

Volunteering Community Reference Group

4 March 2026

Communique #20

The Volunteering Community Reference Group (VCRG) is convened by Volunteering WA (VWA) to provide community input to the Minister for Volunteering. This communique refers to the meeting held on Wednesday 4 March 2026. In attendance were:

Dept. Premier & Cabinet	Name
Minister for Volunteering	The Hon. Hannah Beazley MLA
Ministerial staff	Jacob Mitchell, Policy Advisor, Rebecca Boteler, Senior Media Advisor
VCRG Members	Name
NFP volunteering sector	Craig Spencer, St John’s Ambulance, Chair
Volunteer Resource Centres	Vicki Pollard, Peel VRC, Elizabeth Aason, Swan VRC
Corporate Representative	Heidi Madden, Chair, Corporate Volunteer Council
WALGA Representative	Hannah Godsave
Research representative	Dr Megan Paull, Murdoch University
Emergency Services Volunteer	Phil Scanlan (Metro)
Individual volunteer	Esther Bliss (Regional) Dr Tina Firth (Metro) Sandra Prosser (Regional) Rahul Seth CA (Metro) Michael Wainwright (Metro) Phil Scanlan (Metro)
Volunteering WA (VWA)	Tina Williams, CEO Dominique Hansen, Manager, Policy & Research
Department of Communities	Kristen Newman, A/Executive Director – Strategy
Guest	Angelo Barbaro, Executive Director, Regulation and Quality, Department of communities

The Chair welcomed attendees and acknowledged the traditional owners of the land on which we met, the Wadjuk People of the Noongar Nation, and paid his respects to elders past and present.

1. Opening Comments from Minister Beazley

The Minister noted that the meeting marked her first full year in the portfolio and that the coming year celebrates the United Nations International Year of Volunteers for Sustainable Development (IVY 2026), a year in which volunteers are recognised as key drivers of community resilience, social connection, and global sustainable development goals. The Minister also highlighted two recent Lotterywest Grants provided to volunteering WA:

- \$372,000 for the new Volunteering Hub Initiative
- \$425,000 for National Volunteer Week Grants and Volunteer Awards

The Minister concluded by presenting a certificate of thanks to retiring member and Swan Volunteer Resource Centre Manager, Elizabeth Acaon, for her service to the Volunteering Community Reference Group since it was first established in 2017.

2. Youth Volunteering

Expanding on the VCRG discussion in November 2025 and Volunteering WA's November [2025 State Budget Submission](#), the group discussed and further refined, Volunteering WA's proposal that the State invest in developing a youth volunteering framework which:

- Promotes the benefits of youth volunteering, both for individual children and young people, as well as the benefits for the community, of increased volunteer engagement, including more resilient children and young people, strengthened social capital due to increased volunteer engagement, and improved social cohesion.
- Enables children and young people and their families to volunteer, including the provision of information and clear, supported, pathways into volunteering.
- Recognises that schools and technical education provide the most efficient settings for connecting young people to volunteering.

3. WA Government's Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan

Kristen Newman, the Acting Director, Inclusion Policy advised that the Government's Volunteer Strategy will be 10 years old in 2027 and the associated Action Plan will expire in 2027. The next steps regarding the strategy and plan are currently being considered by the Minister.

4. Update on VCRG Membership

Kristen Newman, the Acting Director, Inclusion Policy provided a brief update on VCRG Member terms, which are ending soon. Further information about the VCRG appointments and renewal process will be provided at the next meeting of the VCRG.

5. Volunteering WA Update

Volunteering WA CEO Tina Williams, provided an update including the [Volunteering WA State Budget Submission](#); the Volunteering WA [Research Grant Program](#); an update on outcomes of the February meeting of the Expert Reference Group on Volunteer Screening; National Volunteer Week Awards and Grants; Volunteering WA's research into social prescribing; Volunteering WA's new premises and new website; and joint policy submissions with Volunteering Australia on the federal budget and on insurance issues for small businesses and not-for-profits.

6. Screening Check Update - Angelo Barbaro, Executive Director, Regulation and Quality, Department of Communities

The newly digitised NDIS online renewal process is working well. Renewal reminders are being sent out and a simple video on the website explains the NDIS renewal process

Work on fully digitising the Working With Children Check is progressing. There are slight delays around the requirement to capture an image which goes on the card. The Department is trying to identify a suitable platform. The project is on track for the online portal to go live in August 2026.

Issues with renewal of Working With Children Checks arose last year following the introduction of multi factor authentication requirements in August 2025. It seems that the system is intermittently not recognising symbols and characters in the login, preventing some users from logging in. To address the issue the online log in process has been updated.

Legislative reforms to the Working With Children Legislation were also discussed. Amendments implementing national reforms agreed to by the Standing Council of Auditors General (SCAG) are currently before the Parliament.

Separately, the submissions received in 2025 as part of the Tranche 2 Review of the Working With Children Check are receiving consideration prior to proposing further legislative reforms.

7. Presentation by regional volunteer, Sandra Prosser

Sandra Prosser has lived and volunteered in Esperance for over 25 years. Sandra explained that:

“Volunteering in Esperance has shown me that community strength isn’t built in moments of crisis. It’s built quietly, over years, by people who show up repeatedly, in school halls, on sports grounds, in emergency vehicles, and in meeting rooms.”

Sandra explained the challenges and the benefits of volunteering in regional communities.

Distance. Emergency incidents aren’t ten minutes away. That changes fatigue and logistics as people need to negotiate with work to attend the incident. You may have to use your own vehicle to get there.

Resourcing these roles. In regional areas, volunteers wear multiple hats.

There’s no separation between volunteer life and community life. That closeness strengthens commitment, but it also adds emotional weight. In regional towns, you often know the people affected. This takes a toll on the entire community.

While compliance regulations have increased, the volunteer pool is shrinking. Governance standards have strengthened, and they should, but in small communities that administrative load falls on the same limited group of people.

Despite those challenges Sandra explained that regional volunteering has powerful benefits:

Trust. In a regional town, reputation matters. When you volunteer, you are accountable not just to legislative requirements, but to people who know you personally. Accountability is personal, and that builds integrity into the system in a very practical way.

Connection. You see the direct impact of your effort.

Capability. Regional volunteers have a broad skill set.

Belonging. Volunteering in regional areas creates a shared identity.

Sandra concluded her presentation with a plea for intentional investment in regional volunteering, not just in funding, but in systems that recognise the unique operating environment of regional Australia. Sandra’s suggested investments include: reducing administrative burden; providing practical training access; recognising emotional load; and ensuring that small communities are not asked to carry metropolitan compliance expectations without proportional support.

8. Next VCRG Meeting

The next VCRG meeting will be held on Tuesday 26 May 2026 at 10am.

Special events 2026	
WA Volunteer of the Year Awards	Thursday 14 May
National Volunteer Week	Monday 18 May – Thursday 24 May
National Conference, Adelaide	Tuesday 16 –18 June
National Youth Volunteer Week	Monday 10 – Sunday 16 August
IVD Garden Party	Thursday 3 December
International Volunteers’ Day	Saturday 5 December

More information on the Volunteering Community Reference Group, including Terms of Reference and membership, is available [here](#).