

The Volunteering Industry in Tasmania - Briefing Paper

Volunteering forms Tasmania's largest industry in terms of its economic, social and community benefit and is driven by the largest cross-sector workforce in the state.¹ Volunteering is an economic multiplier. For every dollar invested in the volunteering industry, \$3.50 is returned in economic, health, social and cultural benefits. Volunteering has been estimated to bring \$4 billion in benefit to the state, with \$2.9 billion being the conservative cost equivalent of wage replacement for the tasks completed by volunteers.²

Volunteering is defined as “time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.”³

Volunteers are involved in a myriad of services and activities, including the arts, emergency management and recovery, aged care, mental health, disability support, animal welfare, food and emergency relief, environment, sports, education, and more. In many cases, the contributions of volunteers are crucial to the survival of the sectors they volunteer in. With a workforce of 297,000⁴, Tasmania is built and sustained upon the goodwill of people who give their time, where they can, to matters they care about.

The volunteering sector is facing unprecedented challenges and is confronted by a persistent lack of resourcing in the infrastructure that sustains the industry. Volunteering is associated with the provision of free labour, but only the time given is free. Labour is accompanied by significant, often hidden administrative and management costs, including Work with Vulnerable People (WWVP) registration, police history record check, Child and Youth Safeguarding training, and first aid training for each volunteer. It is imperative that volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) are resourced with commensurate funding required to deliver safe, accessible, and best-practice volunteering, including those associated with regulatory compliance and the professionalisation and development of volunteer managers.

Cross-industry members and key stakeholders consistently inform us of the need for access to key initiatives, delivered by Volunteering Tasmania, to secure the future of volunteering in this state. This critical infrastructure can only be distributed through the provision of consistent and sustainable peak body funding.

Despite Tasmania's strong volunteering culture, formal volunteer participation has been in decline.⁵ It is estimated that **without significant strategic intervention and investment in the systems that support volunteering, by 2029, there will be a 42% gap between the demand for and supply of**

¹ Volunteering Tasmania, State of Volunteering Report 2019, pp. 38 – 51.

² Ibid, pp. 50.

³ Volunteering Australia, Volunteering Australia Project: The Review of the Definition of Volunteering, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Definition-of-Volunteering-27-July-20151.pdf>.

⁴ Volunteering Tasmania, State of Volunteering Report, 2019, pp. 8.

⁵ Australian Government, Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, Volunteers, <https://www.aihw.gov.au/reports/australias-welfare/volunteers>.

volunteers in Tasmania.⁶ While COVID-19 shone a light on a declining volunteer workforce, research demonstrates that formal volunteer participation has been decreasing for years, exacerbated by a chronic and systemic lack of understanding, recognition, representation, and resourcing.⁷ Despite this very real, cross-sector concern, the volunteer workforce continues to be viewed as an infinite, ever-available resource, which is perpetuated by a pervasive invisibilisation in policy areas that depend on a volunteer presence.

Unlike other jurisdictions, Tasmania does not have a Minister for Volunteering which sees responsibility for the volunteering industry split across government. As a result, the volunteering workforce is not consistently considered in the formulation of policy and programs. This results in policy and regulation that either overlooks volunteering entirely or inadequately addresses its unique challenges. Understanding the ways that volunteering supports and is affected by key government and socio-cultural-political priorities, requires a comprehensive approach, and should be underpinned by a Tasmanian volunteering strategy (with stepped development and implementation to occur across the next five years) that considers the needs of the entire cross-portfolio, volunteering industry.

The volunteer workforce plays a key role in the provision of services to Tasmania’s children and young people, with nearly 90% of community organisations having engaged volunteers in their workforce.⁸ Tasmania is one of only three Australian jurisdictions to charge volunteers for WWVP registration, and it’s the most expensive. Volunteers and VIOs have consistently reported that the financial cost and administrative burden of obtaining WWVP registration is a significant barrier to volunteer recruitment, limiting child and youth safe volunteering to the individuals and organisations who can afford the cost.^{9,10} The reality is that without commensurate funding for increased regulation, organisations will compromise risk management to meet the immediate needs associated with maintaining operations and filling workforce gaps.

Recommendations to the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government’s Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings called for the inclusion of volunteers in the code of conduct, to consider the unique and distinct challenges that VIOs experience in adapting to changing regulation, and to resource VIOs appropriately to safeguard children and young people from harm.^{11,12} We are currently experiencing a significant increase in demand for support from members and the broader volunteering industry as the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Framework comes into effect. Members are identifying gaps where the volunteer workforce has been under-considered and despite high levels of willingness, are experiencing significant uncertainty about how to meet their obligations and how to afford them.

⁶ Volunteering Tasmania, Tasmanian Volunteering Profile 2029, pp. 3, <https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Tasmanian-Volunteer-Profile.pdf>.

⁷ Volunteering Tasmania, The Great Reset: Volunteering in Tasmania post-COVID-19, https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/The_Great_Reset_Paper_2022_FINAL_Web.pdf.

⁸ Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc, A Community Services Industry Built for Tasmania’s Future: Community Services Industry Plan 2021-2031, pp. 8, https://issuu.com/tascoss7/docs/community_services_industry_plan_2021-2031_final.

⁹ Volunteering Tasmania, industry consultation.

¹⁰ National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033, pp. 22, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-2023-2033.pdf>

¹¹ Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc, submission to the Commission of Inquiry into the Tasmanian Government’s Responses to Child Sexual Abuse in Institutional Settings, July 2021, pp. 8, https://issuu.com/tascoss7/docs/tascoss_submission_to_commission_of_inquiry_july_2.

¹² Volunteering Tasmania, submission to the Child and Youth Safe Organisations Bill 2022, September 2022, <https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-Tasmania-submission-Child-and-Youth-Safe-Organisations-Bill-2022.pdf>.

Without adequate indexation and in the context of rising cost of living and operations pressures, VIOs are being increasingly impacted by a growing demand for services from the community.¹³ With minimal finite resources, VIOs are reducing paid workforce expenses and trying to fill service delivery gaps with volunteer labour, without investing in the necessary systems to deliver compliant, best-practice volunteer involvement.^{14, 15}

The Tasmanian volunteer workforce of 297,000 is comparable in size to Tasmania’s paid workforce of 293,000.¹⁶ Just like paid employment, formal volunteering doesn’t happen without deliberate, strategic and ongoing investment in leadership.¹⁷ Volunteer managers navigate distinctly different tasks and responsibilities from employee managers that relate to the complex policy and legislative environment surrounding volunteer engagement.¹⁸ Unlike the paid workforce, volunteers are not incentivised by financial motivations, requiring volunteer managers to engage with a complex set of motivations related to purpose, values, and relationship to retain their volunteers.¹⁹ Volunteer management requires significant time, skill, and effort to sustain the volunteer workforce, yet as a profession it is confronted by a pervasive invisibilisation and a considerable lack of recognition, and legitimacy. With no clear career pathways, minimal training and development opportunities, and no Standard Classification of Operations,²⁰ Tasmanian volunteer managers often fall into volunteer management without the support or opportunities required to perform their roles comfortably.²¹ Efforts have been made to professionalise volunteer management nationally through the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement but professionalisation also requires the establishment of identified career pathways through the delivery of accredited training and development opportunities. With our industry expertise and leadership experience, Volunteering Tasmania would be best placed to broker these pathways of professionalisation, increasing outcomes and impact across the industry.

Volunteering can act as a powerful driver of inclusion, but it is not immune to the systemic barriers that impede participation across society, where access is often mistaken for ability. VIOs have recognised the legacy of ‘traditional’ volunteering in their organisational structures and have identified the need to access support and resources required to embed informed and effective organisational change to recruit and retain a diverse volunteer workforce. Volunteering is evidenced to increase wellbeing outcomes by building social capital, reducing loneliness, fostering purpose, and acting as a pathway to employment. Access to volunteering can either alleviate processes of exclusion and discrimination or reinforce them by gatekeeping access to the opportunities and benefits volunteering offers.

¹³ Tasmanian Community Services Industry Joint Statement of 2021 State Election Priorities, https://issuu.com/tascoss7/docs/1657_tascoss_joint_peaks_statement_2021_draft_3.

¹⁴ Volunteering Tasmania, industry consultation.

¹⁵ Nebbs, A., 2022, Psychosocial hazard management in regional volunteer involving organisations: A review of the current research landscape. Volunteering Australia, https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/VRP_Psychosocial-hazard-management-in-regional-volunteer-involving-organisations.pdf.

¹⁶ Tasmanian Government, Skills Tasmania, The Tasmanian Workforce, https://www.skills.tas.gov.au/about/the_tasmanian_workforce.

¹⁷ National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033, pp. 43.

¹⁸ Ibid, pp. 62.

¹⁹ Stukas, A., & Wilson, S., 2022, Understanding Motivations to Volunteer, Volunteering Australia, https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/VRP_Understanding-Motivations-to-Volunteer.pdf.

²⁰ ANZSCO – Australian and New Zealand Standard Classification of Operations, 2022, <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/classifications/anzsco-australian-and-new-zealand-standard-classification-occupations/2022>.

²¹ Kragt, D., Wilson, S., Forner, V. W., & Newstead, T., 2022, Without leadership there is no volunteering: The importance of strategic investment in leadership development in Australia, Volunteering Australia, https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/VRP_Without-leadership-there-is-no-volunteering-The-importance-of-strategic-investment-in-leadership-development-in-Australia.pdf.

The employment company SEEK has found that 85% of employers believe that volunteer experience is just as credible as paid work.²² The International Association of Volunteer Effort further recognise that **volunteers who live in rural areas increase their likelihood of finding paid employment by 55%** by having gained relevant employment experience through volunteering.²³ Access to volunteering opportunities directly effects life outcomes. **It has the potential to increase the employability of those who experience barriers in accessing employment, including Tasmania's 200,000 school leavers transitioning from secondary education to employment.** The benefits of accessible volunteering have been widely recognised by more than 300 young volunteers engaged with Volunteering Tasmania's Youth Volunteering Army pilot program, supporting young volunteers to enhance their future employment and/or further education opportunities.

In 2021-22, **the Tasmania Fire Service and State Emergency Service employed a combined workforce of 556 paid staff and 5,424 volunteers.**²⁴ In that same year, the Tasmanian Ambulance Service employed 356 qualified ambulance officers and 385 volunteer ambulance operatives.²⁵ **The Tasmanian community sector employs approximately 17,800 paid employees and is supported by more than 35,000 volunteers**²⁶. As a result of persistent underfunding in volunteering infrastructure, these sectors are among many facing the loss of nearly half their unpaid workforce in the next five years. The impacts should not be underestimated. By 2024, an additional 14,000 volunteers will be required in the community services industry alone in order to meet projected community need by 2024. This is 350% more than the 4,000 additional paid jobs required to meet that same demand.²⁷

The realities of an under-resourced volunteering industry are harsh and present significant, avoidable risks to community members, industry, and government. Future proofing the volunteer workforce will require an exploration of partnerships across the volunteering industry, including those with local councils and emergency management services, as well as corporate and business Tasmania to develop sustainable volunteering practices, reduce barriers to volunteering, and enable access to opportunities that benefit both the providers and recipients of volunteer time.²⁸

The pervasive lack of understanding that surrounds the volunteering industry and the assumption made about its sustainability has led to a pervasive failure to adequately resource Volunteering Tasmania to respond to the structural challenges influencing the declining volunteer workforce. Volunteering Tasmania represents the largest, cross-sector workforce in the state, yet we wear a legacy of historic underfunding. Our ability to respond to increasing demand and to support government, industry, and community to mitigate the risks that accompany a declining volunteering workforce are compromised without consistent, sustainable, and adequately indexed funding. Strategic investment must be made to safeguard Tasmania's volunteering workforce by investing in Volunteering Tasmania to deliver core volunteering infrastructure, through – the future of volunteering; workforce development and growth; community-led, place-based initiatives; and sector leadership and sustainability.

²² SEEK, 3 reasons volunteering can put you ahead of the pack, 2019, <https://www.seek.com.au/career-advice/article/3-reasons-volunteering-can-put-you-ahead-of-the-pack>.

²³ International Association for Volunteer Effort, Handbook: Youth Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment, pp. 9, https://www.iave.org/iavewp/wp-content/uploads/2016/08/Youth-Handbook_Intro_Web.pdf.

²⁴ Tasmania Fire Service, State Fire Commission, Annual Report 2021-22, pp. 11, 37-38, <https://www.fire.tas.gov.au/userfiles/jessm/file/TFS%20Annual%20Report%202021-2022.pdf>.

²⁵ Australian Government, Productivity Commission, Ambulance services – data table 11A.8.

²⁶ Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc, A Community Services Industry Built for Tasmania's Future: Community Services Industry Plan 2021-2031, pp. 8, https://issuu.com/tascoss7/docs/community_services_industry_plan_2021-2031_final.

²⁷ Ibid, pp. 10.

²⁸ National Strategy For Volunteering 2023-2033.