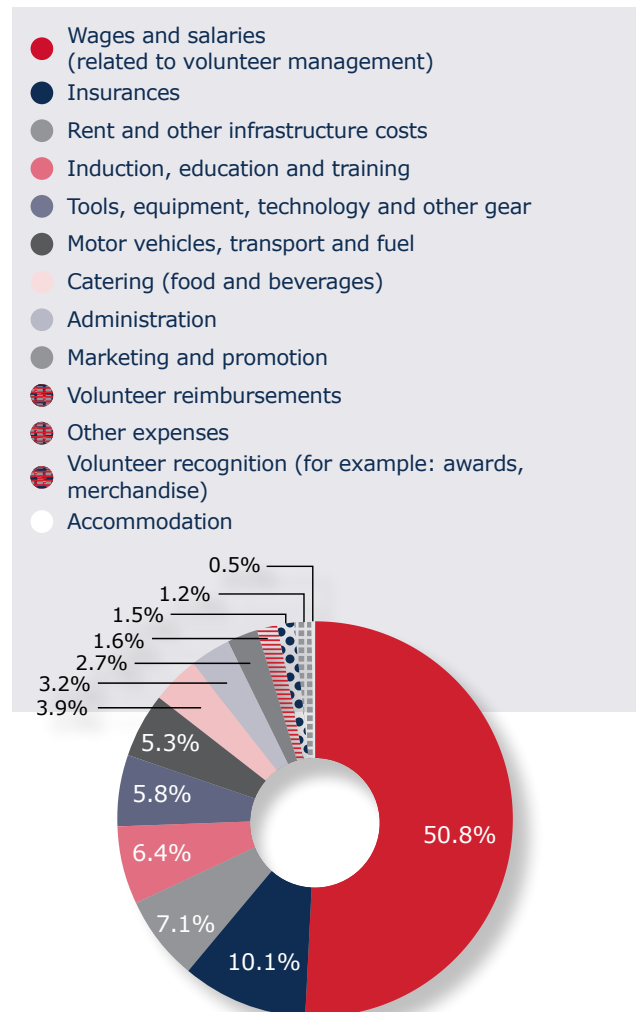
After factoring in the average reimbursement rate of 28.2%, the net out-of-pocket cost comes to \$16.8 billion annually.

This highlights that volunteering involves not just the gift of time, but also a large personal financial contribution from volunteers themselves.

The direct cost to organisations

Organisations that involve volunteers also spend heavily on the people and systems needed to keep those programs running.

Figure 40: Breakdown of volunteer involving organisation expenses (n = 472)



Half of all direct costs (50.8%) go to wages and salaries for staff who recruit, coordinate, train, and support volunteers.

Insurance makes up 10.1% of costs, rent and infrastructure 7.1%, and induction, education, and training 6.4%.

Other notable expenses include tools and equipment (5.8%), vehicles and fuel (5.3%), catering (3.9%), and administration (3.2%).

Smaller shares go to marketing and promotion (2.7%), reimbursements (1.6%), volunteer recognition (1.2%), accommodation (0.5%), and other miscellaneous costs (1.5%).

Costs per hour

In 2025, volunteer-involving organisations spent an estimated \$3.1 billion to support volunteering. When calculated only for formal volunteering, this equates to about \$4.80 per volunteer hour.

The figure is based on organisational expenses divided by the number of volunteers each organisation supports, averaged across organisation types, and then multiplied by the total number of formal volunteers in NSW and their average annual hours.

Limiting the calculation to formal volunteers is important because these costs mainly fund structured programs with defined roles, training, and oversight – costs that do not generally apply to informal volunteering, which happens without organisational infrastructure or funding.

Direct cost analysis

The 2025 data shows that volunteers cover most of the direct costs of volunteering in NSW.

On average, volunteers spend \$15.45 per hour out of their own pocket – over three times the \$4.80 per hour that organisations spend to manage and support them. This equates to \$16.8 billion in net volunteer expenses each year, compared with \$3.1 billion in organisational enabling costs – a ratio of 5.4:1.

Even when factoring in government, philanthropic, corporate, and fundraising contributions to organisational budgets, volunteers still provide 84.4% of the sector's combined \$19.9 billion in direct costs, with organisations covering the remaining 15.6%.

The opportunity cost of volunteers' time

This analysis estimates that the opportunity cost of volunteer time in NSW is \$16.1 billion annually. This represents the value of income volunteers in employment could have earned if they had spent their volunteering hours in paid work instead.

Table 21: The opportunity cost of volunteers' time by age cohort

	Total hours*	Number of vols	Opportunity cost	Total (millions)
15 to 24 years	178.2	844,900	\$8.69	\$1,309.2
25 to 34 years	189.8	995,300	\$21.98	\$4,152.0
35 to 44 years	151.6	961,200	\$27.28	\$3,975.2
45 to 54 years	203.7	675,500	\$28.05	\$3,858.8
55 to 64 years	173.2	582,900	\$22.98	\$2,319.5
65 years and over	250.0	799,500	\$2.56	\$512.1
				\$16,126.7

Table 21 shows that opportunity costs vary sharply by age. They are lowest for young people (15–24 years, \$8.69/hr) and older adults (65+, \$2.56/hr) due to lower average earnings and workforce participation, and highest during peak earning years – 45–54 years (\$28.05/hr), 35–44 years (\$27.28/hr), and 25–34 years (\$21.98/hr).

Middle-aged cohorts contribute the largest share of the total opportunity cost due to higher hourly rates and substantial volunteer participation, while the 65+ group still accounts for over \$500 million because of their high participation and time commitment despite low per-hour costs.

These findings show that volunteering carries a real and significant economic sacrifice – measured in forgone earnings – that forms a major part of the total societal investment in the sector.

*Total number of hours per person, per year.

The opportunity cost of investments

The opportunity cost of volunteering is estimated by asking what return could have been earned if the money currently spent on volunteering were instead invested in a safe, long-term option. The one we use here is the 10-year Australian government bond rate of 4.3% (as of July 2025).

Applying this rate to the total direct costs of volunteering – \$16.8 billion from volunteers plus \$3.1 billion from organisations, or \$19.9 billion in total – produces an annual opportunity cost of \$854.7 million.

This represents the investment income foregone because these funds are devoted to volunteering instead of low-risk financial investments.

The value of volunteering

In 2025, volunteering in NSW generated **\$205.3 billion** in measurable benefits. This value comes from the services volunteers provide, the economic activity they generate, and the personal well-being they gain.

The biggest share is individual benefits – worth **\$98.7 billion** – which covers the personal satisfaction, purpose, and well-being volunteers get from their work. This “volunteer dividend” shows that the personal rewards typically outweigh what volunteers spend or the time they give.

Commercial benefits total **\$44.5 billion**. Most of this (\$41.7 billion) comes from the “productivity premium” – the workplace skills and performance boosts that volunteers bring to their paid jobs. The rest (\$2.8 billion) comes from extra business profits when volunteers and organisations buy goods and services.

Civic benefits add **\$62.1 billion**. \$45.5 billion of this is what it would cost to hire professionals to replace the labour of volunteers. The money spent on volunteering also generates an additional \$12.0 billion in general employment, and \$4.6 billion in tax revenue for the government.

The total benefits far exceed the \$36.9 billion in costs (volunteer expenses, organisational costs, and opportunity costs), giving a **benefit–cost ratio of 5.6:1**. This means **every dollar invested in volunteering produces \$5.60** in measurable value.

Commercial benefits

Commercial benefits refer to the economic value that private businesses and employers gain from volunteering.

These benefits come from two main sources: the skills and experience that volunteers develop, which improve their productivity at work, and the flow-on economic activity created when volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations spend money in local and regional communities.

By focusing on market-based impacts, this category separates the economic gains to the commercial sector from the wider social and community benefits of volunteering, making it easier to measure volunteering’s role in supporting business performance and economic growth.

Producers’ surplus

Producers’ surplus is an economic term that describes the profit businesses make when they sell goods or services for more than the minimum price they would accept. It is similar to economic profit but does not account for all costs, like fixed expenses.

In NSW, many businesses benefit financially from volunteering because they supply the goods and services used in volunteer activities. This includes everything from uniforms and equipment to catering, transport, and printing. These purchases create value for businesses both directly and through their supply chains.

We measured this effect using input-output analysis, which maps how spending flows between industries and calculates the total economic impact of demand in a particular sector. Applying this method to volunteer-related spending shows it generates **\$31.9 billion** in total economic output in NSW. This includes the direct value of goods and services bought for volunteering, plus the flow-on demand created for other businesses that supply those goods and services.

The share of this output that counts as Gross Value Added (GVA) – which is output minus the cost of inputs – is \$19.4 billion. This equals **2.4%** of NSW’s total Gross State Product, placing volunteering-related activity on par with some of the state’s largest industry sectors.

From this GVA, once we subtract labour costs and taxes, the remaining profit to businesses – known as producers’ surplus – is **\$2.8 billion**. This is the return to the capital, land, and assets used in producing goods and services for volunteering, and it is spread across all the businesses in NSW involved in meeting this demand, from direct suppliers to those further along the supply chain.

Productivity premium

The productivity premium is the economic value created when volunteering makes people better at their paid jobs. This is based on the idea from human capital theory that skills, knowledge, and experience gained through volunteering can improve workplace performance.

We calculate it by looking at each age group of volunteers in paid work and factoring in their average earnings, the number of volunteers, their weekly work hours, and a “productivity multiplier” that measures the average improvement reported. This multiplier comes from the Public Survey data, where employed volunteers told us whether volunteering made them more productive at work.

Volunteering creates what economists call a positive externality – a benefit that spills over to others. In this case, employers get better performance without having to pay for it, similar to free professional development. The skills gained through volunteering usually complement workplace skills rather than replace them, so they work together to improve output.

Table 22: Perceived productivity impact of volunteering among different respondent groups (n = 2,528)

	More productive	Less productive	No difference
All respondents	68.5%	5.3%	26.2%
All volunteers	77.1%	4.6%	18.3%
All non-volunteers	49.0%	7.0%	44.0%
All managers	79.6%	5.6%	14.7%
All other workers	60.8%	5.0%	34.1%

Table 22 shows that 68.5% of all survey respondents said volunteering improved productivity, 5.3% said it reduced productivity, and 26.2% saw no difference. The figures were much higher for volunteers (77.1% reported increased productivity) compared to non-volunteers (49.0%). Managers were even more positive, with 79.6% reporting productivity gains compared to 60.8% of other workers.

These differences suggest that people who volunteer, and managers who see the effects first-hand, are more likely to believe in the productivity benefits of volunteering. While these are self-reported perceptions rather than hard measurements, they

support the idea that volunteering can make people better at their jobs.

For consistency with earlier work and to avoid results being distorted by smaller samples, we used the 2023 estimate of a 14.7% productivity boost when calculating the 2025 value. Applying this to all employed volunteers in NSW gives a total productivity premium of **\$41.7 billion**.

This is larger than either the total direct costs volunteers pay out-of-pocket (\$16.8 billion) or the opportunity cost of their time (\$16.1 billion). The benefit is spread widely across the economy because volunteers work in many different industries, meaning most employers benefit without having to invest heavily in training.

The size of this figure reinforces why it makes commercial sense for employers to support volunteering.

Civic benefits

Civic benefits are the economic value created when volunteers deliver services or activities that would otherwise need to be provided by government.

In effect, volunteers help meet community needs without the public sector having to spend money to achieve the same results, saving taxpayer dollars while maintaining or improving services.

We measure civic benefits in NSW in three main ways:

- The jobs created through economic activity linked to volunteering
- The tax revenue from spending connected to volunteering
- The replacement cost of volunteer labour – what it would cost the government to pay workers to do the same work.

These measures are conservative. They do not include other important benefits such as tourism income from volunteer-supported events, savings to the health system from volunteer care and prevention, reduced demand on emergency services, lower criminal justice costs from crime prevention programs, or environmental gains from conservation work that avoid future clean-up costs.

While these extra benefits are harder to measure in dollar terms, they add significant long-term value to both communities and the environment. This means our figures represent only a lower limit of the true civic value of volunteering, and the real contribution is almost certainly much higher.

Employment

Volunteering in NSW supports a large number of jobs across the economy. Input-output modelling shows that spending linked to volunteering helps sustain **135,500 jobs**, including 71,400 full-time equivalent positions.

These jobs are not just within the volunteering sector – they also exist in industries that supply goods and services to volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

This happens because volunteer-related spending creates demand in many areas – such as training, administration, logistics, transport, hospitality, technology, and equipment supply. This demand generates jobs across a wide range of sectors, showing how far volunteer activity reaches into the broader economy.

The jobs created by volunteering lead to \$12.0 billion in wages for households. These wages boost household spending power, which in turn drives more economic activity and investment.

There are also benefits for government budgets. As volunteering helps create jobs, fewer people need unemployment benefits or other forms of social assistance.

This “welfare cost avoidance” means government can redirect funds to other priorities, such as healthcare, education, or infrastructure. In this way, volunteer-driven employment delivers a double benefit – it adds to household incomes while also reducing public spending needs.

Taxes

Volunteering in NSW also delivers a significant boost to government revenue. Input-output analysis shows that spending linked to volunteering generates \$4.6 billion in tax revenue each year across all levels of government.

This revenue comes from several sources, including GST on goods and services purchased by volunteers and volunteer organisations, income tax on wages from jobs created by volunteer-related activity, corporate tax on business profits linked to volunteering, and state and local taxes on property, transactions, and services.

The distribution of these tax benefits does not necessarily match how much each tier of government invests in volunteering. For example, the federal government collects most of the income tax, which can far exceed its direct investment in volunteer

programs. In contrast, local governments often spend heavily on volunteer infrastructure but receive proportionally smaller direct tax returns.

After including all organisational expenditure – both from their own funds and government support – the total investment is **\$3.1 billion**, compared to \$4.6 billion generated in tax revenue. This gap suggests that governments could increase funding for volunteering while still achieving a positive return, given the clear economic benefit to public finances.

Ultimately, this tax revenue strengthens governments’ ability to deliver essential services such as healthcare, education, infrastructure, and community programs. In this way, volunteering indirectly benefits the wider community by expanding the fiscal capacity of all levels of government.

Volunteers’ labour

The replacement cost method estimates the economic value of volunteer work by calculating how much it would cost to hire paid professionals to do the same jobs. This approach recognises that volunteers bring a wide range of skills and experience to their roles – often well beyond entry-level – and so uses more realistic wage measures than minimum wage rates.

For this analysis, we used median wage data for each age group of volunteers. This reflects that different age groups bring different levels of expertise and experience, which in the labour market are linked to higher productivity and higher pay.

To reflect the real cost to an employer, we added 20% to these wages to cover extra employment costs such as administration, equipment, and the mandatory superannuation contributions required in Australia.

This method assumes that the value of services provided by volunteers is the same as what it would cost to employ someone with similar skills and experience. It does not, however, factor in potential differences in productivity between paid and unpaid workers, nor does it capture instances where a volunteer’s skills exceed those typically found in the labour market for their age group.

Table 23: The replacement cost of volunteers' labour by age cohort

	Total hours*	Number of vols	Opportunity cost	Total (millions)
15 to 24 years	178.2	844,900	\$22.69	\$3,416.2
25 to 34 years	189.8	995,300	\$49.85	\$9,415.5
35 to 44 years	151.6	961,200	\$61.91	\$9,021.9
45 to 54 years	203.7	675,500	\$64.01	\$8,807.5
55 to 64 years	173.2	582,900	\$58.02	\$5,856.5
65 years and over	250.0	799,500	\$45.10	\$9,015.7
				\$45,533.3

Replacement cost is different from opportunity cost. Opportunity cost measures only the take-home pay a volunteer could have earned instead of volunteering. Replacement cost is higher because it also includes employer expenses like superannuation, insurance, and administration.

For example, for volunteers aged 65 and over, the average opportunity cost is just \$2.56 per hour – because many are retired and not earning an income – but the replacement cost is \$45.10 per hour, reflecting the skills and experience people in this age group can offer if they were employed.

Applying this method across all volunteers in NSW shows a total replacement cost of **\$45.5 billion** a year. This is the amount it would cost to pay professionals to deliver the same hours and quality of service that volunteers currently provide at no charge.

The scale of this figure – greater than all the direct costs of volunteering combined – shows just how significant volunteers' labour is to the NSW economy.

Volunteering as an industry

To understand the scale of volunteering in NSW, we can compare the value of volunteer labour with wages paid to people in regular jobs. Using the replacement cost method, the value of all volunteer work in 2025 is estimated at \$45.5 billion. This is equal to 43.1% of all wages paid to workers in the state (**\$105.7 billion**).

Table 24: Cost of volunteering vs private and public sector employee compensation

Sector	\$	Relative size of volunteering sector
Replacement cost of volunteers	\$45.5 billion	100.0%
Private sector compensation of employees	\$85.0 billion	53.6%
Public sector compensation of employees	\$21.7 billion	210.0%

To give a workforce perspective, all volunteer hours in NSW (1.33 billion per year) can be converted into job equivalents using the same mix of full-time (39.5 hours/week) and part-time (16.5 hours/week) hours worked by the NSW labour force². This gives:

- 885,240 equivalent jobs in total
- 473,800 full-time equivalent positions (53.5%)
- 411,400 part-time equivalent positions (46.5%).

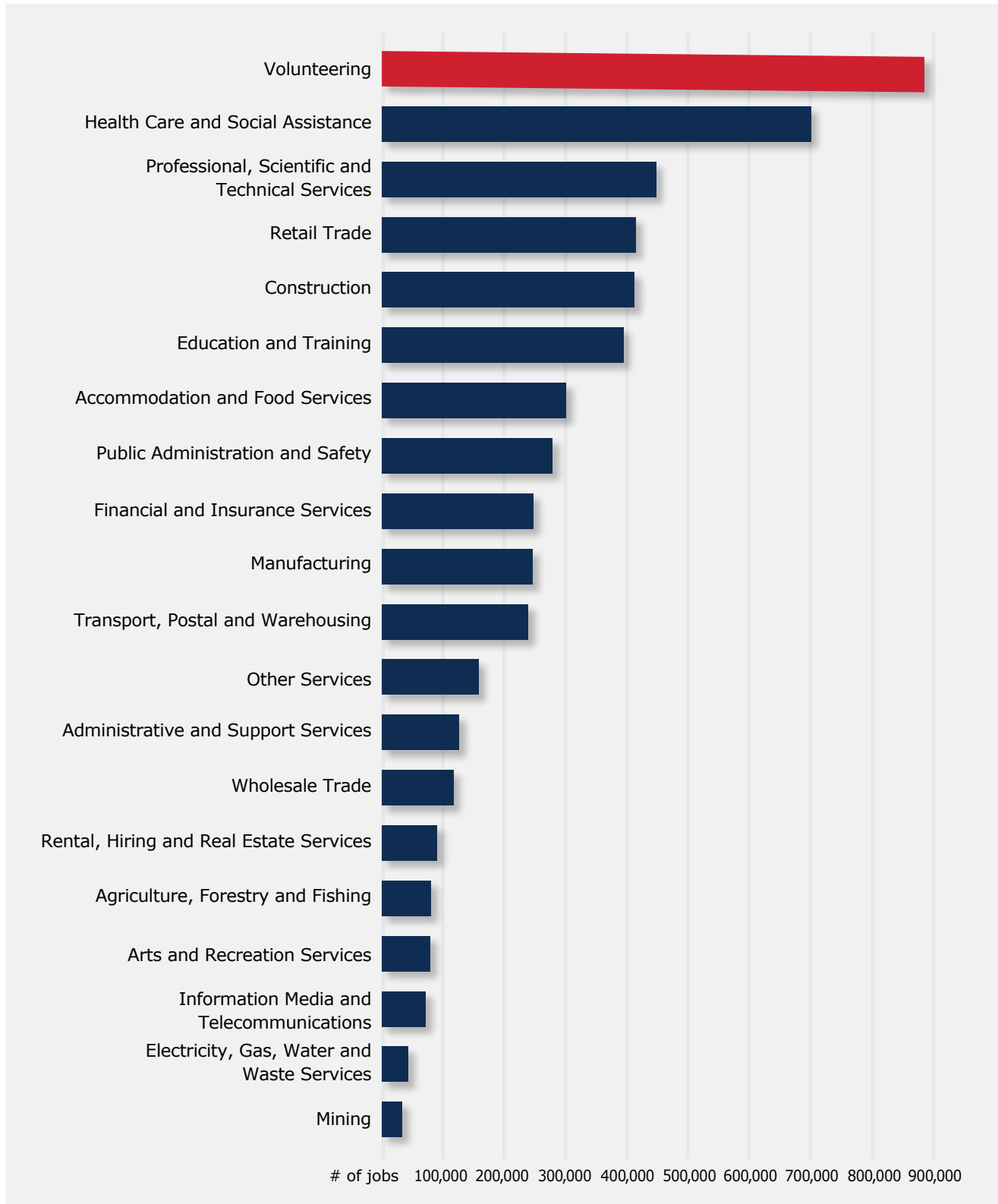
Therefore, if volunteering were counted as an industry, it would be NSW's largest employer, bigger even than Health Care and Social Assistance (698,800 employees). In fact, it is:

- Over 186,000 "jobs" bigger than the health sector
- Nearly three times the size of Accommodation and Food Services (301,600 employees)
- More than 26 times the size of the mining sector and 20 times the utilities sector.

While this does not mean volunteers could simply replace paid workers, it shows the enormous scale of the volunteer workforce. Volunteering adds significantly to the state's productive capacity and delivers services that often complement, rather than duplicate, paid work.

*Total number of hours per person, per year.

² For more information on the data sources for the NSW labour force, please see the methodology appendix.

Figure 41: Volunteering as an industry

Individual benefits

Individual benefits are the personal advantages that volunteers gain from their participation, including emotional, psychological, and physical well-being. These benefits go beyond financial measures to include feelings of happiness, life satisfaction, purpose, and fulfilment.

Economically, volunteers can be seen as consumers who invest their own time and money into volunteering. According to the “consumer surplus” idea from welfare economics, people only choose to participate when the value they get back is greater than what they put in. In volunteering, this extra value comes from all the non-financial rewards – such as enjoyment, purpose, and social connection – that make the experience worthwhile.

Life satisfaction is a well-established way to measure these benefits. It is widely used by researchers, governments, and international organisations because it is easy to measure, works across cultures, and correlates well with other indicators such as income and health.

Data from the 2023 State of Volunteering research showed that volunteering was linked to a 4.4-point increase in life satisfaction (on a 1–100 scale). While volunteering is just one of many factors that influence well-being, this difference was statistically significant. To keep results consistent across years, this analysis uses the same 4.4-point figure for calculating the 2025 results.

The monetary value of these benefits is calculated using the method applied in the 2023 report, which links income to life satisfaction. By converting the life satisfaction increase into the equivalent income gain, we can work out how much extra money someone

would need to earn to get the same well-being boost without volunteering.

For NSW, using the average annual income of \$82,760, the 4.4-point life satisfaction improvement is valued at \$20,300 per volunteer per year.

With 4.9 million volunteers in NSW, the total value of these personal well-being benefits is estimated at **\$98.7 billion**. This makes it the largest single category of volunteer-generated value – well above the productivity premium (\$41.7 billion) and all measured costs of volunteering (\$36.9 billion).

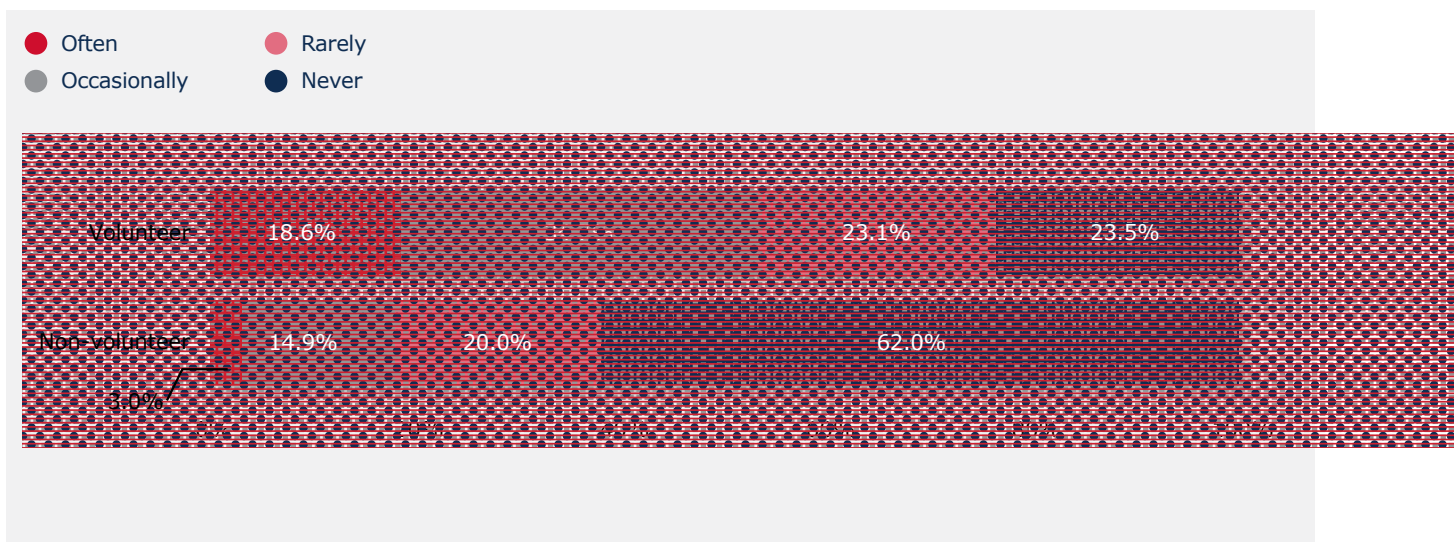
This shows that volunteering not only benefits the community but also provides volunteers themselves with very large, measurable personal returns. From an economic perspective, this supports the idea that volunteering is a rational choice – people continue to do it because the personal rewards clearly outweigh the costs.

Other community benefits

While individual benefits measure the personal well-being volunteers gain from participating, community benefits capture the value that everyone – volunteers and non-volunteers alike – places on how volunteering improves life for the whole community.

The connection between giving and receiving in volunteering makes this tricky to measure. Figure 42 shows that 76.5% of volunteers also benefit from volunteer services beyond their own contributions, and 38.0% of non-volunteers receive volunteer services at least occasionally.

Figure 42: The extent to which individuals report benefiting from the services of volunteers



To better understand the value enabled by this, the Public Survey asked respondents two additional questions:

1. How much do other people's volunteering efforts contribute to your personal quality of life?
2. How much do all volunteering efforts contribute to the quality of life in your community?

Non-volunteers said that other people's volunteering contributes about 54.2% to their personal quality of life, and 58.2% to their community's quality of life. Volunteers gave even higher ratings – 64.7% for personal quality of life and 69.5% for community quality of life.

For volunteers, these ratings show that they value much more than just their own involvement. They appreciate services provided by other volunteers, the facilities and programs those volunteers help maintain, and the community connections that volunteering fosters. For non-volunteers, these scores reflect the genuine benefits they receive from having a strong volunteer presence in their community.

The challenge is that these ratings mix different types of value – personal benefits from taking part, direct benefits from receiving volunteer services, and general appreciation for the presence of volunteering in the community.

Because these overlap, we are not able to measure the extra "community-wide" value without double-counting what is already included in other benefit measures.

This means that our current estimates almost certainly understate volunteering's true social value. In reality, the shared benefits of having a thriving volunteer ecosystem are likely much larger than we can presently quantify.

Developing ways to separate these different streams of value is an important area for future research.

Cost-benefit analysis

This analysis measures both the costs and the benefits of volunteering in NSW in 2025, using established economic methods such as input-output analysis, human capital theory, and welfare economics. It shows how much is invested in volunteering and the value it generates for individuals, organisations, and the wider community.

In 2025, the total value of benefits created by volunteering was **\$205.3 billion**, far higher than the total costs of \$36.9 billion. This reflects both the large number of people who volunteer in NSW and the many ways their activities create economic value.

Table 25: The value of volunteering in NSW, 2025

Costs (\$ million)			
Direct costs		Sub-totals	Totals
Volunteer expenses	\$16,841.1		
Volunteer-involving organisation expenses	<u>\$3,076.3</u>	\$19,917.3	
Opportunity costs			
Volunteers' time	\$16,126.7		
Volunteering investments	<u>\$854.7</u>	<u>\$16,981.3</u>	\$36,898.7
Benefits (\$ million)			
Commercial benefits			
Producers' surplus	\$2,808.4		
Productivity premium	<u>\$41,672.8</u>	\$44,481.2	
Civic benefits			
Employment	\$11,952.5		
Taxes	\$4,643.6		
Volunteers' labour	<u>\$45,533.3</u>	\$62,129.4	
Individual benefits			
Volunteers' dividend		<u>\$98,663.0</u>	\$205,273.6
Social return on investment			\$168,374.9
Benefit: cost ratio		5.6 : 1	

This means that for every \$1 invested in volunteering, \$5.60 of measurable value is created. The net return, after all costs are considered, is **\$168.4 billion**.

The benefits are spread widely: 22% are commercial, 30% are civic, and 48% are personal benefits to the volunteers themselves. This shows that volunteering is not just a transfer of resources – it creates value for multiple groups at the same time.

Between 2023 and 2025, the total benefits grew from \$178.0 billion to \$205.3 billion (up 15.4%), while total costs rose from \$32.1 billion to \$36.9 billion (up 14.9%). This led to the net return increasing by \$22.6 billion, and a small improvement in economic efficiency, with the benefit-cost ratio rising from 5.5 to 5.6.

These figures are likely conservative, as they do not include some important but hard-to-measure benefits such as the improved well-being of service recipients, environmental gains, or the wider community value of a strong volunteering culture.

The consistently high returns suggest that further investment in volunteering – such as better infrastructure, support, and training – would almost certainly deliver strong economic and social payoffs for NSW.

Conclusion

The 2025 data show a clear economic reality: volunteering in NSW delivers \$5.60 in value for every \$1 invested, creating \$205 billion in benefits each year. Returns of this scale would attract strong interest in commercial markets, yet the contribution of volunteering has often been underestimated and overlooked.

With nearly 70% of NSW residents volunteering in some capacity during 2025, the sector shows strong community participation and considerable potential for further growth. Notably, 42% of non-volunteers remain undecided about future involvement – representing a significant pool of potential participants that could be engaged by addressing known barriers.

However, this substantial contribution relies on a model that places considerable pressure on both volunteers and those who coordinate them. Volunteers absorb 84% of direct costs through personal spending, while volunteer managers – particularly unpaid ones – report declining confidence in meeting future demand even as 69% expect volunteer needs to increase. The sector's heavy dependence on personal financial contributions, combined with rising training requirements, burnout, and other concerns, suggests that current operating models may not be sustainable without additional structural support.

This observation does not diminish the sector's achievements; it underscores the importance of building on them. After all, this analysis proves that volunteering generates broad economic returns across commercial, civic, and personal domains, placing it among the most significant economic activities in the state by both participation and value. In economic terms, volunteering is highly efficient, with external benefits that far outweigh the resources required to sustain it.

Yet the figures presented remain conservative. They do not include the well-being of service recipients, broader community value, environmental gains, or other indirect benefits. Including these factors in future research would almost certainly reveal a much higher total value.

Ultimately, these findings offer government, business, and community leaders a strong evidence base for improving how volunteering is supported and managed. By reducing barriers, strengthening organisational capacity, and recognising the sector's true contribution, NSW can further increase both the economic and social returns of volunteering.

Appendix A: Methodology

Public Survey

Data cleaning

Data cleaning is the process of preparing a sample for analysis by removing or excluding incorrect, incomplete, duplicated, or irrelevant data. This standard practice in the statistical sciences is necessary to improve the quality of the data so that the results of the analysis can be trusted.

During the survey, we used built-in checks to lift quality. People only saw questions that applied to them, answer options were shuffled to reduce bias, and some number fields had sensible limits to prevent over-the-top entries.

After the survey closed, we removed responses that didn't meet the rules. Test and pilot entries from before the official start were excluded, as were partly finished surveys. We also removed entries with ages outside 15–100, postcodes outside the study area, responses from outside Australia (by IP address), anyone flagged by a hidden bot check, and joke answers in "Other" fields. Clearly unrealistic totals, like combined work and study hours over 80 per week, were also taken out.

In total, 91 of 2,620 responses were excluded (3.47%), leaving 2,529 valid responses. This produced a strong and representative dataset for analysis.

We then improved the remaining data by recoding sensible free-text "Other" answers into existing categories wherever possible. For example, "other volunteering" descriptions were mapped to the right types and linked to their frequency and volume, which reduced clutter and strengthened the statistics.

To avoid throwing out useful responses, we applied extra checks at the individual answer level. If most of a survey looked fine but one entry was off, we fixed or removed only that answer. This was important because volunteers received extra questions. We deleted time totals that implied more than 4,368 hours per year across work, study, and volunteering (12 hours a day, every day), affecting 63 answers. For spending, we removed 131 careless entries (same number in every category, random huge figures, or unlikely sequences) and set reasonable limits so reported costs could not exceed 20% of household income (using the top of the reported band) or \$1,000 per volunteering hour.

Where it was clearly a typo and the rest of the answers made sense, we corrected the value. We also removed any further non-serious "Other" text in questions about motivations, benefits, barriers, and ideas to increase volunteering.

The end result was a clean, credible dataset of 2,529 responses, with unrealistic or unserious answers removed or corrected and ready for solid statistical analysis.

New variables

We then created new variables from the original survey answers to make the data easier to interpret and analyse. These derived variables helped reveal patterns more clearly without changing what respondents actually reported.

Each new variable was built using clear rules and then checked to ensure it behaved as expected. This validation step protected data quality and kept the results accurate and trustworthy.

Continuous Variables

- *Age this year*: Calculated from respondent year of birth
- *Total volunteer hours*: Aggregate sum of formal and informal volunteering hours and travel time reported
- *Total expenditure*: Combined expenditure across all cost categories from both survey instruments
- *Standardised expenditure variables*: Z-score transformations were created for each expenditure category to facilitate the identification and exclusion of statistical outliers during analysis

Ordinal Variables

- *Age cohorts*: Categorical age groupings derived from continuous age variable
- *Geographic location*: Remoteness classification based on postcode (detailed methodology below)
- *Organisational optimism and volunteering intent*: Scaled responses excluding "Don't know" categories to enable ordinal analysis

Categorical Variables

- *Carer status*: Binary classification (yes/no) derived from relevant responses to the disability and carer demographic questions
- *Volunteer status*: Binary classification (yes/no) derived from volunteering participation responses

Location

Responses to the postcode question were reclassified by location as Major City, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, and Very Remote, in line with the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure.

This involved joining three datasets sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics: Mesh Block codes mapped to postcodes, Mesh Block codes mapped to Statistical Areas Level 1 codes, and Statistical Areas Level 1 codes mapped to Remoteness Areas. When a conflict arose with a postcode covering multiple Remoteness Areas, it was designated as belonging to the smaller Remoteness Area.

Location was treated as an ordinal variable to the extent that each category from Major City to Very Remote was considered to be increasingly distant from a major city, if not in terms of geography, but in terms of access to services. This is how Remoteness Areas are defined in the ASGS.

Data weighting

Data weighting is a statistical technique used to adjust the contribution of individual data points in a dataset. The method is widely applied in survey analysis and research to ensure that the sample accurately represents the target population. By assigning different weights to specific responses, biases or imbalances in the sample data can be corrected. This ensures that groups underrepresented in the sample have a proportional influence on the overall results, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

In the Public Survey, responses were drawn from an online panel of NSW residents aged 15 years and over. Respondents were paid for their participation. Quotas were used to ensure a representative cross-section of NSW residents across gender, age, and location. As a result, these variables were sufficiently representative of the NSW population for the purposes of analysis.

Further analysis revealed household income as the most unrepresentative variable in the sample, prompting the need for data weighting. The initial distribution of responses was skewed towards the lowest income quintile, while just under ten percent of respondents reported being in the highest. Given the unbalanced representation, a weighting scheme was applied to specifically address these discrepancies and mitigate potential

income-based biases. The aim was to bring the proportion of responses in each income quintile closer to an equitable 20% representation.

To do this, weighting coefficients were calculated by dividing the target proportion of 20% by the actual proportion observed in each income quintile. These weights were then applied to all cases within each income group before conducting statistical analyses. This weighting strategy allowed for representation across income levels to normalise, thereby minimising the potential for biased results due to the initially skewed income distribution.

Table 26: Income distribution before and after post-stratification weighting

Income	Un-weighted Sample	Population	Post-weight sample
\$1,104	33.4%	20.0%	20.0%
\$1,779	21.8%	20.0%	20.0%
\$2,434	20.2%	20.0%	20.0%
\$3,214	14.7%	20.0%	19.9%
\$6,054	9.9%	20.0%	20.0%

Sample demographics

The post-weighted sample comprised 2,528 NSW residents aged 15 and over, representing diverse demographic characteristics across age, gender, location, employment, income, and cultural backgrounds.

The 2025 sample (n = 2,528) compares favourably to the samples of 2023 (n = 1,511) and 2021 (n = 1,168). This is a good cross-section of responses, and several population-relevant observations have been drawn from the data and presented in this report.

Table 27: Self-reported identity of NSW residents responding to the Public Survey (n = 2,528)

Age	15-29 years		30-49 years		50 and over
	24.2%		37.2%		38.7%
Gender identity	Male		Female		Non-binary/other/declined
	50.2%		47.2%		2.6%
Location	Major city	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very Remote
	70.1%	17.6%	11.5%	0.4%	0.4%
Weekly hours of work for pay	0	1-20	21-40	40+	
	24.6%	12.9%	53.7%	8.8%	
Weekly hours of study	0	1-20	21-40	40+	
	60.9%	34.0%	4.8%	0.4%	
Household income versus national average	Lowest 20%	Low	Median	High	Highest 20%
	20.0%	20.0%	20.0%	19.9%	20.0%
Education	Year 10 or below	Year 11-12	Vocational	Undergrad	Graduate
	9.7%	16.9%	22.1%	32.3%	19.0%
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual			Non-heterosexual	
	88.1%			11.9%	
Ethnic identity (can choose multiple)	First Nations		Anglo-Australian		Another or multiple cultures
	19.6%		51.6%		41.3%
English as a first language	Yes			No	
	76.0%			24.0%	
Living with disability	Yes			No	
	27.0%			73.0%	
Caring duties	Yes			No	
	52.2%			47.8%	

Volunteer Manager Survey

The Volunteer Manager Survey received 699 valid responses. The group differs in some ways from the general population, but because the survey used a non-random sample, we can't assume these results represent all volunteer managers. These findings should be read with the current gaps in workforce data in mind.

We did not weight the results. There are no reliable national figures for the volunteer manager workforce, and applying weights based on the general population could introduce errors. Volunteer managers – especially those in paid roles – are likely to have different profiles, education, and career paths than the public at large, so population weights would be misleading.

There is good news for future surveys. In late 2024, “Volunteer Coordinator” was added to Australia’s Occupation Standard Classification (OSCA) with

code 411933, under “Other Community and Welfare Support Workers.” This official recognition should improve data collection and workforce planning over time. As government datasets adopt the new code, we may be able to design samples that better reflect the true volunteer manager population.

For now, any comparisons with the general population are provided as context only and should not be taken as definitive differences for the broader volunteer manager workforce.

Additional information on the self-reported characteristics of the organisations associated with the volunteer managers are presented below. Once again, sector representativeness should not be assumed.

Table 28: Self-reported identity of NSW residents responding to the Volunteer Manager Survey (n = 699)

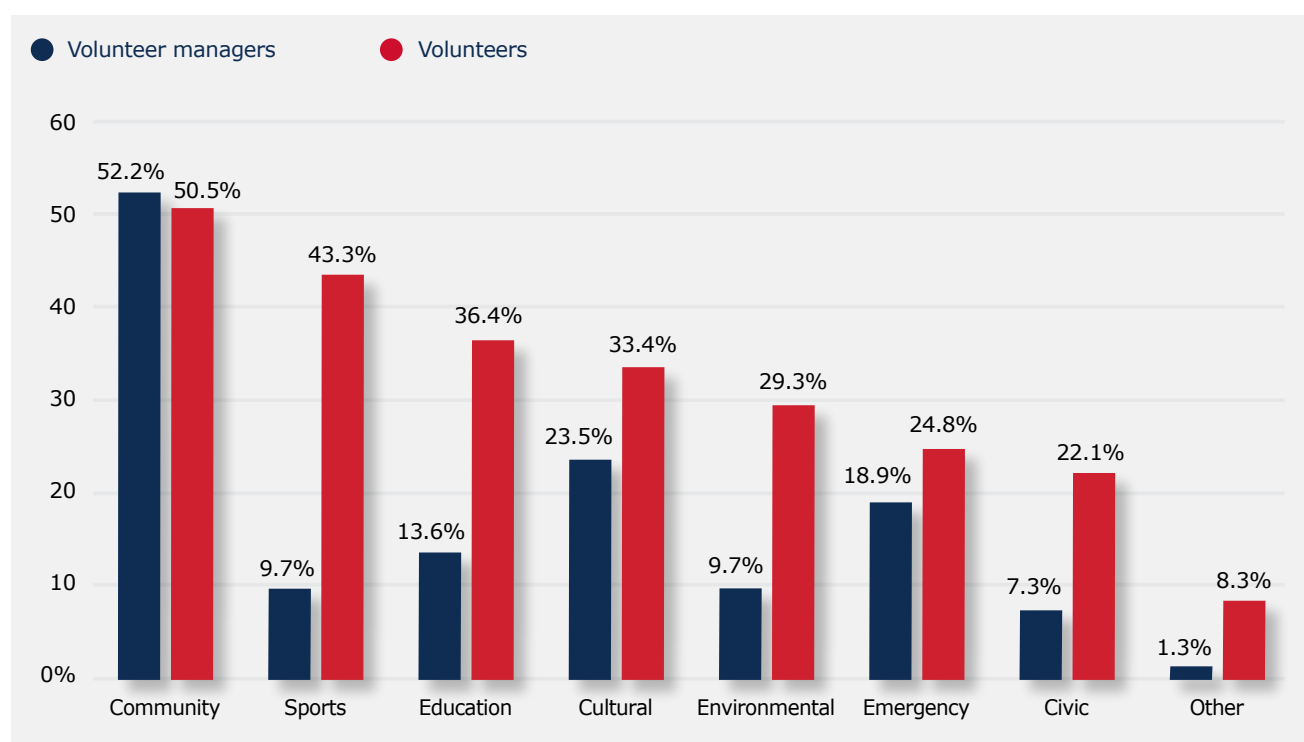
	Paid volunteer manager		Unpaid volunteer manager		Both
Status	52.2%		51.5%		3.7%
Average length of service	8.8 years		13.4 years		N/A
Age	18-29 years		30-49 years		50 and over
	2.6%		28.4%		69.0%
Gender identity	Male		Female		Non-binary/other/declined
	25.8%		70.6%		3.7%
Location	Major city	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very Remote
	51.7%	21.1%	24.0%	0.9%	2.2%
English as a first language	Yes			No	
	85.1%			14.9%	
Living with disability	75.2%			24.8%	
Caring duties	24.2%			75.8%	

Table 29: Organisational characteristics of respondents to the Volunteer Manager Survey (n = 699)

Organisational type	Not-for-profit	Government	Other
	67.5%	26.0%	6.4%
Organisational structure	Volunteer only	More volunteers than paid staff	More paid staff than volunteers
	23.5%	53.2%	23.3%

Most respondents worked in not-for-profits (67.5 percent), with about a quarter in government (26.0 percent) and a smaller share in other types of organisations (6.4 percent). In terms of staffing mix, just under a quarter said their organisation was volunteer-only (23.5 percent), around half reported more volunteers than paid staff (53.2 percent), and the remainder had more paid staff than volunteers (23.3 percent).

When we compare the sectors where volunteer managers work with the sectors where volunteers say they participate, some differences appear. This comparison is included to help identify sectors that may need more targeted recruitment in future surveys to improve coverage of the volunteer manager workforce.

Figure 43: Sector representation comparison between volunteer managers and volunteers (n = 699)

Even with the limits of convenience sampling, the survey's strengths – a large sample, diverse recruitment channels, tools refined with stakeholder input, and timing that allows comparison with previous waves – provide a sound basis for drawing meaningful insights about volunteer management practices and trends within this group of NSW volunteer managers.

Statistical methods used

The selection of the statistical tools used in this research depended on the nature of the data and the question being considered or the hypothesis being tested. Descriptive statistics provided an initial understanding of the data's distribution and central tendencies, cross-tabulations explored categorical data associations, linear and binary logistic regressions addressed relationships and predictions, and TURF analysis optimised choice options. These tools were chosen and strategically applied to extract meaningful insights that might support evidence-based decision-making.

Chi-square test (χ^2): A statistical test used to determine whether there is a significant relationship between two categorical variables, such as the relationship between disability status and discrimination experiences.

Correlation: A measure of the relationship between two variables, indicating whether and how strongly they are related.

Linear regression: Statistical method for examining the relationship between continuous variables, such as predicting volunteer hours based on demographic factors.

Logistic regression: Statistical analysis used to predict binary outcomes (yes/no) based on multiple predictor variables, such as predicting whether someone volunteers.

Mean (average): The sum of all values divided by the number of values, sensitive to extreme outliers.

Median: The middle value when data is arranged in order, less affected by extreme values than the mean and often more representative of typical experiences.

Nagelkerke R²: A measure indicating how much variance in an outcome is explained by predictor variables in logistic regression, ranging from 0 to 1.

Outlier: An extreme value that falls far outside the typical range of data, often excluded using methods like ± 3 standard deviations from the mean.

Percentage point (pp or ppt): The arithmetic difference between two percentages. If volunteering rises from 60% to 65%, it has increased by 5 percentage points.

Population: The entire group being studied, such as all NSW residents aged 15 and over.

Post-stratification weighting: Statistical

adjustment applied to survey responses to ensure the sample accurately represents the population on key demographic variables.

p-value: The probability that observed results occurred by chance. Values below 0.05 typically indicate statistical significance.

Sample (n): A subset of the population actually surveyed or studied, with 'n' indicating the number of respondents.

Standard deviation (SD): A measure of how spread out data values are from the mean, indicating variability in the dataset.

Statistical significance: A result unlikely to have occurred by chance alone, typically when $p < 0.05$, suggesting a real relationship or difference exists.

t-statistic: A test statistic used in hypothesis testing and regression analysis that measures how many standard errors a coefficient is from zero, helping determine if a predictor variable has a significant effect.

Variance: A measure of data spread, calculated as the average of squared differences from the mean.

Wald statistic: A test statistic used in regression analysis to assess the significance of individual predictor variables.

Z-score: A standardised score indicating how many standard deviations a value is from the mean, used in the report to identify and exclude outliers beyond ± 3 standard deviations.

β (Beta coefficient): In regression analysis, the standardised coefficient showing the strength and direction of the relationship between variables, allowing comparison across different scales.

Statistical significance

Descriptive statistics are numbers that summarise and describe the main features of a dataset. The three sections of this report use descriptive statistics to report on things like the percentage of the population who volunteer, the issues volunteer managers prioritise and the amount both groups spend on their volunteering/volunteers.

When comparisons are made across groups – for example, comparing the behaviours of volunteers and non-volunteers, or the experiences of paid versus unpaid volunteer managers – inferential tests of **statistical significance** are routinely applied.

Tests of statistical significance are used to find out if there is a significant relationship between two variables. In simpler terms, it helps us understand if changes in one variable are related to changes in another.

For example, in this report it is important to know if whether or not a person volunteers is related to their age. To learn this, an appropriate test of statistical significance is applied to see if the distribution of volunteers and non-volunteers significantly differs according to respondents' self-reported year of birth.

If the test shows a significant result, it means that the variables in the sample are related, and this is unlikely to be due to random chance. If it is not significant, then any difference observed is probably just random and not indicative of a real relationship between the variables.

In this report, the threshold for statistical significance is set at less than five percent ($p < 0.05$). In simpler terms, this means that any relationship labelled as "significant" has less than a one-in-twenty chance of occurring randomly.

Another way to understand this is to imagine surveying a different group of 1,000 people from the same population 20 times. If a result is "significant," you would expect to see the same result at least 19 out of those 20 times. While it can't be known for sure if this particular sample is the one-in-twenty exception without running the survey 20 times, it is scientifically reasonable to conclude that the significant findings from this sample are likely to be true for the entire population of NSW.

Tests of statistical significance, therefore, help researchers decide if what is observed in the data is likely to hold true for the wider population, or if it is probably just a coincidence.

Keep in mind, though, that a non-significant finding may have meaning, especially if it rebuts an assumption. For example, one could jump to the conclusion that because the Volunteer Manager Survey responses show significantly more female-identifying volunteer managers than males, this means that women volunteer more than men.

The raw data in the Public Survey might support this assumption by revealing that one percent more women volunteer than men. However, if this result fails the test of statistical significance, it is not safe to draw the general conclusion that women volunteer more than men.

In the interests of making this report as accessible

to as many readers as possible, the technical detail of each test run is not written up, although they are available upon request.

Importantly, though, the significant results discussed in this report cannot fully explain all the factors that might impact a finding. For example, even though a person's age did significantly impact whether or not a person reported being a volunteer, a whole range of other factors not measured could also be important, including their health, religious and political beliefs, social status, and environment.

Please do not take from the findings that the factors reported on are the *only* variables of significant (or insignificant) influence.

Input-output analysis

This report uses input-output (I/O) analysis to trace how spending on volunteering flows through the NSW economy. Volunteering-related outlays by individuals, organisations, business and government are treated as final demand and allocated to industries in the NSW Regional Input-Output Matrix (RIOM).

Because RIOM is a closed model with a household sector, it captures direct effects (in the industries where spending occurs), indirect effects (through suppliers and their suppliers) and induced effects (extra household consumption from wages). The model is built on ABS 2022–23 transaction tables, with sector-specific multipliers estimating changes in output, gross value added (GVA), employment, wages, imports and taxes.

Applying these multipliers to 2025 volunteering expenditure estimates the total economic footprint while respecting key assumptions (e.g., constant returns to scale, NSW-only impacts, imports leak out). The analysis reports \$31.9 billion in total output, \$19.4 billion in GVA, about 135,500 jobs supported and \$4.6 billion in tax revenue attributable to volunteering, with the most significant impacts in retail trade, accommodation and food services, and transport.

Figure 44: Indirect and induced impacts of volunteering expenditure on output and Gross State Product (GSP) by sector

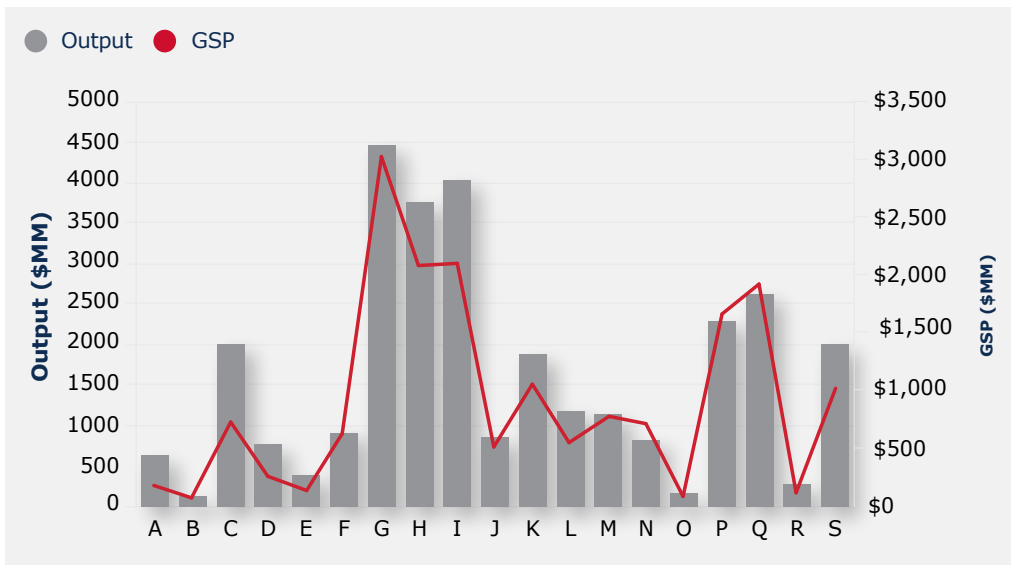
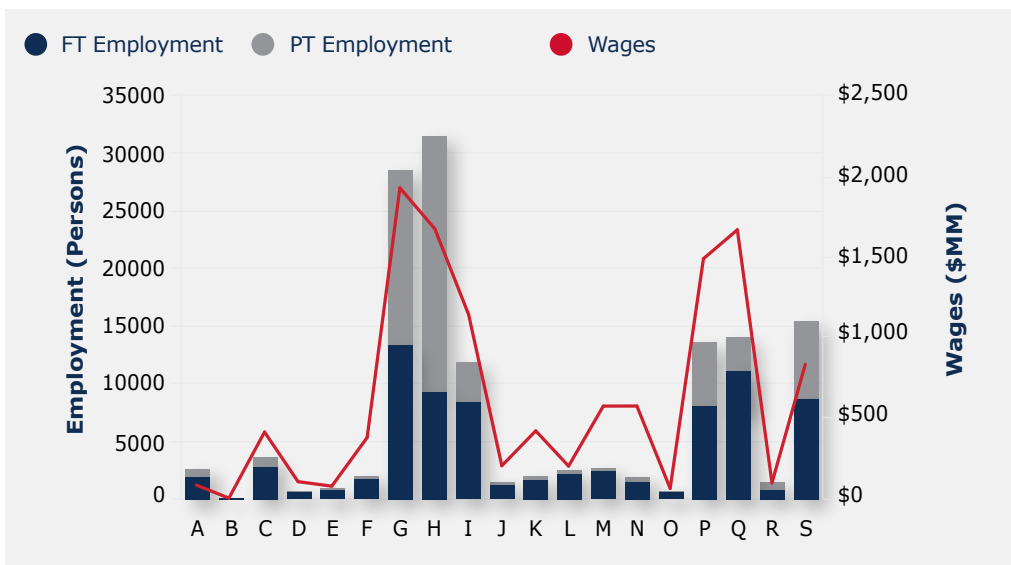


Figure 45: Indirect and induced impacts of volunteering expenditure on wages and employment by sector



Australian Bureau of Statistics reference data

2021 Census - employment, income and education (August 2025)

3101.0.002 National, state and territory population, Dec 2024 (June 2025)

5206.0 Australian National Accounts: National Income, Expenditure and Product - Table 44. Compensation of Employees, State by Sector: Current prices (March 2025)

5209.0.55.001 Australian National Accounts: Input-Output Tables, 2022-23 (March 2025)

6291.0.55.001 - EM1b - Employed persons by Hours actually worked in all jobs, State and Territory, January 1991 onwards (August 2025)

6291.0.55.001 - LM1 - Labour force status by Age, Greater Capital City and Rest of State (ASGS), Marital status and Sex, February 1978 onwards (August 2025)

6291.0.55.001 - RQ1 - Employed persons by Industry division of main job (ANZSIC), Labour market region (ASGS) and Sex, Annual averages of the preceding four quarters, Year to August 1999 onwards (June 2025)

6306.0.010 Employee Earnings and Hours, Australia, May 2023 (January 2024)

6337.0 Employee Earnings, August 2024 (December 2024)

Population estimates by LGA, Significant Urban Area, Remoteness Area, Commonwealth Electoral Division and State Electoral Division, 2001 to 2024 (March 2025)

Regional population, 2021-22 (April 2023)

Appendix B:

Plain English explainer

Direct costs

Money spent directly on volunteering in NSW.

Volunteer expenses

The money volunteers personally spend to take part in their activities.

In NSW, this totals \$16.8 billion a year after reimbursements.

For example: Sae is a volunteer wildlife carer. In addition to giving their time, they pay for specialist training, food, medicines, and habitats for injured animals. In 2025, they built a semi-permanent Stage 2 refuge in their backyard to help animals prepare for release.

Volunteer-involving organisation expenses

The money organisations spend to support their volunteers – including government funding, grants, and other resources.

In NSW, this totals \$3.1 billion a year.

For example: The Care Club is a medium-sized organisation supporting 250 volunteers. They buy uniforms, tools, and equipment, and employ staff to recruit, roster, and train their volunteer team.

Opportunity costs

When time or money is spent on volunteering, it cannot be used for something else. The value of that 'next best' option is the opportunity cost.

Volunteers' time

We assume the next best use of a volunteer's time is paid work.

For example: Suraiya volunteers two hours a week at an adult literacy program. Since she works part-time, the opportunity cost is what she would earn for those two hours. If she were unemployed, her time would have no opportunity cost in this method.

Volunteering investments

We assume the next best (and safest) use of money spent on volunteering would be to invest it in 10-year Australian government bonds (4.3% return in July 2025).

Using this approach, the opportunity cost of all NSW volunteering investments is \$854.7 million a year.

For example: Callum spends \$500 a year doing odd jobs for his elderly neighbours. If he invested that money in bonds, he'd earn \$4.50. That's the small

financial return he gives up in favour of volunteering

Commercial benefits

Economic benefits to businesses and industries linked to volunteering.

Producers' surplus

The profit businesses make from selling goods and services to volunteers or volunteer-involving organisations.

For example: Jabiri buys a referee uniform for weekend junior football. The profit the retailer makes stays in the local economy and is spent again.

Productivity premium

The workplace benefit employers get when staff gain skills through volunteering.

For example: Amy volunteers as an assistant director in a community theatre. She develops organisational and leadership skills that she also uses in her paid job as a project coordinator – skills her employer gets without paying for extra training.

Civic benefits

Benefits the wider community gets from volunteering and related spending.

Employment

Jobs created by the demand from volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

For example: The retailer selling Jabiri's uniform uses part of each sale to pay staff wages. More sales mean more hours and, eventually, more jobs.

Taxes

Taxes paid by businesses that supply goods and services to volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

For example: The retailer selling Jabiri's uniform pays taxes on those sales, helping fund public services like hospitals, roads, and schools.

Volunteer labour

The cost to replace the work volunteers do if it had to be paid at market rates.

For example: Taylor earns \$40/hour, which costs their employer \$48/hour, including super, payroll and admin costs. That's the economic value of Taylor's volunteer time for the Red Cross.

The Centre for Volunteering acknowledges the Gadigal People of the Eora Nation as the traditional owners of the land on which our office stands. We recognise the importance of their connection to place and community on these lands and pay our respects to Elders, past and present.



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