



Backing Volunteers, Strengthening Communities.

2027-28 Pre-Budget Submission

September 2026



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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.

Volunteering is not confined to one sector, but is essential social and economic infrastructure underpinning services, communities and industries across Western Australia.

Recognising this 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 Volunteering WA's Measuring Change social impact project.
- Funding Volunteering Development Services 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 870 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

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 recommendations designed to support volunteering in Western Australia.

These recommendations align with the WA government priorities outlined above as well as the WA Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan⁵ and the National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033⁶. The measures will assist to remove key barriers to volunteering in the areas of volunteer screening checks and volunteer insurance; as well as counter-acting the impact of the fuel crisis on volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

Budget Recommendations

Our budget recommendations seek funding for critical volunteer infrastructure:

1. Fix the Volunteer Screening system:

- 1.1 Remove the fees for volunteer screening checks.
- 1.2 Prioritise the completion and launch of a dedicated online screening check portal for volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. The portal must enable fully digitised, streamlined, volunteer screening checks for NDIS, Working With Children and National Police Clearance screening checks.
- 1.3 Fund the provision of accessible screening processes for the digitally excluded, including in person assistance with screening check applications.

2. Review of volunteer insurance arrangements:

Establish a Working Group to review the insurance arrangements applying to volunteers in Western Australia, in partnership with Volunteering WA.

3. Supporting volunteering through the fuel crisis by:

- 3.1 Providing temporary, targeted grants to volunteer involving organisations, especially those whose services include volunteer drivers, to reimburse their fuel costs to continue to deliver essential services.
- 3.2 Ensuring any fuel rationing measures that may need to be enacted, recognise volunteers as a priority group.

4. Support Volunteering Development Services to continue to recruit and match volunteers:

Increase or at least maintain (and index) the current level of funding for Volunteering Development Services, over the forward estimates.

⁵ WA Volunteering Strategy and Action Plan <https://www.wa.gov.au/government/publications/wa-volunteering-strategy-and-wa-government-action-plan>

⁶ National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033 <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/the-strategy/>

1. Fix the volunteer screening system

Context:

There were 215, 691 applications by employees and volunteers for National Disability Insurance (NDIS) and Working With Children Checks in WA in FY2025/26. Of these, 68,027 or 32% were made by volunteers⁷. These proportions demonstrate the critical role that volunteers play in service delivery in sectors requiring these screening checks.

In 2025 Volunteering WA established an Expert Reference Group to advise government on streamlining volunteer screening checks. This was in response to the ongoing challenge of volunteer shortages in WA, with 80% of volunteer managers identifying recruitment as a very important issue⁸. The WA State of Volunteering Report 2023⁹ explains the critical volunteering shortages that exist, especially in the Care Economy. Community sport is also heavily dependent on volunteers, including coaches, team managers, officials, and committee members. Many of these roles require volunteer screening, and delays, costs or complexity in the onboarding process can directly affect a club's ability to recruit and retain the volunteers needed to provide participation opportunities. This impact can be even greater in disability and inclusive sport.

Case study – How a system designed to protect participants, hampers participation

WA All Abilities Football Association (WAAFA) works with community football clubs across WA to create opportunities for children, young people and adults with disability to participate in football. These programs rely heavily on volunteers, often parents, coaches and other club members who step forward to provide the additional support needed to make participation possible.

We have experienced situations where volunteers have been ready and willing to help, but delays in completing required screening checks have prevented them from commencing. In a community sporting environment, particularly where only one or two volunteers may be available to support an inclusive program, that delay can have an immediate impact on a club's ability to deliver the program and, ultimately, on whether a person with disability can participate.

WAAFA absolutely supports appropriate screening and safeguarding. The challenge is ensuring the process is timely, affordable and easy to navigate, so the system designed to protect participants does not unintentionally become a barrier to their participation.

Our members report that significant numbers of prospective volunteers drop out during the onboarding process, due to inefficient government screening checks which require in-person attendance at government service centres.

⁷ Calculated using NDIS and Working With Children Check data for FY 2025/26 supplied by the Department of Communities to Volunteering WA in August 2026.

⁸ Op. cit. Volunteering WA page 44.

⁹ 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."

Using the volunteer benefits calculator¹⁰ 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, with Good Sammy estimating a cost of \$2.1 million 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)

Volunteers applying for NDIS checks are required to attend a Department of Transport licensing centre in person while those applying for a Working with Children Check are required to attend an Australia Post outlet in person. This is a significant barrier, which is especially difficult for volunteers in remote and regional WA.

Volunteers also report long delays between applying for volunteer screening checks and being approved to volunteer.

Volunteer screening check fees of \$11 per applicant generated \$759,297 in revenue for the Department of Communities in Financial Year 2025/26¹¹. This process requires volunteers to provide their bank details and receipt to the volunteer involving organisation to be reimbursed for the expense. This is a costly, inefficient administrative process that creates unnecessary privacy risks by requiring volunteers to share their personal banking information to volunteer involving organisations to simply recover the cost of a government screening check.

We also know that there were 7891 Volunteer National Police Clearances (VNPCs) issued by the Western Australian Police (WAPOL) in Financial Year 2024/25 at \$17.60 per VNPC. This generated revenue for government of \$138,882¹². The registered contact from the volunteer involving organisation sends a link to volunteers so that they can apply online for their VNPC. This contact is also the one who receives the link from WAPOL to review the completed screening check.

Volunteers applying for a VNPC were able to access a fully digitised online application process and 91% chose to complete their check in this way while 9% of applicants had to complete an analogue "Exceptional

¹⁰ <https://volunteeringwa.org.au/leading-volunteers/resource-library/volunteer-benefits-calculator/>

¹¹ Op. cit, Department of Communities, August 2026.

¹² Calculated using WAPOL data for FY2024/2025 supplied to Volunteering WA in November 2025.

Circumstances” process, mainly due to issues with obtaining the relevant proofs of identity.¹³ Volunteers without passports or driver’s licences were particularly disadvantaged and experienced a much lengthier process, for example having to purchase relevant identity documents such as a photo ID card from a Department of Transport licensing centre. The number of volunteer applicants in this category who dropped out of the process as it was too difficult, time consuming and expensive is not officially recorded, but is likely to be significant.

Unlike the NDIS and Working With Children Checks, the volunteers applying for a VNPC did not pay the \$17.60 application fee themselves. Instead, the registered volunteer involving organisations were billed for the fee. While clearly a preferable arrangement, the VNPC raises a very low level of revenue while still generating administrative burden for both the Department of Communities who must generate and collect payment on invoices, and for the volunteer involving organisations who must pay for and process these invoices.

The current WAPOL digitised process also allows for a volunteer involving organisation to nominate only one primary contact. This causes un-necessary delays in volunteer onboarding for organisations with large numbers of volunteers. A new streamlined online portal could fix this issue by allowing registered organisations to nominate both a primary contact and a delegate.

The Commonwealth Department of Finance is currently working with State and Territory Governments to develop a business case for a single national Care Worker Screening Check. As part of this process, they consulted with Volunteering Peak Bodies and with our assistance, in September, the Commonwealth Department of Finance surveyed 552 volunteers and 382 Volunteer involving Organisations nationally¹⁴. On 21 September 2026, the Commonwealth hosted a webinar for the volunteering sector which included a summary of key survey findings from responses they had received to date. This summary reflects the issues raised by The Volunteering WA Expert Reference Group in the context above and in the rationale for each of the 3 recommendations below¹⁵.

Our 3 recommendations to fix volunteer screening are set out below:

Recommendation 1.1: Remove the fees for volunteer screening checks. (Minimal negative impact to government revenue of \$898,179 annually).

Rationale: We continue to call on the government to make volunteer screening checks free. While volunteer screening check fees generated \$898,179 in State government revenue in WA last financial year, this figure does not account for the cost of processing and administering these payments, which further erodes the net revenue benefit. These fees also create disproportionately greater costs for the community by adding administrative complexity, slowing volunteer onboarding and contributing to volunteer dropouts, further exacerbating existing volunteer shortages and adversely impacting service delivery.

Volunteer involving organisations are unnecessarily burdened by the administrative complexity of these charges and lose potential volunteers due to the inefficiencies they create.

¹³ Ibid. WAPOL , November 2025

¹⁴ 29 September 2026 Email from the Commonwealth Department of Finance to Volunteering WA.

¹⁵ <https://volunteeringwa.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2026/09/Summary-of-VIO-Webinar-21-September-2026.pdf>

Recommendation 1.2: Prioritise the completion and launch of a dedicated online screening check portal for volunteers and volunteer involving organisations. The portal must enable fully digitised, streamlined, volunteer screening checks for NDIS, Working With Children and National Police Clearances.

Rationale: The government has now digitised the NDIS screening check renewal process and has confirmed they are on track to digitise the Working with Children Check application process by the end of October 2026. We congratulate the government on the progress made to date but emphasise the need for government to fully fund digitisation of NDIS screening check applications in the forward years.

The new single online portal must be a “one-stop-shop” enabling fully digitised, streamlined, volunteer screening check applications and renewals for NDIS, Working With Children and National Police Clearances. The system must also allow volunteers to share verified credentials with relevant volunteer involving organisations as this will prevent them from having to repeat the same checks every time they join a new group.

Recommendation 1.3: Fund the provision of accessible screening processes for the digitally excluded, including in person assistance with screening check applications (Revenue impact: A total of \$7.5 Million over 3 years, comprised of up to \$2.5 Million per annum in annual grant funding to be administered and distributed by Linkwest).

Rationale: 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.

Assisting volunteers who are digitally excluded takes time and staff resources. We support this recommendation from the Linkwest Budget Submission 2027/2028¹⁶. Linkwest have confirmed grant recipients will assist volunteers with volunteer screening check applications. With the agreement of Linkwest we have also extended the measure to include Volunteering Development Services. This will provide state-wide services for volunteers who need in person support to complete their screening checks. The measure will be implemented through annual grants of up to \$50,000 to Volunteering Development Services, Community Resource Centres and Neighbourhood Centres over a period of 3 years. The grants will be administered/distributed by Linkwest.

¹⁶ Linkwest State Budget submission 2027/2028 page 4

2. Review of volunteer insurance arrangements

Context:

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.

The volunteering sector is widely affected by fragmented insurance arrangements and information gaps, including limited published claims data and poor transparency and comparability across volunteer insurance products. This creates equity concerns and increases the risk of market failure. For example, small volunteer involving organisations may struggle to afford appropriate volunteer personal accident insurance or other essential cover, such as public liability and sexual abuse and molestation insurance.

Volunteering WA was a joint signatory to the comprehensive Volunteering Australia Submission (Number 44) submitted in March 2026 to the federal government's Inquiry into Small Business Insurance¹⁷ conducted by the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Corporations and Financial Services. Volunteering WA made a further submission (Number 98)¹⁸, to the inquiry in September 2026, which provides a summary of volunteer insurance arrangements in South Korea. These arrangements involve a relatively low-cost, (\$1.23 per active volunteer insured per annum) government-funded National Comprehensive Volunteer Insurance Scheme which has been in place since 2016. The Committee is due to report on this topic on 27 October 2026. As our submission to the inquiry notes:

Both the relatively low cost and transparency of insurance arrangements in this model are particularly noteworthy. The Korean Government publicly reports key data on the scheme, including the number and types of insurance claims and benefits provided. This provides a useful evidence base for understanding the scheme and informing policy development. In the Australian context, volunteer personal accident insurance is provided through a range of private insurers, as well as State and Local Governments, comparable claims data is not publicly available. Greater claims transparency addresses information asymmetry and could also be an important consideration for future policy and regulatory reform.

Recommendation 2: Establish a Working Group to review the insurance arrangements applying to volunteers in Western Australia, in partnership with Volunteering WA. (No revenue impact- minimal costs relate to committing the time of existing staff to meet as a Working Group).

Rationale: Our recommendation is to establish a working group led by WA Treasury; the review will identify current key issues and gaps and explore potential cost-effective options to deliver suitable, equitable insurance coverage for the sector.

The review is a minimal-cost, first step, bringing together key State government and Local government stakeholders (including Communities, Finance, Treasury, the Insurance Commission of Western Australia, the Local Government Insurance Scheme, the Western Australian Local Government Association and Volunteering WA), to understand current gaps and explore successful local, state, national, private, and international approaches. Following this preliminary work the group may choose to meet with relevant state and federal government counterparts, federal regulators including ASIC, and the Insurance Council of Australia, to work together to develop/progress appropriate policy reforms.

¹⁷https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Joint/Corporations_and_Financial_Services/SmallBusinessInsurance/Submissions

¹⁸ Ibid

The group should explore successful international and national approaches such as South Korea where government intervention has been in place since 2016 to provide comprehensive volunteer insurance for all volunteers at a relatively low cost, and the more limited Victorian Managed Insurance Agency (VMIA) arrangement, which provides standardised volunteer insurance for volunteers who work in Government funded community services.

A Volunteering WA Member who operates a large, state-wide organisation, reminds us that it is not only volunteer personal accident insurance that poses a problem for volunteer-involving organisations:

“We also have public liability, cyber, building and contents costs for halls and equipment, marine insurance for canoes and lifejackets etc. These are a major expense for our organisation.”¹⁹

3. Support volunteering during the fuel crisis

Context: The State Government demonstrated national leadership by working closely with volunteer involving organisations when the fuel crisis first arose and providing funding to support the essential work of foodbanks and taking action to ensure fuel security, especially in regional Western Australia.

The Australian Government’s cuts to the fuel excise and a temporary détente in the Gulf of Hormuz lowered prices for a few months.

The return of the full fuel excise has coincided with an amplification of hostilities in the Middle East, leading to a further spike in oil prices. This has had an adverse effect on volunteers and volunteer involving organisations, especially essential services and those relying on volunteer drivers.

Recommendation 3.1 Providing temporary, targeted grants to volunteer involving organisations to reimburse volunteer fuel costs, prioritising services reliant on volunteer drivers. (Initial 6-month commitment of \$1,000,000)

Rationale: This proposal was first put forward by Volunteering WA in March and April 2026 and was informed by feedback from member surveys.

The proposal would entail Volunteering WA administering and distributing a pool of grant funding, to be reviewed and if necessary renewed on a 6-monthly basis. Eligible volunteer involving organisations who demonstrate priority need for volunteer fuel reimbursement will receive grants.

Recommendation 3.2. Ensuring any fuel rationing measures that may need to be enacted, recognise volunteers as a priority group.

Rationale: This proposal was first put forward by Volunteering WA in early 2026 and was informed by feedback from member surveys.

The proposal entails the government designing fuel rationing measures that prioritise volunteers delivering essential services, followed by volunteers in regional and remote areas, and volunteers in metropolitan areas who require fuel to perform their volunteer work e.g. volunteer drivers.

¹⁹ Volunteering WA Member feedback provided 24 September 2026.

4. Support Volunteering Development Services to continue to recruit and match volunteers.

Context: Volunteering Development Services are currently funded through both Department of Communities and Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development's Royalties for Regions Program, with this funding set to expire in June 2027. The Department of Communities has committed to maintain current levels of funding (including the equivalent of the Royalties for Regions component) until June 2028 when a new commissioning strategy will be announced.

Volunteering Development Services in WA play a vital role connecting Western Australians who wish to volunteer with suitable roles in volunteer involving organisations. They also play an important role in fostering inclusive volunteering approaches.

Volunteering supports community service delivery and community connections. It also combats loneliness and mental health issues and helps build social cohesion.²⁰

Recommendation 4: Increase or at least maintain (and index) the current level of funding for Volunteering Development Services through Department of Communities and the Department of Primary Industries and Regional Development, over the forward estimates.

Rationale: Ensuring the sector continues to receive assistance to recruit and place volunteers is vital to allow Western Australian volunteer involving organisations to recover from the post-Covid decline in volunteer numbers.

There is no longer time to wait to address the sustainability crisis facing volunteering in Australia.²¹

Conclusion

Volunteering is essential social and economic infrastructure for Western Australia, delivering significant value to government, communities and the economy. This submission calls for four practical investments to protect and strengthen that contribution: removing barriers in volunteer screening, reviewing volunteer insurance arrangements, supporting volunteers affected by fuel costs, and increasing or maintaining indexed funding for Volunteering Development Services.

These are modest, achievable measures with strong public value. By acting on them, the WA Government can reduce avoidable barriers to volunteering, safeguard essential community services and ensure volunteers can continue to support Western Australians when and where they are needed most.

Volunteering WA thanks the WA Government for its consideration of this submission and welcomes the opportunity to work in partnership to strengthen volunteering across the State.

²⁰ Op Cit. **National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033**

²¹ Ibid p20

Empowering people and communities to enrich Western Australia

🏠 Level 2, 3 De Vlamingh Avenue East Perth WA 6004

☎ 9482 4333

✉ info@volunteeringwa.org.au

🌐 volunteeringwa.org.au

