

Volunteer Community Reference Group

10 May 2021

Communique #3

The Volunteer Community Reference Group (VCRG) is established under the direction of the Minister for Volunteering, Hon Reece Whitby MLA with Volunteering WA providing secretariat support. The group meets quarterly, although the first meeting of 2021 was held on 10 May 2021 (due to State Government caretaker period in February).

In attendance were:

Representing	Name
Hon Minister for Volunteering	Hon Reece Whitby MLA
	Michael Watts
	Mitchell Goff
Not for profit / volunteering sector	Craig Spencer, St. John Ambulance, (Chair)
Volunteering WA	Tina Williams, CEO Meredith Blais
Volunteer Resource Centres	Elizabeth Acaon, Swan VRC Vicki Pollard, Peel VRC
Corporate Sector	Gemma Rapson, Woodside
Researchers	Dr Megan Paull, Murdoch University
Individual volunteer (consumer)	Esme Bowen
State Government Agency	Sue Fielding, Department of Communities
Local Government	Kelly McManus, WALGA [Proxy for Nick Sloan]

The Chair welcomed Minister Whitby and the VCRG congratulated the Minister on his appointment to the Volunteering portfolio.

Members introduced themselves briefly and the Minister noted the value of this engagement mechanism. The Minister highlighted a number of key activities underway including a range of activities the Minister is undertaking as part of National Volunteering Week.

Topics discussed:

1. Corporate Volunteering

A high-level discussion followed regarding Corporate Volunteering, in which Western Australia is considered a leader. Volunteering WA plays a key role in managing a number of the larger programs, which provides a significant advantage to organisations. While individual programs currently operating are relatively mature, the group considers that there is considerable scope to further grow Corporate Volunteering in the State.

2. Public Sector Volunteering

It was noted that many who work in the Public Sector in WA already volunteer in their own time and contribute to the community. Some of the history of program development in WA was shared and it was agreed to revive these ideas and bring a thought-starter document to the next

meeting. This should include clarification regarding current volunteering settings in the Public Sector, including leave entitlements and provisions pertaining to disaster response and recovery.

3. Volunteering Development Program (State Funded)

The VCRG was updated on the review of the Volunteering Development Services program which provides funding to some regional Volunteer Resource Centres in WA. Draft Future Service Level specifications are currently out for comment with funded organisations and a formal recommendation is scheduled to be provided to the Minister in July 2021. Current funding arrangements cease on 30 June 2022.

4. Volunteer Management Activity program (Federally funded)

VCRG discussed pending changes to the federally funded Volunteer Management Activity program where there has been a substantial shift in both focus and coverage. The Department of Social Services has announced that the program is moving from a diverse set of outcomes to support both volunteers and VIOs through eight funded services in WA, to a program funding only one service (Volunteering WA) and solely focused on delivering services to VIOs (online and to support specified priority groups). Volunteering WA is working on the new program, including collaboration at a national level, while also seeking to partner with some or all of the existing service providers in WA. The new program commences 1 July 2021.

The current role of VRCs in WA was discussed and the adverse impact of decisions at a national level noted. VCRG highlighted the importance of fostering volunteering and supporting it in regional areas of WA in particular. It was agreed to provide the Minister with a summary of the impacts on VRCs for further consideration.

5. Volunteer passenger transport drivers

Changes to current legislative parameters pertaining to the licensing of volunteer passenger transport drivers were discussed. There is evidence of volunteers intending to cease and some passenger transport programs facing closure as a result of these changes. Further to consideration by the VCRG in November 2020, Volunteering WA led advocacy to seek to remove the financial and administrative burden placed on volunteers and VIOs arising from this legislation. The Department of Transport has advised that the Minister for Transport has agreed to the change proposed and regulations are currently being drafted to enact. Volunteering WA was thanked for their diligence in identifying the issue and persistence in seeking a positive resolution.

6. WA Volunteering Strategy Action Plan 2021 – 2023

A draft WA Volunteering Strategy Action Plan 2021 – 2023 was tabled. This was prepared by the Department of Communities further to a previous request from the VCRG as outlined in a Discussion Paper released in 2020. There was some discussion on the scope of the document and a suggestion that it be limited to activities of, or funded by, the Department at this time. No decisions were made on this matter and it was agreed that the document should be circulated and a supplementary on line meeting be held to discuss specific questions. This will support the finalisation of the Action Plan to meet the scope and intent to be agreed.

7. NVW2021

National Volunteering Week 2021 is due to be held from 17 – 23 May 2021. Highlights will include the WA Volunteer of the Year Awards, presentation of Volunteer Service Certificates recognising milestones in long-term volunteering by Western Australians, media coverage and the lighting of iconic buildings and sites in red to celebrate.

The Committee thanked Volunteering WA for the IVD Garden Party held at Government House in December 2020 which was hosted by the Governor of Western Australia. It was a fitting final event for the Hon. Mick Murray MLA, former Minister for Volunteering, who has now retired after decades of service to the community.

The Minister closed the meeting underscoring the value of volunteering to the ongoing fabric of communities across the State and in recent response to the Wooroloo Bushfires and Cyclone Seroja. He thanked the VCRG for their attendance and contributions.

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

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