

ACT ELECTION PRIORITIES 2020



VolunteeringACT
an inclusive Canberra



About VolunteeringACT

VolunteeringACT is the peak body for volunteering and community information in the Canberra Region, as well as being a service provider of programs for people experiencing disadvantage and isolation, people with disability, and people needing support for mental wellness. We have a vision of an inclusive Canberra, and a mission to foster inclusion by enabling participation and connection.

We connect people to volunteering opportunities; support volunteer involving organisations with training, advice and volunteer recruitment; make sure information on services and supports is easily accessible to everyone through our Community Information services; support people experiencing disadvantage; and provide programs to help people reconnect with their community and access supported volunteering roles.

VolunteeringACT is a people driven, service-focused organisation that represents the interests of 189 members, advocates for and supports volunteers, and engages with the broader Canberra community.

This election, VolunteeringACT is asking Canberrans to

Vote for Volunteers

because volunteering deserves leadership, sustainability, and evidence.

Recent disasters have shaken the fundamentals of volunteering and we are no longer in a position to take volunteers for granted.



Summary

From bushfires, to COVID, and everything in between, 2020 has been the year of the volunteer. Through consecutive crises, volunteers have been at the coalface of emergency response and recovery. And behind the scenes, volunteers and the organisations that support them have continued to deliver essential services in our community. Volunteers span every aspect of our society, working in all sectors, and delivering significant impact that the government and private sector would not be able to achieve in isolation. It is time we recognise volunteers as an essential workforce and as the foundation of community wellbeing.

This election VolunteeringACT is calling on all candidates and major parties to recognise and support volunteering in a meaningful way.

VolunteeringACT will be encouraging electors to Vote for Volunteers.

Volunteering has tremendous reach and impact. Everyone in the Canberra community is a volunteer, knows a volunteer, or has been assisted by a volunteer. Volunteers and volunteer involving organisations are the often-invisible building blocks of our community. Losing volunteer numbers has had a devastating impact on services and any further decline in numbers will be debilitating.

Recognition of volunteers as an essential workforce operating in all not-for-profit sectors must move from lip service to a tangible investment in the future of volunteering in our city so that we can achieve outcomes for the entire community.



VolunteeringACT is calling for three commitments this election:

LEADERSHIP

The appointment of a Minister for Volunteering

SUSTAINABILITY

Investment in a Volunteer Ready Program

EVIDENCE

Research on the State of Volunteering in the ACT

3 Commitments

candidates can make this election

LEADERSHIP

The appointment of a Minister for Volunteering.

Volunteering must be recognised as a whole of government and whole of community priority.

The Challenge

Volunteers are pivotal to the functioning and wellbeing of the Canberra community, but the future of this critical workforce is not guaranteed. 2020 has been a year like no other, marred by bushfires, hailstorms and COVID-19. Volunteers have been essential to the response to these three subsequent crises and will play a central role in Canberra's COVID-19 recovery. Despite the criticality of the volunteer workforce, it is facing pressures like never before. Volunteers and not-for-profit organisations are accustomed to perennially doing more with less but are now facing an uncertain future. Unless more is done to strategically invest in the volunteering sector in the ACT, the unpaid workforce, which is often taken for granted, may be fractured beyond repair. The urgency of this investment cannot be understated as we continue to live through a global pandemic and are about to face another predicted catastrophic fire season.

Not-for-profit organisations are also experiencing financial, and therefore workforce uncertainty. At a time of increasing demand for many services, organisations are making critical decisions about their sustainability and programs, while losing volunteer numbers.

Without volunteers Canberra will not be able to respond to emergencies and provide critical infrastructure for service delivery. In 2020, first responders have naturally been the face of volunteering. However, volunteers add value across all aspects of our society. Whilst volunteers are stereotypically associated with delivering community services, the reality is they are omnipresent across the Canberra region, volunteering in all sectors including the arts, animal welfare, education, the environment, sports, and tourism. Strategic investment in volunteering is critical to ensuring all forms of volunteering can thrive

and Canberra continues to benefit from the positive effects of high rates of volunteerism. When many not-for-profits face an uncertain future, volunteering must not be taken for granted.

The Solution

Appointing a Minister for Volunteering and establishing a volunteering portfolio demonstrates a clear commitment to Canberra's volunteers and the organisations that support them. It sends a message that volunteering is a whole of government and whole of community priority, and it recognises that volunteers comprise a workforce that is critical to community wellbeing.

As the trusted experts in volunteering and community information in the Canberra region, VolunteeringACT will partner with the ACT Government to develop and deliver a Ministerial portfolio for volunteering. As part of this partnership VolunteeringACT will co-chair and provide the secretariat and policy advice for a Ministerial Council convened by the Minister for Volunteering. This Council will work to advance volunteering in the Canberra region. VolunteeringACT has demonstrated experience in community engagement, having delivered significant projects alongside and on behalf of the ACT Government in recent years.

To ensure the new Minister for Volunteering and the relevant ACT Government Directorate is supported to establish this new portfolio area, VolunteeringACT is requesting an investment of an additional \$75,000 per annum to ensure the new portfolio reflects community need and is representative of the diversity of volunteering occurring in our community. VolunteeringACT has over 180 Members that provide the critical infrastructure needed to ensure volunteering is safe, supported, and sustainable. These Members deliver a diverse range of services, events, programs, and activities, and it is essential there is an equitable opportunity for all volunteer involving organisations to have a voice as we shape the future of volunteering in the ACT.

The Delivery Partner

VolunteeringACT is an expert in policy development. We were commissioned by the ACT Government to develop the ACT Volunteering Statement in 2016 and the

subsequent ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan. We also delivered a key strategic project as part of the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy. Our proven experience in community consultation and policy development will enable the ACT Government to ensure the Ministerial Portfolio for Volunteering is representative and responsive to community need. VolunteeringACT is therefore the perfect delivery partner for this commitment.

VolunteeringACT is both a peak body and a service delivery organisation and delivers the most comprehensive community information database in the ACT, with over 1700 organisations listed that deliver over 3200 services. We are perfectly placed and connected to facilitate community engagement with and for Government that engages all relevant stakeholders. We will leverage our expertise to engage in genuine community consultation about the priorities for advancing and futureproofing volunteering.

The Impact

Volunteers are part of an indispensable workforce in the ACT and are critical to community wellbeing. Whilst the ACT has the highest number of volunteers in the country, this participation rate cannot be taken for granted. Research undertaken in Tasmania, the jurisdiction with the most comparable population to the ACT, showed a decline in the number of volunteers over a five-year period. Nationally, the most recent ABS General Social Survey observed a decline in the total number of volunteers across Australia. Without strategic investment in volunteering there will be a significant threat to the services and programs delivered by volunteers, which touch every aspect of the Canberra community.

To demonstrate the impact of volunteers VolunteeringACT has developed a modelling tool for predicting the economic ramifications of a decline in volunteers by sector and age group. This tool demonstrates that if there were even a 5 per cent reduction in essential volunteering that needed to be replaced by the ACT Government, this would come at a cost of \$5.1 million.

Appointing a Minister for Volunteering and investing in a volunteering portfolio will position the ACT at the forefront of proactive policy making on volunteering. Across Australia only one other state (Western Australia) has a dedicated Minister for Volunteering. In Western Australia the Ministerial Council for Volunteering has been instrumental in assisting the West Australian Government to understand what is happening in the sector, what is important, and what is emerging. By engaging VolunteeringACT as a partner, the voices and expertise of not-for-profit and volunteer involving organisations will be leveraged to shape government's policy responses and deliver robust solutions to volunteering challenges. Our Member Survey undertaken in April found that 72 per cent of volunteer involving organisations had to stand down their volunteers, and 65 per cent were forced to redesign their volunteering programs due to COVID-19. The not-for-profit sector employs 10 per cent of Australians and contributes 8 per cent of Australia's GDP, yet they are often left out of critical conversations. 2020 has been a catastrophic year full of uncertainty, but the one thing we have been able to rely on is our volunteers and the organisations that support them.

This election, position volunteers at the forefront of Canberra's COVID-19 recovery and send a strong message that you believe in the importance of volunteering to our city.

**Will you
commit to the
appointment of
a Minister for
Volunteering?**



SUSTAINABILITY

Investment in a Volunteer Ready Program.

Investment in volunteering and young people must occur as a critical component of Canberra's COVID-19 recovery.

The Challenge

The Canberra community has been in a constant state of crisis since late 2019, living through a bushfire emergency, devastating hailstorm, and a global pandemic. Multiple, successive crises have created an enduring environment of uncertainty, with true recovery efforts yet to begin. Throughout the longest period of insecurity we have weathered as a community, volunteers have been at the coalface of service delivery. Adapting to ever changing circumstances and continuing to show up, our city's volunteers embody true community spirit and what it means to be Canberran.

The impacts of COVID-19 have been devastating and we know this will continue well into the future. Recent modelling suggests the Australian suicide rate could double and unemployment is at a record high. Over the coming months and years Australians will face unprecedented challenges. Volunteering could help provide an antidote to this chaos, but volunteering does not happen for free, and access to volunteering is not always equitable. Whilst Canberra benefits from high rates of volunteerism, it is generally an activity associated with privilege: people who work full time are more likely to volunteer than those who work part-time or are unemployed. And whilst 56 per cent of young people in Canberra are active volunteers, we know that this cohort is disproportionately affected by underemployment.

Emerging research indicates the predicted long-term impacts of COVID-19 will be disastrous for young people. The decade after the global financial crisis found the careers of younger workers were scarred, and we are likely to see this effect again due to COVID-19. 44 per cent of job losses due to COVID-19 have been experienced by those

under 25. For those already living in or on the brink of poverty, COVID-19 will serve to exacerbate this disadvantage.

The Solution

VolunteeringACT's Volunteer Ready Program would enable young Canberrans experiencing or at risk of disadvantage and isolation to access volunteering opportunities. The Program would provide information, training and support to prospective volunteers and volunteer involving organisations to ensure volunteering is accessible for all. The Program will work with young Canberrans to facilitate meaningful volunteering assignments that will help them to develop new skills and add micro credentials to their CV. Program graduates will have a skills passport that will make them more capable and desirable candidates for paid employment.

Volunteering is a proven pathway to employment, with research demonstrating that participation in volunteering can improve an individual's odds of gaining employment by 27 per cent. Research undertaken by employment company SEEK found that 95 per cent of employers identify that volunteering is just as credible as paid work. Further, 92 per cent of employers identified that relevant volunteering experience gave a candidate an advantage in job interviews.

In addition to improving employability, volunteering also builds human and social capital, delivering significant benefits to the community. Participation in volunteering demonstrates valuable personality traits in an individual that can signal whether they will be a good fit for the culture of an organisation, such as motivation, social responsibility, and proactivity, which are three traits highly sought after by modern employers.

VolunteeringACT is seeking an investment of \$100,000 per annum to stand up the Volunteer Ready Program, which can be rapidly implemented to maximise impact. This investment would enable young Canberrans to access meaningful volunteering opportunities and be supported to further their skills development through volunteering. Additionally, this injection of funding would enable VolunteeringACT to better support volunteer involving organisations to navigate the challenges that have arisen during

COVID-19. 72 per cent of VolunteeringACT's Members identified they had to stand down their volunteers due to the public health emergency and 65 per cent were forced to adapt their volunteering programs. To ensure volunteering returns to a sustainable level in the ACT, volunteer involving organisations in the Canberra region need bespoke support and expert advice to re-design their volunteering programs for a COVID-19 world.

The Delivery Partner

VolunteeringACT's demonstrable track record in supporting individuals facing barriers to social and economic participation is proven through delivery of the Inclusive Volunteering Program since 2012. The Volunteer Ready Program is an extension of the highly successful Inclusive Volunteering Program and its extension will mean more Canberrans at risk of disengaging from social and economic participation are empowered to build job readiness, networks, and confidence through volunteering.

VolunteeringACT has strong networks with Members and significant reach into the community. VolunteeringACT is the only Volunteering Support Service (VSS) in the Canberra region. Research demonstrates that a VSS can save a volunteer involving organisation up to \$10,000 a year in volunteer recruitment, training and retention costs. Investing in the Volunteer Ready Program positions VolunteeringACT as the intermediary between people interested in volunteering and organisations that need their support. This three-way partnership will deliver significant benefit for all parties, and for the broader community that benefits from volunteer work.

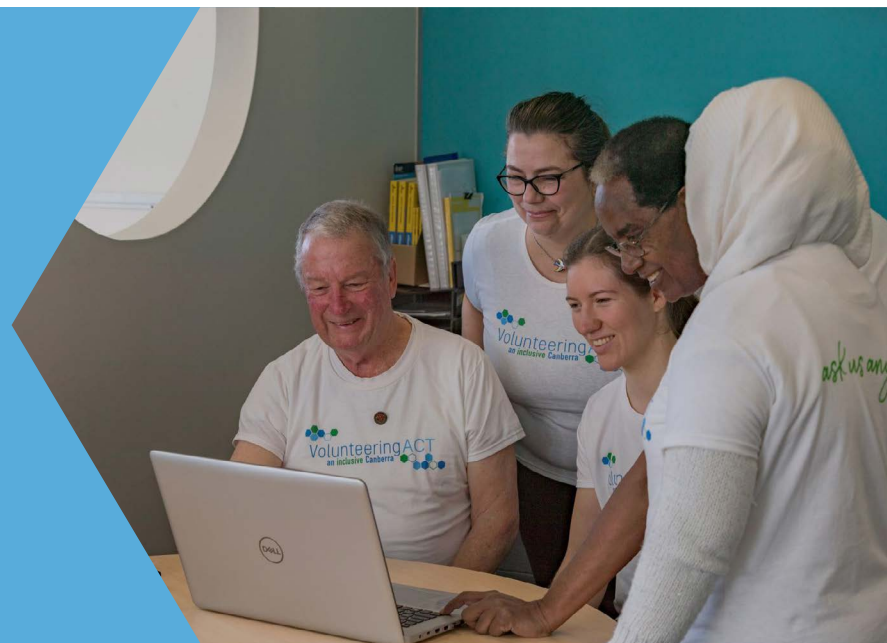
The Impact

VolunteeringACT's Volunteer Ready Program will ensure at risk young people have opportunities for social and economic participation to mitigate the long-term effects of unemployment. Further, volunteering can play a powerful preventative effect against mental unwellness. Our reach into the community will deliver significant return on investment for government by ensuring Canberrans are supported to participate in the community and connect with others.

VolunteeringACT is able to stand this program up immediately, meaning we can maximise impact for program participants and for volunteer involving organisations that are in desperate need of surge capacity as Canberra begins to recover from the impacts of COVID-19.

This election, support young people and the not-for-profit sector by funding VolunteeringACT's Volunteer Ready Program.

**Will you invest
in a Volunteer
Ready
Program?**



EVIDENCE

Research on the State of Volunteering in the ACT.

Research must be commissioned into the value and impact of volunteering in the Canberra region.

The Challenge

Neither the volunteering sector nor the Government has robust data on volunteering trends that can be used for informed decision and policy making. There is no current data on the number of volunteers in the ACT, which sectors volunteering is occurring in, and what impact volunteering has on the Canberra community. Now, more than ever before, understanding the volunteering landscape in the ACT is crucial. The last State of Volunteering in the ACT Report was undertaken in 2013, yet the volunteering sector has seen a dramatic shift over the past seven years. It is critical that we benchmark current volunteering rates and trends to protect the future of volunteering.

With volunteering currently at the forefront of peoples' minds, there is a unique opportunity to invest in mapping the current state of volunteering in the ACT, benchmarking key data, and identifying unmet needs. Robust methodologies for measuring the value and impact of volunteering have already been developed and could be leveraged for ACT-based research. This would reduce the cost of the research and allow for a cross-jurisdictional analysis of volunteering rates and trends, identifying where Canberra sits in comparison to Victoria, Tasmania and

Western Australia. In the absence of this data the ACT is in a precarious position: without understanding where volunteering is today, we cannot adequately plan for the future.

The Solution

Through collaboration with our counterpart state and territory volunteering peak bodies we have access to robust methodology for undertaking volunteering research in the ACT. This methodology has been used by Tasmania, Western Australia and Victoria to measure the volunteer workforce in their respective states. VolunteeringACT is able to duplicate this research, providing significant value for money, and a fast-tracked solution to this challenge.

Historically, society has been complacent about volunteers: it is tacitly assumed they will keep turning up and making a contribution. COVID-19 has changed 'business as usual' for everyone, including volunteers. More than 70 per cent of organisations in the ACT needed to stand their volunteers down this year, and even with some program resumption, not all volunteers have returned. For many organisations delivering community services, an estimated three quarters of their workforce are volunteers. We are no longer in a position to assume things will carry on as normal. Investing in robust research on the state of volunteering in the ACT will enable us to prepare for future emergencies, ensure essential services continue to be delivered, recognise the criticality of volunteering to our territory, and map unmet and emerging needs. VolunteeringACT is seeking an investment of \$85,000 every five years, beginning in 2021, to undertake this essential research.

**Will you
commission
research on
the State of
Volunteering
in the ACT?**



The Delivery Partner

VolunteeringACT works in collaborative partnership with the three state peak volunteering bodies that have previously undertaken research on volunteering: Volunteering Tasmania, Volunteering Victoria, and Volunteering Western Australia. Through this network we will be able to replicate the State of Volunteering research that has already been undertaken in these jurisdictions. This will ensure we can accurately benchmark volunteering rates and trends in the ACT, and will provide an opportunity to compare our current state of volunteering with some of our counterparts in other states.

VolunteeringACT's relationships with over 180 Members, combined with our reach into the community, will ensure that we can obtain a statistically significant response rate. This will result in research reliability and validity and

enable users of the research to generalise the data.

The Impact

Robust data is essential to sound decision-making and allocation of resources. Investing in robust research on volunteering will ensure that we have up-to-date insights on the challenges and opportunities for volunteering in the Canberra region. This research is critical to mapping unmet needs and futureproofing volunteering and is desperately needed by not-for-profits. The State of Volunteering in the ACT report will benefit the entire ACT community: from Ministers, to Government Directorates, to volunteer involving organisations, to individual volunteers.

This election, agree that data-driven insights are urgently needed to inform the planning and sustainability of volunteering in Canberra.

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VolunteeringACT - THE RIGHT PARTNER

VolunteeringACT is the peak body for volunteering and community information in the Canberra region with over 30 years' experience enabling participation and connection.

Only VolunteeringACT:

- has a relationship with over 180 volunteer involving organisations;
- runs the most comprehensive community information database available in the market with over 3200 service listings;
- is the only Volunteering Support Service in the Canberra region;
- is the sole entity in the ACT authorised to deliver training and develop resources on the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement;
- is a Foundation Member of Volunteering Australia, with access to national policy, research and resources;
- collaborates with the national and state and territory peak bodies for volunteering achieving economies of scale and amplifying impact;
- is a peak body, volunteering support service, and service delivery organisation.

If you would like more information on volunteering or any of the research quoted in this document please contact VolunteeringACT.

The artwork featured on the front page of this document was created by local Canberra artist Mick Ashley, also known as Leafy Sea Dragon Artwork. We thank Mick for allowing us to feature this artwork in recognition of the frontline workers who have been the heroes of our community in 2020. More of Mick's work can be found at mickashley.com.au