



# 2020-21 ACT Pre-Budget Submission

## VolunteeringACT

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*VolunteeringACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the Canberra Region. VolunteeringACT pays respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and their vital ongoing contribution to the Canberra Region.*

*VolunteeringACT acknowledges volunteers of all genders and sexualities, with all abilities and from all cultures. Their skills, expertise, and time are critical to delivering services and programs, and in making Canberra a better place to live. We also acknowledge the contribution of the Volunteer Involving Organisations that contribute to the health and happiness of our community.*

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# About VolunteeringACT

VolunteeringACT (VACT) 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.

VACT 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 submission is informed by ongoing consultations with these stakeholders.

## Recommendations

We make the following recommendations for inclusion in the 2020-21 ACT Budget:

1. The ACT Government funds VolunteeringACT to commission research to better understand the state of the volunteering sector in the ACT, and the social, cultural and economic value of volunteering to the Canberra Region.
2. The ACT Government funds VolunteeringACT to establish a structured volunteering program for current and former detainees of the Alexander Maconochie Centre.

## Overview

VolunteeringACT's vision of an inclusive Canberra is one that aligns with the ACT Government's priorities on social inclusion. All aspects of our work seek to develop a truly inclusive community – through increased participation and positive impact through volunteering, or through the provision of up to date and relevant information about services, community groups and events that is accessible to all Canberrans. Our efforts are holistic – they span all identified areas of disadvantage in which the ACT Government is seeking to make improvements.

Volunteering spans every aspect of the Canberra community. With 36.8 per cent of adults in the ACT volunteering, the region has the highest rate of volunteering in the country.<sup>i</sup> Volunteers are primarily involved in community services, welfare, sport, education, and the environment, but are also active across all aspects of the community. Volunteers play a pivotal role in creating connected, diverse, and inclusive communities.

Canberrans are fortunate to have access to a wide range of government and community supports and services. Our role as peak body for community information sees us provide information about 3,256 services and programs delivered by 1,761 organisations. This information is highly sought

after in the community, with our ACT Community Directory receiving over 170,000 views in the 2018-19 year.

The ACT Government is committed to investing in people to build a more inclusive community and to tackle disadvantage.<sup>ii</sup> Volunteering and access to community information are key enablers and drivers of inclusion and ones that are broad ranging and encompass all members of the community. Volunteering, and the services provided by both community and government organisations, links every priority in the ACT Government’s Social Inclusion Statement.

Volunteering, and the availability of information about and access to community and government services is also of high relevance to other ACT Government priorities, including the development of Wellbeing Indicators<sup>iii</sup> and the Community Services Industry Strategy.<sup>iv</sup> The Community Services Industry Strategy 2016 – 2026 was developed in recognition of the significant contribution that community services make to the wellbeing and health of the community, but in response to an identified need to grow a strong and sustainable Industry into the future. The Industry Strategy recognises the importance of workforce planning, and the importance of volunteers to that workforce.

The ACT Government also recently committed to developing Wellbeing Indicators for the region to reflect the values of Canberrans and to ensure that inclusion remains a focus. The consultation process to date has highlighted the contribution of volunteers and volunteering to community wellbeing; the importance of meaningful contributions and participation in the community; and the importance of access to relevant information about organisations, services and events.

To better comprehend the impact of volunteers, the figure below compares the number of Canberrans who volunteer with employment figures across different industry sectors in the ACT. Although the data has been obtained from different years, it is clear that volunteers vastly outweigh employment in any other sector.

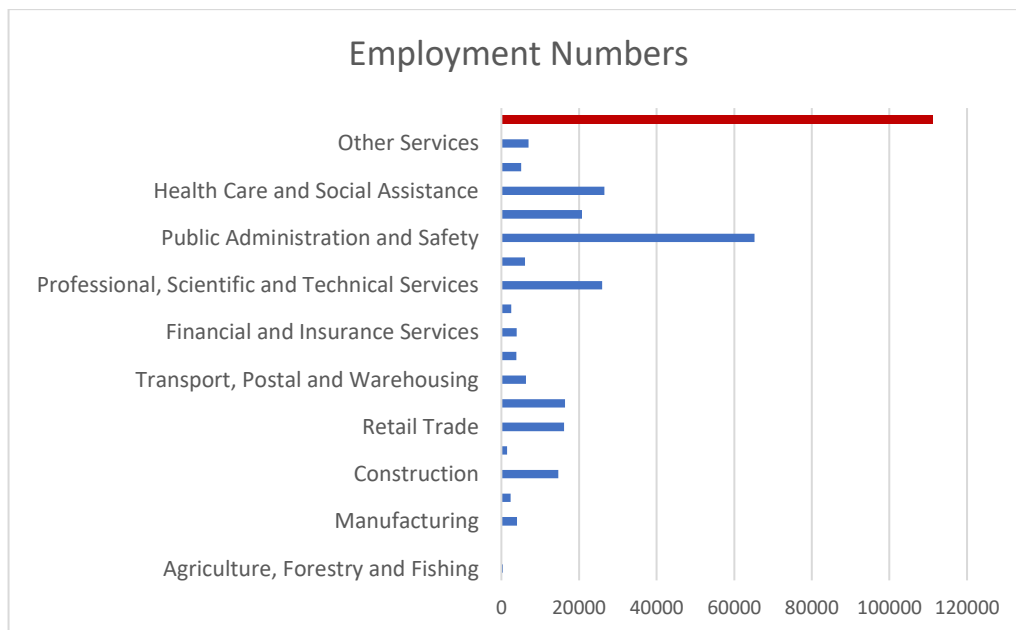


Figure 1: Comparison of number of volunteers measured in 2014<sup>v</sup> with employment figures across different industries measured in 2018<sup>vi</sup>

The strategic imperative to invest in understanding the volunteer workforce, and in utilising community information data is reflected in the following recommendations to the ACT Government.

## **Recommendation 1: Commission of a State of Volunteering in the ACT Report**

VolunteeringACT recommends that the ACT Government commits \$85,000 to conduct strategic, robust and thorough research to understand the region's volunteer workforce in its entirety, including the social, cultural and economic value of volunteering. The benefits of such research will permeate all sectors and all government planning and priorities.

Organisations, governments and industry sectors generally acknowledge that their workforce is one of their greatest assets and that they need to understand, manage and plan for that workforce, and to recognise its impact. The contribution that volunteers make within the workforce across the region, however, is not well quantified. While there is some high-level data available regarding the role and impact of volunteering, the ACT is currently lacking detailed information about this cohort. State of Volunteering research will provide data to help the ACT government measure the social and economic contribution of volunteering and provide information for wellbeing indicators for social connection and mental wellness.

### **Existing Research and Methodologies**

In 2013, Volunteering ACT prepared the first detailed report on volunteering in the region.<sup>vii</sup> This snapshot was based primarily on a survey of Volunteering ACT members and their volunteers. Combining survey results, existing statistics and research about the monetary value of volunteering, that report was able to calculate that ACT volunteers contribute over \$1.5 billion to the ACT economy annually. Whilst a useful and eye-opening result, the report lacked detail on the nature of the volunteer workforce and on its broader impact and was not a reliable tool for mapping future trends.

Since that report was compiled, more robust methodologies for measuring the value and impact of volunteering have been developed. These methodologies have been tested and implemented by other States in relation to their volunteer workforce. States that have invested in conducting this research have been able to robustly demonstrate the social, cultural and economic value of volunteering. The reports have been a driver for formulating and implementing policy and driving future strategic conversations and decision making around the importance and value of volunteers and volunteering to their communities, as well as how to protect and strengthen volunteering.

An example of the benefits from investing in strategic research is Volunteering Tasmania who undertook the first Australian analysis of volunteering as a significant industry in its own right in 2014.<sup>viii</sup> This research used the Institute of Project Management's Model of Value Creation to quantify the social and economic contribution of volunteering in the community. The principal finding in the report was that although the current levels of investment in volunteering yield a strong return, a more economically efficient outcome could be achieved by increasing the regular rate of volunteering in the community. The report identified that exploiting the self-identified under-utilisation of volunteering capacity in Tasmania would yield an additional \$706.1 million in benefits over ten years.

Alarming, in follow up research released in 2019, Volunteering Tasmania found that volunteering rates had declined in the state, and volunteers identified a substantial decline in positive impacts of volunteering and an increase in negative impacts of volunteering.<sup>ix</sup> This evidence serves as a warning sign for the potential implications of failing to strategically invest in volunteering. The community services, aged care, health, mental health and disability sectors are particularly reliant on volunteer contribution, and a trend of declining volunteer numbers in areas where demand for services is increasing, has implications for government funding and service planning. The ACT Government has a unique opportunity to invest in mapping the current state of volunteering in the ACT, benchmarking key data, and identifying unmet needs. We propose conducting this research every five years, with the first report to be released in 2021.

The full State of Volunteering in Tasmania 2019 report has been attached to this submission to serve as an example of what could be delivered for the Canberra Region (**Attachment A**).

### **Research Needed for the ACT**

It is imperative that the ACT Government takes a strategic approach to understanding, measuring and increasing the impact of volunteering in the Canberra Region. An investment in future service demand planning, including the nature of the volunteer workforce, the risks that may impact the continued contribution of volunteers, and the social, cultural and economic value of volunteering will provide the data and information needed to underpin policy decisions and funding priorities to ensure that volunteering and the contribution of volunteers is sustainable. The information will also be of value to volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) in the region and provide data that will help VolunteeringACT design the services and supports needed by VIOs.

The depth of information and evidence about the volunteering workforce and its social, cultural and economic impact will assist in the ACT Government's strategic planning. The proposed research will follow the methodology that has been established and proven in other jurisdictions. Additionally, there is an opportunity to benchmark data and trends with other States that have conducted similar research.

The need for such research into the volunteering sector has also been identified in the ACT Community Services Industry Strategy.<sup>x</sup> A report commissioned as part of that strategy on Workforce Data and Community Needs describes an ideal Canberra in 2026 in which, "volunteers are considered as an integral part of the workforce, and recruited, supported and developed accordingly". However, that report also noted that data around the involvement of volunteers is a critical gap in what is known about the community services workforce. Whilst the work of the ACT Community Services Industry provides additional support for research specifically into the contribution of volunteers to the community services workforce, it is vital that the recommended research includes all volunteers within its scope.

The recommended investment of \$85,000 includes project management, a detailed population survey, econometric modelling, analysis and interpretation, and the drafting, design and production of a final report.

## Recommendation 2: Structured volunteering program for current and former detainees

VolunteeringACT recommends that the ACT Government invests \$75,000 per annum to support VACT to pilot a two-year structured volunteering program for current and former detainees of the Alexander Maconochie Centre (AMC). This program would provide a valuable opportunity for participants to engage in purposeful activity through volunteering, to use or build new skills, and to create connections with the community, hopefully leading to improved future economic participation and social connectedness.

Volunteering has pronounced benefits for people experiencing barriers and/or disadvantage. Active citizenship during incarceration can be a powerful mechanism to engage detainees in purposeful activity. Volunteering is also 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.<sup>xi</sup> For those seeking employment after imprisonment, volunteering could provide a valuable pathway to paid work.

However, people in the justice system and those exiting it can experience significant and complex barriers to volunteering. Additional inhibiting factors, such as difficulty obtaining background checks, may further impede former detainees from engaging in volunteering. The reduction of such barriers, as well as positive efforts to reduce stigma, would likely result in positive outcomes for those in and exiting the justice system who seek to participate in the community. The pilot will seek to overcome the barriers that currently affect the ability of people with criminal histories to volunteer and may result in suggestions for altering the regulatory environment to be more inclusive.

Based on outcomes achieved in different settings, such as VACT's successful volunteering programs for people on a mental health recovery journey, VACT suggests that participation in a structured volunteering program whilst incarcerated and/or following release would have a positive effect on reducing recidivism. The tangential benefit of a structured volunteering program within AMC is the potential surge capacity it could provide for volunteer involving organisations who may be able to access the latent potential of detainees.

An example of a structured volunteering program that could be introduced to AMC is the Inclusive Volunteering Program (IVP) run by VACT. IVP staff assist people experiencing barriers to volunteering by sourcing or creating meaningful and viable volunteering placements. At present, the program works with people with a disability, and we have previously run a pilot program for refugees and migrants. These cohorts provide a valuable case study for the benefits of volunteering for people experiencing disadvantage.

The power of the Inclusive Volunteering Program is that it transforms people who have historically been service users into service providers. The program empowers people to give back to their community, which can be incredibly restorative for those who have often had to access community services themselves. Expanding the program to work with both current and former detainees would enable people in the justice system and those exiting it to have access to a program designed to reduce barriers to participation.

VACT is also the Volunteering Support Service<sup>1</sup> for the Canberra Region and has both the expertise and networks to foster positive and purposeful relationships between detainees and former detainees and VIOs in the Canberra Region. One of the primary benefits of involving VACT as an intermediary in this process is to assist with navigating background checking requirements, which may prove more onerous for former detainees, and to help reduce stigma by providing warm referrals to volunteer involving organisations.

Considerable literature is available studying the effects of volunteering by prisoners, with results demonstrating there are significant advantages to be gained by offering voluntary work and active citizenship opportunities to people who are incarcerated. One study found that, “as prisoners have many of the characteristics of social exclusion and the experience of imprisonment is itself exclusionary, volunteering can be of particular use to prisoners,”<sup>xii</sup> as it can “enable prisoners to take responsibility and reconnect them with society.”<sup>xiii</sup> A study by the Prison Reform Trust in the United Kingdom highlights the restorative and rehabilitative effects that active citizenship can have on prisoners, noting that, “too often, prisoners are passive recipients. Things are done to them, rather than with them. Active citizenship schemes allow prisoners to play a very different kind of role – to be active in making amends.”<sup>xiv</sup> Our pilot will emulate the work done in the UK to provide active citizenship opportunities for prisoners and recently released prisoners. The full report on Active Citizenship and Volunteering in Prison can be found [here](#). The evaluation of our pilot will seek to demonstrate how participation, through volunteering and other forms of active citizenship, can play a powerful restorative and rehabilitative role.

The recommended investment of \$75,000 per annum for two years will fund design and establishment of the pilot program, program management and a full evaluation report. The evaluation will detail the enablers and barriers of civic participation by prisoners and recently released detainees and seek to understand the rehabilitative effects of community involvement on people in and exiting the justice system.

## Conclusion

Funding for the recommendations in this submission will have a demonstrable impact on the Canberra Region. Both projects will provide data and insights that will assist the ACT government to set meaningful wellbeing indicators for social connection, economic contribution and physical and mental health. As evidenced above, the State of Volunteering in the ACT research will deliver benefits for Government, volunteer involving organisations, volunteers, and the broader community.

As the peak body for volunteering and community information, we work with a diverse group of stakeholders. We provide critical information, resources and training to our members; work with current and prospective volunteers in the community; assist people experiencing disadvantage; and help community members access information, services, programs and events. Through the insights gleaned from working with the above stakeholders, we are uniquely positioned to collaborate with Government to map unmet needs and identify solutions. We have demonstrated capability to deliver the projects recommended in this submission, through our proven record of

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteering Support Services are place-based services, that provide the critical infrastructure required for safe, effective and sustainable volunteering. They are responsible for the promotion, resourcing and support of volunteering in local communities, and assist organisations to recruit, retain and manage their volunteers.

delivering inclusive programs, and our recent consulting work for the ACT Community Services Industry. Our role as a peak body gives us authority and access to a network of volunteer involving organisations, with whom we have a trusted relationship.

We have included the above recommendations based on our nuanced understanding of volunteering and community information in the Canberra Region; based on feedback from members, volunteers, clients, and service users; and through robust research based on best-practice volunteering in other jurisdictions. We are of the view that implementation of the two recommendations in this submission will deliver significant social outcomes and wellbeing for all Canberrans.

## Working together to support volunteering and community connection in the ACT

VolunteeringACT would like to acknowledge that it receives considerable support, including funding, from the ACT Government. We look forward to continuing to collaborate with the Government, our members, and other partners, to advance volunteering and community information in the Canberra Region.

We welcome the opportunity to provide further information and evidence to support the recommendations in this submission, and to discuss our submission in further detail.

*VolunteeringACT is the business name of Volunteering and Contact ACT Ltd.*

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<sup>i</sup> 2014 ABS General Social Survey, Table 23 available online at

<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4159.02014?OpenDocument>

<sup>ii</sup> ACT Government Social Inclusion Statement, 2019-20 Budget Papers, available online at

<https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/budget/budget-2019-20/budget-papers/social-inclusion-statement2/inclusive,-progressive,-connected>

<sup>iii</sup> ACT Labor (2019) *Building for the Future* available online at <sup>iii</sup> <https://www.andrewbarr.com.au/news/latest-news/building-for-the-future/>

<sup>iv</sup> ACT Government (2019) *Industry Strategy 2016-2026* available online at

<https://www.communityservices.act.gov.au/hcs/community-sector-reform/industry-strategy-2016-2026>

<sup>v</sup> Volunteer numbers from the ABS General Social Survey, Table 23 retrieved from

<https://www.abs.gov.au/AUSSTATS/abs@.nsf/DetailsPage/4159.02014?OpenDocument>

<sup>vi</sup> Employment numbers from the Labour Market Information Portal, retrieved from

<http://lmip.gov.au/default.aspx?LMIP/GainInsights/EmploymentProjections>

<sup>vii</sup> Volunteering ACT (2013) *Selfless Service: The State of Volunteering in the ACT*

<sup>viii</sup> Volunteering Tasmania (2014) *State of Volunteering Report 2014: The economic, social and cultural value of volunteering* available online at <https://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/so1.pdf>

<sup>ix</sup> Volunteering Tasmania (2019) *The State of Volunteering Report Tasmania 2019*.

<sup>x</sup> Insight Consulting (2019) *Workforce Data and Community Needs Analysis* available online at

<https://www.actcoss.org.au/sites/default/files/public/publications/Workforce%20Data%20and%20Community%20Needs%20Analysis%20-%20April%202019.pdf.pdf>

<sup>xi</sup> Corporation for National and Community Service, Office of Research and Evaluation (2012) *Volunteering as a Pathway to Employment: Does Volunteering Increase Odds of Finding a Job for the Out of Work?* available online at [http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment\\_research\\_report.pdf](http://webcache.googleusercontent.com/search?q=cache:https://www.nationalservice.gov/sites/default/files/upload/employment_research_report.pdf)

<sup>xii</sup> Levenson, J and Farrant, F 2002, 'Unlocking Potential: Active Citizenship and Volunteering By Prisoners', *Sage Journals*, pp. 195.

<sup>xiii</sup> Ibid.

<sup>xiv</sup> Edgar, K, Jacobson, J and Biggar K. (2011) *Time Well Spent: A practical guide to active citizenship and volunteering in prison* available online at

<http://www.prisonreformtrust.org.uk/Portals/0/Documents/Time%20Well%20Spent%20report%20lo.pdf>