



REPORT:
Toward an Australian Volunteering Strategy

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1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Summary

In Australia, Volunteerism is key to the delivery of a diverse range of essential community services ranging from Social Supports to Disaster Recovery to Cultural and Sporting activities. The action of volunteering is also a mechanism for building personal esteem and social inclusion by individuals and groups from a diverse range of backgrounds. The transactions included in volunteering help create and sustain the Nation's Social Capital.

In Australia, approximately one third of the population participate in this activity annually ¹.

Yet, People First -Total Solutions with others in Australia, are concerned that volunteerism may be under threat from significant demographic shifts in the next decade. Baby Boomers, Gen X and Gen Y are volunteering very differently and are beginning to exert pressure on community organisations with their different needs and volunteering patterns. These changes are already seeing more people volunteer but for fewer hours and for shorter terms.

Volunteer management is complicated by an increased emphasis on "newer" models of volunteering in the community including Mandatory Volunteering, Corporate Volunteering, Episodic Volunteering, Voluntourism, "Nomadic Volunteerism" and so-called Skilled Volunteerism².

Accompanying this has been a rise in the regulatory burden and accountabilities carried by volunteers. These appear to have grown to the point where volunteers are openly articulating across the country that "*it is too hard*" and "*it is no longer fun.*" These sentiments warn of potential disengagement from volunteering.

Internationally, Australia has been seen as a leader in volunteer management issues and practices. The development of standards for Volunteer Involvement, the Journal of Volunteer Management (now in abeyance), other publications, the campaigns around volunteering, and

¹Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006, *Voluntary Work Australia*

²People First-Total Solutions asserts we have always had skilled volunteers engaged in the community. See Ellis, Susan J: The Drive towards "Highly-skilled" and "Pro Bono" Volunteering <http://www.energizeinc.com/hot/2009/09jul.html>

our research have helped Australia to be held in very good regard internationally. This lead has now disappeared as practice in the United Kingdom and New Zealand is now seen as ground breaking globally. Australia needs to regain its place as a leader in volunteerism issues.

People First-Total Solutions supports the Government Vision for a National Volunteering Strategy and looks forward to its construction and iteration.

1.2 Volunteering Strategy Consultation Paper

In June, 2010, The Australian Government released a Consultation Paper. In it, they stated *“The Australian Government is committed to supporting volunteers and encouraging Australians from all walks of life to participate in their communities through volunteering.*

A National Volunteering Vision and Strategy will set out the Australian Government’s vision for volunteering over the next 10 years. The Strategy will provide a framework for the development and implementation of government policy which encourages a responsive and supportive volunteering environment.

The strategy will be released to mark the 10 year anniversary of the United Nations International Year of Volunteers celebrated in 2001.

A National Volunteering Strategy will:

- *articulate a vision for volunteering over the next 10 years that is distinctly Australian, reflecting our unique geography, multicultural make-up and way of life;*
- *identify where barriers prevent volunteers from participating as much as they would wish to;*
- *promote opportunities to engage those least likely to volunteer;*
- *set down a framework to support government decision making and policy*
- *development over the next decade; and*
- *encourage community dialogue about the future of volunteering in Australia*³.

³National Volunteering Strategy Consultation Paper, p 10

1.3 Questions for Consideration

The National Volunteering Strategy Consultation Paper poses eight questions for consideration:

1. How can governments, community and corporate organisations best support volunteers?
2. How can governments and the community work together to encourage more people to volunteer?
3. How can people with a range of needs and from different backgrounds be better supported to become volunteers?
4. How can we best sustain and grow the pool of skilled volunteers in the emergency management sector?
5. How can volunteer-based organisations be supported to comply with regulations designed to protect volunteers and the community?
6. How can governments work towards better alignment and co-operation to support volunteering efforts and, at the same time, reduce red tape without compromising safety?
7. How can government, community and corporate Australia best respond to this changing volunteering environment?
8. How can governments and communities best recognise and celebrate the contribution of all volunteers?

1.4 People First -Total Solutions Submission

In our submission, People First-Total Solutions are seeking to answer the eight Questions for Consideration by proposing three main strategies for Australia. Each of the three strategies is linked to a series of specific actions that we are proposing. These three strategies are:

1. Effective National Supports for Organisations
2. Elevating Volunteer Management
3. Encouraging Australians to Volunteer

We would like to see these proposed Strategies and Actions implemented in the period 2011-2021 for the benefit of Australian Volunteering.

2 EFFECTIVE NATIONAL SUPPORTS for ORGANISATIONS

People First -Total Solutions strongly believe that the development of a range of new support services be put in place to assist both small and large Volunteer Involving Organisations to effectively operate their volunteer programs in the next decade.

These include:

- 2.1 Establish Federal Department of Volunteering
- 2.2 A Unified Support Structure for Volunteering
- 2.3 Sustainable Funding of Volunteer Centres with Clear Mandates
- 2.4 National Insurance Scheme
- 2.5 On line admin resources

2.1 Establish Federal Department of Volunteering

In 1999/2000 Volunteering was reportedly worth nine billion dollars of GDP⁴. Despite this substantial economic and social input, there is currently no national oversight or focus on a strategic direction for Volunteerism at the Federal Government level. Instead, support for volunteering occurs in an ad hoc fashion across several Federal Government departments.

A Federal Department of Volunteering needs to be established to support Volunteer Involving organisation organisations and create a strategic direction for Australian Volunteering.

2.2 A Unified Support Structure for Volunteering

There are many organisations providing support for volunteering and representing volunteer involving organisations. These include Volunteer Centres, State and Territory Council of Social Services, Federal Government departments, / State Offices of Volunteering, private consulting groups and Peak Bodies. The result is some degree of competition and duplication between some of organisations and services while significant gaps exist in some sectors.

There needs to be a better national structure to maximise and share resources while allowing creativity, building volunteerism and supporting the National Strategy roll out.

⁴Australian Bureau of Statistics, *Non-profit Institutions Satellite Account, Australian National Accounts, 1999/2000*. Catalogue No. 5256.0, ABS, Canberra, 2002.

Our suggestions are to :

- Identify who is providing services to support volunteerism
- Encourage some consolidation of organisations with identical agendas
- Host a forum for these bodies and organisations to meet together regularly with the Federal Department of Volunteering to work together
- Ensure that each organisation has a clear understanding of its particular role(s) in achieving the National Volunteering Strategy whilst retaining autonomy

2.3 Sustainable Funding of Volunteer Centres with Clear Mandates

Regional and State Volunteer Centre funding is obtained from a myriad of sources with little consistency across Centres. Many Volunteer Centres are hampered in delivering their agendas because of funding pressures. In addition there is not consistency in branding, signage, targets, locations and practice between Volunteer Centres.

A structured funding stream for supporting all Australian Volunteer Centres needs to be established. This needs to be accompanied by clear standardised branding, mandates and targets for their work.

2.4 National Insurance Scheme

In Australia, Volunteering involving organisations are generally expected to provide volunteer accident cover for their volunteers, under the Australian standards. In addition, some funding agreements require this insurance coverage. There are, however, no requirements for the levels of cover provided through these insurance arrangements. Therefore, the amount of Cover and protection for volunteers varies from organisation to organisation. In many cases the amounts offered for accidental injury or death would not be sufficient.

Under this proposal, all Volunteers need to be covered by a universal insurance cover in the context of their volunteering which would protect their health, well-being and income should an injury occur whilst volunteering.

2.5 On line admin resources

To simplify the administrative and recording burden on volunteer involving groups, an online portal be established which would provide access to:

- standard accounting packages
- online police checks
- templates such as policy documents, application forms
- resource sharing

3 ELEVATING VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT

Volunteering England notes that “Many organisations across the public, private and voluntary sectors are recognising that although volunteers give their time freely, they are not cost-free”.⁵ The same is true in Australia. To ensure we are dealing with the complex issues posed by different volunteering expectations, demographics and volunteering models, the Australian Strategy must strive to raise the importance and professionalism of Volunteer Management. Proposals include:

- 3.1 Actively Raising the Value and Importance of Volunteer Management
- 3.2 Reposition the National Standards for Volunteers
- 3.3 Higher Education Training
- 3.4 Recognition of Current Skills and Abilities
- 3.5 Access to Online Training Portal

3.1 Actively raising the Value of Volunteer Management

The starting point is to raise the importance of the Management of Volunteers by governments, volunteer involving agencies and the media. Actions to achieve this need to include:

- supporting the Global International Volunteer Managers Day
- funding the Australasian Association for Volunteer Administrators
- creating best practice awards for innovative volunteering
- including references to volunteer management in discussions regarding volunteering and volunteer programs
- including funding for management of volunteers in program and activity funding

3.2 Reposition the National Standards for Volunteers

The Australian National Standards for Involving Volunteers was developed to promote best practice. These standards need to be

- revised for IYV+10
- made available in a simplified form for organisations to quickly implement
- made more widely accessible (currently they are only available by purchasing them)
- more widely publicised
- given some teeth by being tied to accreditation programs and/or funding provisions for

⁵<http://www.volunteering.org.uk/WhatWeDo/Projects+and+initiatives/value+volunteer+management/What+do+o+ther+organisations+think>

Volunteer Involving organisations

3.3 Higher Education Training

Currently in Australia there are no degree level programs in volunteer management or for those assisting to manage volunteers. Tertiary education and training would strengthen volunteer management by

1. providing volunteering involving organisations with the knowledge and resources to easily and quickly operate effective volunteer programs-ams
2. Setting and maintaining quality standards for volunteer management
3. Providing the high level managerial personnel required to build capacity in on going volunteer work and for emergency response
4. Generating researchers to further build Australia's knowledge of volunteerism and volunteer management

Tuition in volunteer management at a tertiary level is required in two ways:

1. Embedding tuition in management of volunteers into tertiary level courses where graduates are likely to encounter and work with volunteers. This could include nursing, social work, not for profit management, event management etc.
2. Creating Specific Tertiary level volunteer management qualifications

3.4 Recognition of Current Skills and Abilities

Individuals who manage volunteers already possess significant skills, and knowledge. Australia needs to ensure we protect and recognise this grassroots knowledge. A component of a National Strategy for Volunteering would be to give these individuals the opportunity for this to be formally recognised at a national level.

3.5 Access to Online Training Portal

A National Training Portal be established and maintained which would house course materials including training notes and online tutorials. There could be an opportunity for a range of providers from Volunteer Centres, Volunteer involving organisations and other organisation to contribute resources and materials on a pro bono and paid basis through the on-line portal.

4 ENCOURAGING AUSTRALIANS to VOLUNTEER

Volunteering has long been part of the Australian psyche, responsible for much social infrastructure. This norm of volunteering needs to be engendered into future generations, across genders and cultures by:

- 4.1 Undertaking Research into Volunteering
- 4.2 Ensuring Volunteering accessible to all
- 4.3 Developing National Marketing Strategy for Volunteering
- 4.4 Establishing Standardised On-line Training Packages
- 4.5 Extending National Action Plan for Emergency Management Volunteers
- 4.6 Reimbursing employers who release people to volunteer in emergencies

4.1 Undertaking Research into Volunteering

There is a universal lack of consistent research into our understandings of Volunteerism.

Resources need to be invested to create rigorous on going research into:

- the concept(s) of volunteering
- Australian understandings of volunteering
- national and international volunteering trends
- the future of volunteerism
- the essentials of volunteerism, volunteer management and volunteering
- the important differences in patterns of volunteering amongst various populations: age, gender, ethnicity, income level including motivation, commitment level
- Volunteering in all-volunteer groups (those not connected to any institution but operating independently) to see who volunteers, how they function, gaps and needs
- Develop tools for effective screening out of "inappropriate" volunteers, especially those being referred for therapeutic reasons.
- tools for finding the right assignment for hard-to-place volunteers (other than the usual vocational counselling aids).
- tools to measure the effectiveness of volunteers in terms of the many assignments that ask volunteers to affect the "quality of life" of clients (homebound visitation, victim assistance, etc.)
- documenting job-related skill development through volunteering
- Models for Volunteer Centres
- Impacts of Corporate volunteering
- What are the trends and opportunities for "civic groups" such as Apex, CWA, Lions and

Rotary, etc.,

- In times of recession, what really happens for volunteering? ⁶

4.2 Ensuring volunteering is accessible to all

Significant barriers remain in many organisations for volunteers

- from Culturally and Linguistically different backgrounds
- with a disability
- who are Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual or Transgender

Two actions are required:

1. ensure that volunteer involving organisations are required to comply with all Australian Federal and State Governments anti discrimination and equal opportunity legislation
2. work with agencies to better attract engage and retain volunteers from diverse backgrounds

4.3 Developing National Marketing Strategy for Volunteering

Develop national resources to raise community understanding about the role and value of volunteers and who can participate. Ensure Australian examples and models are utilised and that volunteers and volunteer involving organisations be included in the construction and roll out of the Campaigns.

4.4 Establishing Standardised On-line Training Packages

Access to training for volunteers must fit into the time schedules of those volunteers. E-learning is one method that needs to be explored to expand access to training. Standardised training packages for Peak bodies which can be accessed by local agencies and their volunteers would assist with engaging more volunteers.

⁶ Susan J. Ellis, Research on Volunteerism...What Needs to Be Done, Journal of Voluntary Action Research, Volume 14, Number 2-3, April-September 1985, pages 11-14. Originally presented at the Symposium at the 1984 AVAS Conference

4.5 Extending Emergency Management Volunteers National Action Plan

In March 2008, the Ministerial Council for Police and Emergency Management-Emergency Management (MCPEM-EM) undertook the development of an Action plan to enhance the attraction, support and retention of emergency management volunteers. The Plan contained 11 national actions. Under the National Strategy, funding must be made available to ensure these actions are fully implemented. In addition, elements of those actions may be applicable in other sectors.

4.6 Reimbursing employers who release people to volunteer in emergencies

There is a cost to employers to release employees to fight fires, manage floods, repair damage and find people. This cost has never been properly quantified. Anecdotally, there have been suggestions that employers are becoming more reluctant to bear these costs alone.

We propose the establishment of a national fund which would allow employers to be reimbursed for releasing volunteers in emergency situations after a certain period e.g. seven days.

5 ABOUT PEOPLE FIRST-TOTAL SOLUTIONS

5.1 Company Description

People First -Total Solutions was established in 2003 to provide Consultancy and Training Services primarily focussed on the not for profit and community sectors. The Company provides such services in Australia, New Zealand, UK and USA. Growth has been propelled by our knowledge and commitment of the sector and a very high customer satisfaction rate.

5.2 Company Scope

Our projects include:

- Strategic planning
- Evaluation of volunteering programs, strategies and projects
- Training and facilitation
- Evaluation of current services
- Researching trends

Our team possess a strong suite of skills, qualifications and experience in volunteerism, volunteer management and virtual volunteering. In 2010-2011 People First -Total Solutions will provide 200 days of training in ten countries including the National Volunteering Conferences of England, New Zealand and the USA.

5.3 Company Vision

Effective People, Better Organisations, Stronger Society

5.4 Values Commitment:

We at People First –Total Solutions are

- Proactive leaders
- Authentic and accountable
- Collaborative
- Environmentally responsible
- Passionate about being the best