

Submission on shaping the future of employment services

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Overview

Volunteering provides many benefits to the participant, one of which is a potential pathway to employment, allowing them to gain work-related skills and experience while also contributing meaningfully to their community. Volunteering Australia welcomes, with caveats, the proposed employment services reform, that will include voluntary work as an activity to support job seekers' skills development and address the barriers they may face to employment.

This submission responds to the discussion paper released by the Department of Employment and Workplace Relations [Shaping the Future of Employment Services](#). The Department is proposing to create three new service streams, including an intensive services – Stream 3 that will include voluntary work as an activity to support job seekers' pathway to employment.¹

This submission provides advice about issues related to volunteering that must be considered in the design of the new employment services program. We support the inclusion of volunteering as an authorised and funded activity within the new employment services program, with caveats. We recommend the following:

1. Establish a funding mechanism to reimburse volunteer involving organisations, State and Territory volunteering peak bodies and other suitable organisations for the activities they undertake as part of the employment services program.
2. Develop a matching process with a national approach that connects job seekers with suitable voluntary work opportunities that meet their employment goals and considers past and existing state and territory programs.
3. Include volunteering in the proposed trial to demonstrate the efficacy (or otherwise) of volunteering as an adequate pathway to employment.
4. Participation in employment services continue to be optional for volunteer involving organisations and clear guidelines about participation be developed and agreed to.
5. Voluntary work arrangements are clearly distinguishable from paid employment arrangements.
6. Minimise additional obligations and administrative requirements on participating volunteer involving organisations.
7. No penalties be applied to volunteer involving organisations where a job seeker does not attend or meet their mutual obligations on the program.
8. Jobseekers do not incur out-of-pocket expenses through volunteering or reimbursement is provided where costs are incurred.
9. Develop the new scheme through extensive consultation with the volunteering ecosystem to avoid unintended consequences.

¹ <https://www.dewr.gov.au/download/17634/shaping-future-employment-services-discussion-paper/42903/document/pdf>

Introduction

Background and context

Volunteering Australia defines volunteering as time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.² For the purposes of this submission, Volunteering Australia acknowledges that receiving payment, in this case government allowances, through volunteer participation does not strictly meet this definition. However, we accept that volunteering could be part of the solution in these exceptional circumstances and should remain an eligible activity given the mutual benefit it can provide to both the participant and the wider community.

Data from the most recent General Social Survey showed that 9.5 million Australians engaged in either formal or informal volunteering or both in 2025, representing 42.8% of the population.³

The data also showed that a significant amount of unemployed people made a meaningful contribution to volunteering in 2025, with 12.2% of people who were unemployed volunteering through an organisation in 2025. This engagement in volunteering provided unemployed people with opportunities to learn new skills, build new networks, and find pathways to study and training, as well as providing the community with the benefit of the time and skills which volunteers contributed.

A volunteer involving organisation is defined as a not-for-profit, private or government organisation that engages volunteers. They operate across Australia from major cities to remote areas⁴ and range in size from very small local groups that are entirely volunteer run to large national and multinational organisations that also employ paid workers.

While there is no aggregated figure that captures all forms of volunteer involving organisations in Australia, data is available on charities (a subset of not-for-profit organisations). According to the recently released Australian Charities and Not-For-Profit Commission 12th Edition, 53,641 charities provided Annual Information Statements for the 2024 reporting period.⁵ Fifty three percent (53%) of these charities were operating with no paid staff, relying entirely on volunteers. The data also showed that smaller charities were more likely to be volunteer-run with 89.3% of extra small charities being entirely volunteer run, compared to 4.9% of very large charities.⁶ In fact, extra small charities made up 30.1% of all volunteer-run charities while very large charities made up 4.7%.⁷

² <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/get-involved/resources/definition-of-volunteering/>

³ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-GSS-Report-EXPANDED.pdf>

⁴ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Organisation-Perspective.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-12th-edition>

⁶ The ACNC measures charity size by revenue: total revenue for extra small charities is less than \$50,000 and for extra large charities is \$10 million or more but less than \$100 million

⁷ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-12th-edition>

Volunteer involving organisations operate across a wide range of sectors, including sport, religion, health, disability, aged care, community services, education, environment, emergency services, justice, arts and cultural groups and represent a substantial part of the workforce in these sectors.

About this submission

This submission highlights the benefits volunteering can play in building employment readiness and best practice considerations for volunteer involvement. Critically, the submission argues that where volunteer involving organisations, State and Territory volunteering peak bodies and other suitable organisations participate in employment services, they should be adequately funded to support job seeker matching and for engaging job seekers. In addition, to ensure volunteering is a meaningful activity to support the delivery of the new employment services program, a resourced and funded matching process with a national approach should be developed to ensure only eligible and approved volunteer involving organisations take part in the scheme, and job seekers are matched with suitable voluntary work opportunities that support them to achieve their employment goals.

This submission was drafted by Volunteering Australia in collaboration with our foundation members, the State and Territory volunteering peak bodies and follows previous submissions and documents:

- Submission on the Inquiry-into-Small-Business-Insurance⁸
- Submission on national approach to worker screening in the care economy⁹
- Submission to the Productivity Commission on the Delivering Quality Care More Efficiently - interim report¹⁰
- Submission on the Future of Supported Employment Discussion Paper¹¹
- Submission to the Inquiry into Workforce Australia Employment Services¹²

⁸ https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=428&wpfd_file_id=91186&token=&preview=1

⁹ https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=275&wpfd_file_id=58409&token=&preview=1

¹⁰ https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=275&wpfd_file_id=58260&token=&preview=1

¹¹ https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=199&wpfd_file_id=44538&token=&preview=1

¹² https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-admin/admin-ajax.php?juwpfisadmin=false&action=wpfd&task=file.download&wpfd_category_id=199&wpfd_file_id=40389&token=&preview=1

The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023-2033)

The National Strategy for Volunteering (2023–2033) is a ten-year blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia, providing a strategic framework for enabling safe, supported, and sustainable volunteering. The National Strategy for Volunteering was developed through a 12-month co-design process with members of the volunteering ecosystem.¹³ The design and development of the volunteering component of the proposed employment services reform should consider alignment with the National Strategy for Volunteering. Two of the Strategy’s strategic objectives are particularly relevant:

- Strategic Objective 1.1 Focus on the Volunteer Experience
- Strategic Objective 1.3 Ensure Volunteering is Not Exploitative

The unemployment settings in Australia

Current unemployment in Australia

The most recent data from the Australian Bureau of Statistics¹⁴ showed that in June 2026, the seasonally adjusted unemployment rate was 4.4% (or approximately 687,000 people) in Australia, with 4.5% of males unemployed and 4.4% females unemployed. The rate of young people unemployed was 10.7%. Unemployment was highest in Victoria (5.1%) followed by Tasmania (4.9%). The underemployment rate in June 2026 was 6.5% seasonally adjusted. However, many Australians continue to experience challenges in finding meaningful work in a strong labour market.

Those most at risk of not gaining employment often experience overlapping and complex barriers to employment, such as limited education or qualifications, chronic health issues and financial hardship.¹⁵ These individuals tend to encompass the proportion of people who are in employment services for 5 years or more¹⁶, and may be more likely to reside in regional areas of Australia than major cities.¹⁷

The current employment services system and volunteering

Current Workforce Australia employment services help job seekers on the income support safety net find paid work through a focus on mutual obligations, job searching and mandatory activities.¹⁸ Some job seekers can self-manage their mutual obligations and job search online

¹³ <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/the-strategy/>

¹⁴ <https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/labour/employment-and-unemployment/labour-force-australia/jun-2026>

¹⁵ <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/epdf/10.1002/ajs4.70099>

¹⁶ <https://www.dewr.gov.au/download/17634/shaping-future-employment-services-discussion-paper/42903/document/pdf>

¹⁷ <https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/bulletin/2020/dec/pdf/long-term-unemployment-in-australia.pdf>

¹⁸ <https://www.workforceaustralia.gov.au/individuals/obligations/learn/get-started>

through Workforce Australia Online, while an employment services provider can more directly support other job seekers to meet these requirements.

The broader employment services ecosystem also supports people with disability, those with injury or health conditions through Inclusive Employment Australia, and people in remote Australian communities are supported through the Remote Australia Employment Services.

Individuals applying for job seeker payment must engage in employment services and enter into an agreed job plan.¹⁹ A job plan outlines mutual obligation requirements that must be met to receive a job seeker payment and is determined by the person's age, working capacity and carer responsibilities. Mutual obligations consist of agreed job search actions and suitable activities to support or demonstrate job readiness. Where individuals do not comply with their agreed mutual obligations, job seeker payments may be suspended, reduced or cancelled.

Job seekers may engage in participant-sourced or provider-sourced approved activities to meet their mutual obligations. Voluntary work is currently one such approved activity that can be undertaken as part of job seekers' mutual obligation requirements.

According to the 2026 Social Security Guide (3.11.3.30),²⁰ under current laws voluntary work can be undertaken as part of an individual's mutual obligation requirements in addition to job search and other agreed obligation, if it is deemed to help a job seeker gain skills and experience that improve their job readiness, and that it does not result in financial gain to the host organisation.

Approved organisations for voluntary work must be either a not-for-profit or community-based organisation, or government sector agency,²¹ and must submit a legal declaration that outlines evidence of adequate and verifiable public liability insurance and personal accident insurance. Approved organisations must ensure that voluntary work does not overlap with tasks that would normally be expected to be performed by paid workers.

The proposed employment services reform and volunteering

The proposed employment services reform is designed to address the limitations of the existing employment services program by ensuring adequate support is provided to job seekers with very different circumstances. Under the proposal, three new service streams would be created, with each stream calibrated to support job seekers' unique barriers and distance from the labour market. Those closest to the labour market will be placed in Stream 1 and those furthest from the labour market will be supported through Stream 3.

Under the current proposal, each stream will consist of re-designed mutual obligations focusing on supporting job seekers into work and ensuring mutual obligations are calibrated to job

¹⁹ <https://guides.dss.gov.au/social-security-guide/3/11>

²⁰ <https://guides.dss.gov.au/social-security-guide>

²¹ <https://www.servicesaustralia.gov.au/providing-voluntary-work-opportunities?context=21>

seekers' distance from the labour market, circumstances, needs and the intensity of support they require. Volunteering is one activity a job seeker may undertake as part of their mutual obligations in intensive services - Stream 3. This has implications for how job seekers are matched to suitable voluntary work and volunteer involving organisations, how they are supported to succeed in those placements and how the volunteering ecosystem will be adequately funded and resourced to participate.

Volunteering is different from employment

Differentiating volunteering from paid work

There are clear guidelines that differentiate volunteering and paid employment, with both roles encompassing specific legal requirements and obligations. This distinction must be clear so organisations understand how the obligations and the law apply to different forms of working relationships.

The guidelines for volunteering predominantly address voluntary work through an organisation, or 'formal volunteering'. According to The Fair Work Ombudsman,²² a volunteering arrangement is distinguishable under the following characteristics:

1. A volunteer is someone who performs work for the main purpose to benefit someone else
2. The intention of the organisation and individual is not to create a legally binding employment relationship
3. There is no obligation for the volunteer to attend the workplace or perform work, and
4. Payment is not expected or made for the work done by the volunteer.

These standards have been designed to help organisations consider whether they apply to existing or future volunteering arrangements and help organisations set clear boundaries between a voluntary working relationship and an employment arrangement.

Organisations can also consider other factors to make the distinction between a volunteering arrangement and an employment relationship.²³ For example, an employment arrangement is likely if the role encompasses productive work rather than tasks that involve skill development, is work that is integral for organisational operations or work that primarily benefits the organisation, or is for a lengthy period of time. Also, volunteers may claim for out-of-pocket costs for voluntary work from organisations, but this reimbursement must not exceed the amount of the expenses incurred, or be paid on a regular basis, as doing so would meet the threshold of an employment arrangement.

²² <https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/fact-sheets/unpaid-work/unpaid-work-unpaid-work>

²³ https://www.nfplaw.org.au/free-resources/managing-people/managing-volunteers?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=16649364388&gclid=Cj0KCQjwlqTRBhCBARIsANrkrxgu2NV2Rbs1mXSel-DxR3puKSHCU07v4Le6mSwKGKCyYMSsvM8c_x0aAuNREALw_wcB

The benefits of volunteering for employment

Workforce Australia recognises that volunteering is a meaningful activity that provides an important pathway for people who are seeking paid employment.²⁴ For example, volunteering enhances job seekers' confidence, self-esteem and self-development, by enabling them to build new networks and experience different workforce sectors, observe and learn from existing employees, and find pathways to other developmental opportunities such as study or training.²⁵ Many volunteering roles do not require individuals to present with specialised skills, and this allows them to learn and gain new skills through voluntary work and demonstrate other skills such as reliability and working with others.²⁶ To ensure job seekers are matched with suitable volunteering opportunities that build their employment skills, we advise a volunteer matching process be developed alongside the proposed new employment services. This matching process should operate as a mechanism that connects job seekers with suitable volunteer involving organisations, who have the resources and capacity to host job seekers and are best placed to support a job seeker's employment goals.

Create a matching process

The Department of Employment and Workplace Relations is exploring ways to more effectively connect employment services providers with local services so that job seekers engage with the most appropriate services to meet their needs. We recommend the development of a resourced and funded volunteer matching process to support this intent.

The design of the volunteer matching process requires a standardised national approach, utilising lessons from different referral systems in the states and territories, both past and present, that engage job seekers and connect them with suitable voluntary working roles that can support job readiness. As there are differences in how these and similar services have and do operate within the states and territories, consultation with the volunteering ecosystem will be critical to ensure that jurisdictional nuances and lessons are reflected in a national approach to volunteer matching.

The matching process must function as a tool that determines which volunteer involving organisations are most suitable and accessible to support job seekers through voluntary work.

This determination should be made using criteria to assess whether volunteer involving organisations have adequate resources to participate in the employment services program, such as a declaration of insurance and the capacity to provide training and support, and can provide

²⁴ <https://www.workforceaustralia.gov.au/individuals/training/work-experience/volunteer>

²⁵ <https://www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/volunteering/volunteer-now/benefits-of-volunteering>

²⁶ <https://www.jobaccess.gov.au/i-am-a-person-with-disability/i-want-develop-my-skills/work-experience-and-volunteering>

voluntary work that aligns with a job seeker's employment goals and aligns with the volunteer involving organisation's own mission.

The matching process should also act as an effective assessment tool to identify and connect job seekers with appropriate voluntary work opportunities based on their distance from the labour market and agreed employment goal plans. For job seekers who engage in volunteering, this means ensuring that voluntary work is appropriately calibrated to individual job seeker needs and circumstances.

The role of State and Territory volunteering peak bodies or other suitable organisations in the matching process

State and Territory volunteering peak bodies, or where available other suitable organisations (such as Volunteer Resource Centres or Volunteer Support Services) may opt in to participate in the employment services by helping to implement the matching process. These organisations could be funded to partner with employment services providers, and act as a bridge between providers and volunteer involving organisations, assisting providers to find suitable organisations that can support job seekers through volunteering.

There are examples in the volunteering ecosystem of programs which have previously assisted job seekers through a referral system, to match them with voluntary working roles to help improve their job readiness. There is also the existing Inclusive Volunteering Pathways to Employment Program run by Volunteering ACT, The Centre for Volunteering (NSW) and Volunteering Tasmania that provides a similar service for people with disability or mental health condition/s.²⁷

It is also important to note that volunteer peak bodies, and where available other suitable organisations, already actively support volunteer involving organisations to deliver services and meet community needs through volunteering, through access to tools, resources and training. They understand the resourcing and capacity issues across the volunteering ecosystem and could potentially be engaged to identify volunteer involving organisations that have the capability to support job seekers' employment goals through volunteering.

²⁷ <https://volunteeringact.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/IVP-Impact-Report.pdf>

Funding volunteer involving organisations, State and Territory volunteering peak bodies and other suitable organisations through a scaled approach

We recommend funding volunteer involving organisations where volunteering is utilised as an activity in the new employment services program. Funding support should also be provided to State and Territory volunteering peak bodies and, where available, other suitable organisations who support the involvement of volunteering as part of the new employment services program. The design of the funding mechanism should comprise a scaled approach based on existing payment structures provided by The Department of Workplace Relations.²⁸

Employment service providers currently operate in 51 employment regions across Australia.²⁹ There are funding mechanisms through Workforce Australia that allow employment services providers to deliver on their operational requirements and obligations in supporting job seekers to obtain paid work. Under the current employment services, providers can receive a range of payments through entering a Deed with the Australian Government.³⁰

Some payments relate to progress payments that equate to hundreds of dollars that recognise the investments made by providers to support job seekers' employment readiness.³¹ While other provider payments, such as Employment Outcome Payments for a Partial or Full Outcomes, equate to thousands of dollars and are based on the duration of a job seeker's employment placement.

We recommend that volunteer involving organisations participating in the delivery of the employment services system are able to claim for funding to support the management of job seekers, and that appropriate conditions are in place to ensure eligibility. We also recommend that these funding mechanisms be scaled and configured to support State and Territory volunteering peak bodies and other suitable organisations that help providers match job seekers with voluntary work where organisations opt in to this program.

This funding will help the volunteer ecosystem to deliver the employment services program and manage the cost of engaging job seekers as volunteers. Volunteering is not free. Volunteer involving organisations incur operational expenses to run their organisation effectively and to manage their volunteers, including for recruitment, screening, insurance, and equipment and utilities. Larger organisations are better placed to cover the cost of expenses, as they are more likely to receive government funding or revenue from providing goods or services, compared to

²⁸ <https://www.dewr.gov.au/download/13970/workforce-australia-services-deed-standing-offer-2022-2028/42349/workforce-australia-services-deed-standing-offer-2022-2028/pdf>

²⁹ <https://www.dewr.gov.au/employment/employment-services-providers>

³⁰ <https://www.dewr.gov.au/download/13970/workforce-australia-services-deed-standing-offer-2022-2028/42349/workforce-australia-services-deed-standing-offer-2022-2028/pdf>

³¹ Ibid

small organisations who rely on donations and bequests.³² A scalable funding mechanism will help to ensure that the volunteering ecosystem can support the delivery of employment services through volunteering, in addition to delivering existing services that rely on volunteering and align with their mission.

Participation in employment services may also require volunteer involving organisations to provide additional support, training and supervision of job seekers. Volunteer involving organisations may manage this type of direct support where their organisation has paid staff. However, it is likely to be difficult for some of these organisations to meet the threshold to participate in employment services as many experience paid staff shortages or challenges in accessing paid staff. Recent data shows that half of all charities (53%) operate with no paid staff, and small and extra small charities are more reliant on casual paid staff to support their operations.³³ Organisations that experience shortages in paid staff or have a greater reliance on casual employees, have less organisational capacity to provide direct support to volunteers. The funding mechanism must ensure that it covers the proportional cost of existing or new paid staff to provide supplementary support for job seekers.

Future service model trialling

We value the recognition of volunteering as a potential pathway to support job seekers' entry into the labour market. However, we have reservations about how the new employment services program will demonstrate the efficacy of volunteering as an adequate solution in helping to positively shape a job seeker's pathway to employment. While there is evidence that volunteers develop job readiness skills,³⁴ participation in the employment services program is not a guarantee that job seekers will gain paid work. This raises some challenges and considerations for the trialling of the future employment services model.

The first challenge relates to the utilisation of volunteer involving organisations to support a job seeker's pathway to employment. Future trialling of the new employment services model should consider how it will be determined that a host organisation can support volunteering as a remedy or solution for a job seeker's employment pathway. In making this determination, we advise clear instructions be provided to volunteer involving organisations outlining any requirements that warrant modification of existing voluntary work programs to align with requirements of the new employment services.

Secondly, as job seekers will have a range of expectations and conditions as part of their Employment Goal Plan, a future trial should also consider what adjustments, if any, will be required of volunteer involving organisations to support the service. We also recommend that participation in the employment services program remains a strictly voluntary option for

³² <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-12th-edition>

³³ <https://www.acnc.gov.au/tools/reports/australian-charities-report-12th-edition>

³⁴ <https://www.workforceaustralia.gov.au/individuals/training/work-experience/volunteer>

volunteer involving organisations, and that guidelines about participation are clear so that organisations can make their own assessments about whether they are prepared to support the new employment services program and whether activities align with their mission.

Recognise best practice for volunteer involvement

The inclusion of volunteering as an activity in the new employment services raises some key considerations to ensure the services adopt best practice for volunteer involvement.

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteer involving organisations are encouraged to adopt the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement³⁵ which provide best practice guidance for volunteer involving organisations to support volunteer involvement. The National Standards help organisations to create purposeful roles, manage and retain volunteers, and develop effective risk and safety practices.

Three standards, in particular, should be considered to allow community organisations to best support the delivery of the employment services through volunteering:

- Standard 3: Volunteer roles are meaningful and tailored - Volunteers are engaged in meaningful roles which contribute to the organisation's or group's purpose and meet volunteer interests and preferred style of participation.
- Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed - Volunteers understand their roles and gain the knowledge, skills and feedback needed to participate safely and effectively.
- Standard 6: Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected - The health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers is protected and volunteers understand their rights and responsibilities.

Potential risks and considerations for volunteer involving organisations

Many volunteer involving organisations are entirely volunteer-run and operate under limited resources and funding. Placing additional obligations and administrative work on these organisations should be minimised, even though they may have opted in to support the new employment services program through volunteering.

³⁵ <https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/National-Standards-for-Volunteer-Involvement-2024.pdf>

Duty of care

Volunteer involving organisations have safety obligations to both volunteers and staff under the common law of negligence, and the negligence provisions in state and territory legislation.³⁶ These organisations must understand their duty of care obligations towards protecting their volunteers, their organisation and the potential impact of volunteer interactions with third parties. They must operate with adequate measures in place to ensure that all volunteering activities operate under a duty of care.

Health and safety

Work Health and Safety laws require volunteer involving organisations to provide a safe workplace for all workers, including volunteers. Organisations have an obligation to facilitate effective working relationships with employees, and between volunteers, ensure processes are in place to protect the health and safety of volunteers, and that volunteers have access to complaints and grievance procedures. Organisations must also consider safety in the workplace regarding the obligations of the volunteer to manage their own health and safety, the impact of their actions on others, and to comply with health and safety policies and procedures.

Insurance

In general, volunteers are not covered by workers compensation insurance. However, volunteer involving organisations should obtain personal accident insurance as part of their obligations to manage the safety of volunteers and public liability insurance for any risks that the voluntary work may pose to third parties.³⁷ Under the current employment services program, providers who approve voluntary work must ensure that the organisation where the volunteering placement occurs provides a declaration of adequate public liability and personal accident insurance. This should remain a mandatory requirement in matching suitable volunteer involving organisations with job seekers.

Limiting costs for volunteers

While organisations can reimburse volunteers for volunteering expenses, there are still a range of additional expenses that come with volunteering. These include transport or motor vehicle expenses, accommodation, and uniform and clothing. Some job seekers who engage in volunteering as part of their employment goals, will be our most vulnerable in the community and furthest from the labour market. Where job seekers engage in volunteering, we recommend that they are placed in roles where costs can be limited for items that are not typically under the criteria for reimbursement. Where costs are incurred by job seekers through

³⁶ https://www.nfplaw.org.au/free-resources/managing-people/managing-volunteers?gad_source=1&gad_campaignid=16649364388&gclid=CjwKCAjwmJjSBhB-EiwAkZgxiz-Y07enbw1NJGIBEPyHlk_5nyo0NenYs9iG-cT3jWyZJh_tcf0iuxoCElwQAvD_BwE

³⁷ <https://guides.dss.gov.au/social-security-guide/3/11/3/30>

voluntary work placements, the employment services program must provide job seekers with access to reimbursement.

What volunteer involving organisations cannot do

The employment services reforms must consider the distinct obligations volunteer involving organisations have in separately managing both volunteers and paid employees. There are clear guidelines outlining what volunteer involving organisations cannot do when engaging volunteers.³⁸ Volunteers operate under different working arrangements than paid employees and have distinct working expectations, role types and obligations. For example, volunteers attend workplaces to engage in voluntary work by choice, meaning that volunteer involving organisations cannot administer consequences if a volunteer refuses to engage in specific tasks, fails to report to work or leaves without notice even if their participation in volunteering is part of a mutual obligation scenario.

Some job seekers within the new employment services Stream 3 will represent the most vulnerable members of Australian society. Where individuals are prevented from attending voluntary work due to their circumstances, we reinforce that there must be no penalties to the volunteer involving organisation. Further, any expectations placed on volunteer involving organisations to report and keep records of individuals who do not attend volunteering shifts for mutual obligation purposes will require consultation and development with the volunteering ecosystem.

³⁸ https://www.ses.nsw.gov.au/sites/default/files/2024-02/national-volunteering-guide-parts-1-to-6_0.pdf

Recommendations

Based on the proposed employment services reforms discussion paper, we recommend the following actions:

1. Establish a funding mechanism to reimburse volunteer involving organisations, State and Territory volunteering peak bodies and other suitable organisations for the activities they undertake as part of the employment services program.
2. Develop a matching process with a national approach that connects job seekers with suitable voluntary work opportunities that meet their employment goals and considers past and existing state and territory programs.
3. Include volunteering in the proposed trial to demonstrate the efficacy (or otherwise) of volunteering as an adequate pathway to employment.
4. Participation in employment services continue to be optional for volunteer involving organisations and clear guidelines about participation be developed and agreed to.
5. Voluntary work arrangements are clearly distinguishable from paid employment arrangements.
6. Minimise additional obligations and administrative requirements on participating volunteer involving organisations.
7. No penalties be applied to volunteer involving organisations where a job seeker does not attend or meet their mutual obligations on the program.
8. Jobseekers do not incur out-of-pocket expenses through volunteering or reimbursement is provided where costs are incurred.
9. Develop the new scheme through extensive consultation with the volunteering ecosystem to avoid unintended consequences.

Authorisation

This submission has been authorised by the Chief Executive Officer of Volunteering Australia.

A blue ink signature, likely of Mr Mark Pearce, written in a cursive style.

Mr Mark Pearce

Chief Executive Officer

Endorsements

This position statement has been endorsed by the seven state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies.



About Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community. Volunteering Australia's mission is to support a thriving volunteering ecosystem in Australia by promoting and advocating for volunteering and providing leadership at a national level.

The seven state and territory Volunteering Peak Bodies work to advance and promote volunteering in their respective jurisdictions and are Foundation Members of Volunteering Australia.

Our vision is for a future where volunteering is the heart of Australian communities. This vision was co-designed with thousands of people from across Australia during the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering.

Volunteering Australia Contacts

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The Centre for Volunteering (NSW)
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