

Election Priorities Statement 2024

Volunteering Tasmania seeks your commitment to invest in the infrastructure required to address escalating workforce shortages and the risks posed to community members, industry, and government.

Between 2019 and 2023, formal volunteer participation in Tasmania declined by 11%. This represents a loss of 15,000 workers in the face of increasing community demand for the services and supports delivered by volunteers.

While social, cultural, and economic factors have influenced this declining workforce trend, it has been exacerbated by the chronic lack of understanding, representation, and resourcing of industry need in cross-sector, policy areas that depend on the stability of the formal volunteer workforce. Without immediate and strategic investment in the structures required to support the volunteer workforce, Tasmania will remain on track to meet predictions of a 42% gap between the demand for and supply of formal volunteers by 2029.

While the stability of Tasmania's formal volunteer workforce is critical to many policy and election priorities, it is rarely positioned this way in public and political discourse. Volunteers drive service delivery across industries and sectors such as the community services, aged care, emergency management, education, health, business, conservation, sport, and the arts. Their presence can mean the difference between regular and irregular welfare checks for isolated members of the community; access to health care for those whose barriers to transport mean that they would otherwise go without; and faster, more effective responses in the face of natural disasters.

While government reliance on volunteers to fill critical systems gaps and paid workforce shortages has increased, resourcing of the best practice infrastructure required to reduce barriers to formal volunteer participation has not.

Government is not entitled to volunteers. Volunteer presence should never be taken for granted, and we should never assume that volunteers will always be there.

Ahead of the 2024 election, we need leaders to recognise the true value of volunteering by moving beyond verbal expressions of gratitude for the contributions of volunteers, to strategic action to curb the declining trend in formal volunteer participation. As the peak body for Tasmania's largest workforce, Volunteering Tasmania requires sustainable and adequate resourcing to work alongside industry and government to lead and propel workforce growth and development; to drive systemic and cultural change within the industry; and to support the advancement of best practice in community-led volunteering initiatives.

Seven priority areas that must be addressed

A reformed approach to volunteer involvement is critical to curb the escalating decline of Tasmania's essential, formal volunteer workforce and the risks that accompany it. Volunteering Tasmania seeks your commitment to strengthen Tasmania's volunteering industry now and into the future through strategic investment in the targeted measures below which are underpinned by a call for sustainable peak body funding.

Sustainable peak body funding

- Invest in the future of Tasmania's largest and most diverse workforce by providing Volunteering Tasmania with an adequate, appropriately indexed, five-year peak body funding contract that ensures sustainability of operations.
- To date, Volunteering Tasmania's peak body funding reflects the lack of legitimacy, recognition and understanding surrounding the essential volunteering industry and its enabling infrastructure.
- Investment in sustainable industry leadership and development will enable Volunteering Tasmania to work alongside government, industry, and community stakeholders to deliver, guide and support the implementation of the measures below identified by Tasmania's volunteering industry as critical pieces of volunteer-enabling infrastructure.

Professionalisation of volunteer management

- Invest in the profession of volunteer management by funding measures to scope and develop a nationally recognised vocational education training course for Tasmanian volunteer managers.
- Research suggests that leading a volunteer workforce is more challenging than leading a paid workforce. Yet Tasmania's volunteering industry continues to identify significant gaps in the training and development opportunities available to existing and prospective volunteer managers.
- Investment in volunteer management is one of the most impactful things for a volunteer workforce. As general leadership programs are not suitable to the volunteering context, action must be taken to create professional development opportunities and career pathways for current and emerging volunteer managers to build and sustain the formal volunteer workforce.

Accessible and innovative volunteering

- Decrease barriers to formal volunteering by funding the expansion of the Volunteer Connect service.
- Tasmanian volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) consistently tell us that they are struggling to recruit and retain formal volunteers, while individual volunteers often tell us that they have been unable to find a formal volunteer position. Everyone should, but not everyone has, equal access to volunteering and the benefits that accompany it. In acknowledging systemic inequities, Volunteering Tasmania has responded to requests for support from community members and VIOs by establishing the Volunteer Connect service.
- The Volunteer Connect service is a practical and feasible way to increase community participation, promote equitable access to the benefits of volunteering, and to support the sustainable delivery of programs and services provided by volunteers.

Youth Volunteer Army

- Enhance the employability of Tasmania's 24,500 secondary school students through access to the Youth Volunteer Army program.
- For many young people, volunteering can act as a bridge between secondary school and employment by providing opportunities to develop new skills, to expand their personal and professional networks, and to engage in otherwise inaccessible experiential learning.
- Tasmania's youth unemployment rate is concerningly high. With 85% of employers believing that volunteer experience is just as credible as paid work experience, the Youth Volunteer Army can provide young people with equitable access to volunteering opportunities.

Corporate volunteering

- Allocate funding to scope, design and pilot a best practice corporate volunteering program in Tasmania.
- Volunteering Tasmania receives a significant number of enquiries from corporate and not-for-profit (NFP) Tasmania, seeking support to develop or access corporate volunteering opportunities. Without a best practice model or identified body to guide this work, many corporations have experienced challenges in establishing and accessing the benefits of a corporate volunteering program.
- Corporate Tasmania has a significant and willing role to play in strengthening Tasmania's volunteering industry by 'unleashing the power of people toward social impact,' in a coordinated and supported way.

Tasmanian Volunteering Strategy

- Commit to developing, resourcing, and implementing Tasmania's first State Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan to curb the predicted 42% gap between the demand for and supply of volunteers by 2029 in Tasmania.
- Recognition, representation, and resourcing of volunteering has been disjointed and piecemeal in Tasmania. Historically, the volunteer workforce has not been considered with consistency across public policy development or state budget allocations. A state strategy and action plan would increase understanding, build capability, and provide industry and government stakeholders with comprehensive guidance about the future of volunteering in Tasmania.

Free Working with Vulnerable People registrations for volunteers

- Increase the safety of children and young people by absorbing the outward facing cost of Working with Vulnerable People (WWVP) registration for volunteers.
- 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 worker screening to the individuals and organisations who can afford the cost.
- A small cost to the state should not continue to compromise the safety of vulnerable people.