



STATE BUDGET SUBMISSION

Unlocking latent potential of volunteerism for economic and social wellbeing in Melbourne's West

Volunteering for employment outcomes

Volunteering for wellbeing outcomes

Volunteering to build active communities

Volunteering is a public policy solution
not just a shadow workforce

Executive Summary

Hard and soft infrastructure that underpins community volunteering has been chronically underfunded and undervalued, particularly in Melbourne's West.

\$600,000 over 3 years will build a viable collaborative backbone for the West (VoIREACH) to unlock the latent potential of volunteering as a public policy solution to boost employment, wellbeing, and social cohesion.

2.3 million volunteers contribute on average \$1700 per person per year to their volunteering engagement. Volunteering brings \$58 billion of value to Victoria. Volunteers deserve the investment proportional to their contribution.

Funding for volunteerism infrastructure is sound economics as well as just and fair return to 2.3 million volunteers.

Funding Proposal

A viable infrastructure for collective impact: VoIREACH proposal

Volunteer West is the only volunteer resource center, a regional peak, servicing six local government areas in Melbourne's western metropolitan region with almost **a million people**.

VoIREACH (Volunteering Research Engagement Advocacy Community Hubs) is an evidence-informed and community-supported innovative proposal to serve the region.

VoIREACH, will serve as a viable **collaborative backbone**, to unlock the latent potential of volunteering as a public policy solution and public good, by:

- Promoting **inclusive and impactful volunteering** to build hard and soft infrastructure for a growing region that boosts employment, wellbeing and social cohesion
- Innovating practice-leadership to **scale up** collaborative community volunteering projects
- **Unlocking resources and investment** from non-government sources into community volunteering
- Delivering **employment and wellbeing outcomes** through meeting increasing demands for volunteer-to-job and social prescription support mechanisms.


The investment

To be viable, given the size and population of the western region it serves, VoIREACH requires **\$600,000 over 3 years**:

- \$300,000 in Year 1
- \$200,000 in Year 2
- \$100,000 in Year 3

Financial sustainability will be achieved by establishing ready-consortia to attract philanthropic and corporate funding for well-evidenced local innovations.

Central to VoIREACH is **shared power with community to co-design output and outcomes**. Envisaged **activities** across 4 thematic hubs reflecting state government priorities and community strengths (Wellbeing, Sports volunteering, Multicultural and Multifaith, Intergenerational volunteering) are:

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- 4 flagship innovative community-led social change projects with volunteering at its heart, with action-research to evidence the leading practice. This means 1 project per thematic hub that run over 3 years
 - 4 cross-sector communities of practice as mutually-supportive networks (with a small budget and pooled community-assets to progress locally-led agendas and solutions)
 - Procure access to 2 public spaces (inner west, outer west) as regular 'bumping' spaces for organic networking and showcasing of volunteering
 - 1 major expo/conference per year showcasing volunteering innovations to future donors and grant-makers (domestic and international philanthropists, university partners), policy-makers and practitioners
 - 3-year longitudinal regional volunteering impact and volunteering profile findings for future government planning.

VoIREACH is viable, tested, and community-supported

Volunteer West has already invested \$100,000 in broad and deep stakeholder engagement to test its feasibility. The strength and potential of the VoIREACH model is validated, and is already bringing 2:1 return on investment:

- Building a collaborative network of 120+ organisations committed to inclusive volunteering and organisations expressed a clear need for support to collaborative practice
- Unlocking \$100,000+ for action-research into gender and volunteering practice to generate pragmatic policy and practice insights with University of Melbourne
- Developed of a Volunteer Collective Impact Framework to measure economic, wellbeing, and employment outcomes that can also serve to be a statewide common data set for future government policy development
- Over \$1M on consortia grant proposals submitted on the strength of the collaborative networks to form strong and ready consortia.

Appendix 1 provides a 1 page summary of VoIREACH.

Appendix 2 provides a summary narrative of the context and evidence.

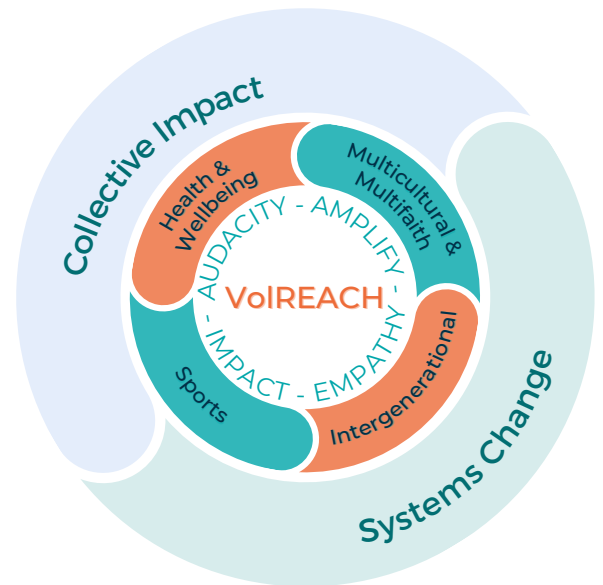
VoIREACH »

VOLunteering
Research,
Engagement &
Advocacy
Community
Hubs

A collaborative platform that works to address the ongoing under-resourcing of community volunteering, and to advance volunteering policy and practice.

Success means community volunteering is better resourced, better trained, and better respected.

VOLUNTEERING IS COMMUNITY BUILDING



We have received enthusiastic support for this audacious vision from many collaborators, including endorsement from community leaders for our trailblazing initiative:

- Hon Bill Shorten MP, Member for Maribyrnong
- Mr Steve McGhie, Member for Melton
- Mayor Clarke, Maribyrnong City Council
- Mayor Marsden, Hobsons Bay City Council

How will we achieve this?

By reimagining and doing volunteering **differently**

By employing a **relational** approach to building a **human learning system** to drive **social change**

By seeking co-investors for a truly **collaborative platform** for collective impact & systems change

Four hubs to foster greater collaboration, innovative research and evaluation, and leadership training: Health and Wellbeing, Sports, Intergenerational, Multi-cultural and Multi-faith. These themes reflect community strengths and policy priorities. What binds the hubs are shared values, an innovative Collective Impact Framework, and a systems-thinking approach.

- Short-term**
- Introduce the VoIREACH collaborative platform to a range of partners
 - Secure seed funding to initiate the collaborative projects to reimagine volunteering

- Medium-term**
- Provide more resources to people and communities in the West
 - Advance volunteering practice towards a person-centred, systems-change model for enduring impact, leveraging pioneering best-practice projects
 - Innovate data-informed evaluation, research, and policy insights to measure what counts for volunteers, communities, and policy makers
 - Raise the profile of the sector by educating volunteers, community and supporters of the positive impacts of volunteering
 - 'Build back better' by scaling up to meet growing unmet post-pandemic needs and stem the decline in volunteering in large segments

- Long-term**
- Ensure the long-term practice of inclusive volunteering experiences that sustain personal well-being and building community resilience becomes commonplace

APPENDIX 2

VOLUNTEERING – A GOOD INVESTMENT WITH STRONG ECONOMIC & SOCIAL OUTCOMES

Good economics

Volunteering delivers significant quantifiable economic value

In Victoria alone, the value of volunteering was **\$58.1 billion in 2019** with **2.3 million Victorians** over 15 years of age undertaking volunteering, donating over 500 million hours. This represents a **net return \$3.70 on every \$1 invested**.¹

Government funding is significantly lower than the total funds from volunteers

Volunteering isn't free. A typical **volunteer outlays approximately \$1700 p.a.**² Yet, state funding towards place-based supports is ad hoc and nominal. Where there is recurring funding, the West doesn't get its due amount. For example, contribution from the Commonwealth government to support a volunteer (Volunteer Management Activity) is around **13 cents p.a.**, well below the (still low) national average of 25 cents (2020-21 figures).

Declining volunteerism is costly to government and community

The long-term impact of this chronic underfunding is felt across many sectors. There is a long-term trend of declining volunteering participation rates³. For example, Sport Australia has expressed concern about the fall in volunteer numbers⁴. The pandemic and bushfires exacerbated the decline: **2 in 3 volunteers stopped volunteering** during the pandemic, amounting to a loss of 600 million hours p.a. of volunteer work⁵.

A decline in volunteering thus sees:

- A drop in the value of volunteering to the economy in the order of billions⁶.
- An increase in overall labour costs to cover skilled work by volunteers, particularly in sectors such as aged care. In Victoria, it would cost \$19.4 billion to replace labour volunteers⁷
- For those who stopped volunteering, their life satisfaction drops to an equivalent of losing \$216 per week⁸.

High investment returns

The economics of investing in volunteering with a return rate of \$3.70 for every \$1 justifies greater state funding. For comparison, it is a higher return rate compared to early childhood education investment which is \$2 for every \$1⁹.

¹ \$58.1 billion includes \$19.4 billion it would cost to replace the labour volunteers; and \$8.2 billion in contributions to Victoria's Gross State Product. If volunteers were paid, the volunteering sector in Victoria would be equal to 1.5 times the Victorian Government sector and nearly half the size of the Victorian private sector (see [2020 State of Volunteering Report](#), hereafter VicGov Report 2020).

² VicGov Report 2020, see note 1

³ [COVID-19 Community Sector Impact Survey 2021](#)

⁴ See [ABC news report 2021](#)

⁵ [ANU 2020](#)

⁶ [ANU 2020](#)

⁷ VicGov Report 2020, see note 1

⁸ [ANU 2020](#)

⁹ [VU 2019](#)

Funding opportunity: Supporting 2.3 million Victorian's wellbeing and more

Volunteering as a policy tool to solve entrenched wellbeing and employment problems

Scarce funding would be **more impactful** to unlock the full potential of volunteering where systems-thinking framing of volunteering informs the funded activities consistent with the **'enablement'** paradigm¹⁰. Funded activities that would be most impactful thus are:

- **Building of collaborative networks of support** (eg ['human learning systems'](#)). Volunteering is local community building and relationship. Volunteering is engaged predominantly through word-of-mouth¹¹.
- **Co-designed place-based local resources** (eg 'asset libraries' of experts, local know-how guides, tools)¹².

Past funding is premised on a narrow framing of volunteering as a 'shadow workforce'¹³. There are unintended consequences with this framing, entrenching inequalities, and foregoing the immense opportunity for best volunteering practice to solve community wellbeing and employment problems.

- Volunteering can be inaccessible for those that need it most such as young people and multicultural cohorts¹⁴.
- Volunteering is now recommended as a [social prescription](#) option for wellbeing, but the volunteering support infrastructure hasn't been funded to facilitate this at scale or to cater to the wellbeing needs of volunteering cohorts.
- There is unrelenting pressure on the sector to meet rising volunteering-to-job needs¹⁵ of the disadvantaged, of new migrants, of students, of Centrelink mutual obligation cohorts, and so on.

[Latest research](#) in December 2020, commissioned by the Commonwealth Department of Social Services, recommends volunteering has much potential to contribute to social cohesion if funding is at **an appropriate level** and **with 'bounded flexibility'** to go beyond mere matching and training services.

Well-designed volunteering programs, placements and practice requires **evolved structural support**: practice development that requires action-research and evaluation, expert intermediaries that can cut across silos (sports volunteering, emergency volunteering, etc), and build backbone collaborative networks for sustained impact.

¹⁰ See [ANZSOG 2020](#)

¹¹ VicGov Report 2020, see note 1

¹² See Volunteer [WestSeed's engagement and consultation findings](#) with 119 organisations in 2021.

¹³ This largely relegates funding to three areas of activity – envisioned with a 'human resources/recruitment' lens:

- boosting brokering/matching often tech-based (ignoring the evidence that people predominantly find volunteering through word of mouth),
- more information about how to volunteer,
- more information about how look after volunteers (where more information is increasingly online, or online training to disseminate such information).

While this may have been necessary, the sector is no longer short on these resources; rather the community is asking for people-based sounding boards to help sift, sort and act on the information (see note 12).

¹⁴ See summary of [evidence](#)

¹⁵ Employment service providers redirect jobseekers to volunteer resource centres (VRCs) to find volunteering. VRCs are **not** funded to levels required to provide wrap-around support to jobseekers and to the community organisations they volunteer at ([Volunteering Australia Research](#)).

Volunteer West acknowledges
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