

A State Volunteering Strategy for Tasmania – Briefing Paper

Purpose	This paper has been prepared to inform stakeholders about the importance of a Volunteering Strategy for Tasmania and the importance of resourcing an associated Action Plan to achieve its targeted priorities. A commitment to this work presents an opportunity to positively impact Tasmania's social, cultural and economic future.
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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.

Definitions of volunteering¹

Volunteering is time willingly 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.

Tasmania's volunteering industry and workforce

The volunteering industry is Tasmania's largest in terms of economic, social and community participation.² **The Tasmanian volunteer workforce of 297,000³ is comparable in size to Tasmania's paid workforce of 293,000.⁴** The number of people involved in the volunteer workforce is over ten times the size of Tasmania's state service.⁵

Volunteering is a core part of Tasmania's culture. Volunteers are present and contribute their time across all aspects of community life.⁶ They provide food relief, mental health support, care for injured wildlife and increase adult literacy outcomes. They transport medical equipment, enable major cultural and sporting events, respond to disasters, and form critical points of connection between business and community. Volunteering has the unique potential to foster inclusion, participation, belonging, connection to people and place, community resilience and individual, collective, and environmental wellbeing.⁷

Despite Tasmania's strong volunteering culture, formal volunteer participation is in decline.⁸ Without immediate and strategic investment in the systems and structures that support the volunteer workforce, it is expected **that by 2029 there will be a 42% gap between the demand for and supply of volunteers in Tasmania.**⁹ Yet the volunteer workforce continues to be viewed as an infinite, ever-available resource. This tension is exacerbated by the minimisation, and at times, invisibilisation of volunteers in public policy and workforce strategies that depend on a sustained volunteer presence.

Across the country, Ministerial responsibility for volunteering is often informally placed with the jurisdictional equivalent of the Minister for Community Services and Development. Yet given the size, scope, and cross-sector nature of Tasmania's volunteer workforce, it is clear that all Ministerial and Shadow Ministerial portfolios have a dependence on volunteers. Without a Minister for Volunteering,

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

² Volunteering Tasmania, State of Volunteering Report 2019, pp. 38 – 51.

³ Ibid, pp. 8.

⁴ Tasmanian Government, Skills Tasmania, The Tasmanian Workforce, https://www.skills.tas.gov.au/about/the_tasmanian_workforce.

⁵ Comparison of volunteering workforce data from the Volunteering Tasmania State of Volunteering Report 2019, and the Tasmanian State Service Annual Report October 2022, pp. 27, https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0012/251031/2021-22-Tasmanian-State-Service-Annual-Report.PDF

⁶ See appendix 1 for types of organisations volunteered for in Australia in 2022.

⁷ OECD, How's Life? 2015: Measuring Well-being – The value of giving: Volunteering and Well-being, https://read.oecd-ilibrary.org/economics/how-s-life-2015/the-value-of-giving_how_life-2015-9-en#page1.

⁸ Comparison of data, Australian Bureau of Statistics General Social Survey Table 15.1 Persons aged 15 years and over, Social Experiences-By State and territory (2019) and Table 6.1 Persons aged 15 years and over, Social Experiences-By State and territory, estimate (2020).

⁹ Volunteering Tasmania, Tasmanian Volunteering Profile 2029, pp. 3, <https://volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/09/Tasmanian-Volunteer-Profile.pdf>.

each hold distinct responsibilities for the future of volunteering in Tasmania. Appendix 2 contains a list of 28 public policies, current and developing with outcomes tied to an assumption about the stability of Tasmania's volunteer workforce. These policies either indicate a reliance on volunteers to meet the policy outcomes, minimise it, or invisibilise it entirely.

In considering some of the sectors that depend on a declining volunteer workforce, it is possible to imagine what some of the implications of a 42% gap might be for community members, organisations and services, businesses, and government.

Community services

Tasmania's volunteer workforce contributes significantly to the delivery of essential community services. The Tasmanian community services industry is supported by a paid workforce of around 18,000 people and an unpaid workforce of about 35,000 volunteers, with **90% of community service organisation's (CSOs) engaging volunteers in their organisations.**¹⁰ While the community service workforce projections require an additional 4,000 paid jobs to meet community need by 2024, it is estimated that the industry will require an additional 14,000 volunteers in that same time.¹¹ The realities of an under-resourced community service sector create significant risks for the safety and wellbeing of our communities.

Charities

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) classified as volunteers.**¹² Many Tasmanian charities and not-for-profits, working across fourteen charity subtypes,¹³ would be unable to survive without the efforts of volunteers.

Partnership with the charities sector presents an untapped opportunity to assist small and emerging businesses to access the benefits of volunteering. Corporate or employee volunteering involves paid staff from a company or business volunteering their time with a volunteer involving organisation (VIO) increase connections within the community, opportunities to practice corporate responsibility, to support employee wellbeing and retention, and to provide VIOs with access to specific skills.¹⁴

Local councils

In 2018, Tasmanian Councils participated in the National Local Government Skills Shortage Survey outlining their current workforce profile and highlighting predictions for the future workforce. **Of the councils who participated in the survey, 92% said that they currently engage volunteers in the workforce, 61% anticipated they would continue to engage the volunteer workforce to the same level in the future, and 30% predicted the need to increase their volunteer workforce.**¹⁵

¹⁰ Tasmanian Council of Social Service Inc, A Community Services Industry Built for Tasmania's Future: Community Services Industry Plan 2021-2031, pp. 8, https://www.dpac.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0017/228041/Community-Services-Industry-Plan-2021-2031-web.pdf.

¹¹ Ibid, pp.10.

¹² 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-9thedition>.

¹³ Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, Charity Subtypes, <https://www.acnc.gov.au/for-charities/start-charity/you-start-charity/charity-subtypes>.

¹⁴ Volunteering Australia, Corporate Volunteering in Australia: a snapshot, <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Corporate-Volunteering-Snapshot.pdf>.

¹⁵ Local Government Association Tasmania, Local Government Workforce and Future Skills Report Tasmania, September 2018, pp. 46, https://www.lgat.tas.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0028/662329/LG-Workforce-and-Future-Skills-Report-Tasmania-Sept-2018-FINAL.pdf.

Of Tasmania’s 29 local councils, 21 recognised volunteers in their 2021-22 strategic plans. Of the eight councils that didn’t, three included volunteering in their annual plans, and the other five included volunteering in other strategies or plans, such as their municipal emergency management plans.¹⁶

Local councils depend on the volunteer workforce to support positive community outcomes in their municipalities. Volunteering Tasmania have been working with councils through the safeguarding volunteers project to co-design community-led, place-based, sustainable volunteering strategies that safeguard against a declining volunteer workforce. These strategies focus on the interconnected nature of communities, and highlight opportunities for collaboration between community members, VIOs, and emergency preparedness, response and recovery activities.

Sport

Volunteer recruitment, management and experience are critical components of planning for and delivering successful events, including sporting events. **An estimated 2.9 million Australians volunteer in sports annually.**¹⁷ Volunteers are the heart of our sport sector and are recognised as having a critical role in the delivery of sport across the country. Sport could not have become so firmly embedded within the social fabric of Tasmania without its volunteers. Volunteers in sport fill an enormous diversity of roles, from coach to club president, administrators to canteen staff, and everything in between.

The sport sector has experienced the impacts of an evolving volunteering landscape, and sporting clubs, groups and associations are grappling with how to attract and retain volunteers, as traditional mechanisms become less and less effective.

The conversation about human resourcing and volunteering enabling infrastructure is particularly pertinent to current discussions about Tasmanian sport and the Macquarie Point Stadium. About 220,000 volunteers contribute nationally to AFL each year across community football, talent, and other programs.¹⁸ **If we were to apply the rate of decline of Tasmania’s volunteer workforce to the number of Australian AFL volunteers, we would see a loss of 92,400 volunteers to Australian AFL.** This would have devastating effects across all aspects of AFL.

Trends in volunteer participation

People will always give their time, where they can, to matters they care about. While governments have become reliant upon an ever available, volunteer workforce, without strategic intervention, volunteers will no longer be present in areas that governments depend on them to be.

¹⁶ Mapping undertaken by Volunteering Tasmania. Resources accessed via all Tasmanian council websites.

¹⁷ Australian Government, Australian Sports Commission, Sport Volunteer Coalition Action Plan, pp. 4, https://www.ausport.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0009/1068570/36994_Sport-Volunteer-Coalition-Action-Plan-update.pdf.

¹⁸ AFL Tasmania, Tasmanian volunteers recognised as state award winners,

A comparison of 2020 ABS data and the 2022 Volunteering in Australia research indicates a significant increase in informal volunteering during this time.¹⁹ In 2022, approximately one quarter of Australians (26.7%) had participated in formal volunteering and just under a half (46.5%) had participated in informal volunteering.²⁰ During the COVID-19 response, Tasmania experienced a sudden rise in informal volunteering, as formal volunteers were obliged to meet increasing compliance and regulation requirements; were unable to initially access volunteer specific public health advice; were stood down in great number; and who found informal volunteering opportunities within their highly mobilised local communities.²¹ 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.²²

One of legacies of COVID-19 upon the paid and unpaid workforce has been a reconsideration of personal priorities, and an opportunity to engage with work, both paid and unpaid differently. Unlike the paid workforce, the volunteer workforce is primarily motivated by passion and purpose, rather than by financial incentive. Volunteers therefore do not necessarily require formalised structures to find meaning in their voluntary work, particularly where they have access to informal opportunities to make meaningful contributions within their communities.

Volunteers and VIOs are navigating increasing social, economic, and geographic challenges. As costs of living and operations rise, so too does community need. A lack of appropriate resourcing and indexation to meet increasing need, has seen a growing demand for volunteers to fill critical systems gaps and workforce shortages without funding the best practice infrastructure required to engage, manage, and retain formal volunteers. Without volunteer enabling infrastructure, VIOs have been unable to effectively dismantle the barriers to formal volunteer participation as identified by their volunteers. This includes a lack of organisational flexibility; marginalisation from safe participation; 'red tape' and increased regulatory requirements; an absence of volunteer management; inaccessible resources to perform their roles; financial burden; and inappropriate volunteer roles.

Empowering people to shape the communities they want to live in is a defining feature of informal volunteering. Yet there is a tension for government in determining how to respond to and support community-led initiatives that do not hinder the agency and innovation of informal volunteers, but that recognise and maintain government functions and responsibilities. This concept can be understood within the context of the emergency management and response sector whereby spontaneous, informal volunteers often arrive on scene before emergency services and play a critical role in the initial response to and recovery from disaster. Yet informal volunteers can also add complexity for traditional emergency response teams as informal volunteers arrive willing, but potentially unprepared to provide support without required training or screening.²³ Informal volunteer participation and community action is inevitable, and governments must account for and consider the roles of the formal and informal volunteer workforce across portfolios.

Volunteering is associated with the provision of free labour, but it is not free. Instead, **volunteer labour is accompanied by significant administrative and management costs, often absorbed by underfunded VIOs.** A member of Volunteering Tasmania recently advised that it costs their

¹⁹ National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033, pp. 67, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-2023-2033.pdf>.

²⁰ Ibid, pp. 19.

²¹ 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.

²² Ibid.

²³ Australian Institute for Disaster Resilience, Australian Disaster Resilience Handbook Collection, Handbook 2, pp. 70, <https://knowledge.aidr.org.au/media/5634/community-recovery-handbook.pdf>.

organisation approximately \$600 to onboard a single volunteer. This does not include the costs to provide ongoing management, training, or support. Another member highlighted that it costs their organisation \$239 to provide a volunteer with mandatory first aid training. With first aid certificates expiring after two years and with an unpaid workforce of approximately 800 volunteers, this is an unfunded cost of \$191,200 that must be absorbed by the organisation every two years to meet their contractual obligations.

These are some of the unintended consequences that accompany the pervasive lack of understanding, representation and legitimacy surrounding the volunteer workforce and its prioritisation in public policy and funding contracts. Without understanding the complexities and the true value and cost of volunteering, decision makers will unwittingly continue to contribute to the decline of the formal volunteer workforce. With **83% of Australian VIOs indicating that they need more volunteers**,²⁴ and a “long-term trend of declining rates of formal volunteering, the future of volunteering relies on a reformed approach to volunteer involvement. This reform must balance the needs of organisations with the experience of their volunteers.”²⁵

National Strategy for Volunteering

The [National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033](#) was published in February 2023, and is the product of an extensive co-design journey with Australia’s volunteering industry. It presents a framework for safe, supported, and sustainable volunteering in Australia. While this strategy is intended to provide high-level national guidance, it does not replace the need for jurisdictional volunteering strategies that respond to the specific social, cultural, economic, political, and environmental context of those communities.

A Volunteering Strategy for Tasmania

The tendency to simultaneously position volunteering as a solution to structural issues and to minimise a systemic dependency upon its sustainability is fraught with risk. It romanticises a limiting narrative of volunteering without resourcing the infrastructure required to deliver safe, accessible, and inclusive volunteering opportunities.²⁶

Recognition, representation, and resourcing of volunteering has been disjointed and piecemeal in Tasmania. Historically the volunteer workforce has not been considered with consistency across policy development and has had significant implications upon budget decisions. This is demonstrated in the varied pockets of funding to volunteering related activities in the 2023-24 state budget.²⁷

“The sustainability of volunteering relies on valuing and supporting volunteering as inherently beneficial for people and communities.”²⁸ Across local and state government, there has been a growing

²⁴ Holmes, K., Dunlop, P. D., Lockstone-Binney, L., Davies, A., Farid, H. M., & Lavery, C., Volunteering in Australia: The Organisation Perspective. Volunteering Australia, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia2022-The-Organisation-Perspective.pdf>

²⁵ National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033, pp. 43, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-2023-2033.pdf>.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 54.

²⁷ Tasmanian Government, 2023-24 Tasmanian Budget, Paper Number 1 and Paper Number 2 Volume 1 and Volume 2, accessed via <https://www.treasury.tas.gov.au/budget-and-financial-management/2023-24-tasmanian-budget>.

²⁸ National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033, pp. 54, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/National-Strategy-for-Volunteering-2023-2033.pdf>.

interest to shift “traditional ways of working from ‘doing policy and programs for, or to, people’ towards partnering with, enabling and empowering communities.” The Department of Premier and Cabinet has expressed interest in exploring opportunities to provide whole of government guidance about the role and value of community-led, place-based work in Tasmania.²⁹ This work is however, dependent on support for and the growth of the volunteer workforce, the importance of which has been recognised and by community, the volunteering industry and by local government.

To date Volunteering Tasmania have worked alongside eight councils and their communities to support the development of local community-led volunteer strategies.

The development of a community volunteering strategy is a vital part of empowering (all) communities. We extend our gratitude for this service (Volunteering Tasmania Safeguarding program). (Council participant)

The focus on a community-led, place-based process has further highlighted the need for all community work to be based on this. We’re using this co-design 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 participant)

The overwhelming, positive response from all community and council members involved in this process has demonstrated that councils, VIOs and communities are seeking support, guidance, and investment to safeguard the future of volunteering in their municipalities.

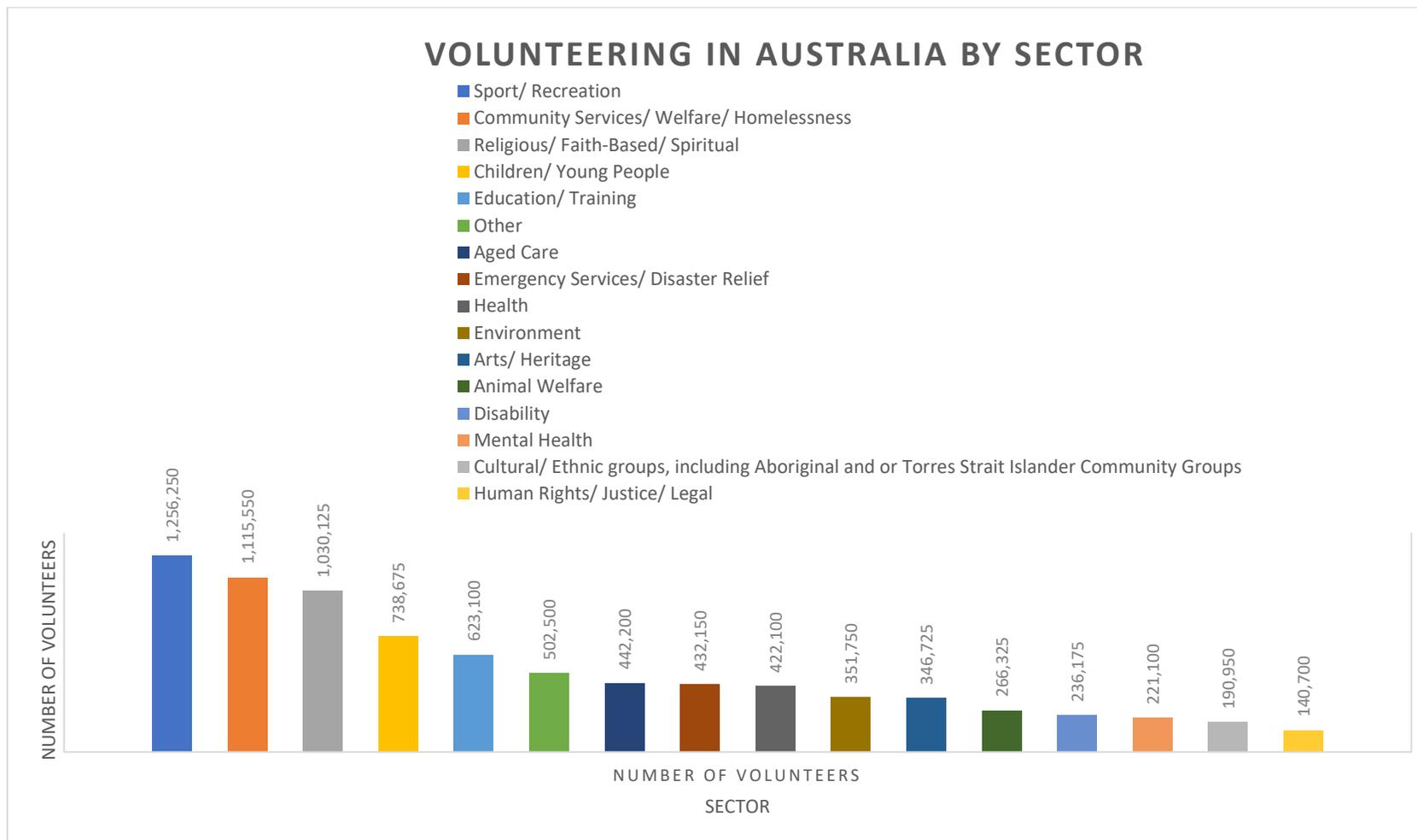
With a declining formal volunteer workforce, an increased number of informal volunteers, an extensive cross-sector reliance on volunteers and a recognised need across the state for government action, **Tasmania needs a State Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan.** To strengthen the volunteer workforce, Tasmania needs a political commitment and investment in volunteer enabling infrastructure that contextualises and localises the National Strategy for Volunteering, while empowering and supporting the development and implementation of community-led, place-based volunteering strategies. A state strategy and action plan would increase understanding, build capacity, and provide decision makers and policy developers with a comprehensive and informed mechanism through which to consider and include volunteering in public policy.

Unlike other jurisdictions,³⁰ Tasmania is in a unique position to undertake this work. Our distinct geographic position and isolation has given rise to a unique culture of community participation and civic engagement. It is a culture that has been built on volunteering but requires immediate strategic intervention and investment if the Tasmanian Government intend to maintain a reliance upon the unpaid contributions of Tasmanians to the strategic and political priorities of government.

²⁹ Tasmanian Council of Social Services and Community Partnerships and Priorities, Department of Premier and Cabinet, DPAC paper – Towards a shared understanding of community-led approaches in Tasmania: March 2023, pp. 2.

³⁰ See appendix 2 for a snapshot of jurisdictional volunteering strategies.

Appendix 1: Types of organisations volunteered for across Australia in 2022³¹



³¹ Biddle, N., Boyer, C., Gray, M., & Jahromi, M., Volunteering in Australia 2022: the Volunteer Perspective, pp. 42, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Volunteer-Perspective.pdf>.

Appendix 2: Snapshot of jurisdictional volunteering strategies.

Jurisdiction	Strategy	Action Plan	Minister for volunteering
Tasmania	Nil	N/A	N
Victoria	Victorian Volunteer Strategy 2022-2027	N	Y
New South Wales	NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020-2030	N	N
Australian Capital Territory	Advancing advocacy with government	N/A	N
Queensland	Have received a commitment from the Queensland Government to progress this work	N/A	N
South Australia	Volunteering Strategy for South Australia 2021-2027	N	N
Northern Territory	Nil	N/A	N
Western Australia	WA Volunteering Strategy	Western Australia Volunteering Strategy Action Plan 2023-2026	Y