

# Volunteer Community Reference Group

16 November 2020

## Communique #2

The Volunteer Community Reference Group (VCRG) is established by under the direction of the Minister for Volunteering, Hon Mick Murray MLA with Volunteering WA providing secretariat support. It meets quarterly with the latest meeting held on 16 November 2020.

In attendance were:

Representing	Name
Hon Minister for Volunteering	Hon Mick Murray MLA
	Matt Kavanagh
Not for profit / volunteering sector	Maija Hildebrand, Red Cross Dan Minchin, Chorus
Volunteering WA	Tina Williams, CEO Meredith Blais
Volunteer Resource Centres	Elizabeth Acason, Swan VRC Vicki Pollard, Peel VRC
Corporate Sector	Gemma Rapson, Woodside
Researchers	Dr Megan Paull, Murdoch University
Individual volunteer (consumer)	Craig Spencer, St. John Ambulance, (Chair) Esme Bowen
State Government Agency	Phillipa Wenn, Department of Communities
Local Government	Nick Sloane, WALGA

The meeting commenced with a discussion on actions taken since the last meeting where issues pertaining to the recovery of the volunteer sector during COVID-19 were raised. It was noted that several of these issues had subsequently been addressed by the Minister and State Government. The Minister confirmed that a letter had been sent to the Premier of Western Australia highlighting the need to expressly consider the role of and impact on volunteers in announcements during the recovery phase of the pandemic. A response is expected shortly.

A presentation on the findings of the ABS General Social Survey 2019 was made by Volunteering WA which generated considerable discussion. The survey was undertaken in 2019 (pre-COVID). Of particular concern was the finding that there has been a loss of some 19% or 130,000 formal volunteers in WA over the past five years and a sharp reduction in female participation, nationally. All states and territories experienced a plateauing or fall in formal volunteer participation over this period.

The Committee discussed a number of possible contributing factors including new approaches required to attract, recruit and retain younger volunteers and the importance of social purpose to young people when considering employment offers.

Overall the Committee felt that the steep fall in participation suggests that the traditional system of formal volunteering may be at risk. There was an urgent sense that deeper analysis of available historical data needs to be undertaken while also beginning to develop a robust forecast of future

volunteering needs and levels to inform policy and corrective action. This should inform a longer term implementation plan to address key aspects, aligned to the WA Volunteering Strategy.

The Department of Communities provided an update on consultation as part of the review of the Volunteer Development Services contracts. A large scale survey was completed with almost 800 responses and the Department has published a summary of responses. Discussion regarding the next phase of consultation suggested that there are concerns regarding the length of time the overall review has taken and the relatively short period of time for next phase, proposed to be led by Volunteer Resource Centres. The Department was aware of these issues and noted that the proposed consultation process was under review. They will advise VRCs and the sector of any changes as soon as they are known.

Another prominent agenda item was the potential impact on volunteers and Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) arising from the introduction of new legislation pertaining to the introduction of Passenger Transport Drivers in WA. The cost and administrative burden was potentially significant for some VIOs, including those involved in aged care, disability services, community and patient transport. It was agreed that further work on this matter should be undertaken prior to full implementation on 1 July 2021, including the development of case studies and further discussions with Government.

A paper on the evolving changes observed in volunteering was discussed. The increase of virtual volunteering was noted, particularly during COVID-19. Volunteering WA is currently preparing a guide to designing virtual volunteering programs to assist with its ongoing introduction. The rise in informal volunteering was also discussed. The Committee welcomed the growing trend of rapid responses in support of neighbours and communities in times of need and agreed that the following factors are increasingly important to consider:

- Local Government response and recovery models are challenged by large-scale or prolonged emergencies covering multiple local government areas, or across regions and states.
- Recovery activities should be community led and place-based where possible.
- Common online databases (such as WA Connect) provide a platform to assist individuals access the help they need easily and quickly.

The International Volunteer Day Garden Party is scheduled to be held in the grounds of Government House on 3 December 2020. The Governor of WA and the Minister for Volunteering will be in attendance to celebrate the contribution of volunteers across WA. It was noted that the event had to be capped to 500 people due to COVID restrictions and was expected to sell out shortly.

The Minister noted that this was his last meeting, due to his retirement from politics coinciding with the forthcoming State election to be held in March 2021. He thanked Craig Spencer as Chair, Tina Williams as convenor and the Committee for their service and underscored the importance of volunteering to WA and our community.

The Committee expressed their thanks to the Minister for his ongoing engagement, leadership and interest in volunteering. The VCRG is seen as a very positive initiative introduced by the Minister in this term of Government which was hoped would continue into the future.

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