

BACKGROUND PAPER
NATIONAL VOLUNTEERING STRATEGY

National Volunteering Strategy

The purpose of this paper is to provide background on the development of a National Volunteering Strategy.

Development of the National Volunteering Strategy

The Government is leading the development of the National Volunteering Strategy to be released ahead of 2011, which will mark the 10 year anniversary of the United Nations Year of Volunteering celebrated in 2001.

Why do we need a National Volunteering Strategy?

A national strategy will articulate the Government's vision and commitment to volunteering in Australia, highlight the key issues and flag the emerging trends in volunteering over coming years.

The strategy will emphasise the value of volunteering to Australia, in particular the role of volunteering:

- in contributing to the Australian Government's vision of a socially inclusive society in which all Australian people feel valued and have opportunities to fully participate in community life;
- in creating social cohesion, facilitating networks to build social capital and engendering a sense of belonging;
- as it embodies active citizenship and community participation and in its contribution towards building the sustainability of communities;
- in responding to the needs of disadvantaged Australians and communities;
- in building community resilience and its critical contribution to emergency services and disaster mitigation and recovery in Australia; and
- in its contribution to the economy.

A National Volunteering Strategy will identify key barriers to volunteering and seek to develop and encourage appropriate policy responses to address these barriers. The development of a cohesive policy framework will support more strategic decision making in relation to volunteering into the future.

Much of the regulatory environment that governs volunteering is the responsibility of state and territory governments and the development of the National Volunteering Strategy will be an opportunity to work together to improve harmonisation and coordination of regulations, where these issues create barriers to volunteering. The development of a National Volunteering Strategy will complement state and territory based strategies and will:

- provide a clear, unified statement from Commonwealth, state and territory Governments about the importance and value of volunteering to the nation;
- provide an overarching framework within which all levels of government can plan and deliver support for volunteering in line with their own levels of responsibility and resources;
- provide ways to identify how the work of individual jurisdictions can complement and add value to the work of others; and
- allow local communities to see the benefits of greater alignment and cooperative effort between jurisdictions.

Where Government can best direct its support to volunteers and volunteering

A strategy that articulates a clear vision for volunteering can be a valuable symbolic tool to reinforce the value of volunteering. However, the strategy needs to be underpinned by practical actions that commit governments in practice as well as in principle.

The House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family, Community, Housing and Youth discussion paper, *The Value of Volunteering*, released in September 2008, recognised the critical role of government in developing a dynamic, innovative and sustainable sector. This paper called for governments to review the level and scope of the current investment in volunteering to better support the sector's changing needs and sought ways to reduce complexity of administration and frameworks that regulate the sector.

The development of the National Volunteering Strategy represents a valuable opportunity to review how resources are targeted towards supporting volunteering. The Strategy will also present an opportunity to better align the limited Commonwealth, state and territory funding of volunteering services and programs with identified community need, and to maximise its outcomes.

Identifying gaps in our knowledge base and encouraging greater levels of research in key areas will also be important.

A longer term view about how we should meet future challenges will also support effective frameworks for decision making to better guide the development of policy and programs relevant to volunteering.

Questions for consideration

- Where are the greatest areas of need to support volunteering currently?
- What are the priority areas for government action into the future?
- What research is needed to provide an appropriate evidence base to support government decision making into the future?

Celebrating IYV 2001 plus 10 (and beyond)

The National Volunteering Strategy presents an ideal opportunity to profile volunteering issues within Australian communities and to identify ways to achieve a greater level of public recognition of volunteers. The nature of much volunteer activity centres on 'giving something back', personal satisfaction and giving to the community. Publicly recognising and celebrating the contribution of volunteers can foster an environment of motivation.

In 2011, the world's eyes will be focussed on volunteering. The United Nations General Assembly has adopted a resolution¹, inviting Governments to carry out activities focused on marking the tenth anniversary of the International Year of Volunteering in 2011 at the regional and national levels. The active support of the media, civil society and the private sector will be encouraged.

This will provide an ideal platform to celebrate volunteering, but identifying the best mechanisms for this that will appeal to a range of age and cultural groups is a challenge for governments.

¹In early 2009 that on or around 5 December 2011, two plenary meetings of the sixty-sixth session of the General Assembly shall be devoted to follow-up to the International Year of Volunteers and the commemoration of its tenth anniversary, under the item entitled 'Social development'

Questions for consideration

- What form of celebration(s) can best highlight the contribution of volunteers in 2011?
- How can we involve the range of partners, volunteer based organisations and volunteers in these celebrations?
- How can we make all volunteers from diverse groups and across all sectors feel recognised and valued?
- What are the merits of implementing ongoing strategies which recognise and value volunteerism and what form should these take?
- Many volunteers do not self recognise as volunteers - how can informal volunteers be encouraged to participate in initiatives that recognise and reward volunteers?

Emerging trends and technology

An aging population and changing patterns of volunteering pose a challenge for organisations to recruit and retain volunteers. The traditional volunteer who makes a long term and regular commitment to a single organisation is starting to give way to an increase in volunteers who favour episodic and project based activities. Volunteers are also more likely to be geographically mobile, for example 'grey nomads' and relief crews from across Australia who volunteer in emergency and disaster situations. A rise in Corporate Social Investment has also resulted in a greater interest in corporate volunteerism.

At the same time, emerging technology is also providing new opportunities for volunteering. Technology has the potential to create new forms of networking and social connectedness, and can minimise the barriers of time constraints, geography and physical limitations. Online volunteer referral services can link skills with opportunities as volunteers from anywhere in the world connect with organisations and communities seeking specific skills and expertise. The use of online volunteering programs, or 'virtual volunteering' increase availability and flexibility for volunteers so that they can work across geographic and time boundaries.

Questions for consideration

- What can be done to target those groups who have traditionally been more difficult to attract and retain as volunteers?
- How can greater participation in volunteering by young people be encouraged?
- How can culturally and linguistically diverse volunteers be encouraged to participate in volunteering?
- How can smaller and less high profile non-profit organisations be assisted to make linkages with the corporate sector?
- How can the needs of the non-profit sector be better matched with the skills of the corporate sector to maximise the impact of corporate volunteering?
- How can non-profit organisations increase their skills and capacity to host corporate volunteering opportunities?
- How can non-profit organisations be encouraged/enabled to capitalise on advances in information and communications technology to complement more traditional modes of volunteerism?
- How can communities be assisted to maximise the potential of technology as a tool to decrease barriers to volunteering and link to resources to cultivate and retain a strong volunteer base in Australia?

How will the Strategy be developed?

Input to the Strategy will be sought from a broad range of sources utilising various mechanisms, with input from key stakeholders and partners including:

- Volunteering Policy Advisory Group: An advisory group has been established to provide advice about volunteering in Australia and provide input to the National Volunteering Strategy. Members of the advisory group have been selected from volunteer based organisations, academia, corporate volunteering, volunteering peak organisations and the emergency management sector.
- State and Territory governments: All governments have a stake in encouraging volunteering and reducing barriers to volunteering and Senator Stephens will be consulting closely with her ministerial colleagues about the development of the strategy.
- Volunteering Australia (VA). As the peak body representing volunteering issues in Australia, VA will play a vital role in informing the development of the strategy. VA released a discussion paper in December 2008, *Towards a*

National Strategy for Volunteering: that is a useful background document informing the direction of the Strategy.

- Volunteers and volunteer based organisations: their support and involvement will be key to the success of a National Volunteering Strategy.
- Other peak bodies that represent volunteering issues (such as sport and recreation, environment, arts and culture, emergency services and Indigenous bodies): they will also be encouraged to input into the National Volunteering Strategy, from their particular perspectives.
- Corporate Australia: It is acknowledged that Government alone cannot address the complex social issues confronting Australian communities. Corporate social investment and in particular trends in corporate volunteering mean that corporate Australia is a key stakeholder in a National Volunteering Strategy

The National Volunteering Strategy will reflect a transformational agenda for the next decade, promoting new ways to deepen and strengthen Australia's volunteer movement. Further information on the progress of the National Volunteering Strategy is available on the Social Inclusion website at www.socialinclusion.gov.au