Submission
Productivity Commission

CONTRIBUTION OF THE NOT FOR PROFIT SECTOR

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Volunteering Australia

Submission to the Productivity Commission on the

Contribution of the Not for Profit Sector

1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Volunteering Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide feedback to the Productivity Commission's study on the contribution of the Not for Profit sector. In order to enhance the efficiency and effectiveness of the not for profit (NFP) sector we contend that a better understanding of volunteers' contribution to our social, environmental, economic and cultural life is pivotal. Volunteering Australia argues that to stimulate the contribution of volunteering and volunteers it is necessary to:

- provide greater recognition of the contribution of volunteers;
- invest more in volunteering;
- provide protection for all volunteers at organisational and regulatory levels; and
- consider the ramifications to volunteers and volunteering in the formulation of new public policy.

We propose that greater recognition will provide better understanding of the breadth and depth of volunteering, through research into all the areas where volunteers are involved, the roles they take up, the incentives and barriers to volunteering. Such awareness will allow the development of tools and processes that meet the needs of volunteers and organisations thus enabling all to better meet the purposes of their work.

We propose that our society needs to invest more in volunteering. Investment comes in the form of long term funding that meets the strategic directions of volunteer involving organisations.

We believe that the contribution of volunteers is at a consistently high level when organisations operate under standards of good practice that enable volunteer involvement. We stress that the development and implementation of standards does not necessitate the growth of bureaucratic processes. However we recognise that the implementation of standards needs to be flexible to meet the needs of volunteers and organisations.

Furthermore we stress the importance of considering volunteers in the development of relevant legislation and regulations. In the development of

policy we maintain that it is necessary to consider the potential impact on volunteers. The best way to access the views of volunteers is to build strong government and volunteer infrastructure relationships.

2 VOLUNTEERING AUSTRALIA – an overview

Mission Statement

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering in the Australian community. We represent the diverse views and serve the needs of volunteers and volunteer involving organisations and we promote volunteering as an activity of enduring social, cultural, and economic value.

3 VOLUNTEERING AS A SPECIALIST AREA

Without volunteering, the not for profit sector would not exist. Volunteers play a major role in advocacy; the identification of need; governance; development and delivery of services.

We advocate for the establishment of volunteering as a specialist area within this research on the contribution of the NFP Sector. Volunteering needs to be acknowledged and considered at all levels of input, output, outcome and impact within the not for profit sector due to:

> *Dependency* – the NFP sector relies on volunteers to support and deliver its multitude of activities - in program design, governance, community wellbeing, individual intrinsic benefits, innovation, service development, delivery and advocacy.
>
> *Risk of Complacency* – Volunteers need the same good practice frameworks and protections that are afforded to the paid workforce. Therefore all relevant legislation needs to consider the impact on volunteers (e.g. equal opportunity/anti discrimination; OHS, privacy, etc)

There is still much about volunteering in Australia that we need to investigate. To effectively evaluate the contribution of volunteers it is necessary to undertake comprehensive research to better understand:

- The motivations of volunteers and how they change over time;
- The standards by which volunteers are managed and how these have an impact on people's willingness to continue to volunteer; and
- The trends of volunteering and how not for profit organisations respond.

Further, while the proportion of the population who volunteer has climbed, the median annual hours has decreased with each successive survey carried out by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (Table 1):

Voluntary work Survey **ABS, Cat. No. 4441.0**	**Number of volunteers**	**Total annual hours**	**Median annual hours**
1995	3,189,400	511.7 million	74
2000	4,395,600	704.1 million	72
2006	5,226,500	729.9 million	56

Table 1: Comparison between number of volunteers, the total annual hours and the median annual hours spent volunteering

With greater understanding it would be possible to consider the value of volunteering and its relationship with paid work in the formation and development of public policy, an area that needs much development. For instance, the recent *Skilling Australia for the Future Discussion Paper 2008*, made only one reference to volunteering in the context of job seeker status – *'a job seeker includes a person who is participating in volunteering activities'.* Volunteering is often a bridge to paid employment or career transition and provides skill development through informal and formal learning opportunities.

As a necessary and significant part of Australia's workforce, albeit there by choice, governments need to consider the impacts on and needs of volunteers and volunteering in its policy development process.

As one volunteer commented in the development of this submission:

> *It's interesting that ….. the NFP sector places such reliance on volunteers. My attempt at a BBQ stopper is to relate to a private enterprise [worker] the unique business model that operates at my not for profit organisation. In this state we have about 120 paid staff and an E. F. staffing of 200-500 volunteers (depending on how you count them). But notably, approximately 85-90% of our service delivery is carried out by the volunteers. The private sector equivalent would be walking into a bank or supermarket and all the staff you come in contact with are volunteers. The paid staff are all back-office people and rarely see a customer.*
>
> *As we know, this is standard practice for many NFP's. The reaction from the private enterprise person is usually disinterest but the odd one picks up the concept and we have a conversation starter.*
>
> *The disinterested response typifies how most of those working in the paid sector relate to volunteering. In their mind, it's not a serious activity (I was there once). Interestingly, there's even a modicum of that attitude within NFP's themselves, especially as you move up the management ladder. (Contributor 4)*

Volunteering comes at a cost

It is claimed that the biggest single business expense to organisations is the cost of human resources. When skills, talent, experience and corporate knowledge 'walk out the door' - the cost of replacement cannot be ignored. While this is well accepted for paid employees it is less known in the case of volunteers. It has been estimated that within the Social and Community Services (SACS) industry the cost to replace an employee on $45,000 p.a., can amount to $17,000. The Council for Equal Opportunity in Employment (now the Diversity the Council of Australia) provided an estimate of turnover costs amounting between 50 and 130 percent of an employee's salary depending on skill level. While we are unaware of any equivalent costing for volunteer turnover, the principles are the same, particularly when volunteers are involved in governance, policy and service delivery roles. Therefore, while volunteers work without wage, they need to be recruited, trained, managed and recognised – all processes that have a dollar value.

Some of these costs create barriers for engaging and managing volunteers. Volunteering Australia's *National Survey of Volunteering Issues (2008)* identified barriers including:

- Lack of capacity (funding and time) to recruit, engage, manage and support volunteers

- Not enough resources (funding and time) to provide necessary volunteer training and skills development;

- Costs and administration associated with legislative compliance and procedural requirements e.g. 'paperwork' or 'red-tape'; and

- Attracting and recruiting suitable volunteers. (2008 p. 12)

Here are three examples from contributors that illustrate the costs of compliance:

One contributor to this submission spoke of the barriers caused by 'red tape'. To report on the success of the program to funding bodies she needed to evaluate her program using 7 different statistical methodologies. 'We need to be accountable because we are using public funds. But the red tape takes too much time' (Contributor 5).

A second contributor noted that problems with reporting was acknowledged by government and the funding department had taken steps to work with organisations to redesign reporting forms so that they took less time to complete but made evaluation more meaningful for both parties, that is, organisations and government (Contributor 6).

Thirdly, another contributor felt that she was 'ticking all the boxes' and that governmental department staff did not take advantage of her reports to enhance all recipient organisations' work. 'I spend hours writing what I think are good reports about what we are doing and where we are going, but two weeks after submitting the reports, someone from the department rang and asked a question … the answer was in my report.' (Contributor 7). This contributor felt that government could make better use of reports to help direct future funding and policy.

In their study to quantify the time and cost of paperwork required by government, Ryan, Newton and McGregor-Lowndes (2008) surveyed fourteen Queensland not for profit grant recipients and estimated that over 12 months, the 'organisations together reported taking an average of 143.57 hours' (p. i). This study also pointed out that there was a difference in the cost of compliance between large and small not for profit organisations, in part due to the fact that in small organisations it was more likely that the CEO or manager was the person to do the compliance work.

Legislative and regulatory frameworks

While volunteers are not explicitly protected or covered under all relevant legislation, it is necessary that not for profit organisations comply with all legislative and regulatory frameworks that impact on their work and their workforce. This necessitates a cost in time, knowledge acquisition, application and implementation.

> Committees of management are now responsible for actions of staff. If I dwell on that I start to think of resigning because the responsibilities are so great it is a disincentive to remain a volunteer, especially in a position of authority as in a governance role. It is extremely onerous. …
>
> When our organisation began we used to be out and about with children all the time. Now due to risk management the kids hardly leave the premises. Risk management controls what we offer. (Contributor 8)

Complying with legislation and regulation also has benefits. These benefits flow through to clients and stakeholders, the workforce and community at large. Here is a sample of legislation and how they impact on volunteers and volunteer involving organisations:

Occupational Health & Safety (OHS) legislation and regulations

Volunteer involving organisations and volunteers routinely identify OHS among the top public policy areas that impact on them. While recognising that duty of care to volunteers and by volunteers is imperative, the main issues that create burdens for volunteer involving organisations are:

- cost of compliance, including time, resources and training;
- complexity of analysing risk and communicating responsibilities / procedures to volunteers;

- complex OHS issues can sometimes be a deterrent to volunteer participation; and

- varying state legislatures – difficult for national organisations to have adequate resources to comply with variations (though national harmonisation will overcome this)

Background checking

Police checks and working with children checks are another regulatory area that has significant impacts on volunteers and volunteering. Background checking, including criminal records checks, is routinely used to screen many potential volunteers for suitability in volunteer roles. This is particularly the case where people volunteer with 'vulnerable' groups such as children, the elderly, and people with disabilities, or in roles that have financial or driving responsibilities. Issues raised are:

- Lengthy processing time for checks;
- The costs of checks and methods of payment;
- Complex processes; and
- Lack of transferability of checks between states and organisations.

Insurance

The main impacts on volunteering is the rising cost of insurance, as well as understanding and having the appropriate level of insurance to cover all known risks relating to organisational operation and volunteer roles. Some policies preclude coverage for certain age groups – particularly younger and older volunteers where risk is considered to increase with the age of volunteers. The consequence is often that organisations restrict the involvement of willing volunteers who are aged outside of policy coverage – younger and older.

We are aware of issues relating to volunteers in government schools in some states where volunteers who are the recipients of some government benefits are precluded from insurance coverage because they are deemed to be in receipt of payment or reward for their volunteering. This ultimately has the impact of volunteers not being insured or not being able to volunteer.

Equal Opportunity/Anti-Discrimination

This is another complex area of compliance, with different state, territory and commonwealth legislatures, that requires careful consideration and understanding by volunteer involving organisations and volunteers. As with OHS, some equal opportunity legislation extends coverage to volunteers, but there is inconsistency across Australia. Many in the not for profit sector would have a broad understanding of discrimination and harassment, particularly as they relate to the attributes of sex, race and disability (generally, the highest areas of complaint). However, many would be unaware of all protected grounds of discrimination such as age, marital status, physical appearance, gender identity, religious and political beliefs etc and what requisite steps such as policy, education, complaints procedures etc that should be in place for volunteers. While protections for volunteers are strongly supported, and it is noted that at least two recent reviews of legislation have recommended extending the coverage to include volunteers, the cost of compliance may be another burden to volunteer-involving organisations.

Boards and committees of management (COMs) rely heavily on volunteer involvement. Boards and COMs are required to be aware of the legislative and regulatory issues that are relevant to volunteers. They also need to be aware of all the other complex regulatory issues, such as taxation, industrial relations, financial and business reporting etc., that apply to the governance of all organisations.

4 VOLUNTEERING DEFINITIONS

Definitions of volunteering vary, but in Australia maintain similar key principles. Through a national consultation with the volunteer sector, unions and government, the definition of volunteering adopted in 1997 by Volunteering Australia is:

- To be of benefit to the community;
- Of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- For no financial payment; and
- In designated volunteer positions only.

While these elements have been adopted for 'formal' volunteering in not for profit organisations we know that there are other types of civic engagement that contain many of the same elements.

It is vital to be aware of the parameters of volunteering. There are other forms of unpaid work that may have similar elements to the definition of volunteering but do not embrace them all. For instance, a person who lends a helping hand to a family member or close neighbour is being a responsible member of a family or a good neighbour, not necessarily a volunteer.

Within the volunteering movement there is a growing trend of small non-formal community projects and organisations that are meeting social, environmental and economic needs. These organisations absorb thousands of individuals participating in a voluntary capacity but not necessarily identified or counted in surveys due to their informal nature. Two examples in Queensland are the Pyjama Foundation which runs a reading program for foster children, and SPACE, an organisation, that provides an environment where organisations can deliver services for children and young adults with disabilities. Another example in Victoria is the Montrose Community Playground Project, where a team of 1,000 volunteers constructed a children's playground in five days.

According to the definition of volunteering, paid employees who are called upon to work more hours than their organisation/business contract stipulates are not volunteering. They are employees who are either expected to provide, or choose to provide, unpaid hours. This could be considered as either an issue of unfair employment expectations or a mark of employee commitment rather than volunteering, where a person chooses to work using their free will and without wage in a volunteer position for community benefit.

To further complicate matters, in Australia there are government departments at all levels that not only support volunteer activities, but actually develop and manage volunteer programs. These programs may come under various departments with responsibility for community welfare, sport, the arts, environment, justice and emergency services to name but six. Contributors to this submission provided examples of government departments that manage volunteer programs (see Table 2)

Federal government departments
Department of the Attorney General; Australian Taxation Office; Department of Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts; Department of Immigration and Citizenship; Department of Innovation, Industry, Science and Research; Department of Veterans' Affairs; Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development Local government; Emergency Management Australia Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs
State government departments
NSW Department of Primary Industries; Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) Queensland; Department of Culture and Arts, WA; State Library South Australia; State Emergency Services in each state; Department of Justice, Vic; Rural Fire Services in each state
Local government
Local Government Volunteer Coordinators Forum, SA Libraries and information services

Table 2: Examples of government departments/offices that directly manage volunteers as provided by contributors to this submission.

One contributor provided the following comment about his experience volunteering in government departments:

> I spend two days a week with the Weather Bureau doing volunteer work, in this case, digitising the early weather folios of the Colony of South Australia. In every respect it meets the tenets of the other Principles of Volunteering but the work is not in the not for profit sector. There are many volunteers working for the three levels of Government so it's strange that they are not recognised nationally as 'volunteers'. Think of weather observers (1000's nationwide), country fire fighters, library volunteers, community carers working through local government, etc. (Contributor 4)

Volunteering can occur through formal or informal partnerships within communities. For instance, there are examples of for profits, particularly in aged care, which manage volunteer programs either on their own or engage volunteers in partnership with not for profit organisations. This apparent contradiction may be the result of the use of the term 'volunteer' to describe much of the unpaid work carried out in the community.

Volunteering – leadership and governance

Volunteering offers people the opportunity to develop new skills or enhance and use existing skills. If one accepts the claim that there are 700,000 not for profit organisations (Lyons 2001) and that a majority of these are governed by boards and managing committees, then it follows that there are a vast number of high level skills displayed through peoples' volunteering.

This is borne out of the findings of three national volunteer surveys (ABS) which identifies committee work as one of the most common activities undertaken by volunteers (Table 3).

Australian Bureau of Statistics Voluntary Work Survey (Catalogue Number 4441.0)				
1995	Fundraising 46.5%	Management/ committee work 40.8%	Preparing/serving food 29.1%	Teaching/instruction 26.5%
2000	Fundraising 56%	Management/ committee work 45%	Teaching 44%	Administration 41%
2006	Preparing and serving food 31%	Teaching/providing information 28%	Administration 26%	Management/ committee work 23%

Table 3: Comparison of the most common volunteer involvements, 1995, 2000, 2006 ABS national surveys on volunteering

While the engagement by volunteers in 'management/committee work/coordinator' activities was found by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS 1996, 2001) to be one of the most common volunteer activities reported 40.8% and 45% respectively, by 2006 the level had dropped to 23% even though the activity remained in the top four of volunteer activities.

Volunteering - Service Delivery

Not for profit organisations are unable to recompense paid workers to the same levels that are available in the for profit and government sectors. Reasons for this are in part historical as many of the original workers in NFP organisations were volunteers and funding was hard to attract. To attract paid workers and retain their increasing knowledge and skills in not for profit organisations, the low wage levels have been supplemented by the adoption of salary packaging and flexible work practices. The loss of expert skills among paid workers can result in a 'brain drain' to the detriment of not for profit organisations (Volunteering SA & NT).

To think that service delivery is measurable by calculating the delivery of end products is to underestimate the work of volunteers. An example of service delivery for volunteer bushfire brigades requires ongoing upgrading of skills, prevention, education and consultation, etc. A first hand account states:

- We maintain emergency services infrastructure such as hydrants in our area to ensure they work when needed.

- We conduct hazard reduction duties for the community so that fire hazards within our areas are kept to manageable levels should a fire occur in the worst possible circumstances and threaten lives and properties.

- We train our volunteers in bush fire suppression, vehicle operations and fire ground safety to protect their lives as well as those around them.

- We manage the upkeep and maintenance of our fire units, our fire station and equipment to ensure that when needed it is in good working order and ready to fulfil the demands of an emergency.

- We assist in the education of the community at large with management of local Bushfire Readiness Action Groups and issuing permits to burn in shoulder periods when fires need to be controlled and managed.

- We advise the City of Swan in issues affecting our brigade and territory that should be managed at higher levels to ensure that the community is adequately protected and informed.

- We back up full time paid career brigades within the Perth urban fringe to provide extra resources for large fires and fire suppression where four wheel drive capability is required and fires are in bush or scrub.

- We back up the Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC) in suppression of fires in the areas under their control (National Parks and protected reserves) when fires occur in the fire season or when their controlled burns become out of control.

- We stand in for full time brigades should an emergency occur when they are otherwise occupied with another emergency. (first hand account of Bushfire Volunteer Firefighter Brigade)

5 VOLUNTEERING INFRASTRUCTURE IN AUSTRALIA

Volunteering does not come without cost. It requires a well resourced and professionally run infrastructure to ensure sustainability and continuous development.

Volunteer infrastructure consists of those organisations whose primary purpose is the provision of organisational support and development, resource development, coordination, representation and promotion to front-line community and statutory organisations that use volunteers in the delivery of services.

In Australia this infrastructure includes national and state peak bodies, regional cluster networks and alliances, local Volunteer Resource Centres (VRC's) and other promotional and referral agencies.

This volunteering infrastructure is independent of government but works with governments at local, state and federal level to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes.

6 EXISTING METHODOLOGIES FOR GAUGING VOLUNTEER INVOLVEMENT

The Australian Bureau of Statistics through its surveys on volunteering is developing a consistent picture of the engagement of volunteers. The *Voluntary Work Survey* has now carried out three national surveys, which contribute to the building of a comparable body of knowledge on volunteering.

Economic estimations of volunteering

There are a variety of economic methods that calculate the dollar value of volunteering. These include: comparable worth; minimum wage; average wage and living wage (Anderson & Zimmerman 2004).

Calculating a dollar value for volunteering is not without controversy. A criticism of this method is that it does not take into account the skills of volunteers or the intrinsic value to the organisation, client/consumer group or the community at large. Thus the same monetary value is assigned to the

volunteer who manages a program/organisation; the volunteer who deliver meals; the volunteer who is responsible for the financial accountability of the organisation etc. Nor does this method allow for the skill development of people as volunteers. Thus new skills gained such as teaching, coaching, fundraising, promoting, saving lives, do not cause any variation in the value of their skills in the same way as would be recognised in the paid workforce.

In Australia, Professor Duncan Ironmonger has estimated the economic value of volunteering at a national level and has been commissioned by governments in Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia to calculate the value of volunteering in those states (Department of Communities 2009; Ironmonger 2002, 2006, 2008; Soupourmas & Ironmonger 2002). Ironmonger argues that the economic method of calculating the value of volunteering illustrates that volunteering time is a 'real donation that is as valuable as money' (2008, p. 3). With his method, Ironmonger recognises that volunteers incur financial and material costs to enable them to volunteer e.g. out of pocket expenses.

Therefore using this method the estimates of the value of volunteering in Australia are much higher than that of a simple dollar value imputed to volunteer hours. ABS (1995) estimated volunteering and community work to be $18b while Ironmonger (2002) argued that the contribution was $42b. Based on the 2008 updated report by Ironmonger, the value of volunteering has risen to $70b[1], (Ironmonger 2008).

Seventy per cent of organisations surveyed in the 2008 National Survey of Volunteering Issues (Volunteering Australia 2008) quantify and measure volunteer contribution to their operations. The most common measure used is the number of hours of volunteering. Other methods include, assigning a dollar value to volunteer effort (reporting varied between $10 - $25 per hour, or minimum wage), number of volunteers engaged by an organisation or program and by results and impacts such as client feedback, tasks completed, kilometres travelled.

The issue of assigning a dollar value to volunteer contribution, as previously mentioned, measures volunteer effort at the lower end of an economic or wage scale and does not take into account the varying skill levels and experience brought to volunteering *(e.g. Volunteer Bush Fire Brigade ' consulting' volunteers; Purcell 2007).*

Further, anecdotally we know that many volunteers dislike the dollar method of evaluating their efforts and worth. They argue that a dollar value does not fully reflect the intrinsic value to themselves, their organisation or their community.

[1] The $70 billion figure was calculated by Ass Prof Duncan Ironmonger, University of Melbourne. It was extrapolated from his report (May 2008) to the Department of Communities Queensland '*The economic value of volunteering in Queensland'*. The calculation in this report was based on data from the Gross State Product of Queensland; the extrapolation to arrive at $70 billion estimation of the value of volunteering was calculated on Gross National Product for the same period. This estimation was made at the direct request from Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia existing 'measures'

Volunteering Australia has two existing 'measures' of volunteering. *A National Agenda on Volunteering: Beyond the International Year of Volunteering,* was compiled as an agenda for change to sustain and further volunteering and it continues to serve as a 'yardstick' to measure progress. *The National Survey of Volunteering Issues* is the second key measure that charts the major issues that impact upon volunteers and volunteering on an annual basis.

National Surveys of Volunteering Issues

Volunteering Australia's National Survey of Volunteering Issues is in its fourth consecutive year of seeking data from volunteers and volunteer involving organisations on their experiences of volunteering and the key issues that impact on volunteering in Australia. It is recognised as a valuable measurement of volunteer experience and expectation, from an individual and organisational perspective. While the focus is largely on public policy issues that impact upon volunteering, other areas explored in the most recent survey (2008) include:

- how organisations measure volunteer contribution (70% of organisations quantify the contribution of volunteers to their organisation e.g. number of hours volunteered);

- volunteers' sense of community belonging (86% of volunteers surveyed feel that volunteering increases their sense of community belonging);

- skills and experience acquired through volunteering (78% feel that training has given them necessary skills for their volunteer role);

- accessing training through volunteering benefits paid workplaces (34% of volunteers surveyed say that training they have accessed as a volunteer has given them skills useful to their current or future employment).

Each of these issues is a measure of contribution and value.

A National Agenda on Volunteering: Beyond The International Year of Volunteers

In 2000 as part of the International Year of Volunteers, Volunteering Australia and Australian Volunteers International established a National Community Council of Advice which conducted a national consultation to identify the major issues facing volunteers and their organisations. The result was the publication of *A National Agenda on Volunteering: Beyond The International Year of Volunteers* in which were identified six main objectives necessary to sustain and further volunteering in Australia. Each

objective listed a number of outcomes through which the objective could be measured. These objectives were:

1. Publicly respect and value, in enduring, formal, and tangible ways, the essential contribution that volunteers make to building and sustaining the Australian community.

2. Ensure that volunteers have legal status and are afforded protection through every piece of legislation and public policy that affects them and their work.

3. Ensure that all new legislation, bi-laws and public policies, developed at any level of government, which may affect volunteers and their work, works only to facilitate and sustain volunteering.

4. Acknowledge that the activity of volunteering is not without cost and develop means by which Australian volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are supported and funded to provide valuable services.

5. Ensure excellence in all levels of volunteer involvement and volunteer management to encourage, protect and enhance the work of volunteers.

6. Ensure that volunteering is a potent, dynamic and unifying social force for community benefit by acknowledging and accepting that it is a diverse and evolving activity.

In 2004 research was undertaken to measure the progress that had been made on meeting these objectives and their measurement. While some progress had been made there was and still remains more that can be achieved to enhance volunteering in this country (Volunteering Australia 2004).

A number of state governments have included volunteering as part of their future community strategies. For example, in the Queensland state government *'Towards Q2' 2020 Strategy* a target has been set to increase volunteer numbers by fifty per cent.

7 TRENDS AND DEVELOPMENTS

An invisible workforce

Volunteers are a necessary and significant part of Australia's workforce as defined by industry sector, but there is still much to understand in terms of their motivations, needs and management and this has implications for future workforce development.

Industry Sector	Paid Workers	Volunteer Workers
Government Skills	122,820*	457,000*
Service Skills	155,000*	1,000,000*
Community Services & Health Industry	1,100,000	300,000

*From Industry Skills Councils' Environmental Scans 2008

Table 4: Industry estimation of paid and volunteer workers

Consistent and ongoing research about volunteer involvement and contribution to industry productivity across all relevant sectors would support future workforce planning. This has been acknowledged in the Productivity Commission's *Trends in Aged Care Services: Some Implications.* At least three industry sectors have identified heavy dependence on volunteer effort to sustain productive service delivery, and this extends beyond the welfare sector.

Some of the industry councils recognise and attempt to quantify the numbers of volunteers that make up their industries' workforce (e.g. Service Skills Australia and Government Skills Australia) and therefore seek to support the volunteer component of their workforce through appropriate training and career pathways. The Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council in acknowledging its great reliance on volunteers to deliver key services identified the 'unique management dynamics for the managers seeking to manage unpaid and paid workforces simultaneously' (CSH 2008, p. 7).

The Agri-Food industry also involves a large proportion of volunteers, particularly through conservation and land management programs such as Green Corps. The Innovation and Business Skills industry, responsible for heritage, arts, media and radio also attracts significant volunteer involvement. It is critical to understand current participation and trends in volunteering in all the relevant industry sectors to effectively map and cater for future workforce needs, which include the distinct needs of volunteers who choose to dedicate time, energy and skills to Australia's productivity.

A consistent measure of volunteer contribution across all industry sectors would connect similar and related workforce needs (paid and unpaid) and

future skills development, particularly in the area of volunteer co-ordination and management.

Ageing – supply and demand

Supply - Australia has an ageing population. On one hand this bodes well for organisations seeking volunteering. It has been anticipated that 'baby boomers' will make up a pool of healthy, well educated and skilled volunteers. While it is still anticipated that the older cohort of volunteers will continue to grow, the commitments to caring, grand-parenting, downturn of superannuation funds and the recent increase of retirement age may impact on this older group's ability to volunteer in larger numbers.

Demand - The recently published Productivity Commission research paper on trends in aged care noted the role of volunteers in transport, home maintenance, meal preparation and delivery (p.163) but warns that future pressures on the system together with potential decline of informal carers suggests the increasing importance of volunteers. This is an example of an area which emphasises the need for volunteers who are capable of a regular commitment to facilitate the development of trust and relationship between client and volunteer.

Short term volunteering

Through consultation processes Volunteering Australia has identified short term volunteering as a threat to the sustainability of traditional volunteer programs. State Volunteering Centres have noticed a decline in the interest of younger volunteers to participate in traditional volunteer programs in favour of short term experiences. These are variously termed, episodic, event, project volunteering. If the traditional model of engaging volunteers through not for profit organisations does not embrace social, economic, environmental and cultural attitudes, in particular from Gen Y, they will be challenged to continue to provide services.

Risk through over management

Anecdotal information points to concern from not for profit organisations that the reaction to the insurance and risk management issues have limited volunteers in direct service delivery. The risk management strategies employed by organisations can form a barrier and disincentive to become a volunteer. For example, in Brisbane hospitals elderly patients were found to be suffering from malnutrition which became apparent when volunteers were prevented from assisting at mealtimes due to risk management issues (Morgan 2007).

Global financial crisis

During the boom people were time poor and looking for well organised and specific commitments which did not waste their valuable time. Now we may

have people looking for volunteering opportunities which do not cost them out of pocket expenses and which provide pathways to employment.

Social entrepreneurship and young people

There is evidence that there is an increase in new organisations being created by young people in particular. These organisations overlap and compete with established, traditional organisations for similar areas; and can be attributed to an increase in established organisations suffering from 'founders syndrome' and being unwilling to change their ways and approaches to accommodate young people.

This leads to a cycle of younger people setting up new and innovative organisations and projects using technology and different models of participation in community activities. Volunteering Queensland has noted a surge of 18-25 year old people wanting to get involved with social entrepreneurial models of volunteering.

Corporate Volunteering

The interest in corporate social responsibility and the rise of businesses and their employees choosing to engage in volunteering as an expression of engagement with community continues to grow. This growth is not only apparent in large corporations but in businesses of all sizes. The National Survey of Volunteering Issues 2008 found that 38% of volunteer-involving organisations surveyed involved corporate/employee volunteers in the last 12 months. Over half considered that businesses had made an extremely valuable contribution to their organisation.

People who are employed are more likely to volunteer than either unemployed, retired or others not in the workforce (ABS 2007) and volunteering through one's business offers an alternative route to community engagement than volunteering directly as a citizen. Benefits of employee/corporate volunteering are perceived to be that it 'helps to build bridges between the private and not-for-profit sectors. The development of skills, improved morale, and team cohesion translate into quantifiable benefits for the company too.' (Cavallaro 2007, p.52) and further results in 'improved rates of staff retention, increased job satisfaction and productivity' (Cavallaro 2007, p. 54).

Skilled Volunteering

Maintaining skills levels or developing high level skills is becoming more apparent. One volunteer described this particular form of volunteering as 'consultant volunteering' (Contributor 4). This form of volunteering can also be found in mentoring and in corporate volunteering.

Volunteering Australia believes that the challenge of skilled volunteering lies not simply in the sourcing of opportunities, but in the accurate assessment and matching of volunteer skills with volunteering projects. The problem can

be compounded by a lack of understanding about how commercial skills can be applied in a not-for-profit context.

8 PROVISION OF COMMENTS INVITED BY THE PRODUCTIVITY COMMISSION'S ISSUES PAPER

Volunteering Australia welcomes the opportunity to provide comment invited in the Productivity Commission Issues Paper. While we acknowledge the terms of reference we would respectfully offer the following comments:

Research is from government perspective

While we acknowledge the objectives of the Productivity Commission we believe that narrowing the study's focus limits the potential for government to identify 'better ways of working with the sector' (Productivity Commission 2009, p. 6). This is particularly apparent when considering the contribution of volunteers as a distinct component of the NFP sector (see Table 1 to view the spread of volunteer activity in Australia).

Whole of government approach

We also note that the Productivity Commission is charged to measure the contribution of the NFP sector from a government perspective, i.e. 'an improved understanding of the contribution of not for profit organisations as a means of informing policy' (pg. 6), that is, 'how' and 'what' the NFP sector can do to improve the work of government in policy development, program funding and service delivery. An alternative would be to ask what government can do to support, benefit and enable the work of the NFP sector. This would entail undertaking a whole of government examination to investigate how each level of government supports and/or hinders the work and goals of the NFP sector.

The call for a whole of government approach is not new. In his speech to Treasury staff in 2007, Ken Henry noted the need for a whole-of-government approach to address policy problems

> Many of the policy problems that we face today have a whole-of-government character. There is no room for silos between central, line and operational agencies; nor between levels of government. Examples of such problems include the adverse impact on workforce participation that arises from the interaction of the tax system with the welfare system; the severe capability deprivation suffered by most Indigenous Australians; widespread environmental degradation, due in part to a history of inappropriate pricing of the nation's natural resources; and water rationing in much of the populated areas of the continent. (Ken Henry, 2007)

While these comments by the Secretary of the Treasury were not made in connection with the not for profit sector or volunteers, they are analogous in the sentiments expressed regarding the need to do away with silos between governments and their departments when addressing policy, and we would argue, volunteering.

As illustrated in Table 1, Types of Organisations, the spread of organisations involving volunteers is spread across the majority of government portfolios. Therefore we call for active involvement by government departments across commonwealth, state and local levels.

Limitation of focusing on government funded services:

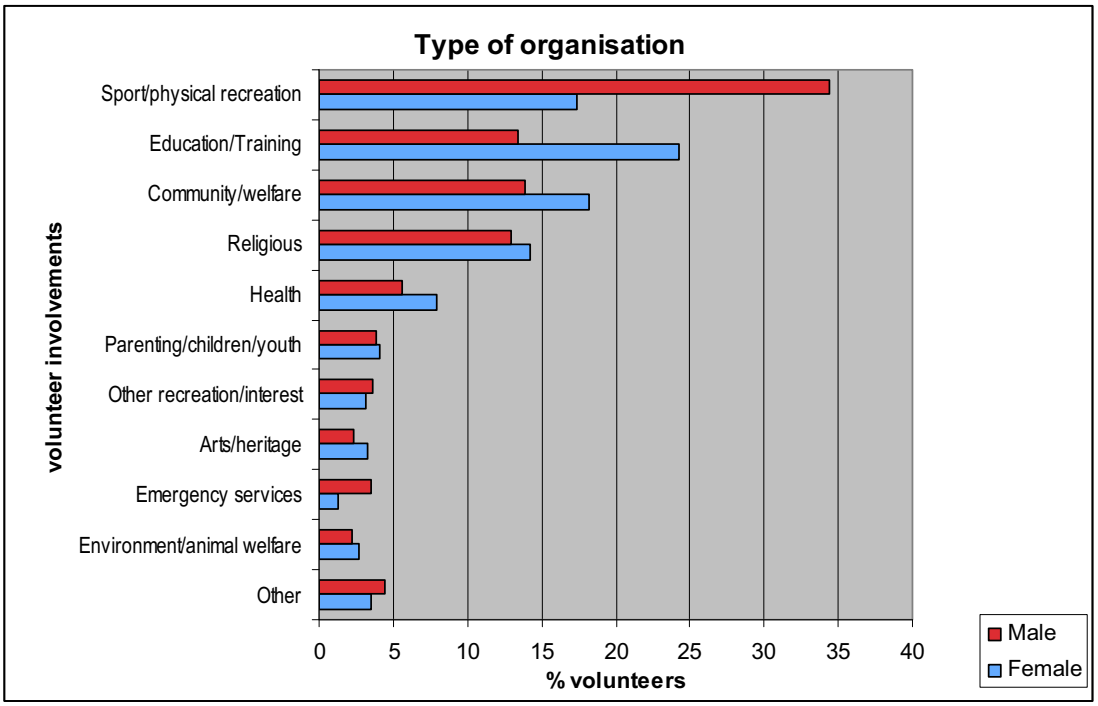
Of note is the focus on government funded services. This means that the current research will concentrate on 2.4 million volunteers whereas the most recent estimate by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2007) is 5.4 million volunteers. Therefore the contribution of the not for profit sector will in part be based on the involvement of less than half of the volunteer workforce in this country. The ramifications of this are:

- It underestimates the work and contribution of volunteers in all fields and limits the strategic relevance of this Productivity Commission research;

- Any recommendations that are taken up by government will be concentrated on a particular segment of the spectrum and responsibility for action will fall to one or two government departments rather than a whole of government;

- Recommendations made by the Productivity Commission may not be restricted to volunteers in funded government services but on policy affecting all volunteers; and

- There is also the potential that this narrowing could have stifling consequences in that the current Productivity Commission research will lead to greater knowledge of government funded services, but miss out on the richness of the spectrum of the sector as a whole.



Source: Australian Bureau of Statistics 2007, *Voluntary Work Australia 2006,* Canberra

Table 5: Spread of volunteers across areas of involvement

Proposed Productivity Commission conceptual framework for measuring the contribution of the NFP sector (2009)

To gauge the contribution of volunteers it is necessary to expand the measurement past the 'input' level as a measure of 'time'. To include an estimation of the work and value of volunteers in simple 'time spent' terms, is to ignore their impact on social development and advancement. Many of the organisations we take for granted and applaud for their great work had their genesis around the 'kitchen table' (Toonen 2001). To design a framework that does not incorporate the depth and breadth of volunteer action will ultimately provide a framework that provides information about what can be 'seen' but with little understanding of the totality of its contribution to society e.g. environmental, cultural, social as well as economic benefits.

We suggest that the framework should include measures to capture the impact of volunteering at each level:

Inputs based contribution measures – Direct economic contribution

- Volunteers provide their own capital goods to enable them to volunteer (e.g. modes of transport; equipment; computers)

- Incur out of pocket expenses over a range of items (e.g. phone calls, fuel mileage, wear and tear expenses, uniforms) Volunteering Australia research (2007) showed that 88% of volunteers incur out of pocket expenses which are not reimbursed. In 2006 when this research was conducted, these costs averaged $700 for each volunteer with net

expenses, or $600 if averaged across all volunteers. As a total input contribution based on 5.4 million volunteers amounts to $3.2 billion per annum. If working on the basis of 2.4 million volunteers (as per the Issues Paper) the input contribution is still $1.4 billion contribution of out of pocket expenses incurred by volunteers that are not reimbursed over the course of a year.

- Skills and knowledge and experience that volunteers bring to add value to their work and organisational capacity

Output based contribution measures

- Enhancement of skill and knowledge levels demonstrated by training and education of volunteers (e.g. number of volunteers undertaking non accredited and accredited training, such as, Certificates I, II and III in Active Volunteering and Certificate IV in Volunteer Program Coordination). Certificates I, II III, and IV have been included in the National Community Services and Health Training Package – CHC08.

- Delivery of services. Needs to also consider the gap that would be left if the service was not delivered by volunteers (e.g. bush firefighters).

- Provision of services to clients, members, volunteers and network partners. Network partners benefit from tangible and intangible services, e.g. worker/volunteer/board member personal and professional development *(intangible output* through passing on learning from experience with government/philanthropic organisation/business informally ; and *tangible output* through engaging trainer on a specific topic for network members); sharing of training expertise (e.g. network members providing training at other member's organisations (*tangible output*); sharing of equipment (*tangible output*); forming a partnership to provide a joint service to clients (*tangible output*).

- Community connections. Needs to consider the sense of wellbeing and social inclusion as demonstrated in the Australian Wellbeing Index; the measurement of trust in ABS Voluntary Work Survey 2006; qualitative data available in the National Survey of Volunteering Issues (VA 2006, 2007 and 2008).

Outcome based contribution measures

- Service outcomes - also applicable to volunteers, who as individuals, also benefit in health, employability and safety/trust.

- Connection outcomes - Volunteers are conduits between organisations and the wider community, for instance, the most common method of volunteer recruitment is 'word of mouth' that is, people choose to volunteer because they are asked to do so by family members/friends

who are already volunteering.

- Advocacy outcomes - Measurement of the volunteering infrastructure that exists at national, state and regional/local levels and their ability to reflect volunteering issues to influence public policy.

- Existence outcomes - Volunteers have a huge impact on this area with their work in environment; land reclamation; cultural heritage.

- Consumption outcomes - It is valid here to measure the health, fitness and creative fulfilment and engagement of volunteers.

Impact based contribution measures

- Volunteers and NFP organisations engage in complex network development. Information sharing, development of working relationships e.g. shared training for volunteers, are two examples of the positive long term impact of networking amongst NFP organisations.

- A long term impact for volunteers is the heightened trust found amongst people who volunteer as opposed to people who do not volunteer (ABS 2007).

- Creating a culture of social connectedness/social inclusion can be measured by the example of parents and family through engagement in community activities and volunteering. Respondents to the ABS (2007) Voluntary Work Survey 2006, who volunteered were more likely to have parents who took part in community events or volunteered.

9 ENHANCING THE EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS OF THE NOT FOR PROFIT SECTOR

Over 5 million volunteers contributed more than 700 million hours. And yet, the need grows. Managers of volunteers say that recruitment is a constant demand. This is to be expected when the volunteer workforce is not protected in the same manner as paid workers; when NFP organisations often leave their vote of appreciation to volunteers on the equivalent of the social pages of annual reports – that is if they are mentioned at all. Further organisations often do not count in any other way than the application of an hour by dollar formula the contribution of volunteers. This is ironic when it is often volunteers who initiated the development of the organisation and are responsible for governance and figure highly in planning strategic direction.

When organisations are challenged by the need to continuously recruit volunteers it can be necessary for organisations to consider how they involve volunteers, and whether they are consulted in formulating strategic policy. Trends in volunteering change and it can be a challenge for organisations to predict and take action to respond to current trends.

Consistent research and greater understanding about volunteer contribution to industry productivity across all relevant sectors would support future workforce planning. At least three industry sectors (Service Skills Australia; Government Skills Australia; Community Services & Health Skills Industry) have identified through their environmental scans that they have a heavy dependence on volunteer effort to sustain productive service delivery. A consistent measure of volunteer contribution across these sectors would connect similar and related workforce needs and future skills development, particularly in the area of volunteer coordination and management.

At a state level, the Queensland Government has identified volunteer training as a key strategy through five strategic priorities under their Queensland Skills Plan. These include Sport and Recreation; Community Services and Health; Arts; Community Safety and Environmental Protection.

Effectiveness by good practice

While the management of volunteers encompasses many human resource management areas, volunteering is different to paid work and the motivations of people to engage in and continue to volunteer change. Successful volunteer programs are based on principles that form a solid foundation that:

- Protects the integrity of volunteering;
- Distinguishes it from other citizenship activities and other forms of unpaid work;
- Recognises the diversity of volunteering involvement;
- Recognises in an inclusive way the values that underpin volunteering; and
- Provides the sector with a framework to promote and advance volunteering.

'It may be that volunteers seek a marriage between the protection and respect offered by human resource management and the ideals of community development and social inclusion.' (Maher & Wilson 2008)

The *National Standards for involving volunteers in not for profit organisations* (Volunteering Australia 2001) emphasise the importance of adopting a systems approach to managing volunteers and compliance with the standards will ensure that volunteer rights are protected, their role is explicit and they work in safe and healthy environments. Not for profit organisations can use the *National Standards* in a number of ways:

- As an audit tool that provides an overall appreciation of where the organisation is placed with respect to best management practice for

volunteer involvement;

- as a guideline or checklist to help identify opportunities for making improvements;

- as a framework of reference to assist in planning and establishing a new volunteer service; and

- as a baseline from which progress in making improvements can be monitored and measured

An organisation that is able to demonstrate compliance with the standards is well positioned strategically to recruit and retain more volunteers, as well as attract funding or sponsorship for new initiatives.

The *National Standards* address the following eight key areas:

Policies and procedures
Management responsibilities
Recruitment
Work and the workplace
Training and development
Service delivery
Documentation
Continuous improvement

As part of the current review of the National Standards being undertaken by Volunteering Australia, a system of accreditation for organisations adopting the Standards is being explored. Any accreditation system that may be developed and administered by Volunteering Australia would provide potential as an output / outcome measurement of organisational efficiency and effectiveness in volunteer management. Any accreditation model developed would be sensitive to the resource base and diversity of volunteer-involving organisations and is not limited to not for profit organisations but also includes: government departments, local governments as well as micro organisations

Effectiveness by partnership development

'Societies founded on networks of trust and co-operation can help to realise human potential.' (Healy et al 2001, p. 39).

Volunteering provides an opportunity for people to work together accruing benefit for all those participating as well as the wider community. At an individual level, the ABS (2007), found that volunteers were more likely to trust others than non volunteers.

Networks and partnerships between groups offer people an opportunity to work together for mutual benefit and development. 'Whatever the motivation for co-operating and trusting, investment in individual and group identify can

lead to the creation of dense social networks and ultimately better economic and social outcomes.' (Healy et al, 2001, p. 40).

Partnerships between not for profit organisations

It is not uncommon to come across close relationships and informal partnerships between not for profit organisations. This can be a factor of networks. Networks provide a mentoring opportunity for professional development, as well as information sharing and a platform for ideas that can lead to new projects and events. The potential and value of networks is still largely unknown but we believe it is through such mechanisms that the work of organisations is promoted; new opportunities are explored; and they offer an arena for the development of joint projects.

Partnerships between research and not for profit organisations

Universities form mutually beneficial relationships with not for profit organisations. Relationships range from not for profit organisations engaging researchers to undertake a specific piece of work; researchers approaching not for profit organisations to join a research project or provide case studies; through to partnerships between organisations and research centres.

Over the last two decades Australia has benefited from increasing research interest in the field of volunteering. A number of centres of research have been established which have contributed to our growing understanding and knowledge on volunteering, a small sample being the:

- Australian Centre of Philanthropic & Nonprofit Studies, Queensland University of Technology
- Australian & New Zealand Third Sector Research Institute
- Centre for Community Organisations & Management, University of Technology Sydney
- Social Policy Research Centre, University of NSW
- Hawke Institute, University of SA

The most recent example is the establishment of the Centre for Social Impact. Each Centre develops our knowledge of volunteering and the not for profit sector thus building connections between research and practice to enhance societal capacity. The value of such partnerships apparent in this small sample illustrates the connections between practice and research:

> Australian Centre of Philanthropy & Nonprofit Studies (QUT) and *Australian Journal on Volunteering* (VA): A three year student prize for the best paper by a tertiary student on volunteering.
>
> James Cook University & Volunteering Queensland: Internship program where Volunteering Queensland enables the placement of post graduate students to not for profit organisations for a 13 week volunteering experience using the skills developed during their university course

Volunteering Queensland regularly promotes volunteering at particular undergraduate courses at University of Queensland and Queensland University of Technology

Edith Cowan University, Volunteering WA & Wheatbelt Development Commission (WA Government): Better Connections will provide more resourcing for community organisations. Research report will identify barriers to newcomers volunteering in Wheatbelt towns.

Volunteering WA Research Network: this network is made up of researchers and practitioners to promote and support research in WA on volunteering matters.

Volunteering Australia has taken a lead role in promoting research in the sector. It does this through a number of channels including:

1. Leading a research advisory committee comprising academics, members of key non-profit and business organisations;

2. Publication of the sector journal, Australian Journal on Volunteering;

3. Organising a major biannual conference attracting academics, practitioners and policy makers, and

4. Convening a biannual research symposium.

The most recent research symposium on volunteering was held in 2008. Researchers from Australia and New Zealand, whose expertise lay in the research of the NFP sector and volunteering, were asked to identify the major knowledge gaps in relation to volunteering (see Table 6)

Identified knowledge gaps in volunteering
Indigenous community—volunteering means of social engagement, perspectives, experiences (the whole gamut)
Greater understanding of the variety of volunteering models in the Australian context including Informal and non formal volunteering; Definitions/linking language; CALD community engagement
Issues around involving people as volunteers who may have additional support needs(i.e. people with disabilities, or people with mental health issues) and the identification of practical responses to enhance participation
Insurance/risk management impact on volunteer management
Research process—sampling, ethics, methods, issues/barriers to data collection. More cross disciplinary studies/longitudinal studies (5 year life cycle) and more research from collectivist societies and developing countries.
Build scholarly community working towards an Australasian forum
Work/leisure – investigation of where volunteering sits on this continuum
Management and initiation of partnerships that reflect research/policy/practice
Impact of the volunteer on client/consumer; organisation; community
Trends in volunteering: New generation volunteers - IT methods
Social forecasting - What do we want or might we need volunteering to be in future?

Table 6: Major knowledge gaps about volunteering

Partnerships between business and not for profits

Partnerships with business offer both parties the opportunity to contribute.

Feedback from volunteering centres points to benefits to both not for profits and businesses in partnerships. For instance, not for profits benefit from specialised skills found in businesses and businesses are able to contribute to the community and trading environment in which they operate. (Volunteering Gold Coast)

One of the benefits of partnering concerns dual capacity building. Ongoing partnerships promote a familiarity that allows the not for profit organisation to 'dip in' to a particular skill set necessary for one aspect of their work or project. Due to the trust, empathy and relationship built up between business and organisation, a not for profit is able to seek support from a business fairly quickly and the business responds in a timely manner. This can represent an enormous saving in time for the not for profit in that they are able to access the skills necessary in order to meet their mission.

Competition at odds with collaboration

In line with industry reforms made by previous governments, not for profit organisations, particularly those in the community services area seek funding from government under the competitive tendering model by which not for profit organisations compete with each other to provide services.

Lyons (2001) argued that there are fundamental flaws in this model, for example, 'although the government is the purchaser, it is not the consumer of the services and is thus not in a position to readily evaluate the appropriateness or the quality of the service' (p.188). Others argue that there are major differences and that for-profit businesses developed under a competitive philosophy are at odds with not for profits that are founded under community development principles and a 'collective and co-operative philosophy' (Murphy 2001, p. 124)

During interviews carried out in the preparation of this submission, one person stated that while she enjoyed the sharing of knowledge and skills found through networking with other managers of volunteers, she noted that her best ideas would not be shared as she feared that if these were shared she would lose a competitive edge over the other members of her professional network. (Contributor 1)

In another interview, a trainer providing pro bono workshops found that her original resources were rebadged by a not for profit in order to win a tender. The interviewee considered that she was the victim of competitive tendering 'with its focus on dollars and cents, there is more risk that not for profits move away from the collaborative strength of the sector'.(Contributor 2)

These illustrations are mentioned, not to imply that competition is unethical, but rather that employees and volunteers in the not for profit sector are more principally aligned with community development and collaborative tenets.

As another interviewer put it, 'organisations are disadvantaged when they fail to recognise that they have superordinate goals and should work together to achieve those goals. This is particularly important when government departments move into areas already being addressed by not for profits. It seems that instead of identifying what already exists and funding existing programs, government announces new programs, with different names.' (Contributor 3)

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