

Office of Digital Government
Department of the Premier and Cabinet
Locked Bag 3001
West Perth WA 6872

28 October 2020

Dear Sir / Madam

DIGITAL INCLUSION IN WA – BLUEPRINT PUBLIC SUBMISSION

Thank you for the work of your Government to prepare this Blueprint and invite public comment on this vital issue.

As the peak body for volunteering in Western Australia, Volunteering WA's role is to lead, advance and celebrate volunteering. We represent over 700 member volunteer organisations, which deliver essential services to our community including:

- government services
- community and public health services
- emergency response and recovery
- visitor and tourism guides
- environmental care and conservation.

The Western Australian Government has long aligned with the community and the volunteering sector in genuinely valuing the contribution that volunteers make to our community. In 2018, the Minister for Volunteering, Hon Mick Murray MLA, released the WA Volunteering Strategy¹. It noted that:

“The State and local governments are some of WA’s largest volunteer-involving organisations. They engage volunteers to support the delivery of essential community services – such as firefighting and meals on wheels – as well as sporting, cultural, and recreation programs and activities that enhance local life. The Department of Fire and Emergency Services engages ... emergency service volunteers to support its’ operational, administrative and functional activities [and] volunteers enable Department of Local Government, Sport and Cultural Industries funded organisations to deliver activities and events to Western Australian audiences”.

This submission highlights three issues for consideration in the Blueprint:

- technology as a barrier to volunteer participation
- technology as an enabler to volunteer organisations
- need to invest in digital volunteering infrastructure in WA

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¹ <https://dlgc.communities.wa.gov.au/Publications/Pages/Volunteering-Strategy.aspx>

Technology as a barrier to volunteer participation

About 600,000 volunteers in WA willingly give their time, skills and service and benefit in terms of social connection, participation, pathways to employment and mental health.

The Blueprint highlights the significant challenges in WA terms of digital inclusion. These issues are exacerbated in remote and regional areas, with seniors, people on low incomes and people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Volunteers may require access to technology to apply for advertised positions, undertake online induction or training modules, undertake work or participate in meetings. COVID-19 highlighted this issue where many volunteers were required to undertake Infection Control training from the federal Department of Health, only available online, before they could return to their volunteer role.

The ABS recently released data for the first time into volunteering roles undertaken using technology². It indicates that in 2019 8.5% of volunteers accessed the internet to undertake their role. The volunteering sector is expecting this participation to grow rapidly.

Improving community access to digital technology and literacy supports volunteering. The four strategic priorities of Connectivity, Affordability, Skills and Design are supported in principle.

In practice, subsidising the cost of hardware and connectivity, provision of training and continued access to technology in Volunteer Resource Centres, libraries and Community Resource Centres for vulnerable cohorts will be required to support their continued participation in the volunteer workforce.

Technology as an enabler to volunteer organisations

The not-for-profit sector in Australia represents 11.5% of the total workforce and relies on volunteers – with 2.9 million volunteers and 1.3 million paid staff³. In WA there are about 5,000 volunteer organisations – about half of these operate without any paid staff and may lack funding or adequate access to technology.

Volunteer involving organisations are increasingly using technology to deliver their services and engage volunteers. This was accelerated by COVID-19 where much engagement and service delivery was undertaken virtually.

In addition to adequate funding to access technology and connectivity, many of these organisations require coaching and training on virtual volunteering and the use of technology to facilitate recruitment (which can be very helpful to diversify the pool of volunteer applicants).

Specialist training on matters such as cyber security and privacy is also required, particularly where organisations provide services to vulnerable cohorts including youth, people with disabilities, people experiencing homelessness, migrants and seniors.

² ABS General Social Survey, 2019

³ https://clarety-acf.s3.amazonaws.com/userimages/Resources/ACT_Report_McCrindle_Feb2019.pdf

Volunteering WA developed a quick guide “Tips to Optimising Virtual Volunteering” during the pandemic to assist volunteer organisations⁴. Demand for more information from members is resulting in us developing a longer guide, to be available in December 2020.

Funding and support to facilitate digital access is required for many small volunteer involving organisations in Western Australia.

Need to invest in digital volunteering infrastructure in WA

Volunteering WA owns the IT platform VIKTOR, which is the most widely used volunteer recruitment database and referral system in WA and Australia. There are over 10,000 organisations advertising positions displayed on multiple websites, including SEEK Volunteer, attracting over two million visits each year.

Volunteering WA is planning to invest in the rebuilding and rebranding of this platform to be GoVolunteer as the new one-stop shop for volunteer recruitment and management. GoVolunteer will provide recruitment, matching and reporting capabilities to support volunteering, as well as a volunteer management component that assists organisations to manage their volunteers, track hours contributed (and estimated financial value), and training provided.

The ‘volunteer profile’ component will enable individual volunteers to keep their own volunteer history in one place and document their skills and experiences for easy transferral to a CV.

The rebuild, rebranding and new capability will better serve the sector and will benefit both volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers. This investment will help to activate thousands of volunteers in Western Australia in supporting critical needs within our community and address the critical challenge of unemployment due to COVID-19.

Woodside Energy, who have been a partner in our corporate volunteering program for over ten years, has provided funding to initiate this work.

Further investment is required to realise the full benefits and complete this project, which will underpin future volunteer recruitment and management in Western Australia.

Closing

Volunteering WA welcomes the development of the Digital Inclusion in WA Blueprint and the opportunity to comment. Please contact myself or Meredith Blais, Senior Policy Advisor, on 0400 564 054 if we can be of further assistance in any way.



Tina Williams
CEO
Volunteering WA

Att.

⁴ <https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/factsheets/optimising-virtual-volunteering.pdf>

VWA - Digital Results 2019

