

2020

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

ACT Volunteering Statement Action Plan 2018-2021: 2020 Annual Update

**Presented by
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One of the most precious gifts we can give is our time.

Which is why I am delighted to rise today to acknowledge the efforts and contributions of our city's volunteers.

Three years ago, this Government had the foresight to enshrine in this Legislative Assembly the importance of volunteers – and indeed the benefits of volunteering to our community – through the ACT Volunteering Statement.

It was through this Statement that we as a Government recognised how our diverse network of volunteers have made our city stronger, fairer, more inclusive and more sustainable.

How every week thousands of Canberrans – younger, older, of all abilities and cultural backgrounds – give so generously of their time to help others, organise local sports and cultural activities, and protect and preserve our natural heritage.

By introducing the ACT Volunteering Statement, we affirmed a central point of reference for volunteering in the territory to reflect a whole-of-government and community approach to supporting and recognising the sector.

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

These principles are about:

Ensuring volunteering is **recognised** through promoting volunteering to government, businesses, and the wider community so that everyone is aware of the breadth of opportunities and supports available and the value of volunteering across the community.

Ensuring volunteering is **valuable** by encouraging collaboration and linking people with meaningful volunteering opportunities.

Ensuring volunteering is **diverse** through tailoring promotion of volunteering opportunities for people of all cultural backgrounds, ages, abilities and gender identities.

Ensuring volunteering is **supported** by supporting the professional development of volunteers and managers of volunteers and facilitating access to relevant resources.

To augment the Statement, through an extensive consultation process, we developed an action plan.

The action plan drew on the initiatives and ideas of hundreds of people across the city – everyday Canberrans and members of community organisations – to anoint in daily practice the four principles.

Our action plan calls for more integrated, person-centered and effective support for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations, as well as Individual wellbeing, social inclusion and community connectedness.

In the time of COVID-19, the ACT Volunteering Statement, action plan and principles of recognition, value, diversity and support are now more imperative than ever.

In December 2019, I provided to this Assembly a first update of the ACT Volunteering Statement.

Since that time, from the beginning of January 2020 right through until this very day today, here in this very Assembly, our city has faced enormous challenges and threats – fire, hail, smoke, pandemic, job losses and austerity.

But right there – alongside the Government and community response to these challenges and threats – stood our incredible volunteers making time, where practicable, to support our community.

From ACT Rural Fire Service volunteers on the fire frontlines in Namadgi and ACT State Emergency Services volunteers on rooftops covering hail-damaged homes, to Red Cross friendly phone call makers, people helping to pack food hampers at the Canberra Relief Network warehouse and kind-hearted individuals helping their neighbours, Canberra's volunteers have shone.

The role of our volunteers as we rebuild, reconnect and develop our new normal will be integral in our ability to rebuild our city and our economy. Recognising the role our volunteers play is essential in understanding the needs of our community as we reconnect and rebuild. Our volunteers work across multiple community organisations across our city every day to provide the support needed for Canberrans in need. The impact of COVID-19 on these volunteers has been significant and we need to support our community organisations as they operate without their volunteer base. Alongside this we need to understand how we integrate our volunteers, particularly our older volunteers back into meaningful and safe volunteering work.

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

Canberrans are motivated to volunteer for a variety of reasons but none more so than to give something back to the community and to make a difference in the lives of others.

There are hundreds of volunteer-involving organisations in the Canberra region that span everything from community services, to the arts, to sporting clubs.

In addition, the city benefits from the vital services and programs delivered by the ACT Government that rely on the tireless and skilled contribution of volunteers.

Volunteering is integral to our city's community connectedness and enables people with all skills and all abilities to participate.

When we view volunteering from an economic investment standpoint, our Government supports volunteers through provision of funding to Volunteering ACT, the peak body for volunteering and a key enabler of volunteering services in the ACT.

During the 2019-20 financial year, through a deed of grant, our Government provided Volunteering ACT more than \$800,000 to invest in the training, development and enablement of volunteers to participate in giving back to the community through avenues or interests of their choice.

It was our monetary commitment to the four guiding principles and resulting activities of enhancing volunteering in our community: recognition; value; diversity; and support

It is with a sense of pride and gratitude that we align closely with Volunteering ACT in this aim.

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 have enhanced volunteer good practice through provision, for example, of undertaking background checking free-of-charge for volunteers engaged in regulated activities.

Importantly, our directorates 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.

We actively promote volunteering opportunities and engagement through our myriad communications channels and outreach across government including publications such as our fortnightly Multicultural e-newsletter, linking with culturally and linguistically diverse Canberrans.

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

We also support celebratory and commemorative occasions such as National Volunteer Week and International Volunteer Day, held each year in May and December and recognise the work the volunteers through our various awards programs across Government.

On 5 December 2019, to mark International Volunteer Day, our Government and Volunteering ACT hosted an early morning event in this Assembly to facilitate the connection of prospective volunteers with volunteer organisations.

It was a fabulous event celebrating volunteerism and linking like-minded people, while sharing stories and insights. I very much enjoyed the opportunity to host the event.

Unfortunately, events in May 2020 were cancelled, or re-imagined online, due to COVID-19. Indeed, COVID-19 has had a significant impact on the numbers of volunteers being engaged to support the community due to the wide-spread cancellation of events and face-to-face opportunities.

Where opportunities for volunteers have remained active during COVID-19 our Government has made available supplies of personal protective equipment to organisations requiring materials.

Providing these have helped to keep the wheels turning but also protect our volunteers and community members. Our number one priority during this period.

While the pandemic has had 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 will be led in part by our city's volunteers.

Through our Community Recovery Plan and Roadmap, volunteers will be essential in helping to build connections and resilience as we begin our journey out of the response phase and into recovery.

We will be looking to our volunteers to re-engage to their essential roles in linking our community through the arts, sport, church, nature, culture and festivals, including our wonderful National Multicultural Festival.

Through our investment in volunteering by funding Volunteering ACT, as well as direct grants to volunteer organisations and initiatives, our Government is working to ensure volunteers and volunteering opportunities continue to blossom in Canberra, post-pandemic.

Over the next two years, as we step out of 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.

While there is still much to do, I am proud of the achievements we have made to support volunteering and through such civil engagement, make Canberra a strong, vibrant, diverse and inclusive community.

Our Government looks forward to continuing this work to strengthen our inclusive city so that everyone is welcome and supported to reach their full potential. Our gratitude is with all of our amazing volunteers and volunteer involving organisations.

The giving of time is indeed the most valuable of all commodities – in Canberra we are so blessed to have a wealth of volunteers and volunteering spirit. In Canberra, we are strong together.

END.