

2021

**THE LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY FOR THE
AUSTRALIAN CAPITAL TERRITORY**

ACT Volunteering - Update

**Presented by
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I am so pleased to update the Assembly on the *ACT Volunteering Statement and Action Plan 2018-2021*, as well as provide an opportunity for all to reflect on the dedication and contributions of our city's selfless volunteers, who dedicate their time to create a more kind, connected and caring Canberra.

This update is particularly imperative as we shift our attention to social and community recovery from COVID-19.

Our city's diverse network of volunteers strengthen the fabric of our community by giving so generously to help or empower others through a raft of initiatives, from organising local sports and cultural activities, to protecting and preserving our natural heritage.

Volunteers make our city a fairer, more accessible, sustainable, and inclusive place to live. In recognition of the social, community and economic impacts volunteers have on our community, the *ACT Volunteering Statement and Action Plan* was developed almost four years ago.

The Plan was developed as a central point of reference for volunteering across the Territory to reflect a whole-of-Government and community approach to supporting and recognising the sector.

It is a platform for good practice in volunteer engagement and management and has four high-level principles – recognition, value, diversity and support.

These principles are will:

- Promote volunteering to government, businesses, and the wider community to raise awareness of the many opportunities available and the positive impacts they have across the community.

- Encourage collaboration and link people with meaningful volunteering opportunities.
- Promote volunteering opportunities for people of all cultural backgrounds, ages, abilities and gender identities.
- Support the professional development of volunteers and managers of volunteers and facilitating access to relevant resources.

Today's update to this Assembly will be the last for this iteration of the *ACT Volunteering Statement and Action Plan* as its lifecycle has come to an end.

However, I will take this opportunity to outline the envisaged process of developing a new three-year plan.

I am very excited for this next stage to further invest in and support our city's volunteers and organisations.

Canberra benefits from having the highest rate of volunteering across the nation, with around 36 per cent of adults and 57 per cent of young people contributing their time to our culture of giving.

It is a testament to the motivated, kind, and caring people we are – focused on giving back to the community and making a positive difference in our communities.

There are hundreds of volunteer-involving organisations in the Canberra region which span community services, environment, arts, cultural and sporting clubs.

Our city benefits from the vital services and programs delivered by the ACT Government, some of which rely on the tireless and skilled contribution of volunteers. Their passion and commitment makes our city more connected and inclusive, where people of all skills and all abilities can participate.

It's a great privilege to be part of a government that funds Volunteering ACT, a peak body which both advocates for volunteers and provides services for our community.

During the 2020-21 financial year, almost \$1 million was provided by ACT Government to boost training, development, and opportunities for volunteers to give back to the community through avenues or interests of their choice.

This allocation included a Deed of Grant under the Community Development Program of \$880,696.

An additional \$45,000 was also provided to Volunteering ACT under our COVID-19 Stimulus Rapid Response Grants for its Connection Program, and a further \$5500 was provided under the Participation (Digital Communities) Grants to assist with its Translated Resources Program.

This funding equated to almost \$1million investment – or more precisely \$931,196 – during the past financial year, exemplifying our Government's commitment to supporting our city's key volunteer stakeholder organisation as well as acknowledging the importance of volunteers to our community and economy.

While Volunteering ACT is the peak non-government organisation responsible for the elevation and connection of volunteers, all ACT Government directorates facilitate the involvement of volunteers in many areas, including sport and recreation, health, education, environment, tourism, major events, emergency services, libraries and community services.

Government directorates continue to enhance volunteer good practice through provision, for example, of undertaking background checking free-of-charge for volunteers engaged in regulated activities.

Importantly, our directorates continue to administer various grants programs in key community focus areas – such as seniors, veterans, culturally diverse Canberrans, women, youth and health – supporting scores of community organisations which depend on the work of volunteers.

During the past financial year – in an appropriate COVID-safe way – Government Directorates, including Community Services, actively promoted volunteering opportunities and engagement through myriad communications channels including publications such as the Multicultural e-newsletter, linking with culturally and linguistically diverse Canberrans.

The ACT Diversity register, managed by the ACT Community Services Directorate, continued to encourage diverse representation on government boards, including in voluntary roles.

While COVID-19 has impacted many opportunities to celebrate volunteers in person, we continued to support celebratory and commemorative occasions such as National Volunteer Week and International Volunteer Day, held each year in May and December, and recognised the work the volunteers through our various awards programs across Government.

Last week, the Resilient Australia Awards for the ACT were announced, with the Canberra Relief Network announced as the winner in the Government Award category, and ACT Government's Community Resilience and Crisis Response Team was Highly Commended. The Canberra Relief Network has also been announced as a finalist in the National Resilient Australia Award.

Over 2020 and 2021, the Canberra Relief Network has demonstrated the power and capability of government and community sector organisations working collaboratively, as well as the generous support of Woolworths as our

grocery partner to help us keep running costs as low as possible. Volunteers have been a key part of the CRN's success. Volunteers have been part of every aspect of the CRN's operations over the past year and a half, including taking calls from people in need, placing orders, packing hampers, delivering to households, and connecting people with social supports.

I would like to thank the following community organisations who have been part of the Canberra Relief Network since its commencement in April 2020:

- Canberra City Care
- Canberra Region Community Service
- Communities@Work
- Community Services #1
- Companion House
- Gordon Community Centre
- Gugan Gullah Youth Aboriginal Corporation
- Holy Cross Tuckerbox
- MARSS Australia
- Mustard Seed Uniting Food Pantry
- Red Cross
- St James Uniting Church
- St John's Care
- St Paul's Ginninderra Anglican Church – Helping Hand Food Pantry
- St Vincent de Paul Society (Dickson, Weston Creek, Phillip, Mitchell)
- The Pantry @ Watson
- Tuggeranong Uniting Church
- Uniting Care Kippax
- University of Canberra Food Pantry

- Wesley Uniting Church
- Woden Community Service

I would also like to thank the dedicated staff in Community Services Directorate for their long hours and creative thinking to overcome tricky logistics issues in making the CRN such a success; Volunteering ACT, who demonstrated great empathy and care in taking calls from Canberrans in need at the CRN's Connect Centre; SES volunteers who managed deliveries during the initial stage of lockdown; and Disaster Relief Australia, who managed deliveries for a significant period during the recent lockdown. Where opportunities for volunteers throughout our community remained active during COVID-19 restrictions and lockdowns since March 2020, our Government has made available supplies of personal protective equipment to organisations requiring materials.

While the pandemic continues to have a significant impact on the volunteering sector in our community in terms of the way services and support are delivered, and indeed how volunteers are engaged, our recovery from COVID-19 and our new normal of living alongside it going forward is being led in part by our city's volunteers.

Through the ACT COVID-19 Pathway Forward, which came into effect on 15 October 2021, volunteers will be essential in helping to build connections and resilience as we begin our journey out of the response phase and into our new sense of 'normal'.

As we continue to hit milestones and COVID-safety prevails through vaccination uptake and entrenched protocols, we will be looking to our

volunteers to re-engage to their essential roles in linking our community through the arts, sport, worship, nature, culture and festivals.

Over the next two years, as our city – and indeed the world – continues COVID-19 recovery, we will continue to explore ways to minimising barriers to volunteering for people with disabilities; better promoting government grants opportunities for volunteer organisations; and developing new resources to support volunteers, to ensure a more inclusive volunteering community.

It is with this in mind, I am pleased to outline the envisaged consultation process for our city's new volunteering policy to succeed the current *ACT Volunteering Statement and Action Plan*.

To develop the new policy will be seeking the ideas and initiatives of volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations across the Territory, as well as the broader Canberra community.

We will be exploring more integrated, person-centred and effective supports for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations, as well as individual wellbeing, social inclusion and community connectedness.

The consultation process will be achieved through direct engagement with stakeholders and seeking feedback via surveys and other community engagement and communications channels and activities.

I am excited to hear from our community over the coming months and next year launch of our city's new volunteering plan.

END.