

Volunteering Community Reference Group

22 August 2023

Communique #10

The Volunteering Community Reference Group (VCRG) is convened by Volunteering WA to provide community input to the Minister for Volunteering. This communique refers to the meeting held on 22 August 2023. In attendance were:

Representing	Name
Hon Minister for Volunteering	Hon Don Punch MLA Tina MacDonald DPC
NFP volunteering sector	Craig Spencer, Chair Dan Minchin, Chorus Maija Hildebrand, Vinnies WA
Volunteer Resource Centres	Elizabeth Aason, Swan VRC Vicki Pollard, Peel VRC
Researchers	Dr Megan Paull, Murdoch University
Individual volunteer (consumer)	Esme Bowen
Volunteering WA (VWA)	Tina Williams, CEO Meredith Blais
Department of Communities (Communities)	Sue Fielding
Local Government	Susie Moir, WALGA
Corporate volunteering	Carlie Jones, RAC

The Chair acknowledged the traditional owners of the land on which we met, the Wadjuk people of the Noongar nation, and paid his respects to elders past and present.

The Hon. Donald Punch MLA, Minister for Volunteering and all members of the Group were welcomed to the meeting.

Minister Punch addressed the VCRG, at this first meeting after appointment to the Volunteering portfolio. He commented on the overlay with some of his other Ministerial portfolios, including Disability and Regional Development and the importance of volunteers to WA.

Other topics discussed:

1. Current state of volunteering in WA

The Group discussed how things are going in volunteering in WA.

Key themes for most positive changes that members have seen impacting on volunteering in WA included community willingness to contribute, noting the care for vulnerable people during COVID and the COVID response. The way COVID has facilitated the technical infrastructure to allow for working from home/offsite has allowed VIOs to consider a greater range of volunteer opportunities and corporate volunteers re-engaging after COVID.

The huge decline in volunteer numbers (including skills-based volunteering in the corporate sector), volunteer fatigue and some big changes in how people want to volunteer were among the negative changes that members have seen impacting on volunteering.

Members would like to see the Premier and Cabinet visibly support and prioritise the volunteer portfolio. A volunteer passport that allows volunteers to move from one organisation to another with less bureaucracy/form filling would be welcomed as would media recognition of volunteers as the “hidden workforce” in our communities. It was also noted that enabling corporate volunteering to be easier and more accessible for all workplaces would benefit communities. The importance of acknowledging the differences of regional and metro volunteering was noted.

The Hon. Donald Punch MLA noted the importance managing relationships between organisations and volunteers in a dynamic way. He also spoke of the need to re-establish connections post COVID, suggesting that it could take a few years to correct itself and asked the Committee to consider how the Governments can work to address this. Committee was invited to provide feedback to the Minister and Tina MacDonald.

2. WA Volunteering Strategy Action Plan

The current WA Volunteering Strategy was developed in 2016 and released by the State Government in 2017. The State Government has recently released the WA Volunteering Strategy Action Plan 2023 – 2026¹.

Sue Fielding from Communities outlined the process of development of the Action Plan, and the commitments made by the State Government to achieve the six outcomes of the WA Volunteering Strategy over the next three years. There are many linkages across the State Government, with 17 agencies named as lead or partner agencies in delivery.

The question was raised as to the prospect of an independent evaluation of the Strategy as is undertaken for other State Government strategies (e.g., Family and Domestic Violence). Sue confirmed that this could be undertaken under the current guidelines of the Government. The group noted that this would ideally be prior to development of the next Strategy and would require State Government funding.

¹ https://www.wa.gov.au/system/files/2023-05/volunteering-action-plan-2023-26_0.pdf

3. Review of VCRG Terms of Reference and Membership

It was noted that this agenda item has been carried forward from previous meetings and impacted by changes in the allocation of the volunteering portfolio.

It was agreed that it was timely to now review the terms of reference and membership. Different views were expressed regarding the merits of including representatives from other State Government agencies, representation from diverse volunteer cohorts (such as youth, disability) and representation from a broader range of volunteering sectors (such as sport).

It was agreed that Volunteering WA as secretariat will work with Chair to provide feedback to the Minister for Volunteering on these matters, and subsequently report back to the Group.

4. Forthcoming events

WA State Volunteering Conference	14 and 15 November 2023
Thank-A-Volunteer Day	5 December 2023
International Volunteer Day Garden Party	7 December 2023

More information on the Volunteering Community Reference Group, including Terms of Reference and membership, is available [here](#).