

'Volunteering Action Plan'  
Volunteering and Contact ACT  
PO Box 128  
CIVIC SQUARE ACT 2608

Dear Sir/Madam

***ACT Volunteering Statement: Action Plan 2018-2019***

CONSULTATION PAPER

The release of the *ACT Volunteering Statement: Action Plan 2018-2019* in December 2017 for public comment is timely and important. Volunteering is vital to the high standard of social and economic functioning that characterises the ACT.

The ACT Government's support and recognition of volunteering through the ACT Volunteering Statement, the draft Action Plan and through the funding and support of Volunteering and Contact ACT are commendable achievements.

I particularly commend the Action Plan for its whole-of-government and community approach to supporting and recognising volunteers, and welcome the opportunity to comment.

Volunteering contributes at least \$1.5 billion to the ACT economy annually.<sup>1</sup> Nationally, volunteering is worth more to the Australian economy than the combined mining, agriculture and retail sectors.<sup>2</sup> It improves the lives of volunteers themselves, the recipients or beneficiaries of their work and, directly and indirectly, society, the environment and the

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<sup>1</sup> Consultation Paper ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan 2018-2019. Community Services Directorate ACT Government 2017

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.adelaide.edu.au/news/news55621.html> accessed 22 January 2018



economy.<sup>3</sup> In spite of the obvious value of volunteering, personally, socially, economically and culturally, overall rates of volunteering across Australia are declining.<sup>4</sup>

I make the following recommendations to assist in supporting important elements of the Action Plan and the effective engagement, management and recognition of volunteers in the ACT.

## Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Recognition

The ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population is growing at a faster rate than all other states and territories. At present 1.5% of ACT residents identify as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander.<sup>5</sup>

In recognition of the important role Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and culture play in the ACT, signatories of the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2015-18 are committed to:

- pursuing equitable outcomes for members of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community in the ACT; and
- supporting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, the community and their organisations to develop the opportunities, knowledge and skills to build an empowered, resilient and sustainable future.

Volunteering is of significant importance in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities.

Research has found that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people engage in more informal voluntary work than non-Indigenous Australians. However, this volunteering is often less structured and therefore explicitly excluded from many of the formal networks, research and funding that exist to support structured volunteering.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Key-statistics-about-Australian-volunteering-16-April-20151.pdf> accessed 22 January 2018

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.volunteeringtas.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/m4.pdf> accessed 22 January 2018

<sup>5</sup> [https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0011/349337/CensusFS4.pdf](https://apps.treasury.act.gov.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0011/349337/CensusFS4.pdf) accessed 18 January 2018

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.communities.qld.gov.au/resources/communityservices/volunteering/documents/literature-review-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-volunteering.pdf> accessed 19 January 2018

*Recommendation One:*

- a. Provide for the explicit recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in the Action Plan; and
- b. Consider approaches which recognise and link both formal and informal Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander volunteering with the commitments in the ACT Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Agreement 2015-18.

## Volunteering Snapshot

A Snapshot of ACT volunteering provides interesting and topical statistics relating to both the characteristics and benefits of volunteering in the ACT.

Research consistently shows that information is more easily remembered, shared, and has a higher impact when presented graphically. The infographic below, commissioned by Volunteering WA<sup>7</sup> displays similar statistical and other volunteering information as an infographic.



<sup>7</sup> [https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa\\_report%20book\\_web.pdf](https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa_report%20book_web.pdf) accessed 23 January 2018

*Recommendation Two:* Consider the use of infographics to present information in the Action Plan.

## Measuring the Actions

The purpose of the Action Plan is to provide actions which will realise the intentions of the ACT Volunteering Statement. This clearly stated aim establishes the overall vision for the Plan. It is a statement of position that provides direction for the (draft) actions.

To provide the means to get to aspirational goals it is essential that the actions in the Action Plan are specific and provide the means to measure progress.

Implementation of the actions is the responsibility of the ACT Government and volunteer organisations.

Measurable actions allow the Plan's managers to measure the success of the plan and to test whether the actions are contributing to the realisation of the ACT Volunteering Statement 2017.

*Recommendation Three:* Consider the inclusion of an assessable monitoring framework for the actions.<sup>8</sup> This could include the following:

- Detail the responsible Agency or Organisation;
- Describe the participants in the partnerships, outlining who, or what organisation will assist with implementation;
- Determine the measurement methodology; and
- Set timeframes for implementation or completion of each action.

## The Value of Volunteering

The value of volunteering cannot be understated.

Based on the work of O'Dwyer (2013)<sup>9</sup> *ACT Volunteering* found that ACT volunteers contributed \$1.5 billion to the ACT economy annually.

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<sup>8</sup> See for example the measuring framework outlined in the Greater Shepparton Volunteer Strategy and Action Plan 2014 – 2018 available at [http://greatershepparton.com.au/assets/files/documents/community/volunteer/Volunteer\\_Strategy\\_and\\_Action\\_Plan\\_2014\\_-\\_2018.pdf](http://greatershepparton.com.au/assets/files/documents/community/volunteer/Volunteer_Strategy_and_Action_Plan_2014_-_2018.pdf)

or the Red Cross's Strategy 2020 Humanity in Action which allows actions to be tracked – available at <https://www.redcross.org.au/strategy2020/roadmap/track-our-progress.html>

In September 2017 my Office released a report, *Environmental-Economic Accounts for ACT State of the Environment Reporting - Proof of Concept*. The report included an environmental expenditure account for the ACT.<sup>10</sup>

This work showed that ACT environmental volunteers participate in a range of activities including

- tree planting and bush regeneration,
- caring for injured wildlife,
- administration and management of environmental group activities,
- education, and
- control of invasive species.

Each year since 2013-14, ACT environmental volunteers have been a significant contributor to overall activity in this sector.

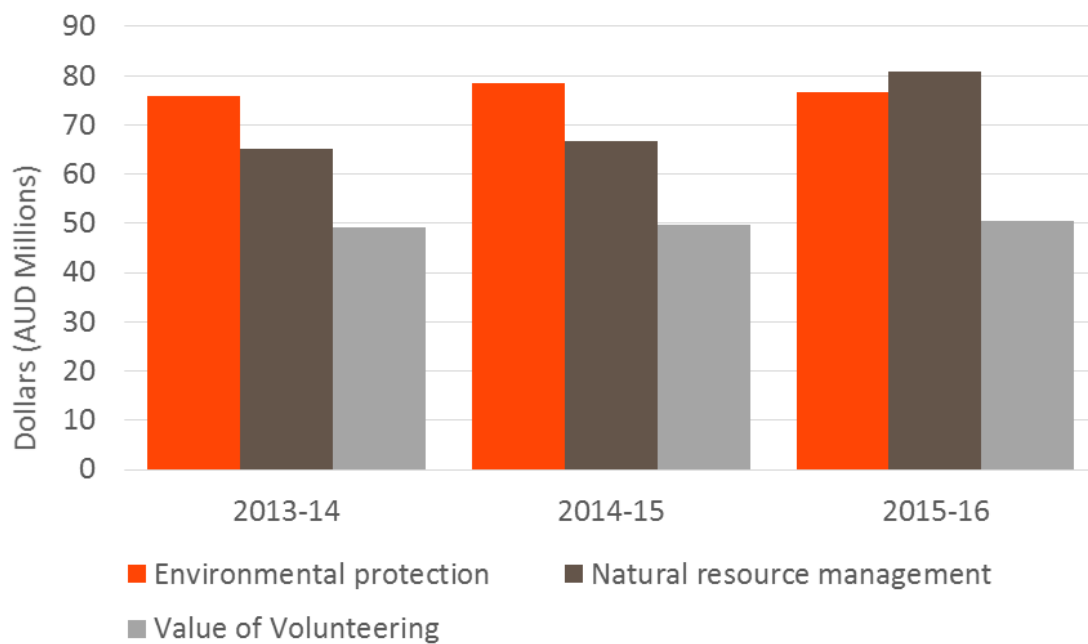
In the three years scrutinised in the OCSE *Proof of Concept*, the estimated value of volunteer activity was in excess of 22% of total ACT Government expenditure on the environment (Figure 1). Replacement wages were determined as follows

- 2013-14: expenditure of \$49.2m,
- 2014-15: expenditure of \$49.8m, and
- 2015-16: expenditure of \$50.5m.

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<sup>9</sup> O'Dwyer (2013) in "Selfless Service: The State of Volunteering in the ACT 2013" Volunteering ACT. December 2013

<sup>10</sup> <http://www.environmentcommissioner.act.gov.au/publications/environmental-economic-accounts> accessed 22 January 2018



**Figure 1: ACT Government expenditure on environmental protection and natural resource management and the value of volunteering in the ACT from 2013-14 to 2015-16**

The *Proof of Concept* noted that the value of volunteering in this experimental environmental-expenditure account was calculated using a replacement cost approach. This is the same approach used by *Volunteering ACT* and by the *United Nations* in its publication *The Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts*.<sup>11</sup>

There are, however, a range of approaches that can be used to place monetary values on volunteering.

The replacement cost approach has the following characteristics:<sup>12</sup>

- It does not capture all unpaid volunteer time, as most community groups and non-profit organisations use other non-monetary inputs in the form of in-kind contributions to run the organisations themselves.
- It uses the same valuation approach to estimate values of outputs which may:
  - be free or provided at below market price (for example, providing free veterinary products to treat injured wildlife or planting trees), or
  - have no market price (for example building a sense of community or protecting the environment – and often both).

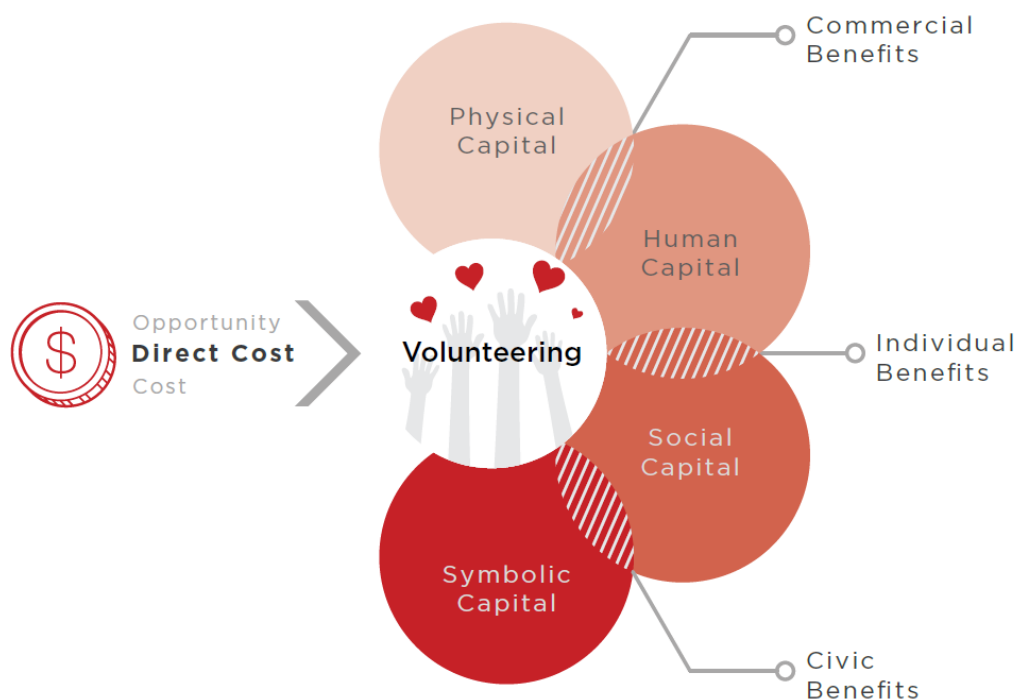
<sup>11</sup> *The Handbook on Non-Profit Institutions in the System of National Accounts*.<sup>11</sup> United Nations UNITED NATIONS PUBLICATION ISBN 92-1-161461-9 Printed in United Nations, New York 2003

<sup>12</sup> [https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa\\_report%20book\\_web.pdf](https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa_report%20book_web.pdf) accessed 22 January 2018

- It focuses on the direct impacts that arise from the volunteering activity, such as expenditure and income of volunteering groups and does not capture the indirect economic impacts of volunteering activities, such as an increase in local business turnover.
- It does not capture the contingent or hidden values such as the value volunteers place on the 'intangible' personal benefits they receive from their participation, including improvements to psychological and physical well-being.

It follows that volunteering is both enabled by, and contributes to, the well-being and functioning of individuals, businesses and government (Figure 2).

Figure 2 also illustrates how investment in volunteering, such as through the ACT Volunteering Action Plan, improves individual and community states of physical, human, social, and symbolic capital.



**Figure 2: The value of volunteering<sup>13</sup>**

### *Volunteering in the ACT and the Sustainable Development Goals*

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are part of the United Nations 2030 Agenda; a plan of action for people, planet and prosperity, fostering peace and requiring partnership from all sectors.

<sup>13</sup> [https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa\\_report%20book\\_web.pdf](https://volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/downloads/vwa_report%20book_web.pdf) accessed 23 January 2018

Volunteers are indispensable to achieving the SDGs. The *2030 Agenda* recognises that volunteers are stakeholders in achieving the 17 SDGs (Figure 3). Volunteers effectively facilitate every one of the SDGs by raising awareness, inspiring others, or engaging in grassroots efforts.

There are clear links between local ACT volunteering and the SDGs. The Action Plan points to the high levels of volunteering in welfare and community organisations.

These volunteers are directly working towards the achievement of *Goal 10: Reducing Inequalities*. The 30.1% of ACT volunteers working in the education sector are contributing towards *Goal 4: Quality Education*.

In respect of SDG *Goal 15: Life on Land*, it is clear volunteer initiatives spread knowledge, raise awareness, and encourage recommended practices which support the needs of present and future generations, and have an economic value. Landcare, conservation and natural resource management projects in the ACT support this goal. *Goal 15* highlights the role these volunteers play in enhancing the quality of life on the land. The *OCSE Proof of Concept* supports this contention.



Figure 3: Sustainable Development Goals<sup>14</sup>

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> accessed 23 January 2018



## Prioritising and Adding to the Actions

Considering the important role volunteers play economically, socially and environmentally on a local ACT scale, as well as nationally and internationally, I submit the following suggests as to the prioritisation of, and additions to, the draft actions.

### DRAFT ACTIONS

Volunteering in the ACT is:

#### SUPPORTED

- Volunteers are included in the life of organisations and have clear roles
- Organisations are committed to best practice in volunteer management, provide appropriate training and support, and take pride in the role of volunteers

#### Actions:

- Support the professional development of volunteers and managers of volunteers
- Provide volunteer organisations with access to resources and templates to facilitate effective, safe and sustainable volunteer involvement, including information on how existing grant programs can be efficiently and effectively accessed

#### VALUABLE

- Volunteers make a vital contribution to the life *and economy* of the ACT
- Organisations enable volunteers to draw on their passion, skills and experience to build a more inclusive, creative and sustainable city and region

#### Actions:

- Encourage partnerships and other collaborations with business to link people with meaningful volunteering opportunities
- Recognise the social, environmental *and economic* contribution of volunteering to the ACT as well as nationally and internationally

#### DIVERSE

- Volunteering is for all ages and abilities, and volunteers can contribute in all sorts of ways
- Organisations demonstrate commitment to social inclusion and diversity by encouraging and supporting volunteers from all walks of life

#### Actions:

- Create pathways to volunteering for people experiencing barriers, including by encouraging the recognition of the value of e-volunteering
- Tailor promotion of volunteering opportunities for people from diverse backgrounds

#### RECOGNISED

- Volunteers in the ACT are acknowledged and celebrated
- Individuals, community organisations, businesses and government all play a role in promoting the contribution of volunteering in the ACT

**Actions:**

- Market volunteering to government, business, and the wider community to ensure that people and the widest possible range of organisations are aware of the breadth of opportunities available
- Conduct research to identify the trends, issues, challenges and opportunities affecting volunteering in the Canberra Region – including the engagement of corporate and virtual or e-volunteers
- Hold an event on International Volunteer Day to acknowledge and celebrate volunteers in the Canberra Region.

Thank you once again for the opportunity to comment on the consultation paper *ACT Volunteering Statement: Action Plan 2018-2019*. My office is happy to be contacted for further clarification if required.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Kate Auty". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Professor Kate Auty  
Commissioner for Sustainability and  
the Environment

13 February 2018