

Volunteer Management Activity
Community Consultation Summary
May 2022



Background

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services from 2021-2026, the [Volunteer Management Activity](#) (VMA) aims to increase opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their broader community through volunteering.

Part of this funding is to increase the reach of Volunteering Tasmania into rural and regional communities and particularly smaller, grassroots organisations to support their access to online resources.

Our first step was to consult with Tasmanian Councils and associated community organisations to understand the current situation.

Community consultations

These consultations explored the role Councils and associated community organisations currently play in supporting volunteering across their community; what is needed; and digital literacy and access issues.

20 Councils and 1 associated community organisation took part in these consultations between November 2021-June 2022.

Desktop review

In addition to these consultations, a desktop review was undertaken to review all Council websites, to explore the following:

- A dedicated page for volunteering
- Reference to volunteering in Strategic / Community Plans
- Resources to support volunteering in their community i.e. Volunteer Strategy, Volunteer Policies etc.

Where Volunteer Sustainability Strategies were available for Councils previously involved in the Safeguarding Volunteering Project¹, these were also reviewed.

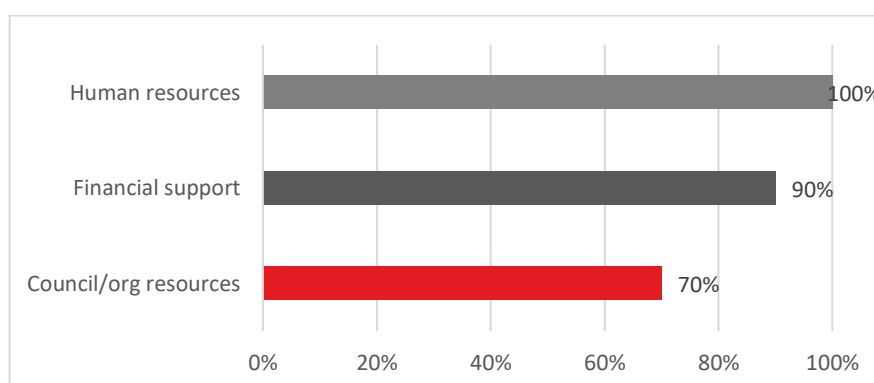
¹ *The Safeguarding Volunteering Project focuses on supporting local Councils to develop a community-based Volunteer Sustainability Strategy/Framework that focuses on preparing for a strong volunteer community in the future.*



Summary of findings

Councils and associated community organisations, play a role in supporting volunteering programs within the wider community through a variety of ways. This support is generally provided via community groups and organisations and includes:

- **Human resources**, providing advice and support on technical matters; strategic/business/event/project planning and management; governance; insurance; COVID planning; grant applications; advocacy and expertise, including seeking out resources to support. Some Community Services staff within Council said they act as a conduit between community and Council to support with planning permits etc.
- **Financial support** through 'peppercorn' leases; waived or lower fees; rate remissions; parking permits; donations; partnership and auspicing arrangements; and community grants, events funding and sponsorship programs.
- Access to **Council/organisational resources** such as facilities (including maintenance of); event resources (bollards, sounds equipment etc.); templates around risk management, staff/volunteer management (position descriptions for example) etc.; printing; volunteer awards; connection to networks for partnership purposes, promotion of activities etc.



- Councils hold a range of **information on their websites** in relation to volunteering, however **33%** noted that these are not utilised as much as they could be, and that they are not as user-friendly as they could be (often large, very wordy documents).
- 45% offered/facilitated **training opportunities**. The opportunities noted here include group facilitation; mental health first aid; leadership; grant writing; social media; asset-based community development; inclusion; and measurement and evaluation.
- 71% support **collaboration and networking**, to assist with resource sharing.
- 29% made a direct **connection to the health and wellbeing** within their communities and volunteering.



Challenges identified:

- 52% attributed an increase to **workload and accountability** for community groups as a result of **COVID** (signage, check in, cleaning etc.). Individual risk was noted as a concern from volunteers who are now reluctant to take on additional responsibility.
- 52% spoke of the **ageing population of volunteers**; some who are not good with change; some who experience health challenges; and some who are reliant on their volunteering for social connection and purpose.
- Lack of **business continuity and succession planning** and reliance on one or two key people was identified by 48% as being a challenge for many groups.
- 38% spoke of the need for more **flexible volunteering** opportunities that attract younger people. Formal versus informal volunteering was also highlighted.
- 33% made note of the need to **grow the capacity** of community groups/organisations, rather than just provide them with a service.
- 1 raised the challenge of managing a mix of **mutual obligation** volunteers (who have to be there to receive a Centrelink payment) and volunteers who are there driven by passion.

95% of communities reported challenges around digital literacy and access. Issues faced include:

- 29% identified as regional communities who have pockets with **no or unreliable internet access**, with 'digital blackspots' identified in these local government areas.
- 29% reported significant numbers of **households without internet connection**, particularly in regional communities. One Council reported 25.2% of households in their local government area to have no internet connection.
- 29% of communities made a **connection between disadvantage** and low digital literacy and access (lower literacy levels and financial barriers).
- 19% highlighted that volunteers in their communities were a **diverse group with varying digital literacy levels**. Can be difficult to provide targeted support.
- **Navigating information** was identified as an issue for 19%, with volunteer organisations not knowing where to go to find the information they need.
- 38% of communities are still using **printed materials** to share information in order to reach those who are not accessing information online.
- Low capacity for social media promotion and interaction and not having email addresses, was identified by 14% of communities. This impacts **digital communication channels** and can be a barrier to attracting volunteers and promoting activities/events.
- Most communities spoke about **access to support** through their local Library or Online Access Centre, however 38% noted that this often is not taken up or needs to be better promoted. Issues here related to limited resources i.e. limited opening hours, limited space, limited staff, only having one computer available at a Neighbourhood Centre. Some communities outlined other



forms of support, including IT clinics, local digital literacy groups and hubs (run by volunteers), Tasmania Government Digital Coaching Program and a Council of the Ageing (COTA) program building IT skills for seniors.

- 33% noted the reliance on one/two **key people** to administer the organisation, noting that they often do not have the digital literacy or confidence needed.
- 2 communities shared that some volunteers have a **strong sense of ownership**, which can impact on attracting younger people who have digital skills. A lack of flexibility and culture within the volunteer organisation was also noted by 35% as a reason for not **attracting younger people** as volunteers.
- 38% have seen evidence of some smaller volunteer organisations that are run by volunteers, often **relying on smart phones** to get online.
- Many volunteer organisations have the **hardware and software** (although some use their personal equipment), but it was noted by 14% that they don't have provision to upgrade equipment and software. Some Councils reported that community grants are accessed to purchase hardware and noted that it would be beneficial to have more grants available for this. Identified by many Councils that community groups do not have printers.
- 14% noted that many smaller volunteer organisations are using old equipment and systems, resulting in **lack of efficiency**. Often this is due to a lack of knowledge about what is available and expertise and time to implement new systems.
- 14% highlighted that **grant opportunities** rely on a good level of digital literacy and access, and a number of community groups are missing out on these opportunities.
- 38% of communities shared that volunteer organisations have faced barriers throughout **COVID** where they haven't had the digital literacy to manage requirements around moving events online or ticketing for in-person events etc.

Councils would like our support to strengthen volunteering within their community by:

- 62% would like to have more information and resources available to **promote volunteering** in their community. Examples of this include support to develop a comprehensive list of volunteering opportunities within the community; engaging locals to share their experiences and showcase the benefits of volunteering through short videos that can be shared in a number of media's. A particular focus on attracting young people to volunteer roles was noted.
- 62% would like to see more **training** opportunities for volunteer organisations, including self-care; mental health; using social media; business essentials; collaboration; change management; succession planning and how to diversify; Child Safe Organisation requirements; understanding rights and responsibilities (for volunteers and organisations); resilience and culture (use examples from other community groups).
- 48% would like us to be a conduit to **online information** that is easy to navigate and **pathways to support** around digital literacy.



- 38% would like providing practical, easy to use **resources**, such as cheat sheets and checklists, for business planning; strategic planning; succession planning; communication planning; recruitment and retention; volunteer recognition; and COVID case studies.
- 33% need tools and strategies to **engage volunteers**, making processes inclusive and accessible. Ideas included training mentors to support new volunteers.
- 29% would like to find new ways to **recognise volunteers** and thank them for their efforts. Current activities in this space are resource/time intensive and are not receiving a good level of engagement from volunteers.
- 29% identified the need for support in providing more **flexible opportunities** to volunteer, including recognising informal volunteering.
- 24% would like **information, resources and connections** for forums and other opportunities within communities.
- 19% suggested we need to make our support known, **inclusive and accessible**.
- 14% suggested **skilling up young people** to become digital support mentors for volunteer organisations.
- 10% would like direct support for **setting up committees** and support for them to understand their roles and responsibilities including how to run a meeting etc. Provide opportunities for committees to undertake online training together and explore flexible models to support broader participation.

Next steps

At Volunteering Tasmania, we have good access to the community sector and organisations who have paid staff to support volunteers. Where we don't have a lot of reach is with smaller, grassroots volunteer run organisations. We estimate that there are around 3,000-5,000 volunteer groups in Tasmania, and we currently connect to 300-500. We know that these groups utilise support from their local Councils and often go to Councils as a trusted source of information. Therefore, this provides us with a great opportunity to partner and work together to support these groups.

Volunteering Tasmania will put out an Expression of Interest for nine Councils/associated community organisations to form a 26TEN Community for Volunteering. This will focus on the accessibility of volunteering resources by reviewing VT resources and creating community resources using Plain English principles. We will also work with these nine Councils/associated community organisations to design a suitable website integration where Council/associated community organisations can link to VT website resources. Templates will then be provided to promote volunteering via community-based websites and link to the Volunteering Tasmania website, ensuring up to date best practice volunteering resources are available within communities.

Other information and ideas for strengthening volunteering across communities, will be shared with all Volunteering Tasmania Portfolio areas, and applied to projects, including other Volunteer Management Activity deliverables.