



The VIO Lens Future Proofing our Volunteer Workforce

Emerging Stronger Research Grant

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Research Overview

The number of engaged volunteers has been in decline since the millennium, COVID-19 and associated illness. Lockdowns during (2019-2021) have been a significant event resulting in an increased rate of disengagement. COVID has decimated the older volunteers, upon which the sector had heavily relied, and people are returning but in different ways. Volunteering Victoria has stated, "COVID has accelerated volunteering disengagement by 64.1%. Even before the pandemic, the rate of formal volunteering had been steadily and worryingly declining, decreasing from 36.2% in 2010 to 28.8% in 2019. The assumption that volunteering will organically return to a sustainable level in the coming months without deliberate support threatens the viability of the whole sector." In some instances, there has been a loss of 80% of volunteers who show no interest in being re-engaged. While COVID-19 has had a significant impact the decline was inevitable, due to the developing disconnect between the needs and wants of the contemporary volunteer and the traditional volunteer offerings from Volunteer Involving Organisation (VIO) (Kappelides & Johnson, 2020¹ | Lachance, 2021² | Victorian Volunteer Strategy 2022-2027³).

This research explores this contemporary volunteer-VIO disconnect through investigating each lens i.e., 'both sides of the coin'. The overarching question this project sought to shed light on was, "How do we build a sustainable volunteer workforce?". More specifically, what are the strategies that will increase and diversify our volunteer workforce, and support VIOs to offer volunteers opportunities that suit the needs and wants of a contemporary volunteer, as well as their own service delivery requirements.

The volunteer lens of this research focused on understanding how to identify potential volunteers, determine their readiness to engage in volunteering and how to best transition these individuals to volunteering.

The VIO lens of this research also focused on understanding the challenges VIOs faced during and post COVID, how these organisations have responded to these challenges, and how they are positioning themselves to facilitate a sustainable volunteer workforce.

The three major objectives of this research were to develop understandings and strategies to:

- 1. Identify, connect, and engage individuals within the community who are most likely to convert to volunteering.**
- 2. Re-connect and re-engage volunteers who have disengaged.**
- 3. Support VIOs to build a sustainable volunteer workforce.**

Significance

The significance of this study is underpinned by the comprehensive and compelling research that shows that a culture of volunteering is an indicator of a healthy and connected community. In its broadest sense a society where people help one another, by their very nature, is more resilient and robust and can rapidly mobilise and respond in an emergency or crisis (Victorian Volunteer Strategy, VVS³). Volunteering offers environmental, social, cultural, health and wellbeing benefits that translate to the broader community. In addition, volunteering contributes significantly to the economy.

In 2019 it was estimated that it would cost \$19.4 billion to replace the labour that volunteers contribute to Victoria (VVS). If volunteer opportunities are not offered in a way that meet how people want to volunteer in the short and longer term, then there will be a significant loss of services to community. In real terms, if the volunteer participation grew nationally by 10% of the nation's non-volunteers, volunteer numbers in Australia would increase by about 1.6 million people.

This report presents data related to Objective 3 above, Objectives 1 and 2 are addressed in The Volunteer Lens. Executive Summary brings the findings of both reports together in the presentation of functional and effective strategies to strengthen the sustainability of the volunteer workforce.

¹ Kappelides, P., & Johnson, T. (2020). A Heavy Load: Challenges and Current Practices for Volunteer Managers in the USA, Australia, and Canada. *Journal of Nonprofit & Public Sector Marketing*, vol. 32, 4-24.

² Lachance, E. L. (2021). COVID-19 and its Impact on Volunteering: Moving Towards Virtual Volunteering. *Leisure Sciences*, vol. 43, 104-110.

³ <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-volunteer-strategy-2022-2027/strategy-glance>

The VIO Lens

Supporting VIOs to build a sustainable volunteer workforce

Introduction

Delivery of services through a volunteer workforce, whether it be integrated with a paid workforce or stand-alone, requires management and is the other side of the volunteering coin. Organisations which are often called Volunteer Involving Organisations or VIOs increasingly have to offer opportunities which volunteers want to take up, rather than the traditional models of volunteering in person on a regular basis. This changing trend has been well identified since pre COVID.

As part of its construction, the National Volunteering Strategy provided some timely research into VIOs. This work⁴ noted:

“It is well recognised across the volunteering ecosystem that recruiting and retaining volunteers is an ongoing challenge (McGregor-Lowndes 2017). While broadly there is an imbalance between volunteer supply and demand, evidence from Holmes et. al (2019) found that this imbalance is likely to be more acute in some sectors, roles, and geographies. In summary, essential and healthcare services and volunteer roles that require frequent, regular attendance were likely to be the hardest to fill if vacant.” [p21]

“A review of literature on volunteer involvement reveals a number of key challenges to engaging and retaining volunteers. Meeting the expectations of volunteers and engaging volunteers in more flexible, temporary roles have been noted as ongoing challenges in the recent literature (eg. Hoyer and Kappelides 2021; Dunn et al. 2022). Further, advancing diversity and inclusion remains a complex and challenging issue for volunteer involving organisations (Jeanes et al. 2018).” [p26]

It is clear from this study that organisations will require more volunteers over the next five years to provide much needed community services, and the study concluded that VIOs were facing significant challenges, including “increasing red tape, an uncertain financial climate, and an apparent reduced willingness of volunteers to commit to regular, formal volunteering roles”.

The Victorian Volunteer Strategy⁵ identified similar barriers and challenges, and committed to making volunteering more flexible and easier in its priority outcomes of:

- **Community groups use a range of strategies to effectively connect with volunteers.**
- **Victorians can volunteer in flexible, short-term, informal, and virtual ways, that make it easy to give back to their community.**

This current research investigated the following questions:

- “What would it take for VIOs to change the way they are offering their volunteer opportunities to respond to these obvious challenges?”
- “What enablers and barriers exist to this capacity for change?”

Inherent in the messaging around this issue is the fact that volunteer workforces are not just gap fillers. They are a serious workforce which when absent, reduces the capacity of VIOs to deliver services in the same quantum and style as they have done in the past. COVID-19 showed us that reduction in volunteer workforces had and continues to have significant impacts on the community, and the services it can expect. The motivations for volunteering are different to the paid workforce but both need strategic management.

This study was time poor, so a single focus group and selected interviews were held to commence the conversation about what would enable VIOs to make the changes needed, to respond to the contemporary volunteer.

⁴ Holmes, K., Dunlop, P. D., Lockstone-Binney, L., Davies, A., Farid, H. M., & Lavery, C. (2022) Volunteering in Australia: The Organisation Perspective. Volunteering Australia, <https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia2022-The-Organisation-Perspective.pdf>

⁵ <https://www.vic.gov.au/victorian-volunteer-strategy-2022-2027/strategy-glance>

Methods

The VIOs' delivery of volunteer opportunities was assessed by a two-step process. Step 1 involved VIOs across diverse sectors being interviewed about the impact of COVID, trends in volunteering, and thoughts on how to build a sustainable volunteer workforce (Table 1). There were 14 interviews conducted across a broad range of organisations including: Volunteer Resource Centres, Red Cross, Meals on Wheels, Transport, Interchange, Migrant Information Centre, AMES, Ballarat Foundation, Neighbourhood Houses.

TABLE 1 INTERVIEW QUESTIONS WITH VIOS RELATED TO THE IMPACT OF COVID, TRENDS IN VOLUNTEERING AND BUILDING A SUSTAINABLE VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE.

Impact of COVID	The Contemporary Volunteer	Building Sustainability
How did COVID change and impact, the way your organisation operated?	Have you noticed a trend for different volunteer needs and wants? How would you describe these trends?	What do you consider to be the key elements that contribute to a sustainable, volunteer workforce?
Have these changes for the organisation been maintained post-COVID?	How would you describe the impact of these trends on the way your organisation now operates?	What do you consider the greatest challenge to the sustainability of your volunteer workforce?
How did COVID change and impact the way your volunteers operated?	How has your organisation responded to these trends?	What steps has your organisation taken to address these challenges?
Have these changes for volunteers been maintained post-COVID?	Does your organisation offer the following opportunities: episodic, flexible, one-off, short-term, long-term, virtual, remote?	
Matching of interest, skills, availability?	What else could be done to address these challenges within your organisation?	
	What challenges do you face recruiting volunteers?	What else could be done to address these challenges external to your organisation?
	What do you find to be the most successful recruitment strategies?	Anything else you would like to contribute?

Step 2 was the delivery of a "Future Proofing our Volunteer Workforce Forum" (Figure 1). VIOs across the state were invited to attend the forum, in person or virtually, and participated in whole-group and café style discussions. Twenty participants joined the forum from VIO non social services and social services, and included the following

organisations: REAL, Manningham Council Sports, Knox City Council, Ballarat Foundation, EV Inc, Guides Victoria, Brotherhood of St Lawrence, Travellers Aid, Western Health, Jesuit Social Services, Melbourne Polytechnic, Swinburn University, Red Cross, Friends for Good, Ballarat Neighbourhood Centre.

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1. Introduction and Welcome
2. Emerging Stronger Research Survey Synopsis
3. What are the barriers and enablers that influence a VIO's ability to think differently about offering innovative volunteering opportunities?
4. Break – tea, coffee and cake
5. Group discussions
 - Theme 1: Organisation capability and capacity
 - Theme 2: Organisation culture and leadership
 - Theme 3: Volunteer capability
6. Summary and conclusions
7. End

FIGURE 1 AGENDA FOR THE VIO FORUM “FUTURE PROOFING OUR VOLUNTEER WORKFORCE”.

Results – Interviews with VIOs

Transcripts of the interviews are reported in Appendix I to IV and the common narratives are reported as follows:

Covid Experiences

Some experiences were industry specific but overwhelmingly VIOs experienced similar issues during the COVID period and associated lockdowns:

Impact of COVID, complete or partial closure of services.

- *The impact of COVID was that services were either closed or substantially compromised in the delivery of service. This was more evident in the metro than regional. It was also reported that COVID had a greater impact on older volunteers. In addition, several groups reported that COVID led to accessing a different cohort of volunteers, such as younger people and highly skilled/professionals who had lost their jobs.*

How did the organisations respond to the COVID challenge?

- *Organisations reported quickly adapting to COVID lockdowns with innovative and virtual opportunities to deliver services.*
- *Organisations highlighted the importance of maintaining engagement and social connectedness during lockdown, for volunteers and the people being supported.*

Covid catalyst leads to innovation in delivery

What was exciting and inspirational was the amazing innovation and success of many VIOs not only to navigate COVID challenges but to come out the other end with a far more innovative, effective, and far reaching service. “We achieved 10 years of progress in two years”.

- *Training, induction, and volunteering services became online, offering streamlined and easily accessible processes.*

What has been maintained post-COVID?

- *Previous services, that were offered face-to-face, are now offered online which reduces costs, and in many instances results in more efficient and streamlined processes. The majority are now offering a hybrid or blended model to suit the needs of volunteers.*
- *Enormous gains were achieved through being forced to pivot and adapt to COVID, resulting in services, that were previously only provided locally, now being delivered at a much larger geographical area, and in some instances at a national level.*

Challenges to moving forward

There are challenges being faced post-COVID. The volunteer workforce is under stress, and both paid and volunteer workforces are experiencing burn out. There is a greater reliance being placed on smaller numbers of volunteers, and organisations are unable to provide opportunities to match the diverse needs of volunteers.

Some specific challenges were cited as:

- *Previous volunteers no longer available as a direct result of COVID experiences.*
- *Volunteers have either gone back to work, are worried about their health, or simply have different life perspectives and priorities.*
- *Lack of resources and expertise to develop volunteer focused experiences, compared to corporate sector, and organisations that operate in this space.*
- *The need for more government funding, a whole government approach and funding for volunteer coordinators.*
- *The importance of recruiting volunteers according to attributes, expectations.*
- *The burden of onboarding and compliance.*

Delivering a sustainable volunteer workforce

What needs to happen to deliver a sustainable volunteer workforce?

- *Organisation culture, leadership, capability, and capacity*
- *Volunteer capability*

Results – VIO Forum, Future Proofing our Volunteer Workforce

Five major themes emerged through the course of the forum:

1. Identity:

Many organisations simply do not identify as Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) and are therefore not engaged with supports, information, and messaging about the changing nature of volunteering. What will it take for organisations to adopt the concept that they are a VIO? This is a critical barrier to messaging, half not listening because “it doesn’t apply to me”.

2. Depth of investment:

Even if organisations identify as a VIO, the depth and breadth of their investment impacts their resourcing of the volunteer workforce. Their values around their volunteers and their willingness and capacity to invest in what is needed, to respond to the changing face of volunteering.

3. Cost of person and resources:

The cost of resourcing and facilitating a placement was highlighted many times. Resourcing of onboarding, compliance, training and support is often inadequate, and many questioned the balance of this investment when volunteers stay short-term. There is a need to address how we efficiently support people into more episodic volunteering, given the weight of compliance demands.

4. Volunteer passport:

Many identified the need to implement a volunteer passport to reduce the burden of onboarding and the associated barriers to volunteer. It is recognised that this has many jurisdictional issues to face and neither the Commonwealth nor Victorian strategies have supported the concept of a passport. This reinforces the need to look at more efficient ways to manage onboarding and compliance, especially when volunteering is short-term, episodic or one-off.

5. Work with the Volunteer Management Activity 5:

It was recognised that the VMA5 activity, funded by the Commonwealth, could assist VIOs to adapt to change, as they remained place-based, but narrower than the previous Volunteer Support Services (VSS).

When reviewing the data and viewpoints from the Forum some commonalities arose with the consultations held at the Eastern Region Victoria Alive Forum⁶ addressing inclusive volunteering. These themes are presented below.

Theme 1: Capacity and capability of the organisation

Organisation capacity was defined as ‘the amount of time and resources (human and other) required, to achieve a particular outcome or performance level’. Organisation capability was defined as ‘the competencies (skills, knowledge and strengths), attributes, attitudes and behaviours required, and the ability to use these to achieve a particular outcome or performance level’.

This resonates with the issues that many organisations do not see themselves as volunteering organisations which impacts their capability to respond to changes in that workforce. Capacity resonates with the depth of investment made in volunteering workforces. Shallow investment signifies limits on capacity to respond.

Forum participants also raised issues of capability and capacity as:

- *Volunteer managers are expected to do everything for the volunteers; however, it is paid staff that manage them.*
- *The organisation needs to commit to analysing what are good roles for volunteers, and what are good roles for paid staff. They often don’t have the time or resources to do this.*
- *How clear are the position descriptions, so volunteer and paid staff know they will be working side-by-side and treated equally.*
- *How can we quantify volunteer output to show their value and determine resource requirement?*
- *Cost to facilitate and onboard can be viewed as undervalued.*
- *Depending on the industry, technology can be a barrier to getting people involved, or an enabler for people getting involved. Depth and breadth of investment (i.e., capacity) will impact how efficient and effective organisations can be, to onboard and support volunteers.*

⁶ https://www.victoriaalive.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Victoria-ALIVE_Eastern-Volunteers-Forum_Final-Report.pdf

Results – VIO Forum, Future Proofing our Volunteer Workforce

Theme 2: Culture and leadership of the organisation

Organisational culture was defined as ‘the shared values and beliefs that guide how members of an organisation, approach their work, and interact with each other. It is expressed and manifested through the behaviours, customs and practices these members collectively display’ (Victorian State Services Authority, 2013).

The Victoria Alive forum found “the need for organisational leadership to drive cultural change and enable systems development/redesign was acknowledged. The commitment and leadership of the organisation’s governance body and senior management to inclusion and valuing volunteers, were seen as important to success; some identified the need for training for these groups to enable strong leadership and effective planning and implementation of change.”

These themes resonated in the VIO Forum; for there to be investment which is deep and broad in volunteering workforces and recognition as a VIO, organisations need to have culture driven by leadership to succeed.

The VIO Forum raised the following points on this:

- *Depth of investment: Does management see volunteers as a valued asset or a gap-filler?*
- *Some organisations have a history of being purely volunteer based, with later limited addition of paid staff. This impacts culture and values around the workforce. In the same way, the opposite can influence culture i.e., paid staff with volunteers coming later to “fill gaps”.*
- *Us and them culture: Volunteers aren’t celebrated enough. An example was given where volunteers were not invited to the Christmas celebration of the organisation, clearly identifying them as different and excluded. The Forum identified the inclusion of volunteers, in all workforce issues within an organisation, is critical to good practice and retaining volunteers, and communicates the culture of the organisation.*
- *Some paid staff need support on how to accept and work alongside volunteers. Paid staff need to think differently about the volunteer’s worth to the business.*
- *Depth of investment and leadership determines how volunteers are valued and viewed.*
- *A diverse paid workforce will promote a diverse volunteer workforce.*

Theme 3: Volunteer capability

The Victoria Alive Report noted elements of volunteer capability important to engagement and inclusive volunteering. These were autonomy, building competencies, empowerment, experience, and self-esteem.

Autonomy was discussed as “loss of autonomy through poor organisational practices, especially where recruitment and onboarding are inadequate and may set a volunteer up to fail. Opposing this is the enabling of autonomy when volunteers with disability are encouraged to speak out, to ensure the best fit for their volunteering role, during these processes.”

Building Competence highlighted the need to understand what volunteers want to get out of their volunteering, and the opportunities which can be provided, for them to build competence, in a range of areas across the organisation.

Empowerment related to being able to advocate for oneself as a volunteer. Forum “participants spoke of being proactive, opening discussions about pathways to employment or other roles, and advocating for opportunities that are important to them. Others spoke of empowerment through the support of peers, friends, family, school, and networks.”

Experience included a few comments related to negative experiences; through pre-conceived ideas, past experiences, or lack of confidence that the opportunity is right for them. One group spoke of the time pressures associated with life for some people with disability, and that their available time may not meet the organisation’s needs or enable fulfilment for the volunteer themselves. “

Self-esteem was highlighted through understanding cumulative effect of poor experiences with organisations who may have rejected you as a volunteer or discriminated against you.

Elements of these capabilities were raised in the VIO Forum namely:

- *How are organisations resourced to establish the necessary environment to build and/or take advantage of volunteer’s capabilities?*
- *How are volunteers and existing staff and management resourced to change culture where it is getting in the way of good experiences for volunteers and service delivery?*
- *People need to feel connected to their workplace, this doesn’t just happen, it needs resourcing and supporting.*
- *Provision of meaningful skill opportunities for volunteers takes planning and strategic thinking within an organisation.*
- *Offering social connection opportunities and skill development pathways is important and again takes time and resources.*
- *Being conscious of what volunteers want and being super flexible.*
- *Volunteer workforces need management which is recognised within the organisations.*

Results – VIO Forum, Future Proofing our Volunteer Workforce

Summary

There were real synergies between the VIO Forum results and those of the Victoria Alive Forums looking at inclusive volunteering. If organisations are to see themselves as VIOs and invest deeply and broadly in integrated volunteer and paid workforces they need a culture, leadership, and resources to support this position. The history of the workforces in an organisation impacts how volunteering is valued and viewed and needs to be understood. The capacity and capability of a VIO to provide meaningful volunteering roles which are onboarded and supported effectively, and resourced efficiently, is critical to understand. Nothing however is possible if an organisation does not identify as a VIO and is therefore oblivious to the messages of the volunteering sector.

COVID has provided a platform for innovation, which was resourced in many cases. It has also provided significant change in how people want to volunteer. COVID innovated the sector, but volunteer workforce shortages remain and require much broader organisational responses, to ensure that services, especially welfare, health, emergency management and community services, can meet the needs of communities moving forward.



Appendix

I. Covid Experiences

Some experiences were industry specific but overwhelmingly VIOs experienced similar experiences during the COVID period and associated lockdowns:

Impact of COVID: Complete or partial closure of services.

The impact of COVID was that services were either closed or substantially compromised in the delivery of service. This was more evident in metro than regional areas. It was also reported that COVID had a greater impact on older volunteers. In addition, several groups reported that COVID led to accessing a different cohort of volunteers, such as younger people and highly skilled/professionals who had lost their jobs.

Quotes supporting these statements.

"During COVID (2020 & Winter 2021, some of winter 2021) the volunteer Hub was closed as staff worked from home – provided a reduced service, adapted to online services."

"Volunteer bank allowed Transport to access several new volunteers where covid wasn't as big a deal and a younger cohort 40-50. They responded well because they were looking for something to do. A big response from people who weren't in the past interested in volunteering but covid changed that. However, when employment opened back up, we lost them. They still wanted to volunteer however time became an issue."

"During covid the bulk of service was stopped and could only carry on in essential form. Vulnerable groups could continue however given their circumstances they were unlikely to travel. Drivers dropped from 60 to 9 – applied for funding to make up the volunteer shortfall and it meant we didn't have to put driver in an uncomfortable environment. There was additional paperwork and reporting, sanitising, and PPE. We introduced the "welfare caller program" originally used to keep drivers engaged (especially over 65 who needed to be stood down). We can kind of do ride share where more than one person is in the car at the time. The cost is still substantially higher today than pre covid because of the effects of covid."

"At first, many programs had to cease operations entirely when the lockdowns were instigated. Some of these programs resumed face-to-face operation between lockdowns, while others pivoted to entirely online service delivery. The communities we support faced an even greater need for support and engagement, and so like many other organisations we had to find creative ways to support those who need it most."

"A decrease in overall rates of volunteering across our shire and a decrease in volunteer roles promoted on behalf of organisations"

"Older volunteers had more difficulty"

"Younger volunteers were less concerned with covid but more frustrated, the older volunteers were more concerned because of health and wanted to hibernate, some felt forced to back off but wanted to stay connected."

"Some older people were told to take a break which was hard cos they rely on social interaction, some backed out because they had a partner who was at high risk, and some were happy to continue however not a lot of opportunities to keep them involved which was a struggle."

"The impact brought a surge of interest in formal volunteering opportunities, with many highly skilled people losing jobs and people wanting to "help" during this difficult time. Volunteer expressions of interest to volunteer tripled during this period."

"Volunteers are hesitant to participate in formal volunteering – volunteer programs across the region are struggling for volunteers"

Appendix

How did the organisations respond to the COVID challenge?

Organisations reported quickly adapting to COVID lockdowns with innovative and virtual delivery of services.

Quotes supporting these statements.

"More flexible and everything had to be shifted online quickly – recruitment process, training and how they work with clients. Had to explore different options to getting the job done if technology wasn't great. Everything is done online and completed/stored online."

"Workshops and events delivered online, rather than in-person"

"Volunteer appointments delivered online or over the phone, rather than in-person"

"Turned on its head – moved from committed to putting people very much f-2-f organisation – very very rapidly switched from f-2-f to online. We had to adapt very very quickly"

"People had to flip from more traditional to digital to connecting. Actively working how to get people re engaged"

"We had to try and reconfigure programs that were always face to face and make them online. This is difficult when working in vulnerable and disability landscape where people rely on social interaction. Reimagine ways of connecting and reaching the people that needed it. Also looking after staff and making sure they were looked after and engaged."

We introduced the "welfare caller program" originally used to keep drivers engaged (especially over 65 who needed to be stood down).

Engagement and the importance of maintaining social connectedness – for volunteers and the people being supported

Quotes supporting these statements.

"Sense of providing social cohesion in our own social bubbles – when there was a lockdown break and came in f-2-f got double the amount of work done. Suspect in time we will learn types f-2-f and types virtual"

"We also made our computers available to people who needed to access them for digital certificates, myGoV, My Aged Care etc. Staff continued to support over 500 clients whilst working from home and we managed to deliver 80% of our Adult Education over the past 3 years by implementing practical and covid safe practices in our facilities."

"Lost the social connection that binds people together, lack of social cohesion"

"In terms of social cohesion of our divisions – people feeling disconnected with the organisation"

"We redeployed our driver workforce to keep them involved – some were calling clients and doing social checks and following up accounts etc. Sometimes they would get bored and pull away so we would have to get them reengaged again."

"The volunteer workforce was the biggest we had ever had. Our programs thrive on face to face. So, when going online, we had to come up with new ideas of keeping them engaged. We had pen pals, online dinner parties and disco nights to keep them onboard. People's motivations changed as lockdowns went on. COVID fatigue. For the initial lockdown many people were keen to stay involved and support, however as it went on people became less engaged as other things started to take precedent. We extended our reach to look after the welfare of our volunteers as well as clients"

"There was a swing during covid towards remote volunteers, however people wanted to get back to the office for the social interaction. There were a group of people that were very anxious and didn't want to volunteer F2F."

"A training calendar was developed with new training opportunities during lockdown to keep volunteers and agencies connected. We also ran a weekly online support group via Zoom for volunteers and volunteer managers called "Staying Connected." This was especially important during the hard lockdowns."

"We stayed connected with volunteers by calling them in person, sending texts and emails to support them, updating our website and social media pages daily and keeping them in the loop about the current situation."

Appendix

II. Covid catalyst leads to innovation in delivery

What was exciting and inspirational was the amazing innovation and success of many VIOs not only to navigate COVID challenges but to come out the other end with a far more innovative, effective, and far-reaching service. "We achieved 10 years of progress in 2 years."

Training, induction and volunteering services became online, offering streamlined and easily accessible processes.

Quotes supporting these statements.

"But the COVID-19 pandemic was also a catalyst to "pivot" and encourage organisations to modernise and streamline their practices. This included initiatives to develop online training via Zoom to encourage and develop online skills, inducting volunteers online and connecting to registered organisations and volunteers through other digital means, like social media, Facebook and Instagram. Much of this work was innovative and improved efficiencies."

"Our monthly face to face induction sessions highlighting volunteer and organisations rights and responsibilities were no longer an option. Staff employed a videographer to film and edit the volunteer co-ordinator delivering the session and this was posted on You-Tube and is now set as a link <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5AENDf5PSfo> to volunteers expressing interest in positions advertised on Seek and Go Volunteer."

The video included two secret code words embedded through the video to make sure people watched it to the end. The registration forms were also adjusted to be able to complete online and we also have the option of people registering through our website."

"We embraced online training with close to 200 people enrolling online through the five community houses!"

"Assisting with hosting online social events such as Talking cafés, cooking, gardening, craft"

Aided people with trouble using their devices to connect to social media etc. – via phone or email

"The website was used as an important tool for Covid resources with staff updating this information weekly to assist organisations and volunteers on new developments. We also created an opportunity to enrol online via our website and introduced a search engine with job opportunities on the front page. New online positions and opportunities were advertised, and these filled quickly by highly skilled people who found themselves out of work during this challenging time."

"We quickly developed a Covid-19 vaccination booking mentor position to assist elderly patients with no or low-level computer skills to book vaccination appointments online."

Appendix

What has been maintained post COVID?

Previous services that were offered face-to-face are now offered online which reduces costs and, in many instances, results in more efficient and streamlined processes. The majority are now offering a hybrid/blended model to suit the needs of volunteers.

Quotes supporting these statements.

"Psychological first aid – relief phase of emergencies. Developed phone-based referral system – wound back field presence. Developed digitally enabled options."

"They have all been maintained post covid – haven't reverted to f-2-f training."

"Now opened the box – difficult to go back – larger cohort across greater area for less money."

"Some programs remain virtual, but majority have resumed to in-person delivery".

"Everything has stayed the same, covid forced us to think outside the box. Forms can now be completed on any device – update details anytime they like so we are always up to date."

"Yes, we aim to still provide face to face, telephone and digital support for next 12 months."

"Some volunteer appointments still delivered online and over the phone, if requested by a volunteer. Many events are delivered online as appropriate. Although overall rates of volunteering have increased, they remain lower than pre-COVID."

"Organisations are expecting more which makes it a little difficult. Many people don't want to go through the hoops to get into formal volunteering, but it needs to be done. A higher need to target one on one, previously a post to a group would be sent out, this has changed more to a one on one and personal approach to volunteer. Man hours have increased trying to get people on board – needs to be managed relationship. Need to sell the role of volunteering more to people."

"Online worked for some people however the majority of people wanted to go back to face to face as soon as they could."

"Flexible workforce has stayed which is fantastic."

"Old generations are more involved and competent with online platforms, so participation has increased. Social connection is always important so finding more opportunities for social interaction."

"Yes. Many have been maintained and been an absolute asset such as the online induction following Expressions of Interest through Seek and Go Volunteer. The training calendars have been maintained on a Term basis to engage volunteers and volunteer managers in learning and upskilling into the future, with around 20 courses on offer either Free or low cost on a quarterly basis to upskill volunteers."

These changes were incredibly successful following positive feedback and offers a quick turnaround in referring potential volunteers onto VIO's.

"Yes, in part. Some programs are still operation either partially, or entirely, online. Some people found it easier to access services, support, and training in an online platform, as the barriers of distance, travel, time and childcare were lessened. However, we also identified that some people were experiencing heightened disadvantage due to the 'digital divide'. That is, individuals with low digital literacy were unable to access online resources and meetings. And so, our Digital Literacy Program was born – and volunteers now work 1:1 (online) with participants to help them achieve their digital literacy learning goals."

"Some programs have resumed face-to-face operations, while others are operating with a blended model. Our online only volunteer roles will continue to support people in an online capacity."

Appendix

Enormous gains achieved through being forced to pivot and adapt to COVID, resulting in services, that were previously only provided locally, are now being delivered to a much larger geographical area, and in some instances, at a national level.

Quotes supporting these statements.

“Now delivering training across 4 states – would have been laughable pre COVID”

“Have been able to extend geographic reach. Access to training has improved more access to other organisations for training as they are online.”

“Some volunteer roles are back to normal (i.e. helping in classroom) however for those that don't want to come back they can be matched to a student who is happy to learn online. This also allows people regionally to get help from metro tutors and vice versa.”

COVID also gave opportunities for us to trial online-only volunteer programs, which offer both flexibility to the volunteer and a chance to expand our reach. Because distance is not a barrier to these online roles, we can now recruit volunteers from interstate.

“Advantages you can pull in intel from a wide variety across greater geographical – hybrid mode”

“During Covid our database advertised some online positions interstate and some volunteers in Queensland and Sydney are still working on online projects. Our profile increased Australia-wide during this period.”

“Progressed 10 years in 2 years – still having growing pains”



Appendix

III. Challenges to moving forward

Challenges and needs for moving forward to build a sustainable volunteer workforce.

Challenges being faced post COVID: volunteer workforce is under stress and experiencing burn out, there is a greater reliance being placed on a smaller number of volunteers, and organisations are unable to provide opportunities to match the diverse needs of volunteers.

Quotes supporting these statements.

"Greater reliance is placed on smaller number of volunteers who do have capacity to assist."

"Long term volunteers that to varying degrees resist change and flexibility – 10 to 30 years volunteering"

"Their needs and wants – shorter shifts and not wanting to work with people. We have moved to Facebook and Instagram to try and entice a younger crowd however the younger crowd are time poor and still have lives to live – children, work, mortgages."

"Still a perception that volunteering is for older people. The spirit of volunteering is dying. We need to attract the millennials. They are very self-centred – everything is for social media not for the feel good of helping someone else."

"Time to get out and about to recruit is always an issue. More time is always needed to train and make the people feel like they are properly prepared and ready to go."

Because we don't recruit for other businesses, the challenges – never enough volunteers, volunteers have other time commitments so their capacity can be challenged as volunteering for several other services"

"Cost of living – however we try to avoid this as a barrier for volunteers."

Time is one of the biggest challenges – if they don't have the capacity then they don't get involved. As volunteers age, it becomes a little easier however working professionals are more time poor."

"Organisations unable to offer appropriate flexibility to accommodate the diverse needs of volunteers"

"Reduced interest in volunteering generally across the community"

"We had to reinvent ourselves and develop and deliver new programs at the same time – all at once. Total burnt out."

"Number of roles that have had to be regenerated has been a challenge. Can't stand down a workforce for a period of time and then expect to refill when everything switches back on. We have had to find new ways, more costs and work in on trying to find people. COVID has forced us to think differently and make us think ahead of the curve. Because everything had to happen all at once it makes it challenging to bring it back to where it was. Make sure we aren't doing things too slowly or too quickly and letting things fall through the cracks. Participation from new drivers has been very encouraging – sometimes better than existing drivers. Not where near as many volunteering as a mutual obligation because they can probably get the same job paid elsewhere."

"Organisations not being realistic with where they are at and what their workload should look like. Everyone is in the same position where they don't have enough volunteers or as many as they did in the past. They shouldn't be pushing volunteers to hard and expecting the unexpected from them. Tough one where many organisations must run on the smell of oily rag, however sometimes things just need to get done."

"Organisation that not geared and a volunteer who had no experience"

Appendix

**Trends: Including previous volunteers no longer available as a direct result of COVID experiences.
Back to work | Worried about health | Different life perspectives and priorities.**

Quotes supporting these statements.

“Currently, paid employment availability is competing with volunteering. People who would otherwise be volunteering are finding paid employment instead.”

“Currently, the ready availability of paid employment is the greatest challenge. Volunteers have withdrawn applications, discontinued volunteering, and have less time available to volunteer. Even retirees who have been volunteering for several years are now returning to the workforce.”

“Covid put life into perspective for some and saw other aspects of life to be more important”.

“Volunteers are flowing for more admin work but don’t really want to work with people. More demand for remote roles. There is a younger cohort (40-50) wanting to work on a weekend or after hours because it suits their lives, but this is something we don’t do. Drivers are very scarce now unless they are paid – this is across the issue.”

“Some people also just found other things to do so dropped off – ie renovations.”

“As there are so many jobs there is no longer a need for a pathway to employment”

“Easily accessibility to paid work. Not providing meaningful volunteer opportunities or have the role/skills grow with him.”

“We are being flexible and meeting their needs for shorter shifts or certain areas vs what we would ideally like and want. As a service provider we need to have drivers, so we need to adapt. Even in the office we have reduced roles and made them more appealing to those who don’t want to work with a lot of people or for long periods of time.”

“Their needs and wants – shorter shifts and not wanting to work with people. We have moved to Facebook and Instagram to try and entice a younger crowd however the younger crowd are time poor and still have lives to live – children, work, mortgages.”

“Spending time on rebuilding database to pre covid levels. A little easier as people weren’t out of the game too long cos regional wasn’t locked down as much as metro. Keeping them involved through social online catch ups.”

“We have changed our approach a little bit to include more presence on social media. We don’t advertise in print media anymore because of cost, so we are advertising and connecting on social media. More people using and searching using this function.”

“The older generation tend to be travelling more and getting out and about so taking this opportunity post covid”

“They need volunteer opportunities that are flexible, and can they go onto paid employment if they volunteer with us. Most volunteers are from migrant backgrounds and looking for experience and then employment. They also want to know if they can get a reference for employment opportunities.”

“Offering one off for corporate volunteering.”

“Individual volunteers we focus on short term and flexible – not regular which works for people who are working full time, they can be involved however regularly they want to be.”

“All other choices are adopted too especially matching skills and interests where applicable.”

“Community Volunteering has change – less participation and less willingness to give time to formal volunteer programs.”

“Organisations have embraced new technologies and continue to offer online or remote volunteer opportunities post-COVID”

“Greater desire for flexibility, more volunteers seeking online or remote volunteer roles, High interest and engagement in face-to-face events.”

“Volunteers are spending less time with us. Prior to Covid we had many volunteers looking for employment who would stay with us for up to a year. Now with unemployment at historically low levels, volunteers are often only staying 3-6 months.”

“The other trend has seen an increase in volunteers who want to give back or do good. This has seen an increase in volunteers who are connected and working but want to do something for others which makes them feel good about themselves.”

“Yes – people are wanting more flexibility in when and how they volunteer. They also want to volunteer for shorter periods of time.”

“We are becoming a more agile organisation. COVID has challenged our perception of what a volunteer role looks like, and how volunteers can participate in our organisation to help us achieve our mission. We have become more open minded, flexible, and creative.”

“We are also encouraging teams to think about whether volunteer roles can be conducted online (or a blend) to allow for flexible working arrangements, and we are encouraging more short-term opportunities with shorter contact hours per week.”

“We have implemented a Volunteer Engagement Reference Group – this group considers all volunteer engagement strategies and offer insights into their experiences as a volunteer, and advice on how best to ensure volunteer needs are met.”

Appendix

Lack of resources and expertise to develop volunteer focused experiences, compared to corporate sector and organisations that operate in this space.

Quotes supporting these statements.

"Need to have IT platforms that are easy to access – new and emerging operators in this sector – login and complete and is seamless. Challenge for traditional as they don't have the platforms."

"Very difficult to navigate – not designed for volunteer experience. 2 things we don't do well. Can't login, lost their passwords – can take weeks to get onto our platform."

"Spending a lot of time educating people and helping them getting in our systems – too much time. Almost a half time staff member."

"Disaster relief Australia – is a stunning example of how to do it, in terms of their learning."

Home - Australian Resilience Corps

Home - Australian Resilience Corps - We are pooling help from across the country, to build Australia's largest network of volunteers.

https://www.resiliencecorps.org.au/?gclid=CjwKCAiAy_CcBhBeEiwAcoMRHDbTknA7vDIqJejcqs--mOkneSb3cnDwclL5vBFX36Co56t1v4NUHBoCQigQAvD_BwE

"System challenges can make the recruitment process slightly convoluted for prospective volunteers"

"Funding is always an issue but one of the hardest challenges we have is IT."

The need for more government funding; a whole government approach and funding for volunteer coordinators.

Quotes supporting these statements.

"We don't have the budget to have a volunteer coordinator to support volunteers. Volunteers don't have a dedicated person that they can take to address these and listen to volunteers concerns etc"

"Current staff are having to absorb the workload of a coordinator. Everyone is taking this role on and embracing it as important to a sustainable workforce. They understand the importance of touching base with volunteers and listening to them."

"More funding for a volunteer coordinator."

"Having a paid Volunteer Coordinator to manage them. With 100 volunteers, the high compliance requirements, and rosters etc this is critical to ensure both the organisation and the volunteer benefits from the relationship."

"We have trialled several different approaches to managing volunteers with limited success. The only effective way for us to manage them is to imbed the Volunteer Administration and Compliance role into our office positions. Then the day to day management of volunteers is done by the various project / program managers."

"Need an all of government approach – sorry need 2 weeks to get a police check. A surge workforce (spontaneous volunteering) – process in 24 hours. Government needs to get serious about supporting us if they want us to be here in the long term."

"We get 40 chain saws but need administrative support!!"

"Government funding support needs to be increased."

"Great funding models available however the amount of funding for emerging stronger grants – would love to see an ongoing commitment to funding for rebuilding volunteers and getting them involved in the world again. Would be great to have volunteering as a key portfolio for a minister and not tacked onto something else they do."

"Government incentives or reimbursement for volunteering"

Appendix

Recruitment: The importance of recruiting volunteers according to attributes and expectations .

Quotes supporting these statements.

"Word-of-mouth volunteers generally have more realistic expectations of the volunteer roles, and demonstrate greater level of aptitude, commitment, and retention. Other recruitments are from SEEK, Volunteer Resource Centres, MIC website, MIC Newsletter, advertising directly with universities."

"Social media is making it harder and easier at the same time to connect with volunteers."

People enjoy working with us so once onboarded they stay, and we just check in with them."

"Direct partnerships – iwatch pages most successful campaign – direct marketing to interested groups. Volunteering expo (May 2022) for national volunteer work – number of VIOs involved and lots of interest and enquiries on the day. Run a major fundraising event in Nov 2022 included schools."

"Our Skills Bank service supports organisations to connect with skilled professionals who may have the skills, expertise or experience needed for a specific role or project."

"Word of mouth campaigns, Existing volunteers promoting opportunities to their personal networks, engaging ads that use targeted language to engage specific cohorts"

"Word of mouth referrals and a focus on "doing good"

"Making the job advertisement on Seek and Go Volunteer a bit quirkier and more different"

A flexible, multi-faceted approach!

The burden of onboarding and compliance.

Quotes supporting these statements.

"We need to get more creative with short term volunteering. The onboarding etc takes a lot of resources and time, so we need to take that into consideration for ROI – for drivers not so much for admin yes. Do we need to target those that are part time workers and starting to wind down their lives"

"People are a lot more time poor so getting their commitment. Onerous onboarding process – puts people off."

"We don't tend to offer one off very well nor have a history of doing – the onboarding is quite arduous so not really plausible."

"Increasing compliance – for example the new Child safe training will add about \$5000 costs to my organisation each year without any matching revenue to cover this cost."

"Screening and onboarding – these are necessary but take a long time. Matching volunteers with roles in different geographic settings. Organisational barriers (policies and procedures, team resourcing etc)"

"Greatest challenge: Resourcing – time, staff, funding."

"We utilise a volunteer management program which helps onboarding."

"Our systems for onboarding/screening work really well now."

Appendix

IV. Delivering a sustainable volunteer workforce

What needs to happen to deliver a sustainable volunteer workforce?

Organisation culture, leadership, capability, and capacity. Volunteer capability.

Quotes supporting these statements.

"Development of a pooled volunteer network"

"Spontaneous volunteering on the ground we must address"

"Reframe the volunteer experience, Focus through the volunteer lens"

"Need to build resilience into our volunteers and shake up the culture in organisation about how we view and service our volunteers. Asking more and more of volunteers – funding for sector so important."

"Ongoing support and communication, not just asking volunteers for more"

"Renewal – continually bring in fresh people into the organisation and enabling opportunity"

"Clear and honest communication (from the outset-during the interview stage) to identify each individual volunteer's expectations so that this can be aligned to their volunteering experience. Each volunteer's needs must be addressed appropriately"

"Also, checking-in with volunteers regularly to ensure that expectations are being met or identify whether their expectations/needs have changed and addressing these appropriately. This can be done through a survey, but a phone-call is more personal and effective."

"Greater and more innovative promotion of volunteering to expand the existing volunteer cohort"

"Explore other ways of volunteer recruitment such as promotion at Volunteer Expo's."

"People knowing your brand and being your organisation of choice for volunteers. We need to offer more. We get volunteers into provide a service, but we don't recognise them enough. We need to offer them perks and days to honour them, so they feel valued. People need to want to volunteer for us because we offer a range of extra perks and value adds – don't need to be big. We need to sell our brand and make people want to come to us and we will make you feel good along the way. Tough when resources are limited."

"We need to get more creative with short term volunteering."

"Workplace culture. People need to feel they are connected to the work they are doing and to the people they are working with."

"Funding is always an issue. People not being funded adequately through NDIS plans and not being able to advocate for themselves."

"Looking to streamline processes to take the pressure off funding. But it is an investment to start with."

"Trying to make the processes simple and more beneficial for all the smaller bodies that need help."

"Engagement is an ongoing thing; it isn't just about onboarding a volunteer but making them feel like they are supported throughout their journey."

"Volunteer recognition. Understanding how vital volunteers are to making things happening and programs running successfully."

"Trying to keep them engaged. Depends on what the volunteer is after – asking them if they want skills based with path to employment or happy to volunteer. Why are they doing? How do they want to do it? Then we try and match. If we can't we will encourage them to look elsewhere or VIOs to step up and be connected."

"Having a good relationship, good management, listening to them, supporting them and training them. Need to have a 'nicer' tone – don't tell them but you can ask them!!"

"Develop a pool of volunteers which people can dip into when they are ready. Like minded organisations to pool resources for all to tap into."

"Being conscious of what volunteers want, super flexible and ensuring you understand the why and how and can I match that!"

"Satisfaction in job – whatever they do has to be meaningful and purposeful."

"Social connection opportunities "

Appendix

"Recruitment and communication processes to be involved – do they feel supported, is it easy to get involved?"

"Offering expos and come and see what's involved and how you can be involved"

"Story bank of testimonials (big focus for 2023) to engage people again"

"Offering more training – feeling acknowledged and there is a pathway to success."

"Organisation will have to be very supportive of volunteers – from recruitment to onboarding to end of term.

A dedicated volunteer coordinator person to make the feel supportive and valued. The work needs to be meaningful for them as well to keep them involved."

"Volunteering Activities needs to be meaningful to allow volunteers to share their existing knowledge and skills with options to work from home and to around the volunteer other commitments."

"Engaging the right volunteer for the right role – skill volunteers with a true interest in supporting others. Funding to purchase computers to support volunteer's work."

"An appropriate and consistently delivered reward and recognition program." "Good communication with volunteers from the outset"

"Meaningful skill development opportunities for volunteers"

"Flexibility" "Diversity and inclusion"

"Development of training and resources to support organisations to retain volunteers (eg/ tip sheets and audit tools)"

"Continue to work on promoting volunteering amongst hard-to-reach cohorts (eg/ First Nations people and CALD communities)"

"Matching of interest and skills is always the best fit so we can get them in and keep them."

"Person centred approach and tailoring it to each person. A wide cast net isn't working anymore. Board EOI are fine through major platforms however it needs a personalised approach after that. A lot of people came from personal recommendations and event attendances. Social media wasn't great – wasn't optimised. We got insane reach, a lot of people reaching out but once contacted back, they didn't respond. We did get volunteers through community groups and churches – something we didn't have a lot in the past. We are constantly reshaping PDs to see what works and what doesn't and what people respond too in their applications. Misconceptions on industry is still very high and where there may be confusion, face to face and person to person contact clears that up."

"Seeking Constant feedback from volunteers – we encourage. We organisation meetings semi regularly – we want to hear the good the bad and ugly. We want them to be able to do what they want to do with minimal barriers. We need to acknowledge their feedback and be prepared to work and rectify."

"External funding barriers are going to mean we put extra pressure and expectations on people so we can get back to pre-covid levels. How long can we tread water before we get the entire workforce back and is it sustainable."

"Diverting funds from other program areas"

"Collaborating with the Volunteer Resource Centre to incorporate child safe training into Induction training subsidised by ACFE VC"

Flexibility and short-term opportunities such as events. Also celebrating and acknowledging their contributions often with gifts, remembering birthdays and morning teas. Feeling like they are really part of the organisation not just an accessory. Respect and Thank-you's often!

"A well-planned approach to recruiting volunteers."

"A sound commitment to volunteer engagement strategies."

"A commitment to engaging volunteer managers/coordinators. Involve volunteers to have a say in matters that relate to them."

"Advocating for volunteer engagement at every level to ensure organisational support. Ensure volunteers are seen and celebrated, and that the organisation is willing to invest in volunteering and see volunteers as part of their workforce."

"Advocating for volunteer engagement at every level. Acting on a one-workforce approach."

"More collaboration opportunities with external organisations – we can learn a lot from others."