# Volunteering Community Reference Group

## 4 November 2026

### Communique #23

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 November 2026. In attendance were:

| **Dept. Premier & Cabinet** | **Name** |
|---|---|
| Minister for Volunteering | Represented by Mr Hugh Jones MLA, Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Volunteering |
| Ministerial staff | Jacob Mitchell, Policy Officer |
| **VCRG Members** | **Name** |
| Chair | Craig Spencer, St John Ambulance |
| Volunteering WA | Tina Williams, CEO |
| Volunteering WA | Traci Gamblin, Policy consultant |
| Research representative | Dr Megan Paull, Murdoch University |
| Corporate Representative | Heidi Madden, Corporate Volunteer Council |
| Individual volunteer | Esther Bliss (Regional)<br>Dr Tina Firth (Metro)<br>Rahul Seth CA (Metro)<br>Michael Wainwright (Metro) |
| Volunteering WA (VWA) | Tina Williams, CEO<br>Traci Gamblin, Consultant |
| Department of Communities | Claire Harding, Department of Communities |
| Apologies | The Hon Hannah Beazley, MLA Minister for Volunteering,<br>Phil Scanlan (Emergency Services Volunteer - Metro); Michael Gardner (Department of Communities); Sandra Prosser (Individual Volunteer - Regional), Hannah Godsave, Policy Manager, WALGA |

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.

The Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Volunteering, Hugh Jones MLA for Darling Range, spoke about the important contribution volunteers make across his electorate and the significant role volunteering plays in strengthening community connection and supporting local services. He acknowledged the important work of volunteer managers, highlighting the upcoming Volunteer Managers' Day as an opportunity to recognise and celebrate those who coordinate and facilitate volunteering. He emphasised that while volunteers are essential to the community, the people who support and manage them also play a crucial role in ensuring volunteering remains sustainable and effective.

# 1. Volunteering WA Update

Volunteering WA CEO, Tina Williams, provided an update on its ongoing sector advocacy, research activities and initiatives to support volunteer-involving organisations across Western Australia.

**Volunteer Screening**

Volunteering WA has been advocating for improved volunteer screening processes and coordinated national reform. Its Expert Reference Group on Volunteer Screening, (est. Aug 2025), continues to provide specialist advice and feedback to government, including case studies and recommendations to simplify screening requirements.

Information shared during a recent Department of Finance consultation process on volunteer screening arrangements revealed overwhelming support for safeguarding and appropriate screening requirements amongst those volunteers and volunteer involving organisations consulted. There is support for a single screening process that is recognised across organisations, roles and jurisdictions and that is proportionate, transparent and appropriate to the activities being undertaken by each volunteer. In addition, screening is widely recognised as only one element of effective safeguarding alongside supervision, training, governance and organisational culture.

**Research Update**

Volunteering WA provided an update on its Research Network activities and current research projects supporting the volunteering sector. The organisation continues to share research findings with volunteer managers and organisations, including presentations on artificial intelligence research and four current projects funded through Australian Research Council and Volunteering WA research grants.

**Volunteer Insurance**

Volunteering WA continues to advocate for improved and more affordable insurance arrangements for volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations. It contributed to and endorsed Volunteering Australia's submission to the Federal Parliamentary Inquiry into Small Business Insurance. Volunteering Insurance is also one of the key priorities in its State Pre-Budget Submission (see below).

**Training, Events and Volunteer Manager Network**

VCRG members were encouraged to access Volunteering WA's 2026 Training and Events Calendar to explore upcoming workshops and Volunteer Manager Network meetings. Planning has commenced for the next State Volunteering Conference, scheduled for October/November 2027. The conference is expected to provide an opportunity to share findings from the 2027 State of Volunteering Report.

**International Volunteer Day Garden Party**

Volunteering WA's annual International Volunteer Day Garden Party to celebrate the contribution of volunteers is to be held at Government House on Thursday 3 December 2026 at 3.30 pm.

**International Year of Volunteers – WA Museum Exhibition**

Volunteering WA partnered with the WA Museum Boola Bardip to present a special exhibition featuring photographs, stories and treasured objects celebrating the volunteers behind the everyday moments that shape life in Western Australia. The exhibition recognised the extraordinary contributions of volunteers and the important role they play in strengthening communities and creating shared memories across the State.

## 2. Volunteering WA's State Budget Submission

Volunteering WA presented its 2027-28 State Budget Submission, developed through sector consultation, research and engagement with members.

The priorities below reflect key areas for investment that could reduce barriers to volunteering, improve support for volunteer-involving organisations and strengthen the sustainability of the volunteering sector.

- **Fix the volunteer screening system**
- **Review volunteer insurance arrangements**
- **Support volunteering through the fuel crisis**
- **Support Volunteering Development Services**

## 3. Screening Check Update

An executive from the Department of Communities presented an update on the development of the new WA online screening portal.

Technical issues with applicant photograph capture have been resolved, facial verification has been incorporated, and user acceptance testing is nearing completion. Work is continuing to integrate the portal with the existing screening system and secure Commonwealth digital identity approvals.

The portal is expected to launch in early 2027. The existing paper-based application process will remain available, with applicants also able to access assistance through Australia Post and Department of Transport service locations. The portal will include initial questions to help applicants determine whether they require a Working with Children Check, with an accompanying education campaign and an initial internal soft launch planned ahead of its broader release.

The committee expressed interest in having an opportunity to view and test the portal before launch, with the Expert Reference Group for Volunteer Screening identified as an appropriate group to provide feedback, given its representation across sport, health, disability and other sectors.

## 4. State of Volunteering Report

Megan Paull provided an update on progress towards the 2027 National State of Volunteering Report, being developed through collaboration between state and territory volunteering peak bodies and research partners.

Consultation has informed the research methodology and survey design, with particular attention given to ensuring the survey is manageable for participants while enabling meaningful comparisons across jurisdictions. Members of Volunteering WA's research committee and its policy advisor were heavily involved in this consultation.

The research methodology has been developed with reference to international frameworks, and ethics approval has now been obtained. The next stage involves progressing the tender process to appoint an organisation to undertake the national survey, followed by data collection, analysis and development of the report.

The report is expected to provide important evidence to inform government policy and investment, support sector advocacy and improve understanding of volunteering participation, trends and barriers across Australia. Publication is targeted for around October 2027.

## 5. Volunteering Insights

Michael Wainwright provided insights from the many years of volunteering, particularly within a service organisation. The discussion highlighted growing challenges in recruiting and retaining volunteers, particularly in regional communities, with changing demographics, rising costs and increasing administrative requirements all contributing. Members discussed the need for organisations to adapt

traditional volunteering models, offer more flexible opportunities and better engage younger generations. The importance of promoting social connection and community benefits of volunteering was also emphasised. Concerns were raised about the difficulty recruiting people into committee roles, with some organisations struggling to maintain operations due to a lack of volunteers willing to take on these responsibilities.

The discussion highlighted the need to reduce red tape and provide more practical support to volunteer organisations.

## 6. Informal Volunteering Research

Megan Paull provided a brief update on a Volunteering WA-supported research project examining informal volunteering, undertaken in collaboration with Murdoch University and Chorus.

The research explores the nature of informal volunteering and the role of community connections in supporting people to contribute to their communities outside traditional organisational structures.

The discussion highlighted the potential importance of community anchor organisations, such as libraries and schools, in providing accessible spaces for people to connect, share information and develop informal volunteering activities. These activities can also provide pathways for informal groups to evolve into more formal community initiatives and organisations.

The research report has been submitted to Volunteering WA and is expected to be published online following internal processes. It was proposed that the research leads be invited to present the research at the first committee meeting next year.

## 7. VCRG Meetings

VCRG members were thanked for their contributions to the committee. Members were also advised that this may be the final meeting in the current committee composition, with further information about VCRG membership to be announced.

| Special events 2026 | |
|---|---|
| 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.