



Volunteer Management Activity Evaluation

Department of Social Services

13 Oct 2025



Version and date of publication October 2025

Report title and description Volunteer Management Activity Evaluation

The *Allen + Clarke* Consulting team would like to extend our sincere thanks to the many individuals and organisations across Australia’s volunteering sector who generously contributed their time, insights and expertise to this evaluation. Your reflections and perspectives have been invaluable in shaping the findings and recommendations identified in this report.

All due care and responsibility have been taken in the preparation of this report. This report (including any enclosures and attachments) has been prepared for the exclusive use and benefit of the addressee(s) and solely for the purposes for which it is provided. Allen + Clarke accepts no liability or responsibility if this report is used for an alternative purpose from which it is intended, or by any third party. The information contained in this report is confidential and commercially sensitive.



+61 447 734 185
office@allenandclarke.com.au
www.allenandclarke.com.au



Quality
ISO 9001

Allen + Clarke has been independently certified as compliant with ISO9001:2015 Quality Management Systems



TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0	Executive Summary	4
2.0	Introduction	8
2.1	Volunteer Management Activity	8
2.2	Background to the evaluation	9
2.3	Purpose and structure of this report.....	10
3.0	Method and approach	11
3.1	Value-for-money analysis	12
3.2	Limitations.....	12
4.0	Observations and recommendations	14
4.1	Recommendation 1	22
4.2	Recommendation 2.....	26
4.3	Recommendation 3.....	29
4.4	Recommendation 4.....	33
4.5	Recommendation 5.....	34
4.6	Recommendation 6.....	36
4.7	Recommendation 7.....	38
4.8	Recommendation 8.....	40
4.9	Recommendation 9.....	43
5.0	Conclusion	45
6.0	References	46
Appendix A:	Glossary	50
Appendix B:	Participant summaries	52
Appendix C:	Best practice case studies	55
	Victoria’s consortia model	55
	A statewide approach in design	55
	How the consortia model delivers	55
	The value of the consortia model	56
	Justice Connect’s legal support.....	57
	An invaluable legal support for volunteer organisations	57
	Intersectional volunteering project.....	58
Appendix D:	Value for money analysis	59
	VMA.....	59
	SLRA.....	59



1.0 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Volunteers are essential contributors to Australia’s economy and contribute to improved wellbeing for many Australians. Volunteering generates economic value through the delivery of goods and services, and enables volunteers and their communities to build cohesion, connection and meaning. Despite 56.7% of Australians participating in either formal or informal volunteering in 2022, volunteering rates have been declining since 2010, with a sharp decline during the COVID-19 pandemic. This has created significant challenges for Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs), and communities.¹

The Australian Government implemented the redesigned Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) model in 2021. The VMA is a national initiative under the Australian Government’s Families and Communities Program (Outcome 2.1) and aims to create a thriving volunteering culture by supporting local communities in meeting the demand for capable and diverse volunteers. Under the redesigned program, the Australian Government is distributing \$37.5 million over 5 years (1 July 2021 to 30 June 2026) through seven state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies (VPBs) to address the evolving needs for skilled and committed volunteers by creating sustainable volunteering practices.

To ensure the VMA continues to meet its objectives, the Department of Social Services (DSS) engaged *Allen + Clarke* to evaluate the program’s performance, including the Specialist Legal Resources to Support Volunteer-Run Community Organisations Activity (SLRA) delivered by Justice Connect. The evaluation assessed the effectiveness, appropriateness, implementation, and efficiency of the VMA program, including the SLRA, to determine their long-term sustainability and alignment with the broader goals of enhancing community participation and volunteer support. Key observations from this evaluation are outlined in **Table 1**, with recommendations for future delivery provided in **Table 2**.

The evaluation found that the VMA is delivering activities aligned with its objectives. It is increasing the capability and capacity of VIOs to engage, support and manage volunteers through online management tools and breaking down volunteering barriers for identified priority groups. A majority (70%) of surveyed VIOs indicated that the VMA had delivered activities aligned with their expectations and increased their capacity to manage and support volunteers.

The VIOs also identified stronger alignment with nationally consistent strategies, improved awareness of best practice volunteer management, and increased use of online resources and training modules. These evaluation findings support the program theory that targeted resources and consistent approaches across jurisdictions enhance VIO capability. This evidence also points to early shifts in inclusivity and diversity, as demonstrated by the significant improvement in adoption of inclusive and culturally safe practices. This indicates that with improvement in the implementation of the program, the VMA is likely to deliver the intermediate and longer-term outcomes envisaged in the program logic model.

¹ Volunteering Australia, *National Strategy for Volunteering: 2023-2033*, available at: [Volunteering Strategy](#).



Evidence from this evaluation shows that the VMA is being implemented differently across Australia with VPBs designing and delivering tailored approaches for their own jurisdictions. This localised approach aligns with international best practice with a [2025 research report](#) delivered for the UK Government Department for Culture, Media and Sport reflecting that 'locally-led approaches can improve efficiency and outcomes in both the short and longer-term.' An example of this can be found in a successful consortia model developed in Victoria, whereby Volunteering Victoria is partnering with eight local organisations across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria to deliver the VMA, including training sessions, one-on-one mentoring, peer learning circles and the development of resources for engaging with priority groups. The VMA also provides a positive economic contribution to Australia. Based on a value for money (VfM) analysis, the evaluation has determined that the economic value of volunteer work facilitated by the VMA far exceeds the program's cost. The return on investment (ROI) is estimated to be 2.78, reflecting an annual benefit of \$22.26 million, well above the \$8 million annual investment. For SLRA, the ROI is even greater, generating a benefit of \$8.70 return for every one dollar invested in the program.

The evaluation highlights opportunities for improvement for the VMA. Qualitative data indicates that there is a lack of clarity about the role of Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) under the redesigned VMA, and how this relates to the services provided by VPBs. The evaluation notes VRCs have received funding to support their transition and to adapt their services to align with the VMA every year since the VMA was redesigned in 2021.

Some VMA stakeholders also said the quantum of annual VMA funding did not support the sustainable delivery of volunteer management activities. Smaller VPBs reflected that the fixed costs of establishing and maintaining impactful VMA delivery, such as staffing, partnership development, and volunteering infrastructure, are not proportionate to the level of funding received. Some VIOs also reflected that small amounts of grant funding attached to short term projects created uncertainty in sustainable project delivery. Overall, the evaluation considers the current VMA model is appropriate for supporting VIOs to build capacity and capability. At a structural level, the jurisdictional-led approach enables targeted and tailored approaches to support VIOs. However, there is an opportunity to increase DSS' oversight and communication of the program, to ensure jurisdictional VMA programs are delivered in line with government expectations. This includes greater articulation of the roles and responsibilities of actors within the VMA, as distinct to their role in the broader volunteer sector. Continuous improvement of the VMA model should be encouraged through reform of performance measurement and reporting so that the VMA remains proportionate and focused on outcomes.



Table 1: Key observations

1	Alignment with objectives: The VMA is delivering activities aligned with its objectives, including activities focused on enhancing the capability of VIOs to engage and manage volunteers, with opportunities for improvements in the way it is implemented.
2	The VMA is delivered differently across Australia: VPBs adopted jurisdictional-specific approaches to implementing VMA, creating different experiences and expectations of VMA for VIOs and VRCs.
3	Relationships between actors delivering the VMA have varying maturity: Following the redesign of VMA, new relationships and collaborations were built, although there appears to be varying maturity in collaboration between VPBs, VRCs and VIOs in some jurisdictions.
4	Challenges in targeting priority groups: There was support from the sector to target priority groups through the VMA. However, there was concern that limited resources and broad targeting diluted impact. Despite improved practices to support inclusion, this has not yet translated into more diverse volunteer participation.
5	Legal support meeting needs: Legal resources under the SLRA, delivered by Justice Connect are well-received and effectively address the legal support needs of VIOs, but could be enhanced through greater awareness of the SLRA among VIOs and VRCs
6	Strong economic return: The VMA delivers significant economic value, with a ROI of 2.78—translating to \$22.26 million in annual benefits against an \$8 million annual cost. The SLRA has an even higher ROI of 8.7, which translates to a benefit of \$8.70 return for every one dollar invested.
7	Opportunities for governance improvement: The VMA's implementation could be more effective with clearer roles and enhanced involvement of DSS in decision-making.
8	Need for smarter performance measurement: The current performance measurement framework is complex and burdensome, especially for small grants. There is a need to streamline data collection, use risk-based performance measures, and leverage technology to enhance efficiency



Table 2: Recommendations

<p>1.</p> <p>Maintain a focus on jurisdictional-led approaches in VMA but strengthen national co-ordination and adoption of better practice through revised governance arrangements (rec 6), improved role clarity (rec 6), implementation guidance (rec 5), and communication of lessons learned.</p>	<p>2.</p> <p>VPBs have a role to play in identifying/selecting individual priority groups based on jurisdictional needs and risks.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. DSS to identify a selection of priority groups. b. VPBs to choose individual priority groups out of the selection. c. DSS to agree on selected priority groups. 	<p>3.</p> <p>Refine the VMA funding model to clearly distinguish national projects from other components of the program and review the allocation to reflect jurisdictional needs.</p>
<p>4.</p> <p>Encourage longer-term funding rounds at VPB level, with transparency in the distribution of VMA funds.</p>	<p>5.</p> <p>DSS to provide oversight of VPB implementation frameworks, including change management strategies to strengthen sector relationships.</p>	<p>6.</p> <p>Review governance arrangements to ensure:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. DSS has appropriate oversight of VMA b. roles and responsibilities of actors within VMA are clear.
<p>7.</p> <p>Improve transparency of the VMA program to promote understanding within the volunteering sector.</p>	<p>8.</p> <p>Refocus VMA performance measures to improve assessment of effectiveness and minimise reporting burden on the volunteering sector.</p>	<p>9.</p> <p>To promote efficiency in data delivery and assessment, review whether technology could be utilised to streamline data collection processes.</p>



2.0 INTRODUCTION

2.1 Volunteer Management Activity

In 2021, the Australian Government, through DSS, implemented the redesigned VMA model. This followed recommendations from the 2018 evaluation of the VMA², and was further refined based on findings from the 2022 post implementation review.

The redesigned VMA model is a national initiative which sits under the Australian Government's Families and Communities Program (Outcome 2.1).³ It aims to strengthen volunteering across Australia, and to create a thriving, inclusive, and diverse volunteering culture by supporting local communities in meeting the demand for capable and diverse volunteers.

The VMA model is delivered through two funded activities: (1) the VMA, and (2) the SLRA. Under the redesigned program, the Australian Government distributes up to a total of \$37.5 million to the seven state and territory VPBs for the period 2021-2026. There was also \$6.6 million provided in transition funding for VRCs. Transition funding has continued, including outside of the VMA program since 2022-23. DSS also provides \$250,000 in annual funding to Justice Connect to deliver the SLRA.

VMA

The VMA seeks to enhance the capacity and capabilities of VIOs to attract, engage, support, and manage volunteers across Australia, particularly those from identified priority population groups. This includes the implementation of activities to develop online resources, training materials and resources that support VIOs to build their capacity and capabilities to recruit, support, and retain volunteers.

The VMA is delivered and implemented through seven different state and territory VPBs, each responsible for developing and implementing strategies within their respective jurisdictions. The VPBs are also expected to work collaboratively with VRCs and DSS to support the transition to the redesigned VMA model.

SLRA

The SLRA aims to deliver legal support to VIOs and to promote best practice resources that help develop their capacity and capabilities to engage and manage volunteers legally, with the goal of being more effective in creating cohesive and resilient volunteer communities. This includes the implementation of activities that support the development of online resources to help VIOs understand the legal implications of engaging with, and managing, volunteers.

² Department of Social Services. (2018). [Report on the review of the VMA](#). DSS.

³ Department of Social Services. (2022). [Annual report 2021-22](#). DSS.



2.2 Background to the evaluation

Allen + Clarke was engaged by DSS to undertake a comprehensive evaluation of the VMA and the SLRA, funded under the VMA program. The evaluation assessed the effectiveness, appropriateness, implementation, and efficiency of both activities, with a view to providing insights into their long-term sustainability and alignment with the broader goals of enhancing community participation and volunteer support.

2.2.1 Aims and objectives

The aim of the evaluation was to explore the extent to which the VMA programs have delivered against their intended workplans. The evaluation also examined the outcomes and impacts of the activities towards improving VIO capacity and capabilities to engage, retain, and legally manage volunteers, and how they have improved volunteering among priority populations.⁴

The evaluation also considered the extent to which the activities were implemented as planned, and whether the funding and administrative arrangements were VfM. The key evaluation questions (KEQs) guiding this evaluation are highlighted in **Table 3**.

Table 3: Key evaluation questions

Appropriateness	1. To what extent do the activities meet VIOs' capacity and capability to attract, engage, support and manage volunteers, including identified priority groups?
Appropriateness	2. To what extent are there evidence-based links between the VMA program activities (including implementation of consistent strategies in the delivery of VMA) and short-term outcomes demonstrated in the program logic.
Appropriateness	3. To what extent were grantees sufficiently resourced and supported to effectively implement the funded activities?
Appropriateness	4. How does the VMA funding allocation model address the unique operational contexts of VIOs within different jurisdictions?
Implementation	5. What are the benefits and challenges of delivering the VMA model across different jurisdictions?
Implementation	6. To what extent were the funded activities effectively implemented as planned?

⁴ The six priority populations for the VMA program are people with disability, First Nations peoples, newly arrived migrants, vulnerable women, young people aged 12-18 and people who are unemployed.



Effectiveness	7. To what extent has the VMA responded effectively to challenges identified in the post-implementation review?
Effectiveness	8. What evidence is there that the funded activities have the intent and capacity to continue beyond the end of the grant period?
Effectiveness	9. To what extent do outcomes vary among different types of volunteer organisations and identified priority groups of volunteers?
Effectiveness	10. What outcomes, intended and unintended, have been observed to date?
Efficiency	11. To what extent have the funded activities delivered legal support to VIOs to engage and manage volunteers legally?
Efficiency	12. To what extent have the funded activities increased the capacity and capability of VIOs and the volunteering sector in communities across Australia?
Efficiency	13. To what extent is there evidence to support the use of nationally consistent resources to support volunteers, VIOs and the volunteering sector?

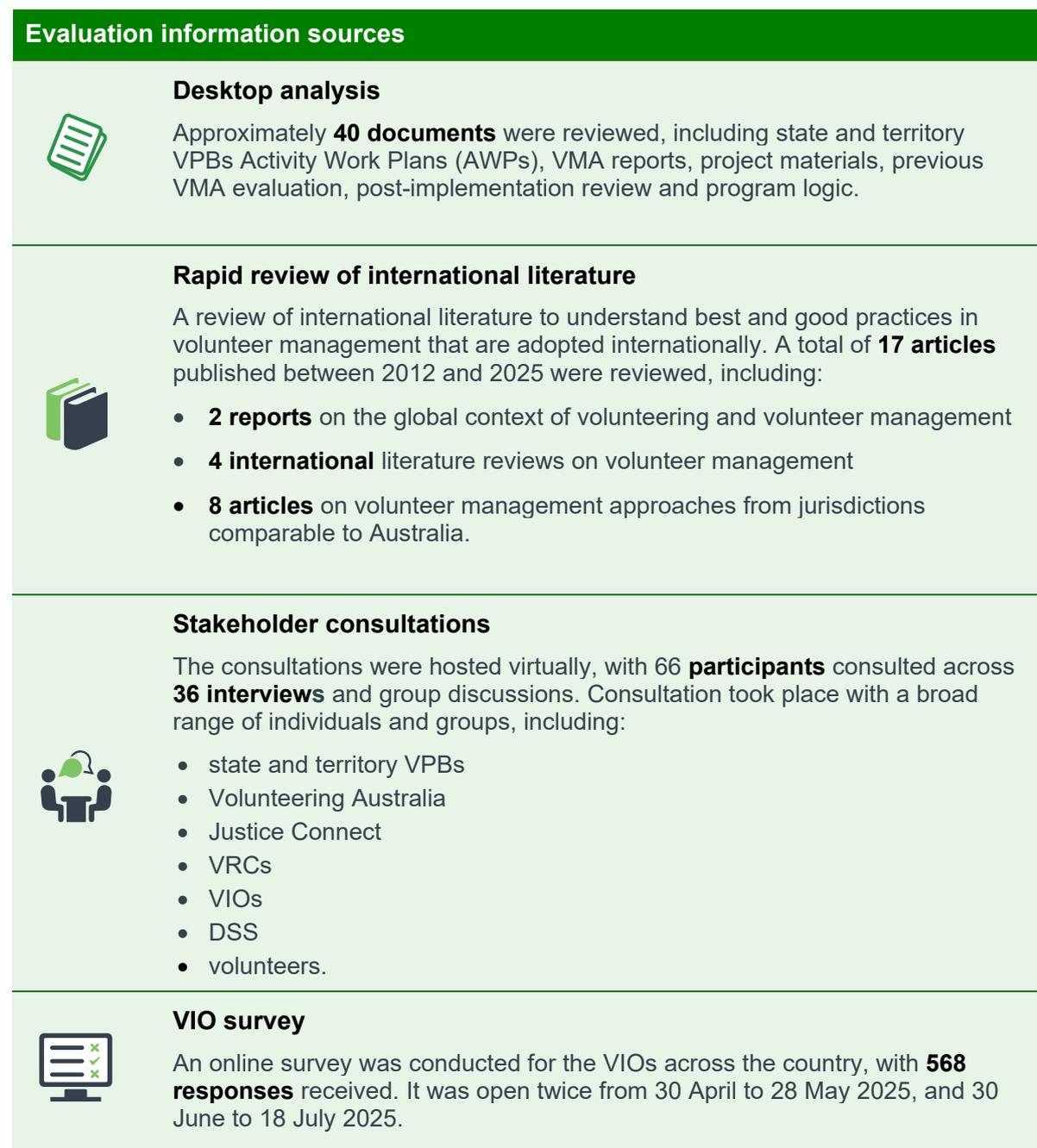
2.3 Purpose and structure of this report

The purpose of this report is to set out the observations and key findings identified through the evaluation of the VMA and the SLRA, including the methodology employed to generate these findings. It also presents the recommendations that have been developed under this evaluation. The appendices of this report set out the glossary, VMA participant summaries, best practice case studies, and our value for money (VfM) analysis.

3.0 METHOD AND APPROACH

This evaluation was undertaken between February to August 2025, using the mixed methods approach summarised in Figure 1, which included desktop analysis, rapid literature review, stakeholder consultations, VIO survey, and a VfM analysis.

Figure 1: Summary of mixed-methods approach





3.1 Value-for-money analysis

A VfM analysis was undertaken to assess the quantitative value of VMA. The analysis used the data collected from the document review and stakeholder engagement, employing the 4E framework, summarised in **Table 4**.

Table 4: The 4E framework to assess VfM

Framework criteria	Description
Economy	Focused on demonstrating efforts to ensure that costs are reasonable considering the required quality of the services developed.
Efficiency	Focused on providing evidence that the implementation process is appropriate, allowing the program to deliver its outputs in the smoothest way possible.
Effectiveness	Focused on providing evidence that the program is achieving results that are transformational and sustainable and that appropriate learning processes are in place to support this.
Equity	Focused on providing evidence that specific measures have been put in place to address the priorities of those experiencing vulnerability, apply gender-sensitive principles, and ensure clear targeting has been undertaken.

3.2 Limitations

The evaluation encountered limitations that should be taken into consideration when interpreting the findings, including inconsistent data sets, limited volunteer engagement and varying levels of VIO participation.

Inconsistent availability of robust and comparable quantitative datasets held across jurisdictions

Currently, state and territory VPBs collect data on an *ad hoc* basis, with different methodologies applied, and intermittent collection cycles. For example, the State of Volunteering reports capture data on volunteering and volunteer management in each state and territory. The data for these reports, which are not a component of the VMA, are collected periodically and intermittently.

Without the availability of robust and consistent quantitative data across jurisdictions, the extent to which causal relationships between activities under the VMA and outcomes can be inferred and attributed to VMA is difficult. It is therefore challenging to comprehensively evaluate some of the KEQs, for example, KEQ 2: to what extent are there evidence-based links between the VMA program activities (including implementation of consistent strategies in the delivery of VMA) and short-term outcomes demonstrated in the program logic.

Nevertheless, this limitation is in line with other research and reviews within the volunteering sector, which allude to the limited availability of data around volunteering.⁵

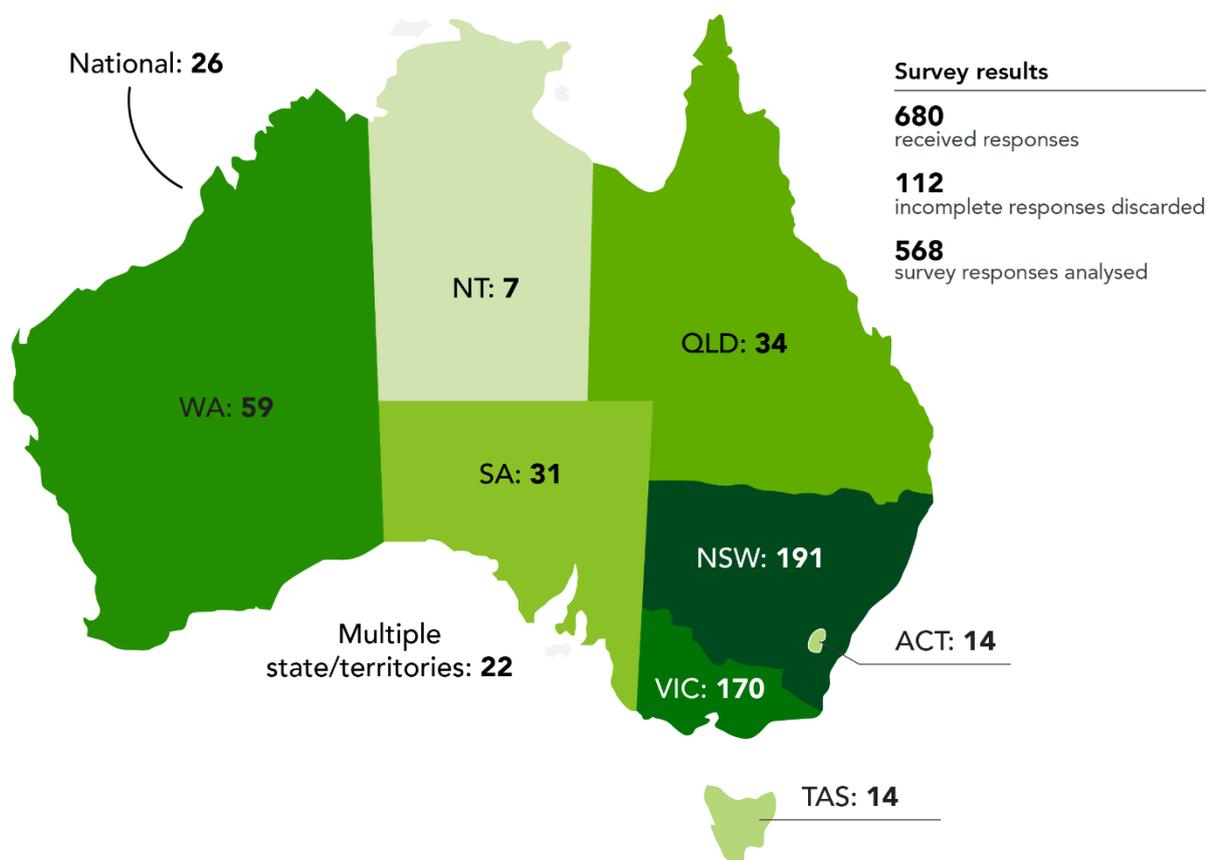
Limited volunteer engagement

The *Allen + Clarke* evaluation focused on volunteer management, concentrating on the experiences of volunteer managers and coordinators. Volunteer experiences were not a focus of this evaluation, however, three focus groups were scheduled to enable volunteers to contribute their view. There was low participation in these groups, despite recruitment efforts and so we are unable to draw any meaningful conclusions about volunteer experiences as part of this evaluation.

Varying levels of VIO participation

Another challenge encountered in this evaluation centred on engaging VIO managers across different jurisdictions. There was a skew of responses in Victoria and New South Wales, with lower participation by VIO managers in the Northern Territory, Queensland, and South Australia, as outlined in **Figure 1**. In an effort to address this limitation, the survey was opened twice from 30 April to 28 May 2025, and 30 June to 18 July 2025. Following the reopening, data saturation was achieved.

Figure 1: VIO survey response distribution



⁵ Muller, P. (2025). [A snapshot of volunteering in Australia](#). State and Territory VPBs.



4.0 OBSERVATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation makes a range of observations and recommendations, which are articulated below.

VMA has increased VIOs' capacity and capability to manage volunteers

The evaluation found the VMA is supporting VIOs to increase their capacity and capability to manage and support volunteers. A majority (70%) of surveyed VIOs said the VMA had delivered activities aligned with their expectations, and a majority of VIOs indicated the VMA had increased their capacity and capability to manage and support volunteers. One third of VIOs said the VMA had led to an increase of volunteer referrals, with almost 40% saying they were undecided it had led to referrals.

VIOs told the evaluation that the VMA helped them to navigate complex volunteering problems and access resources to support and manage volunteers. For example, one VIO said, *'I think they're (VRCs and Peak Bodies) totally invaluable for me ... They've helped me with things like writing, you know, volunteer role descriptions.'* Another VIO said, *'We have not needed to recruit new volunteer managers in most spaces which is a good sign! They all definitely feel more knowledgeable and confident when faced with tricky situations and the need for me to intervene has dropped dramatically.'*

The VMA also enabled VIOs to engage with volunteer managers across the volunteering sector. A regional VIO said, *'The resources are very valuable to support us in ensuring we recruit, support, develop and retain our volunteers. I value the networking opportunities as they provide learning for people that are new to volunteer management and coordination. This helps volunteer coordinators and managers to feel supported rather than working in isolation.'* A metropolitan VIO said, *'The VMA's emphasis on best practice recruitment, training, and retention strategies has contributed to improved volunteer satisfaction and retention rates. By providing comprehensive training and fostering a supportive environment, we've been able to better meet the needs of our volunteers and enhance their overall experience.'*

VMA's focus on priority groups is supported, but has had limited impact

The evaluation found there was broad sector support for targeting priority groups. A majority (70%) of surveyed VIOs said VMA had led to more inclusive volunteer management practices. One VIO said, *'Our organisation has taken the opportunity to rethink and reshape volunteer roles to be more inclusive and accessible. We've identified specific goals and measures to guide this work, focusing on creating roles that better reflect the diverse needs and strengths of our community.'* However, 49% of VIOs surveyed said there had been no change in their volunteer demographics as a result of the VMA. This lack of change was attributed by some VIOs to the relevance of certain priority group programs to their volunteer management activities. One VIO felt the priority group focus was not as relevant or useful to their context as intended, as there was low uptake to the detriment of those outside these priority groups who might participate.



“

The VMA has not supported us to recruit and retain volunteers outside of the priority groups. All our workplans and activities are only for the priority groups. We have not been successful in getting volunteers from the priority groups, although VIOs are more aware and understand the barriers, but uptake has not been widespread from within the priority groups.

VIO

Another driver was the quantum of overall funding, with some stakeholders suggesting it was insufficient to make a meaningful impact across the six priority groups (which include people with disability, First Nations peoples, newly arrived migrants, vulnerable women, young people aged 12-18 and people who are unemployed). This view was also reflected in [Volunteering Australia's](#) public Incoming Government Brief, which said, *'We are also seeking increased investment in the VMA, as demand has outpaced funding and the depth and breadth of priority groups is not matched by the current funding envelope.'* In noting this point, the evaluation recognises the VMA funding agreements with VPBs did not compel VPBs to target each priority group.

Jurisdictional variations in delivery model

VPBs, as the main agents for delivery, have demonstrated they are creating and publishing national projects, facilitating jurisdictional-based VMA grant rounds, delivering resources and reporting on grant outcomes on their websites. The implementation approach of VPBs was different across Australia, with VPB's designing and delivering their own approach for their jurisdiction. This included a consortia model in Victoria, whereby Volunteering Victoria partners with eight local organisations across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria to deliver VMA. Each of the local organisations leads each region with other partner organisations in the consortium to conduct training sessions, one-on-one mentoring, peer learning circles and the development of resources for engaging with priority groups.

The productiveness of the relationship of VRCs and VIOs with VPBs was, at a general-level, dependent on the jurisdiction. One VPB reflected, *'So, whilst it's a national program. And inevitably, volunteering takes place jurisdictionally, it's fair to say that the program has been dealt with and implemented in different ways by different actors jurisdictionally so the effectiveness of the program is mixed, and that's where the fragmentation comes in.'*



The evaluation heard that in certain states and territories, VPBs were meeting expectations and filling volunteering support gaps. For example, one VIO said, *'The relationship with [VPB] has provided my participants with potential pathways to address their barriers, such as returning to employment, gaining self-confidence, connecting to their community.'* A VIO said the VMA had addressed regional gaps in volunteering services.

“

It is great to finally have a VMA resource in [regional Victorian town], this new model plugged a gap that didn't exist, [VPB] & [organisation] who are leading the consortium should be commended for their collaboration to put the new model in place there.

- Regional VIO, Victoria

In contrast, the evaluation had mixed responses from VRCs and VIOs in other jurisdictions. For example, one VRC said, *'We haven't had anyone from [peak body name] in our region since prior to COVID... So I would say the working relationship, it's pretty ineffectual compared to our other partnerships.'*

SLRA helped VIOs

Legal resources provided under the SLRA by Justice Connect met VIO expectations. Over 70% of VIOs surveyed said the SLRA had helped them meet their legal needs, with 70% saying the SLRA had improved their capability and understanding of legal requirements.

“

The Justice Connect resources are excellent, and the source of truth used by all. I have been on workshops with councils, large govt departments and other training where these resources have been used.

- VIO

The VMA is delivering significant value for money

The VMA also provided a positive economic contribution to Australia. Based on a VfM analysis, the evaluation has determined that the economic value of volunteer work facilitated by the VMA far exceeds the program's cost. The ROI is estimated to be 2.78, reflecting an annual benefit of \$22.26 million, well above the \$8 million annual investment. This is a conservative assumption, noting the analysis did not consider out-of-pocket volunteer costs or improvements in volunteer efficiency resulting from VMA initiatives. For the SLRA, the ROI is even greater, with an 8.7 ROI modelled. This means for every one dollar invested in the SLRA program, a benefit of \$8.70 is returned (detailed further at [Appendix C](#)).



Opportunities to improve the delivery of the VMA

The evaluation found the implementation and performance of the VMA should be strengthened to be more efficient and effective, through:

- DSS playing a greater decision-making role to better connect program delivery to government objectives
- greater transparency around program governance and decision-making
- clarification of roles and responsibilities within the VMA to ensure actors understand the scope of their engagement with the VMA
- more targeted and risk-based performance measurement by refocusing the metrics included in the performance measurement framework
- improving the efficiency of data collection and analysis to maximise the value of data collection, with opportunities to further explore the use of technologies to reduce the reporting burden on VRCs/VIOs.

Recommendations

Based on the evaluation's observations, nine recommendations have been developed. These recommendations cover policy and program design, funding and resource allocation, change management, governance and risk, data and evidence, and evaluation. **Table 5** sets out the key evaluation observations which inform the recommendations, as well as the relevant KEQ. The remainder of the chapter discusses these recommendations and observations in further detail.



Table 5: Summary of evaluation observations and recommendations

Category	Recommendation	Key evaluation observations	Relevant KEQs
Policy & Program Design	1. Maintain a focus on jurisdictional-led approaches in the VMA but strengthen national co-ordination and adoption of better practice through revised governance arrangements (rec 6), improved role clarity (rec 6), implementation guidance (rec 5), and communication of lessons learned.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VMA is achieving its intended outcomes described in the program logic, especially the access to and use of accessible, nationally consistent volunteer management products (resources, training, legal requirements and implications) and adoption of inclusive and culturally safe practices. The current model enables more comprehensive and efficient delivery across Australia. However, there are concerns about the lack of clarity surrounding the role of VPBs and how the sector works together. There are significant differences in jurisdictional models, with certain jurisdictions more effective in delivering volunteer management support, by leveraging strong partnerships with VRCs and VIOs to deliver the program. 	9, 11, 12, 13
Policy & Program Design	2. VPBs have a role to play in identifying/selecting individual priority groups based on jurisdictional needs and risks. <ol style="list-style-type: none"> DSS to identify a selection of priority groups. VPBs to choose individual priority groups out of this selection. DSS to agree on selected priority groups. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The sector supported focusing on priority groups but felt the budget didn't support the breadth of groups targeted. Throughout the delivery period, DSS acted to clarify to the sector that not all priority groups needed to be targeted. There has been significant improvement in organisational capability to support inclusive practices, this has not resulted in observable change in volunteer demographics. 	1, 5



Category	Recommendation	Key evaluation observations	Relevant KEQs
Funding & Resource Allocation	3. Refine the VMA funding model to clearly distinguish national projects from other components of the program and review the allocation to reflect jurisdictional needs.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stakeholders were able to use the funds to deliver positive outcomes despite funding limitations e.g. VIO grant funding for 12 months or less There were some concerns around the lack of central coordination in funding decisions which created a risk of duplication of volunteer management resources across jurisdictions. Some VPBs, particularly from jurisdictions with smaller populations, highlighted that the current funding model is not sustainable. National projects are considered valuable. VPBs fund national projects using their VMA allocation. No minimum allocation amounts are prescribed in the VMA Alliance Agreement, but there is a cap equivalent to \$100,000. The intent of the VRC transition funding is not well understood across the sector and there is inconsistent evidence that the funding has successfully supported integration of VRC services into the redesigned VMA. 	3, 4, 6, 7, 10
Funding & Resource Allocation	4. Encourage longer-term funding rounds at VPB level, with transparency in the distribution of the VMA funds.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Volunteer management activities across the sector would not progress without the VMA funding. Short term contracts at a jurisdictional-level create uncertainty and multi-year funding was considered important for setting up projects for success. There is a perceived lack of transparency in how funds are distributed from VPBs to delivery partners. 	6, 9



Category	Recommendation	Key evaluation observations	Relevant KEQs
Change Management	5. DSS to provide oversight of VPB implementation frameworks, including change management strategies to strengthen sector relationships.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Issues in delivery of the redesigned VMA stem from inconsistent implementation planning and varying levels of sector inclusion in determining partnership models. • Many challenges remain, particularly around perceived competition and conflict between VPBs and VRCs. • The success of the VMA was highly dependent on the relationship the VIOs/VRCs had with the VPB. 	5, 6
Governance & Risk	6. Review governance arrangements to ensure: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> a. DSS has appropriate oversight of the VMA b. roles and responsibilities of actors within the VMA are clear. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • DSS is a non-voting member of the main VMA governance body for VMA, VMAAC. • VPBs are not compelled to deliver national projects. • VRCs continue to receive transition funding to address misalignment of expectations of the role of VRCs in the VMA. 	5, 6, 12
Governance & Risk	7. Improve transparency of the VMA program to promote understanding within the volunteering sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is publicly available information about the design, delivery, and impact of the VMA, including the VMA's scope, VMAAC's composition, VPB-level program outcomes, and high-level impact reports. • There is an opportunity to enhance reporting on the VMA's governance and decision-making. • Section 5.1 of Commonwealth Grant Rules and Principles 2024 provides rationale for greater reporting and transparency, including that 'Effective disclosure and reporting arrangements for grants administration are essential for reasons of transparency, integrity and public accountability.' 	3, 6



Category	Recommendation	Key evaluation observations	Relevant KEQs
Data, Evidence & Evaluation	8. Refocus the VMA's performance measures to improve assessment of effectiveness and minimise reporting burden on the volunteering sector.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VMA's performance measurement framework is developed and owned by VPBs and includes 26 metrics. VPBs require regular reporting from their VMA grant recipients, with examples of 3-month data collection cycles. [NB.DSS noted to the evaluation that their VMA reporting requirement is once every 6 months for jurisdictional and national programs, and that VPBs set the reporting requirements for their project partners e.g. VIOs]. The VMA's performance measurement framework does not completely align with the DSS VMA program logic. 	2, 9
Data, Evidence & Evaluation	9. To promote efficiency in data delivery and assessment, review whether technology could be utilised to streamline data collection processes.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The VMA's performance data is collected and reported using AWP's. Data must be extracted from AWP's using a manual process. The Australian Government and DSS have released complementary data strategies which include goals of harnessing technology and analytical tools to maximise the value of data. 	8



4.1 Recommendation 1

Maintain a focus on jurisdictional-led approaches in VMA but strengthen national co-ordination and adoption of good practice through revised governance arrangements (rec 6), improved role clarity (rec 6), implementation guidance (rec 5), and communication of lessons learned.

Summary

Based on the evidence from the evaluation, it is recommended that the VMA model be continued, with VPBs delivering on the program in collaboration with delivery partners. The continuation of the SLRA is also recommended. Improvements are needed in how the VMA model is implemented, including clarifying the role of VPBs, enhancing the collaboration of VPBs, VRCs and VIOs, and fostering shared understanding of good implementation practices. The evaluation considers this can be facilitated using existing committees, webinars and platforms, but with more intentional focus on achieving clarity and collaboration within the VMA. DSS' role can also be strengthened at the design and implementation stage, to ensure alignment of the VMA's projects with government objectives. This is discussed further at [Recommendation 6](#).

Evaluation observations

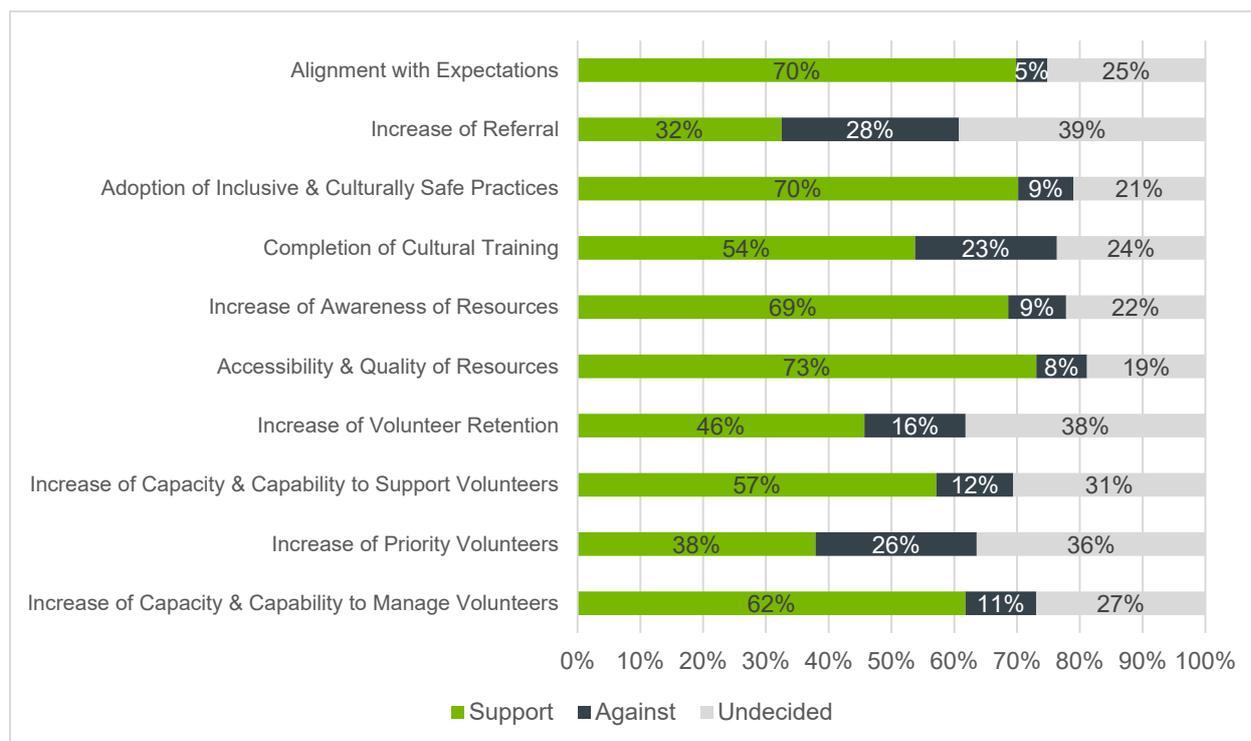
The evaluation found the jurisdictional-led VMA model was sound, with many VIOs and VPBs regarding the current model as enabling more efficient and consistent program delivery across Australia.

Most VIOs highlighted that outcomes achieved following the introduction of the redesigned VMA were generally positive, as illustrated in **Figure 2**, indicating that the VMA has made a meaningful contribution to strengthening the capacity and capability of VIOs. Further, VIOs identified stronger alignment with nationally consistent strategies, improved awareness of best practice volunteer management and increased use of online resources and training modules.

The evaluation also identified shifts in inclusivity and diversity, as evidenced by the significant improvement in adoption of inclusive and culturally safe practices, indicating that the program is likely to deliver the intermediate and longer-term outcomes envisaged in the logic model, with improvements in the implementation of the program.



Figure 2: Outcomes achieved from the VMA – VIO survey



Most VIOs reported that the activities provided under the VMA significantly supported them in managing volunteers. The majority accessed and utilised training opportunities and resources, particularly the national standards, which were regarded as foundational to their volunteer management practices. These were especially critical for smaller and newer VIOs, who noted that they would have been unable to effectively perform their roles without the standards. In addition to formal training, many VIOs highlighted the value of networks established through Communities of Practice and other platforms, which enabled the sharing of ideas and cross-sector learning. A small number of more established VIOs expressed interest in more advanced training opportunities tailored to their higher levels of capability.

The evaluation attributes these outcomes to the redesigned VMA model, where government acts a facilitator to support existing local volunteering organisations and enables the sector to do the work themselves. The evaluation found Australia is one of the leading countries adopting this nationally coordinated, locally delivered model within the volunteering sector, noting there are calls for the UK and New Zealand to do the same, especially to better address the needs of First Nations population groups.

For example, a [recent 2025 report](#) commissioned by the UK Government Department for Culture, Media and Sport discussed key themes underpinning how a country’s enabling environment for volunteering might be better supported in the future. The report identified that government should use its power as a convenor and a facilitator to support existing local organisations and enable the sector to do the work themselves. The report also reinforced the value of structural models that allow for national consistency and local flexibility. An example of this model in practice is the AmeriCorps’ Volunteer Generation Fund, a volunteer management program that is commissioned as a national program with state-set priorities, delivered through a hybrid model. The fund is delivered through each state’s State Service



Commission, acting as an intermediary who distributes funding to organisations within the state, as well as by direct funding through a competitive application process. The program demonstrated benefits of locally tailored capacity-building under shared federal guidelines, especially in the following four areas:

- **Focus areas:** better engagement, recruitment, retention, and increased organisational/individual capacity.
- **Volunteer recruitment:** improvements in recruitment practices, including hiring an outreach coordinator.
- **Volunteer retention:** substantial/transformational improvement in engaging and retaining volunteers.
- **Increased capacity:** higher manager confidence/networking, greater community/state recognition, attainment of certifications (and recognition as thought/planning leaders).

In [New Zealand](#), there is a strong desire from organisations delivering volunteering initiatives for more strategic and coordinated funding mechanisms from the government to better address the needs of Māori and other population groups.

Despite the benefits, and the international pursuit for a similar volunteer management model, the evaluation identified challenges with the implementation of VMA. In the current model, DSS provides flexibility for each VPB to develop their delivery model that is responsive to their priorities. Consequently, there were significant differences in delivery models across jurisdictions. Feedback from the sector suggested that the VMA was more effectively delivered in certain jurisdictions, such as Victoria and ACT. Whereby, Victoria's consortia model was regarded as an exemplar, highlighting the value of a jurisdictional-led approach, delivered through a shared implementation framework and strong relational infrastructure.

Most VRCs raised concerns about the lack of clarity surrounding the role of VPBs and how they would work together, utilising their experiences and strengths. The degree to which VPBs engaged with VRCs varied significantly between jurisdictions, leading to inconsistent experiences of collaboration. In some cases, VRCs reported feeling in competition with their respective VPB, creating mistrust within parts of the sector. For example, the evaluation heard that VRCs provide services to recruit volunteers, while some VPBs also provide the same service as well as training programs to build VIO's capability to recruit volunteers. For many VIOs, especially those with high organisational maturity, organisations prefer to be empowered to recruit themselves. In addition, VRCs also provide training programs and mentoring for volunteer managers, a service that is also provided by VPBs.

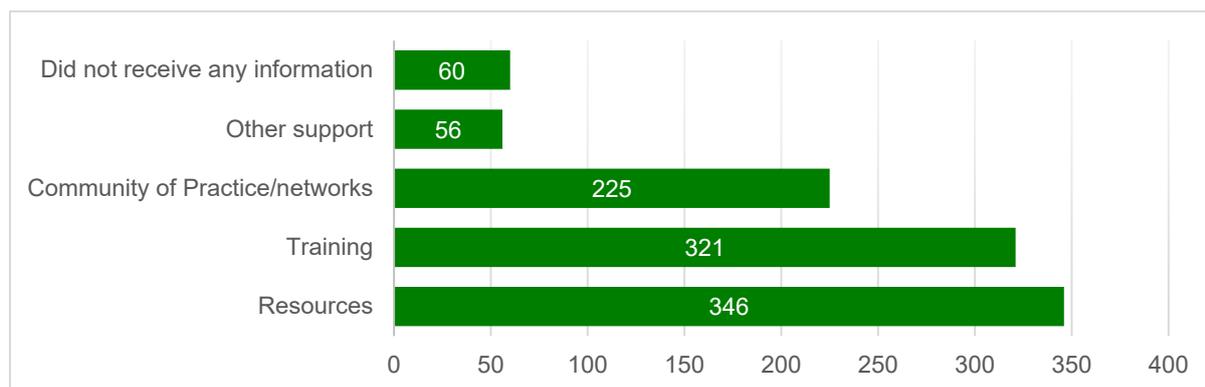
“

They (VRCs) are competing for the same volunteers. It's tricky to get their help.

- VIO



Figure 3: Support received by VIOs – VIO survey



Overall, the evaluation found the jurisdictional-led approach remains sound and should be retained, as evidenced by international best practice in favour of nationally coordinated, locally implemented model, as well as the evaluation’s assessment that the VMA program is meeting its intended short-term outcomes and on track to realise its medium- and long-term outcomes. The challenges observed and shared by stakeholders, especially VIOs and VRCs, relate primarily to the way the VMA program was implemented at a VPB-level rather than due to weaknesses in the underlying design. To realise full benefits of the VMA model, the evaluation recommends strengthening national co-ordination and adoption of good practice through revised governance arrangements, improved role clarity, implementation guidance, and communication of lessons learned. The evaluation considers there is a need for DSS to play a stronger role in guiding implementation, particularly during the early phases of program delivery by encouraging development of implementation frameworks for each VPB. This is discussed further at [Recommendation 6](#).

4.2 Recommendation 2

VPBs have a role to play in identifying/selecting individual priority groups based on jurisdictional needs and risks.

- a. DSS to identify a selection of priority groups.
- b. VPBs to choose individual priority groups out of the selection.
- c. DSS to agree on selected priority groups.

Summary

It is recommended that DSS should maintain strategic direction on priority groups.⁶ However, there is an opportunity for VPBs to play a role in selecting individual priority groups that are most relevant for their jurisdictions, in consultation with VRCs and VIOs. This approach aims to balance the need for national consistency in breaking down barriers for priority groups with the realities of the population dynamics across jurisdictions. It recognises the importance of priority groups while allowing VPBs flexibility to focus on communities that are the most relevant for them. With DSS being the final decision maker, it enables consistency and coverage across all states/territories.

Evaluation observations

International literature from the UK and [Canada](#) strongly supports focusing on priority groups, particularly in building the capability of volunteer organisations to recruit and support volunteers from diverse and underrepresented communities. These approaches are associated with more inclusive volunteering ecosystems and greater alignment with community needs.

State of volunteering reports, which are not part of the VMA's reporting requirements, also show variation in participation levels across priority groups. For example, young people in Victoria were leading engagement with priority groups, suggesting that there is an opportunity for jurisdictions to leverage their strengths in targeting priority groups.

Most stakeholders supported a focus on priority groups but felt the funding envelope did not support appropriate action towards the 6 different priority groups. In [Volunteering Australia's](#) public Incoming Government Brief, they said, *'We are also seeking increased investment in the VMA, as demand has outpaced funding and the depth and breadth of priority groups is not matched by the current funding envelope.'*

Nevertheless, there has been significant improvement in organisational capability to support inclusive practices (as outlined in **Figure 2**, supported by 70% of VIO respondents), suggesting achievement of a key objective of the VMA. However, this has not translated to

⁶ The current VMA program has defined priority groups that it prioritises, including people who are unemployed, people with disability, First Nations peoples, newly arrived migrants, young people and vulnerable women.



diversification of people who volunteer, as only 23% of VIOs reported observable change in volunteer demographics, as shown in **Figure 4**. It is important to note that many VIOs acknowledge the process of measuring change in demographics has been inconsistent across the states/territories.

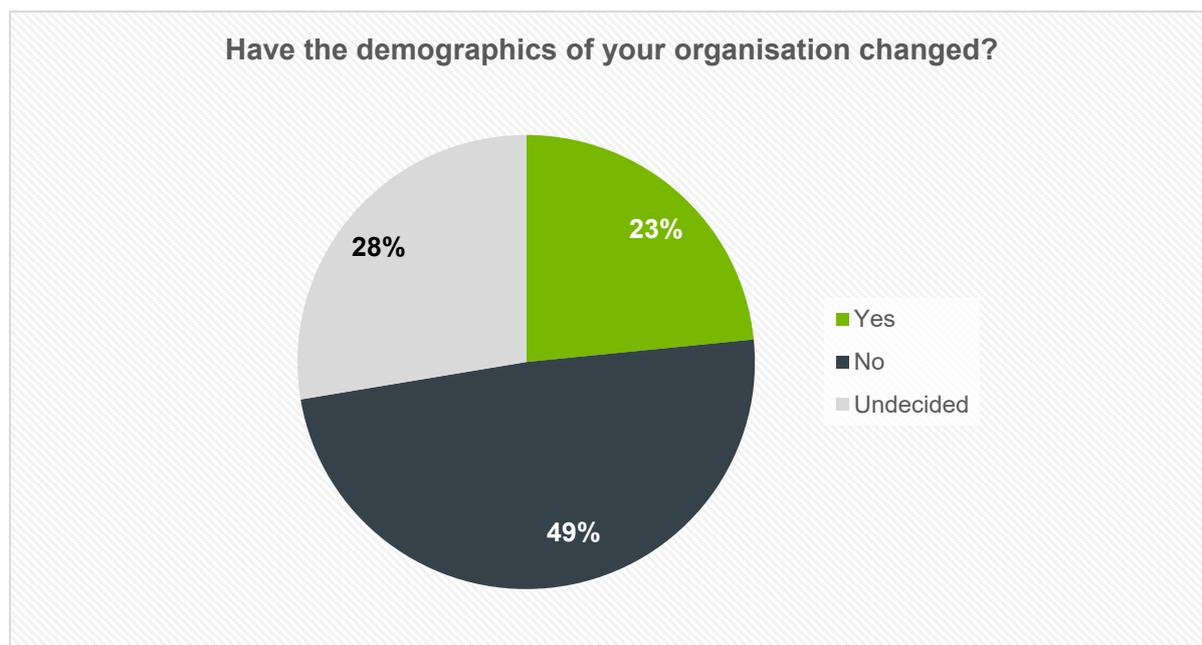
To measure change in volunteer demographics effectively, stakeholders delivering the VMA should take a structured approach as aligned with existing frameworks such as United Nations' [Measuring Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda](#). It is critical for all organisations delivering the VMA to collect demographic data at regular intervals using the same question, potentially as aligned with existing data collection activities (i.e. State of Volunteering survey) so trends are comparable. There is an opportunity for this to be part of the VMA's performance measurement.

“

More so the change has increased our knowledge of inclusive practice and removed some of the barriers that were in place in our organisation to working with these priority groups. So, as well as being more inclusive to new volunteers, the experience of our existing volunteers has improved

VIO

Figure 4: Change in volunteer demographics – VIO survey





Across jurisdictions, engagement with priority groups varied significantly, reflecting differing local needs, capacities, and demographics. Smaller jurisdictions reported the resource burden of applying collaborative methods such as co-design, even though such approaches are widely acknowledged as best practice.

“

Our volunteers need fairly specific skill sets and resources to be successful. we send them out to remote and very remote areas of the NT to work alongside staff or to host in campgrounds. We also have a number of volunteer groups that source their own members from within their local community. This means that people in vulnerable situations are sometimes not suitable for placement as they need more support than can be given in remote and very remote areas.

- VIO

The evidence from the survey and stakeholder feedback point to a need for greater flexibility in how priority groups are selected and engaged. The growing demand for volunteer-based services confirms the need to focus investment where it can have the most impact. The challenge is not whether to support priority groups, but how to do so in a way that is targeted, feasible, and meaningful.

Continuing to have a nationally defined set of groups would be an opportunity for DSS to provide strategic direction, but allowing VPBs to select those most relevant to their context acknowledges local needs. Collective decision-making between DSS and VPBs will help ensure investments in priority groups are both strategic, relevant and implementable. Once agreed, the selected priority groups should remain for the duration of the funding period to enable planning, consistency, and meaningful reporting against outcomes.



4.3 Recommendation 3

Refine the VMA funding model to clearly distinguish national projects from other components of the program and review the allocation to reflect jurisdictional needs.

Summary

There is a need to review the funding model to promote:

- a redesigned funding model that aligns with the intent and scope of the program
- dedicated funding for the three VMA workstreams – national projects, state/territory work, and direct funding for specific projects
- allocation on a needs-basis to determine appropriate base funding, with considerations of remoteness and the whole population instead of the number of formal volunteers
- alignment of the SLRA funding cycle with the VMA funding cycle.

The review of the funding model should be undertaken in consultation with VPBs, Justice Connect and Volunteering Australia.

Evaluation observations

The VMA uses a [funding formula](#) based on the population of formal volunteers, diversity, remoteness, and a base rate to ensure financial viability. However, the rise of informal volunteering, especially among diverse communities, priority groups and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, challenges the assumption that formal volunteering is a good measure of people who volunteer. The Native Women's Association of Canada conducted an [analysis of volunteering trends](#) among Aboriginal peoples (First Nations, Inuit, and Métis) of Canada. The findings of this research indicates that Aboriginal people have strong cultural traditions of sharing, helping and caring for each other without expectations of payment. The research also found that volunteerism is an inherent part of Aboriginal peoples of Canada and is not perceived as volunteerism but rather as 'helping out', with communities rarely going through formal channels to volunteer in their communities.

In the [UK](#), [New Zealand](#), [Canada](#) and [USA](#), competitive grants and calls for proposals remain the most common mechanisms for distributing funding, with national organisations and state-based organisations competing for a pool of funding. However, there is growing acknowledgement that funding mechanisms must reflect both administrative realities and broader volunteering trends.

Most stakeholders across the sector highlighted that while VMA funding was limited, they were able to use the funds to deliver positive outcomes. However, there was some concern, particularly among VRCs, that the lack of national oversight and coordination in funding decisions created a risk of duplicating volunteer management activities, such as training programs for volunteer managers.



Some VPBs, particularly from jurisdictions with smaller populations, expressed concern that the current funding model is not sustainable. Many noted that the fixed costs of establishing and maintaining impactful VMA delivery, such as staffing, partnership development, and volunteering infrastructure, are not proportionate to the level of funding received. There is widespread agreement that the baseline funding is not appropriate to support these activities, and there is an opportunity for a deeper conversation with each state and territory to understand the amount of funding that would work for them. “

“

Our recipient numbers are just smaller than the larger jurisdictions, so I think there was an obvious flaw in that original funding model where you can't assume that just because the recipients are higher that you know you need more resources. Yeah, you can't just keep giving (a peak body) 1% of national funding for something that's about capacity building, which is all about having resources to deliver capacity.

- VPB

Most stakeholders across the sector highlighted that while the VMA funding was limited, they were able to use the funds to deliver positive outcomes.

“

The geographical area required to be covered by a partner organisation, in rural and regional [state/territory] is impossible to cover within the existing funding model. Having said that, if the funds were diluted further, to increase the number of partner organisations to cover that area, it would not be economically viable for some of the current partner organisations to continue. The current VMA model has already seen many VRCs close. If we don't address the model this trend may well continue.

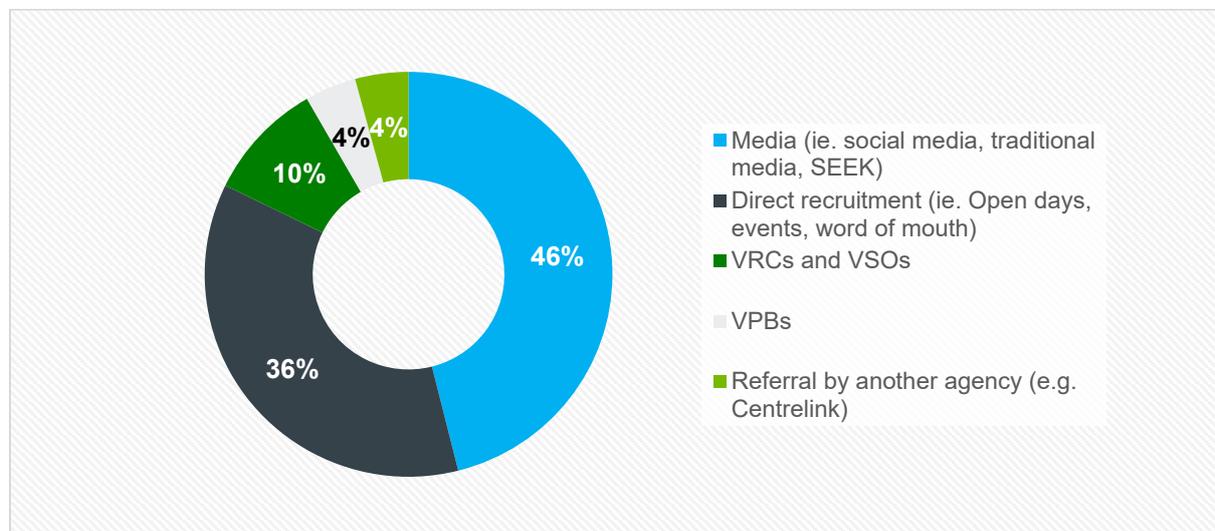
- VIO

VPBs, VIOs and VRCs also strongly valued the contribution of national projects to the volunteering ecosystem. However, the absence of additional dedicated funding for these initiatives presents a challenge, especially for smaller jurisdictions that struggle to contribute to national work without diverting resources from state/territory activities.

The VRC transition funding has been valuable, although most VRCs consider the \$50,000 funding per organisation as insufficient to support the VMA work or to support the viability of their organisations [NB. Transition funding was not intended to be the sole financial support of a VRC's viability]. Currently, VRCs provide 10% of the proportion of volunteer recruitment, which is considered important, especially for smaller VIOs (as outlined in **Figure 5**). However, it is important to note that the intent of the transition funding was not well understood across the sector, and there is inconsistent evidence that the funding has successfully supported the integration of VRC services into the redesigned VMA.

National projects present a significant value in delivering on the VMA program outcomes, especially in reducing duplication of efforts and enabling knowledge and resource sharing between VPBs. However, funding for national projects should be separated as a distinct workstream within the program, potentially with a national budget that is delivered proportionately by each VPB. There is also an opportunity to investigate a centralised solution to volunteer recruitment for organisations who do not have this capacity or capability.

Figure 5: Volunteer recruitment method – VIO survey



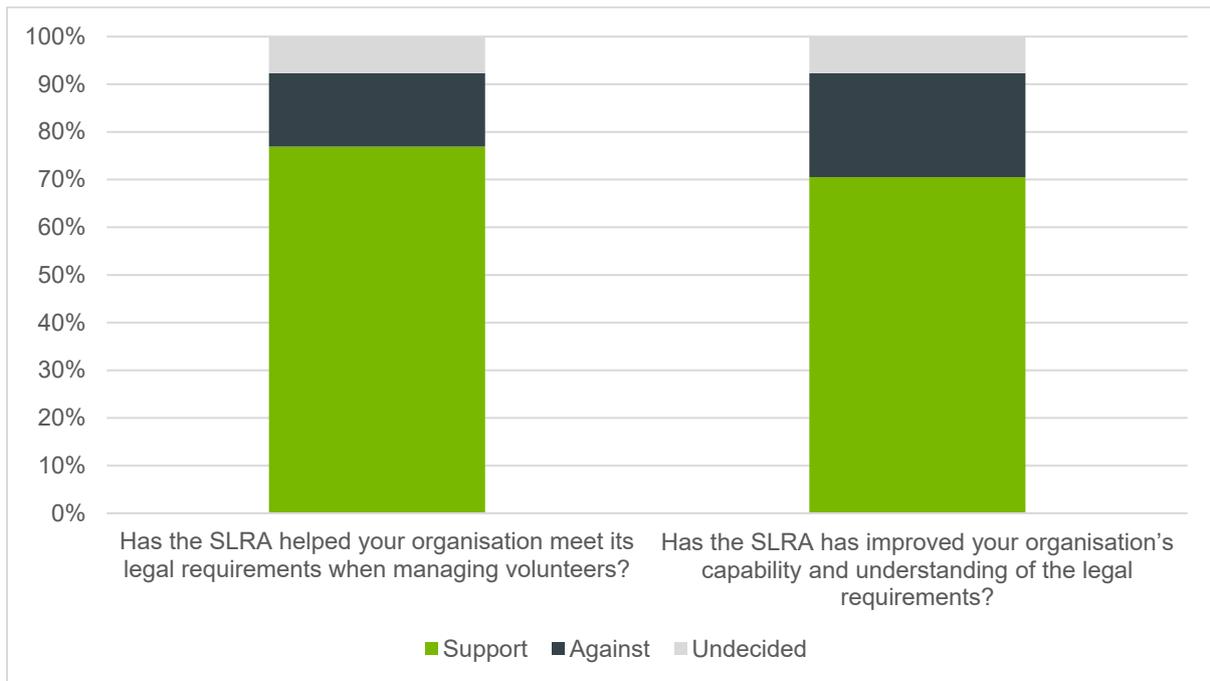
The VMA's future funding model should be refined, with considerations of operating costs (such as staffing and coordination) to ensure sustainability of the smaller VPBs. The fixed costs should be determined in collaboration with VPBs. In addition, there is an opportunity for a mechanism for direct funding from DSS, for projects with specific scope, timeframe, and outputs, to ensure that the VMA is maximising coverage for those in rural and remote areas with specific needs.

The SLRA has brought significant value to the volunteering sector, with most VIOs in agreement that the service has built capability in relation to their legal requirements as outlined in

Figure 6. To enable consistency and accurate assessment of outcomes for the whole program, the SLRA funding cycle should be aligned with the 5-year funding of the VMA.



Figure 6: SLRA outcomes





4.4 Recommendation 4

Encourage longer-term funding rounds at VPB level, with transparency in the distribution of VMA funds.

Summary

There is a need for longer-term, multi-year funding arrangements for VPBs' delivery partners. In tandem, there needs to be greater transparency in how the VMA funds are allocated and distributed to enable more effective planning and delivery.

Evaluation observations

Volunteering Australia [surveys](#) conducted over the last 6 years consistently found there is universal support for funding terms of five years to support long-term capacity building and sector outcomes. This aligns with evidence from the UK, Canada, and New Zealand, which has consistently demonstrated the need for flexible, longer-term investment models to drive stronger outcomes and reduce fragmentation. This approach is especially important for organisations operating in regional and rural Australia to ensure their viability. The [Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework](#) published in 2025 explicitly highlights an intention to work more closely with community sector organisations on funding design.

Nearly all VRCs and VIOs noted that their volunteer management activities would not last without the VMA funding. Though it was acknowledged that other funding sources were available to deliver volunteering programs, there are no other sources that can be used specifically to deliver on volunteer management initiatives to the scale that the VMA resources have supported. Most stakeholders highlighted that short term contracts created uncertainty and were sometimes unhelpful, especially to deliver on a program focusing on priority groups that requires collaborative approaches. Most VIOs noted that multi-year funding was considered important for setting up projects for success, and that the 5-year funding for VPBs should be aligned with the term of funding for their delivery partners.

“

Working under the funded grant project was a group of migrant women ...an initiative of that nature was something that none of those women had ever really done before...and so by the end of the period where then there's almost this kind of respectful pressure for us to produce some sort of lovely case study...we haven't had the time and the resourcing to really work with them sensitively in the context of everything that's happening in their life over that period of time [12 months]

- VIO

Longer-term funding for the VMA is critical for effective program delivery. Multi-year funding from VPBs to their delivery partners would allow time for VIOs and VRCs to build new sector



partnerships, strengthen organisational resilience and realise outcomes. To foster trust across key players in the sector, transparent reporting on the distribution of funds at VPB level is equally essential.

4.5 Recommendation 5

DSS should provide oversight of VPB implementation frameworks, including change management strategies to strengthen sector relationships.

Summary

DSS should take a more active role in reviewing and approving the implementation frameworks developed by VPBs, having regard to:

- alignment with policy objectives
- implementation of best practice that fosters partnerships across the sector
- minimising the risk of duplication in the VMA
- effective change management strategies to strengthen sector relationships, with considerations of optimal time to transition to the future VMA
- how feedback from the jurisdictional volunteering sector has informed the implementation plan.

These changes would enable DSS to build assurance that the implementation of the program aligns with its intent and is being delivered in a way that promotes partnerships and strength-based approaches across the sector. This oversight is critical to ensuring diverse jurisdictional approaches are consistent with the shared program goals and delivered with integrity and collaboration with the sector.

Evaluation observations

[The Governance Blueprint](#), developed as part of Australia's National Strategy for Volunteering, stresses the importance of oversight mechanisms and shared accountability among stakeholders in the volunteering ecosystem to ensure alignment with national policy and standards. Similarly, [a rapid literature review](#) conducted by the NSW government on volunteer governance noted that central oversight ensures consistency, helps reduce duplication, promote accountability, and supports quality practice.

The 2024 OECD report titled [Unleashing the potential of volunteering for local development](#) highlighted that transitions in volunteer programs require structured planning and collaborative change management, to preserve trust and institutional relationships across the sector. In addition, the 2018 [VMA review](#) emphasised that rapid transitions often disrupt stakeholder engagement and delivery continuity. Transition periods that allow for capacity building and shared planning are associated with smoother implementation and enhanced sector cohesion.



Currently, the VMA program provides flexibility for each VPB to develop their delivery model in a way that is responsive to their priorities, which was valued by many VPBs. However, as a result there is wide variation in quality and coherence across VPB implementation approaches. Stakeholders pointed to the effectiveness of implementation in jurisdictions like Victoria and the ACT as examples of how structured planning and collaborative approaches at early implementation stages can deliver stronger results. A lot of the issues in delivery of the redesigned VMA stem from inconsistent implementation planning and varying levels of sector inclusion in determining partnership models. Many challenges identified in post-implementation review remain, particularly around perceived competition and conflict between VPBs and VRCs.

A consistent theme during the consultation was that the success of the VMA was highly dependent on the relationship the VIOs/VRCs had with the peak body. Many VIOs expressed that although new relationships were built, some relationships were still immature, which is a common feature of a complex, long-term change program such as the redesigned VMA. Some VRCs and VIOs noted a lack of active engagement from VPBs and the need to constantly communicate (through email and other means), which hindered the effective delivery of the program and took away resources from an already pressured sector.

“

The real issue is there's distrust built after that federal funding got taken away from the VRC and we started feeling like we were in competition with our peak body, there's still that feeling where often they will come and say visit our regions under the guise of VMA, but then want to meet our membership and anything we kind of do, they'll get our Members to complete a membership with them.

- VRC

Enhancing DSS' oversight would support safeguarding implementation quality, enabling continuous improvement and promoting confidence in the VMA model at the national level. By reviewing VPB implementation frameworks, DSS will be able to ensure that each jurisdiction's approach reflects the VMA's principles, minimises duplication, incorporates meaningful community feedback and promotes collaborative delivery models. This role would also allow DSS to better understand risks and provide relevant support where gaps are identified.

“

I think if the measure of success was - has volunteering improved, then the answer is no. You can hear stories about the sector being split and segregated and even locked into things like state borders, we're not even talking about this idea of sharing knowledge between different States and jurisdictions around best practice, we haven't got that in that space.

- VRC



4.6 Recommendation 6

Review governance arrangements to ensure:

- DSS has appropriate oversight of VMA.
- Roles and responsibilities of actors within VMA are clear.

Summary

The VMA's governance arrangements should be reviewed to enable DSS to have better oversight and control of the VMA. Changes are also recommended to promote role clarity and trust within the VMA program. Actions which could strengthen DSS's oversight of VMA could include:

- informed by jurisdictional perspectives, DSS becomes the decision-maker for the VMA programs. This includes approving implementation plans, and national projects.
- replacing VMAC with a DSS-led VMA advisory committee.
- similar to VMAC, this new committee could still comprise of representatives of each VPB, including Volunteering Australia. However, its purpose would be to advise DSS, rather than to make decisions on program design.
- setting expectations and clarifying the roles of VPBs, VRCs and VIOs in VMA delivery.

To ensure recipients of the VMA funding understand DSS' expectations of each actor, DSS could further articulate the roles and responsibilities of the VMA's actors in a statement.

Evaluation observations

The evaluation found the alignment between policy objectives and implementation could be strengthened through the reform to the VMA governance arrangements, with DSS taking a leading role in the oversight of the VMA's implementation.

DSS currently funds VPBs to deliver the VMA, including national projects and activities focused on priority groups. DSS does not approve the national projects or the activities focused on priority groups, however, reviews these commitments as part of their assessment of AWP's.

The delivery of national projects is governed by an Alliance Agreement between the VPBs and DSS. The stated focus of VMAC is the delivery of national projects, including endorsement of the National Activity Work Plan, the national budget and stakeholder engagement. The national budget is based on each VPB making maximum allocation to national projects each financial year equivalent to \$100,000. This is comprised of a 0.6 FTE SCHADS 6 equivalent resource (or higher) and up to a maximum of \$50,000 in funding for national project delivery. The Alliance Agreement is overseen by the VMAC and comprises of VPBs as voting members,



with DSS and Volunteering Australia as ex-officio members. Decisions require a 75% majority, with VPBs able to exclude themselves from delivering the project.

The evaluation, through the document review, found that the scope of VMA had expanded from a focus on national projects, to the overall VMA program. It also heard from stakeholders there are times where disagreements around which national projects should be identified and concerns that smaller jurisdictions were expected to deliver the same outcomes with less resources.

The evaluation also found there was some, but limited, publicly available information regarding VMA's decisions, particularly around funding. The 2023/24 impact report, 'Our VMA journey', sets out the 'impacts, partnerships, and successes of the VMA program', including identifying national projects. The evaluation understands this report was created in response to DSS' request for clearer impact reports on the VMA. However, what doesn't appear to be publicly documented, is the amount of VMA funding allocated to the delivery of national projects and the decision-making that underpinned the delivery of national projects.

The evidence reviewed in this evaluation found that the accountability for the delivery of national projects to achieve government outcomes could be strengthened. National projects are determined by VMA, and while the Alliance Agreement provides for decisions to be made on national projects, there is no requirement on VPBs to support a national project. The outcome creates a delivery risk for DSS and means it has limited tools to ensure the national projects align with government policy objectives.

These findings suggest DSS should have greater control and oversight over the delivery of the VMA, including national projects, to ensure alignment with government objectives. This may involve clarifying DSS as VMA's decision-maker, including approving national projects and implementation plans. It could also include DSS establishing new oversight arrangements, to ensure VPB delivery aligns with government policy objectives. For example, VMA could be replaced with a DSS-led VMA advisory committee, with VPBs advising DSS on their delivery of the VMA, including on emerging risks.

Consistent with the principles of good governance, roles and responsibilities within the VMA should also be clarified. Prolonged transition funding for VRCs, since 2021, and expectation misalignment of what the VMA, as observed during stakeholder engagement, suggests actors within the VMA ecosystem may still not understand their expected role within this new approach. This presents an opportunity for DSS to consider articulating these roles to clarify their expectations.

The evaluation's reflections draw similar conclusions as the 2022 post-implementation review for the VMA⁷, which made a range of recommendations, including on accountability and effective governance.

⁷ Think Place, 2022, Post-implementation review for the Volunteer Management Activity 5, p.5



4.7 Recommendation 7

Improve transparency of the VMA program to promote understanding within the volunteering sector.

Summary

DSS should revise how the VMA program, including its design and delivery, is communicated to the volunteering sector. Potential measures should be aimed at promoting expectations alignment across the sector and building trust in how decisions are made to deliver the program. For example, DSS could consider revising the VMA page on its website to include details of:

- scope of the VMA and SLRA, and how they sit within the broader volunteering funding landscape
- governance structure
- funding allocation, including for SLRA
- key performance targets
- implementation plans for each VPB
- VPB progress against targets
- program reviews.

Evaluation observations

Transparency around program delivery is critical for promoting trust. Engagement from participants is likely to be more effective and efficient if they understand how the program is being delivered. The evaluation found a range of publicly available information regarding the VMA, including on VPB and DSS' website. However, the evaluation did not observe publicly available information on VMA's decisions, the post-implementation review report, and how performance of the VMA was being measured.

The evaluation found publicly available information about the design, delivery and impact of the VMA, including VMA's scope, VMA's composition, VPB-level program outcomes, and high-level impact reports. This includes the [2023/24 Our VMA Journey report](#), which identified VPB collaboration focus areas, attendance levels and downloads for the [Knowledge Base](#), a volunteering resource website developed as a national project under VMA. This website also provided summaries of national projects, and projects delivered at a state and territory level. Each VPB also had VMA pages on their respective websites, which detailed the projects they had funded.

VIOs and VRCs within the sector had an inconsistent understanding of the scope of the VMA, with some using the funding to deliver the full spectrum of volunteering activities. In addition, just over half (51%) of VIOs and many VRCs did not have awareness of SLRA, the scope of the program, who can access the service and how they could access it.



The evaluation did not observe publicly available information on VMA's decisions, the post-implementation review report, and how performance of the VMA was being measured. This outcome meant there was information asymmetry across actors within the VMA ecosystem, and examples from stakeholders of distrust. One VRC that participated in a focus group as part of the review noted he was aware of a post-implementation review but had not seen its findings.

Expectations around disclosure for government grant administration programs are set out in whole-of-government instruments. For example, the Commonwealth Grant Rules and Principles 2024, issued by the Minister for Finance under section 105C of the Public Governance, Performance and Accountability Act 2013 sets out mandatory requirements and key principles for grant administration. Specifically, section 5.1 of this ministerial instrument provides that *'Effective disclosure and reporting arrangements for grants administration are essential for reasons of transparency, integrity and public accountability. Reliable and timely information on grants awarded is a precondition for public and parliamentary confidence in the quality and integrity of grants administration.'* The evaluation has not formally assessed VMA's compliance with the Commonwealth Grant Rules and Principles 2024 but considers there are likely to be opportunities to strengthen the VMA in line with this ministerial instrument.

Therefore, it is recommended that more information regarding the VMA should be made public. This may include key VMA governance and performance information on DSS' website, such as scope of VMA and SLRA, VMA funding decisions, identified program-level performance metrics and performance reports (whether prepared by DSS or VPBs), program reviews or evaluations. This type of information will not only improve transparency around the delivery of the VMA, but will reduce information asymmetry across VMA actors, assisting to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of how they engage with the VMA.



4.8 Recommendation 8

Refocus VMA performance measures to improve assessment of effectiveness and minimise reporting burden on the volunteering sector.

Summary

DSS should review current performance measurement approaches, with a focus on:

- ensuring performance measures reflect the VMA delivery spectrum, including activities, outputs and outcomes
- containing the number of performance measures to those which are critical to measuring the VMA's effectiveness to minimise reporting burden
- establishing jurisdictional or national targets per performance measure to enable a consistent and transparent approach to assessing success.

Evaluation observations

The performance of the VMA, including compliance with funding agreements, and program outputs, is regularly being reported on, and monitored by, a range of actors within the VMA. The performance focus is largely towards outputs, driven by a performance measurement framework developed by VPBs. DSS' priority focus is compliance with commitments in agreements they have with VPBs. To improve efficiency and effectiveness of performance measurement, there appears to be an opportunity to reduce the reporting burden and refocus the metrics towards outcomes.

The evaluation found that VIOs/VRCs report to VPBs on their performance to deliver a project every 3 months.⁸ VPBs collect this data, including data on its own VMA activities, and report this information to DSS about the delivery of the VMA every six months in an AWP progress report. DSS noted to the evaluation their VMA reporting requirement is once every 6 months for jurisdictional and national programs, and that VPBs set the reporting requirements for their project partners (e.g. VIOs).

The VPB-developed VMA performance measurement framework guiding the reporting requirements reflected in the AWP was developed by VPBs in 2023. While there are no targets for metrics, the performance measurement framework describes the purpose of each category.

During the stakeholder engagement process for the evaluation, some VRCs/VIOs reflected that the reporting requirements for the VMA were onerous and disproportionate to the quantum of funding received. Proportionality is a key principle of the Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024. It also aligns with pillar 3 of the Australian Government's [Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework](#), which was released in March 2025 and promotes reduced

⁸ Volunteering WA, [Volunteer Management Activity 2022–26: Volunteering WA Project Grant Guidelines for Applicants](#), accessed July 2025

administrative burden and simplified reporting requirements in community grant programs (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Pillar 3, Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework

Pillar 3: Reduced administrative burden

Objective: Enable improved focus on service delivery, through reduced administrative burden.

Description: Reducing administrative burden on the sector will create efficiencies and enable a stronger focus on the delivery of grant outcomes for Australian communities. Complex and duplicative reporting and acquittal requirements, which are disproportionate to the size, value and risk of programs, can hinder the sector’s abilities to provide quality service delivery and deliver on program objectives.

Clearly defining outcomes, removing complexity, simplifying reporting requirements and where possible standardising grant management practices, including across government, will also help reduce administrative burden for the sector. While efficiencies are important, it is fundamental to create and maintain behaviours and practices that are safe. This includes consideration of potential unintended consequences, particularly for vulnerable people, where enhanced protections need to be maintained.

This pillar aligns with the proportionality key principle within the *Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024*, which outlines the importance of risk-based approaches to reporting to suit the specific circumstance of each grant.

Under this pillar, the APS is committed to:

- designing grant activities to focus on clearly defined outcomes
- adopting a risk-based approach to reporting
- looking for opportunities to use reporting for multiple purposes
- clearly linking reporting requirements to the objectives and outcomes of the activity.

Consistent with the Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework, it is recommended that DSS should review the performance reporting requirements on the recipients of VMA funding. This includes reviewing their focus, and the frequency within which data is collected to assess performance.

The focus of reporting requirements could be better aligned to the outcomes of the VMA, rather than outputs. This could include improving alignment of DSS’ VMA program logic with the VMA performance measurement framework. This means the data collected and reported by VPBs to DSS, should better link to the outcomes, as well as activities and outputs, identified in the VMA program logic.

The reporting requirements should also better reflect the VMA’s size, value and risk profile. This approach is consistent with the Department of Finance’s Commonwealth Grants (RMG 410), which states ‘*officials should ensure performance measures are proportionate to the risk profile of the grant opportunity, grantees, and the grant activities being funded*’. Compared to other government programs, the VMA is a small government program at \$40.1 million over five years. DSS should have regard to whether 26 reporting metrics in the VPB-developed VMA performance measurement framework is proportionate to the risk profile of the VMA, and whether less than 6 monthly reporting requirements imposed by VPBs is appropriate for



VRCs/VIOs, particularly considering their grant amounts is usually less than \$100,000. For example, in the [NSW Centre for Volunteering 2023-24 project partnerships](#), funding allocated was between \$27,500 to \$87,625.

DSS should consider establishing targets for performance measures for the VMA. Currently, there are no targets in the performance measurement framework which means determining success is challenging. For example, an obligation to report the number of newsletters distributed in the absence of a circulation target makes it difficult to conclude whether having zero, 10, or 100 newsletters represents success. Establishing targets would strengthen the efficiency and effectiveness of how the VMA's performance is monitored.

Overall, the evaluation considers DSS should review existing performance measurement requirements for the VMA to ensure the burden placed on the volunteering sector is proportionate to the value and risk of the VMA.



4.9 Recommendation 9

To promote efficiency in data delivery and assessment, review whether technology could be utilised to streamline data collection processes.

Summary

DSS should review the form and platform used to collect data on the VMA to improve efficiency in data analysis and assessment. This may include exploring the use of data collection portals, including survey tools, to streamline this process.

Evaluation observations

AWPs are used by DSS VMA grant recipients to report their progress to DSS. This includes outputs delivered by VIOs/VRCs on behalf of VPBs for the VMA. The report comprises of quantitative and qualitative data and is provided in a word/pdf document.

Without reflecting on the content of the report, this delivery format does not appear conducive to supporting DSS to conduct an efficient comparative analysis of the performance of the VMA. From what the evaluation has reviewed, it appears a manual process would be required to draw out the information from the reports to enable a comparative and longitudinal analysis to occur. This approach is cumbersome and does not maximise available technologies that could streamline data analysis, and therefore, deliver higher value.

The Australian Government's [Data and Digital Government Strategy](#) has 5 missions to realise its 2030 vision, *'The Australian Government will deliver simple, secure and connected public services, for all people and business, through world class data and digital capabilities'*. One of these missions is to maximise value from data, whereby the Australian Government commits to, *'harnessing analytical tools and techniques (including machine learning and artificial intelligence) to predict service needs, improve user experience, support evidence-based decisions and gain efficiencies in agency operations.'*

Consistent with the Australian Government's whole of government data approach, on 10 July 2025 DSS published their [Data and Analytics Strategy 2025-2027](#). Relevantly, this strategy states, 'We need to acquire and provide access to technological systems that support quality data and timely access to it'.



If we provide a structured approach to managing data it will ensure it is used responsibly, efficiently, and innovatively to enhance service delivery and policy development.

- DSS Data and Analytics Strategy 2025-2027, p.13



Therefore, aligned with the Australian Government's and DSS' respective data strategies, the evaluation considers DSS should consider how data collection processes for the VMA can better harness technology to create value from data. This could include new data collection methods such as survey tools and enhancing Grant Connect to support trend analysis.



5.0 CONCLUSION

Volunteers are a critical part of Australia's social and economic fabric, yet volunteerism has declined since 2010 and fell sharply during COVID-19. The Australian Government redesigned the VMA in 2021 as a national initiative, investing \$37.5 million over five years to help local communities meet demand for capable and diverse volunteers. In 2025, DSS engaged *Allen + Clarke* to evaluate the effectiveness, appropriateness, implementation and efficiency of the VMA, including the SLRA.

The evaluation found that the VMA is delivering activities aligned with its objectives. Most VIOs reported that the VMA delivered outcomes that were aligned with their expectations and the majority indicated increased capacity to manage and support volunteers. The program's emphasis on nationally consistent online tools and resources is helping VIOs strengthen recruitment, management and inclusion, consistent with the short-term outcomes anticipated in the program logic.

Implementation varies across jurisdictions, reflecting the role of VPBs in designing local delivery. This tailoring is working well in several settings. In Victoria, for example, a consortium model led by Volunteering Victoria partners with eight local organisations across metropolitan, regional and rural areas to provide training, one-on-one mentoring, peer learning circles and practical resources for engaging priority groups. International research is consistent with this direction, indicating that locally led approaches can improve efficiency and outcomes in both the short and longer term.

The evaluation found that the VMA provides positive economic value. The VfM analysis estimates a return on investment (ROI) of 2.78, equating to annual benefits of \$22.26 million against an \$8 million annual investment. SLRA generates an even higher ROI of 8.70 per dollar invested, reflecting substantial benefits from accessible legal resources that support volunteer-run organisations to operate safely and effectively.

The evaluation noted opportunities for improvement. Stakeholders reported early challenges with some VPB delivery models and an ongoing lack of clarity about the role of VRCs under the redesigned model. Smaller VPBs and some VIOs also noted that the quantum and duration of funding do not always cover fixed costs associated with establishing and sustaining impactful delivery, such as staffing, partnership development and volunteering infrastructure. Monitoring and evaluation requirements are considered burdensome and largely output-focused. The VPB-developed performance framework includes 26 metrics with no targets, and VIOs and VRCs can be required to report as frequently as quarterly by VPBs, often for grants under \$100,000. These settings limit visibility of outcomes and divert effort from delivery.

Overall, the current VMA model is appropriate for supporting VIOs to build capacity and capability and jurisdictional tailoring in the delivery of the program is a strength. To ensure the program is tracking to deliver its intermediate and long-term outcomes, DSS should increase oversight and communication, clarify roles and responsibilities across VPBs and VRCs, and maintain local flexibility within a clearer national framework. Aligning funding settings with the real costs of sustainable delivery and replacing the current metrics with a proportionate, outcomes-focused performance framework (with clear targets and streamlined reporting) will help lock in the program's benefits for volunteers, VIOs and communities.



6.0 REFERENCES

AmeriCorps Corporation for National and Community Service, 2025, [Funded Grants – AmeriCorps](#), AmeriCorps, accessed July 2025.

AmeriCorps Office of Research and Evaluation, 2024, [Volunteer Generation Fund Program Evaluation](#), AmeriCorps, accessed August 2025.

Department for Culture, Media & Sport, 2025, [Comparing National Enabling Environments for Volunteering](#), Department for Culture, Media & Sport, accessed July 2025.

Department of Finance, 2023, [Data and Digital Government Strategy](#), Commonwealth of Australia, accessed July 2025.

Department of Finance, 2024, [Australian Government Grants Framework \(Commonwealth Grants Rules and Principles 2024\)](#), Department of Finance, accessed July 2025.

Department of Social Services, 2018, [Report on the Review of the VMA](#), DSS, accessed July 2025.

Department of Social Services, 2022, [Annual Report 2021–22](#), Department of Social Services, accessed July 2025.

Department of Social Services, 2022, [Volunteer Management Activity Frequently Asked Questions](#), Department of Social Services, accessed July 2025.

Department of Social Services, 2024, [Report on the Review of the Volunteer Management Activity](#), Department of Social Services, accessed July 2025.

Department of Social Services, 2025, [Community Sector Grants Engagement Framework](#), Department of Social Services, accessed July 2025.

Department of Social Services, 2025, [Data and Analytics Strategy 2025–2027](#), Department of Social Services, accessed July 2025.

Elson, Peter R. & Carmichael, Peyton, 2022, [A Short History of Voluntary Sector–Government Relations in Canada \(Revisited\)](#), The Philanthropist (The Philanthropist Journal), accessed July 2025.

Employment and Social Development Canada, 2025, [Canada Service Corps – Results of the 2023 Call for Proposals](#), Employment and Social Development Canada, accessed July 2025.

mpconsulting, 2018, [Report on the Review of the Volunteer Management Activity](#), Department of Social Services, accessed July 2025.

Native Women’s Association of Canada, 2012, [Volunteering Among Aboriginal Peoples and Encouraging Volunteerism: Fact Sheet](#), Native Women’s Association of Canada, accessed July 2025.



New South Wales Government, [**Department of Communities and Justice, 2023, Best Practice in Volunteer Governance: A Rapid Literature Review**](#), New South Wales Government, accessed July 2025,

New Zealand Department of Internal Affairs, June 2022, [**Strengthening Our Approach to Volunteering**](#), Internal Affairs Te Tari Taiwhenua, accessed July 2025,.

Olling, J., 2025, [**How Much Should You Pay a Lawyer in Australia: A Guide**](#), Lawpath, accessed July 2025.

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD), 2024, [**Unleashing the Potential of Volunteering for Local Development**](#), OECD Publishing, accessed July 2025,.

Randle, Melanie & Reis, Samantha, 2023, [**Best Practice in Volunteer Governance: A Rapid Literature Review**](#), Department of Communities and Justice, New South Wales Government, accessed July 2025.

The Centre for Volunteering, 2024, [**TCfV Project Partner Program 2023–24**](#), The Centre for Volunteering, accessed July 2025.

ThinkPlace, 2022, *Post-implementation review for the Volunteer Management Activity 5*. ThinkPlace

United Nations, 2020, [**Measuring Volunteering for the 2030 Agenda**](#), United Nations, accessed August 2025.

Volunteer Canada, 2017, [**Canadian Code for Volunteer Involvement**](#), Volunteer Canada, accessed July 2025.

Volunteering ACT, 2024, [**State of Volunteering in the ACT 2024 Report**](#), Volunteering ACT, accessed July 2025.

Volunteering Australia, 2023, [**National Strategy for Volunteering: 2023–2033**](#), Volunteering Australia, accessed July 2025.

Volunteer Peak Bodies, 2023, [**Snapshot of Volunteering in Australia: Key findings**](#), Volunteering Australia, accessed July 2025.

Volunteering Peak Bodies, 2024, [**Our VMA Journey: Creating a Thriving and Inclusive Volunteering Culture Across Australia**](#), Volunteering WA, accessed July 2025

Volunteering Australia, 2024, [**Governance Blueprint – National Strategy for Volunteering**](#), Volunteering Australia, accessed July 2025.

Volunteering Australia, 2025, [**Federal Election Platform 2025: Volunteer Nation – Positive Impact, Strong Communities**](#), Volunteering Australia, accessed July 2025.

Volunteering Australia, 2025, [**National Knowledge Base**](#), Volunteering Australia, accessed July 2025.



Volunteering Queensland, 2024, [**State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report, Volunteering Queensland**](#), accessed July 2025.

Volunteering SA&NT, 2024, [**Summary of the SA State of Volunteering Report 2023, Volunteering SA&NT**](#), accessed July 2025.

Volunteering Victoria, 2022, [**VMA5: Development of a Framework and Implementation Process for Victoria**](#), Volunteering Victoria, accessed July 2025.

Volunteering WA, 2025, [**Volunteer Management Activity 2022-26: Volunteering WA Project Grant Guidelines for Applicants**](#), Volunteering WA, accessed July 2025.



Appendices



Appendix A: Glossary

Abbreviation	Specification
AWP	Activity Work Plan A detailed plan outlining the specific activities, timelines, responsibilities, and expected outcomes of a funded project or program.
DSS	Department of Social Services Responsible for funding and performance measurement of the redesigned VMA
GOG	Grant Opportunity Guidelines Official guidelines outlining the objectives, eligibility criteria, application process, and assessment criteria for a grant opportunity.
KEQs	Key Evaluation Questions Strategic questions used to guide the evaluation of VMA
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development An international organisation that works to build better policies for better lives by promoting policies that improve the economic and social well-being of people around the world.
PMF	Performance Measurement Framework A structured approach to measuring and assessing the performance of VMA that was developed by the VPBs
ROI	Return on Investment A financial metric that measures the effectiveness of a program, comparing the benefits it generates to its overall costs.
SARC – Volunteering	Strong and Resilient Communities – Volunteering A stream of funding under the Strong and Resilient Communities program aimed at supporting and strengthening volunteering efforts in local community.
SLRA	Support Volunteer-Run Community Organisations Activity A program that provides legal support for volunteer management
VfM	Value for Money A systematic approach used to assess whether VMA is achieving the best possible outcomes with the resources available
VIOs	Volunteer Involving Organisations Organisations that engage volunteers in delivering services, programs, or activities that benefit the community.
VMA	Volunteer Management Activity



	A government-funded program focused on building the capacity of volunteer-involving organisations through improved volunteer management practices.
VMAC	Volunteer Management Activity Council A governance or advisory body that oversees or supports the implementation and strategic direction of VMA
VPBs	Volunteer Peak Bodies Organisations that deliver VMA and represent the interests of volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers at the regional, state, or national level.
VRCs	Volunteer Resource Centres Organisations that provide support, training, and resources to volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations within a community or region.

Appendix B: Participant summaries

Participant



Volunteer Resource Centre (VRC)

Organisations that provide support, training, and resources to volunteers and volunteer involving organisations within a community or region.

What we observed

- VRCs continue to play a role in the delivery of volunteer management services to the volunteering sector.
- Initially one-off funding, VRCs continue to receive transition funding from DSS to transition to the redesigned VMA model.
- VRCs also receive funding via grant rounds facilitated by VPBs.
- The evaluation heard from some VRCs that the money they received was not adequate to deliver the level of services they have previously provided.
- Some VRCs also expressed frustration that they appeared in competition with VPBs for funding, when they perceived the role of the VPB to be one of advocacy.
- VRCs also experienced different VMA implementation experiences, largely based on their working relationship with their VPB.
- Victoria was often identified as an exemplar by Victorian VRCs.
- VRCs also found reporting requirements were onerous and disproportionate to the value of the grant received from VPBs.

'The real issue is there's distrust built after that federal funding got taken away from the VRC and we started feeling like we were in competition with our peak body, there's still that feeling where often they will come and say visit our regions under the guise of VMA, but then want to meet our membership and anything we kind of do, they'll get our Members to complete a membership with them' – VRC

What this means

- There is a lack of clarity of the role of VRCs in the implementation of VMA, which is affecting their ability to deliver their services in an efficient and effective manner.
- To address this, the evaluation recommends:
 - DSS to provide oversight of VPB implementation frameworks, including change management strategies to strengthen sector relationships (rec 5).
 - Reviewing governance arrangements to ensure:
 - DSS has appropriate oversight of the VMA
 - roles and responsibilities of actors within the VMA are clear (rec 6).
 - Improving transparency of the VMA program to promote understanding within the volunteering sector (rec 7).
 - Refocusing the VMA's performance measures to improve assessment of effectiveness and minimise reporting burden on the volunteering sector (rec 8).

Participant



Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs)

Organisations that engage volunteers in delivering services, programs, or activities that benefit the community.

What we observed

- VMA is delivering activities focused on enhancing the capability and capacity of VIOs.
- Many VIOs regard VMA as enabling more efficient and consistent volunteer management across Australia, reporting that the activities provided under the VMA significantly supported them in managing volunteers.
- VIOs utilised VMA training opportunities and resources, particularly the national standards, which were regarded as foundational to their volunteer management practices.
- VIOs highlighted the value of networks established through Communities of Practice and other platforms, which enabled the sharing of ideas and cross-sector learning.
- VIOs supported the targeting of priority groups and felt the focus had increased awareness of the need for inclusive practices in volunteering. However, many VIOs felt that targeting too many groups simultaneously took resources away from efforts to recruit, train, and retain the main group of volunteers within their communities, which may not align with the priority groups.
- VIOs found legal resources provided by SLRA as highly valuable and effective in building capacity in their legal requirements. However, only 51% of VIOs were aware of SLRA.
- VIOs prefer longer-term funding, finding 12 months or less challenging to effectively deliver a project.
- VIOs considered reporting requirements onerous and disproportionate to the value of the grant.

‘The VMA program has enabled major improvement of volunteer management across the state. Through the VMA program, all volunteering organisations and volunteers can access free of charge, a range of resources on-line that includes the Volunteer Management handbook, Volunteer Management eLearning, and the National Standards. In addition, the VMA program has allowed the establishment of networks for Volunteer Leaders in different sectors and the Volunteer Manager Help Desk.’ – **VIO**

What this means

- VIOs are using the VMA’s outputs to improve volunteer management, however they could benefit from a reduced reporting burden, longer term funding and more information on who is providing VMA services, including SLRA.
- To address this, the evaluation recommends:
 - Encouraging longer-term funding rounds at VPB level, with transparency in the distribution of VMA funds (rec 4).
 - Refocusing VMA performance measures to improve assessment of effectiveness and minimise reporting burden on the volunteering sector (rec 8).

Participant



Volunteer Peak Bodies

Organisations that deliver VMA and represent the interests of volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers at the regional, state, or national level.

What we observed

- Under the redesigned program, the Australian Government is distributing \$37.5 million over 5 years (1 July 2021-30 June 2026) through VPBs to address the evolving needs for skilled and committed volunteers by creating sustainable volunteering practices.
- VPB funding allocation is based on population size of the state and territory.
- Some VPBs suggested a review of this funding approach, with one VPB reflecting, *‘Our recipient numbers are just smaller than the larger jurisdictions, so I think there was an obvious flaw in that original funding model where you can’t assume that just because the recipients are higher that you know you need more resources’*.
- VPBs have driven the delivery of the VMA, through national projects and jurisdictional based funding rounds.
- The different implementation approaches used by VPBs to deliver VMA has created jurisdictional-specific VMA experiences across states and territories, some positive and some negative responses from VRCs and VIOs.
- The delivery of VMA national projects is overseen by the VPB-run VMA Council (VMAC). DSS and Volunteering Australia are ex-officio members on VMAC.
- There is no official governance body for jurisdictional-led projects, however VMAC is being used to consider the broader implementation of VMA.
- VPBs have established a performance measurement framework, comprising of 26 metrics.
- VPBs report on their delivery of VMA to DSS through Activity Work Plan progress reports every 6 months. These plans reflect data consistent with the performance measurement framework and are informed by data collected from their grant recipients such as VIOs.

What this means

- VPBs have delivered activities aligned with the objectives of the VMA. However, the diverse implementation experience across the states and territories, requires DSS to play a greater role to ensure the outcomes pursued by the VMA can be achieved consistently and efficiently across Australia.
- To address this, the evaluation recommends:
 - Refining the VMA funding model to clearly distinguish national projects from other components of the program and review the allocation to reflect jurisdictional needs (rec 3).
 - Reviewing governance arrangements to ensure:
 - DSS has appropriate oversight of the VMA
 - roles and responsibilities of actors within the VMA are clear (rec 6).

Appendix C: Best practice case studies

Victoria's consortia model

Under the redesigned VMA program, jurisdictions were given the autonomy to interpret and implement the program in line with the needs and context of their jurisdictions. Volunteering Victoria responded to this national challenge by bringing organisations across the state together under a consortia model.



A statewide approach in design

At the onset of VMA, Volunteering Victoria undertook extensive engagements (including weekly online meetings and a workshop) with the volunteering sector, including with VRCs previously funded under the VMA. The engagements served multiple purposes, including to:

- ensure VRCs, and other stakeholders, were informed about the redesign process
- discuss the potential impacts, risks and uncertainties around new funding arrangements
- co-develop ways forward to implement the transition process and work collaboratively into the future in the implementation of the VMA.

Using a consortia model, Volunteering Victoria is partnering with eight local organisations across metropolitan, regional and rural Victoria, which aligns with the emergency management services region boundaries.

Each consortium includes a lead organisation, working with other organisations who are members representing the regional population, including at least one VIO or a Volunteering Victoria member with volunteering as their primary service. In implementing the program, each consortium designs and delivers bespoke strategies to break down barriers to volunteering for priority groups and build capability through face-to-face and online support. In addition, Consortium Leads form a collaborative network that operates as a community of practice to facilitate information sharing, problem solving and capability building.

How the consortia model delivers

Since 2022, the consortia model has delivered impactful activities across the state, contributing towards the national goals for the VMA program, including:

- training sessions and workshops on inclusive volunteer management
- one-on-one mentoring and tailored organisational support
- resources for engaging with priority groups and diverse communities
- peer learning circles and local networks to build capability across the sector

Feedback from VRCs and VIOs delivering VMA as part of the consortia model has been overwhelmingly positive, highlighting that the model has promoted strong collaboration and culture across the sector within Victoria, with organisations playing to their strengths to achieve the common goal.



The value of the consortia model

Bringing together multiple stakeholders to the same table

The consortia model brings together a diverse mix of organisations that are best placed to foster connections and deliver tailored support, while retaining consistency with Volunteering Victoria providing strategic leadership across the state. Consequently, the model ensures that support for volunteering is tailored to each community's unique needs.

Reducing duplication and facilitating resource sharing

A key strength of the model lies in its ability to reduce duplication and share resources. By pooling capacity and expertise across regions, consortia partners are better equipped to support VIOs to engage with priority groups in their area. The model encourages collaboration and shared learning through a community of practice that meets regularly to share information, solve problems collectively and improve volunteering practice.⁹

⁹ Volunteering Victoria, 2022, [VMA5: Development of a framework and implementation process for Victoria](#), Volunteering Victoria, accessed July 2025..

Justice Connect's legal support

Justice Connect's Specialist Legal Resources and Advice (SLRA) program is a shining example of innovation in volunteer support.



An invaluable legal support for volunteer organisations

As part of the VMA, the SLRA initiative strengthens VIOs by providing them with expert legal guidance, risk management tools, and support with volunteer practices. It connects a national network of pro bono legal professionals with VIOs to ensure that volunteering programs are legally compliant, inclusive, and well-supported.

What Justice Connect delivers

Justice Connect delivers a unique offering through its not-for-profit law service, offering a wide range of ad-hoc and ongoing legal support. This includes a national online library of nearly 350 legal resources, regular training and customised in-house workshops, developed in partnership with VPBs to ensure they are fit for purpose.

In addition, volunteering organisations can access legal advice from Justice Connect's in-house lawyers or be referred to more than 50 pro bono law firms for more complex matters such as volunteer agreement drafting or legal disputes. Justice Connect ensures nationwide access and equity through a dedicated digital outreach strategy, including optimised resources, monthly legal updates to subscribers, and national resources accompanied by fact sheets for each jurisdiction.

Every year, up to 300 lawyers deliver services under this program, backed by a network of over 10,000 pro bono lawyers. The scale of what Justice Connect is delivering has not been matched by any other community legal centre in Australia.

The value of Justice Connect's legal support

Empowerment and resources

Justice Connect's SLRA program empowers VIOs with the knowledge and tools they need to provide/deliver best practice volunteer management. It also removes legal uncertainty, which is considered a major barrier for volunteering organisations. It provides VIOs with the confidence to act on legal issues and improves the volunteer experience by ensuring policies and practices are clear, inclusive, and legally sound. Evaluation shows the SLRA is valuable: 91% users said it helped them comply with legal obligations, 71% said it helped prevent legal problems, and 64% said it resolved an existing one.

Efficiency and equity

Justice Connect's model promotes efficiency and equity. The program offers centralised expertise that can be tailored to each organisation's needs. This reduces duplication, lifts overall capability, and ensures that legal help is not limited to well-resourced organisations. It is a model grounded in access to legal support and tailored to the unique needs of the volunteering sector.

Intersectional volunteering project

Through the Australian Government's Volunteer Management Activity (VMA), Volunteering SA&NT (VSA&NT) is exploring practical ways to broaden inclusion and diversity in volunteering. This is done through co-design approaches, listening to and learning from young Aboriginal women to drive inclusive volunteering practices.



The value of VSA&NT's intersectional volunteering

A key focus of this project is listening to young Aboriginal women who contribute significantly to community life yet are under-represented in formal volunteer roles. These engagements occur through a series of consultation and **lived experience workshops**. They aim to gather insights and understand how volunteering can better reflect young Aboriginal women's aspirations and realities. This is a new approach for VIOs that is expected to significantly inform future approaches to recruit, manage and retain young Aboriginal volunteers.

What is being delivered

VSA&NT is currently running a 12-month co-design project centred on lived-experience workshops with young Aboriginal women in metropolitan Adelaide. The project is facilitated in partnership with a Ngarrindjeri and Chinese consultant with deep experience working alongside Aboriginal communities, facilitation and co-design. This consultant's role is to support a culturally safe process that enables participants' voices and translates their insights into practical changes VIOs can apply.

The value of co-design

The project aligns directly with the intent of the VMA: to create a thriving, inclusive volunteering culture by building VIO capability and breaking down barriers faced by priority groups, including First Nations people and young people. By engaging young Aboriginal women as co-design partners, VSA&NT is addressing two priority cohorts at once and modelling an approach that other VIOs can adapt. The national program also emphasises strengthening online and face-to-face supports for priority groups and improving volunteer management practice, informing future work programs.

Model for learning and future implementation

Co-design principles underpin the work, with participants guiding topics, modes of engagement and definitions of "what good looks like". This approach is expected to make volunteering more culturally safe and attractive for young Aboriginal women. VSA&NT plans to share emerging lessons with the volunteering sector as the project progresses, supporting early practice change rather than waiting for the project to end. Sharing these learnings will be invaluable in supporting and fostering shared practices.



Appendix D: Value for money analysis

VMA

To determine VfM, a ROI benefit analysis is conducted. This analysis compares the program's costs with the economic and social benefits it generates. VMA program costs are estimated at around \$8 million per year.

To determine the ROI, assumptions are made on VMA outcomes based on available data, including AWP. This evaluation conservatively assumes that VMA helps *retain or encourage* an additional 0.5% of the national volunteer base (equivalent to 25,000 people). Since Volunteering Australia suggest the average volunteer provides 97 hours each year, the evaluation conservatively assumes the additional volunteers associated with VMA allocate half this number of hours per year, 49 hours per week. The evaluation notes organisations value this time using the average hourly part-time wage. Although the part-time wage will vary by age and region, the average part-time wage in Australia in August 2024, as reported by the ABS, was \$18.19 (including entitlements).

Using these conservative assumptions, the value of this additional 1.22 million hours is \$22.26 million, well above the \$8 million annual investment, resulting in a ROI of 2.78. This ROI does not take into out-of-pocket volunteer costs or improvements in volunteer efficiency resulting from VMA initiatives.

Empirical evidence suggests very high ROI in volunteer support. A recent Queensland report found a ROI of 4.7, implying that every \$1 invested in volunteering goods and services generates a benefit of \$4.70 to society.¹⁰ A South Australian report found volunteering activities returned \$5.20 for every \$1 of volunteer cost.¹¹ An ACT report found a \$5.40 benefit for every \$1 invested.¹²

Overall, even conservative estimates indicate the economic value of volunteer work facilitated by VMA far exceeds the program's cost. The high intrinsic ROI of volunteering implies that VMA is likely a sound economic investment, provided it effectively connects communities with volunteering opportunities and improves management.

SLRA

Similarly to VMA, to determine VfM for SLRA, a ROI benefit analysis is conducted. This analysis compares the program's costs with the economic and social benefits it generates. SLRA program costs are estimated at around \$250,000 each year (for two years).

For the period covering July-December 2024, Justice Connect delivered 351 separate instances of free legal information and advice equivalent to an estimated 2,460 hours. The

¹⁰ Volunteering Queensland 2024, [State of Volunteering in Queensland 2024 Report – Volunteering Queensland](#), Volunteering Queensland, accessed July 2025

¹¹ Volunteering SA & NT 2024, [State of Volunteering South Australia 2023](#), Volunteering SA & NT, accessed July 2025

¹² Volunteering ACT 2024, [State of volunteering in the ACT 2024](#), Volunteering ACT, accessed July 2025



majority (76%) of these cases were for minor legal enquiries and 24% were for legal issues requiring comprehensive advice / representation.

Lawpath suggest that potential legal costs for a lawyer to work on a low matter of complexity (i.e., simple wills, basic contracts, letters of demand) costs between \$660 - \$1,056 for one hour's work (an average of \$828 per hour).¹³ Medium complex cases (i.e., employment contracts, partnership agreements, debt recovery) costs between \$792 - \$1,320 for one hour's work (an average of \$1,056 per hour). High complex cases (i.e., litigation, complex estates, IP disputes) costs between \$990 - \$1,760 for one hour's work (an average of \$1,375 per hour). Lawpath estimates that a medium complexity legal case in Australia typically requires 10 to 50 hours of legal work.

Using Justice Connect's data and assuming that 1,870 hours (76% x 2,460) were devoted to low complex cases equates to an estimated cost of \$1.55 million (1,870 hours x \$828 per hour). An estimated 590 hours (24% x 2,460) were devoted to medium complex cases, equating to an estimated cost of \$0.62 million (590 hours x \$1,056 per hour). The total value of this pro bono time is estimated at \$2.17 million. Compared with annual grant funding of \$0.25 million, this equates to a ROI of 8.7, for every one dollar invested in Justice Connect, a benefit of \$8.70 is returned. This is a conservative estimate as it reflects only one outcome from Justice Connect over a 6-month time frame.

Overall, relatively small investments in legal resources are providing a significant ROI.

¹³ Lawpath 2025, [How Much Should You Pay a Lawyer in Australia: A Guide](#), Lawpath, accessed July 2025

