LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY
FOR THE AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY

STANDING COMMITTEE ON ECONOMY AND GENDER AND ECONOMIC EQUALITY
Mr James Milligan MLA (Chair), Ms Suzanne Orr MLA (Deputy Chair),
Ms Laura Nuttall MLA

Exhibit Cover sheet

Inquiry into Unpaid Work

Exhibit number: 05

THE STATE OF VOLUNTEERING

in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

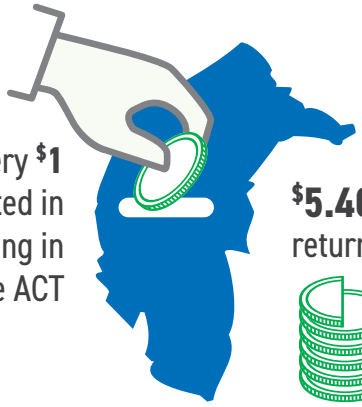
2024

VolunteeringACT
an inclusive Canberra

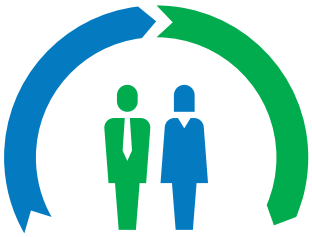
STATE OF VOLUNTEERING IN THE ACT 2024 – KEY FINDINGS

THE ECONOMIC VALUE OF VOLUNTEERING

For every $1 invested in volunteering in the ACT



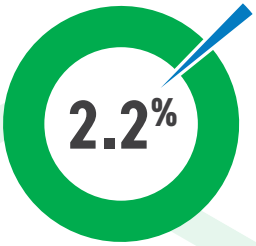
$5.40 is returned



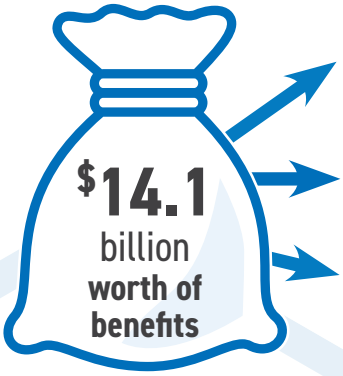
The cost of **replacing volunteer labour is estimated to be**

$3.3 billion

The contribution of volunteering expenditure to the ACT's Gross Product:



In 2023, Volunteering in the ACT enabled an estimated



Incorporating:

billion in commercial benefits

billion in civic benefits

billion in individual benefits

ACT volunteers spend

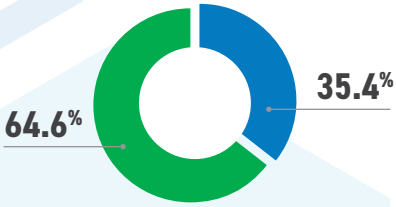
per hour they volunteer

Volunteer-involving organisations spend

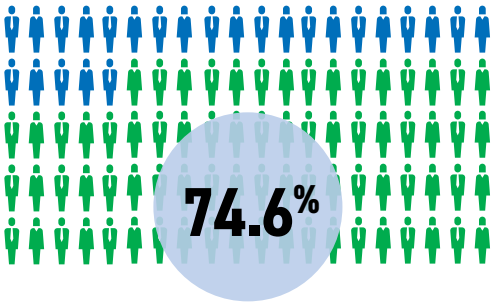
$11.41

per volunteer hour

Volunteers shoulder **64.6%** of the financial burden associated with volunteering, while volunteer-involving organisations shoulder **35.4%**



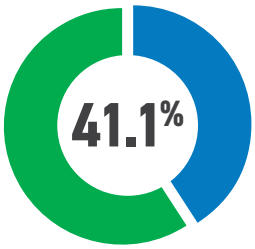
VOLUNTEERS



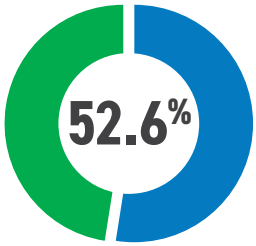
of the ACT population aged over 15 years **(279,000 people)** volunteered in 2023

In 2023, ACT volunteers contributed **63.7 million hours**

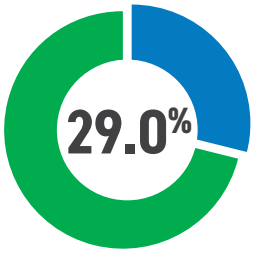
On average, ACT volunteers spend **19 hours per month** volunteering



of ACT residents over 15 volunteered in formal settings with volunteer-involving organisations, such as not-for-profit, government and private organisations



donated their time informally without organisational support

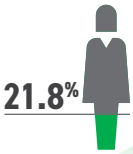


volunteered both formally and informally

The top three ways ACT residents volunteer are:

social or wellbeing support

event support



environmental or animal protection

55.7% of ACT volunteers do so in their local community

25% volunteer online or from home

KEY FINDINGS

VOLUNTEERS

The top 3 **motivations** for **volunteering** in the ACT:

61.7%
To help others

37.7%
For social and community connection

34.7%
For enjoyment

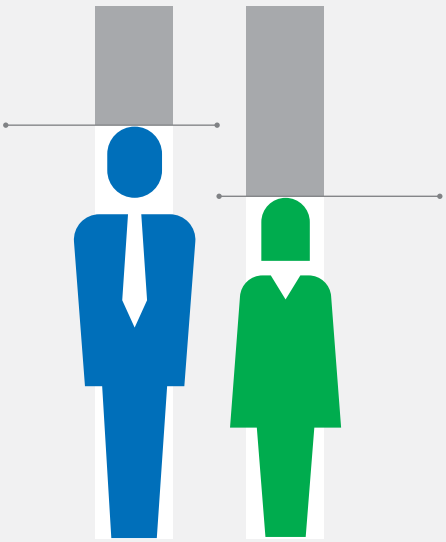
33.6%
of volunteers intend to volunteer more in 3 years' time

41.3%
of non-volunteers intend to volunteer more in 3 years' time

The ACT volunteering workforce

...is **over 4/5** the size of the private sector workforce ...

... and **over 2/3** the size of the public sector workforce



If volunteering was recognised as an industry, **it would be the largest industry by employment in the Territory**

The top 3 **barriers** to ACT **volunteers** volunteering more:

47.3%
No time

19.0%
Costs

12.2%
Burnout (over-volunteering)

The top 3 **barriers** to ACT **non-volunteers** volunteering:

58.0%
No time

21.2%
Not interested in volunteering

18.0%
Not sure how / never been asked

VOLUNTEER MANAGERS

KEY INCLUSION METRICS – The percentage of volunteer managers that include these volunteer demographics in their programs:

89.1% include volunteers aged 65+

69.6% include volunteers aged under 25

52.2% include culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) volunteers

43.5% include First Nations Peoples

10.9% include online or remote volunteers

Top 3 volunteer retention strategies used by volunteer managers

- Volunteer training and development
- Personal relationship building
- Awards and formal recognition

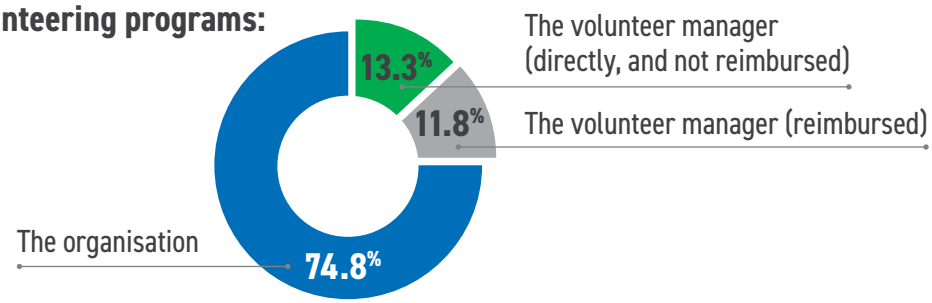
Top 3 volunteer recruitment strategies used by volunteer managers

- Word of mouth
- Website
- Social media

Top 3 changes in the last 3 years (as reported by volunteer managers)

- Number of volunteers has decreased
- Number of hours people want to volunteer has decreased
- Number of young people volunteering has decreased

Who pays for volunteering programs:



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

VolunteeringACT acknowledges the Ngunnawal people as the traditional custodians of the Canberra region and recognises any other peoples or families with connection to this Country. VolunteeringACT is committed to reconciliation and will continue to walk alongside First Nations Peoples and embrace the traditions, stories, and wisdoms of the oldest continuing cultures in the world.

This is an independent report, coordinated by VolunteeringACT, the peak body for volunteering in the ACT. VolunteeringACT engaged the Institute of Project Management (IPM) to design the surveys, conduct the research with ACT residents and volunteer managers, and analyse findings. It is authored by Paul Muller, Managing Director of IPM with statistical assistance from Muhammad Ijaz and Dionne Morris.

This report could not have been prepared without significant contributions from the following personnel from Volunteering ACT:

- Jean Giese – Chief Executive Officer
- Cath Cook – Senior Manager: Policy, Advocacy and Sector Development
- Naomi Thomson – Policy and Advocacy Coordinator
- Joseph Anumba – Data and Research Coordinator

The author would also like to thank the many individuals and organisations who gave their time directly, via the surveys, or during the consultation process, and acknowledge the Centre for Volunteering, NSW for their support in translating the survey instruments into languages other than English.

The analysis and opinions presented in this report are primarily those of its author. Explanatory note: Where figures have been rounded, discrepancies may occur between totals and the sums of the component items. Proportions, ratios, and other calculated figures shown in this report have been calculated using unrounded estimates and may be different from, but are more accurate than, calculations based on the rounded estimates.

Disclosure: *This report was prepared with the support of generative artificial intelligence (AI) technology to assist the writing process. It is important to note that while the AI has aided in composing the text, the analysis and findings presented in this report are solely those of the author.*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2023, 279,000 ACT residents contributed over 63 million hours of their time to volunteering, generating $14.1 billion of value for the Canberra Region. This report provides an overview of volunteering in the ACT and offers insights into various aspects of the sector.

Despite the challenges of the current cost-of-living crisis and ongoing impacts of COVID-19 still effecting volunteering recovery, ACT volunteers have continued to actively contribute to their communities in a variety of ways. On average, each volunteer in the ACT contributed 19 hours of their time per month in 2023. ACT residents contribute to their communities as volunteers both formally through an organisation or group (41.1%) and informally, outside of an organisation (52.6%). A significant number of ACT volunteers are young people, with 74.3% of people aged 15-25 years actively engaged in volunteering.

It is important to acknowledge, however, that ACT volunteers reported significant costs associated with their volunteering, highlighting the fact that although volunteers give their time willingly for no financial gain, volunteering is not something that comes for free. The research revealed an hourly cost to volunteers of $12.76, with volunteers absorbing 64.6% of the total expenses associated with volunteering activities, compared to the 35.4% absorbed by volunteer involving organisations. Despite this, 78.1% of volunteers intend to either maintain or increase their volunteering hours over the next three years and 41.3% of non-volunteers intend to take up volunteering activities in the same period.

The report confirms that volunteering provides huge social and economic benefits to the ACT. Every dollar invested in volunteering in the region results in a remarkable $5.40 return. Further, the report estimates the replacement labour cost of volunteering in our region to be $3.3 billion, which is more than two-thirds of the cost of the entire ACT public sector.

The report is based on the findings of two surveys conducted in 2023. The first, a Public Survey, involved a random sample of 534 ACT residents. The second, a Volunteer Manager Survey, included 46 ACT volunteer managers, working across a variety of volunteering programs and sub-sectors. It is the first time these surveys have been conducted in the ACT and they were simultaneously conducted in every State and Territory in Australia. Conducting the Surveys again in future years will provide a valuable opportunity to observe ACT volunteering changes and trends over time.

The findings in this report clearly demonstrate the significant, vital, and diverse contribution that volunteers make to the ACT community and provide a clear justification for ongoing recognition, support, and investment in the volunteering ecosystem.

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FOREWORD

From the Chair and CEO of VolunteeringACT

VolunteeringACT is thrilled to share our inaugural State of Volunteering Research report, a culmination of vital insights gathered from volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations, stakeholders, and our dedicated community. As the lead advocates for volunteering in our region, this report not only amplifies the diverse voices and impactful stories within our volunteering landscape but also offers substantiated evidence to enrich our understanding.

At VolunteeringACT, our fundamental mission is to cultivate a vibrant and inclusive Canberra by fostering connections and enabling active participation. Every day, the passionate volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations across our region bring this vision to life, showcasing the profound impact and extensive reach of this sector. We trust that the report's discoveries will be warmly embraced by our community, shedding light on their continuous contributions to the fabric of our city and region as well as highlighting the direct return on investment in support for volunteering.

In the face of recent challenges across the Australian volunteering ecosystem, our report identifies crucial trends and potential barriers hindering volunteering. It underscores the importance of creating a safe, ethical, inclusive, and sustainable environment for volunteers, especially as economic pressures and demands on volunteer-led services intensify.

We extend our deepest gratitude to all who have supported and enriched this research endeavour, including VolunteeringACT's Policy and Advocacy Team, the Institute of Project Management, and the invaluable volunteers and managers who shared their expertise graciously. We also recognise the unwavering support from ACT Government Community Services Directorate and the VolunteeringACT Board, whose investments have empowered us to drive data-informed policy and advocacy initiatives.

We invite you to delve into this comprehensive report, equipping yourselves with compelling insights to champion your volunteering initiatives. Let us collectively engage with these findings, steering our efforts towards ensuring a thriving volunteering ecosystem throughout the ACT. Together let us continue to provide guidance, support, and solutions essential for the flourishing of volunteering initiatives across our region.

Jean Giese
CEO

Robyn Hendry
Chair

INTRODUCTION

Coordinated by VolunteeringACT, this research report offers a comprehensive overview of the current state of volunteering in the ACT. It serves as a valuable resource for policymakers, community leaders, volunteer managers, and engaged citizens.

The objectives of this report are to quantify the economic and social value of volunteering, provide insights into the characteristics of and challenges faced by volunteers and volunteer managers, and to provide robust evidence-based data that can be used to inform stakeholder decisions. This is the first report of its kind in the ACT, and it complements and extends previous work in this field, including State of Volunteering Reports in other jurisdictions and research undertaken by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS).

The research underpinning this report is one of the largest-ever population-representative surveys conducted on volunteering within the ACT, comprising a sample of 534 ACT residents. This is supported by a survey of 46 volunteer managers in the ACT[1].

This extensive dataset enables a deeper understanding of volunteering from both the volunteer and volunteer manager perspectives, making the findings of this report particularly relatable and reliable. It tells a rounded story of volunteering in the ACT and captures the unique characteristics that make up the ACT's volunteering landscape.

[1]These surveys were concurrently undertaken in every State and Territory in Australia, resulting in a national dataset of 6,830 individuals and 3,948 volunteer managers.

The report also includes a robust cost-benefit analysis that quantifies the economic and social value volunteering delivers to the ACT. The analysis reveals that the benefits of volunteering significantly outweigh the social costs, resulting in a substantial return that has a positive impact on the whole community, and flow on effects for the ACT economy.

Ultimately, this report is designed to be more than a compilation of statistics and observations; it aims to encourage and support informed decision-making and actions. By drawing quantifiable evidence from real experiences, the State of Volunteering research can play a key role in informing the strategic direction of the ACT volunteering sector.

Interpretation of findings

This report is intended to provide more up to date baseline data on the current state of volunteering in the ACT. It does not attempt further analysis and interpretation of what may lie behind the survey data. For example, while it is evident that factors like age significantly influence whether someone volunteers, the scope of this study is limited to capturing a point in time snapshot and this report does not attempt to offer explanation as to why this is the case. The next steps will include this further analysis and the report will guide future discussions with key stakeholders across the ACT volunteering ecosystem.

The report findings will help inform VolunteeringACT's ongoing partnership work with the ACT Government to finalise an ACT Volunteering Strategy and action plan, and our national advocacy on the action planning process for National Strategy for Volunteering implementation. We look forward to learning from this research and working with the ACT volunteering sector and government partners to establish a more current and shared understanding of the ACT volunteering landscape, it's value to individuals and the ACT community, and using the evidence to help inform strategic and financial decision making in our region.

METHODOLOGY

Note: a more detailed account can be found in Appendix C: Methodology detail.

To assess the State of Volunteering in the ACT, two primary research projects were conducted in July 2023.

The first project was a general survey of the ACT residents and is referred to in this report as the **Public Survey**.

The Public Survey asked a range of questions about individuals' volunteering participation (both formal and informal), motivations, barriers, impacts on employment, and future intentions. The analysis of this data is presented in Section 1 of this report. Additional data collected on volunteers' expenditure is used as an input for the cost-benefit analysis presented in Section 3.

The second project was a survey of volunteer managers in the ACT and is referred to in this report as the Volunteer Manager Survey. The definition of a volunteer manager used in the survey included persons who "supervise, organise or coordinate" volunteers.

The Volunteer Manager Survey questioned managers on a range of topics, including their organisational structure (if applicable), the demographics of their volunteer workforce, recruitment and retention strategies, expenses, current and emerging issues, and growth projections. The analysis of this data is presented in Section 2 of this report. The data on volunteer management expenses is also used as an input for the cost-benefit analysis presented in Section 3.

In addition to their distribution in the ACT, these surveys were concurrently fielded in every State and Territory in Australia. To promote participation from a broad cross-section of the community, they were professionally translated by Multicultural NSW into the following 11 languages.

- Arabic
- Chinese (simplified)
- Chinese (traditional)
- Italian
- Japanese
- Korean
- Nepalese
- Persian (Farsi)
- Punjabi
- Spanish
- Vietnamese.

After preparing the data for analysis (Appendix C), the following valid samples of the ACT and Australian Public and Volunteer Manager Surveys were analysed. These samples are among the largest ever collected in volunteer specific surveys in the ACT and Australia.

Table 1: Public and Volunteer Manager Survey sample sizes

	ACT	All of Australia
Public Survey	534	6,830
Volunteer Manager Survey	46	3,948

VOLUNTEER
VOLUNTEER

SECTION 1:
Characteristics of Volunteers in the ACT

KEY FINDINGS

74.6%
Percentage of the population aged 15 and over who volunteer

279,000
Total ACT residents aged 15 and over who volunteer

19.0
Average hours volunteered per month

63.7 million
Total hours volunteered in the ACT

41.1%
Formal volunteers *(as a percentage of population aged 15+)*

52.6%
Informal volunteers *(as a percentage of population aged 15+)*

25.0%
Percentage of volunteering done online or at home

Top 5 volunteer motivations

1. To help others
2. For social and community connection
3. For enjoyment
4. To be active
5. To use my skills and experience

Top 3 recruitment channels

- Word of mouth
- Social media
- Online search

Social preference for volunteering

24.6% By myself
30.7% With others
44.6% Both

KEY FINDINGS

Top 3 demographic constraints on volunteering with others
(as reported by volunteers)

- Living with disability
- Age (for persons over 75 years)
- Caring duties

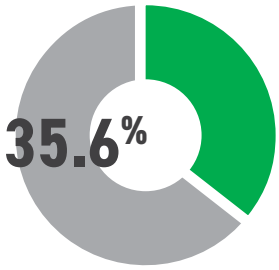
Top 5 barriers to volunteering
(as reported by non-volunteers)

- No time
- Not interested in volunteering
- Not sure how / never been asked
- Lack of confidence
- Not interested in volunteering options

Top 5 barriers to volunteering more
(as reported by volunteers)

- No time
- Costs
- Burnout (over volunteering)
- Health reasons
- Not interested in volunteering anymore

ACT residents who intend to volunteer more in 3 years' time



Sample demographics

The Public Survey of ACT residents received 534 valid responses. The post-weighted demographic characteristics of the sample are described in Table 2 below[2].

Table 2: Self-reported identity of responding ACT residents

Age	Under 30	30-49 years	50 and over		
	38.0%	43.2%	18.8%		
Gender identity	Male	Female	Non-binary/ other/ declined		
	47.3%	50.4%	2.2%		
Location	Major city	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very Remote
	96.3%	3.7%	NA%	NA	NA
Weekly hours of work for pay	0	1-20	21-40	40+	
	18.1%	12.5%	58.6%	10.8%	
Household income versus national average	Lowest 20%	Low	Median	High	Highest 20%
	11.4%	15.5%	25.1%	22.8%	25.2%
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	Non-heterosexual			
	83.9%	16.1%			
Ethnic identity	First Nations	Anglo-Australian	Another or multiple cultures		
	11.8%	52.4%	35.9%		
English as a first language	Yes	No			
	86.3%	13.7%			
Born in Australia	79.9%	20.1%			
Living with disability	11.3%	88.7%			
Caring duties at home	49.3%	50.7%			

This is a good cross-section of responses and several population-relevant observations have been drawn from the data and presented in this report.

[2] See Appendix C: Methodology detail for a description of the weighting technique applied.

Volunteer participation

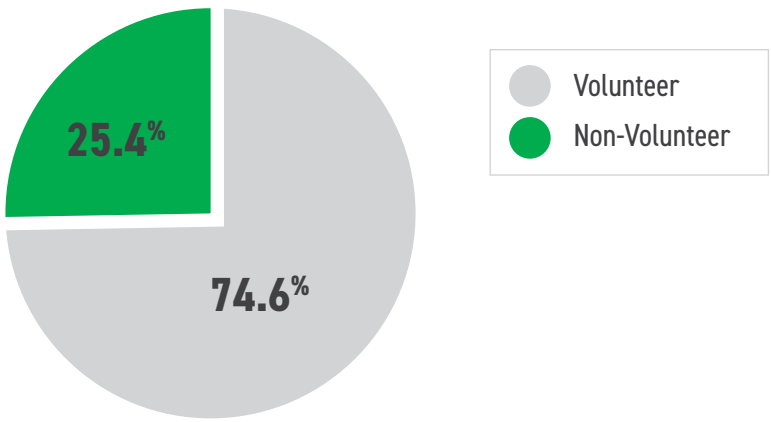
For the purposes of the Public Survey, volunteering was defined as, "*time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain*", with several plain English scenarios and examples provided to support understanding.

This definition aligns with the Volunteering Australia definition of volunteering and subsequent guidance. For a discussion of the empirical benefits of this approach, see Appendix D: ABS Comparison.

Survey participants were asked to select from a list, all activities they had participated in, within the last 12 months.

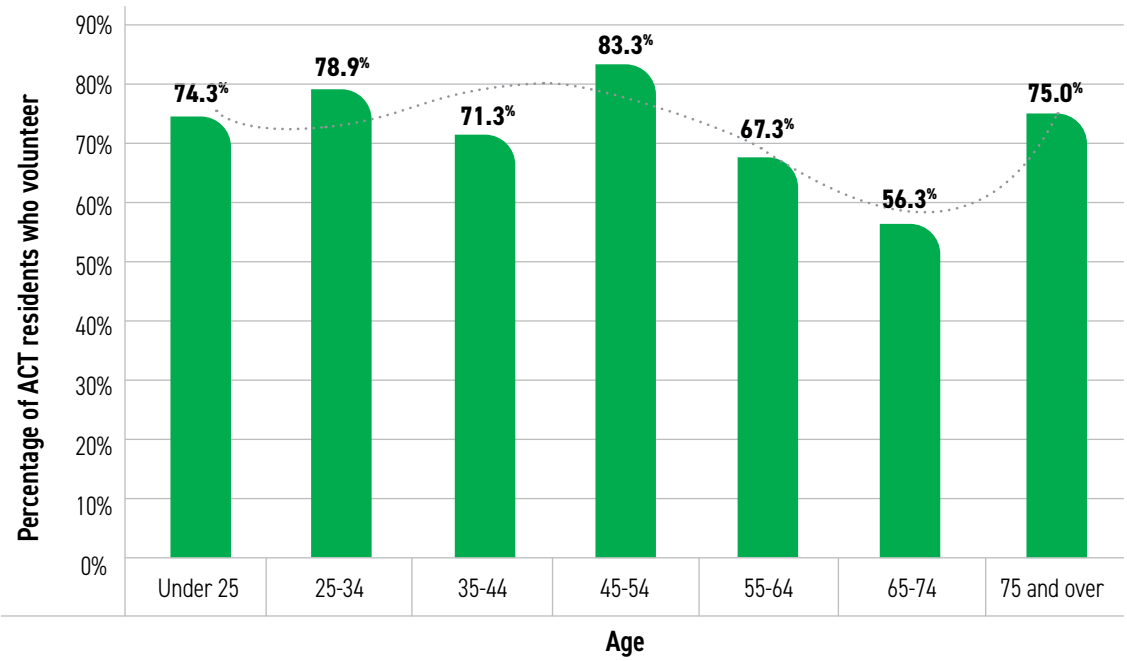
As illustrated in Figure 1, nearly three-quarters (74.6%) of ACT residents aged 15 and over, or 279,000 people, contributed to the community as volunteers in 2023. This is greater than the 65.4% rate of participation in volunteering for the rest of Australia.

Figure 1: Percentage of ACT residents aged 15 and over who volunteer



As illustrated in Figure 2, the relationship between age and volunteering in the ACT is not linear and different stages of life correlate with different levels of volunteering. The age groups that reported the highest percentage of people volunteering in the ACT were 45-54 years (83.3%), 25-34 years (78.9%) and 75 and over (75%). The lowest percentage was reported amongst those aged 65-74 (56.3%).

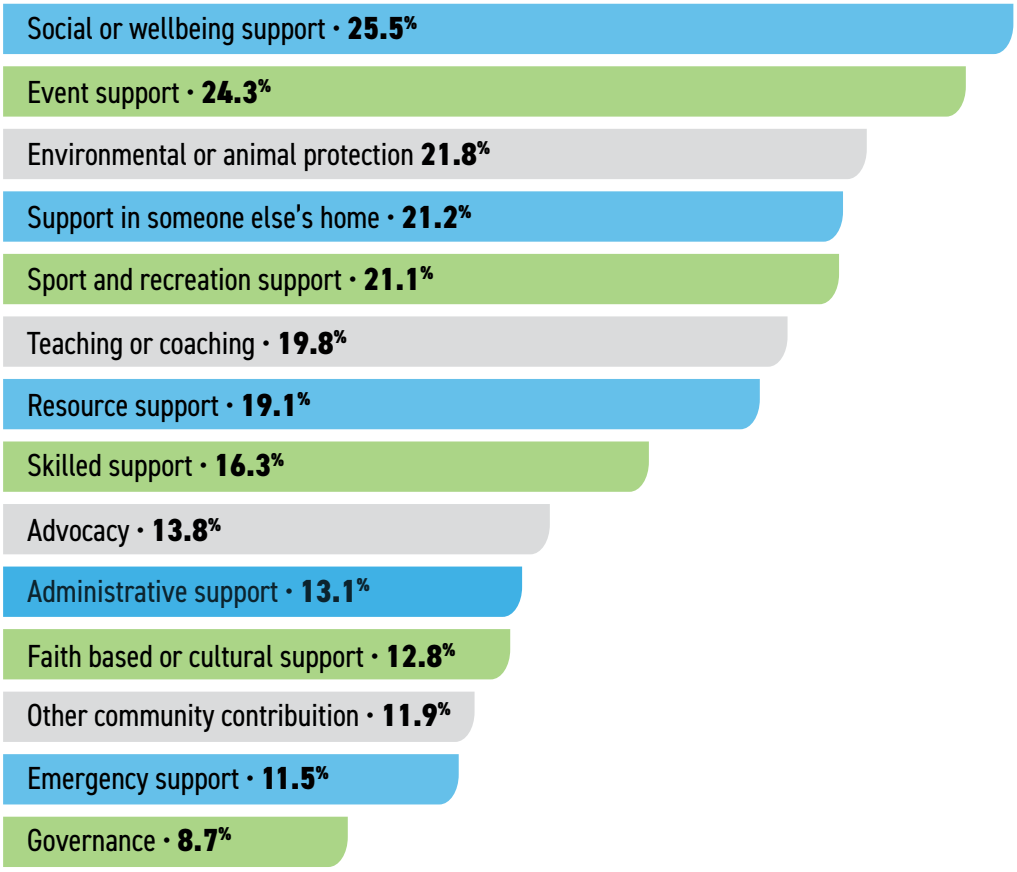
Figure 2: Volunteering participation in the ACT by age cohort



ACT volunteers also identified various methods of contributing to their community. As illustrated in Figure 3, the most common ways in which people in the ACT contribute as a volunteer are social or wellbeing support (25.5%), event support (24.3%), environmental or animal protection (21.8%), support in someone else's home (21.2%) and sport and recreation support (21.1%).

On average, each ACT volunteer reported undertaking 2.4 different forms of volunteering from a list of 14 options.

Figure 3: The ways in which people contribute to their community as a volunteer



NATIONAL ANALYSIS

At a NATIONAL level, the following statistically significant observations were made about whether or not a person was a volunteer in Australia:

- As age increased, the likelihood of person being a volunteer decreased.
- The more hours a person worked for pay, the more likely they were to be a volunteer.
- If a person had caring duties at home, they were more likely to be a volunteer.

Gender, location, ethnic identity, and disability status made no significant difference to whether or not a person was a volunteer.

Further questions about formal and informal volunteering were only shown to people who identified as volunteers to capture the amount of time spent volunteering and who they volunteered for. Formal volunteering is defined in this research as volunteering with an organisation or community group, whereas informal volunteering refers to any other volunteering.

The definition of informal volunteering shown to survey respondents is based on the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) list of informal volunteering activities used as prompts in its General Social Survey (see also Appendix D: ABS Comparison).

Questions were framed to capture if a respondent's volunteering occurred within an organisation or group, or in a setting other than these, and how much time they gave. Respondents were provided with definitions of common settings where formal volunteering occurs to help them differentiate between informal and formal and answer correctly.

Among residents of the ACT, as detailed in Table 3, it was found that:

- 41.1% volunteered in formal settings with volunteer-involving organisations, such as not-for-profit, government and private organisations (55.0% of volunteers)
- 52.6% donated their time informally without organisational support (70.4% of volunteers).
- 29.0% volunteered both formally and informally (44.8% of volunteers)

Table 3: Volunteering rates in the ACT and Australia

	ACT	All of Australia
All volunteers	74.6%	66.2%
Formal	41.1%	33.0%
Informal	52.6%	45.0%
Both	29.0%	22.0%

Please note that the formal and informal figures above do not add up to the total value for all volunteers, as a percentage of survey respondents participate in both informal and formal volunteering activities.

In formal settings, ACT volunteers contributed an average of 16.7 hours per month to 2.8 different organisations. People volunteering informally gave just over half that time at 8.4 hours per month.

Overall, volunteers in the ACT contributed an average of 19.0 hours per month, or 4.4 hours per week. This compares to an average of 20.4 hours per month (4.7 hours per week) in the rest of Australia.

In aggregate, volunteer contributions in the ACT amounted to 63.7 million hours over the previous 12 months.

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

The following national statistically significant observations were made about formal volunteers in Australia:

- **Younger volunteers were more likely than older volunteers to do so formally.**
- **Men were more likely than women to volunteer formally.**
- **The more hours a person worked for pay, the more likely they were to volunteer formally.**
- **People with caring duties were more likely to volunteer formally.**

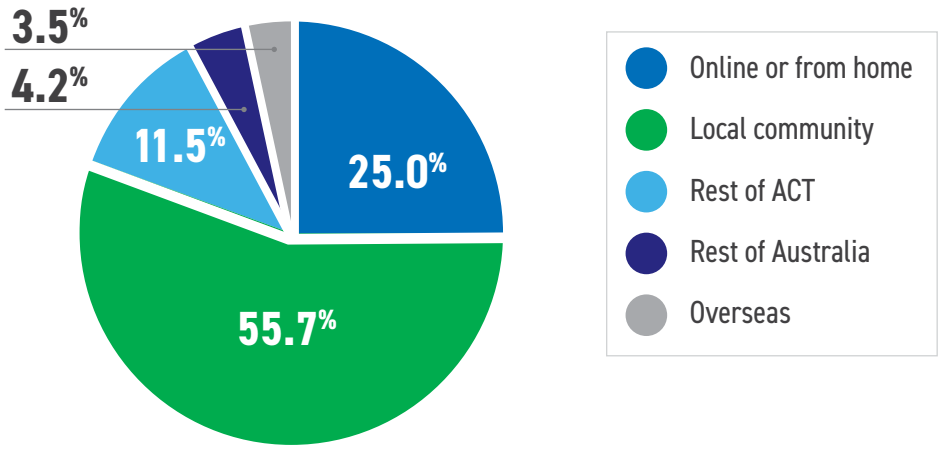
Location, ethnic identity, and disability status made no significant difference to whether a person was a formal volunteer.

Where volunteers give their time in the ACT

ACT residents who volunteer were asked to state by percentage the location where volunteering took place – including volunteering from their home or online.

As shown in Figure 4, while more than half of volunteering in the ACT occurred in the local community (55.7%), one-quarter (25%) was done online or from home.

Figure 4: Where volunteers volunteer in the ACT



NATIONAL ANALYSIS

The following statistically significant observations can be made about online or at-home volunteering in Australia.

- **The more hours a person worked for pay, the less likely they were to volunteer online or at home.**
- **People living with a disability were far more likely to volunteer online or at home.**

Gender, location, ethnic identity, and carer status made no significant difference to whether a person volunteered online or at home.

Volunteer motivations

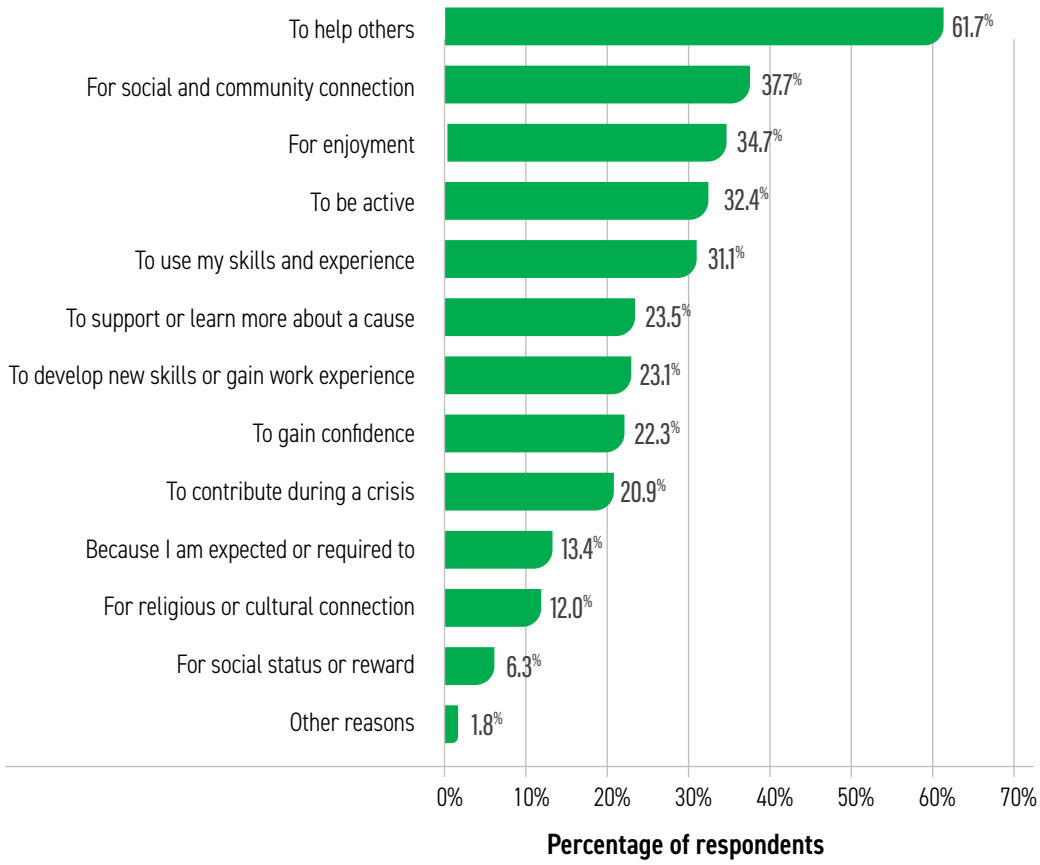
ACT residents who volunteer were asked why they volunteered.

As shown in Figure 5, from the 13 options presented to them, the top five motivations for volunteering in the ACT were:

- To help others (61.7%)
- For social and community connection (37.7%)
- For enjoyment (34.7%)
- To be active (32.4%)
- To use my skills and experience (31.1%).

On average, ACT residents reported 3.2 different motives for volunteering from the list of 13 possible responses, a number not significantly different from the national average.

Figure 5: ACT volunteers' motives for volunteering

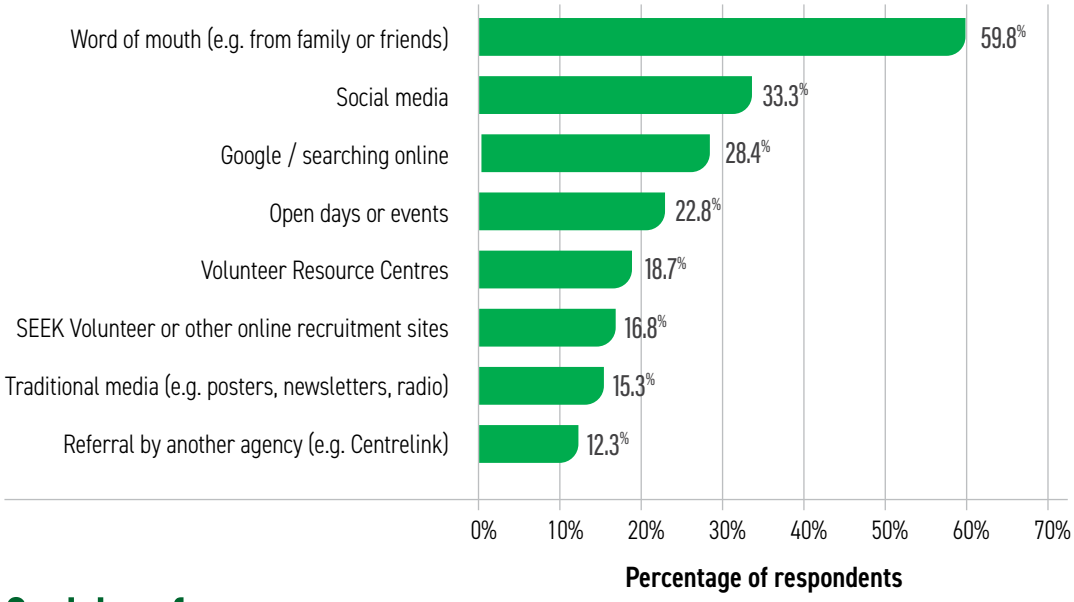


Volunteer recruitment

People who identified as volunteers in the survey were asked how they found opportunities to volunteer. The list of options presented to them is shown in Figure 6, in order of most to least frequently selected.

Most ACT residents (59.8%) reported finding volunteer opportunities through word of mouth (e.g. from family and friends), followed by social media (33.3%) and Google/searching online (28.4%). On average, ACT volunteers reported using 2.1 different recruitment channels to find volunteering opportunities from the list of eight options, a number not significantly different from the national average.

Figure 6: How ACT volunteers find opportunities to volunteer

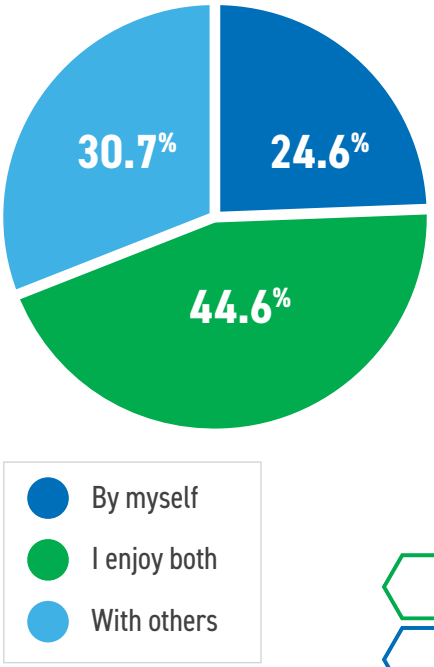


Social preference

ACT residents who volunteer were asked if they prefer to volunteer alone or with others.

As illustrated in Figure 7, almost half of ACT volunteers (44.6%) enjoy volunteering both by themselves and with others, 30.7% prefer to volunteer with others and 24.6% prefer to volunteer alone.

Figure 7: How people prefer to volunteer in the ACT



The following statistically significant observations were made of **AUSTRALIAN** volunteers who exclusively preferred to do so alone:

- **Older volunteers were more likely to prefer to exclusively volunteer alone.**
- **Men were more likely to prefer to exclusively volunteer alone than women.**
- **The further a volunteer lived from a major city, the more likely they were to prefer exclusively volunteering alone.**
- **Volunteers who identified multiculturally were less likely than others to prefer to exclusively volunteer alone.**
- **People living with disability were more likely to prefer to exclusively volunteer alone.**

Hours of paid work and caring duties made no significant difference to whether a person preferred to volunteer exclusively alone.

Barriers to volunteering

The survey asked all ACT respondents to the Public Survey about barriers to volunteering to understand the different perceptions from volunteers (those people already volunteering) and non-volunteers (people who were not currently volunteering at all).

For existing volunteers, the question was framed around what was preventing them from giving more time to volunteering, and for non-volunteers, was framed around what was preventing them from volunteering at all.

The list of options presented to them is shown in the figures below, in order of most to least frequently selected, and the two graphs are meant to be read together. Figure 8 (1/2) shows instances where a greater number of volunteers than non-volunteers reported a self-identified barrier. Figure 9 (2/2) shows instances where a greater number of non-volunteers than volunteers reported a self-identified barrier.

Volunteers and non-volunteers reported an average of 1.7 and 1.8 barriers respectively from the list of 16 options presented to them.

In summary, the top five barriers to ACT volunteers volunteering more were, in order:

1. No time – 47.3%
2. Costs – 19.0%
3. Burnout (over-volunteering) – 12.2%
4. Health reasons – 11.6%
5. Not interested in volunteering more – 11.1%

The top five barriers to ACT non-volunteers participating were, in order:

1. No time – 58.0%
2. Not interested in volunteering – 21.2%
3. Not sure how / never been asked – 18.0%
4. Lack of confidence – 13.5%
5. Not interested in volunteering options – 13.1%

Figure 8: Barriers to volunteering (more) in the ACT (1/2)

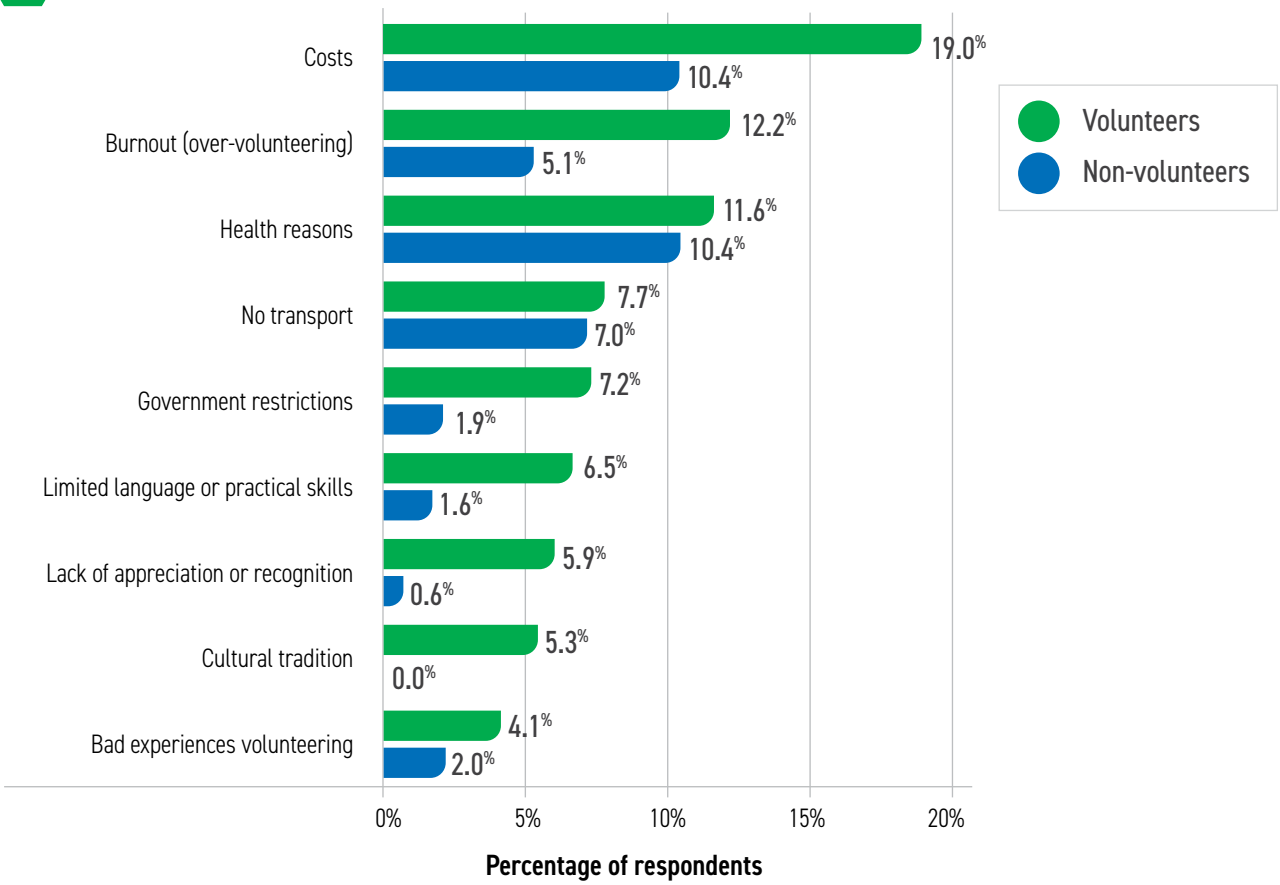
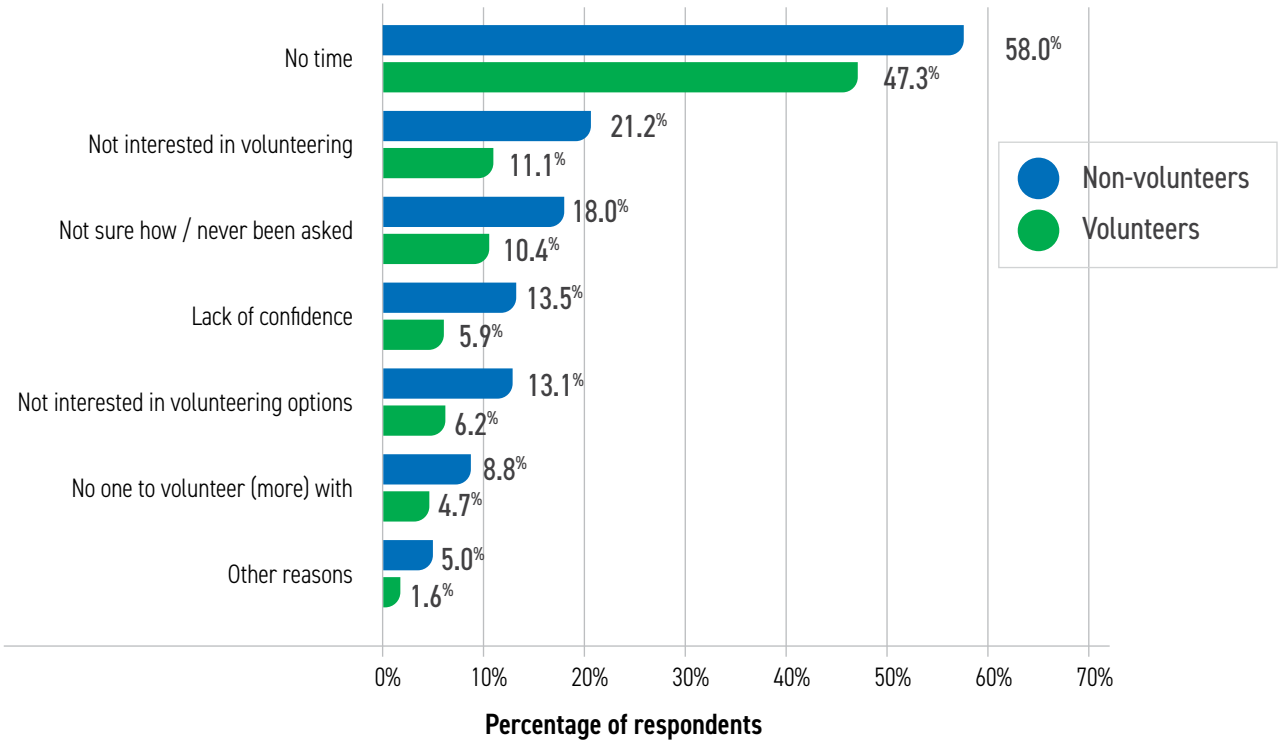


Figure 9: Barriers to volunteering (more) in the ACT (2/2)



The following statistically significant observations were made about those who identified costs as a barrier to their volunteering in Australia:

- The younger you were, the more likely you were to identify costs as a barrier.
- Men were more likely to identify costs as a barrier than women.
- The further you lived from a major city, the more likely you were to identify costs as a barrier.
- People living with a disability were more likely than others to identify costs as a barrier.
- People with caring duties were more likely than others to identify costs as a barrier.

Multicultural identity and the number of hours a person worked for pay each week made no significant difference to whether they identified costs as a barrier to volunteering (more).

The following statistically significant observations were made about those who identified a lack of time as a barrier to their volunteering in Australia.

- The younger you were, the more likely you were to identify time as a barrier.
- Women were more likely to identify time as a barrier than men.
- The more paid hours worked each week, the more likely you were to identify time as a barrier.
- People living with a disability were less likely than others to identify time as a barrier.
- People with caring duties were more likely than others to identify time as a barrier.

Location and multicultural identity made no significant difference as to whether a person identified a lack of time as a barrier to volunteering (more).

The following statistically significant observations were also made about those who reported being not sure how or never been asked to volunteer (more) in Australia.

- The younger you were, the more likely you were to report being unsure how or never been asked to volunteer.
- The less paid hours worked each week, the more likely you were to report being unsure how or never been asked to volunteer.
- People living with disability were less likely than others to report being unsure how or never been asked to volunteer.
- People with caring duties were less likely than others to report being unsure how or never been asked to volunteer.

Gender, location, and multicultural identity made no significant difference as to whether a person reported being not sure how or never been asked to volunteer (more).

Volunteering constraints

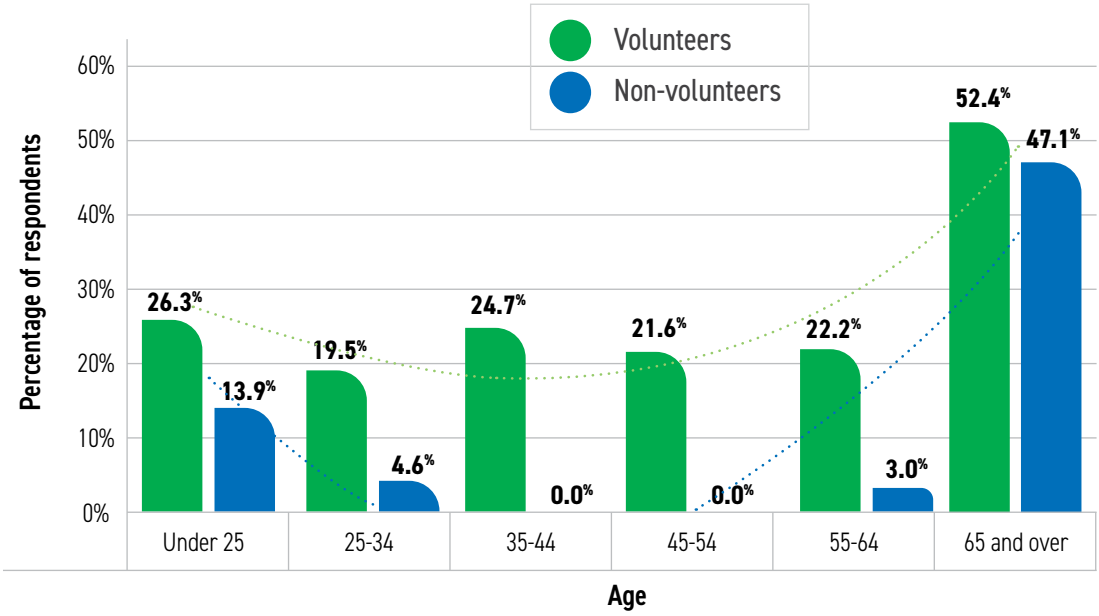
All ACT residents participating in the Public Survey were asked to state what constraints (if any) made it hard for them to volunteer with others. Answer options relating to ethnicity, level of English language skill, sexuality, disability, and caring responsibilities were only shown to respondents who identified as (in order); First Nations or multicultural, non-native English speakers, non-heterosexual, living with disability, or having caring duties.

Overall, 55.4% of non-volunteers and 41.2% of volunteers in the ACT reported that one or more of the demographic factors they were asked about limited their ability to volunteer with others.

Age

Figure 10 shows how various age groups in the ACT perceived their age as a barrier to volunteering with others. The most significant age group to self-identify their age as a barrier were people aged 65 and over with 52.4% of volunteers and 47.1% of non-volunteers in this age range considering it a barrier.

Figure 10: Age as a self-perceived constraint to volunteering with others in the ACT (volunteers versus non-volunteers)



Gender

It should be noted that the data relating to gender as a constraint on ability to volunteer with others in the ACT is limited in scope due to the methodology and response options included for this question, leading to the overall sample size of respondents identifying as non-binary, or not specifying their gender being too small to meet the minimum viable sample requirements.

Therefore, Table 4 below only presents the breakdown of responses to the question of gender as a constraint to ability to volunteer from survey participants identifying as either men or women. The figures show that men and women were equally likely to perceive their gender as a constraint on their ability to volunteer with others in the ACT.

Dedicated sampling in future research in this regard is recommended and will be incorporated into the next iteration of the survey.

As detailed in Table 4, 13.9% of male volunteers and 13.6% of female volunteers perceived their gender to be a constraint to volunteering with others. Meanwhile, 4% of female non-volunteers and 0.8% of male non-volunteers reported gender as a constraint.

Table 4: Gender as a self-perceived constraint to volunteering with others in the ACT:

	Volunteers	Non-volunteers
Men	13.9%	0.8%
Women	13.6%	4.0%

Employment

A total of 12.7% of non-volunteers and 11.5% of volunteers in the ACT reported their employer as a constraint on their ability to volunteer with others.

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

The following statistically significant observations were made about Australians who identified their employer as a constraint to their volunteering:

- **The younger you were, the more likely you were to perceive your employer as a constraint.**
- **Men were more likely to perceive their employer as a constraint than women.**
- **The more paid hours of work done each week, the more likely you were to perceive your employer as a constraint.**
- **People with caring duties were more likely than others to perceive their employer as a constraint.**

Location, multicultural identity, and disability status made no difference on if a person perceived their employer as a constraint to volunteering with others.

Ethnicity and language

As detailed in Table 5, 3% of ACT volunteers identified ethnicity as a barrier to volunteering, compared to 3.9% of non-volunteers. Further, 18.8% of volunteers identified language as a barrier, compared to 15% of non-volunteers.

Table 5: Ethnicity and language as a self-perceived constraints to volunteering with others in the ACT

	Volunteers	Non-volunteers
Multicultural	3.0%	3.9%
English as an additional language	18.8%	15.0%

Sexual identity

A total of 21.6% of the ACT volunteers who identified as non-heterosexual perceived their sexual identity to be a constraint on their ability to volunteer with others. In comparison, 13.2% of non-volunteers who identified as non-heterosexual felt similarly constrained.

Disability

The findings for people in the ACT living with disability were particularly striking. Specifically, 47.1% of volunteers living with disability reported feeling that their disability constrained their ability to volunteer with others. Significantly, 80.4% of non-volunteers with disabilities felt similarly constrained.

Caregivers

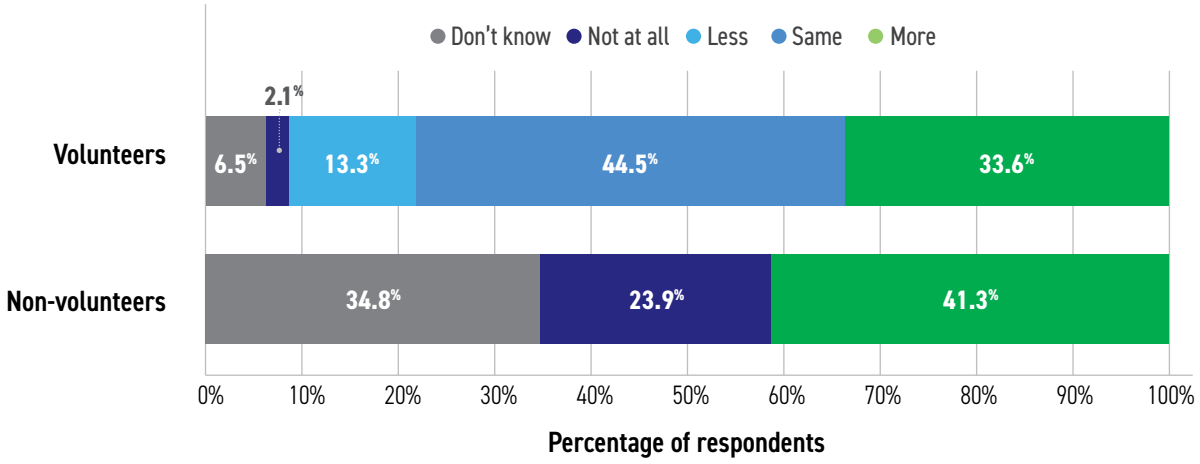
For ACT volunteers with caregiving responsibilities at home, 27.8% reported that these duties constrained their ability to volunteer with others. As with people living with disability, the figure for non-volunteers was much higher at 58.4%.

Future Intent to Volunteer

As part of the Public Survey, all ACT respondents were asked about their future intentions to volunteer. This question was framed to capture if existing volunteers were likely to be volunteering more or less in the future, and if non-volunteers would remain as non-volunteers, or if they felt they may be volunteering in the future.

As detailed in Figure 11, 44.5% of volunteers reported they were likely to be volunteering about the same amount in 3 years' time, 33.6% reported they would likely be volunteering more, 13.3% said they'd be volunteering less and 2.1% said not at all. Meanwhile, 41.3% of non-volunteers reported they were likely to be volunteering more, 23.9% not at all and 34.8% weren't sure. In total, 35.6% of ACT residents (volunteers and non-volunteers) intend to volunteer more in three years' time.

Figure 11: Future intent of ACT residents to volunteer (volunteers v non-volunteers)



NATIONAL ANALYSIS

One way to look at this data is through the lens of optimism. For example, if a person said they plan to volunteer "more" in the next three years, they were showing a high level of optimism about their future volunteering and were more optimistic than someone who thought their volunteering would stay "About the same."

Going a step further, someone saying that their volunteering would stay the same was more optimistic than someone saying they would volunteer "Less." And someone saying they would volunteer less is more optimistic again than someone saying they would "Not (be) volunteering at all."

Excluding those respondents who said they "Don't know," the following statistically significant observations were made about Australian's optimism towards volunteering in three years' time:

- The younger the respondent, the more optimistic they were about volunteering.
- The more hours they worked for pay each week, the more optimistic they were about volunteering.
- People living with caring duties at home were more likely than others to be optimistic about their volunteering.
- People living with a disability were more likely to be pessimistic about their future volunteering.

Gender, location and multicultural identify made no significant difference to a person's optimistic intent to volunteer (more).

SECTION 2:
Volunteer Managers

KEY FINDINGS

KEY INCLUSION METRICS – The percentage of volunteer managers that include these volunteer demographics in their programs:

89.1% include volunteers aged 65+

69.6% include volunteers aged under 25

52.2% include culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) volunteers

10.9% include online or remote volunteers

Top 3 volunteer recruitment channels used by volunteer managers

- Word of mouth
- Website
- Social media

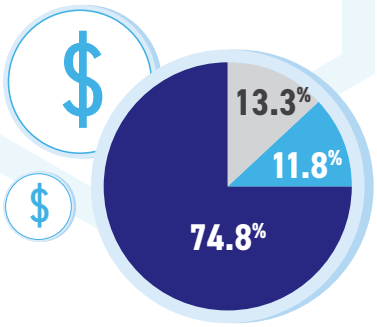
Top 3 volunteer retention strategies used by volunteer managers

- Volunteer training and development
- Personal relationship building
- Awards and formal recognition

Top 5 barriers to volunteering *(as perceived by volunteer managers)*

- No time
- Health reasons
- Burnout
- Loss of interest
- Loss of connection

Who pays for volunteering programs



- The volunteer manager (direct)
- The volunteer manager (reimbursed)
- The organisation

KEY FINDINGS

The **3 biggest changes** of the last 3 years
(as perceived by volunteer managers)

- Number of volunteers has decreased
- Number of hours people want to volunteer has decreased
- Number of young people volunteering has decreased

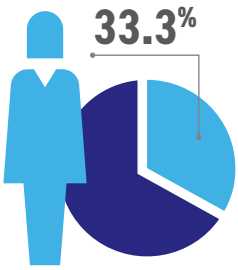
Top 3 issues in volunteering
(as perceived by volunteer managers)

- Organisational culture, inclusion and diversity
- Volunteer health and safety
- Volunteer retention

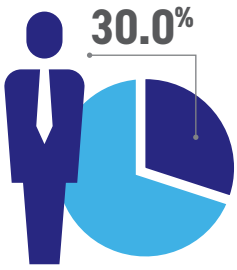
Top **3 sources of help** utilised by volunteer managers

- Their volunteers
- Fellow volunteer managers
- Their organisation

Volunteer managers who say more people will be volunteering with their organisation in 3 years' time



Volunteer managers who say they will be doing more with their organisation in 3 years' time



Sample demographics

The Volunteer Manager Survey in the ACT received 46 valid responses. The unweighted demographic characteristics of the sample are detailed in Table 6 below.[3]

Table 6: Self-reported identity of responding volunteer managers in the ACT:

Age	Under 30	30-49 years	50 and over		
	13.3%	40.0%	46.7%		
Gender identity	Male	Female	Non-binary/ other/ declined		
	26.7%	73.3%	0.0%		
Location	Major city	Inner regional	Outer regional	Remote	Very Remote
	95.7%	4.3%	NA%	NA	NA
Weekly hours of work for pay	0	1-20	21-40	40+	
	16.7%	6.7%	70.0%	6.7%	
Household income versus national average	Lowest 20%	Low	Median	High	Highest 20%
	16.7%	20.0%	36.7%	23.3%	3.3%
Sexual orientation	Heterosexual	Non-heterosexual			
	86.2%	13.8%			
Ethnic identity	First Nations	Anglo-Australian	Another or multiple cultures		
	0.0%	86.7%	13.3%		
English as a first language	Yes	No			
	93.3%	6.7%			
Born in Australia	83.3%	16.7%			
Living with disability	10.0%	90.0%			
Caring duties at home	40.0%	60.0%			

The Volunteer Manager Survey commenced with a simple qualifying question to ask if the respondent managed/coordinated volunteers either in a paid role, or within a volunteer role. Any persons who responded "No" were exited from the survey and their response was not counted.

In total, 50.0% of ACT volunteer manager responses reported managing volunteers in a paid role, while 50.0% said they managed volunteers as a volunteer themselves. In this report, these volunteers are referred to as "unpaid volunteer managers." Only a small fraction, 4.3%, carried out both roles. Note that this does not mean that 50.0% of volunteer managers in the ACT are paid – it is only a reflection of the 46 participants in this survey.

ACT Volunteer managers were asked about the type of organisation or group they managed volunteers within, the number of volunteers they were responsible for, and the number of hours they spent on volunteer management.

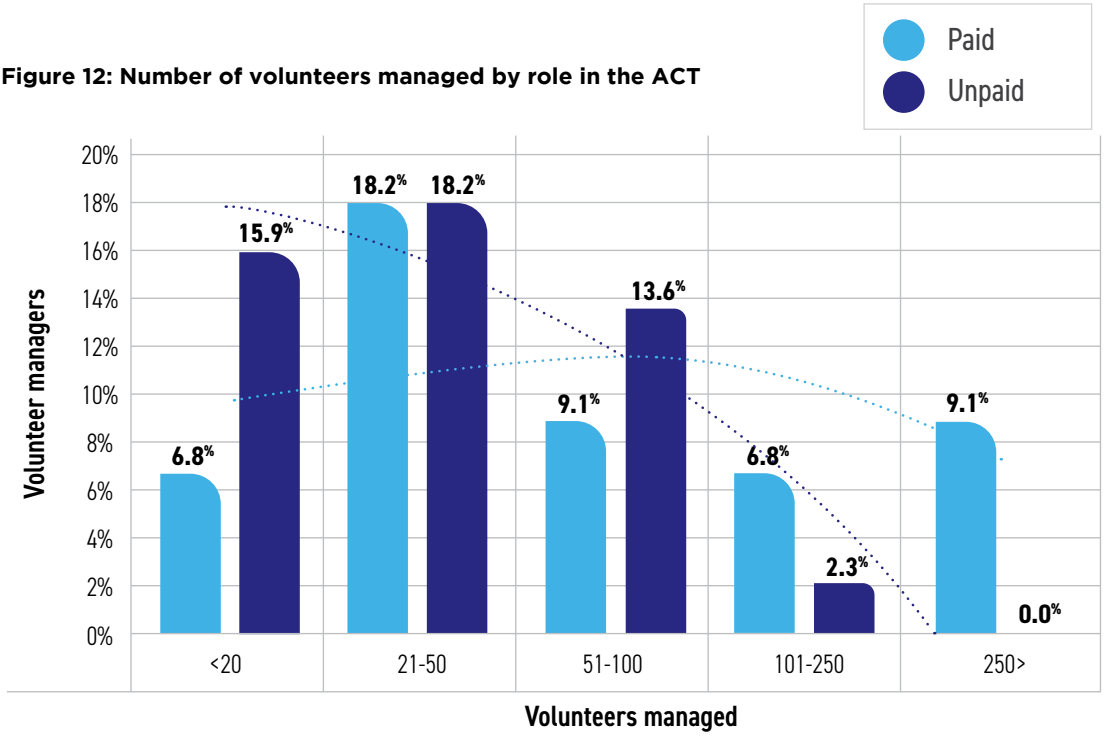
The overwhelming majority of respondents in the ACT (80.4%) managed volunteers within a not-for-profit or community organisation. Government departments or agencies made up 19.6% of the sample, and no respondents reported managing volunteers within a privately owned or commercial enterprise. However, given the small sample size, no firm assumptions about the distribution of volunteer managers in the ACT should be made from these numbers, but this is a great starting point

[3]See Appendix C: Methodology detail for a description of the weighting technique applied.

to understand the current picture, with a view to expanding the survey's distribution during future iterations.

As illustrated in Figure 12, paid volunteer managers are more likely to oversee a larger number of volunteers compared to their unpaid counterparts. However, it is worth noting that a small number of volunteer managers were responsible for managing large groups of volunteers without payment.

Figure 12: Number of volunteers managed by role in the ACT



NATIONAL ANALYSIS

The following factors significantly impacted the number of hours that a volunteer manager in **Australia** reported contributing each week:

- Age: The younger a volunteer manager, the more hours they reported contributing per week.
- Location: The closer the volunteer manager lived to (or in) a major city, the more hours they contributed per week.
- Gender: Men who manage volunteers contributed more hours per week than women.
- Workforce status: Paid volunteer managers contributed more hours per week than unpaid volunteer managers.
  - Unpaid volunteer managers who responded to the survey contributed an average of 11.5 hours per week.
  - Paid volunteer managers who responded to the survey contributed an average of 19.2 hours per week.

Volunteer inclusion

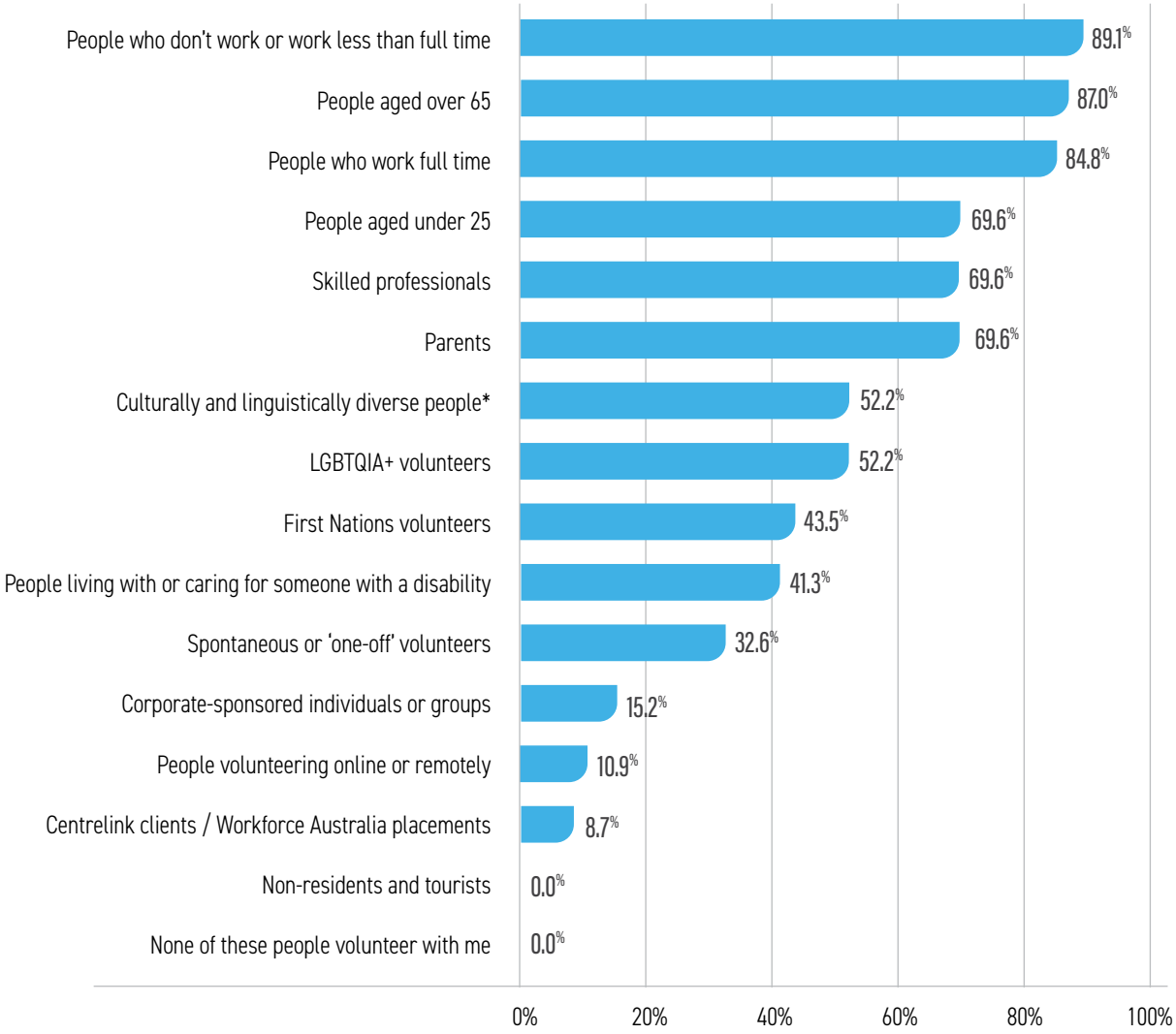
Volunteer managers in the ACT were asked about who volunteered with them.

Their responses, presented in Figure 13, provide a snapshot of the diverse groups that volunteer-involving organisations engage, the different forms of volunteer engagement, and their different employment and life contexts. The options overlap, capturing both demographic and occupational characteristics. Most volunteer managers reported that their volunteer-involving organisation engaged people who don't work or work less than full time (89.1%), people aged over 65 (87%) and people who work full time (84.8%). Around half engaged culturally and linguistically diverse people (52.2%) and LGBTQIA+ people (52.2%), with 43.5% engaging First Nations people. The least represented groups were Non-residents or tourists (0%), Centrelink clients/Workforce Australia participants (8.7%) and people working remotely or online (10.9%).

Volunteer managers in the ACT reported engaging an average of 6.0 different options in their organisation from the list of 15 provided, compared to a national average of 5.7.

The data presented in Figure 13 simply highlights whether organisations involve volunteers from the listed demographics ('yes/no'). It does not represent the actual rate of volunteer participation from these demographics.

Figure 13: Characteristics of volunteers included in ACT volunteer-involving organisations



* The category "Culturally and linguistically diverse people" includes newly arrived migrants and refugees.

Table 7 below compares two key metrics for various demographic groups. First, it shows the rate at which each demographic group engages in formal volunteering. Second, it presents the percentage of managers who are responsible for overseeing 50 or more volunteers and have reported including members of these demographic groups in their volunteer programs.[4] This observation gives insight into how volunteers from the specific demographic groups are distributed within larger organisations that involve volunteers. Data is provided for both ACT and all of Australia.

If there is a wide difference between the two figures presented in each row of the table, it suggests that volunteers from that demographic group are spread out more broadly across various formal volunteering organisations. On the other hand, a smaller gap indicates that these volunteers are more concentrated within specific organisations.

Table 7: Inclusion among larger volunteer-involving organisations in the ACT versus all of Australia

	Percent of formal volunteer population (ACT)	inclusion rate in large organisations (50+ volunteers)	
		ACT	All of Australia
People aged over 65	3.4%	**91.3%**	79.6%
People aged under 25	20.1%	**69.6%**	15.0%
Non-heterosexual volunteers	15.3%	**69.6%**	42.9%
Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) people	24.8%	**60.9%**	44.1%
People living with disability	10.0%	**52.2%**	41.8%

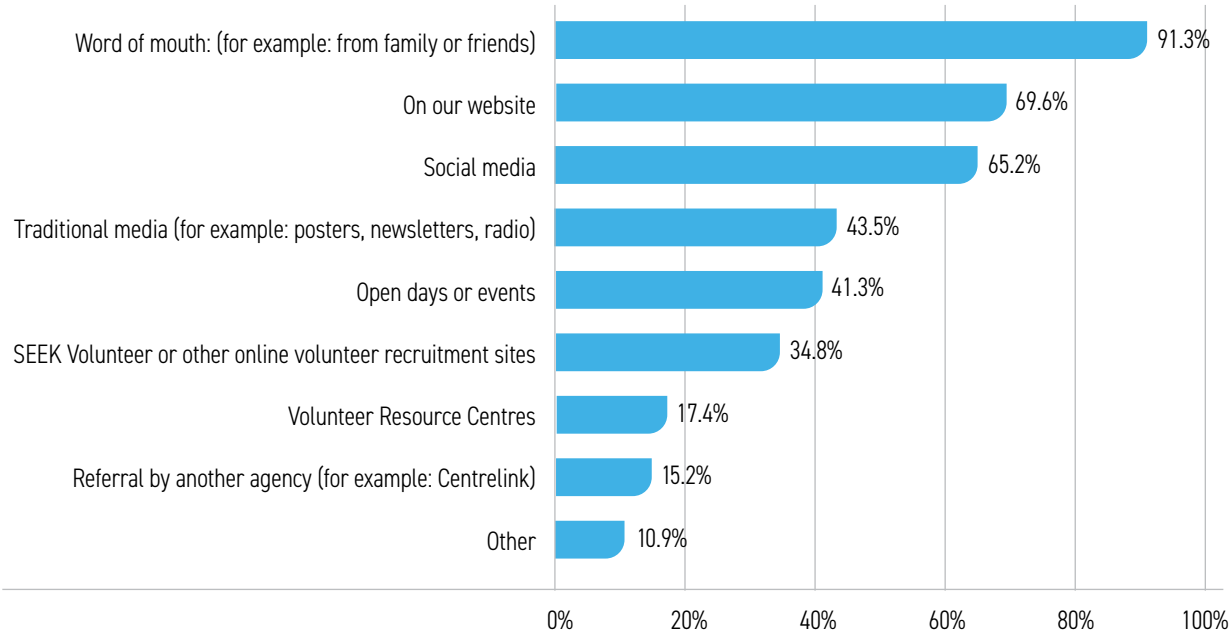
[4] Expecting managers of smaller groups of volunteers (less than 50) to have a diverse volunteer base that is population representative is inappropriate, as smaller teams may operate with different objectives and constraints. Excluding them in this analysis helps to avoid drawing misleading conclusions about what demographic representation 'should' look like in the volunteering sector.

Volunteer recruitment

The Volunteer Manager Survey asked respondents how they typically attracted volunteers.

As detailed in Figure 14, the top three recruitment strategies used by respondents were: word of mouth (91.3%), own website (69.6%) and social media (65.2%). An average of 3.9 concurrent recruitment methods were reported by volunteer managers in the ACT from the list of eight provided, compared to a national average of 3.5 methods.

Figure 14: Recruitment strategies for ACT volunteer managers:

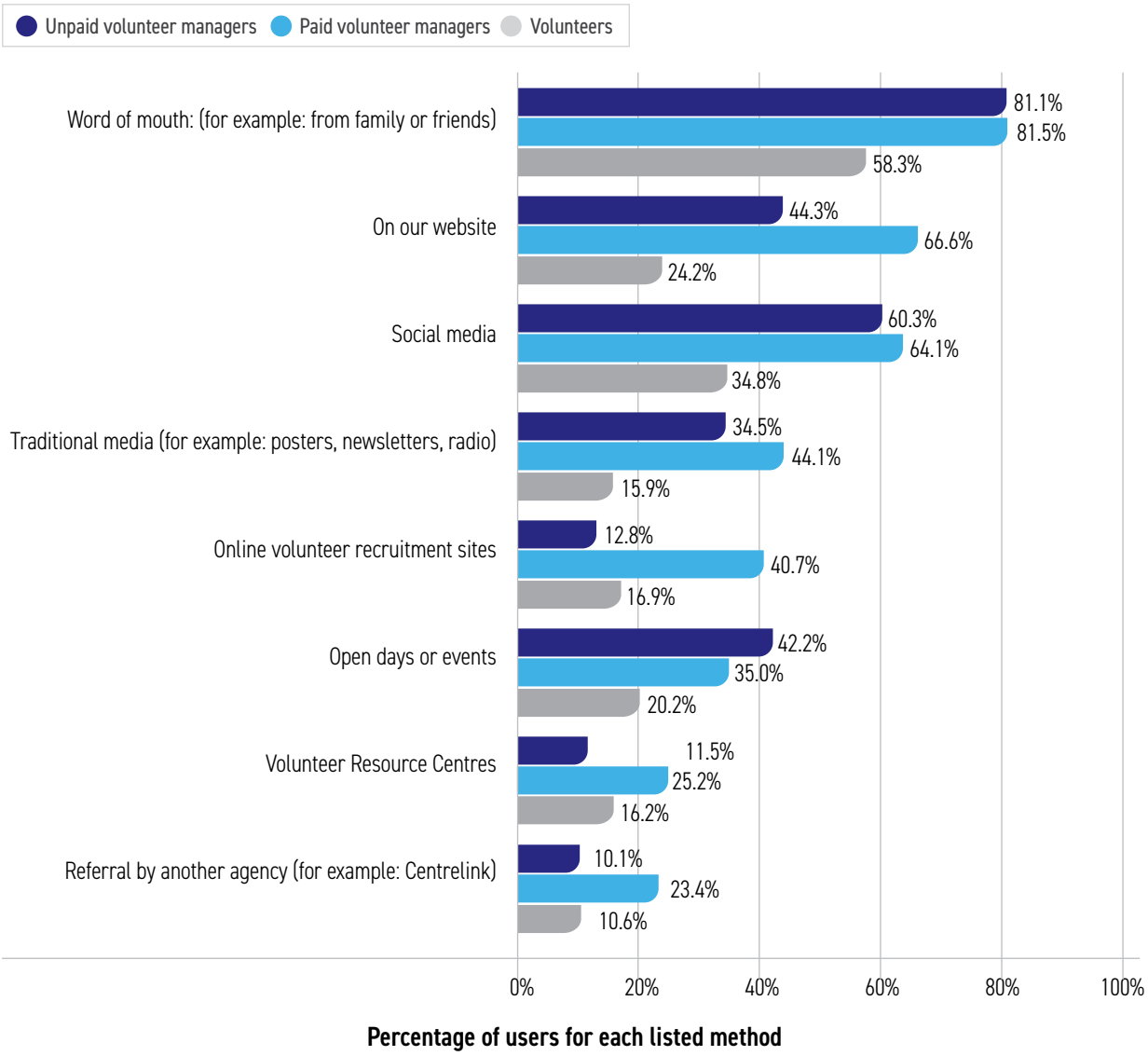


Note that it is reasonable to expect that volunteer managers would use more recruitment channels than individual volunteers use. Indeed, it was reported in Section 1 that ACT volunteers rely on an average of only 2.1 different channels to source their volunteering opportunities.

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

Additional insights are revealed in the national data when these methods are distinguished by whether the volunteer manager is paid or unpaid, as shown in Figure 15. Figure 15 also provides a comparison between recruitment methods used by volunteers themselves and recruitment methods used by both paid and unpaid volunteer managers in Australia.

Figure 15: Comparison of recruitment methods used by Australian Volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers:



Volunteer recognition, engagement and retention

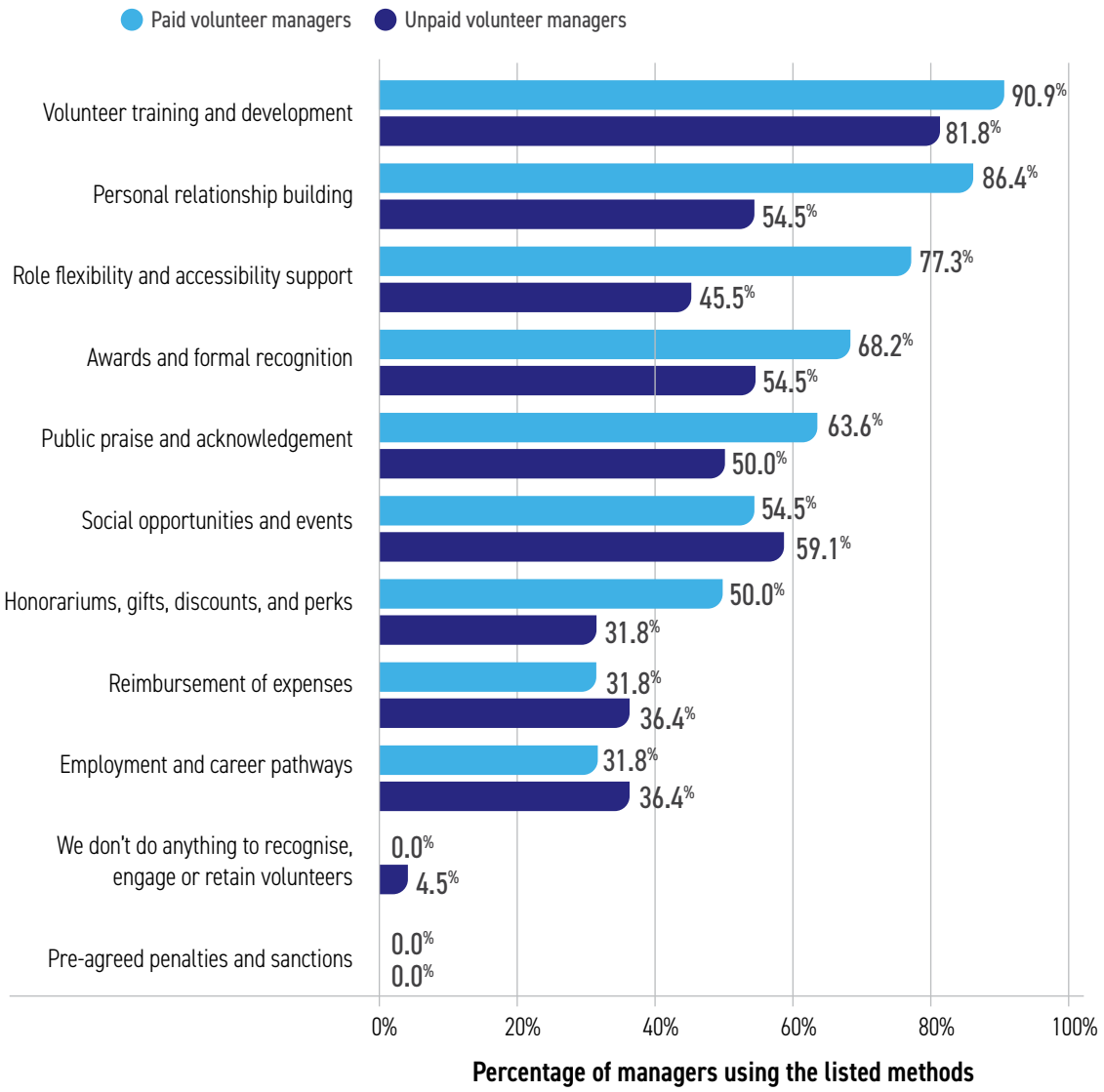
The Volunteer Manager Survey asked respondents about how they recognise, engage, and retain their volunteers.

Volunteer managers were presented with a randomised list of 20 options and asked to select the methods that they use. To better understand the data, these 20 options were consolidated into the categories listed in Figure 16 below[5]. The most popular methods used by paid volunteer managers were volunteer training and development (90.9%), personal relationship building (86.4%) and role flexibility and accessibility support (77.3%). Similarly, the methods most used by unpaid volunteer managers were volunteer training and development (81.8%), social opportunities and events (59.1%) and personal relationship building (54.5%).

In the ACT, volunteer managers reported using an average of 4.7 different methods from the reduced list of 10 potential methods to recognise, engage and retain volunteers, compared to the national average of 4.5 different methods.

[5] *See Appendix C for a detailed discussion of the consolidation process.*

Figure 16: Methods used by ACT volunteer managers to recognise, engage and retain volunteers:



NATIONAL ANALYSIS

Further statistical analysis of national data[6] identified the optimal mix of methods a volunteer-involving organisation could use to recognise, engage, and retain volunteers. The analysis assumed that volunteer managers in Australia are prioritising their retention, recognition, and reward strategies according to what volunteers themselves find most meaningful.

1. **Volunteer training and development has the most individual impact, as it is employed by 71.3% of volunteer managers in Australia.**
2. **When a second strategy, personal relationship building, is added to it, coverage is increased to include 86.6% of all responding volunteer managers. In other words, 86.6% of volunteer managers in Australia use either one or both of volunteer training and development and personal relationship building as recognition, engagement, and retention strategies.**
3. **Adding public praise and acknowledgement to these two strategies increases reach to include the preferences of 90.5% of all volunteer managers in Australia. Even though this is only the fifth most popular strategy on its own nationally, it is the most effective for maximising reach when used in combination with the first two.**

[6] TURF analysis used - see Appendix C: Methodology detail.

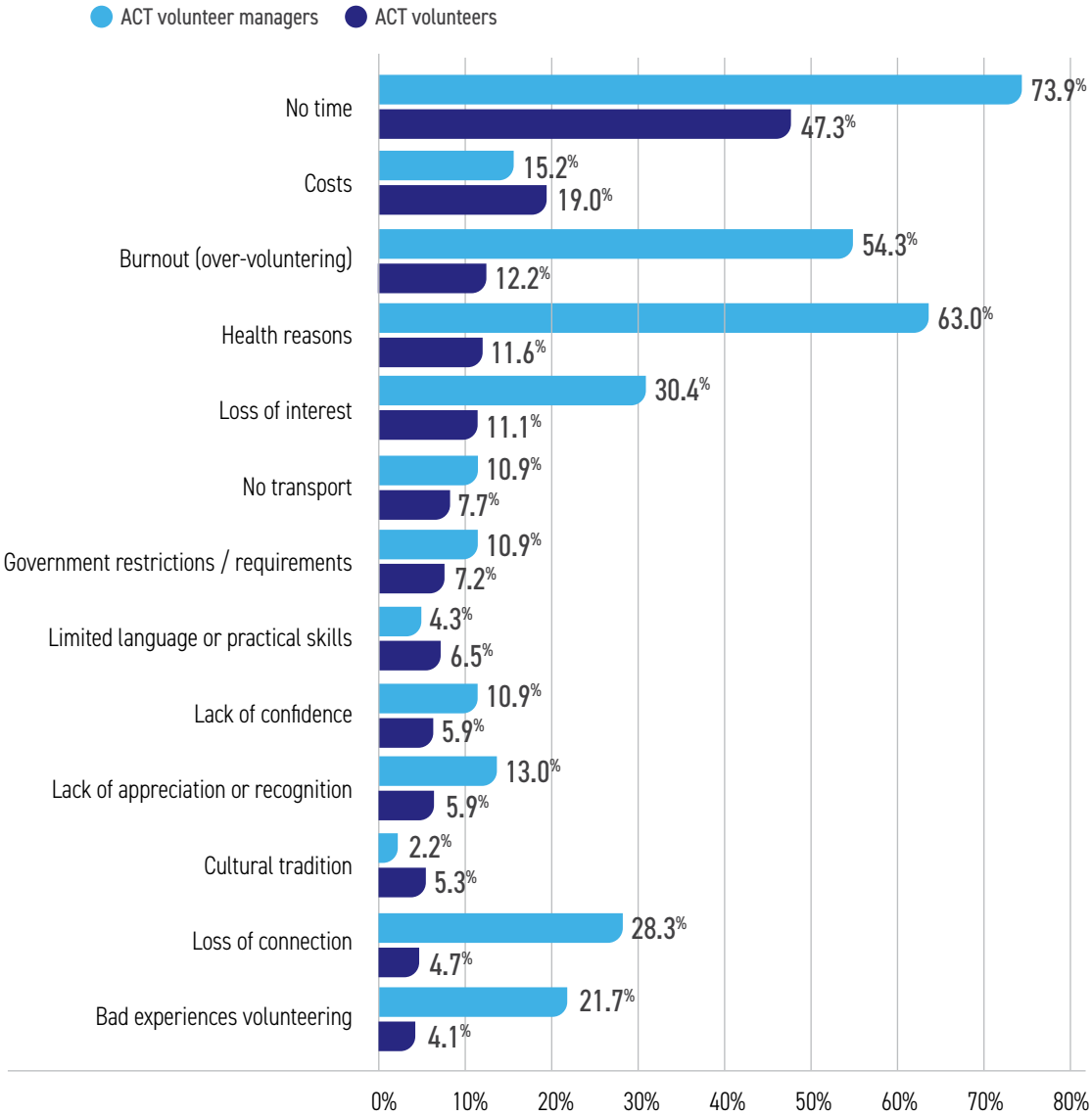
Barriers to volunteering

When asked why they thought people stopped volunteering with their organisation or group, volunteer managers were given the same list of options to choose from that Public Survey participants were given at the equivalent question in that survey (see Section 1, Figures 8 and 9). This allows the comparison shown in Figure 17 below between the barriers all volunteer managers (both paid and unpaid) perceive, and the barriers perceived by volunteers. The barriers perceived by non-volunteers are not included here and can be reviewed in Section 1.

The highest percentage of both volunteer managers and volunteers identified 'No time' as a barrier (73.9% and 47.3% respectively). However, as shown in Figure 17, the remaining results differed somewhat, suggesting that volunteer managers' perceptions of barriers to volunteering may not fully align with the experiences of volunteers. For example, while 63% of volunteer managers identified 'Health reasons' as a barrier, this was selected by only 11.6% of volunteers. Similarly, 54.3% of volunteer managers identified 'Burnout' (over-volunteering) as a barrier, while this was only selected by 12.2% of volunteers. And finally, while 'Cost' was listed as the second largest barrier for volunteers, it was rated seventh by volunteer managers.

On average, each manager listed 3.4 barriers, while individual volunteers reported 1.7 barriers from the 13 options provided. This is expected as managers are accounting for all volunteers, whereas volunteers are only reporting for themselves.

Figure 17: Barriers to volunteering identified by volunteer managers versus volunteers:

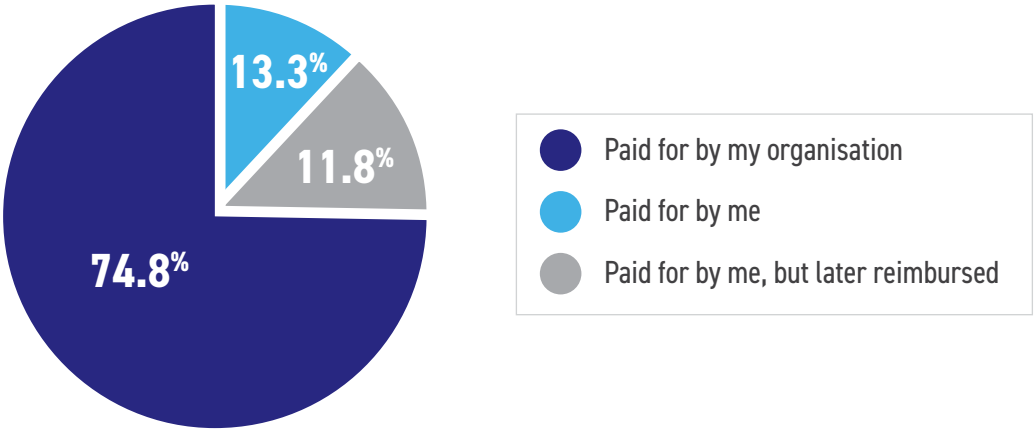


The cost to volunteer managers

Section 3 of this report examines in detail the costs and benefits of volunteering in the ACT, including the expenses organisations incur supporting their volunteers. Volunteer managers were also asked if they had to spend any of their own money when carrying out their role duties, or if those expenses were covered/reimbursed by their organisation.

As shown in Figure 18, ACT volunteer managers incur significant direct costs, reporting that they paid 13.3% of volunteer management expenses themselves. A further 11.8% was reportedly paid for by volunteer managers and later reimbursed by their organisation.

Figure 18: The burden of volunteer management expenses in the ACT:



National data shows that unpaid volunteer managers pay 23.0% of volunteer management costs, after reimbursement. Meanwhile, paid volunteer managers report paying only 6.4% of volunteer management costs after reimbursement.

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

Three years of change

Volunteer managers in the ACT were surveyed on the changes they have observed in their sector over the past three years. While some managers reported seeing no significant changes, others noted either improvements or deteriorations.

To quantify these perceptions, a net favourability score was calculated for each answer option. This score represents the difference between the percentage of managers who reported positive changes ('More') and those who reported negative changes ('Less'). So, a lower number suggests that more volunteer managers selected 'Less' than 'More'. Expressed in percentage points, this net favourability score serves as a useful measure of the overall sentiment of volunteer managers in relation to each specific change in the volunteer sector. Table 8 below is arranged in descending order of these net favourability scores, from highest to lowest.

Additionally, the table includes a 'volatility ranking' for each change. This ranking measures how much consensus there was among managers about whether conditions have remained "About the same." The question with the highest volatility ranking of one (1) means that the fewest number of managers indicated that the situation remained "About the same" over the previous three years. In simpler terms, the volatility ranking sorts the questions from the least stable (lower numbers) to the most stable (higher numbers), based on managerial perceptions of change over the last three years.

The options listed in Table 8 are reproduced exactly as they appeared in the Volunteer Manager Survey. It is worth highlighting that 41.3% of volunteer managers perceived a decline in the number of young people wanting to volunteer over the past three years. Specifically, 34.8% more managers

reported a decrease (as opposed to an increase) in youth participation. However, the Australia-wide evidence of the Public Survey indicated that the younger a person was, the more they likely it was that they volunteered. The results also indicate that volunteer managers perceive that less people want to volunteer (particularly youth), more volunteer training is needed, indirect and direct costs have increased, more volunteers want flexible and occasional hours, less volunteers are claiming expenses and less Board-level volunteers are available.

Table 8: Perceptions of volunteering sector change over the last 3 years (ACT)

	Less	About the same	More	Net favourability	Volatility
Number of people who want to volunteer	56.5%	39.1%	4.3%	-52.2%	1
Hours people want to volunteer	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	-50.0%	2
Number of youth / young people who want to volunteer	41.3%	52.2%	6.5%	-34.8%	=3
Amount of training volunteers need	2.2%	63.0%	34.8%	32.6%	7
Board-level volunteers are available	30.4%	67.4%	2.2%	-28.3%	10
The direct and indirect costs to volunteers	6.5%	58.7%	34.8%	28.3%	6
Volunteers want flexible hours	4.3%	65.2%	30.4%	26.1%	8
People want to volunteer occasional hours, rather than regular hours	10.9%	56.5%	32.6%	21.7%	5
Volunteers are claiming expenses	28.3%	65.2%	6.5%	-21.7%	9
Volunteering is done online or from home	19.6%	52.2%	28.3%	8.7%	=3
Organisations want to volunteer employees' time	10.9%	78.3%	10.9%	0.0%	11

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

The following statistically significant observations were made of the volunteer managers in Australia who felt the number of young people wanting to volunteer had decreased over the last three years:

- **The younger the volunteer manager, the more likely they were to believe the number of youth volunteering was decreasing.**
- **The closer the volunteer manager lived to a major city, the more likely they were to believe the number of youth volunteering was decreasing.**

Gender, the number of hours spent managing volunteers and the number of volunteers under management made no significant difference to a volunteer manager's perception of a decline in the number of young people wanting to volunteer over the past three years.

Issues in volunteer management

Volunteer managers in the ACT were invited to share their perspectives on the significance of various issues and challenges experienced in their sector, including where they may seek help themselves to assist their ongoing practice. The survey aimed to gauge how volunteer managers ranked the importance of these common issues in the context of their day-to-day operations and overall organisational strategy.

The responses are illustrated in Figures 19-21 below, broken into three different categories – volunteer-related issues, organisation-related issues, and external issues.

Overall, the top six "Very important" issues for volunteer managers in the ACT were:

1. Organisational culture, inclusion, and diversity – 88.4%
2. Volunteer health and safety – 84.8%
3. Volunteer retention – 82.5%
4. Volunteer recruitment – 76.0%
5. Risk, insurance and legal requirements – 74.4%
6. Volunteer rights, responsibilities, protection, and dispute management – 74.4%

Figure 19: Volunteer-related issues and their relative importance to volunteer managers in the ACT

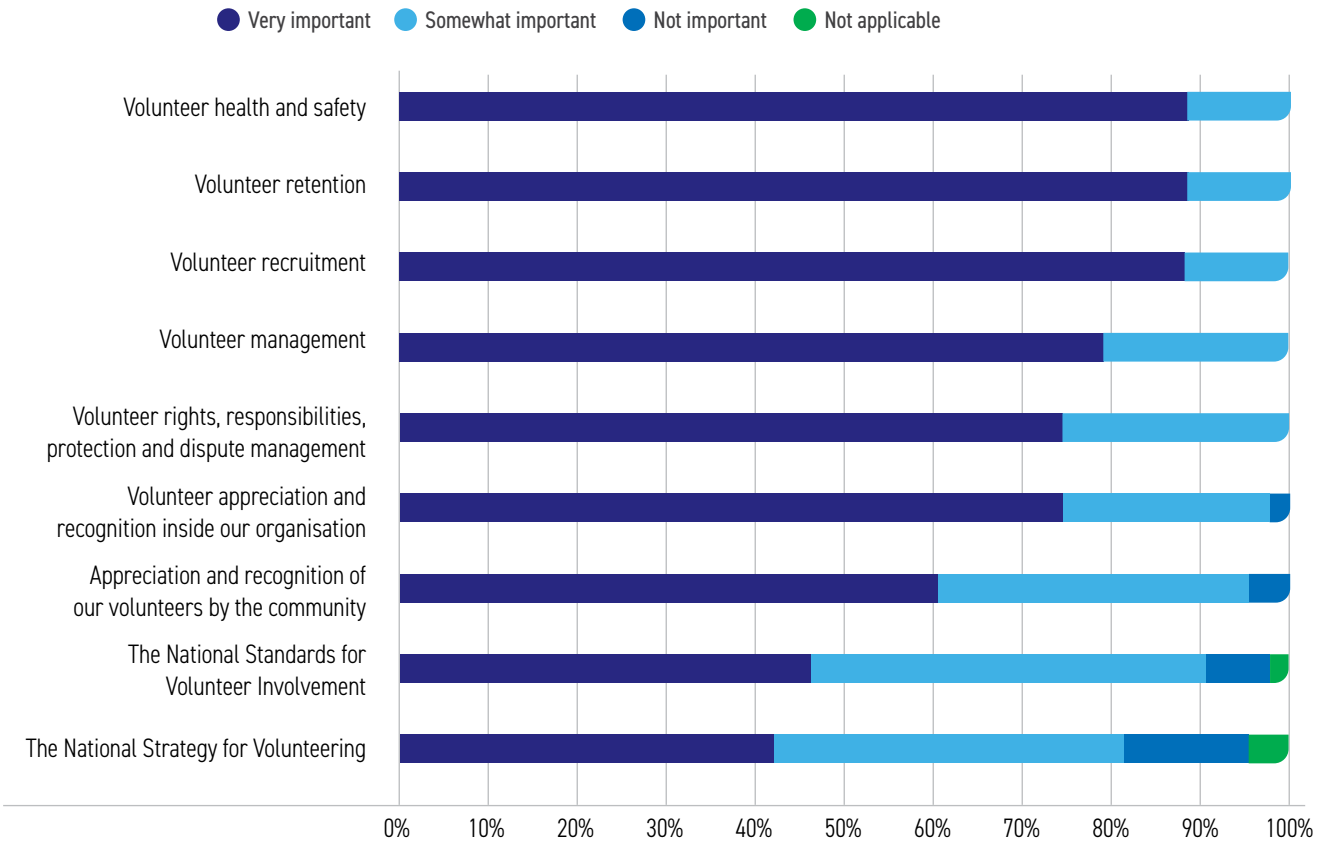


Figure 20: Organisation-related issues and their relative importance to volunteer managers in the ACT

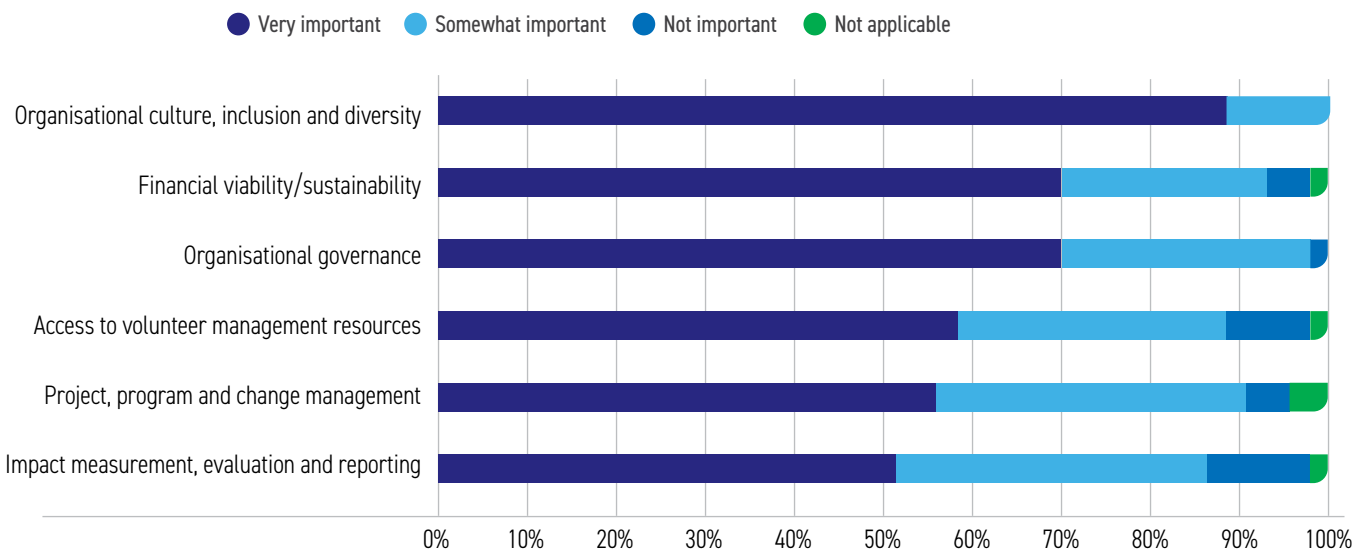
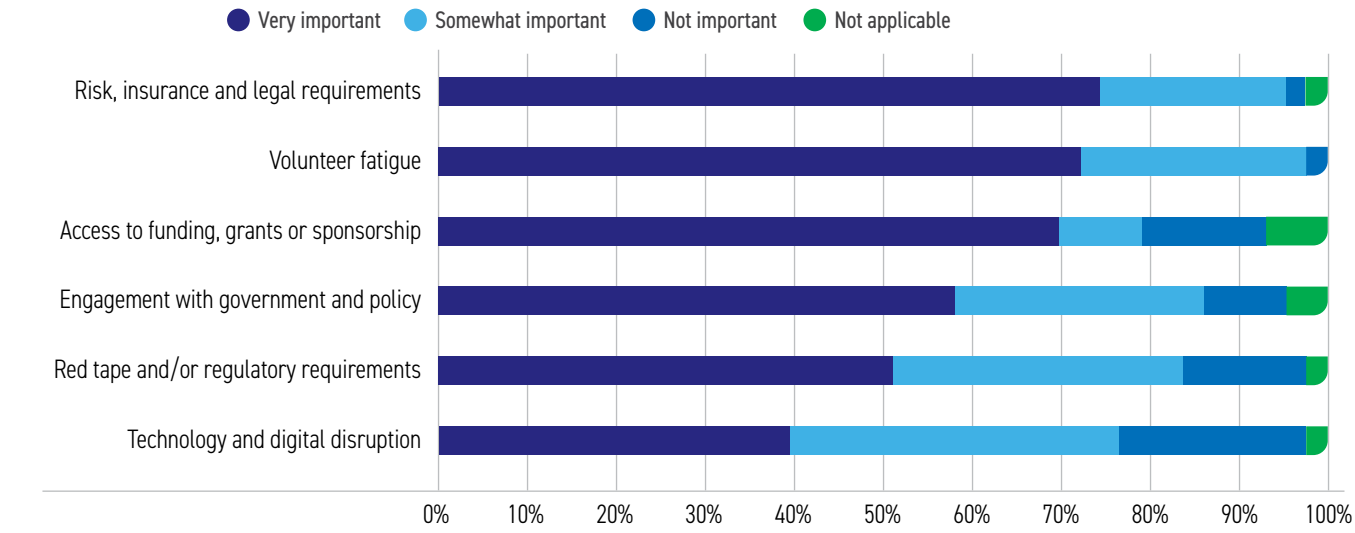
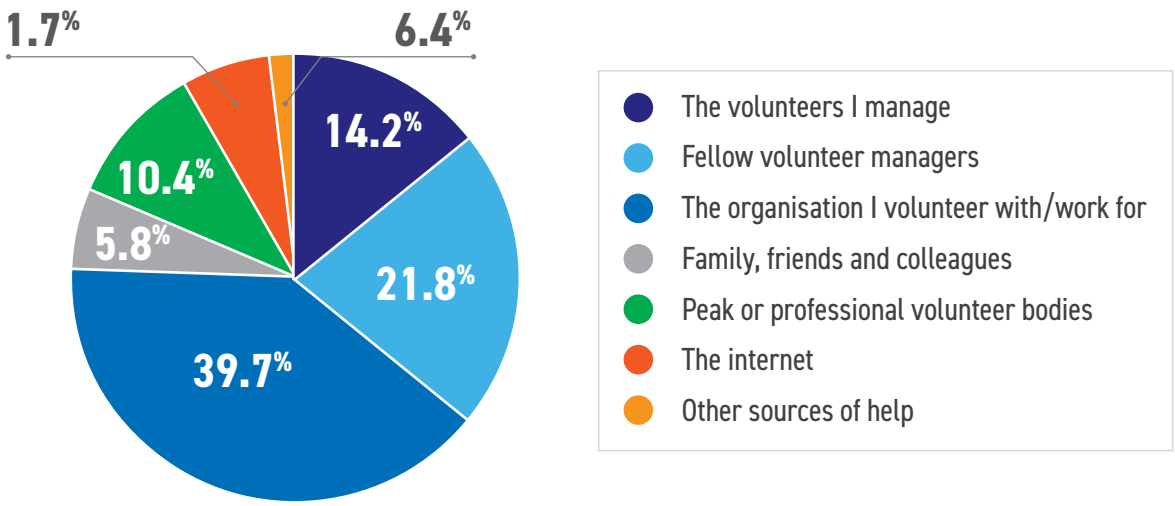


Figure 21: External issues and their relative importance to volunteer managers in the ACT



As illustrated in Figure 22, most ACT volunteer managers reported seeking help from the organisation they volunteer with/work for (39.7%), followed by fellow volunteer managers (21.8%) and the volunteers they manage (14.2%).

Figure 22: Where volunteer managers in the ACT seek help with managing volunteers

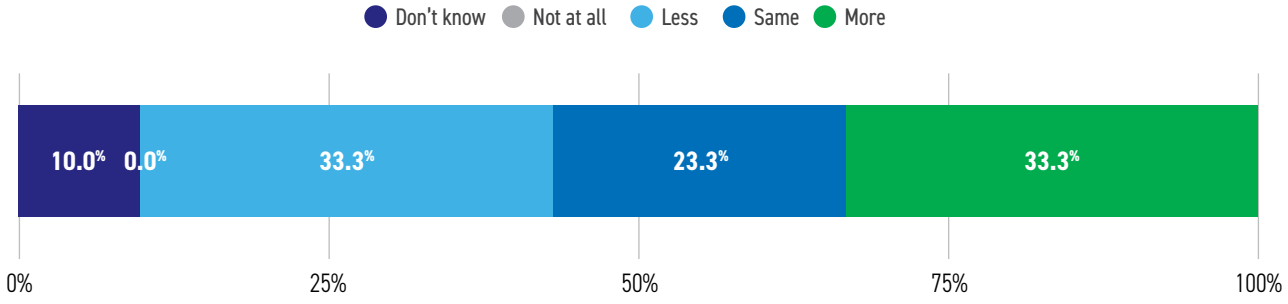


Organisational optimism

ACT Volunteer Managers were asked how likely they thought it was that people would still be volunteering with their organisation/group in three years' time.

As illustrated in Figure 23, 33.3% of ACT volunteer managers believed people would be volunteering more with their organisation in three years' time, while 33.3% believed they would be volunteering less and 23.3% believed they would be volunteering about the same amount.

Figure 23: The likelihood of people volunteering with the volunteer manager's organisation in 3 years (ACT)



NATIONAL ANALYSIS

As with the Public Survey question on intent (Section 1), this question was examined through the lens of optimism. For example, if a volunteer manager said that people were "More" likely to be volunteering for their organisation in the three years, they were showing a high level of optimism about the future of their organisation.

This was more optimistic than managers who thought the number of people volunteering for their organisation would be "About the same," and so on down the options to "Less," and "Not at all."

Excluding those uncertain respondents who said they "Don't know," the following statistically significant observations were made about the optimism of volunteer managers in Australia:

- **The closer a person lived to a major city, the more optimistic they were about their organisation's future.**
- **Paid managers were more optimistic than unpaid managers about their organisation's future.**
- **The more hours a volunteer manager contributed each week, the more optimistic they were about their organisation's future.**

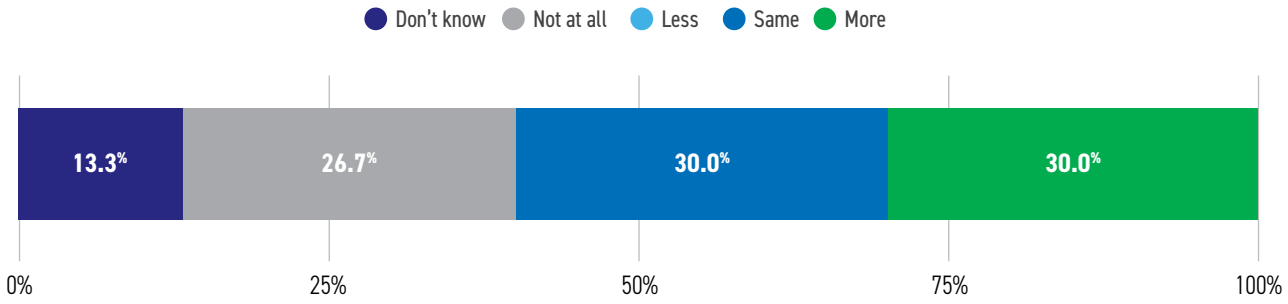
Age and gender made no significant difference to a volunteer manager's optimism for their organisation.

Future Intentions

Volunteer managers were asked about the likelihood of them still being in the same role with the same organisation in three years' time.

As illustrated in Figure 24, a total of 60.0% of volunteer managers in the ACT believed they would be doing the same (30%) or more hours (30%) as a volunteer manager with their organisation in three years' time. Meanwhile, 26.7% believed they would no longer be with their organisation and 13.3% weren't sure.

Figure 24: The likelihood of a volunteer manager being with their organisation in that role in 3 years (ACT):



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As per the previous question, the further along the scale from "Not at all" to "More" a volunteer manager was, the more optimistic they were about their future with their organisation.

Excluding those uncertain respondents who said they "Don't know," the following statistically significant observations were made about the optimism of volunteer managers in Australia regarding their own future with their organisation:

- Younger volunteer managers were more optimistic about their future with their organisation.
- Paid volunteer managers were more pessimistic than unpaid volunteer managers about their future with their organisation.
- The more hours a volunteer manager contributed each week, the more optimistic they were about their future with their organisation.

Gender and location made no significant difference to a respondent's optimism for continuing as a manager with their organisation in three years.

SECTION 3:
The value of volunteering

Cost-benefit analysis is the Australian government preferred approach to valuing the social and economic impacts of an activity or intervention. A discussion of the cost-benefit methodology and its application in this Section can be found in Appendix C of this report.

The value of volunteering to the ACT across the entire community is the sum of the social and economic benefits enabled. As detailed in Table 9, this analysis values these benefits at **$14.1 billion** per year.

This amount is significantly greater than previous estimates based only on price or economic impact, yet it is likely to be an underestimate given the limitations of the available data and forensic techniques.

KEY FINDINGS

Table 9: The value of volunteering in the ACT, 2023

Costs ($ million)			
Direct costs		*Sub-totals*	*Totals*
Volunteer expenses	$640.6		
Volunteer involving organisation expenses	$351.8	$992.4	
Opportunity costs			
Volunteers' time	$1,569.0		
Volunteering investments	$41.8	$1,610.8	$2,603.1
Benefits ($ million)			
Commercial benefits			
Producers' surplus	$168.0		
Productivity premium	$3,118.5	$3,286.5	
Civic benefits			
Employment	$606.4		
Taxes	$227.7		
Volunteers' labour	$3,311.4	$4,145.5	
Individual benefits			
Volunteers' dividend		$6,642.0	**$14,074.0**
Social return on investment			*$11,470.8*
Benefit: cost ratio	**5.4 : 1**		

Contrasting the net value of volunteering in the ACT with the cost of inputs, demonstrates that for every dollar invested by the community, **$5.40** is returned (the benefit-to-cost ratio).

The net (or social) return on investment – the difference between benefits and costs – is **$11.5 billion**.

Because the external benefits of volunteering significantly outweigh the social costs involved, this leads to what economists would term an "efficient outcome". In simpler terms, there is a substantial economic, social, and cultural 'profit' in volunteering.

A plain English explainer of the costs and benefits described in Table 9 can be found at Appendix E.

Other findings of interest about the costs and benefits of volunteering in the ACT are summarised in the infographics below.

Average volunteer expenses per volunteer hour (before reimbursement)

Average volunteer-involving organisation expenses per volunteer hour

Percentage share of total expenses

64.6% Volunteers

35.4% Volunteer involving organisations

The contribution of volunteering expenditure to the ACT's Gross Product

Jobs created in all sectors by expenditure on volunteering

The volunteering workforce is the largest industry by employment in the ACT

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

The extent to which volunteering improves workplace productivity in Australia

14.7%

The increase in individual well-being attributable to volunteering in Australia

+4.4 percentage points

Non-volunteers' attribution of community well-being to the impact of volunteering in Australia

54.2%

*Australian findings are reported for those questions where the ACT sample size was not big enough to report an ACT figure

Costs

Volunteering is often assumed to be a selfless act that costs nothing, but this isn't accurate given the context in which volunteering takes place.

The economic cost of volunteering and its associated activities in the ACT is calculated to be $2.6 billion. This figure is a combination of two distinct components: direct costs of $1.0 billion and opportunity costs of $1.6 billion.

Recognising these costs helps us understand both the immediate financial implications of volunteering, and the economic choices and societal values that underpin its practice.

A more theoretical explanation of the costs measured here can be found in Appendix C of this report. A much simpler explanation of how these values were derived can be found in Appendix E.

Direct costs

In this report, the term "direct costs" is used to estimate the financial impact volunteering has on the overall demand for goods and services in the ACT in 2023. These costs are the sum of expenditures made by both individuals and organisations to facilitate volunteer activities.

The direct cost of volunteering and its associated activities in the ACT is $1.0 billion. This amount is a combination of two distinct components: costs to individuals of $0.6 billion and costs to organisations of $0.4 billion.

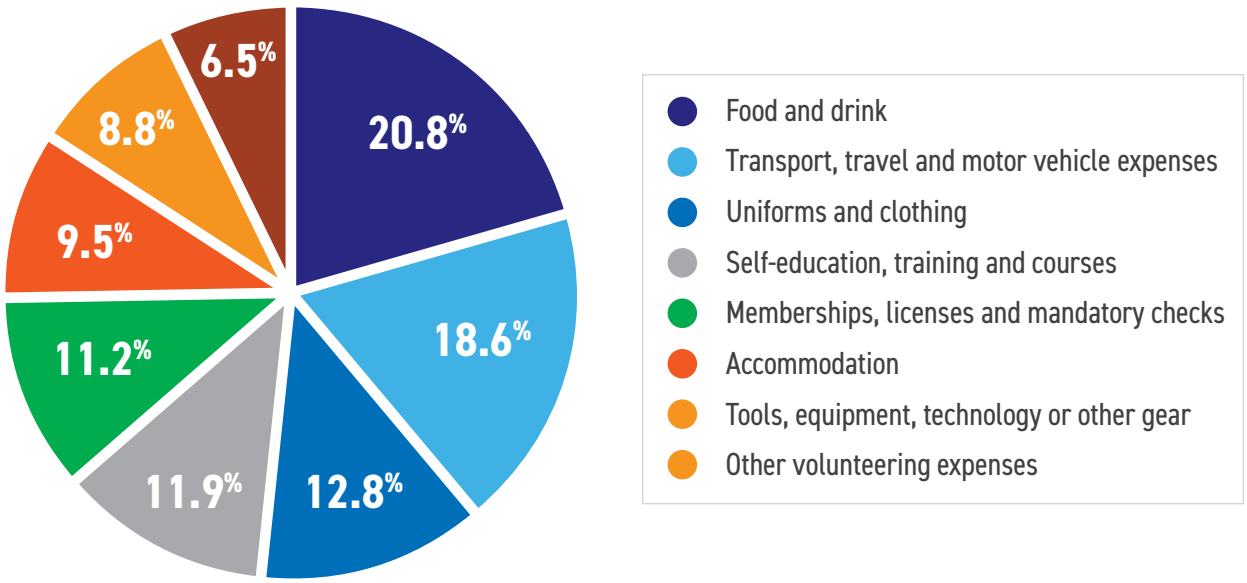
To eliminate the risk of double counting, intermediate inputs like production costs are included in these figures and are not tallied separately. In practical terms, this means that the costs involved in organising volunteering events are considered to be part of the final purchase price. Similarly, expenses such as equipment, labour, and utility overheads for providers of volunteer-enabling goods and services are assumed to be fully offset by their sales revenues.

Costs to individuals

The Public Survey asked volunteers to state on average, how much money they personally spent on their volunteering each month.

Before reimbursements, volunteers in the ACT reported spending an average of $243 per month, or $12.76 per hour they volunteered. As illustrated in Figure 25, most of these costs were related to purchasing food and drink (20.8%), followed by transport, travel and motor vehicle expenses (18.6%) and uniforms and clothing (12.8%).

Figure 25: Breakdown of volunteer expenses each month by category in the ACT



Volunteers in the ACT also reported that, on average, they were **reimbursed for only 25.6%** of their total expenses.

The total direct costs to volunteers in the ACT over the 12 months are calculated by annualising the average cost to volunteers each month (net of reimbursements) and multiplying that amount by the number of volunteers.

For the 12-month period analysed, the net out-of-pocket costs (direct expenses) for volunteers in the ACT totalled **$640.6 million**.

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

The following statistically significant observations were made about the amount volunteers in Australia spent on their service per volunteer hour.

- **The younger the volunteer, the more they spent on their volunteering per hour.**
- **Men reported spending more than women per volunteer hour.**
- **The greater a volunteer's household income, the more likely they were to spend more per volunteer hour.**

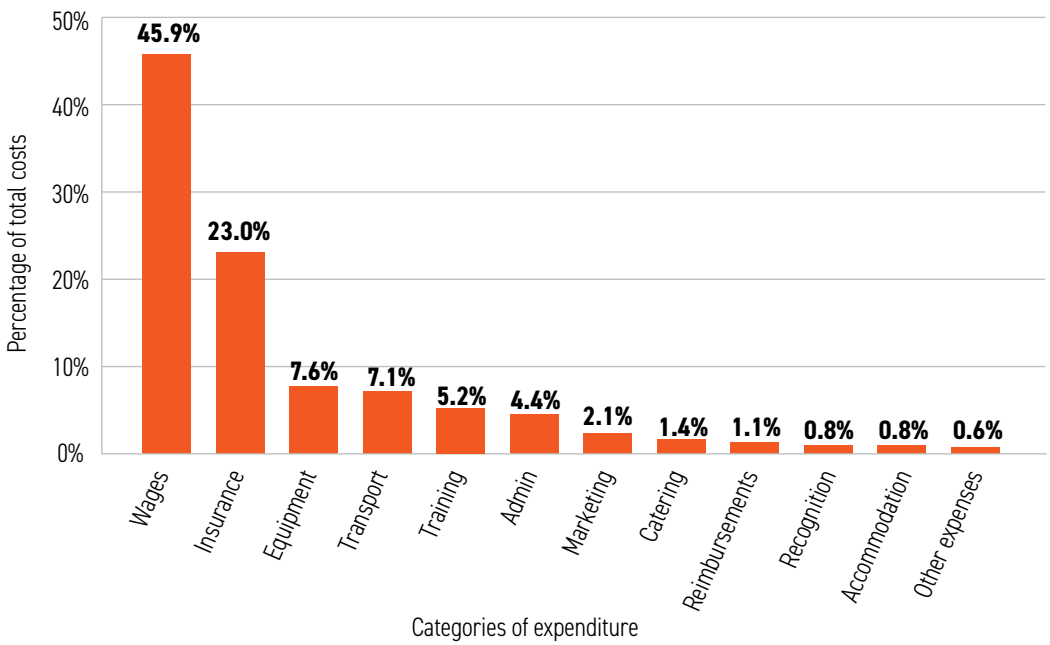
Location, multicultural identity, disability or carer status, and paid hours of work made no significant difference to how much a person spent on their volunteering per hour.

Costs to volunteer-involving organisations

The Volunteer Manager Survey asked respondents to state the cost of managing their volunteers, including any volunteering-related expenses incurred either by them, or by their organisation.

Volunteer-involving organisations in the ACT reported spending an average of $190.85 per volunteer per month, or $11.41 per formal volunteer hour[7]. As illustrated in Figure 26, almost half of these costs were wages (45.9%), followed by insurance (23%) and equipment (7.6%).

Figure 26: Breakdown of volunteer-involving organisations' expenses by category



[7] In this calculation, informal volunteers are not included because, according to the definition used in this report, volunteer managers do not oversee or support informal volunteering activities

As expected, paid volunteer managers in the ACT reported spending significantly more on salaries and wages in their organisations compared to unpaid managers. Apart from this, the distribution of expenses across various categories remained roughly the same for both paid and unpaid volunteer managers.

The total direct costs incurred by volunteer-involving organisations in the ACT over a 12-month period are calculated by annualising the average monthly cost per volunteer to these organisations and multiplying it by the number of formal volunteers in the ACT.

In 2023, the direct cost to volunteer-involving organisations in the ACT was $0.4 billion.

This indicates that volunteers shouldered 64.6% of the financial burden associated with volunteering, while volunteer-involving organisations covered the remaining 35.4%.

Indirect costs

To assess the opportunity costs of volunteering, this analysis makes a hypothetical assumption that there is no volunteering activity taking place in the ACT. In this scenario, all the resources currently being used for volunteering, whether they are human labour or financial investment, would be redirected to other productive activities.

Opportunity costs are calculated by estimating the potential financial returns that these resources could generate if they were allocated to other endeavours instead of volunteering. This provides a clearer understanding of the economic trade-offs involved, helping us understand what is being sacrificed when these resources are chosen to support volunteering rather than being used for other potentially profitable activities.

The total indirect cost of **$1.6 billion** is the sum of the opportunity costs of volunteers' time ($1.6 billion) and the opportunity costs of investments in volunteering ($41.8 million).

Opportunity cost of volunteers' time

To accurately calculate the opportunity cost to volunteers of their labour, this analysis considers the variability in wages among different groups. The opportunity cost is calculated using the average weekly earnings for both part-time and full-time workers within each age cohort.

This average is then reduced by a 35% effective rate of tax, which accounts for all forms of direct and indirect taxation. The resulting hourly rate is further adjusted to reflect the workforce composition of the ACT, comprising full-time, part-time, and non-participating individuals, segmented by age group.

A straightforward leisure/work trade-off model is then applied, valuing the opportunity cost of a volunteer hour at the income that could be earned by working an additional hour. This approach assumes a flexible labour market model and assumes the availability of additional work opportunities.

The opportunity cost of leisure varies by age: it is relatively low for the very young and the very old, who are less likely to be participating in the workforce or may be underemployed. The opportunity cost is higher for age groups with greater workforce participation and labour market value.

As detailed in Table 10, according to this model the hours contributed to the ACT community through volunteering equate to an opportunity cost of **$1.6 billion.** This figure is a monetary estimate of what volunteers gave up in potential earnings by dedicating their time to unpaid work.

Table 10: Opportunity costs of hours contributed to the community by ACT volunteers

Age	Opportunity cost of volunteers' time $/hr	Average hours volunteered per month	Total volunteers	Total opportunity cost ($millions
15-24	$11.42	17.0	46,000	$107.3
25-34	$29.39	22.3	63,700	$502.2
35-44	$38.50	21.4	50.800	$501.3
45-54	$39.77	10.7	47,400	$242.6
55-64	$26.45	19.6	30,400	$189.1
65+	$4.88	11.1	40,600	$26.5
				$1,569.0

Opportunity costs of diverted resources

A similar assumption is made about the opportunity cost of purchases made by both individual volunteers and the organisations that utilise them.

If these purchases were withheld (in a hypothetical scenario where the community places no value on volunteering) then their financial resources could be spent elsewhere. For example, they could be redirected toward long-term investment opportunities, considered here to be the next best alternative use.

The metric used for evaluating what that profit might be (the long-term investment opportunity cost) is the 10-year Australian government bond rate, which stood at 4.2% in October 2023, the time this calculation was made. Using this rate as a benchmark, an estimate of the financial implications of the resources allocated to volunteering activities can be made.

Therefore, in 2023 the gross opportunity cost – that is, the potential value of gains missed out on by individuals and organisations due to their involvement in volunteering – is estimated to be $41.8 million.

The benefits of volunteering

Volunteering in the ACT has a multi-dimensional impact, changing the economic, social and cultural capital of individuals, organisations, and communities. These varied forms of capital are transformed into economically valuable outputs that offer wide-ranging benefits, contributing to the collective welfare of society.

It is calculated that volunteering in the ACT enabled **$14.1 billion** worth of benefits across the community. These were the sum of commercial benefits worth $3.3 billion, civic benefits valued at $4.1 billion, and individual benefits of $6.6 billion.

A more theoretical explanation of the benefits measured here can be found in Appendix C of this report. A much simpler explanation of how these values were derived can be found in Appendix E.

Commercial benefits

In this report, the term "commercial benefit" is used to distinguish the financial gains enjoyed by ordinary businesses and the employers of volunteers. These benefits include increases in productivity and skill development among employees as well as purchases made by individuals and organisations during their volunteering efforts.

The commercial benefits generated by volunteering in the ACT are valued at **$3.3 billion.** This is the sum of producers' surplus ($0.2 billion) and the productivity premium returned to employers ($3.1 billion).

Producers' surplus

The term "producers' surplus" refers to the economic benefits that producers gain from selling their goods or services in the market. This benefit is calculated as the difference between the price a producer receives and the minimum price they would be willing to accept for it. This surplus can be alternatively described, albeit not perfectly, as net profit.

In the ACT, businesses receive a net commercial benefit linked to the sales of goods or services that are either intermediate or final products consumed while volunteering.

Input-output modelling is a method used in economics to understand how different sectors within an economy interact with each other. It illustrates the flow of goods and services between sectors, helping to predict the output effect of a change in demand for a particular industry.

Employing input-output modelling methodology (see Appendix C), it is found that the volunteering-related expenditure of $1.0 billion increases the overall output in the ACT economy by $1.6 billion. This calculation includes the production of intermediate goods and accounts for imports worth $0.4 billion.

The Gross Value Added (GVA) by volunteering to the ACT economy is $1.0 billion, which equates to 2.2% of the Territory's Gross Product of $45.3 billion. This is similar in scale to the ACT's accommodation and food services sector, which also contributed $1.0 billion in GVA.

Considering that material inputs and existing infrastructure are already accounted for, when the cost of labour and taxes is subtracted from this GVA, a theoretical producers' surplus of $0.2 billion is revealed.

This surplus is a fair return on investment for providers of capital and is assumed to offset the opportunity cost of using land or buildings for other purposes. It is important to clarify that this surplus to producers is distributed among all firms in the ACT contributing intermediate or final goods and/or services consumed by volunteering activities, not just those directly involved in volunteering.

Productivity premium

The Public Survey asked volunteers to think about how volunteering impacts their work (note: non-volunteers were asked about "people's" work).

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

As detailed in Table 11 (noting these figures are based on Australia-wide findings), the act of volunteering is largely seen as having a positive or neutral impact on work performance. Those who actively volunteer are more likely to attribute increased productivity in their work performance to their volunteering.

Table 11: Percentage of residents on how they believe volunteering impacts work performance **(Australia)**

	Volunteers	Non-volunteers	Total
Less productive	3.9%	3.9%	3.9%
No change	39.0%	61.7%	46.7%
More productive	57.1%	34.4%	49.4%

To further quantify productivity, if respondents expressed that volunteering made them or others more productive at work, they were asked **how much** "more" productive they felt.

If respondents expressed that volunteering made them or others less productive, they were asked how much "less" productive they felt. If they answered, "no difference," they were not shown this follow-up question.

The concept of 'net productivity impact' refers to the mean alteration in workplace productivity because of volunteer work, based on the collective perception of the survey respondents. The 'productivity multiplier' is the quantified average effect on productivity, which, as shown in Table 12, is reported as 14.7%. This suggests that, on average, productivity is enhanced by this percentage across the board when individuals participate in volunteering, indicating a positive correlation between volunteering and productivity in the workplace or other areas of professional and personal endeavour.

The differences in perceptions between Australian volunteers and non-volunteers were statistically significant, underscoring the impact of personal experience on the belief that volunteering affects work performance.

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

Table 12: The extent to which residents believe volunteering impacts work performance **(Australia)**

	Volunteers	Non-volunteers	Total
Less productive	-25.8%	-27.0%	-26.2%
No change	+32.4%	+30.0%	+31.8%
More productive	+17.5%	+9.3%	**+14.7%**

Applying these rates to the cost to employers of labour per age cohort (replacement cost) as per the formula in Appendix C enables the quantification of a 'productivity premium' enjoyed by employers because of their employees' volunteering.

For consistency in reporting, the productivity multiplier was derived from the national sample and held constant for all States and Territories. Other equation inputs were specific to the ACT.

The extent to which volunteering in the ACT improved the productivity of employees is estimated to be **$3.1 billion**.

This benefit is separate to the (soon to be discussed) well-being benefit directly enjoyed by volunteers, even if a fraction of the productivity premium is returned to employees in the form of increased wages.

NATIONAL ANALYSIS

National statistically significant observations about the productivity multiplier (Australia) were:

- **The younger a person was, the higher their productivity multiplier.**
- **The more hours a person worked for pay each week, the higher their productivity multiplier.**
- **People living with disability were more likely to report a lower productivity multiplier.**

Gender, location, and carer status made no significant difference to a respondent's productivity multiplier.

Civic benefits

In this report, a "civic benefit" is the valuable contributions made or inspired by volunteers that, in their absence, would have to be supplied by the ACT government to maintain the current standard of community living. These contributions can be understood as costs that the government avoids incurring because volunteers are stepping in to provide those services or benefits.

For example, if volunteers are cleaning a local park, the government saves on the cost of hiring workers for that task. In essence, civic benefits represent a form of financial relief for the government, allowing it to allocate resources elsewhere.

The civic benefits enabled by volunteering in the ACT are valued at **$4.1 billion**. This is the sum of employee wages ($0.6 billion), taxes ($0.2 billion) and the theoretical replacement cost of volunteers' labour ($3.3 billion).

Important civic benefits acknowledged but not quantified by this analysis include the inbound tourism generated by volunteering in the ACT, as well as costs potentially saved by the civil systems of health, emergency services, criminal and social justice, to name but a few.

Beyond these economic factors, some forms of volunteering have a notable environmental impact. Many volunteers are actively contributing to conservation and sustainability initiatives. While these environmental contributions may not be easily quantifiable, they are nonetheless vital for the long-term health and well-being of both communities and the environment at large.

For that reason, the estimate of civic benefits is likely to be significantly understated, and these gaps are recommended as directions for future research.

Employment

The input-output model (see Appendix C) shows that volunteering motivated expenditure in the ACT generated 6,800 jobs across all sectors of the economy. Of these, 4,600 were full-time positions.

It is important to note that these are not jobs solely within the volunteering sector; rather, these jobs are created economy wide. For instance, volunteering contributes to the demand for professional services such as training, administration, and logistics. This creates new employment opportunities in those industries.

The model quantifies the wage benefits generated by these jobs as being worth $0.6 billion. This figure directly benefits households, augmenting their disposable income and, consequently, their purchasing power.

This also means an equivalent welfare cost is avoided by the government. As more people become employed thanks to the ripple effects of volunteering expenditure, fewer people rely on unemployment benefits or other forms of social assistance. This results in an equivalent saving for the government, which can reallocate these saved funds to other critical sectors like healthcare, or they can choose to reinvest in volunteering.

Taxes

The input-output model also reveals that the ACT's volunteering-related expenditure of $1.0 billion generates $0.2 billion in tax revenue for the government.

It is important to note that the tax revenue generated is not necessarily proportional to the investment made by each tier of government in the volunteering sector. Different levels of government – federal, State/Territory, and local – may contribute different amounts to support volunteering but may benefit differently from the generated tax revenue.

Yet despite generating significant tax revenue, it is unlikely that the government reinvests an equivalent amount back into the volunteering sector. In other words, the financial contributions that the volunteering sector makes to public coffers may not be fully reciprocated through government funding or support for volunteering activities.

Volunteers' labour

It was noted in Section 1 of this report that volunteers in the ACT contributed 63.7 million hours of their time to volunteering. The replacement cost of that labour is the expense that beneficiaries would incur if they had to hire paid professionals to do the same work.

Because volunteers bring a diverse set of skills and professional experience to their roles, adding specialised value to the services they provide, volunteer labour cannot be simply substituted with minimum wage workers. It is more accurate to use median wage data tailored to each age cohort of volunteers, accounting for the varying levels of expertise and skill sets they offer.

In addition to the base wage, there are several other costs associated with employment that need to be considered. These include the administrative and capital overheads that would be incurred for each working hour, as well as the minimum requirements of the Australian government's superannuation guarantee. To allow for these, an additional 15% has been added to the median wage data for each age group.

This approach assumes that the value of the activities provided by each volunteer is equivalent to the value of their direct employment, accounting for their age. This is not a perfect accounting of the value of the services provided by volunteers but is more reliable than approaches that price volunteer labour at the minimum wage. Improving the replacement cost method is encouraged as a direction for future research.[8]

As detailed in Table 13, on these terms the cost to the ACT community (and avoided by government) of replacing volunteer labour is $**3.3 billion**.

Table 13: Replacement cost of hours donated to the community by the ACT volunteers

Age	Replacement cost of volunteers' time $/hr	Average hours volunteered per month	Total volunteers	Total opportunity cost ($millions
15-24	$25.75	17.0	46,000	$242.1
25-34	$56.2	22.3	63,700	$967.4
35-44	$69.63	21.4	50.800	$906.6
45-54	$73.08	10.7	47,400	$445.9
55-64	$65.40	19.6	30,400	$467.6
65+	$51.88	11.1	40,600	$281.9
				$3,311.4

Note that the replacement cost of a volunteer's labour is much greater than the opportunity cost of a volunteer's time. This is because the replacement cost includes all the costs an employer would have to pay (including taxes, superannuation, and administrative costs), whereas the opportunity cost is only a measure of what a volunteer would receive 'cash-in-hand' if they were paid. Opportunity cost is also discounted by the number of people not in the labour force. Using this approach, if a person is not working, then there is no opportunity cost to their time when it comes to volunteering.

Therefore, the opportunity cost of time for people over 65 is quite low at an average of $4.88 per person, as most people at this age are no longer working. However, of the people who are working at this age, their average replacement cost to employers is $51.88 per hour as their experience and skills are valuable.

[8] The potential intrinsic value that results from a volunteer's willingness to donate their time at below market rates is considered in the Volunteer dividend section.

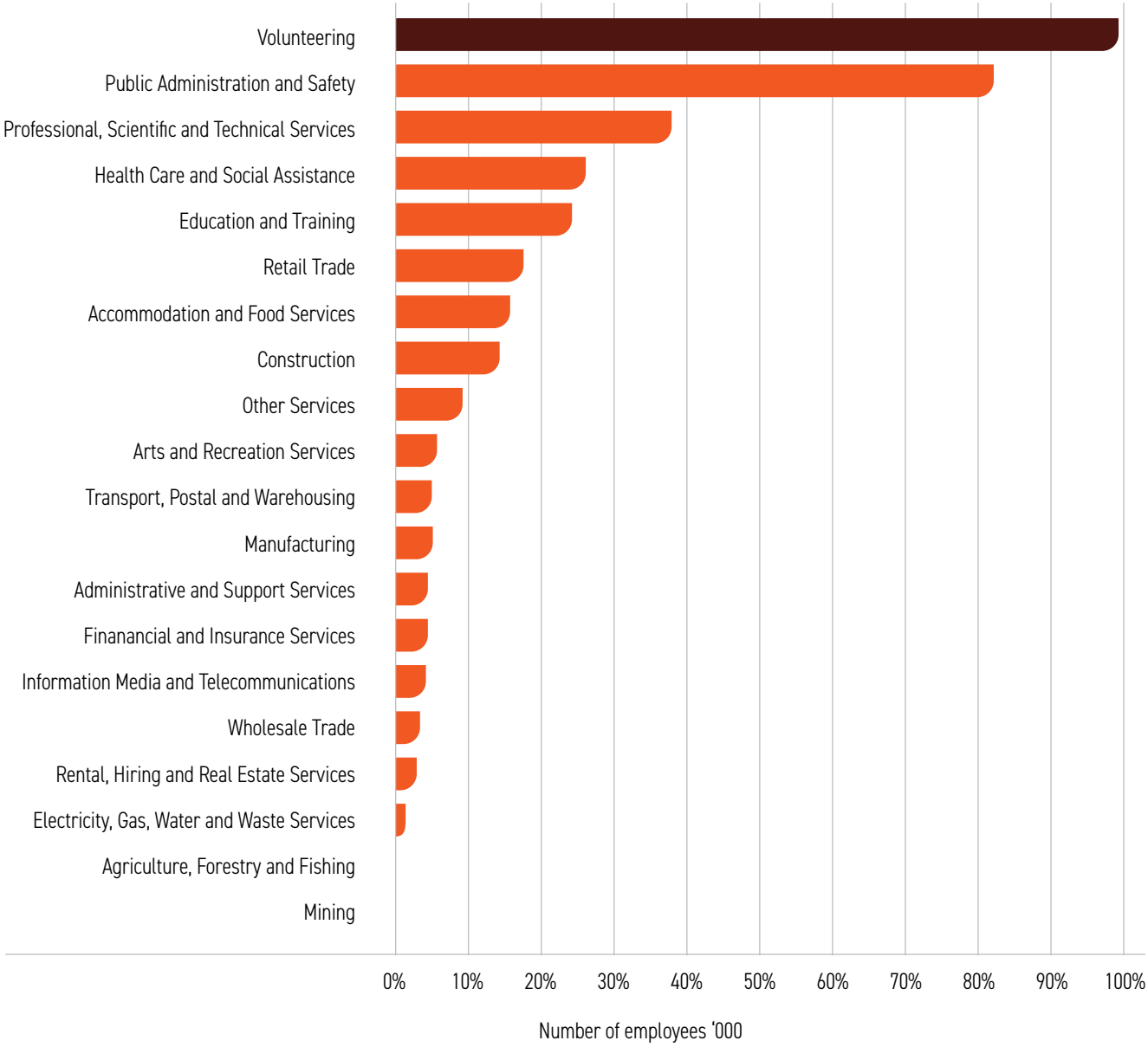
To illustrate the scale of the volunteering sector, the replacement cost of volunteer labour in the ACT is compared with the total compensation given to employees in both the government and private sectors. On this basis, the results – detailed below at Table 14 - were eye-opening. The ACT volunteering workforce is over four-fifths the size of the workforce in the ACT private sector and over two-thirds the size of the workforce in the ACT public sector.

Table 14: Cost of volunteering vs private and public sector employee compensation

Sector (the ACT)	$	Relative size of volunteering sector
Replacement cost of volunteers	$3.1 billion	100.0%
Private sector compensation of employees	$3.8 billion	87.1%
Public sector compensation of employees	$4.6 billion	71.4%

As illustrated in Figure 27, using the replacement cost method, volunteering is the largest industry sector by participation in the ACT.

Figure 27: Volunteering as an industry by employment in the ACT



Individual benefits

The benefits described to this point are the tangible benefits provided to the community, also known as the 'outputs' of volunteering. These outputs have been quantified to illustrate the new value they add to others.

Now, the focus shifts to explore another important dimension of volunteering: the intrinsic satisfaction or well-being benefits that volunteers themselves experience because of their participation. This aspect values the emotional and psychological rewards that volunteers gain.

In economic terms, when individuals engage with volunteering through an act or a purchase, it is assumed they derive some level of benefit or utility from that decision. The rational economic framework suggests that people act to maximise this utility and would not intentionally make decisions that diminish it. Consequently, each act of volunteering and its related consumption comes with an implied benefit to the individual beyond the value added to employers and the community.

At a minimum, this benefit is equal to the costs individuals bear in the pursuit of their volunteering. Therefore, using the revealed preference method (Appendix C), it can be said that in the ACT, volunteers enjoyed at least $2.2 billion in individual benefits from their volunteering. This is the sum of the money they spent ($0.6 billion) and time they contributed ($1.6 billion).

But how much more would individuals be willing to pay to experience the full range of benefits that come from volunteering? And what about those who are not volunteers – do they derive benefits from the volunteering of others, even if they are not directly participating?

In answering the first question, the value of the benefits that volunteers personally accrue is estimated to be $6.6 billion.

Compelling evidence is also put forward in the non-use value discussion that follows to show that even non-volunteers significantly value the contributions to society made by their volunteering peers.

Volunteer dividend

In many analyses, consumer surplus plays a critical role in evaluating the net costs or benefits of an activity. If consumers derive more value from a product or service than what they pay for it, this is a sign that resources in the economy are being allocated efficiently. This is important to understand for shaping public policy. For example, knowing how much additional value people get from public transportation can inform ticket pricing.

In this context, volunteers are the consumer and can experience non-monetary satisfaction and/or psychological benefits from their participation.

Government agencies around the globe are increasingly requesting a quantification of the well-being benefits stakeholders might accrue (or lose) in formal cost benefit analyses presented to them. In the absence of specific methodological direction from the ACT and Australian governments, the method stipulated in the United Kingdom and New Zealand for quantifying the changes in well-being that volunteering might induce is applied.

In the Public Survey, all respondents were asked to rate how satisfied they were with their life. From the national sample of over 6,800 Australian residents, it was found that being a volunteer was associated with a 4.4-point increase in life satisfaction, recognised as a proxy for well-being.

The number of hours spent volunteering did not significantly impact one's sense of well-being. This demonstrates that the mere act of volunteering is enough to produce well-being benefits.

According to the formula described in Appendix C, the monetised value of a consumer's surplus associated with a 4.4-point increase in life satisfaction in the ACT is $23,800 per volunteer per year. This equates to a well-being benefit for the ACT community of $6.6 billion a year.

Important note

Expressions of consumer surplus essentially measure satisfaction and should not be confused with a willingness on the part of volunteers to pay more. In terms of value, increasing prices would result in a real loss for current volunteers. This is because the dividends enjoyed by volunteers would be converted into producers' surplus for no net gain to them as consumers, increasing the real and opportunity costs of entry and forcing some volunteers out.

As will be demonstrated, a more efficient gain can be realised by converting non-volunteers into volunteers and incentivising those who are under-volunteering to volunteer more. Deliberately exploiting the currently high levels of consumer surplus – by either increasing prices or withdrawing subsidies – is likely to be counterproductive.

In other words, you should not increase the costs associated with volunteering just because people perceive a value that is greater than what they spend.

Non-use value

Non-use value in economics refers to the value that people assign to a good, service, or resource even if they do not use it. This concept is often used in environmental economics to explain why people might place a value on preserving natural habitats, endangered species, or cultural heritage, even if they never actually engage with these resources.

Non-use value is explained in various ways in academic literature, but largely centres around the following three ideas that are contextualised here for volunteering:

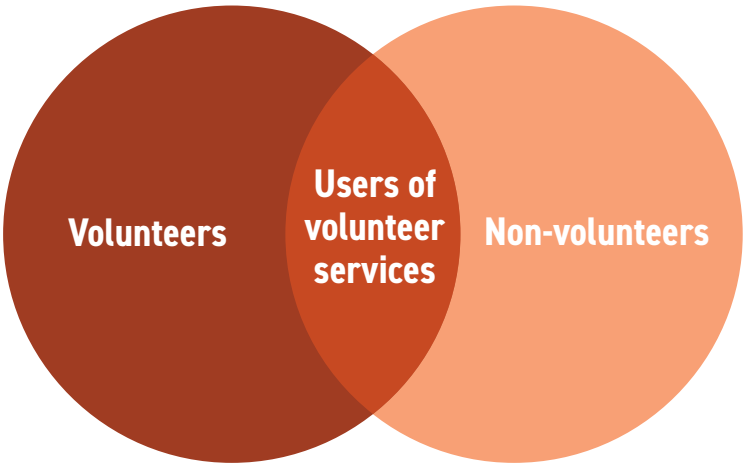
- **Existence value:** The value people derive from knowing that volunteering exists, even if they never use it.
- **Bequest value:** The value people place on preserving volunteering for future generations to enjoy.
- **Option value:** The value people place on preserving the option to volunteer in the future, even if they are not volunteering today.

To better understand the non-use value of volunteering, Public Survey respondents were asked about quality of life, and how much they thought volunteering in the community impacted the quality of life of everyone.

Given the findings already revealed in this report, it is not surprising to see a statistically significant difference in the average reported scores between volunteers and non-volunteers nationally. What does stand out, however, is that non-volunteers in Australia attribute 54.2% of community well-being to the impact of volunteering.

This observation introduces a complex measurement challenge due to the significant overlap among volunteers, non-volunteers, and users of volunteer services (see Figure 28). To fully understand the true value of volunteering, it is necessary to quantify the consumer surplus for each of these three groups without double-counting the benefits.

Figure 28: The relationship between volunteers, non-volunteers and users of volunteer services



Unfortunately, the limits of the method applied here do not allow us to make these distinctions. Acknowledging our approach therefore undervalues the full suite of volunteering benefits, this is identified as a promising direction for future research.

CONCLUSION

This report clearly highlights the value and the contribution of the ACT volunteering sector. It suggests that the scale and impact of volunteering in this region has been historically undervalued and under-recognised.

Notably, nearly three-quarters of ACT residents volunteer in some form. Yet it is also evident that volunteering in the ACT has room for further growth as it continues to recover from the challenges of the past few years.

The data presented is compelling, with a proven annual return of 540% on every dollar invested in volunteering in the ACT. From an economic standpoint, this report challenges the traditional view that the value of volunteering is merely the minimum-wage replacement cost of its labour. Rather, volunteering has a much broader economic impact, affecting almost every activity in the ACT.

The cost-benefit analysis reveals that the external benefits of volunteering far outweigh the social costs, making volunteering very economically efficient. Moreover, it indicates that increased investment in volunteering could produce exponential returns.

This report and its findings are a significant step forward in measuring and understanding the far-reaching benefits and impacts of the ACT volunteering sector. Whilst the study has limitations that warrant further research, it offers a strong foundation of evidence that decision-makers in the public, private and not-for-profit sectors can use to better understand how to support and recognise ACT volunteers and strengthen a sector that is essential to the wellbeing of all ACT residents.

GLOSSARY

ABS	Australian Bureau of Statistics
ACT	Australian Capital Territory
ASGS	Australian Statistical Geography Standard
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
GSP	Gross State Product
GSS	General Social Survey of households conducted by the Australian Bureau of Statistics.
GVA	Gross Value Added
Net favourability score	A measurement that shows whether a group has a positive or negative view of something, taking into account both favourable and unfavourable opinions.
NSW	New South Wales
Percentage point	A "percentage point" is a unit of measure used to describe the absolute difference between two percentages. It's not the same as "percent change," which is a relative measure. For example, let's say the percentage of people who are volunteering increased from 40% to 50%. The difference is 10 percentage points, because you subtract the starting percentage (40%) from the ending percentage (50%). However, if you were to describe this as a "percent change," you would say that the percentage of people volunteering increased by 25%. This is calculated by taking the change (10%) and dividing it by the starting value (40%), then multiplying by 100 to get it in percentage terms.
Public Survey	Survey of ACT and Australian residents.
Quintile	In statistics, a quintile is one of four points that divide a data set into five equal parts, or one of the five groups created by these points. Each quintile contains 20% of the total observations, allowing for easier comparison and analysis of data distribution.
Statistical significance	A less than one-in-twenty chance that the result is random. It is safe to assume that a statistically significant finding can be generalised for the population the sample is drawn from.
TURF analysis	Total Unduplicated Reach and Frequency analysis is a statistical technique used to determine how to include the most diverse options or items within a limited selection.
Vols	Volunteers
Volunteer	Someone who willingly gives time for the common good and without financial gain.
Volunteer manager	Someone who manages, supervises, organises or coordinates volunteers. They can be paid in this role or a volunteer themselves.
Volunteer Manager Survey	Survey of ACT and Australian volunteer managers.

APPENDIX A: Survey instrument

Questions excluded from the analysis have not been reproduced here.

Public survey

Thanks for taking part in this important survey. It should take less than 10 minutes of your time. The answers you provide are anonymous.

We're asking the following questions to better understand the diverse perspectives in our community. Your responses will help ensure we are inclusive in our approach.

What year were you born?

_____

What is your postcode?

_____

How do you identify?

- I am a man
- I am a woman
- I am non-binary
- I'd prefer not to say
- I identify another way

On average, how many hours per week do you work for pay? Enter zero (0) if you do not have paid employment.

_____

On average, how much does your household earn each week, after tax? Include the income that you share with others in your house, such as a partner or parent. Choose the value closest to your after-tax income.

- $1,041
- $1,667
- $2,260
- $2,970
- $5,544

Were you born in Australia?

- Yes
- No

With which ethnicity or culture do you most identify?

- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander
- Anglo-Australian
- Another or multiple culture(s)

Is English your first language?

- Yes
- No

What is your sexual orientation? Tick all that apply.

- Heterosexual / Straight
- Lesbian
- Gay
- Bisexual / Pansexual
- Asexual
- Queer / Questioning
- I'd prefer to self-describe _____
- I'd prefer not to say

Do you have a disability that limits your ability to carry out everyday activities?

- Yes
- No

Do you care for someone in your home? Tick all that apply.

- Child or children under 10
- Child or children aged 10-18
- Disabled person or persons
- Elderly adult or adults
- I do not have caring duties in my home

Volunteering is defined here as "time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain." Volunteering is helping someone or something (even if you don't call it volunteering).

You do not receive money for this, but maybe someone pays for your food, travel or other costs. It includes volunteering organised by your employer or school.

It does not include work you do to receive a government allowance (like work for the dole) or as part of a court order (like community service). It does not include only helping your family or people living in your house.

An example that is volunteering: coaching your child's football team, because people outside your household and family also benefit. Another example is helping a neighbour mow their lawns or put their bins out.

An example that is not volunteering: helping your flatmate, cousin or sister with their homework.

Even if you did not think of it as volunteering, did you volunteer for any of these activities in the last 12 months? Include any seasonal, occasional, spontaneous, one-off or online help you gave.

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ Resource support (for example: meal sharing, translation, transport, running errands)
- ☐ Social or wellbeing support (for example: personal care, assistance, companionship)
- ☐ Support in someone else's home (for example: domestic work, home maintenance, unpaid child care)
- ☐ Teaching or coaching (for example: as an unpaid mentor, advisor, leader)
- ☐ Administrative support (for example: fundraising, book-keeping, customer service)
- ☐ Skilled support (for example: pro bono work, workplace or school supported activity)
- ☐ Emergency support (for example: during a pandemic or natural disaster)
- ☐ Event support (for example: at a festival, school, ceremony)
- ☐ Sport and recreation support (for example: coaching, officiating, organising, providing transport)
- ☐ Advocacy (for example: creating or sharing media, campaigning, protesting)
- ☐ Governance (for example: as an unpaid official, board or committee member)
- ☐ Environmental or animal protection (for example: clean-up, citizen science, rescue, rehabilitation)
- ☐ Faith based or cultural support (for example: religious instruction, pastoral care, sharing culture)
- ☐ Other community contribution (for example: aged care, veterans support, food or goods distribution)
- ☐ I did not or could not volunteer in the last 12 months

Was any of your volunteering in the last 12 months as a member of an organisation or community group?

- ☐ Yes
- ☐ No

How many different organisations did you volunteer for? Enter zero (0) if you did not volunteer for a category listed.

	Number of organisations volunteered for
Not-for-profit organisation(s) such as sporting clubs; environment, conservation and animal welfare groups; special interest or hobby groups; youth groups; political parties; churches or charities	
Government service(s) such as public schools, hospitals, libraries, emergency or local government services	
Private/commercial organisation(s) such as private schools, aged care facilities, festivals or events	

On average, how many hours did you volunteer for these groups each month? As well as regular hours, include any seasonal, occasional, spontaneous, one-off or online volunteering you did.

	Average hours volunteered per month
Not-for-profit organisation(s) such as sporting clubs; environment, conservation and animal welfare groups; special interest or hobby groups; youth groups; political parties; churches or charities	
Government service(s) such as public schools, hospitals, libraries, emergency or local government services	
Private/commercial organisation(s) such as private schools, aged care facilities, festivals or events	

On average, how many hours do you volunteer each month without being part of an organisation or group?

Do not include unpaid help or caring only given to your family or people living in your house.

Include things like domestic work, home maintenance or gardening outside your home, transport or running errands, unpaid childcare, teaching, coaching or practical advice, social support, personal care or assistance, lobbying, advocacy or campaigning for a cause, helping out in the community or environmental or animal protection.

As well as regular hours, include any seasonal, occasional, spontaneous, one-off or online helping you did. Enter zero (0) hours if you did not volunteer this way.

_____

What percentage (%) of your volunteering is done...These totals should sum to 100%

- Online or from home _____
- Within your local community _____
- Somewhere else in your State _____
- Somewhere else in Australia _____
- Overseas _____

On average, how much money do you personally spend each month on your volunteering? Please provide a rough estimate or best guess for each. Enter zero (0) if you did not spend anything in a given category.

	$ spend per month
Memberships, licences and mandatory checks	
Transport, travel and motor vehicle expenses	
Self-education, training and courses	
Uniforms and clothing	
Tools, equipment, technology or other gear	
Food and drink	
Accommodation	
Other volunteering expenses	

What percentage of your volunteering expenses were reimbursed?

_____%

Why do you volunteer? Tick all that apply.

- For social and community connection
- To develop new skills or gain work experience
- To gain confidence
- To use my skills and experience
- Because I am expected or required to
- To help others
- To contribute during a crisis
- For religious or cultural connection
- To support or learn more about a cause
- For enjoyment
- To be active
- For social status or reward
- Other reasons

Do you prefer to volunteer by yourself or with others?

- By myself
- With others
- I enjoy both

How do you find opportunities to volunteer? Tick all that apply.

- Word of mouth (for example: from family or friends)
- SEEK Volunteer or other online volunteer recruitment sites
- Social media
- Google / searching online
- Traditional media (for example: posters, newsletters, radio)
- Referral by another agency (for example: Centrelink)
- Open days or events
- Volunteer Resource Centres
- Other _____

What stops you giving more time as a volunteer? Tick all that apply

- No time (for example: family, work or study commitments)
- No transport
- Costs
- Health reasons
- Limited language or practical skills
- Bad experiences volunteering

- ☐ Cultural tradition
- ☐ Lack of confidence
- ☐ Lack of appreciation or recognition
- ☐ Burnout (over-volunteering)
- ☐ Government restrictions or requirements
- ☐ I don't have anyone to volunteer more with
- ☐ I'm not interested in volunteering more
- ☐ I'm not interested in the volunteering options in my area
- ☐ I'm not sure how / never been asked
- ☐ Other reasons _____

Do any of the following make it harder for you to volunteer with others? Tick all that apply.

- ☐ Your age
- ☐ Your gender
- ☐ Where you live
- ☐ Your employer
- ☐ Your ethnicity
- ☐ Your English language skill
- ☐ Your sexuality
- ☐ Your disability
- ☐ Your caring duties
- ☐ None of these make it harder for me to volunteer with others

Now we'd like you to think about how volunteering impacts your work.

For example, employees who volunteer outside of work might be happier, have stronger networks or develop skills that make them better at their job.

On the other hand, they might need to take a few more days off, feel like they can do less or be more tired due to their volunteering.

So, do you think volunteering outside of work has a positive or negative impact on your employment?

- ☐ Positive - volunteering makes me more productive at work (better at my job)
- ☐ Negative - volunteering makes me less productive at work (worse at my job)
- ☐ Volunteering makes no difference to my productivity at work

Lots of things contribute to workplace productivity. These include:

- The physical conditions and culture of the workplace
- The technology and tools available to do the job
- Your skills and experience
- Your personal and professional networks
- Your physical and mental health
- Your satisfaction with your job and life

As a percentage, how much more/less productive at work are you because of your volunteering?

_____%

We'd now like to ask you a question about how you generally feel (not just today).

On a scale of 1-100, where 1 is very dissatisfied and 100 is completely satisfied, how satisfied are you with your life nowadays?

_____

Quality of life is the degree to which you feel healthy, comfortable and able to participate in or enjoy life's events.

It is determined by lots of things, including our:

- Physical health
- Psychological health
- Financial wealth
- Level of independence
- Social relationships
- Environment
- Spiritual, religious or personal beliefs.

Volunteering – in all its forms – can impact many of these domains.

As a percentage, how much do you think volunteering in the community impacts the quality of life of all of us?

_____%

Finally, in 3 years' time are you likely to be volunteering more or less than you did in the last 12 months?

- ☐ More
- ☐ About the same
- ☐ Less
- ☐ Not volunteering at all
- ☐ Don't know

Volunteer manager survey

Thanks for taking part in this important survey. It should take less than 10 minutes of your time. The answers you provide are anonymous.

Do you manage (supervise, organise or coordinate) other volunteers? Tick all that apply.

- ☐ Yes, in a paid role
- ☐ Yes, as a volunteer
- ☐ No

What type of organisation or group do you manage volunteers with?

If you manage volunteers with multiple organisations or groups, choose the one you do the most work with.

Please answer all remaining questions specifically for this organisation or group. You are welcome to complete this survey again for any other organisations or groups you manage volunteers with.

- ☐ Not-for-profit / community organisation or group
- ☐ Government department / agency
- ☐ Privately owned / commercial enterprise

Approximately how many volunteers were you responsible for over the last 12 months?

_____

Approximately how many hours per week do you spend managing volunteers?

_____

Who volunteers with you? Tick all that apply.

- ☐ People who work full-time
- ☐ People who don't work or work less than full-time
- ☐ Parents
- ☐ Skilled professionals
- ☐ Corporate-sponsored individuals or groups
- ☐ People aged under 25
- ☐ People aged over 65
- ☐ LGBTQIA+ volunteers
- ☐ Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- ☐ People living with or caring for someone with a disability
- ☐ Non-residents who are travelling or from outside the region (tourists)
- ☐ Culturally and linguistically diverse people (including newly arrived migrants and refugees)
- ☐ People volunteering online or remotely
- ☐ Spontaneous or 'one-off' volunteers
- ☐ Centrelink clients / Workforce Australia placements
- ☐ None of these people volunteer with me

How do you typically attract volunteers?

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ Word of mouth (for example: from family or friends)
- ☐ SEEK Volunteer or other online volunteer recruitment sites
- ☐ Social media
- ☐ On our website
- ☐ Traditional media (for example: posters, newsletters, radio)
- ☐ Referral by another agency (for example: Centrelink)
- ☐ Open days or events
- ☐ Volunteer Resource Centres
- ☐ Other _____

How do you recognise, engage and retain volunteers?

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ Reimbursement of expenses
- ☐ Paid honorariums
- ☐ Internal awards (for example: certificates / letters of appreciation)
- ☐ External awards (for example: State Volunteer of the Year Awards, Australia Day honours)
- ☐ Rewards (for example: movie tickets, tokens of appreciation)
- ☐ Out of hours gatherings, events or celebrations
- ☐ Public ceremonies and events
- ☐ Status (for example: titles, rank, privileges)
- ☐ Accredited training (for example: Certificate II, Diploma)
- ☐ Other training (for example: short courses, workshops)
- ☐ Mentoring programs
- ☐ Media mentions (for example: website, socials, newsletters, press releases)
- ☐ Pre-agreed penalties or sanctions for non-participation (for example: loss of privileges or competition points)

- Formal performance reviews or references
- Personal connections and relationship building
- Flexible work arrangements
- Diverse and rewarding volunteer opportunities
- Dedicated volunteer management training and/or resources
- Induction and orientation programs
- Discounted or free meals, uniforms, insurance, accommodation and the like
- Another way _____
- We don't do anything to recognise, engage or retain volunteers

Why do you think people stop volunteering with your organisation or group?

Tick all that apply

- No time (for example: family, work or study commitments)
- No transport
- Costs
- Health reasons
- Limited language or practical skills
- Bad experiences volunteering
- Cultural tradition
- Lack of confidence
- Lack of appreciation or recognition
- Burnout (over-volunteering)
- Government restrictions or requirements
- Loss of interest
- Loss of connection (for example: friends have left)
- Other reasons _____

How has volunteering changed for your organisation since 2020?

	Less	About the same	More
Number of people who want to volunteer			
Hours people want to volunteer			
People want to volunteer occasional hours, rather than regular hours			
Volunteers want flexible hours			
Organisations want to volunteer employees' time			
Volunteers are claiming expenses			
Amount of training volunteers need			
Board-level volunteers are available			
Number of youth / young people who want to volunteer			
Volunteering is done online or from home			
The direct and indirect costs to volunteers			

How important are these volunteer issues to your organisation?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Not applicable
Volunteer recruitment				
Volunteer retention				
Volunteer management				
Volunteer appreciation and recognition inside our organisation				
Appreciation and recognition of our volunteers by the community				
Volunteer rights, responsibilities, protection and dispute management				
Volunteer health and safety				
Understanding and implementing the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement				
Understanding and implementing the National Strategy for Volunteering				

How important are these organisational matters related to volunteering?

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Not applicable
Organisational culture, inclusion and diversity				
Organisational governance				
Financial viability/sustainability				
Project, program and change management				
Impact measurement, evaluation and reporting				
Access to volunteer management resources and templates				

How important are these external issues to your organisation

	Very important	Somewhat important	Not important	Not applicable
Red tape and/or regulatory requirements				
Technology and digital disruption				
Risk, insurance and legal requirements				
Engagement with government and policy				
Volunteer fatigue				
Access to funding, grants or sponsorship				

Where do you go when you need help with volunteer management?

These totals should sum to 100%.

The volunteers I manage _____

Fellow volunteer managers _____

The organisation I volunteer with/work for _____

Family, friends and colleagues _____

Peak or professional volunteer bodies _____

The internet _____

Other sources of help _____

How much did it cost to manage your volunteers over the last 12 months?

Include volunteering-related expenses you and your organisation incurred.

Your best estimate is good enough!

Please enter zero (0) if you did not spend anything on a category.

	$ spend last 12 months
Wages and salaries (related to volunteer management)	
Tools, equipment, technology or other gear	
Marketing and promotion	
Induction, education and training	
Insurances	
Motor vehicle, transport and fuel	
Catering (food and beverages)	
Accommodation	
Volunteer reimbursements	
Volunteer recognition (for example: awards, merchandise)	
Administration	
Other expenses	

How much of this did you pay for out of your own pocket? These totals should sum to 100%.

- Paid for by me _____
- Paid for by me, but later reimbursed _____
- Paid for by my organisation _____

In 3 years, are people more or less likely to be volunteering with your organisation or group?

- More
- Less
- About the same
- Not volunteering at all (our organisation will have closed or our group will have ended)
- Don't know

How likely are you to be with your organisation, as a volunteer manager, in 3 years?

- Still here, doing more hours
- Still here, doing less hours
- Still here, doing about the same hours
- Not here at all
- Don't know

Finally, we're asking the following questions to better understand the diverse perspectives in our community.

Your responses will help ensure we are inclusive in our approach.

What year were you born?

_____

What is your postcode?

_____

How do you identify?

- I am a man
- I am a woman
- I am non-binary
- I'd prefer not to say
- I identify another way

APPENDIX B: Directions for future research

Data collection

Future research is recommended to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the volunteer manager population in Australia. A more robust survey methodology, including offline outreach through paper-based surveys, could be employed to capture a broader range of demographics, potentially including those who may have been inadvertently overlooked in this study. Such under-represented demographic groups include:

- Young volunteer managers
- Culturally and linguistically diverse volunteer managers
- Volunteers and their managers in the public and private sectors.

While continuously reinventing the survey instruments could hinder the ability to track trends over time, several minor adjustments to the instruments are proposed based on feedback from the sector. These minor changes aim to improve the survey's relevance and accuracy without significantly compromising its longitudinal comparability.

Longitudinal research

The body of knowledge that has been accumulated in this and complementary State of Volunteering Reports in Australia provides valuable cross-sectional insights into the volunteering sector. However, a key limitation of cross-sectional research is that it captures a snapshot at a single point in time, making it difficult to infer cause-and-effect relationships or track changes over time. This is where longitudinal studies can add significant value to our understanding of the volunteering sector.

Longitudinal studies involve collecting data from the same subjects repeatedly over a period of time. By doing so, trends and changes in volunteering attitudes, behaviours, and management practices can be observed. This approach allows for a more in-depth analysis of causal relationships between variables. For instance, the current research highlighted certain demographic and organisational factors correlated with managerial optimism for the future of their organisation. A longitudinal study could show whether changes in these factors directly lead to changes in optimism and, if so, under what conditions.

Moreover, the volunteering landscape is influenced by numerous external factors such as economic conditions, changes in government policy, or shifts in community needs and interests. Longitudinal data would enable researchers to control for these variables, offering a clearer understanding of intrinsic factors that drive or hinder volunteer participation. This would enrich the current body of knowledge by contextualising it within a broader temporal framework, making the findings more robust and actionable.

Longitudinal studies can also validate the sustainability of successful volunteer management practices. If a certain approach to volunteer management is shown to consistently produce high levels of engagement over several years, this adds credibility to its efficacy. Conversely, practices that seem promising in the short-term but lose effectiveness over time could be flagged for reconsideration.

Finally, longitudinal research can offer insights into the lifecycle of volunteers and volunteer managers. This could include understanding points of entry and exit from volunteer roles, the long-term impacts of volunteering on personal and professional development, and generational shifts in attitudes toward volunteering. Such insights are crucial for strategic planning and for developing targeted interventions that encourage long-term volunteer engagement.

Even though the existing body of research has laid a solid foundation, revisiting it at regular intervals will enrich our understanding of the complex dynamics affecting the volunteering sector. This multi-dimensional approach will allow for a more nuanced, comprehensive, and actionable body of knowledge that can inform both policy and practice in meaningful ways.

Mixed methods

The analyses of this report modelled a range of demographic and organisational attributes as predictor variables. While these attributes did reveal some level of correlation, it's crucial to acknowledge the limitations of our modelling, particularly their relatively low predictive influence.

Our research indicates that a large percentage of the variance in the dependent variables analysed could not be fully explained by the demographic factors modelled. Essentially, while the statistical significance of some relationships affirms that they contribute to understanding the phenomenon, the extent to which they do is limited. This raises questions about what other factors could be at play, highlighting a research gap that requires further exploration.

Future research could benefit substantially from incorporating qualitative methods to complement our quantitative method. Qualitative approaches, such as in-depth interviews or focus groups, could offer nuanced insights into the specific contexts, attitudes, and experiences that contribute to changes in volunteer behaviour. This could encompass both personal factors (like individual motivations or emotional resilience) and external factors (such as organisational culture, community engagement, or the policy landscape), which the models employed in this study cannot adequately address.

Moreover, ethnographic studies that immerse researchers within organisations for an extended period could provide a more holistic understanding of the day-to-day challenges and opportunities in volunteer management. Through this method, researchers can witness firsthand the complexity and diversity of experiences in the sector. By integrating the richness of qualitative data with existing quantitative findings, a multi-faceted understanding of what drives the volunteering sector can be achieved.

While this analysis has advanced a foundational understanding of how demographic and organisational attributes relate to volunteering, the unexplained variance signals a need for more comprehensive research. Utilising qualitative methodologies could unearth hidden dimensions to these complex issues, thus enriching our understanding and potentially leading to more effective strategies for bolstering the volunteering sector in the future.

Inclusive volunteering

The importance of mixed-method research becomes particularly evident when studying demographic groups that do not align with the mainstream, able-bodied, and Anglo-centric perspectives on volunteering. For such communities – including First Nations Australians and people living with disability – the definitions and experiences of volunteering may differ significantly from those of the general population.

This makes it challenging to directly compare metrics related to participation and inclusion. At a minimum, any relevant survey questions and the presentation of findings should be contextualised appropriately.

The unique perspectives of different communities should not be left out of discussions about volunteering. Their differences make their inclusion in the broader body of research on volunteering all the more critical. This is not just because volunteering can have a profound impact on these communities, but also because their experiences can offer valuable insights that may be applicable in other settings.

Therefore, additional research in these spaces is highly recommended to create a more comprehensive understanding of volunteering in the ACT.

The social cost of volunteering

There is a growing need for comprehensive research aimed at quantifying the social costs associated with volunteering. While the positive impacts of volunteering are often highlighted, understanding its hidden costs – such as the displacement of paid workers, inequities in participation, volunteer burnout, potential compromises in service quality, and volunteer-enabled extremism – is essential for a 'warts-and-all' view of its societal implications.

These social costs are often complex, interconnected, and elusive, making them difficult to measure through conventional means. Nonetheless, developing methodologies to assess these impacts can provide a more balanced perspective that could inform public policy and organisational decision-making.

The goal should be to formulate a framework that not only quantifies but also contextualises the social costs, thus enabling more sustainable and equitable practices in the realm of volunteering. This research direction has the potential to substantially enrich the discourse on social welfare, the intersections between volunteering and paid labour, and the role of government in civil society.

Unmeasured and under-measured benefits

Other areas inviting further investigation are the unquantified and under-quantified benefits of volunteering. Examples include, but are not limited to, the following.

- The transfer effects of inbound and outbound volunteer tourism.
- Employers' perspective on the productivity multiplier.
- The true replacement cost of volunteer labour.
- The well-being benefits enjoyed by consumers of volunteer services.

Another key challenge to tackle is the issue of measurement complexity arising from the considerable overlap among volunteers, non-volunteers, and users of volunteer services. Fully understanding the true societal value of volunteering requires a comprehensive framework that can reliably quantify the consumer surplus for each of these distinct groups.

This would involve crafting methodological approaches that can segregate and measure these benefits without double-counting or overlapping, thereby providing a more nuanced and accurate view of volunteering's impact on community well-being.

The demand side of volunteering

The current study has made a substantial contribution to the field by examining the supply side of volunteering, focusing on volunteer participation and various motivational factors behind it. However, one of the significant gaps in this research domain is the lack of focus on the demand side of volunteering.

The demand side refers to the necessity or requirement for volunteer efforts within the community. The question asks, how many volunteers does our community actually need? For this, a whole range of sub-questions might emerge. For example, are market methods of pricing the replacement cost of volunteers appropriate given the different competitive pressures in the scramble to secure reliable volunteer labour? Which services can and should be reasonably supplied by volunteers versus paid workers?

To fill this gap in the research, various methodological approaches can be considered. These might include community surveys among volunteer-involving organisations and governmental bodies, data analytics using machine learning algorithms, gap analysis, economic modelling, and in-depth case studies. Each of these methods offers a unique angle from which to understand and quantify volunteer demand, providing a more balanced and comprehensive view of community needs and opportunities for volunteer engagement.

By complementing the existing research on the supply side with a rigorous examination of the demand side, a more holistic understanding of the volunteering ecosystem is enabled. This balanced view is crucial for everyone involved, from volunteers and community organisations to policymakers, ensuring that community needs are met effectively, efficiently and equitably.

APPENDIX C: Methodology detail

Data cleaning

Data cleaning is the process of preparing a sample for analysis by removing or excluding incorrect, incomplete, duplicated, or irrelevant data. This standard practice in the statistical sciences is necessary to improve the quality of the data so that the results of the analysis can be trusted.

The Public Survey and Volunteer Manager Survey had in-built integrity checks to ensure the data was of a high quality. The surveys employed condition logic to ensure only relevant questions were shown to respondents, answer options were randomised to reduce position bias, and where appropriate, numeric entry fields were capped with logical limits to prevent the inadvertent overstatement of value.

The following individual survey responses were further excluded from the analysis:

- Responses commenced before the survey officially opened (pilot and test responses)
- Incomplete responses (Public Survey only)
- Responses that took less than three minutes to complete (Volunteer Manager Survey only)

As respondents to the Public Survey were being paid for their participation, very strict qualification criteria were applied to their responses. Cleaning criteria for the Public Survey included:

- Year of birth could not be before 1923 – answers that met this criterion voided the whole response.
- If a person has 16 waking hours a day in a 30-day month, that is 480 hours. Therefore, the sum of hours and paid work and hours volunteered could not be greater than 450 per month – answers that met this criterion voided the whole response.
- A person was reclassified as a non-volunteer if the sum of their reported volunteer hours was zero.
- If a person stated they volunteered for one or more organisations but reported zero hours, they were not considered to be a formal volunteer.
- A logical cap of 50 was applied to the sum of organisations a person volunteered for in one year.
- A logical cap of 350% was applied to the productivity premium a person could nominate.
- Free-text responses to “Other” questions that were given in bad faith (for example, giving “Attack helicopter” as gender) – answers that met this criterion voided the whole response.

Careless responses to the expenditure questions in both surveys were also encountered. A response to the expenditure question was considered to be "careless" if it met any of the following criteria: entering the same number for each category of expenditure (for example, $2000 for all), inputting a number that appeared to be randomly typed (for example, $5643685), or providing a sequence of numbers that is highly improbable (for example, $1, $2, $3, $4, $5).

Careless responses to the expenditure question in the Public Survey voided the entire response. The assumption here was that if a respondent was careless on one question, there is a reasonable likelihood that they may not have been attentive or truthful in their other answers as well. This is a known risk when people are paid to complete surveys.

In the Volunteer Manager Survey, however, it was known that respondents were more earnest by electing to participate without payment, and that many respondents would be (and were) challenged by this question. For that reason, the expenditure question was placed as late in the survey as possible, and only careless answers to the expenditure question were voided, without voiding the other questions that the respondent answered.

New variables

To facilitate analysis, several new variables were created from the sample data in its raw form. The following new variables for each respondent were derived from their original responses. The validity of the new variables was assured through confirmation of the new sample sizes and rigorous spot checks to assess data integrity.

- Continuous variables
  - Age this year (from Year of Birth)
  - Total volunteer hours (the sum of formal and informal volunteer hours)
  - Total expenditure (the sum of the individual expenditure categories in both surveys)
- Ordinal variables
  - Age by cohort (from Age this year)
  - **Location** (from Postcode)
  - Organisational optimism and intent to manage or volunteer (excluding "Don't know" responses)
- Categorical variables
  - Volunteer (yes/no from the volunteering participation question)
  - **Volunteer retention** (from the Volunteer Manager Survey question, *"How do you recognise, engage and retain volunteers?")*

Location

Responses to the postcode question were reclassified by location as Major City, Inner Regional, Outer Regional, Remote, and Very Remote, in line with the Australian Statistical Geography Standard (ASGS) Remoteness Structure.

This involved joining three datasets sourced from the Australian Bureau of Statistics: Mesh Block codes mapped to postcodes, Mesh Block codes mapped to Statistical Areas Level 1 codes, and Statistical Areas Level 1 codes mapped to Remoteness Areas. When a conflict arose with a postcode covering multiple Remoteness Areas, it was designated as belonging to the smaller Remoteness Area.

Location was treated as an ordinal variable to the extent that each category from Major City to Very Remote was considered to be more increasingly distant from a major city, if not in terms of geography, but in terms of access to services. This is how Remoteness Areas are defined in the ASGS.

Volunteer retention

The Volunteer Manager Survey asked the following question.

How do you recognise, engage and retain volunteers?

Tick all that apply.

- ☐ *Reimbursement of expenses*
- ☐ *Paid honorariums*
- ☐ *Internal awards (for example: certificates / letters of appreciation)*
- ☐ *External awards (for example: State Volunteer of the Year Awards, Australia Day honours)*
- ☐ *Rewards (for example: movie tickets, tokens of appreciation)*
- ☐ *Out of hours gatherings, events or celebrations*
- ☐ *Public ceremonies and events*
- ☐ *Status (for example: titles, rank, privileges)*
- ☐ *Accredited training (for example: Certificate II, Diploma)*
- ☐ *Other training (for example: short courses, workshops)*
- ☐ *Mentoring programs*
- ☐ *Media mentions (for example: website, socials, newsletters, press releases)*
- ☐ *Pre-agreed penalties or sanctions for non-participation (for example: loss of privileges or competition points)*
- ☐ *Formal performance reviews or references*
- ☐ *Personal connections and relationship building*
- ☐ *Flexible work arrangements*
- ☐ *Diverse and rewarding volunteer opportunities*
- ☐ *Dedicated volunteer management training and/or resources*
- ☐ *Induction and orientation programs*
- ☐ *Discounted or free meals, uniforms, insurance, accommodation and the like*
- ☐ *Another way*
- ☐ *We don't do anything to recognise, engage or retain volunteers*

To better understand the data, these 20 options were consolidated into 10 categories and the "Do nothing" alternative. Free text "Another way" responses, which accounted for less than five percent of the data, were also recoded to fit within the new category list.

Here is the updated list of strategies related to the recognition, engagement, and retention of volunteers. It is presented in alphabetical order. This revised approach is recommended for future data collection.

- Awards and formal recognition
  - Internal awards (for example: certificates / letters of appreciation)
  - External awards (for example: State Volunteer of the Year Awards, Australia Day honours)
  - Honour boards
- Employment and career pathways
  - Formal performance reviews
  - LinkedIn endorsements or letters of reference
  - Status (for example: titles, rank, privileges)
  - Progressive autonomy and empowerment
- Honorariums, gifts, discounts, and perks
  - Paid honorariums
  - Discounted or free resources (for example: meals, uniforms, insurance, accommodation)

- Free merchandise or gifts (for example: t-shirts, gift cards, movie tickets)
- Rewards (for example: movie tickets, tokens of appreciation)

- Personal relationship building
  - Birthday, Christmas and anniversary acknowledgement
  - Group chats, team meetings
  - Regular communication and thanks
  - Opportunities for feedback
- Pre-agreed penalties and sanctions
  - Loss of privileges or access to privileges
  - Loss of competition points
  - Severance (for example: ethical breaches, persistent no-shows)
- Public praise and acknowledgement
  - Media mentions (for example: website, socials, newsletters, press releases)
  - Public ceremonies and events
- Reimbursement of expenses
- Role flexibility and accessibility support
  - Diverse and rewarding volunteering opportunities
  - Flexible work arrangements
  - Inclusive workplace or role modifications
  - Volunteer accessible services (for example: childcare, transport, mental health)
- Social opportunities and events
  - Out of hours gatherings, events, or celebrations
  - Peer-enabled safe spaces
  - Cultural and inter-organisational exchanges
- Volunteer training and development
  - Accredited training (for example: Certificate II, Diploma)
  - Other training (for example: short courses, workshops)
  - Dedicated volunteer management training and/or resources
  - Induction and orientation programs
  - Mentoring programs
- We don't do anything to recognise, engage or retain volunteers

It is acknowledged that by not presenting this new list to respondents, the intent of some respondents may be incompletely represented. It also means the findings are not directly comparable to previous State of Volunteering Reports. This issue will resolve in future studies should the new taxonomy be continued.

Data weighting

Data weighting is a statistical technique used to adjust the contribution of individual data points in a dataset. The method is widely applied in survey analysis and research to ensure that the sample accurately represents the target population. By assigning different weights to specific responses, biases or imbalances in the sample data can be corrected. This ensures that groups underrepresented in the sample have a proportional influence on the overall results, thereby enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings.

Public Survey

In the Public Survey, responses were drawn from an online panel of the ACT residents aged 15 years and over. Respondents were paid for their participation. Quotas were used to ensure a representative cross-section of the ACT residents across gender, age, and location. As a result, these variables were sufficiently representative of the ACT population for the purposes of analysis.

Further analysis revealed household income as the most unrepresentative variable in the sample, prompting the need for data weighting. The initial distribution of responses was skewed towards the lowest income quintile, while just under ten percent of respondents reported being in the highest. Given the unbalanced representation, a weighting scheme was applied to specifically address these discrepancies and mitigate potential income-based biases. The aim was to bring the proportion of responses in each income quintile closer to an equitable 20% representation.

To do this, weighting coefficients were calculated by dividing the target proportion of 20% by the actual proportion observed in each income quintile. These weights were then applied to all cases within each income group before conducting statistical analyses. This weighting strategy allowed representation across income levels to normalise, thereby minimising the potential for biased results due to the initially skewed income distribution.

Volunteer Manager Survey

The Volunteer Manager Survey used a convenience sampling method, meaning the survey was distributed and promoted to the Volunteering ACT's first- and second-degree networks of volunteer managers and the organisations that engage them. It is acknowledged that these networks are extensive but not a complete reckoning of every paid and unpaid volunteer manager in the State.

Given the vast and diverse landscape of volunteering in the ACT, the true demographic makeup of the State's population of volunteer managers remains unknown. Anecdotal evidence – supported by the survey returns – suggests a tendency for this group to skew older, female, and lower income, meaning it cannot be assumed that the population of volunteer managers mirrors the demographic makeup of the State. Yet, without a population baseline of volunteer managers to compare the sample to, there is also no reference point to weight the data against.

The large sample size somewhat reduces the risk of the sample being unrepresentative. While a large sample size does not completely eliminate the limitations inherent in the sampling method, it does provide a more robust dataset that is less susceptible to extreme variances. In the absence of more reliable data, this sample is a useful starting point for analysing the experiences and perspectives of volunteer managers in the ACT.

Statistical methods

The selection of the statistical tools used in this research depended on the nature of the data and the question being considered or the hypothesis being tested. Descriptive statistics provided an initial understanding of the data's distribution and central tendencies, cross-tabulations explored categorical data associations, linear and binary logistic regressions addressed relationships and predictions, and TURF analysis optimised choice options. These tools were chosen and strategically applied to extract meaningful insights that might support evidence-based decision-making.

Descriptive statistics including frequencies and means, were used to provide a summary overview of the data. Frequencies gave insight into the distribution of categorical variables, indicating the count of observations within each category. Means, on the other hand, were calculated for continuous variables, offering a measure of central tendency.

Cross-tabulations were used to explore relationships between two categorical variables. This tool allowed us to create contingency tables to visualise the distribution and association between variables. Pearson's chi-square test of significance was used to assess whether the differences between variables correlated.

Linear regression was employed to examine the relationship between a continuous or ordinal dependent variable and one or more independent variables, with the assumption that the relationship was linear in nature. Independent variables that failed to meet the assumption of collinearity were rejected from each model.

Binary logistic regression was applied when the dependent variable was binary and categorical. It was used to model the probability of an event occurring, such as whether or not someone was a volunteer (yes/no). For the outcome of either regression to be reported in this study, the model itself had to meet our threshold of statistical significance ($p < 0.05$).

TURF (Total Unduplicated Reach and Frequency) analysis was employed in situations where it was desirable to determine the optimal combination of options or features to maximise reach while minimising duplication. TURF analysis helped identify the most effective combinations that would reach the widest audience without unnecessary overlap.

Statistical significance

Descriptive statistics are numbers that summarise and describe the main features of a dataset. The three sections of this report that follow use descriptive statistics to report on things like the percentage of the population who volunteer, the issues volunteer managers prioritise and the amount both groups spend on their volunteering/volunteers.

When comparisons are made across groups – for example, comparing the behaviours of volunteers and non-volunteers, or the experiences of paid versus unpaid volunteer managers – inferential tests of statistical significance are routinely applied.

Tests of statistical significance are used to find out if there is a significant relationship between two variables. In simpler terms, it helps us understand if changes in one variable are related to changes in another.

For example, in this report it is important to know whether or not a person volunteers is related to their age. To learn this, an appropriate test of statistical significance is applied to see if the distribution of volunteers and non-volunteers significantly differs according to respondents' self-reported year of birth.

If the test shows a significant result, it means that the variables in the sample are related, and this is unlikely to be due to random chance. If it is not significant, then any difference observed is probably just random and not indicative of a real relationship between the variables.

In this report, the threshold for statistical significance is set at less than five percent ($p < 0.05$). In simpler terms, this means that any relationship labelled as "significant" has less than a one-in-twenty chance of occurring randomly.

Another way to understand this is to imagine surveying a different group of 1,000 people from the same population 20 times. If a result is "significant," you would expect to see the same result at least 19 out of those 20 times. While it can't be known for sure if this particular sample is the one-in-twenty exception without running the survey 20 times, it is scientifically reasonable to conclude that the significant findings from this sample are likely to be true for the entire population.

Tests of statistical significance therefore help researchers decide if what is observed in the data is likely to hold true for the wider population, or if it is probably just a coincidence.

Keep in mind though that a non-significant finding may have meaning, especially if it rebuts an assumption. For example, one could jump to the conclusion that because the Volunteer Manager Survey responses show significantly more female-identifying volunteer managers than males, this means that women volunteer more than men.

The raw data in the Public Survey might support this assumption by revealing that one percent more women volunteer than men. However, as this result fails the test of statistical significance, it is not safe to draw the general conclusion that women volunteer more than men.

The tests of statistical significance applied in this study are done on the more statistically reliable national datasets and discussed in Appendix C. In the interests of making this report as accessible to as many readers as possible, the technical detail of each test run is not written up – the place for that will be in future academic publications.

Importantly, though, the significant results discussed in this report cannot fully explain all the factors that might impact a finding. For example, even though a person's age did significantly impact whether or not a person reported being a volunteer, a whole range of other factors not measured could also be important, including their health, religious and political beliefs, education, social status, and environment.

Please do not take from the findings that the factors reported on are the only variables of significant (or insignificant) influence.

Cost-benefit methodology

Volunteering makes significant contributions to society beyond the hours spent in service. It is a source of social, cultural, and even economic capital that enriches Australian communities. Traditional methods of quantifying the value of volunteering often fall short because they primarily focus on how much it would cost to replace volunteers with minimum-wage staff. But this replacement cost method is limited; it fails to capture the wider societal impacts of volunteering, such as enhanced community cohesion or individual well-being.

Cost-benefit analysis, which has become the international standard for evaluating policy choices, offers a more comprehensive approach. Originating from private sector practices, cost-benefit analysis evaluates the overall advantages and disadvantages of an action, including its wider economic and social impacts.

For example, if a company is considering investing in new machinery, they would normally only look at the cost of the equipment versus the expected financial return. Cost-benefit analysis goes further by also considering the broader, social implications, like job creation or environmental impacts, which could affect the community. These considerations are important if the company expects community support or government subsidy for their investment.

In the context of volunteering, cost-benefit analysis considers more than just the price of a volunteer's time; it also evaluates the positive and negative impacts on the organisations they volunteer for and the community in which they move. This involves looking at the value of skills transferred, boosts in economic output, and even the social bonds formed, which are all benefits. On the flip side, it also considers the direct and opportunity costs incurred by volunteers – what they could otherwise have achieved with their time and money spent volunteering.

In Section 3 of this report, which aims to estimate the value of volunteering in the ACT, cost-benefit analysis measures volunteering's overall contribution to the Territory over a one-year period. This does not mean it compares the value of volunteering to something else directly; rather, it aims to provide a thorough understanding of its net impact in market terms.

For accuracy, this analysis must be rigorous. To that end, it integrates several well-established methodologies to determine the unique input costs and outcomes of volunteering – financial analysis to gauge the scale of volunteering, revealed and stated preferences to evaluate direct and opportunity costs, input-output analysis for economic impacts, econometric methods to quantify costs avoided by the community through volunteering, and hedonic pricing to estimate the well-being benefits returned to individual volunteers.

Importantly, a conservative position is adopted by tending in the presence of uncertainty to overestimate costs and underestimate benefits. The ultimate objective is to provide a comprehensive, reliable, and defensible estimate of the value created by volunteering in the ACT, establishing an evidence base for investment and laying a platform for future research in this regard.

What follows is a theoretical explanation of the different costs and benefits measured in this report. A much simpler explanation of how these values were derived can be found in Appendix E.

Costs

Direct costs to volunteers

While volunteers are not paid, volunteering is not 'free', as volunteers incur costs to contribute and participate as volunteers. These costs can include transportation to and from the volunteering site, the purchase of special clothing or equipment, and even meals during their service hours.

If volunteers have to take time off work or access childcare to be able to volunteer, this represents a monetary cost. In some instances, volunteers may need to independently undergo specific training or certification, which may also come with associated fees.

Even if they are individually modest, these purchases can add up and create a financial burden on the volunteer. As noted in Section 1, one-in-seven volunteers in the ACT reported these costs to be a barrier to volunteering more.

Direct costs to organisations

Organisations that rely on the efforts of volunteers have a similar cost burden. Administrative costs include the salaries of staff who manage volunteer programs that demand recruitment, retention, and supervision[9]. Organisations may also need to spend money on background checks, insurance, and safe work practices to ensure the safety and well-being of volunteers.

Resources like office space, utilities, and supplies may also be necessary, as well as less visible costs such as system management software or tools that help keep track of volunteers, their schedules, and their contributions.

Each of these elements, and many more, represents a financial commitment from the organisation to facilitate volunteering.

Opportunity cost of volunteers' time

When volunteers dedicate their time to a cause, they forego other activities they could engage in. This is known as the opportunity cost of their time. This could include missing wages from paid employment, time that could be spent on educational advancement, or even leisure time with family and friends that contributes to their well-being.

The opportunity cost is real and should be acknowledged. For some, that cost may be minimal, but for others, particularly those who are already time-poor or financially constrained, the opportunity cost can be substantial.

When the volunteers in Section 1 said they had no more time to give, what they meant in economic terms was that they had reached the point where their other work and leisure activities were now more valuable to them than their volunteering.

Opportunity costs of diverted resources

Resources, whether financial or material, are finite. When organisations allocate resources to manage and facilitate volunteer programs, those resources are diverted from other potential uses. For example, an organisation may choose to invest in a volunteer program aimed at environmental clean-up, but the same funds could be used to support other social initiatives, like education or healthcare. Each choice comes with trade-offs, and the opportunity cost of the expenditure on volunteering prices the benefits that could have been gained from the next best alternative that was not chosen.

However, when it is said that money is "diverted" to volunteering, it is important to remember that this is often a positive form of economic redistribution. While this money could indeed have been used for other welfare-improving projects, it is also true that volunteering often supports causes and fills gaps that are not otherwise funded or sufficiently addressed by other means.

Understanding these trade-offs is essential for organisations to make informed decisions that align with their mission and the greater social good.

Benefits

Commercial benefits relate to the tangible financial gains and economic value that arise directly and indirectly from volunteer activities. One of these benefits is the producers' surplus, which refers to the extra profit that local businesses earn from the sale of products and services that facilitate volunteering. This added income has a ripple effect on the local economy, promoting its growth and long-term sustainability.

There is also what is termed the productivity premium. This concept captures how volunteering benefits the workforce. The experience and skills gained by volunteers often translate into increased efficiency and value in their professional lives. The spillover of these skills enhances organisational productivity, creating a mutually beneficial situation for both employers and employees. Together, these commercial benefits amplify the overall positive economic impact of volunteering within the community.

[9]These were all top-five issues reported by volunteer managers (Section 2).

Equation 1: Productivity premium formula

$$\textbf{Productivity Premium} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} (C_{Li} \times P_{Mi} \times V_{Ni} \times H_{Wi})$$

Where:

- *Productivity Premium* is the total productivity premium for the population summed over all 10-year age cohorts.
- $\sum_{i=1}^{n}$ indicates the sum over *n* different 10 year age cohorts.
- C_{Li} is the replacement cost of labour for the ith age cohort.
- P_{Mi} is the productivity multiplier of labour for the ith age cohort.
- V_{Ni} is the number of volunteers also in paid employment of labour for the ith age cohort.
- H_{Wi} is the average hours worked per week for the ith age cohort.

Civic benefits primarily accrue, in the economic sense, to the public purse. By extension, they continue through to society as a whole. First among these is the role volunteering plays in employment. The money spent on volunteer-related activities stimulates job creation in various sectors. This does more than just add value to the economy; it also helps the government save on welfare costs, reducing the financial burden it would otherwise have to shoulder.

Another source of civic benefit comes from the taxes levied on volunteer-motivated expenditure. The significant revenues government collects in this regard is returned to the community as essential public services like hospitals, schools, and road infrastructure, enhancing the overall quality of life for residents.

A further civic benefit enjoyed is the contribution of volunteers' labour. If this labour were to be replaced with paid employees, the resulting economic cost would be substantial. Since volunteers often fulfill roles that are not commercially viable, they save the government from incurring these expenses while maintaining current standards of living.

Individual benefits stand apart from commercial and civic benefits, in that they are directly enjoyed by the volunteers themselves. The concept of 'well-being' serves as an umbrella term to capture the range of emotional, psychological, and even physical advantages that come from volunteering.

When individuals engage in altruistic activities, they often report higher levels of happiness, life satisfaction, and a sense of purpose. This enhanced well-being is not just a nebulous feeling; it can have real-world implications. For instance, increased happiness and lower stress levels can lead to better physical health, which in turn could result in fewer medical expenses and a longer, more fulfilling life.

Additionally, volunteering often provides opportunities for social interaction and skill-building, contributing to an individual's personal development and social connectivity. These benefits to the individual, while perhaps less tangible than commercial or civic gains, are nonetheless real and quantifiable.

Self-rated life satisfaction scales like this are regarded as reliable measures of well-being for several reasons.

Foremost, they are straightforward and easy to administer, offering broad accessibility. They also capture the nuanced, subjective experiences that are crucial for a holistic understanding of well-being. Importantly, they have been found to correlate well with other objective and subjective indicators, such as income and health status, and demonstrate good test-retest reliability. They are also adaptable to diverse cultural settings.

For those reasons, life satisfaction scales are utilised by a wide range of stakeholders, including academic researchers, government bodies, healthcare providers, economists, corporations, and international organisations like the World Bank and United Nations. Their widespread use across multiple sectors attests to their reliability and versatility in measuring well-being.

The approach to pricing the surplus life satisfaction attributable to volunteering is based on the recent work of Daniel Fujiwara of the London School of Economics. Fujiwara's method centres on the relationship between the natural logarithm of income (ln[income]) and life satisfaction. In his 2021 research, Fujiwara found that the coefficient for ln(income) is 1.25 when life satisfaction is measured on a 1-7 scale.

Equation 2: Consumers' surplus of volunteering

$$\text{Consumers' Surplus} = \left[\frac{f'(\ln(M))}{M}\right]^{-1} = \frac{M}{\beta_y}$$

To translate that coefficient for ln(income) to the 1-100 scale of the Public Survey, the original value of 1.25 is multiplied by 100/7, yielding a converted coefficient, denoted as β_y, of 17.86.

$$\beta_Y = \frac{100}{7} \text{ x } 1.25 = 17.86$$

Using this to calculate a consumer's surplus for 1-point of life satisfaction on the 1-100 scale, reference is made to the average annual earnings data for the ACT residents, which was most recently $1,611.70 per week (M).

Input-output modelling

The value of expenditure associated with volunteering in the ACT can be understood in two contexts. First, the amounts spent by individuals, businesses and government on volunteering reveal a value that the community perceives in the activity. Second, expenditure on volunteering creates a change in final demand that has an economic impact on employment, output and gross state product. The economic impact includes the impact on intermediate goods and the compensation of employees.

Analysis of the total impact, including indirect effects, is based on an understanding that industries, and individual companies within these industries, do not exist in a vacuum, but use each other's products to produce their own. Thus, an increase in demand for one industry's products leads to increases in the demand for the products of other 'linked' industries.

An input–output representation of the economy comprises a set of industries that are linked by these input–output or intermediate relationships and by the final demand for each industry's output. The model used in this report is the ACT Regional Input–Output Matrix (RIOM) model.

Broadly speaking, input–output modelling examines how different industries interact to produce final demand. For example, a dairy farmer (as part of the agriculture industry) may sell some of their milk to a cheesemaker (part of the Manufacturing industry), who uses it as an ingredient. This company in turn sells some of its output to a retail wholesaler (part of the Wholesale Trade industry), who sells some of it to a volunteer-involving organisation, who passes it on in a meal to a homeless person.

The same milk has been sold several times, but only the last transaction represents final demand. Thus, the inputs required by one industry form part of the demand for the products of another.

There are two major types of input–output model: open and closed models. In open models, the labour and wages of employees and the gross operating surplus of companies are treated as primary inputs in the production of goods and services; if you want to produce more widgets, you must employ more widget makers. This type of model captures the direct and indirect effects of changes in demand in one industry on the other industries in the economy.

By contrast, RIOM is a closed model that includes the household sector as a separate industry. This enables the consideration of induced effects of changes in demand. Induced effects reflect the changes in consumer spending resulting from changes in economic activity and therefore in employment. The household sector is considered as an 'industry' whose outputs are labour, and whose inputs consist of consumer spending; if you create more employment, you also create an increase in demand from the household sector for consumer goods like food, accommodation, entertainment and so on.

RIOM applies the ABS 2020-21 transaction tables in conjunction with demand and employment information for each Australian state and territory to model the impact of changes in demand on these regional economies, estimating changes in their output, employment and gross state product (GSP).

The transaction tables used in the model identify 60 industries across 19 industry sectors. For expenditure allocated to each industry sector, a unique multiplier effect is calculated estimating the impact on gross supply, output, GSP (following the value-added method), employment, wages, imports, and taxation.

Equation 3: Leontief multiplier

$$(1\text{-}X\text{-}C)^{-1} \times \mathbf{LV_E} = \Delta \mathbf{O}$$

$\mathbf{LV_E}$ = vector of volunteering expenditure
$\Delta \mathbf{O}$ = change in total output
X = transaction table of intermediate demand
C = table of induced consumption demand

As previously noted, the producers of volunteering (the volunteers and the organisations that involve them) in the ACT spent a combined amount of $1.0 billion (direct costs) on volunteering-related expenditure in 2023. This figure represents final demand in four main industry categories:

- community services
- road transport
- retail trade, and
- accommodation and food services.

The expenditure on volunteering in the ACT has an economic impact that includes a combination of increased output by industries directly subject to increased volunteering-related demand, increased output by suppliers to those industries and their suppliers, as well as increased output by all industries that have a role in supplying the demand of increased expenditure by households, generated by increased wages.

Changes in employment and GSP are proportional to changes in output following the constant return to scale assumption inherent in input–output models. A number of the assumptions that underpin the analysis are disclosed here:

- The motivating expenditure for the analysis is the estimated expenditure in 2023. Unless explicitly stated and adjusted for, all data is sourced from that period.
- Financial multipliers are calculated using the ACT RIOM model. This model is derived from the ABS 2020-21 the ACT Input–Output Table. Financial multipliers are assumed to be consistent between 2023 and 2020-21.
- Volunteering activities were fully realised within the ACT in 2023. Investment expenditure is limited to items included in the survey responses, which are assumed to represent typical annual expenditure.
- Impacts are calculated based on direct, indirect (intermediate inputs), and household consumption effects. Increases in gross operating surplus or taxation revenue are not assumed to directly result in increased expenditure in the ACT economy (the government sector is not closed).
- Where demand results in importation of goods or services from outside the ACT (interstate or overseas), no further impact is assumed on the economy.

Impacts across alpha-coded industry sectors and by outputs, GSP and employment are shown in the tables below.

Table 1: Australian and New Zealand Standard Industrial Classification of industries by division

Sector	Code	Sector	Code
Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing	A	Financial and Insurance Services	K
Mining	B	Rental, Hiring and Real Estate Services	L
Manufacturing	C	Professional, Scientific and Technical Services	M
Electricity, Gas, Water and Waste Services	D	Administrative and Support Services	N
Construction	E	Public Administration and Safety	O
Wholesale Trade	F	Education and Training	P
Retail Trade	G	Health Care and Social Assistance	Q
Accommodation and Food Services	H	Arts and Recreation Services	R
Transport, Postal and Warehousing	I	Other Services	S
Information Media and Telecommunications	J		

APPENDIX D: ABS comparison

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) measures volunteering in Australia in two ways.

The Census of Population and Housing (2006, 2011, 2016 and 2021) recorded people who spent time doing unpaid voluntary work through an organisation or group in the 12 months prior to Census night, excluding work done:

- as part of paid employment
- if the main reason is to qualify for government benefit; obtain an educational qualification; or due to a community work order, or
- for a family business.

The examples given were voluntary work for sporting teams, youth groups, schools, or religious organisations.

This is broadly aligned with the definition of formal volunteering used in the Public Survey but excludes workplace volunteering (facilitated by employers) and volunteering aligned to an educational outcome, categories allowed for by the Volunteering Australia definition.

The 2021 Census results found that 18.4% of residents of the ACT volunteered, a large drop from the 2016 Census (24.3%). That said, the 2021 Census was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, when many parts of Australia were in lockdown and movements within, into and out of Australia were tightly controlled.

Regardless of the timing, the ABS recognises that this figure significantly underestimates the absolute rate of volunteering in Australia. To better understand the quantum of volunteering in the community, the ABS began including questions on volunteering in their General Social Survey (GSS) in 2002. The GSS captures data on the social characteristics, well-being, and social experiences of people in Australia in greater detail than the Census.

Following extensive community consultation, the ABS updated its definition of volunteering in the 2019 GSS from, '*The provision of unpaid help willingly undertaken in the form of time, service or skills, to an organisation or group, excluding work done overseas,*' to better align with Volunteering Australia's 2015 definition, *'Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.'* With this in mind, the ABS also redesigned the GSS to distinguish informal volunteering, while maintaining the longitudinal integrity of the extant questions on formal volunteering.

Also conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the most recent iteration of the GSS in 2020 collected data from approximately 5,304 Australian households but excluded people who live in very remote parts of Australia.

The 2020 GSS found the following for the ACT residents:

- 30.9% of residents of the ACT aged 15 years and over, participated in unpaid voluntary work through an organisation in 2020 (formal volunteering).
- 38.9% of ACT residents aged 15 years and over participated in informal volunteering in the four weeks prior to the survey.[10]

These findings are notably higher than the Census results, but still well short of the 41.1% of formal volunteers, 52.6% of informal volunteers, and 74.6% of the ACT residents aged 15 aged years and over total volunteers revealed in this report.

The ABS is careful to clarify that their GSS figures are not summable, as no effort has been made to allow for double counting (people who reported volunteering both formally and informally). The ABS also notes that it is unknown if the volunteering figures can be safely extrapolated to estimate an annual rate of informal volunteering or if the data can be reliably compared to previous periods.

[10] Informal volunteering is defined by the ABS as the provision of unpaid work/support to non-household members, excluding that provided only to family members living outside the household.

So how might the differences in findings between the Census, GSS and Public Survey used in this report be explained?

The State of Volunteering in Queensland Report of 2020 was used to test the quality of the Public Survey methodology. In that study, the same group of respondents were randomly presented one of two distinct questions about whether they volunteered, or not.

Half the survey respondents were asked the GSS questions on volunteering participation exactly as they appeared in the GSS. The second group were presented with a detailed definition of volunteering and a series of volunteering options to choose from, as per the question presented at the top of Section 1 in this report.

A detailed discussion of the method and findings can be read in the State of Volunteering in Queensland Report of 2020. However, as with this report, the research revealed significantly higher rates of volunteering participation using the Public Survey questions over the GSS questions.

Those results were consistent with the findings of the 2019 State of Volunteering Report in Tasmania, in which a representative online panel was used to survey 403 respondents over a two-week period in April 2019; followed by a second set of 315 telephone interviews undertaken in May 2019. In that study, there were no statistically significant differences in the responses between the two cohorts when comparing participation rates in volunteering or the number of hours volunteered per month.

Four other State of Volunteering Reports using the Public Survey method were conducted in New South Wales, Victoria, Australian Capital Territory and Tasmania between 2013 and 2021. All returned consistently higher rates of volunteering participation than the Census and GSS collections over the same period.

Besides the differences in the questions asked and context provided to survey respondents, there are other material differences between the Census, GSS and the Public Survey that may further explain the differences in the reported rates of volunteering participation.

- The length of the survey instruments.
  - According to the ABS, the census takes an average of 30 minutes to complete, and the GSS takes 90 minutes to complete. The average time to complete the Public Survey in 2023 was under eight minutes (nationally).
  - Respondents may become disinterested of fatigued when faced with a lengthy survey. This can lead to lower response rates and less accurate or thoughtful responses as participants rush through questions to complete the survey quickly.
- The framing of the survey instruments.
  - The Census and GSS are broad surveys covering a wide range of topics, whereas the Public Survey is specific to volunteering.
  - When a survey covers a wide range of unrelated topics or frequently switches from one theme to another, respondents can experience cognitive overload. They may find it challenging to stay focused and provide well-thought-out responses. This can result in more errors and less reliable data.
- The relative positioning of volunteering questions in the Census and GSS survey instruments.
  - Census question 51 of 66 and GSS section 7.9 of 16 are about volunteering.
  - The later a question is asked, the more likely it is that the risk factors mentioned above will impact the quality of response data.

It is hypothesised that these factors are as significant as the differences in the questions themselves in explaining why the Public Survey methodology reveals a rate of volunteering participation that is much higher than what has been reported by the ABS.

This study's relative focus, coupled with its established test-retest reliability, instils a high degree of confidence in the accuracy of the findings presented in this report, complementing the existing work of the ABS.

APPENDIX E: Economic analysis in plain English

Understanding the economic impact of volunteering aids in efficient resource allocation, enabling governments and organisations to maximise the impact of volunteers by directing funds and resources strategically. Policymakers, particularly those in government and treasury departments, rely on data to make informed decisions about funding programs across all sectors. Quantifying the economic impact of volunteering allows for like-for-like comparisons, facilitating decision-making processes.

For instance, by assessing the economic value of volunteer hours in the healthcare sector compared to investments in public infrastructure, such as building a road, governments can allocate resources based on the cost-effectiveness and societal benefits of each sector. If the government lacks an understanding of the economic impact of volunteering when making allocative decisions, it risks undervaluing volunteer contributions, potentially leading to their oversight.

Economic analysis further underscores the significance of volunteering as a form of social investment, contributing to the development of social capital and community well-being. It additionally recognises volunteering's role in workforce development, providing individuals with skills and networking opportunities.

By recognising the economic value of volunteering, stakeholders can ensure that volunteer efforts are appropriately valued and integrated into decision-making processes, ultimately enhancing social investment and community well-being.

The costs and benefits of volunteering to the ACT, 2023

Costs ($ million)			
Direct costs		*Sub-totals*	*Totals*
Volunteers' expenses	$640.6		
Volunteer involving organisation expenses	$351.8	$992.4	
Opportunity costs			
Volunteers' time	$1,569.0		
Volunteering investments	$41.8	$1,610.8	$2,603.1
Benefits ($ million)			
Commercial benefits			
Producers' surplus	$168.0		
Productivity premium	$3,118.5	$3,286.5	
Civic benefits			
Employment	$606.4		
Taxes	$227.7		
Volunteers' labour	$3,311.4	$4,145.5	
Individual benefits			
Volunteers' dividend		$6,642.0	**$14,074.0**
Social return on investment			*$11,470.8*
Benefit: cost ratio	**5.4 : 1**		

Direct costs

Cash investments in volunteering.

Volunteer expenses

Cash investments made by volunteers in their volunteering activity.

For example: Sara is a volunteer wildlife carer. Above and beyond the time she donates, she purchases specialty training as well as foods, medicines, and habitats for her injured charges. In 2023, she built a semi-permanent Stage 2 refuge in her backyard for animals on the path to release.

Volunteer-involving organisation expenses

Cash investments made by volunteering-involving organisations in support of their volunteers.

For example: The Care Club is a medium-sized volunteer-involving organisation supporting 250 volunteers. In addition to purchasing uniforms, tools, and equipment for their volunteers, they employ and resource dedicated personnel to recruit, roster and professionally develop their volunteer team.

Note: *This figure includes investments made by government in volunteering as either volunteer-involving organisations themselves, or as donors to community-based volunteer-involving organisations.*

Opportunity costs

In choosing to invest time or money in volunteering, an individual or volunteer-involving organisation misses out on the opportunity to spend that money on something else.

The benefit that they would have received from the 'next best' use of their money is – in economic terms – an opportunity cost.

Volunteers' time

It is assumed that the next best use of a volunteer's time is paid work. The benefit they forgo by volunteering for one hour is the money they would receive in their hand for one hour's work.

For example: Suraiya volunteers two hours per week toward an adult literacy program at her local library. As she is otherwise employed part-time, the opportunity cost of her volunteering would be her equivalent take-home pay for two hours work per week.

Note: *If Suraiya was unemployed, there would be no opportunity cost to her time using our method.*

Volunteering investments

It is assumed that the next best – and safest – use of the money spent by volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations on volunteering (direct costs) would be to invest in Australian government-backed 10-year bonds.

For example: Callum spends $500 of his own money each year doing small jobs for his elderly neighbours. If he chose instead to invest that money in 10-year bonds, he would make $4.50 profit. The opportunity to make $4.50 has therefore been lost to him by his choice to volunteer.

Note: *We can assume from this that Callum receives personal benefit from his volunteering that is at least equal to $4.50.*

Commercial benefits

Benefits to employers and industry because of volunteering and its investments.

Producers' surplus

The money invested in volunteering (direct costs) is spent with producers and suppliers all around the Territory. The profit made on these transactions by the producers and suppliers is known as the producers' surplus.

For example: Jabiri purchases a uniform to referee junior football games on the weekend. The profit made by the uniform retailer is a direct benefit to the Territory, as the producer will now re-spend it in the economy.

Note: The intermediate profits made within the supply chain, and those that occur outside the Territory, are not counted here as benefits.

Productivity premium

The productivity premium is the self-reported extent to which a person's volunteering impacts (positively or negatively) their 'day job'.

Revealed here as a net benefit, it is enjoyed by employers, as they do not have to pay for the knowledge, skills and experience their employees gain through volunteering.

For example: Amy volunteers as an assistant director with a community theatre group. In that role she acquires and hones a range of organisational and leadership skills that are relevant and transferable to her paid employment as a project coordinator with a construction company.

Note: *The productivity premium enjoyed by the beneficial recipients of acts of volunteering (for example, Amy's theatre troupe) are not counted in this study. As such, our productivity premium is likely to be a significant underestimate.*

Civic benefits

Benefits enjoyed by the community due to volunteering and its investments.

Employment

Producers that supply goods and services to volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations necessarily employ people to fulfil this demand. Employment here refers to the jobs created by the investments in volunteering.

For example: The retailer that sells Jabiri his uniform to referee weekend football matches allocates a percentage of each sale to their labour costs. As they and others sell more and more uniforms, this adds up to real part- and full-time equivalent jobs in the economy.

Note: *Another way to look at this employment is as an equivalent welfare cost avoided by government.*

Taxes

Producers that supply goods and services to volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations necessarily pay taxes on those sales. Taxes here refer to the sum of local, state, and federal taxes they incur.

For example: The retailer that sells Jabiri his uniform to referee weekend football matches pays a direct and indirect percentage of each sale to the government in the form of taxes.

Note: *The government redistributes these taxes to deliver benefits to the whole community through, for example, hospitals, roads, and schools.*

Volunteer labour

This is what it would take to replace the labour of all the ACT's volunteers at a fair market rate. As a saving enjoyed by volunteer-involving organisations, government, and the community, it is expressed here as a benefit.

For example: Taylor normally earns a gross wage of $40/hour. With superannuation and other payroll expenses, the actual cost to their employer is an equivalent of $46/hour.

When Taylor donates their time as a volunteer to the Red Cross, this is what their time should truly be valued at (noting that this is not the only benefit realised).

Note: *The variable effect of age on labour cost is allowed for in this study.*

Individual benefits

The benefits returned to individual volunteers.

Volunteers' dividend

The sum of less tangible benefits enjoyed by volunteers above and beyond (in direct and opportunity costs) what they paid to participate.

For example: It costs JC 5 hours and $15 in transport costs to volunteer each week at a local hospice. It's worth so much more to him than that – three times as more, in fact!

Note: *This figure does not include an estimate of the value gained by the hospice patients JC volunteered for, nor the value placed on JCs time by the patient's families or others in the community.*

Value of volunteering

Benefits. The value created by volunteering in the ACT in 2023 is estimated to be $14.1 billion.

Social return on investment

Benefits less costs. Volunteering's social return is estimated here to be $11.5 billion.

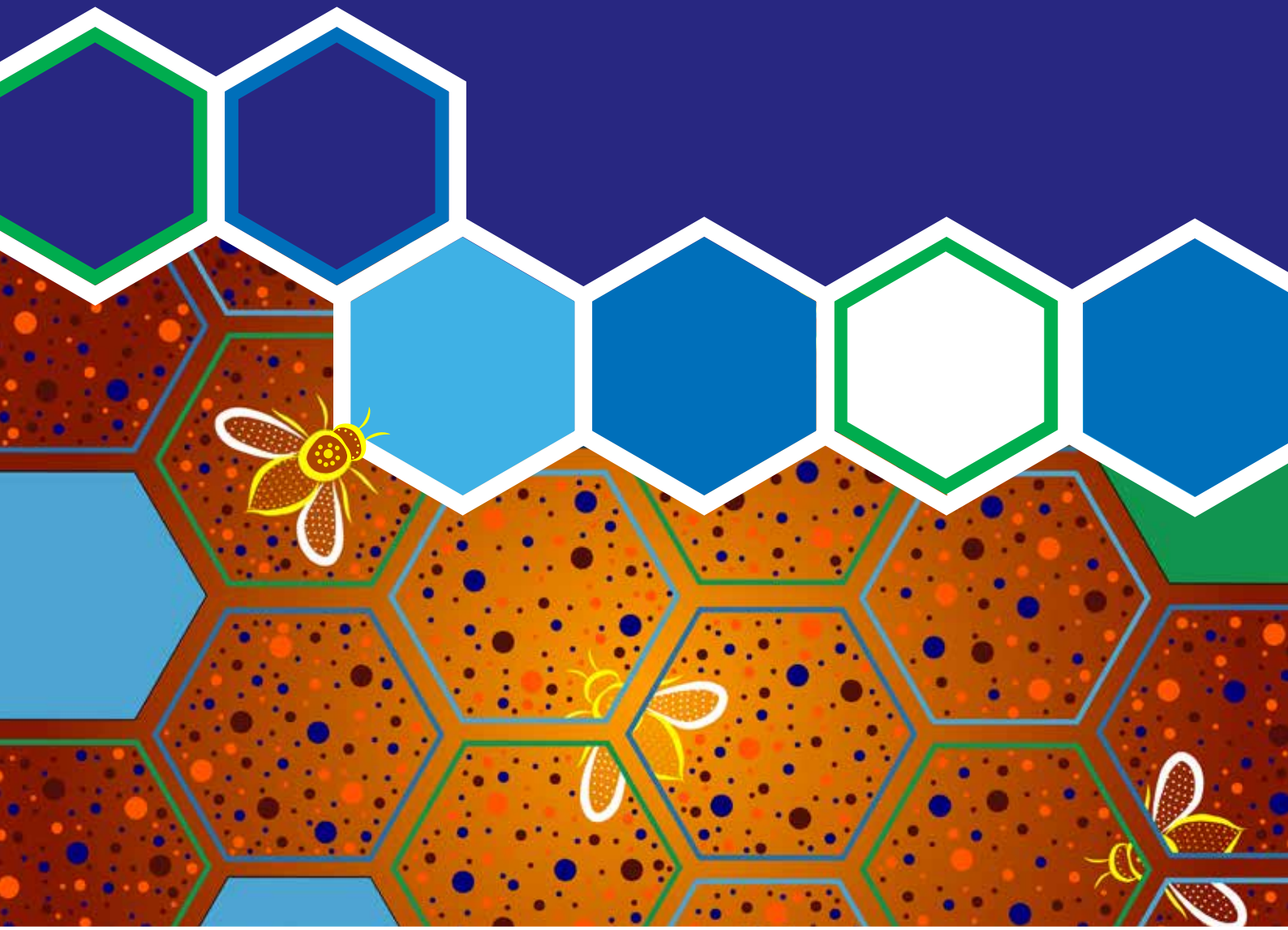
Benefit cost ratio

Benefits divided by costs. Using this method, we can see what each dollar of investment (cost) enables in the community; in this case, $5.40 in benefits.

THE STATE OF VOLUNTEERING

in the Australian Capital Territory (ACT)

2024



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