

An Agenda for Volunteering for the Australian Capital Territory Community, 2003-2007

December 2002

Forward from Chief Minister

Volunteers make a vital contribution to the prosperity of the ACT, with many thousands of Canberrans investing their time and effort to improve the community's quality of life.

My Government recognizes that without the support of volunteers, Canberra could not deliver a whole range of essential community services nor staff major national and international events.

It is vital therefore that we plan for the future to ensure we have sufficient people who are appropriately trained and resourced to follow in the footsteps of our current volunteer workforce. We need to encourage new volunteers and nurture existing volunteers.

I commend Volunteering ACT for facilitating the development of this strategic framework, together with those who participated in its making - the business sector, the community sector and ACT Government agencies - and look forward to the implementation of the specific actions that will breathe life into this important community initiative.

Jon Stanhope
Chief Minister

Message from Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia (VA) believes the ACT Agenda for Volunteering is the result of a very sound consultation process and will provide an excellent framework for the next five years. The ACT and national agendas will complement each other very well, ensuring that volunteering will continue to flourish and that volunteers are protected in their work. VA commends the work that has been accomplished to develop such a sound document.

Sha Cordingley
Chief Executive Officer

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1 Introduction

The importance of volunteering to the Australian community was taken to new levels of public awareness during the 2000 Sydney Olympics. The profile and achievements of the 50,000 volunteers who worked across the many venues, events and roles during the Olympics are defining events in the history of volunteering in Australia. Around 1,400 of those volunteers were ACT residents. Volunteering effort contributes significantly to our GDP with an estimated contribution of 2.2 million hours valued at around \$42 billion per annum (Ironmonger, 2001). According to the 2000 ABS study, over 31% of the population now volunteers annually in Australia. That volunteering effort builds the capacity of communities to support individuals, families, organisations and groups to work together, to feel a sense of belonging, to foster a shared responsibility for community well-being, to recognise and support diversity and to build the skills and resources of all community members. It is undertaken through a very diverse range of organisations ranging from very small, locally based groups through to large organisations.

The 2000 ABS national survey shows that the ACT has a higher than average level of volunteering (36%) annually across very diverse organisations and activities; the latest ABS survey confirms that over 81,000 people volunteered in the ACT in the past year (ABS, 2001).

In July 2001, Volunteering ACT, with the support of the ACT Government and the business sector, convened a Summit on Volunteering in Canberra. The Summit was attended by over 80 people representing organisations with a commitment to volunteering, volunteers themselves, volunteer managers, the business community, and the ACT Government. The Summit set the scene for the development of a volunteer framework for the ACT to be developed jointly by community based organisations, the business community and the ACT Government. The idea of the framework was to set an agenda for volunteering in the ACT community and to build on the achievements of the International Year of Volunteers (IYV).

Many jurisdictions across the world have established broad agendas for volunteering including Ireland, Canada, The Netherlands, New Zealand and Britain. The Australian Government has signed off on a National Agenda, Beyond the International Year of Volunteers, with Volunteering Australia Inc. Volunteering has changed markedly over the past few decades. Understanding how these changes impact on individuals, organisations and the community has driven many of the agenda setting approaches which have been initiated in Australia and other countries.

This framework was developed through a wide community consultation process undertaken in mid to late 2002; over 170 people participated, representing around 100 organisations from government, business and community. It reflects the concerns, issues and hopes of the diverse range of people and organisations that contributed to its development. The framework will be known as An Agenda for Volunteering for the Australian Capital Territory and will be referred to as an Agenda from here on in.

What is this Agenda?

This document sets out a blue print for the development of volunteering in the ACT community for the next five years. It provides directions and ideas for the wide range of organisations who rely on volunteers, for the business community, for unions, and for the ACT Government. It has identified many of the most pressing issues which organisations and sectors face in this new century as they try to sustain and build their volunteer base. It will respond to the key issues raised during the development process especially to matters concerning protection, safety, recruitment and retention and partnerships with business.

What will the Agenda do?

The Agenda will:

1. Establish some principles around volunteering in the ACT which will encourage and support volunteering as an important social and economic activity building healthy and inclusive communities
2. Address the challenges facing volunteers and organisations involving volunteers including those issues which relate to the protection of volunteers, organisations, and the community
3. Encourage key stakeholders to take a leadership role in addressing those aspects which both support and hinder volunteering
4. Set some priorities for action by Volunteering ACT, the ACT Government, the business community, the unions, and other community based organisations with a leadership role on specific issues
5. Underpin the development of a code of practice on volunteering to sit within the COMPACT¹
6. Provide practical resources and ideas for volunteer managers, volunteers and organisations.

How organisations/sectors might use the Agenda?

The Agenda should assist organisations and/or sectors to:

1. Understand and promote volunteering within some agreed practices which protect people volunteering and make sure the communities in which volunteers work achieve the best possible outcomes from volunteer effort
2. Keep and build their volunteer base
3. Find solutions to some of the challenges which have made it increasingly difficult to manage and support volunteers
4. Access resources which assist in rewarding their volunteers and/or organisations within sectors which work with volunteers
5. Understand and respond to the changing face of volunteering in the 21st Century.

¹ 1 The joint statement of understanding developed in the ACT between the ACT Government and Non-government organisations in the community sector.

How is volunteering understood?

The Universal Declaration (2001) on Volunteering states that the many activities that constitute volunteering are:

- Based on personal motivation and choices, freely taken;
- Ways of furthering active citizenship and community involvement;
- Taking the form of group activities generally carried out within the framework of an organisation;
- Enhancing human potential and quality of daily life, building up human solidarity;
- Providing answers for the great challenges of our time, striving for a better more peaceful world;
- Contributing to the vitality of economic life, creating jobs and new professions (IAVE, 2001).

Volunteers work across many areas of community life including arts and cultural heritage, the environment and conservation, sport and recreation, emergency services, community services, health, animal welfare, religious and cultural institutions, education, overseas and local aid, human rights, age related, new social movements, and political and local governance activities.

This diverse range of organisations and activities share many common experiences and at the same time respect the different reasons people have for volunteering and the areas where their experiences are different. People can volunteer on an ongoing basis or as a once off experience and can move in and out of volunteer activities across their life span.

2. Key facts for Australia and the ACT

The ABS has undertaken two national surveys on volunteering, one in 1995 and the second in 2000. Simple comparisons across the two survey periods are difficult as the 1995 survey used an age grouping commencing at 15 years of age, the 2000 survey used 18 years of age and older.

Some key facts for Australia:

According to the 2000 ABS data:²

1. Around 31% of the national population over 18 years volunteered in the previous year
2. Volunteers contributed over 704 million hours of unpaid work to the community total and averaged 72 hours per volunteer per year
3. Around 40% of this work was undertaken by people aged between 35 and 44 years of age
4. Whilst in the overall population slightly more women volunteer (33%) than men, (31%), the gap is closing and there has been an increase since 1995 in the number of men volunteering
5. Volunteering patterns still reflect gendered activities for example more women are involved in preparing food and community services; more men are involved in repairs, maintenance, gardening or coaching
6. Volunteering occurs across all age groups well into retirement years.

² This survey excluded the 2000 Olympic's volunteer effort as this would have skewed the data

For the ACT:

- The ACT community benefits from higher than average levels of volunteering - over 36% of the population volunteer compared with 31% nationally
- Our volunteers contributed approximately 8.2 million hours annually
- The ACT has slightly more men contributing than the national average for men
- The ACT draws volunteers from the surrounding areas of NSW.

One of the unique features of the ACT is the high number of national institutions located in the ACT and representing many areas of volunteering such as the National Museum, the National Gallery, Questacon and the War Memorial. No other state or territory has this characteristic and our community is enriched by opportunities for local people to volunteer in these organisations. Some of those key national institutions actively contributed to this Agenda. Volunteering ACT is committed to supporting the involvement of these institutions in the work of the Agenda as an important contribution to the ACT community and to the wider Australian population. Volunteering ACT will work with Volunteering Australia on matters which impact on these institutions where these matters need to be addressed at the federal level.

3. Vision

We share a common vision for volunteering in the ACT, that is:

The ACT community will be enriched through the active involvement of volunteers, from many walks of life, working with and through organisations which will facilitate and provide the best possible environment for volunteering, and jointly find ways of addressing new challenges to volunteering as they arise.

This will be evidenced by:

- sustained high levels of volunteering
- active and shared leadership on key challenges
- strong support from the business community for volunteering
- good relationships between and across sectors and cultural groups
- collaborative efforts within and across sectors and organisations
- activities and opportunities to volunteer which support diversity, build inclusive communities, and recognise and value difference.

4. Principles

The following principles are important to the ACT community.

Volunteering:

- will reflect the changing nature of the ACT community and wider society and the changing nature of volunteering
- makes a major contribution to the well being of the ACT community
- should meet the needs of individual volunteers and organisations
- should not be abused as a replacement for paid work
- should be an active choice and not imposed
- will be supported by organisations having good work practices and standards
- will be resourced and supported by all sectors of the community.

5. Leadership

This Agenda has been developed following an extensive consultation process with stakeholders. It is widely supported by the range of stakeholders as a practical and exciting document. Whilst Volunteering ACT will play a leadership role in the implementation of the strategic framework, leadership will be shared with other key stakeholders including the ACT Government, the Commonwealth Government, the business community and organisations with a clear responsibility for progressing key priorities. Volunteering ACT will seek a commitment from other stakeholders to support the Agenda and to take leadership in areas where they have existing strategies or a clear responsibility for progressing some priorities.

The Agenda has identified priority objectives in the following areas:

- Recognising and valuing volunteers
- Promoting volunteering
- The protection of volunteers, organisations and the community
- The development of training and resourcing for volunteering
- Community building through volunteering
- Building partnerships and networks.

Key outcomes under each area, which reflect the priorities for the ACT, have been identified and these shall be used to evaluate the Agenda over the next five years.

This Agenda will complement and support A National Agenda on Volunteering – Beyond the International Year of Volunteers, and other key policy initiatives in the ACT including the COMPACT the ACT Government’s community capacity building and sustainability strategies, initiatives which aim to build partnerships with the business community and the Commonwealth Government’s Stronger Families and Communities.

6. Objectives

Recognition and Valuing

To recognise the value and importance of volunteering the Agenda will work towards:

- Developing and promoting an understanding of the social and economic value of volunteering to ACT communities
- Ensuring that policies are developed which address the out-of-pocket costs of volunteering
- Encouraging the continued reinvestment of the economic benefits of volunteering by all sectors
- Promoting the recognition of individual and organisational volunteer effort.

Key Strategies

1. Forums for an ongoing dialogue about how volunteering is changing and how the changes can be addressed in the ACT
2. Development of policies which establish benchmarks for consistency in funding volunteer management across all government funding programs and other areas of policy
3. Creation of a resource kit with practical advice/tools for ways organisations can recognise volunteer effort at both the individual and organisational level.

Outcomes

1. Evidence and information about the social and economic benefits of volunteering to the community
2. Higher retention rates and an increase in the numbers of people volunteering with a wider range of life and cultural experiences
3. Shared solutions for some of the current challenges to volunteering
4. Resources which can be used by organisations working on the ground
5. Volunteers and organisations report improved recognition of their skills, strengths and contributions
6. Leadership, on volunteering, from the broader business community is well established.

Promotion

To promote volunteering as an important social and economic activity which contributes to community building and cohesiveness, the Agenda will work towards:

2. Developing promotional activities which build community understanding of volunteering
3. Ensuring a wide range of opportunities for people to volunteer in the area of their choice and to improve the retention rates
4. Raising the profile of volunteering as a significant contribution to society and expanding the range of people volunteering.

Key Strategies

1. Developing a promotional campaign for recruiting and encouraging volunteering which:
 - Has a diversity of messages and messages about diversity
 - Reaches people from all walks of life
 - Promotes the role of people with disabilities as volunteers
 - Is relevant across sectors
 - Facilitates partnerships between business, government and community
 - Explains how volunteering is changing
 - Uses high profile champions
 - Identifies the contribution of families to volunteering
 - Is well targeted.
2. An audit of previous promotional campaigns and an assessment of the relative success of these
3. Creating policies for the workplace which support and encourage workers to volunteer in their communities
4. Working with schools to encourage and promote volunteering by young people.

Outcomes

- An increase in the range of people who volunteer
- An improved understanding by the whole community of the nature and importance of volunteering in contemporary Australia
- Improved volunteer retention rates across all sectors
- A safer and more supportive environment for volunteering effort
- Workplace policies which support employees in their volunteer activities
- More opportunities for people to take up volunteering including people with disabilities in non-disability specific sites
- Partnerships between media, government, business and community in the promotional campaign/s
- Promotional material will ensure images of volunteers show diversity of ages, gender, culture, life experiences and people with disabilities

Protection

To ensure volunteers and organisations are protected in volunteering activities and effort the Agenda will work towards:

- An environment, in which people volunteer in the ACT, which is safe and provides maximum protection physically, socially and industrially
- Ensuring that the costs of protection and safety are affordable and accessible for any group working to establish good practice volunteering opportunities
- Developing a risk management framework for volunteering which can be used by all organisations and across sectors
- Ensuring that volunteers and organisations have a clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities as volunteers and as organisations involving volunteers.

Key Strategies

1. Opportunities for debate and discussion regarding safety and screening in the recruitment and management of volunteers
2. Finding solutions for affordable and accessible insurance for volunteering and related activities
3. Exploring and finding solutions for the legal protection of volunteers
4. An audit of ACT legislation relevant to volunteering and a program of amendments to ensure volunteering implications are addressed
5. Working with Volunteering Australia on the audit of national legislation which impacts on national and local institutions
6. An audit across all sectors of the factors which make volunteering unsafe and of risk management approaches which are successful and/or which require development.

Outcomes

- Affordable and sustainable insurance packages available for all organisations including small local groups
- Agreed risk management strategies which can be used by all organisations
- Negotiated benchmarks for creative and innovative screening and assessment approaches
- Resources and strategies for improved screening and assessment which ensures the safety of volunteers and the communities they serve
- Legislative changes which improve the protection and safety of volunteers
- Resources, and strategies for sharing the expertise of organisations, regarding protection, across sectors.
- An increased contribution from the business community of the skills in this sector relevant to these issues.

Development and resources

To grow and support volunteering the Agenda will work towards:

- Creating opportunities for training and development which build the skills and knowledge of volunteers and organisations involving volunteers
- Ensuring adequate and accessible resources are available for training and development
- Promoting new opportunities for volunteering and keeping abreast of changing trends and knowledge.

Key Strategies

1. A training and support strategy for organisations regarding recognising and supporting volunteering
1. Building and establishing a resourcing strategy for development and training including strategies for addressing diversity in training and recruitment
2. Marketing the wide range of training available
3. Creating new opportunities for volunteering which reflect the changes in volunteering patterns
4. Encouraging the business community to contribute their skills and expertise to training and support across the various sectors.

Outcomes

- An improved understanding of the need for training and support for volunteers across all sectors
- An improved understanding of the barriers people face in volunteering
- A wider range of training and development activities across sectors with a better balance of generic and sector specific training
- Improved access to a range of training opportunities from a range of providers
- An increase in the resources and opportunities available for training
- An increase in the contribution of the business community to training and support for volunteering
- Better utilisation of the skills of the business community by organisations
- A wider range of volunteering opportunities which reflect the changing nature of volunteering and reflect the diversity of the wider community including people with disabilities, young people and

Community building

To support the community building, which occurs through volunteering, the Agenda will work towards:

- Volunteering which builds the strengths of communities and organisations across the ACT
- Activities and initiatives which build links and understandings between and across different socio-economic and cultural groups in the ACT
- Initiatives between schools, youth organisations and older people's organisations.

Key Strategies

1. Identify and remove barriers to volunteering for a range of people and implement strategies that build inclusiveness and diversity
2. Cross-sectoral activities which facilitate linkages between volunteers and different groups in the ACT and surrounding areas with particular attention to age, gender, ability, and culture
3. Create a wider interest amongst younger people in volunteering
4. A specific strategy between schools in the ACT region and surrounding areas, and ACT based national sports, arts and cultural institutions to increase the links between young people and these bodies.

Outcomes

- Evidence of an increase in volunteering activities across cultural groups
- Local volunteering activities attract a wider mix of socio-economic groups participating
- Mainstream volunteering activities attract people from different cultural backgrounds and life experiences
- Higher numbers of younger people volunteering and in mixed age groups across sectoral activities
- Younger and older people's organisations are working together on joint projects
- Tools and resources available to organisations to remove barriers and to build inclusive practices
- Organisations are more culturally aware and actively support other cultural groups
- An increase in volunteers available after hours in key areas.

Partnerships and Networking

To ensure the spirit of partnership is built and maintained, and that networks which support volunteering are nurtured, the Agenda will work towards:

- Collaborative and respectful relationships and efforts with respect to volunteering between and across sectors in the ACT
- The creation of opportunities to build partnerships which benefit the community and individuals in the ACT.

Key Strategies

1. Developing initiatives which involve cross sectoral approaches to the promotion and development of volunteering
2. Encouraging partnership approaches which involve schools and organisations with younger populations
3. Fostering government, business and community partnerships to develop better links, access the skills and expertise of the business community and to promote wider business involvement in volunteering in the ACT
4. Working with local Indigenous communities to identify opportunities for volunteering partnerships
5. Supporting the development of local networks of volunteer managers including the national institutions based in the ACT

Outcomes

- Schools are an important source of referrals of younger people to volunteering and have an active volunteer program across ACT schools
- Organisations which find it difficult to recruit and involve young people are working more closely with schools and young people's organisations
- Partnerships exist between disability organisations and a broader range of organisations which promote and facilitate the broader involvement of people with disabilities
- Partnerships are established between small and medium size businesses and organisations supporting volunteers
- Government, business and community are working together on major issues confronting volunteers and volunteer organisations
- Business skills and expertise are being offered to organisations and businesses who report benefits from increased volunteer activities
- Resources and skills are shared across and between sectors
- A range of events which facilitate and support networking and partnerships with increased support from the corporate and small business sectors for such events.

7. Implementation

The Agenda for Volunteering will be implemented over the next five years and will be overseen by an Implementation Taskforce, established and supported by Volunteering ACT, with members drawn from the ACT and Commonwealth Governments, business sector, a wide cross section of community based organisations representing all areas of volunteering, and unions. The Implementation Taskforce will establish a Work Plan for the implementation of the Agenda with priorities and timelines, and which sets out the designated responsibility for carriage of specific strategies. Information and ideas collected through the consultative process for the development of the Agenda will be provided to the Implementation Taskforce and will be used to inform the Work Plan. The Work Plan will establish what can be achieved each year.

Specific and detailed action for each of the sectors will be developed to ensure the objectives of this agenda are implemented and evaluated.

8. Resources

Existing resources for some of the key strategies have been identified and responsibility allocated for some specific strategies; these will be set out in the Work Plan for the Implementation Taskforce.

Potential sources of new funding for some other strategies have been identified and the responsibility for pursuing will be agreed by the Implementation Taskforce. Resourcing approaches for the remaining strategies will be considered by the Implementation Taskforce.

9. Evaluation

The Implementation Taskforce will support an evaluation of the Agenda ensuring both formative and summative evaluation strategies are used. Resources will be identified, and allocated to this end. Action research will be encouraged as a component of an ongoing and cost effective evaluation methodology throughout the implementation of various strategies.

Volunteering ACT will report progress at every Annual General Meeting for the next five years. Other organisations, including leading non-government, the ACT Government and the business community's peak bodies, will be encouraged to report annually on achievements against the objectives.

Glossary

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
COMPACT	The formal agreement reached between the ACT Government and ACT community services sector which guides the relationship between sectors
GDP	Gross Domestic Product (national economic measure)
IYV	International Year of Volunteers (2001)
NGOs	Non-government organisations
Volunteering Australia	The national peak body on volunteering in Australia

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