



Volunteering Tasmania

Submission to the Premier's Economic
and Social Recovery Advisory Council

Phase 2 | Longer-term recovery measures

November 2020

INTRODUCTION

The response of Tasmanians to COVID-19 has shown us that we have the resourcefulness, common sense and capacity to self-organise to solve problems, get things done and look after each other. We will need to continue to work collectively as we respond to the aftermath of the health crisis, the economic and social challenges, and ongoing impacts of climate change.

Around 297,000 Tasmanians volunteer each year, giving on average four hours a week to volunteering. They do this formally through organisations, and informally through helping their neighbours and taking action in an emergency.

Volunteering is an enabler across all ten themes outlined in the PESRAC consultation program: Economy, Jobs, Access to the Basics, Health and Mental Health, Environment, Education, Aged Care, Housing, Community and Social Recovery.

Volunteering contributes \$4 billion to the Tasmanian economy each year. It gives people skills, confidence and social connections that help them into work. Volunteers support vulnerable people in our communities to get basic support like meals, gardening and social connection, contributing to better health and mental health.

Volunteers give many hours to looking after our environment, giving to our school system, and acting as educators for lifelong learning. They are the mainstay of boards and committees, making decisions that benefit thousands more Tasmanians.

Volunteering Tasmania (VT) is a signatory to the Peak Organisations' principles for community engagement. We support the vision that all Tasmanians have the opportunity to contribute to rebuilding their communities as resilient, healthy, safe and economically vibrant places to live. We are working to ensure that out of our current challenges Tasmanians will emerge as more empowered citizens who contribute to the resilience and connectedness of their communities.

VT proposes five key areas for action to enable Tasmanians to build their own future as we recover from COVID-19 and respond to future economic and social challenges and opportunities.

1. A statewide strategic approach to volunteering.
2. Community-led, flexible models of volunteering.
3. Support for small volunteer organisations.
4. Skilled volunteering in the future of work.
5. Basic income for participation.

ACTIONS FOR RECOVERY

Volunteering has a crucial role to play in the next two to five years of recovery and rebuilding as we shift from emergency assistance to more complex challenges like financial and relationship stress and mental health issues.

1. A statewide strategic approach to volunteering

While Tasmania currently leads the nation in rates of volunteering¹, participation is declining. VT modelling shows that if participation in volunteering continues to decrease at the current rate and the demand for services increases at the current rate, we are likely to see a 40% gap between demand and supply by 2029.

The traditional response has been to focus on the supply side and seek to increase the number of volunteers. A more strategic approach should examine the demand for volunteers and consider the roles that are appropriate for a volunteer workforce compared to paid employees.

The appeal of volunteering for many people is its informality and flexibility. Volunteers are increasingly required to comply with professional standards to a point that compliance is becoming a barrier to participation. This may be one of the causes of the drop in Tasmanians' satisfaction with volunteering from 48% positive in 2014 to 16% in 2019.²

We will not bridge this 40% gap unless we make a strategic investment now in changing the way we conduct volunteering.

Volunteer organisations need support to shift their practice to community-level, purpose-driven, project-based, flexible models of volunteering.

VT proposes:

- A co-design process to develop a Tasmanian Volunteer Strategy that maps the current and future demand for volunteers across the State. It will include actions that address the barriers to volunteering and allow for solutions that are tailored to the unique needs, assets and resources of communities. It will also be aligned with regional economic approaches.

¹ ABS General Social Survey 2019. Rates of formal volunteering: National 29.5%, NSW 28.9%; Victoria 32.1%; Queensland 26.5%; South Australia 27.1%; West Australia 27.1%; Tasmania 34.2% NT 28.7%; ACT 29.8% (<https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/people-and-communities/general-social-survey-summary-results-australia/latest-release/#voluntary-work-and-unpaid-work-support>).

² Volunteering Tasmania, State of Volunteering Report 2019 (SOVR).

2. Community-led, flexible models of volunteering

The top motivation for volunteering in Tasmania is 'community contribution', with nearly 50% of people saying they are motivated by helping in an emergency.³ Seventy-six per cent volunteer in their own community.⁴

It is vital that community members are genuinely engaged in decision-making and empowered to lead the change that impacts them.

Communities must be supported and trusted by governments to self-organise safely within informal, flexible models rather than be forced to operate within top down, centralised approaches.

State government and local councils can play the role of enablers in a place-based model that delivers activities, services and supports across the volunteering spectrum from formal

organisations to informal groups, depending on need. This approach would be developed within the Tasmanian Volunteer Strategy (see 1. *A statewide strategic approach to volunteering*).

VT proposes:

- The development of place-based, community-led approaches to volunteering (through a statewide Tasmanian Volunteer Strategy).
- Explicit funding for volunteer organisations to engage and empower volunteers in decisions that impact them and their communities.

3. Support for small volunteer organisation

Half of Tasmania's volunteers (around 100,000 people) are in organisations that are either completely run by volunteers or have less than five staff. Many of these organisations do not have the funding or staff time to dedicate to their volunteer workforce.

Many organisations operate with the support of older volunteers in rural and regional communities in Tasmania and are at risk as our population ages. The groups and organisations likely to benefit from support include Landcare, Bushcare, Rotary, Lions Club, Legacy, regional museums, etc.

With support, these groups and organisations will be able to continue to deliver local services, programs and activities through the COVID-19 recovery and beyond, so that volunteering can

continue to play a role in the resilience and connectedness of their communities.

VT proposes:

- A support program for small volunteer-involving organisations to develop practical, accessible resources that help Tasmanians feel motivated and safe to volunteer in their local communities. These resources may include specific professional development training and support for volunteers and staff, as well as podcasts, webinars, digital assets and equipment.
- Long-term support to groups and organisations to set up sustainable processes and systems that enable them to recruit and manage a younger generation of volunteers.

³ SOVR

⁴ SOVR

4. Skilled volunteering in the future of work

Across the country highly skilled people like pilots and engineers are finding themselves out of a job for the first time in generations of their families. These people don't necessarily need to retrain—the economy will recover—but they do need to be given purpose, connection and belief. Volunteering can provide this.

The economic and social challenges brought about by the response to COVID-19 is bringing the future of work sharply into focus. In Tasmania there are 6400 more people unemployed than there were this time last year, and our unemployment rate is now the highest in the nation at 8.2%. This means there are 22,500 Tasmanians searching for fewer available jobs.

With unemployment forecast to rise and automation contributing to the decline of job opportunities in some sectors, it is time for a broad conversation about the role work plays in our lives and society.

Volunteering must be part of that conversation, and a solution. Volunteering gives job seekers the skills, confidence and networks they need to secure employment.

Volunteering also plays a key role in protecting mental health and wellbeing by fostering participation and connection and is a way for individuals to contribute to positive outcomes in society.

VT proposes:

- A skilled volunteering program that enables people to contribute their expertise and time to projects. We would facilitate the matching of skills to need for specific tasks as requested by organisations. This could be run through our existing Volunteer Connect service with specific promotion to targeted organisations and skills.

“Giving back to the community, using my skills in retirement to assist other community members who may not have had the education, experiences, love and care I have had.”

“I'm motivated by helping others. I believe community connections and kindness to strangers is integral to build happy resilient communities.”

- Responses to the question, 'What is your main motivation for volunteering?'
- Volunteers in the Huon Valley, Clarence and Devonport, Safeguarding Volunteering Project, October 2020

5. Basic income for participation

A basic income in the form of an adequate, periodic, unconditional payment to individuals would allow for an increase in the number of people available to deliver activities, services and supports in their communities.

From 1 January 2021 the JobSeeker rate will cut by another \$100 a fortnight, bringing payments down to just \$51 a day. This is only \$11 a day more than the Newstart rate of \$40 a day and is clearly inadequate for enabling Tasmanians to build their own future.

With fewer employment opportunities it will become increasingly problematic to require individuals receiving JobSeeker to comply with the onerous mutual obligation requirements. Instead it is important that individuals are empowered and have choice and independence in how they contribute to society. To achieve this they need reliable, adequate income.

The key question for Tasmanians in a conversation about the future of work is: *What would you do if your income were taken care of?*

The *State of Volunteering Report 2019* identifies 'limited time' as the main barrier to volunteering (65% of volunteers and 57% of non-volunteers) with 'work commitments' the second barrier (55% volunteers and 46% non-volunteers).

There have been many forms of basic income around the world, including currently in Iran, Kenya and a new scheme in Spain. As an island state, Tasmania is ideally placed to trial a model of basic income.

VT proposes:

- A Tasmanian trial of a payment to individuals that is periodic, unconditional and adequate for covering the essentials of life, so that citizens are empowered to participate in society on their own terms, including as volunteers.

"If the option of paid employment becomes a reality to me in the future then I can also use my volunteer work on my resume and have people to use as reference."

- Volunteer participating in the Safeguarding Volunteering Project, October 2020