

2020

Volunteering Strategy for South Australia: 2021-2027

STAGE 2: Qualitative research findings

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INTRODUCTION

This is the second report on the development of the next *Volunteering Strategy for South Australia 2021-2027*. It follows the collection and analysis of quantitative data gathered in Stage 1. This report summarises comments and feedback that will inform the final Strategy document for 2021-2027.

Due to restrictions caused by COVID-19 the face to face sessions were replaced by five online forums using Microsoft Teams. Facilitation was through the South Australian Public Sector Innovation Lab www.InnovationLab.sa.gov.au

A total of 69 participants took part. They represented the Local Government Volunteer Managers Network, Public Sector Volunteer Policy Network, Central, Northern and Southern Volunteer Managers Network, Student Volunteering Champions Reference Group, Volunteering SA&NT, together with representatives of young and older people, culturally diverse groups of people, regional and emergency organisations, and sporting clubs.

In the lead up to the forums each participant was provided with:

- A list of the achievements of the first Volunteering Strategy for South Australia 2014-2020 and,
- Priorities and recommendations for action based on the main findings of the Stage 1 quantitative research. This was made up of three surveys for organisations, volunteers and students and submissions made to the Department of Human Services, SA.

Participants were asked to prioritise those actions they thought were the most relevant and important to volunteering, volunteers and their organisations. Together these formed the basis for discussion in each forum. As each discussion developed participants contributed their knowledge of resources and research relevant to the topic under discussion.

At the beginning of each forum a member of the Volunteering Strategy for South Australia Partnership Board welcomed participants. This was followed by a presentation of the analysis of the quantitative research findings from Stage 1. The report of Stage 1 is available on the Volunteering Strategy South Australia website.

The process of the development of the Volunteering Strategy is unique in Australia. The Partnership Board is made up of representatives of Business SA, Local Government Association of South Australia, Volunteering SA-NT and the Government of South Australia. This project was organised and managed by Daniella Nofi, Executive, Volunteering Strategy for SA Partnership Board, with Rod Dolling, Senior Policy & Programs Officer, Community Services Directorate Department of Human Services South Australia.

Report layout

The first section of this report concerns the major themes that emerged during forum discussions which, in turn, were based on survey and submission findings.

The report concentrates on the four focus areas. The title of each focus area remains unchanged as in the Volunteering Strategy SA 2014-2020. This is due to their continued relevance to the current volunteering philosophy and practice in South Australia. Each focus area provides parameters for the priorities and action possibilities.

The title of each focus area is followed by two explanations. The first is from the 2014-2020 Strategy and is included for comparison purposes. The second is the suggested explanation for the new Volunteering Strategy SA. These are followed by potential priorities and actions. They are offered as suggestions for use in Stage 3 of the development of the Strategy.

FORUM DISCUSSION THEMES

Participants brought to the forums their understanding and experience about volunteering in South Australia. A number of themes emerged and were repeated across the five forums. These themes are reflected in the focus areas and priorities.

1. **Language:** People want clear and plain language used in the Volunteering Strategy for South Australia, 2021-2027. More broadly participants called for clearer language to be used in all areas of volunteering, such as in policies, communication, job descriptions, training materials, and research.
2. **Innovation:** Participants spoke of the need to be aware of economic, social and cultural trends and how volunteering could respond. The world is constantly changing and the challenge for volunteering is to stay abreast of trends and even be able to predict the future needs of volunteers and volunteering.
3. **Improved ways to connect:** Participants called for better connections between disparate groups in the community. One way to deal with this is to communicate existing databases (e.g. the Festival Volunteers Database and other networks known to volunteering infrastructure organisations) existing volunteer databases in different sectors could be built upon and their reach into other sectors extended.
4. **Global understanding of volunteering and volunteers:** Volunteering is for all, not one particular aged cultural or social group. All people have the opportunity to participate, contribute and gain according to their needs and aspirations.
5. **The needs of different groups of people:** People become volunteers for different reasons. And, as they continue to volunteer their needs change and develop. Promotion and communication about volunteering could be more nuanced, targeting specific cohorts, e.g. young, old, CALD, Aboriginal, LGBTIQ, families, etc. It is no longer good enough to have a 'one size fits all' approach to communication and promotion of volunteering.
6. **Education and learning:** Participants spoke to the need of take greater advantage of existing knowledge, skills and resources that currently exist. It was suggested that South Australia could capitalise and build networks, mentoring, and resources in order to raise standards of volunteering.
7. **Expansion of our understanding of volunteer roles:** Many people look for more than rudimentary tasks in their volunteering. Their skills, knowledge and expertise can immediately benefit an organisation. Organisations need to be flexible and able to respond to the opportunities for growth that volunteers with high level skills can offer.
8. **New and interchangeable ways to engage:** Small groups, associations and clubs can be made up of people with multiple and fluid roles which can be interchangeable. Such groups called for clarity about the resources that exist and help to ensure their groups are compliant with regulation.
9. **Recognition:** Recognition was a theme in both the surveys and forums. Participants called for a review of volunteer recognition, information about the most popular types of recognition, how small groups could recognise the efforts of their member volunteers, the importance of clear and regular communication to both volunteers and the community in general. Publicly recognising volunteers and their efforts was also noted as a form of education and information about volunteering to the community in general.

10. **Resourcing:** In both surveys and forums participants there was a call for better access to the resources that currently exist in South Australia. Participants provided links and information about the research undertaken and the practical materials for management and training. It was noted that lack of awareness of the high quality resources that currently exists puts groups and volunteers at a disadvantage.

Major finding and potential action:

Similar to the findings of the surveys and submissions, participants of the five forums spoke of the difficulty of learning, and being aware, of current resources, research, information and networks. On the other hand, government agencies, peak bodies and universities spoke of information about existing materials, resources and information. While not a new concept, there appeared to be a blockage between those who have the information and those who seek it. If there is one overarching action that would, in part, meet the needs of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations it would be to investigate how to navigate and overcome that blockage. Further this would not be a once-off action. To remain current and sustainable, resolving this blockage would need ongoing resourcing from governments, business, peak bodies and networks.

1. INVEST IN THE FOUNDATIONS OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering Strategy SA 2014-2020 explanation for Focus Area 1:

This focus area will ensure that volunteers are welcomed and valued by society and are given the opportunity to develop according to their individual abilities, needs and aspirations.

Volunteering Strategy SA 2021-2027 explanation for Focus Area 1:

This focus area highlights the value and benefits of volunteering to the individual, the local community and the State of South Australia. It ensures all people, regardless of age, culture, gender or ethnicity have the opportunities to be involved.

Priorities for Focus Area 1:

- **Value and benefit:** Highlighting the value of volunteering to the community as well as the benefits of volunteering to the individual. Volunteering has an overarching value to society as a whole. It is expression of cohesiveness by individuals to ensure the values society is built upon continue and flourish. It is also an opportunity to strive to improve and build upon those values through advocacy for a fairer and more just society.
- **Free will and rights:** The definition of volunteering activity sets it apart from other forms of endeavour. Its strength is the ability for all South Australians to choose to take part. Through choice volunteers can engage in the volunteering that will help them meet their needs and aspirations.
- **Diversity:** Historical notions of diversity are limited. Today's volunteering encourages all people, regardless of ethnicity, culture, ability, age, or gender to engage in volunteering. Such diversity can enhance and challenge volunteering to learn and evolve.
- **Regional/rural:** Volunteers in South Australia work in three climate zones, desert, grasslands and temperate. Within these zones are different cultural, economic and social demands. Volunteers in regional and rural communities endeavour to meet these different demands. This focus area recognises the special needs of regional and rural volunteering due to distance, climate, environment, emergency and day-to-day life.

Actions:

- Recognise the value of volunteering for all ages. Volunteering can reinforce the value of learned skills and experience, lead to paid work, raise awareness of economic, social and cultural issues, enable people to contribute their time and skills and respond to emerging social and environmental problems. Volunteering can also be fun and build connections between community members.
- Develop employment and study pathway opportunities for young people through volunteering by strengthening the links between schools and community volunteering opportunities.
- Provide resources and organisations to aid them identify the high level skills they need to further their work. For individuals, offer better connections between skilled and experienced volunteers and organisations that need those specific skills.
- Resource and support volunteers responding to local, regional, rural and remote area needs. Identify existing resources and research whether there are gaps and need that is not being addressed. Encourage the adoption of solutions that can be adapted across South Australia.

- Encourage businesses and corporations to consider the skills and experiences gained when their employees volunteer and how the community, as a whole, benefits.
- Raise awareness that volunteering is unique and unlike any other form of work. Volunteering offers people real choice – to be involved, where to be involved, how long and in what capacity. Volunteering offers people the opportunity to express themselves in ways not possible through paid or other forms of unpaid work.
- Consider the needs for volunteers to be reimbursed for their out of pocket expenses, particularly for volunteers in regional, rural and remote areas.

2.PROMOTE AND INFORM ON THE BENEFITS OF VOLUNTEERING

Volunteering Strategy SA 2014-2020 explanation for Focus Area 1:

This focus area will raise the profile of volunteering in South Australia to ensure all facets of the community have a greater understanding of the benefits of volunteering, with the ultimate goal of facilitating greater participation. A key challenge is to create and strengthen more resilient communities by sourcing volunteers to meet demand.

Volunteering Strategy SA 2021-2027 explanation for Focus Area 1:

This focus area seeks to spread awareness and information about volunteering. Volunteering is constantly evolving. The evolution requires constant awareness raising of the activities available, and, how to advocate for volunteering to better understand its development and value to South Australia.

Priorities for Focus Area 2:

- Communication: With volunteers and other stakeholders. Word of mouth, social media and printed material all contribute to telling people and communities about volunteering and volunteer options.
- Promotion: Promotion is continually evolving. Participants spoke of the need to be innovative, trying new methods such as social media and apps such as 'WeDo' (Volunteering SA&NT) and using new technologies, while at the same time, maintaining and encouraging well proven promotional methods. Participants wanted barriers that inhibit volunteering addressed.
- Organisations: Organisations need to be prepared to involve volunteers. They need to actively recruit people from all parts of society. One size fits all messaging does not attract people from different cohorts. Indeed, generic messaging can reinforce stereotypes about volunteering and the work volunteers undertake.

Actions:

- Increase the visibility of different types of volunteering people can do for all sections of the community, particularly children and young people.
- Challenge the stereotypes about volunteering and identify what messages volunteers think would attract people.
- Identify the attraction of volunteering to older people. Design promotional campaigns that meet those needs. These might include building volunteering around other aspects of busy lives, maintenance of skills and experience and, the opportunity to share those skills with other volunteers.
- Simplify advertisements and promotion messages for cultural groups with little understanding of volunteering.
- Engaging with community is a way of life for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders. Mechanisms between such engagement and volunteering need to be highlighted. Offer opportunities for engagement that makes sense to individuals and their communities.
- In consultation with diverse communities, develop innovative engagement strategies to raise awareness of volunteering, its benefits and opportunities for participation.
- Promote the benefits of volunteering to address social isolation and build healthy and resilient individuals and communities.

- Strengthen the links between children, adolescents, schools, clubs and community volunteering.
- Offer students support before and during the volunteering experience. For example, mentoring for students who have not previously volunteered and investigating options for transportation to the volunteering organisation or site.

3. IMPLEMENT LEADING PRACTICE AND HIGH QUALITY STANDARDS

Volunteering Strategy SA 2014-2020 explanation for Focus Area 1:

This focus area will support an active infrastructure that is essential to inclusive and sustained volunteer involvement. Issues that impede volunteering need to be responded to and more effective policy interventions need to be initiated to support volunteering

Volunteering Strategy SA 2021-2027 explanation for Focus Area 1:

This focus area considers the policies and management of volunteering. Volunteering activity must be underpinned by high standards of management and organisation. This focus area challenges policy makers and all organisations that involve volunteers to ensure volunteers are equipped to carry out their volunteering endeavour to the best of their abilities.

Priorities for Focus Area 3:

- **Innovation:** Organisations and groups involving volunteers strive to be innovative in their managerial practices and the way they involve volunteers. Case studies known to participants can be promoted as options for other organisations.
- **Education:** Participants called for more education about the issues that impact on people's expectations and experiences of volunteering. For example, managers of volunteers may not know the effects of volunteering work can have on people with chronic illness or disability.
- **Management:** The management of volunteers is a profession with standards and qualifications and accountability. For small volunteer led groups and clubs understanding the principles and practicalities of volunteer management can be opaque. Participants sought support for very small groups and clubs.
- **Regulation:** Regulation is a safety issue. Some volunteers who have grown up in an era of risk may be more accepting of the need for regulatory compliance. Whereas others chaff at what they consider burdensome paperwork. From a managerial perspective, compliance is a necessity for their work and training volunteers to understand its significance can ensure clients, volunteers and employees are protected. All organisations and volunteers need to be compliant regardless of age or organisational mission.
- **Rights:** People have the right to choose to volunteer. They have the right to expect to be provided with the tools and guidance necessary for them to do their work. The community has the right to expect that volunteers they engage with are trained to a high standard and capability.

Actions:

- Promote existing mechanisms that would help all organisations, regardless of their size or management structures, to become compliant. Seek feedback on the barriers to becoming compliant and how they might be addressed.
- Encourage organisations to consider how they recruit people with diverse backgrounds. Build relationships with diverse community organisations and champions to ensure resources and management practices are welcoming and encourage participation.
- Gain a better understanding of the scope and amount of informal volunteering taking place in South Australia.

- Make an inventory of the resourcing, information and research available to set up, maintain and develop a not-for-profit organisation that involves volunteers. From this inventory, identify gaps in knowledge and resourcing and develop the required materials.
- Reimburse volunteer costs to make volunteering more attractive e.g. payment for parking, and other out of pocket expenses.
- Volunteer managers should have opportunities for training in leadership, management, recruiting, marketing and governance. This should be easily accessed and at very low cost.
- Provide resources and professional supports for regional, remote and rural volunteer involving organisations. Make an inventory of the resources, materials and networks that are available. Use this information, with regional, remote and rural input, to develop resources necessary for today's volunteering and volunteers.
- Support front line volunteers who work with people suffering trauma or have similar lived experiences e.g. people with disabilities dealing with hospitals may on occasion be reminded of their own trauma. Raise awareness of the need for debriefing during the volunteer recruitment process. Develop specific resources and strategies for volunteers.
- Provide more support and resources for informal volunteer groups such as gardening clubs, dog training clubs, carers organisations, friends of parks, etc.
- Provide mechanisms that small groups and clubs can use that guide them through regulation and compliance issues. Small groups can need reassurance that the steps they have taken are correct and finalised.

4. PROACTIVELY ADAPT THROUGH CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

Volunteering Strategy SA 2014-2020 explanation for Focus Area 1:

The value of volunteering to individuals and communities needs to be recognised across South Australia. This focus area aims to ensure that the impact of volunteering on individuals, organisations and communities is measured consistently with the aim of continuous improvement and advocacy.

Volunteering Strategy SA 2021-2027 explanation for Focus Area 1:

This focus area ensures continuous improvement and advocacy for volunteers and volunteering. Through research on all aspects of volunteering, measuring and understanding its evolution governments, business, individuals and not-for-profit organisations and groups are best able to meet challenges in order to build community.

Priorities for Focus Area 4:

- Partnerships and relationships: Successful volunteering is not solely the concern of individuals and volunteer involving organisations. Successful volunteering is facilitated by relationships, networks and partnerships. Business, government and organisations have a role to play in supporting those volunteers who want a springboard into paid employment or want to learn about the broader world and community in which they live. Partnerships need to be maintained beyond emergencies or festivals. They have a role as conduits between different sections of the community.
- Volunteer wellbeing: Participants discussed volunteer wellbeing from different perspectives. One was the need to provide programs that make it easy for volunteers to contribute. Another was the need to ensure volunteers were not exploited and paid employees not discriminated against. A third wellbeing perspective was the need for research that would provide evidence for the anecdotal knowledge about volunteering in South Australia.
- Continuous improvement: 2020 is the year of COVID-19. The coming Volunteer Strategy for South Australia 2021-2027 will need to address volunteer management and engagement post pandemic.

Actions:

- Build partnerships with business that result in pathways from volunteering to paid work.
- Communicate and promote the work of the Volunteer Strategy Partners in their work of making links that facilitate volunteering.
- Raise awareness in the public service of volunteering and volunteer programs. Build on work of the Network of Government Agencies to ensure that public policy considers its impact on volunteering and volunteers.
- Review the current level of public recognition of volunteers in South Australia and identify how recognition programs could be improved.
- Provide mechanisms that volunteers, paid workers and organisations can use to negotiate solutions for workplace problems.
- Identify volunteer opportunities that do not heavily rely on English language skills. Educate organisations in the need to provide information and positions descriptions that are clear and simply written.

- Educate the population on the difference between paid work and volunteering. Both provide necessary and valuable services.
- Encourage academic research to provide evidence of volunteering as a pathway to employment and the implications that COVID-19 will have on volunteering into the future.