



Investing in our Volunteers

Volunteering WA State Budget Submission

November 2025

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Overview

In 2023 volunteering contributed \$63.9 billion to the Western Australian community and \$4.8 billion to WA's Gross State Product¹, strengthening community resilience, and improving wellbeing, inclusion, and workforce participation. Community services, sport and recreation, the arts and the environment sectors in WA are heavily reliant on volunteers to deliver their services.

The Western Australian government currently provides vital support to volunteering through:

- A designated Minister for volunteering
- Implementing the WA Government's Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan
- Providing funding to the volunteering peak body through the SSDA
- Lotterywest grants for National Volunteer Week, and the Volunteering WA Measuring Change social impact project.
- Funding 19 Volunteer Resource Centres located in metropolitan and regional Western Australia
- Small Grants to celebrate International Volunteer Day (5th December)
- Engaging an estimated 72,000 volunteers in State government agencies².

The return on investment in volunteering is 470%, with \$4.70 returned for every dollar invested.³ This submission proposes that the economic, community and individual wellbeing of Western Australians can be significantly enhanced through targeted, strategic investment in volunteers and volunteering.

About Volunteering WA

Established in 1988, Volunteering WA is the peak body for volunteering in Western Australia. With a membership of more than 850 volunteer involving organisations, we work in partnership with community, corporate, educational and public sector organisations to provide leadership, advancement and promotion of volunteering to achieve the greatest impact for Western Australia.

As the leading voice for volunteers and volunteer involving organisations, we work to strengthen the sector and promote the benefits of volunteering and its value in transforming and enriching the communities in which we live. Volunteering WA proudly represents over 1.5 million volunteers across the state including 742,000 people aged over 15 who volunteer formally with an organisation or group.

As the State's peak body for volunteering, Volunteering WA works closely with the Minister for Volunteering, the Department of Communities and other government agencies in the support of volunteering.

We strengthen the WA Government's Volunteering Strategy, Action Plan and the following government priorities⁴:

- Developing a skilled and productive workforce
- Fostering a vibrant and creative economy
- Promoting active healthy lifestyles
- Providing more support for mental health.
- Building Safe and inclusive communities so that all Western Australians feel secure at home, at work and in the community
- Investing in a more inclusive community

¹ **WA State of Volunteering Report 2023** Volunteering WA, page 14

² From a verbal presentation by the Insurance Council of Western Australia to the Volunteering Community Reference Group in August 2025.

³ Op. cit. Volunteering WA, page 14

⁴ **Our priorities for government 2025-2029** Government of Western Australia

The proposed investments align with WA government priorities outlined above as well as the WA Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan, the State Seniors Strategy, and the Youth Action Plan, *Koorlangka Bidi*. The measures will assist to remove key barriers to volunteering in the areas of screening checks and insurance; and will fund critical volunteering infrastructure, including a **Building Connections Project**, designed to help reverse the volunteer shortages that we are currently experiencing in critical sectors such as the Care Economy and reduce loneliness through positive and proven interventions.

Budget Recommendations

Our budget recommendations seek funding for critical volunteer infrastructure:

- 1. Fund the Building Connections Project (\$200,000 indexed for 3 years)** - to help reverse the statewide decline in volunteering and boost connectivity. This project will work with stakeholders to identify, embed and support clear pathways into volunteering for young people, seniors and families in Western Australia.
- 2. Commission a Triennial State of Volunteering Report 2026/27 (\$100,000)** -The State of Volunteering Report (SOVR) provides WA with vital information about our volunteering sector. This project builds on the data set collected in the 2023 WA State of Volunteering Report.

The surveys of members of the public and Volunteer Managers need to be conducted regularly to establish a reliable time series to inform policy development in this sector. The Report is also an essential part of the evidence base to help evaluate the return on government's investment in volunteers. Fieldwork would commence in 2026 with a published report by June 2027.
- 3. Conduct a review of the insurance arrangements applying to volunteers in Western Australia** - in partnership with Volunteering WA. The review will inform the design of suitable, equitable insurance coverage for the sector. This measure requires in-kind contributions of staff time and expertise from relevant government agencies and Volunteering WA.
- 4. Fix the Volunteer Screening system:**
 - 4.1 Remove the fees for volunteer screening checks (\$855,000 annually)- Volunteer screening check fees generated \$855,000 in revenue in WA last financial year but generated disproportionately greater costs to the community through inefficiencies in volunteer onboarding and consequent volunteer dropouts, further exacerbating existing shortages.
 - 4.2 Allocate forward year funding allocations to the Department of Communities to ensure completion of the government's current project to fully digitise volunteer screening checks while ensuring accessible screening processes are provided for the digitally excluded.
 - 4.3 Provide a dedicated screening checks online portal, co-designed with Volunteering WA's Expert Reference Group, through which volunteers and volunteer involving organisations can access volunteer screening checks and update relevant information.

About this submission

This submission explains how the economic, community and individual wellbeing of Western Australians can be significantly enhanced through targeted, strategic investment in 4 proposals designed to support and measure volunteer engagement and help to reverse the current decline in volunteering.

1. The Building Connections Project

This project is designed to help reverse the statewide decline in volunteering. The business-as-usual approach is not working. We need to be offering flexible, tailored opportunities to stem the decline in volunteering in Western Australia and help to address volunteer shortages in critical areas such as the care economy.

The evidence shows that volunteering contributes significantly to our state GDP and assists the community but also improves the volunteer's individual wellbeing, by building social connections and combatting loneliness⁵. Certain target groups need more support to identify and connect with volunteering opportunities, especially children and young people, families and seniors⁶.

Context and rationale for investing the resources needed to drive the engagement of Children and Young People and Families in Volunteering:

In 2025 the Minister's Volunteering Community Reference Group discussed intersections between the Koorlangka Bidi Youth Action Plan and opportunities to promote youth engagement in volunteering. Our previous [YVolunteer](#) project (the funding ended in 2023), developed a platform and resources for volunteers and volunteer involving organisations to mobilise and advance youth volunteer engagement. The YVolunteer project also identified the opportunity to design programs to engage younger children through family volunteering. We have since partnered with Teach Learn Grow and Volunteer South West on two federally funded pilot projects which have provided further tools and insights on how best to connect young people in school and vocational education settings to volunteering opportunities.

Schools provide the most efficient settings for connecting young people to volunteering. Many private schools offer service-learning opportunities for their students as part of their pastoral care programs. By contrast, the State School system currently lacks the relevant supports and resources to offer similar opportunities to their students, although research published in 2025 from the United States provides evidence for volunteering as a potential solution for the health-related social outcomes of loneliness and isolation experienced by adolescents in the United States. Modelling results showed that volunteering was associated with lower odds of difficulty making or keeping friends and behaviour or conduct problems in adolescents. Participation in volunteering and the associated social benefits suggest volunteering may be a win-win, wherein youth help others and help themselves.⁷

Analysis of data from *The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children (LSAC)*, by the Australian Institute of Family Studies, in 2023, confirms the benefits of volunteering for young people's mental health: **"if by age 13 a young person was involved in volunteering, the odds of having 'clinical levels' of emotional symptoms two years later were reduced by approximately 28%"**.⁸

⁵ **Adolescent volunteering in the United States: associations with friendship and behavior outcomes** Kevin Lanza, Mikaela Lies, Melissa Gutierrez-Kapheim, Michaela Krogen, Maureen R. Benjamins, *Children and Youth Services Review*, Volume 179, (published online 1 October 2025), 108612

⁶ **The Relationship Between Volunteering and the Occurrence of Loneliness Among Older Adults: A Longitudinal Study with 12 Years of Follow-Up**, Joonyoung Cho & Xiaoling Xiang (2023), *Journal of Gerontological Social Work*, 66:5,680-693, DOI: 10.1080/01634372.2022.2139322

⁷ Op. cit. Kevin Lanza, Mikaela Lies, Melissa Gutierrez-Kapheim, Michaela Krogen, Maureen R. Benjamins (2025)

⁸ **Prosocial behaviours and the positive impact on mental health** (Growing Up in Australia Snapshot Series – Issue 9). Rowland, B., & Evans-Whipp, T. (2023). Melbourne: Australian Institute of Family Studies.

Context and rationale for investing the resources needed to drive the engagement of Seniors in Volunteering:

Two of the 4 pillars of change in the WA Government's 10-year State Seniors Strategy 2023-2033 are:

- Staying connected and engaged and
- Thriving spiritually, mentally and physically.

Connecting Seniors to volunteering is critical to delivering the following key strategy outcomes:

- Seniors have the support and information they need to support their wellbeing
- Seniors are supported to engage in their community in ways they choose

The strategy goes on to describe "Wellbeing" and "Volunteering and social participation" as Key Focus Areas falling under each of these Outcomes.

There is evidence demonstrating a reduction in loneliness in later life where older volunteers complete at least 100 hours of volunteering per year. The same study suggests that more volunteering opportunities be provided to older adults as a public health intervention and that there is value in providing relevant education or training for older adults to enable them to apply for their preferred volunteer roles.⁹

Young people and seniors derive special benefits from volunteering, with the benefits of volunteering for these groups aligning with existing State government priorities. It makes sense to design a project to maximise engagement of these cohorts.

The Building Connections project will engage with key stakeholders such as schools, (through the Department of Education), retirement communities, local governments delivering aged care services and school holiday and youth programs, the Minister's Youth Advisory Council, youth peak body, YACWA, the senior's peak body, Advocare and volunteer involving organisations seeking to engage with these groups.

Volunteering WA will work with these stakeholders to build connections through events-based volunteering which will also build social connections:

- Micro-volunteering "tasters"
- School "Vollie Day" programs for families with young children
- Volunteering incursions and excursions for school students and seniors

As well as building connections, we will also support young people and seniors on volunteering pathways through sharing important information and resources about volunteering opportunities and relevant training to build skills and confidence.

The 3-year project will be phased with both stakeholder and volunteer engagement building over the life of the project.

A full-time dedicated Project Co-ordinator will drive the significant stakeholder engagement required for this project to succeed. The project costing also includes funds for project evaluation, and the usual project on-costs as well as travel and communications.

Recommendation 1: Fund the Building Connections Project to help reverse the statewide decline in volunteering. (\$200,000 per annum, for 3 years, indexed at 3%).

⁹ Op. cit Joonyoung Cho & Xiaoling Xiang (2023)

2. Triennial State of Volunteering Report

The State of Volunteering Report (SOVR) provides WA with vital information about our volunteering sector. This project builds on the data set collected in the 2023 WA State of Volunteering Report. The surveys of members of the public and Volunteer Managers need to be conducted regularly to establish a reliable time series to inform policy development in this sector.

The Report is also an essential part of the evidence base to help evaluate the return on government's investment in volunteers. Previous reports are regularly cited by State Government and referenced in strategy and policy work. Similar surveys are conducted in States and Territories around Australia, allowing useful comparisons between jurisdictions.

The costing for this project is based on actual expenditure for the previous State of Volunteering Report Project conducted in FY2023/24. Fieldwork for this project would commence in 2026 with production of a published report by June 2027.

Recommendation 2: That the State Government allocate \$100,000 to produce the triennial Volunteering WA State of Volunteering Report.

3. Review of volunteer insurance arrangements

Work health and safety laws apply equally to volunteers and employees in Western Australia. However, only employees are entitled to worker's compensation. There is no legal obligation on volunteer involving organisations to provide personal accident insurance for volunteers, nor is there a minimum industry standard for personal accident insurance for volunteers.

A patchwork of insurance arrangements, along with information asymmetry, exists in the volunteering sector, posing equity issues and potential market failures. For example, small volunteer involving organisations may not be able to afford appropriate volunteer personal accident insurance nor other specific insurances essential to their continued service delivery including public liability insurance and sexual abuse and molestation insurance.

The review is a low-cost, first step, requiring key State government and Local government stakeholders (Communities, Finance, Treasury, ICWA, LGIS, WALGA) to make in-kind contributions by meeting with Volunteering WA to map the issues and identify potential solutions.

Any solutions identified through this preliminary process would be put forward for consideration in a future budget process.

Recommendation 3: Conduct a review of the insurance arrangements applying to volunteers in Western Australia, in partnership with Volunteering WA. The review will inform the design of suitable, equitable insurance coverage for the sector. (Uncosted- no new money proposed, only time of existing staff within government and Volunteering WA).

4. Fix the volunteer screening system

In this section we make three simple recommendations to fix the volunteer screening system, which currently acts as a significant barrier to volunteer engagement in WA.

Volunteer shortages are a problem in WA with 80% of volunteer managers citing volunteer recruitment as a very important issue¹⁰. The WA State of Volunteering Report 2023¹¹ explains the critical volunteering shortages that exist, especially in the Care Economy. Our members have told us that significant numbers of volunteer applicants drop out during the onboarding process due to inefficient government screening checks which require in-person attendance at government service centres.

Using the volunteer benefits calculator¹² on our website, and case study feedback from our members about potential volunteer hours lost, we estimate this hidden cost to the volunteering sector to be worth many millions of dollars per annum.

Case Study – The cost of volunteer dropouts due to inefficient screening checks

Good Sammy loses 60 volunteer applicants per month.

These applicants express interest in the role, start the onboarding process, including the NDIS screening check, and then drop out.

Had they not dropped out, these volunteers would likely have volunteered for 360 hours per year.

The estimated annual financial cost of *Good Sammy's* forsaken volunteer hours is \$2.1 Million. (Calculated using the Volunteer Benefits Calculator on the Volunteering WA website).

We continue to call on the government to make screening checks free for volunteers. In 2024/25 fee revenue from these checks totalled \$855,000, yet waiving these costs would have delivered far greater value to the estimated 73,000¹³ volunteers who completed screenings, as well as the volunteer involving organisations across the state. These organisations are unnecessarily burdened by the administrative complexity of these charges and lose potential volunteers due to the inefficiencies it creates.

Recommendation 4.1: Remove the fees for volunteer screening checks. (\$855,000 annually).

In 2025 we established an Expert Reference Group to advise government on streamlining volunteer screening checks. The government has now digitised the NDIS screening check renewal process and is on track to digitise the Working with Children Check application process by June 2026. We congratulate the government on the progress made to date but emphasise the need for government to fully fund digitisation of the NDIS and Aged care screening check applications in the forward years.

The government and Volunteering WA recognise that digitisation is only part of the solution and well resourced, accessible processes must be appropriately designed and resourced to support the digitally excluded.

¹⁰ Op. cit. Volunteering WA page 44.

¹¹ Op. cit. Volunteering WA page 48: "In mid-2022, most organisations in WA reported an immediate need for fewer than 10 volunteers (47.4%) while at the other end of the spectrum were 15.7% of organisations looking for more than 50 volunteers. Organisations reporting acute shortages in WA included those from the emergency services, disability, youth and aged care sectors."

¹² Volunteer benefits calculator - Volunteering WA

¹³ Estimate derived from a combination of published and unpublished WA government data.

Recommendation 4.2: Allocate forward year funding allocations to the Department of Communities to ensure completion of the government’s current project to fully digitise volunteer screening checks while ensuring accessible screening processes are provided for the digitally excluded. (Uncosted).

To further reduce administrative complexity for both volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations, Volunteering WA seeks a commitment from government to fully fund a new single online portal for volunteer screening checks in WA with improved functionality for both volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. This new Volunteer Screening Check Portal should be designed in consultation with Volunteering WA and our Expert Reference Group.

Recommendation 4.3: Provide a dedicated screening checks online portal, co-designed with Volunteering WA’s Expert Reference Group. (Uncosted).

Conclusion

This modest investment is critical for WA’s volunteer infrastructure and to help reverse the decline in volunteering; rigorously measure the extent, challenges and impact of volunteering in WA; and to better understand and reduce key barriers to volunteering in the areas of insurance and volunteer screening checks.

All these measures align with government priorities and will have significant positive impacts on individual volunteers as well as the broader Western Australian Community.

Strategic investment in the critical volunteering infrastructure outlined in this submission will deliver a high return on investment by building connections, reducing barriers, and leveraging the existing strengths of Western Australia’s volunteers and volunteer involving organisations to create a more inclusive, connected and active community.

Empowering people and communities to enrich Western Australia

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