



Volunteering ACT

# VACT PRIORITIES FOR THE ACT BUDGET 2008 - 2009

September 2007

## VACT 2006-2007 BUDGET PRIORITIES.

*Volunteering ACT, (VACT), is the peak body for volunteering activity in the ACT and wider Canberra region, founded in 1986 and incorporated in 1989. The organisation seeks to promote and facilitate appropriate volunteer effort to meet current and emerging community needs. It is a member of the nationwide network made up of each of the State/Territory peaks and over 40 regional referral and resource centres and its national peak Volunteering Australia.*

### Vision

VACT is the leader in the field of Volunteering. By engaging the community, governments, the business sector and the union movement, we will sustain, resource, recognise and promote volunteer effort, which is accessible to all, to enhance the social and economic well being in our region.

### Mission

Volunteering ACT is the peak body for volunteer effort in the ACT, working to advance volunteering in the ACT and its region. It represents the diverse views and needs of the volunteer movement while promoting and facilitating the activity of volunteering as one of enduring social, cultural and economic value to the community.

### Values

Volunteering ACT is committed to meeting the needs and exceeding the expectations of all its clients and stakeholders, and operates according to the following principles: integrity, reliability and commitment in all its work practices.

- Relationships with people, both within and outside the organisation, are characterised by respect, acceptance, patience and trust.
- Services and practices are democratic, inclusive and accessible for all people in its home community.
- Imaginative leadership, which is informed by an awareness of the environment of volunteer effort, enables it to focus on future endeavours
- It is committed to continual improvement of its services so that it maintains the highest standards of practice possible.

### BACKGROUND:

Volunteering is for everyone and we want to find ways to engage, challenge, excite and enthuse all to share their time and talents freely with one another. Volunteering is a two-way activity that gives great benefit to both parties.

- Volunteering ACT calls on the ACT Government to work with us to enhance and improve the development of information technology and communication media to promote volunteering – including the utilisation of online volunteering.

#### VOLUNTEERING AND INSURANCE

The top challenge for volunteer organisations is to secure sustainable income streams. One of the most critical infrastructure issues faced by volunteer organisations is the cost of insurance. VACT thanks the ACT government for its encouragement and initiative of the development of group insurance through the support of ACT Treasury.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- Volunteering ACT continues to call on the ACT Government to support our endeavours to challenge the insurance industry to reduce premiums and to continue its support of the development of group volunteering schemes.

#### CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY AND PHILANTHROPY

Sustainable funding for volunteering is essential and Volunteering ACT recognises this is a shared responsibility.

Volunteering can play a major role in assisting the business and corporate sector to achieve their community goals pertaining to Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR). Compared with USA, Canada, United Kingdom and New Zealand, Australian businesses have not responded to the needs and requirements expected by the community. Although Canberra does not have the weight of corporate numbers experienced in other major cities, it more than makes up for this when the public service sector is included. Considerable work has been conducted by VACT in identifying the involvement of volunteering in philanthropy and the integral part it can play when CSR is used to fulfil the needs of the community. For instance, VACT can act as an organiser, a broker or a coordinator in activities such as employee volunteering or any of the host of undertakings that form a part of philanthropy in our society.

The business community has the responsibility to provide more ongoing support to organisations and the corporate social responsibility movement in the ACT needs to be nourished. Initiatives which help corporations to participate in volunteering are welcome. Opportunities for businesses to give money, as well as time, are now easier than ever with workplace giving schemes.

Volunteering is already built into the workforce activities of a number of businesses and government agencies. More opportunities for this to occur through paid and unpaid leave that respects volunteers' responsibilities is essential from employers. This is particularly true in the emergency services where volunteers are often required without notice.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- Volunteering ACT challenges the private and public sectors to set a target of 50% of all government and businesses providing at

least 15 hours a year to enable employees to undertake volunteering

- VACT asks the ACT Government to recognise and fund VACT's role as an organiser, a broker or a coordinator in activities such as employee volunteering or any of the host of undertakings that form a part of philanthropy in our society.
- VACT also challenges all ACT government departments to encourage volunteering by showing appropriate recognition for the efforts of its staff who volunteer eg: by the erection of "honour boards" or similar in each of its departments for those who contribute significantly to their community by volunteering.

#### MULTICULTURAL AND SENIORS' VOLUNTEERING

The social plan makes mention of the government's desire to aid the senior members of our community – those who are excluded or exclude themselves from meeting similar members of the community or participating in activities that encourage them to move out into their community and become a part of the life of society.

Volunteering ACT had a successful entry into this field with our *Live and Love Longer* project where we collaborated with local GPs. This exercise which increased the well-being of those who were encouraged to become involved in volunteering instead of being 'housebound' could be expanded if we were to run a similar program through other outlets where the brochure can be distributed into areas where it will eventually fall into the hands of the target population eg: retirement villages and hostels, seniors sports and service clubs, aged care homes, etc. Whilst many of these outlets cater to those who are already involved, a large proportion of them would be able to pass the information on to their less fortunate peers.

The encouragement to volunteer in an activity that is both pleasurable and meaningful is often denied to many of our CALD people simply due to the fact that many of them are unaware that volunteering has the capacity to bring them into contact with others from various cultures (including Australians). Many of these newer citizens have a desire to meet and mix with others of diverse nationalities in order to assimilate into Australian society, but can find no way to do so.

Volunteering is one way for them to begin, and a pamphlet similar to the one mentioned above explaining the benefits and advantages of volunteering for them could be distributed through their own cultural networks.

#### **RECOMMENDATION:**

- VACT be funded to promote CALD and Seniors volunteering through appropriate literature and activities.

#### NEXT GENERATION VOLUNTEERING

Canberra has an ageing population and the claim that older people are a drain on Territory resources can be challenged. People who are older contribute their time and expertise as volunteers and are the backbone of the voluntary sector.

there may be a changed atmosphere in many of the students' homes which is being transferred to the next setting - the school.

The 2006 SPICE Evaluation shows that students are far more settled in the classroom after participating in the SPICE Program.

The SPICE Program tries to prevent long-term unemployment and social isolation by increasing students' confidence, work abilities, literacy and numeracy skills, and employment prospects. In other words, offering at-risk students the opportunity to participate in the SPICE Program increases students' work readiness, and their workplace literacy and numeracy skills. Therefore students will feel less alienated from the realities of work and their workplace and more importantly they will feel valued members of their communities. If students feel connected to their communities then crime is far less likely to take place. People who know each other generally have respect for one another.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

- **Volunteering ACT asks the ACT Government to recognise the value of this SPICE program to the community in all its aspects by ensuring that this program continues to receive funding beyond the life of its current Community Inclusion Funding, so that the program can be adequately staffed and grown to meet the ever-increasing demand for its services.**

#### QUALITY AND STANDARDS

The ACT Government should encourage and reward the continued reinvestment of the economic benefits of volunteering by all sectors and promote the recognition of individual and organisational volunteer effort and shared solutions for some of the current challenges to volunteering.

**It should also recognise that the recruitment, training and management of this large volunteer workforce is not cost neutral and that organisations need to have the resources at hand to be able to effectively maintain their volunteer staff.**

Volunteering ACT is indicative of the many volunteer-involving and community organisations generally, in the ACT, in that it has a chronic shortage of staff that is constantly being required to spend longer hours to do more work to keep up with the demands placed upon them.

Many valuable and capable people are constantly being lost to this sector by the offer of better pay and conditions in the public service and the private sector. This means constant retraining of staff, loss of corporate history, and a general feeling of insecurity. Due to the tenuous nature of funding and grants schemes, new people are reluctant to commit to a system that cannot offer them security of tenure, or does not have sufficient secured funds to offer them the full-time work that they would generally prefer to have.

Volunteers add-value, enhance and enrich the lives of individuals, families, communities and organisations. As the peak body, Volunteering ACT knows from our members, surveys, networks and research that volunteers,

supporters of volunteers, and organisations with volunteers, have particular needs.

#### Volunteers need:

- Recognition and to be valued
- Safe working conditions
- Sustainable and secure management
- Reimbursements for participation (eg child care, respite support, transport costs)
- Opportunities for training

#### Volunteer managers and coordinators need:

- Support and leadership in their organisations
- Recognition of their role in human resource management
- Parity of wages
- Adequate budget allocations for volunteer reimbursements
- Professional development

#### Volunteer involving organisations need:

- Secure funding streams
- Reductions in insurance premiums
- Increased support from the business community
- Capacity to meet expectations on volunteers
- Budgets that allow them to pay adequate wages/salaries that allow attraction and retention of appropriately professional staff
- Capacity to meet national standards for volunteer management

**National Standards for the Involvement of Volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations** were established and promulgated by Volunteering Australia, with support from the Commonwealth Department of Families and Communities in 1997.

Volunteering ACT supports volunteer involving organisations working towards meeting the National Standards and challenges all volunteer involving organisations to meet these standards by 2008.

#### RECOMMENDATION:

- **Volunteering ACT calls on the ACT Government to recognise financially the need for all volunteer-involving organisations to have the capacity to meet the National Standards.**

#### VOLUNTEERS ARE VITAL

Volunteers and volunteering are the essence of a vital and dynamic civil society, but they need the assistance of government to create an environment in which they can flourish.

Volunteers, as individuals or members of associations provide a unique role in building any community's capacity and resilience.

As a phenomenon of civil society they operate independently of government and need support and recognition.