

Volunteering Tasmania

Submission to City of Hobart

Capital City Strategic Plan 2019-2029: 2023 Review

June 2023

Overview

This submission has been prepared by Volunteering Tasmania for the Capital City Strategic Plan (Plan) 2019-2029: 2023 Review consultation.

Volunteering Tasmania congratulate the City of Hobart on the development of this Plan and the work undertaken to partner with and strengthen Hobart's communities through it.

Hobart's culture is built upon strengths of diversity, participation, reciprocity, and resilience. In short it is built upon volunteering. Volunteering Tasmania recognise that the principle, sentiment, and value of volunteering are embedded within the draft Plan, yet the words volunteer/s, and volunteering go almost unmentioned. Formal volunteer numbers have been decreasing across the state, as the dependence on volunteers to fill systems gaps increases. Strategic planning and investment in the structures that support volunteering is required to realise the City of Hobart's vision for the future.

This submission offers two recommendations which Volunteering Tasmania believe will support the City of Hobart to achieve the objectives of this Plan. Volunteering Tasmania welcome the opportunity to engage in the consultation process and invite the City of Hobart to discuss the content of this submission further.

About Volunteering Tasmania

As the peak body for Volunteering in Tasmania, we work to see an inclusive, thriving, and celebrated culture of community participation across the state by strengthening and enhancing volunteering through leadership, education, and connection. We work to ensure community-based volunteering is sustained, valued and integral to community resilience and wellbeing.

Recommendations

- Recognise Hobart's culture of volunteering and represent Hobart's volunteers by using the language of 'volunteer/s' and 'volunteering' in the Plan.
- Develop a local Volunteering Strategy to support the Capital City Strategic Plan 2019-2029. Resourcing and support is available through Volunteering Tasmania's safeguarding volunteering program.

Definitions of volunteering¹

Volunteering is time willing given for the common good and without financial gain.

Formal/ traditional volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.

Informal volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside the context of a formal organisation or group. This includes assisting people in the community, excluding one's own family members. For example, looking after children, property or pets; providing home or personal assistance; or giving someone professional advice.

Background

Tasmania

Volunteering is a core part of Tasmania's culture.

The volunteering sector has the largest workforce in the state. It is 2.5 times the size of the Tasmanian Government workforce².

According to the 2021 Census data³, **33% of Tasmanians volunteered in their communities, with 45% of Tasmania's volunteers based in Hobart.** Given the nuances surrounding formal and informal volunteering and complexities associated with data collection, we expect this figure to be much higher.

Volunteers are present and contribute their time across all aspects of community life. They provide food relief, and mental health support, they transport medical equipment, provide skills development, and create opportunities for connection. Volunteering is a catalyst for change. It fosters inclusion, access and participation; social cohesion; community resilience; and individual, collective and environmental wellbeing. It is a crucial component of effective workforce, community, and population planning. Yet volunteering often goes unrecognised and unnamed in public policy.

Stakeholder knowledge, experience, and research all evidence a declining formal volunteer workforce. Despite this, volunteering continues to be viewed as an infinite, ever-available resource. This tension is exacerbated by the invisibilisation of volunteering in policy areas that depend on volunteer presence, by substituting the word volunteering with terms such as community participation and civic engagement.

The Australian Charities and Not-For-Profits Commission (ACNC) data notes that in **2021 there were 1,053 charities registered with the ACNC in Tasmania, with 62% of staff (paid and unpaid) being**

¹ Volunteering Australia, Common Languages Guide, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Common-Languages-Guide-2022-FINAL.pdf>.

² Volunteering Tasmania, State of Volunteering Summary Report, <https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/State-of-Volunteering-Summary-Report-Summary-2019.pdf>

³ Australian Bureau of Statistics, Hobart 2021 Census All persons QuickStats, <https://abs.gov.au/census/find-census-data/quickstats/2021/601>.

volunteers.⁴ Many not-for-profits in the Hobart region would not be able to survive without the efforts of volunteers.

Despite Tasmania's strong volunteering culture, formal volunteer participation has been in decline. **It is estimated that by 2029, there will be a 42% gap between the demand for, and supply of volunteers in Tasmania**⁵. COVID-19 gave us a glimpse into a world with fewer volunteers. It revealed significant systems gaps, a concerning dependence on volunteers to deliver wellbeing supports to the community and a need to invest in the systems that support both formal and informal volunteering.

When we think about the culture of Tasmania and City of Hobart's vision for the future, we need to think critically about the roles of volunteers within it, and whether this vision is achievable without them.

Hobart

Local councils are the closest level of government to our communities. They are the caretakers of community knowledge and have an insight into the needs of community that are unparalleled by state and federal governments.

Hobart is said to foster a sense of community and connection rarely experienced in a capital city.⁶ Tasmania's unique geographic position, and the isolation it has experienced has given rise to a unique culture of community participation and civic engagement – to a rich and distinct volunteering culture.

*"Hobart's isolation and scale have required resilience. We know that future challenges will demand that we work hard and work together. But we are our best selves in times of adversity and vulnerability. We are caring, helpful and supportive of everyone at all times but especially when things get tough. We flourish in times of hardship."*⁷

*"In Hobart, we help each other. As the rest of the world becomes more and more individualist, Hobart has kept a community feel. Many of us talk about holiday street parties, helping neighbours as they grow older, volunteering and giving back in honour of those who helped us. We have all experienced, or at least heard about, the bushfires of 1967 and the day the Tasman Bridge went down in 1975. Although these were painful and challenging times, many of us have stories of how these disasters are symbols of Hobart at its best."*⁸

⁴ Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, Table 5: Charity revenue source, volunteers and employees by state or territory, <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-9th-edition>.

⁵ Volunteering Tasmania, Concerns for the Future, <https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Concerns-for-the-Future-of-Volunteering.pdf>.

⁶ City of Hobart, Draft Capital City Strategic Plan 2019-29: 2023 Review, pp. 6.

⁷ City of Hobart, Resilience Hobart, <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Community/Community-programs/Resilient-Hobart>.

⁸ City of Hobart, Hobart: A Community Vision For Our Island Capital, pp. 29, <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/files/assets/public/council/strategies-and-plans/hobart-a-community-vision.pdf>.

Hobart Capital City engage approximately 820 volunteers through different programs.⁹ Including:

- Mathers House and Criterion House
- Youth Arts and Recreation Centre
- Bushcare
- Still Gardening
- City Welcome Volunteer Program
- International Student Ambassadors¹⁰

Volunteer services brought nearly \$296,000 in resources to the City of Hobart in 2020-21, more than doubling to \$602,000 in 2021-22.¹¹ Council would have had to purchase or provide those services, resources and supports had they not been donated/ volunteered.¹²

The City of Hobart state, that “the City recognises the value and importance of volunteering and sees increased levels of volunteering as one of the key components of a cohesive and harmonious community.” Volunteer involvement is integral to the delivery of [our] programs.¹³ The draft Plan is to be commended. It is consultative, thoughtful, and future focussed, but it does not represent the contributions of or critical need to safeguard volunteering if Hobart are to see the realisation of the Plan’s vision.

As a concept volunteering sounds simple - “time willing given for the greater good without financial gain”.¹⁴ But effective, safe, inclusive, and sustainable volunteering requires strategic planning, critical support, best practice infrastructure and appropriate representation in and resourcing through policy. Volunteering Tasmania encourage the City of Hobart to plan for and invest in the systems and structures that support volunteering into the future.

The 2023 draft Capital City Strategic Plan

Volunteering Tasmania celebrate the City of Hobart’s recognition of the value and strength in working alongside community.

The Plan is the City of Hobart’s major planning document. It responds to and reflects the community’s values and aspirations as expressed in the Community Vision – Hobart: A community vision for our island capital.¹⁵ The draft Plan is underpinned the by seven pillars of the Community Vision, being:

- Pillar 1 – Sense of place
- Pillar 2 – Community inclusion, participation and belonging
- Pillar 3 – Creativity and culture

⁹ City of Hobart, Volunteering, <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/Community/Community-programs/Volunteering>.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ City of Hobart, 2021-22 Annual Report, pp. 98, <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/files/assets/public/council-meetings-aldermen/agms-and-annual-reports/city-of-hobart-annual-report-2021-22.pdf>.

¹² Ibid pp. 102

¹³ City of Hobart, Volunteer Management System Manual, October 2017, pp. 4 - <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/files/assets/public/community/community-programs/volunteering/updated-volunteer-management-system-manual-october-2017.pdf>.

¹⁴ VA

¹⁵ City of Hobart, Strategic Plan Four Year Review, <https://yoursay.hobartcity.com.au/strategic-plan-four-year-review>.

- Pillar 4 – City economies
- Pillar 5 – Movement and connectivity
- Pillar 6 – Natural environment
- Pillar 7 – Built environment
- Pillar 8 – Governance and civic involvement

In reality, volunteers and volunteering, contribute significantly across each of these pillars. By applying a volunteering lens to the draft Plan, we can see where the concept of informal volunteering is present, for example in statements such as:

*2.2.1 Support people from all backgrounds and life experiences to participate in Hobart life.*¹⁶

Volunteering gives social connection; good opportunity to connect with others; sense of belonging to group – Volunteering Tasmania stakeholder consultations with newly arrived migrants.

*6.4.5 Actively manage bushfire risk in collaboration with the community and fire and emergency services.*¹⁷

*Volunteer participation in emergency management is shown to improve longer-term outcomes for the wellbeing of those directly impacted; accelerate the recovery process; and increase community capacity for local disaster management.*¹⁸

8.1.1 Undertake genuine, transparent and appropriate community engagement to understand the current and future needs of the community and make informed decisions.

Volunteers value the opportunity to work with councils and to have their voices heard and actioned. *“We get a chance to voice our opinions and ideas and to consult with council and the wider community to really make a change here (in our community). We need new people and new ways of thinking.”* – Volunteering Tasmania network group member

Yet the words volunteer/s and/ or volunteering appear only twice in the draft Plan. The first as a statistic about the percentage of Hobart residents who identify as volunteers, and the second alongside Pillar 8 – Governance and civic involvement:¹⁹

Outcome 8.2 Hobart is a city that delivers public value and excellence by being a financially responsible, high performing and accountable organisation that is responsive to the needs of the community.

*Strategy 8.2.3 Foster a positive and supportive organisational culture that prioritises staff, elected member and **volunteers’** health and wellbeing.*

¹⁶ City of Hobart, Draft Capital City Strategic Plan 2019-29: 2023 Review, pp. 18.

¹⁷ Ibid pp. 27

¹⁸ Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection, Handbook 12, pp. 4, <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5618/aidr-communities-responding-to-disasters-planning-for-spontaneous-volunteers-handbook.pdf>.

¹⁹ City of Hobart, Draft Capital City Strategic Plan 2019-29: 2023 Review, pp. 31.

It is evident that volunteering was recognised more strongly in the 2019 original iteration of the Plan, where it was included alongside Pillars 2, 4, 6, and 8, in the following ways:²⁰

Pillar	Outcome	Strategy
2: Community inclusion, participation and belonging	2.2 Hobart is a place where diversity is celebrated and everyone can belong, and where people have opportunities to learn about one another and participate in city life.	2.2.5 Acknowledge and celebrate the value of volunteering and support further development of volunteer programs.
4: City economies	4.2 People have a range of opportunities to participate in the economic life of the city	4.2.4 Recognise and celebrate the contribution of volunteers and unpaid workers to the city economy
6: Natural environment Volunteers were named in the description where they were recognised as accessing Hobart’s parks, reserves, and bushland for education and engagement with nature.		
8: Governance and civic involvement	8.3 City leadership is accessible and reflects Hobart communities.	8.3.2 Promote diversity in the City’s staff and volunteers .

The review of the Plan is intended to position the City of Hobart to meet the future challenges and opportunities of population growth and rapid social, economic, and environmental changes; climate change, and housing and transport pressures.²¹ Tasmanian councils have long recognised the value of volunteers and volunteering to the wellbeing of their communities. As formal volunteer rates decline across Tasmania, we consider the following questions:

- What does the City of Hobart’s future look like without volunteers?
- And what can be done now to safeguard volunteering in the City of Hobart?

²⁰ City of Hobart, Capital City Strategic Plan 2019-29, <https://www.hobartcity.com.au/files/assets/public/strategies-and-plans/strategic-plan-2019-29/capital-city-strategic-plan-2019-29.pdf>.

²¹ City of Hobart, Strategic Plan Four Year Review – FAQs, <https://yoursay.hobartcity.com.au/strategic-plan-four-year-review/widgets/406539/faqs#101107>.

The *National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-33*²² and the *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement*²³ (currently being refreshed) note that best practice volunteering involvement requires recognition, representation, strategic planning, and effective resourcing of the systems and structures that support volunteering. Recognising Hobart's volunteers and their significant contributions to the community by using the words 'volunteer/s' and 'volunteering' throughout the strategy would support representation and demonstrate effective leadership in volunteering practice. We cannot afford to take volunteering for granted and must invest in the systems and structures that support volunteering.

Volunteering Tasmania's Safeguarding Volunteering Program

Volunteering Tasmania have been partnering with councils to co-design place-based, community-led volunteering strategies which support community resilience by safeguarding volunteering. These strategies focus on the interconnected nature of communities, and highlight opportunities for collaboration with community members, volunteer led and volunteering including organisations, and emergency preparedness, response and recovery activities which rely on volunteers.

Councils involved in the Safeguarding Volunteering Project all conclude that working collaboratively with community members, including volunteers was needed to support health and wellbeing and resilient communities. *"We're (continuing to) use this co-design/collaborative approach going forward because things don't work unless you have community buy-in. You need your community onboard so that things can actually happen."* (Council member)

There are a range of reasons for the decline in volunteering in Tasmania across the past five years, including: changes to motivations of volunteers; decreased willingness to make long-term commitments to volunteer roles; barriers to volunteering including a lack of organisational, human, and financial resources; rigid organisational structures; and regulatory burden.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic impacted volunteering dramatically. During February – April 2020 in Tasmania, an average of 250,000 hours of weekly volunteer time that was lost has still not been recovered.²⁴

Hobart's volunteering sector requires significant, systemic and ongoing investment in the structures that enable and support volunteer recruitment, retention, management and safety to achieve the strategic objectives of the Plan. The City of Hobart is facing distinct challenges as the population grows, the Future of Local Government Review progresses, the risk of natural disaster increases, and cost of living pressures continue to rise. As the consequential demand for community support and services increases, can Hobart truly risk a declining volunteer workforce?

²² Volunteering Australia, National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-2023-2033.pdf>.

²³ Volunteering Australia, The National Standards For Volunteer Involvement, <https://www.cbaa.org.au/sites/default/files/National-Standards-Documents-FINAL-3004.pdf>.

²⁴ Volunteering Tasmania, COVID-19 Coronavirus Information, Re-engaging Volunteers.

Volunteering Tasmania encourage the City of Hobart to develop a Volunteering Strategy to complement and support the Plan. Volunteering Tasmania welcome any interest in and discussion about provision of support through the safeguarding volunteering program.

Advocacy for a Tasmanian Volunteering Strategy

Volunteering Tasmania's advocacy for a Tasmanian Volunteering Strategy has been received positively. While individual council strategies are critical to supporting the distinct needs of the local communities and their volunteers, a state strategy will seek to address the systemic challenges confronting Tasmania's volunteering ecosystem. Developing a local volunteering strategy would present the City of Hobart with an opportunity for leadership as the state strategy is developed, having already undertaken work to incorporate the updated national standards of volunteer involvement and best practice volunteer management principles.

Conclusion

Volunteering is a critical part of Hobart's community and culture.

To meet the objectives of this Plan, volunteering must be recognised, represented, and resourced to ensure the City of Hobart is best placed to meet the needs of the future.

We understand that the Future of Local Government Review will mandate a change to existing council borders, yet the need for the systems and structures required to support safe, effective, and sustainable volunteering will not change with amalgamation.