



NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020 - 2030

Growing volunteering, making a difference

Acknowledgment of Country

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of Australia, and the oldest continuing culture in the world.

We pay respect to Elders past and present. We commit to respecting the lands we walk on and the communities we walk with.

We celebrate the deep and enduring connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Country and acknowledge their continuing custodianship of the lands, seas, and sky.

We acknowledge the ongoing stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the important contribution they make to our communities and economies.

We reflect on the continuing impact of government policies and practices and recognise our responsibility to work together with, and support, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, towards improved economic, social and cultural outcomes. We support local decision-making and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Thank you

The NSW Government would like to thank all those who contributed to the development of the NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020-2030, in particular the:

- NSW peak body for volunteering, The Centre for Volunteering
- NSW peak body for sport, Sport NSW
- 1,204 individuals and volunteer involving organisations that participated in the online survey
- 62 volunteer involving organisations and NSW Government agencies that participated in the Strategy development process.

Contents

Minister's Message	4
Volunteering in NSW	6
Volunteering is vital for health and wellbeing outcomes	8
Volunteering and young people	8
A volunteering vision for NSW	11
Our vision for the future	11
Definition of volunteering – a common understanding	12
Guiding Principles	13
Our Strategic Approach	15
Volunteer-centered	16
Life course	17
Recognising diversity	18
Technology	18
Whole-of-sector and whole-of-community	18
State-wide change and locally-driven responses	18
Our Focus Areas	21
Focus Area 1: Growth and Support	22
Focus Area 2: Knowledge	23
Focus Area 3: Value	24
Implementation	26
Ongoing Conversation	26
Action Plans	26
Reporting	26
Review, Monitoring and Evaluation	26
More Information	26

Cover image is Volunteer at the Sydney Royal Easter Show



Minister's message

The NSW Volunteering Sector is a powerhouse, with a vast array of volunteers from all walks of life joining forces to make a difference. Volunteering helps us to respond to the challenges we face in an age of disruption, in our communities and in our lives.

With 4.3 million volunteers, contributing almost 900 million hours to our collective wellbeing in NSW, volunteering is a force for change. The contributions made by volunteers, regardless of the size, help to make our communities great places to live. It is the small contributions day in and out as well as the big ones that generate change in our communities, and in the lives of others that is critical to our collective wellbeing. Without the efforts of volunteers, our lives and our communities would be poorer, more isolated, less resilient, and not the great places we call home.

While volunteering often provides a serious and essential service that saves lives and changes lives, it is not a one-way transaction. Volunteering also provides those involved an opportunity for fun, to get physically active, to improve skills, build networks, reduce social isolation and improve wellbeing.

The volunteering ecosystem is made of many crucial parts. Volunteer involving organisations, and dedicated volunteer managers and coordinators are a critical factor for success, providing leadership, structure, resources and places to connect.

And whilst the sector is supported by a workforce of committed, self-less, caring people who contribute their time, effort and skills freely, there are many challenges that the sector is facing.

It is important to recognise the impacts of the cost-of-living, cost-of-volunteering and cost-of-operating pressures on the sector. While volunteers are not paid, volunteering is not without a cost. The cost of volunteering should not be a barrier to inclusion, and should not be a factor that jeopardises the sustainability of the sector as it strives to generate the change we all rely upon and need in an age of disruption.

This is just one of the issues the sector is grappling with, along with a range of others in an ever-changing world. This is why the NSW Government has in place the NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020–2030.

Through the Strategy we are:

- investing in ways to grow participation and build the sector's capacity;
- enhancing our knowledge of volunteering by investing in research; and
- supporting initiatives such as the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards as a key way to recognise the contributions of volunteers and the impact of the sector.

And, importantly, we are working in collaboration with the sector, taking a volunteer-centred approach to all we do, so that our actions respond to your needs - the needs of volunteers and your organisations.

Growing up I experienced firsthand the impact and change volunteers can generate; I have stood alongside other volunteers with charities, community radio, Landcare groups, Meals on Wheels and providing support to people experiencing crisis during natural disasters. I continue to see and experience it as part of who we are, our social fabric. All of our lives have been impacted by a volunteer in both direct and indirect ways – we would not be who we are without the efforts of volunteers.

As Minister responsible for Volunteering, I look forward to working with the Sector, to achieving this Strategy's vision, generating change, growing volunteering and making a difference, because by working together we can achieve so much.

The Hon. Jodie Harrison MP

Minister responsible for Volunteering,
Minister for Women, Minister for Seniors, and
Minister for the Prevention of Domestic Violence
and Sexual Assault



Volunteers with Wrap with Love

Box 1 of 1



Volunteers with Foodbank

Volunteering in NSW

Volunteers provide an irreplaceable service to the community. Volunteering benefits communities, the economy, and the health and wellbeing of volunteers. Organisations cite that volunteers bring new insights, increase the efficiencies and volume of operations, build networks, improve effectiveness and enhance the image of the organisation. Volunteering broadens the networks and professional skills of the volunteers themselves. Volunteering builds social capital.^{1,2}

Volunteering is vital for health and wellbeing outcomes

The NSW Human Services Outcomes Framework supports NSW agencies to better focus activities towards achieving outcomes for NSW citizens, across seven domains: safety; home; economic; health; education and skills; social and community; and empowerment. The Framework provides a way to understand and measure the extent to which we are making a long-term positive difference to people's lives.

Volunteers and a healthy volunteer sector play an important role in the delivery of outcomes aligned to the Human Services Outcomes Framework.

Volunteers are on our sports fields, in our schools, hospitals, museums and cultural institutions, national parks, homeless services and animal shelters. Volunteers support people with disability or recovering from illness. During special events volunteers direct us, give us sunscreen, water or first aid. They search for people lost in the bush or surf, they fight fires and respond in times of emergency, often cleaning up after storms or natural disasters. Our lives are touched by volunteers every day, often in ways that are unseen but felt.

In NSW it is calculated that there are over 4.3 million people who volunteer their time to help others, contributing at least 893.9 million hours.³ Their presence and efforts increase social inclusion, and deliver a range of important or essential services to those living in NSW. Into the future, we want to see these numbers grow. We are better off with a vibrant volunteer sector.

Research reveals that volunteering benefits include reduced symptoms of depression, better self-reported health and lower mortality, particularly for the newly retired and older generations. Volunteering expands people's social networks, and can lead to employment as a result of new skills, expanded networks and experience.

Volunteering transcends age, ability, gender, culture, religion and language. At its core, volunteers are people who share common values working together to build resilient and inclusive communities. Volunteers are people united by a desire to make a difference.

A key outcome of this Strategy will be increased community participation through volunteering.

Volunteers in Sport – helping to keep us active and healthy

In NSW, volunteer numbers in sport are substantial. Volunteer participation in sport has both health and community benefits.

Volunteers are our club administrators, coaches, equipment managers, umpires and referees, they manage the canteens, and get the teams and athletes to the venues. Volunteers organise sporting events and competitions, and help to maintain the sporting venues. Our top athletes often attribute their journey to the volunteers that helped them along the way.

Sport based volunteering is also a major avenue for members of the community to get involved in community life. Volunteering in sport can build local connections, increase physical activity, improve health and wellbeing, and reduce social isolation.



Volunteering is advocated for by the United Nations (UN), Australian, New Zealand, North American and European governments as a way to engage people in their local communities and improve social capital, with the potential for public health benefits such as improving wellbeing and decreasing health inequalities. The United Nations 2018 *Thread that Binds*⁴ Report recognises that volunteering builds resilient communities by enhancing trust, expanding support bases, and increasing social and human capital.

Investing in volunteering assists the NSW Government to meet its key priorities, using less financial resources while achieving greater social cohesion.⁵ NSW State of Volunteering Research found that every dollar invested in volunteering yields a return of \$5.50 to the community - a 550% return on investment.⁶

Volunteering and young people

Younger generations are actively involved and interested in volunteering. The 2023 NSW State of Volunteering research reports that the number of young people aged 15-24 who volunteer is 737,200.⁷

Young people are volunteers now and our volunteers into the future. We rely on them now, and will need to rely on them into the future. To ensure that NSW has a strong volunteer sector we need more people, including young people to be actively involved.

Young people are our volunteer leaders and managers of the future. They are our emergency services volunteers, our lifesavers, our event coordinators, our environmental conservation volunteers, our volunteers in schools, in hospitals, and community organisations, and they are our community sports and recreation volunteers.

Many young people view volunteering as a way to support their communities, families and friends. Others see it as a way to gain skills, experience and build social networks, helping them to gain employment in areas that align with their interests.

Young people have told us that they want to be involved but it needs to be easier to participate in volunteering. They have told us that barriers need to be removed, and volunteering needs to be flexible and accessible, and have a better range of opportunities.⁸

This Strategy intends to remove or reduce the barriers to volunteering young people experience, because we need young people to be active in volunteering if we are to maintain a healthy and vibrant sector. We want young people to experience the benefits of volunteering in their daily lives, throughout life.



Volunteers with Surf Life Saving NSW

Volunteering in NSW



4.3 million

volunteers in NSW



63.9%

of the population aged 15 and over volunteer



Value of the volunteering sector's contribution to NSW is

\$178

billion



Return on Investment, for every \$1 invested \$5.50 is returned (or a return of 550%).



4

is the average number of hours per volunteer / week



893.9 million

hours contributed by volunteers

737,200

young people aged between 15-24 years volunteer in NSW





Volunteer at the Sydney Royal Easter Show

Our volunteering vision for NSW

Volunteering in NSW grows and is vibrant. Everyone can volunteer, more often, throughout life, and their contributions are celebrated.

Our vision is purposeful, aspirational and inclusive.

Volunteers make a difference.

The next decade is one where communities continue to be strengthened and supported by volunteers; and volunteering is promoted, supported and valued.

To achieve our vision we need to inspire others, share our stories, work in partnership, improve our knowledge, promote the benefits and impact of volunteering, and invest in it.

This Strategy is a state-wide commitment to the importance and impact of volunteering. The investments made by the NSW Government will be responsive to emerging trends, they will be creative and volunteer-centred. Our investments will assist the sector to build its leadership capacity, to be agile and forward-thinking.



Definition of volunteering – a common understanding

This Strategy uses the definition of ‘volunteering’ established by Volunteering Australia, which is:

Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.⁹

The definition, revised by Volunteering Australia in 2015, draws attention to three areas which must be fulfilled for an activity to be considered volunteering:

- Firstly, that it is time willingly given, volunteering must not be exploitative nor be used in place of paid employment.
- Secondly, that volunteering must be for the common good, directly or indirectly benefitting people outside the family or household, or benefit a cause.
- Lastly, there is no financial gain, excluding reimbursement or the good practice of a volunteer being recognised or rewarded.

Volunteering includes formal volunteering for an organisation, and informal volunteering where people help out in their community outside of formal arrangements with an organisation. Informal volunteering can also include helping others in the community, outside of an organisation or family unit.

Informal volunteering can include spontaneous volunteering for example, where members of the public help in times of need during or after disasters.



Volunteer with Volunteer Rescue Association (VRA) NSW

Guiding Principles

A set of seven guiding principles emerged from the strategy consultation process. These principles will not only guide the future of volunteering in NSW, they will shape it. They will influence our actions and investments over the next decade.

The principles will help to ensure that the sector is able to adapt, and:

- all those wishing to be involved are able to do so
- the sector is responsive and well resourced
- volunteer leaders have the tools and support they need
- the contributions made by the sector are recognised and respected
- the benefits and impact of volunteering is understood and recognised; and that the sector grows.

Our Seven Guiding Principles





Volunteer with NSW Rural Fire Service

Our Strategic Approach

This Strategy articulates how the NSW Government will invest in, support and recognise volunteers and volunteer involving organisations over the next decade, building on the achievements of earlier strategies.

It is important to note that initiatives implemented under this Strategy will augment investment and action already underway.

The NSW Government's role is multifaceted. The Government is an investor, active change agent and volunteer involving organisation.

NSW Government's roles in the volunteering sector



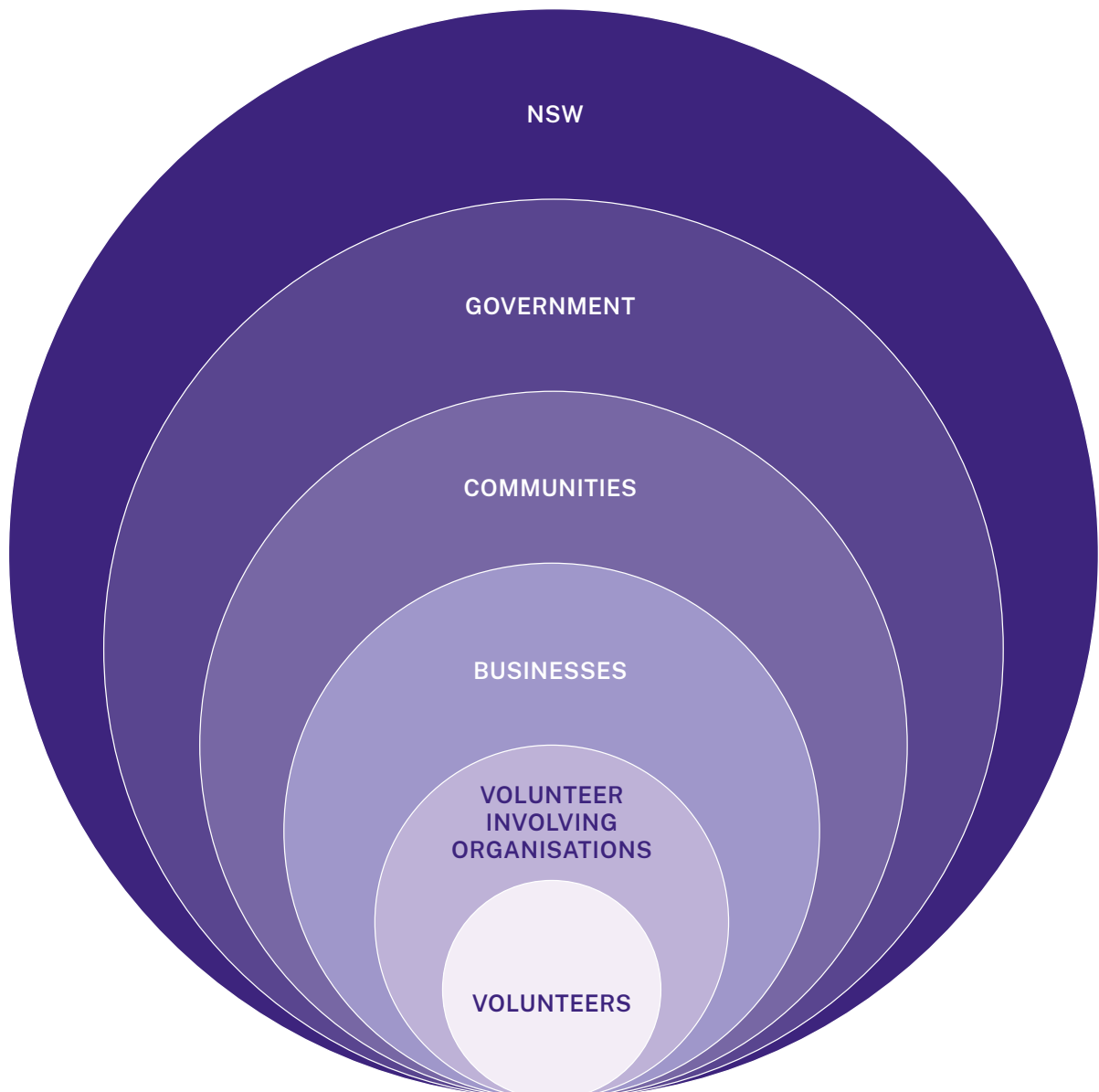
Volunteer-centered

The needs of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations are at the centre of each investment and activity under the Strategy.

Over the next decade we will:

- engage volunteers and volunteer involving organisations in decision making about issues that affect them
- work with volunteers and volunteer involving organisations to develop volunteer-owned solutions to challenges and opportunities
- work with communities, government, non-government and business sectors to develop place-based solutions that meet local needs
- develop partnerships that strengthen the sector and communities.

Spheres of volunteering – putting volunteering at the centre



Life course

This Strategy recognises that volunteers are all ages, and that involvement in volunteering occurs throughout life.

This Strategy recognises age-related transition points in people's lives, and provides a framework to develop volunteering opportunities for people across all life stages.

The health and wellbeing benefits of volunteering experienced by volunteers are experienced throughout life and can have lasting benefits.

Volunteering Benefits across the Life Course



EARLY Young people and students

People who start volunteering early continue to participate throughout life. Volunteering makes social connections and builds valuable skills, experience and networks as young people enter the workforce. Volunteering provides opportunities for young people to explore their interests and participate in their local community, enhancing post school participation and employment.



MIDLIFE Working and family

People who volunteer throughout life while working or supporting their family are more socially connected, and live happier and healthier lives. Families and communities are more resilient and active. Volunteers build their skills, knowledge, experience and networks. Volunteering helps people who are looking to re-enter the workforce after raising children.



OLDER Soon to retire or are in retirement

In later life, people that become involved in their local communities through volunteering are more likely to live longer and healthier lives. Participation through volunteering assists the transition to retirement. Volunteering reduces social isolation, improves mental health and provides useful physical activity. Volunteering enables skilled and experienced individuals to remain active, contributing to organisations or causes they are passionate about.

Recognising diversity

Volunteers are diverse and come from all walks of life. They are crucial to the health, wellbeing and resilience of communities across NSW. This Strategy responds to the diversity of our communities, and the challenge of distance that exists in rural and regional areas.

Creative and innovative solutions over the next decade will need to be developed and invested in if the sector and our communities are to respond to changing demographics, and needs.

These realities when combined with the complexity of the volunteering sector, and the wide variation in volunteer roles means a 'one size fits all' approach is not appropriate in all circumstances.

Some of the initiatives implemented under this Strategy will directly target areas where improvements can be made to ensure volunteering is as accessible and inclusive as it can be for everyone. This may mean targeted investment in volunteering programs, removing barriers to participation. The NSW Government will work with strategic partners to ensure that anyone interested in getting involved through volunteering is able to do so.

However, this Strategy also recognises that volunteer involving organisations, volunteer managers and coordinators, and volunteers also have much in common. They share common experiences. This is why under the Strategy, many of the initiatives invested in will be open to volunteer organisations, volunteer managers and volunteers regardless of the type of organisation or volunteering role.

Technology

Technology continues to evolve and so must the NSW volunteering sector. Investment in technological solutions that make volunteering easier will be vital to this Strategy's success.

The NSW Government will work in partnership with the sector to support the development, implementation and uptake of technological solutions.

An agile volunteer sector that utilises current and emerging technological solutions will help to ensure that communities and volunteer involving organisations are resilient.

Whole-of-sector and whole-of-community

The NSW volunteering sector is intertwined with the communities it supports and where our volunteers live.

Over the next decade we will take a whole-of-sector and whole-of-community approach. This means that initiatives will strive to build on and strengthen the whole sector, as well as the communities it supports.

NSW would not be the State it is today without the contributions of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. This Strategy recognises the impact volunteers and their organisations have, making our local communities and State great. Our communities would not be as vibrant, or resilient without the contributions of our volunteers.

State-wide change and locally-driven responses

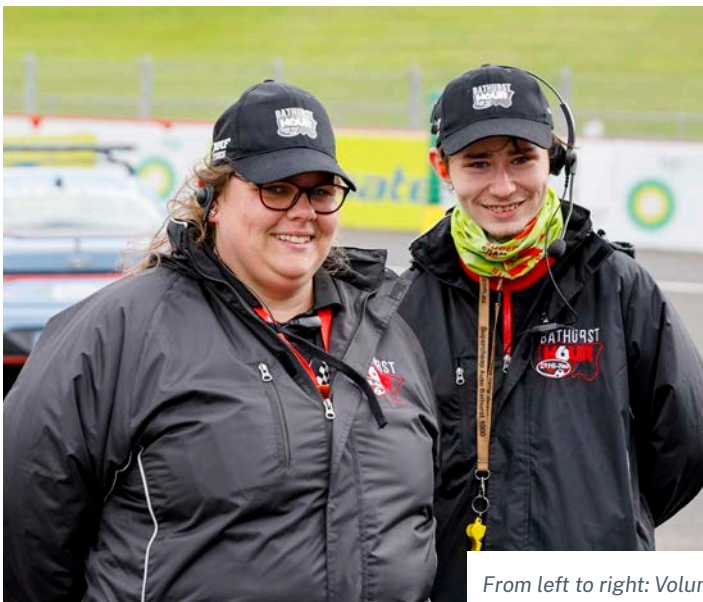
The next decade is one of change, change for the sector, and change for communities and volunteers. Business as usual practices that are no longer appropriate or viable will need to evolve into ones that are responsive to local, regional and state needs.

Some initiatives invested in under this Strategy will be locally focused, taking a place-based approach, while others will support the sector across NSW.

We will invest in initiatives that support volunteer involving organisations and grow volunteer participation in community services, sport, emergency services, the environment, arts and culture, health and education just to name a few. Some investments will help individual types of volunteering, while others will benefit everyone regardless of the volunteering focus.



Event volunteer with the Mudgee Cycling Classic



From left to right: Volunteers with the Sydney Royal Easter Show; a Community Resource Centre; Dubbo Rivercare; OzHarvest; Bathurst 6 Hour Race; BloodBikes Australia

Our Focus Areas

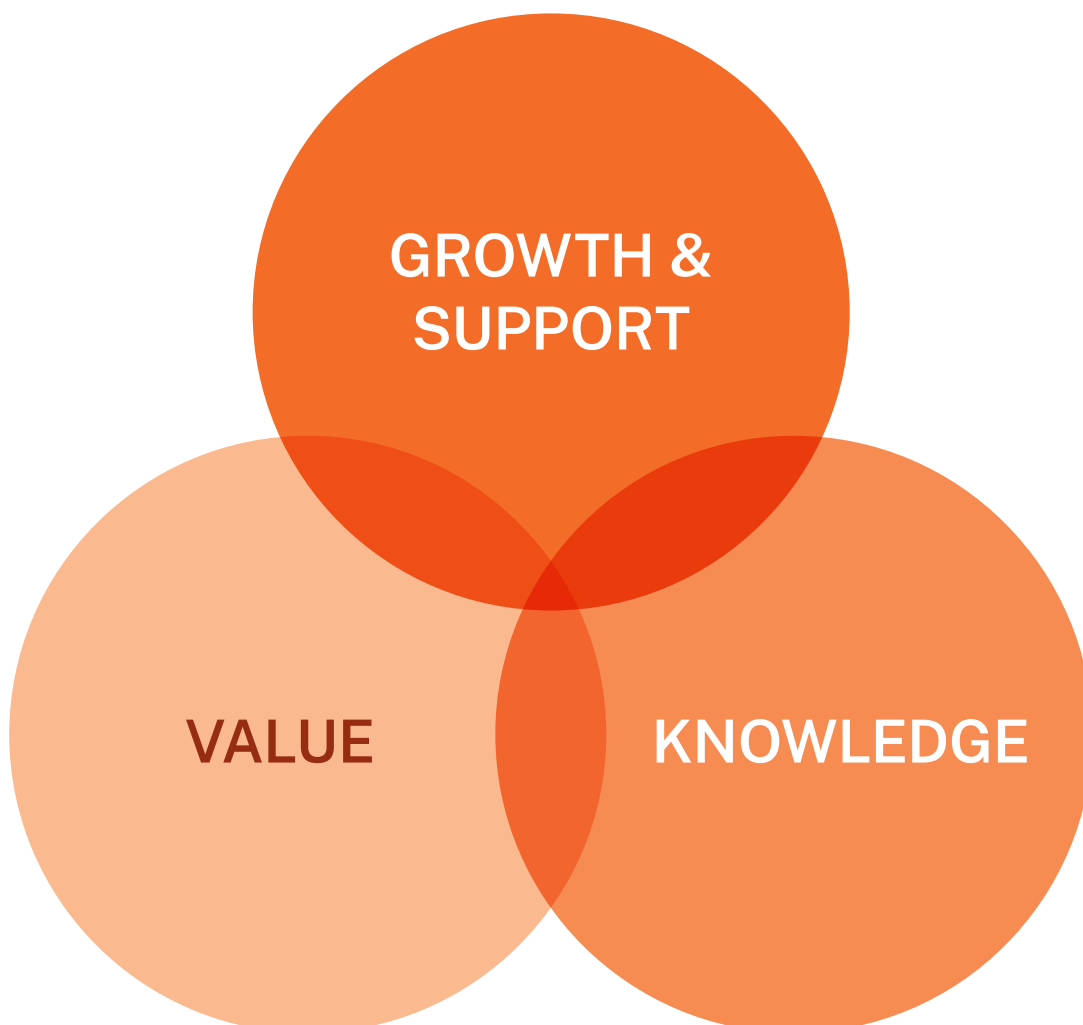
This Strategy focuses on three key areas for the future: growth and support, knowledge and value.

These focus areas are key components to success regardless of the location, volunteer involving organisation or government agency.

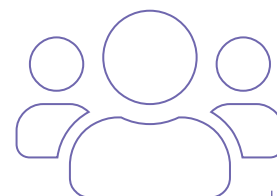
Investment for positive change along the volunteering journey in these three areas will help:

- to grow participation in volunteering
- to make the volunteer experience happier and easier
- to recognise the value and impact of volunteering
- the sector to be agile, accessible, supportive and respectful.

Our three focus areas are key to the sector continuing to have the remarkable impact we all experience every day. The focus areas are supported by our Guiding Principles and Strategic Approach outlined in this Strategy.



Focus Area 1: Growth and Support



Our Objectives:

- Increase participation in volunteering
- Make volunteer recruitment, retention and management easier by building the capacity of the sector

Our Outcomes:

- Increased participation in community life through volunteering
- Enhanced capacity of the sector to deliver best-practice volunteer management.

Why growth and support?

The landscape of volunteering is changing. The next decade will be characterised by changes in community demographics, local needs and technology.

During the Strategy consultation process many volunteer involving organisations told us that they are facing a significant challenge in recruiting and managing volunteers.

You told us that you need more volunteers either because you don't have enough to meet demand, or you wish to keep your workforce vibrant. You also told us that support is needed to deliver best-practice volunteer management, including recruitment and retention. We have listened and understand that you have a need for tools and resources, and that you need help to build your capacity through training.

During the consultation process, volunteers told us that there needs to be a wide variety of volunteering opportunities that interest them and meet their needs, that recruitment pathways must be accessible, and utilise technology.

This is why the NSW Government will invest in initiatives that help to grow participation in volunteering, and make it easier.

Focus Area 2: Knowledge



Our Objective:

- **Improve understanding of volunteering in NSW**

Our Outcome:

- Expanded knowledge base on volunteering in NSW, supporting a culture of innovation and excellence.

Why knowledge?

Understanding the nature of volunteering in NSW, its impact, the benefits, the value and cost are key for a healthy future. Improving our knowledge of volunteering will help us to understand emerging trends, identify approaches to expanding participation, and identify local solutions to local issues.

During the Strategy consultation process you told us more research is needed. You told us that we need to know more about the nature of volunteering if informed decisions are to be made, solutions designed, lessons learnt, and a culture of excellence is to characterise the future. You also told us that you want investment in research so that the sector can be as agile and vibrant as possible, and the value of our collective efforts are understood.

This is why the NSW Government will invest in initiatives that help to expand our knowledge base.

Focus Area 3: Value



Our Objective:

- Enhance recognition of the value of volunteering and the contributions made by volunteers in NSW

Our Outcome:

- Increased recognition of the value of volunteering and the contributions made by volunteers in NSW.

Why value?

Valuing the impact of volunteering, as well as the contributions made by volunteers and organisations is vital. Meaningful recognition is a key way to inspire, motivate, recruit and retain volunteers.

Publicly acknowledging the contributions made by volunteers is a good way to say thank you. It is critical to maintaining and enhancing a culture of volunteering. Recognition directly aligns to the guiding principles of this Strategy – in particular, growth, vibrancy and respect.

During the Strategy consultation process you told us that most volunteers want their efforts to be recognised and respected. You told us that you want your stories to be told, in order to raise awareness about the difference being made. You also told us that you want to be valued for the contributions made at a local level, and as a sector.

This is why the NSW Government will invest in initiatives that help to recognise the contributions made by volunteers, as well as the value and impact of volunteering.



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Volunteer with the Country Women's Association of NSW

Implementation

Achieving our vision for volunteering in NSW, requires a whole-of-sector and whole-of-community approach. This means all partners must work together.

Ongoing Conversation

Over the next decade, the NSW Government will invest in the volunteering sector. We will strive to keep the conversation and collaboration going with volunteers, volunteer involving organisations, relevant peak organisations, and government agencies.

Ongoing engagement is an essential part of the Strategy's implementation. The NSW Government is committed to the volunteer-centred approach outlined in this Strategy.

Action Plans

The Department of Communities and Justice will lead the implementation of this Strategy.

This Strategy will be supported through a series of phased Action Plans. The Action Plans will typically be two years in duration.

Over the next decade our efforts will shift and evolve as needs change, and technological solutions emerge. We will integrate lessons learnt, try new initiatives, and undertake research. New or expanded initiatives will be detailed in the phased Action Plans.

Our Action Plans will include partnership projects that engage the most appropriate partners across Government, volunteer involving organisations, and the broader community.

Reporting

Every two years the NSW Government will publish a Report Card. The Report Card will highlight initiatives commenced, completed, achievements to date and case studies.

The Report Card will be publicly available on the NSW Volunteering Website, and other related websites as appropriate.

Review, Monitoring and Evaluation

The NSW Government will develop an Evaluation Plan and Outcomes Framework to measure and report on progress against the Strategy's objectives.

An Interim Evaluation Report will be published in Financial Year 2025/26 and a Final Evaluation Report in 2030.

More Information

An electronic version of this Strategy and further information can be found at www.nsw.gov.au/volunteering

Endnotes

- 1 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare 2017, Australia's Welfare 2017, Australia's Welfare Series no. 13.AUS 214, Australia's Welfare Report, Australian Government, Canberra
- 2 Price Waterhouse Coopers Australia 2016, State of Volunteering in Australia, Volunteering Australia
- 3 The Centre for Volunteering, 2023, New South Wales State of Volunteering Report, <https://www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/volunteering>
- 4 Mukwashi et al, 2018, 2018 State of World's Volunteerism Report: The thread that binds, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, 12/04/2019, <https://www.unv.org/publications/swvr2018>
- 5 Mukwashi et al, 2018, 2018 State of World's Volunteerism Report: The thread that binds, United Nations Volunteers (UNV) programme, 12/04/2019, <https://www.unv.org/publications/swvr2018>
- 6 The Centre for Volunteering, 2023, New South Wales State of Volunteering Report, <https://www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/volunteering>
- 7 The Centre for Volunteering, 2023, New South Wales State of Volunteering Report, <https://www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/volunteering>
- 8 Office of the Advocate for Children and Young People, 2018 and 2019, Consultation feedback from young people during two Youth Forums, and the consultation discussions during the development of the Regional Youth Framework
- 9 <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Definition-of-Volunteering-27-July-20151.pdf>

All images in this Strategy are volunteers in action.

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