

Safeguarding Volunteering

Project update | November 2020



Building sustainable volunteering in our communities

Volunteering Tasmania (VT) have been working with three local councils, Clarence, Huon Valley and Devonport as part of the Safeguarding Volunteering Project to support sustainable volunteering communities. Funded by the State Government, the project focuses on supporting local councils to develop a community-based Volunteer Sustainability Strategy/Framework. The framework is being co-designed by community with the aim of preparing for a strong volunteer community in the future.

Background

The Safeguarding Project team commenced community co-design in September in all three regions. During this phase each of the regions established a Local Volunteer Network Group (LVNG) to support and lead the development of the framework.

Each of the groups has a combination of local volunteers and people who work with volunteers. The LVNG members represent small grassroots groups and larger, state-wide organisations with sporting clubs, emergency services, community support, arts/heritage and culture, emergency relief, aged care and environmental groups involved.

Group members, along with council and Volunteering Tasmania staff, have been meeting regularly since September to work through the project activity and build an understanding of the current volunteer environment in each community.

This has involved sharing their knowledge of volunteering in the region, looking at current and projected data on volunteering trends and undertaking community consultations.

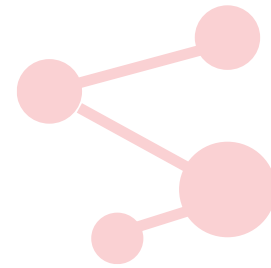
The community consultations were undertaken with over 200 local people, both current volunteers and people not volunteering participated via interviews with LVNG members and online surveys. People shared the strengths and challenges for local volunteering and ideas they had for the future.

This information will be used in each region to develop focus areas and actions for each of the strategies. When compiling all the information from each region the themes that follow were identified as common focus areas across all three regions.

COMMON THEMES

During the codesign process and community consultations, the following common themes emerged:

1. Flexible, diverse, and accessible volunteering opportunities
2. Collaboration
3. Best practice volunteer management
4. Demand for volunteers
5. Youth participation
6. Raise the profile and awareness of volunteering



1. Flexible, diverse, accessible volunteering opportunities

Innovative ways to contribute to a group, deliver a volunteer role or support a cause, were raised as top priorities.

People expressed time restraints, competing priorities, lack of flexibility in roles and the cost to volunteer as some of the biggest barriers to volunteering.

As seen in national and state data more flexible opportunities that could work around people's lives without ongoing, regular and large commitments were seen as good additional options to traditional volunteering roles.

Specific ideas included:

- short-term, event- or project-based, task-specific, online, micro volunteering opportunities
- options for family volunteering
- let the volunteer determine/design their role
- reimbursement of any costs for volunteers to remove the barriers people face to engage
- soft entry points for people who feel nervous or unsure about engaging with a new activity or organisation

2. Collaboration

Both volunteers and people working with volunteers highlighted the benefits of working more collaboratively across the local volunteer community.

Working collaboratively was identified as a way to build a strong culture of volunteering, share resources and best practices for working with volunteers as well as a more efficient and effective way of operating.

Specific ideas included:

- better referrals and connections between volunteer involving organisations
- collaboration across groups and volunteers to share knowledge, skills, solve problems, hold social gatherings and run community events
- create a volunteer culture by partnering with schools and businesses
- partner with local businesses to increase volunteering in the workforce

3. Best practice volunteer management

Streamlined and organised processes, strong communication and safe working environments were highlighted as key elements of an enjoyable volunteer role and a strong organisation.

Included in best practice volunteer management is volunteer recognition, engagement in training and education opportunities and reducing the red tape to streamline processes where possible.

Specific ideas included:

- improving organisational capacity
- adopting various methods of volunteer recognition
- increasing supports for volunteer involving organisations

4. Demand for volunteers

People expressed concerns about the suitability of what volunteers were being asked to do in community and whether some of the roles should be paid positions.

Data projections and feedback suggests that we are seeing more responsibility and demand placed on volunteers which is likely to increase in the future.

Specific ideas included:

- assessing the suitability of volunteer roles
- reducing the high reliance and expectations on volunteers - not overloading volunteers which leads to burnout, drop off or dissatisfaction
- not replacing volunteers with what should be paid positions

5. Youth participation

People suggested that volunteering and the current way we promote and celebrate volunteers doesn't relate or appeal to the younger generations, nor do the traditional volunteering roles.

Consideration should be given to a specific recruitment strategy and alternative ways of promoting volunteering that appeal to younger people.

Specific ideas included:

- use a range of platforms for recruitment
- promote the benefits of volunteering for employment opportunities
- volunteering is a part of the school curriculum
- offer project-based or purpose-driven volunteer opportunities

6. Raise the profile and awareness of volunteering

A lack of awareness and understanding of current needs and opportunities for volunteering across the regions was a barrier to engaging.

People weren't aware of the value, contribution and need across the community, and said that more innovation in the way volunteering is talked about and promoted is needed.

Building a culture of community contribution and celebrating and highlighting the value of volunteers was outlined as a priority to building a strong volunteering sector, as was getting access to local information about opportunities to engage.

Specific ideas included:

- improve communication regarding volunteering – change the language, use different local platforms to reach people (including traditional and new technology) and sell the impact and need
- increase exposure – community events, online promotion and celebration, storytelling and celebrating the contribution of volunteers
- online local platforms with all local volunteering information

NEXT STEPS

To develop the Volunteer Sustainability Frameworks each region will work with their LVNG to refine the focus areas and identify priority actions. This will involve testing with the community to ensure the strategies are effective in creating a more sustainable volunteering community.

By June 2021 we anticipate that the final versions of the Volunteer Sustainability Framework will be released.

We'll also be working closely with each community and council to support a whole-of-community investment in these strategies and the actions that promote a strong volunteering community. Ideally, the framework will be owned and used by the whole volunteering community.

In addition, Volunteering Tasmania will be developing resources and tools for other local councils to develop their own Volunteer Sustainability Frameworks.

