



25 April 2023

EdConnect Australia is pleased to make a submission to the Productivity Commissions Review into Philanthropy. As a NFP with over 25 years of contributing to the community the importance of philanthropic giving and volunteering is critical to charities achieving their purpose and mission. It is time to increase the rate and appetite for volunteering amongst members of the community alongside building a strong and long-lasting culture of giving amongst all Australians. The Review is welcomed.

Recommendation

EdConnect Australia suggests the Productivity Commission:

1. Recommend that the Federal Government fund a long-term National Giving Campaign – to be run by the not-for-profit sector - aiming to encourage a stronger culture and practice of giving in Australia. Encouraging volunteering should be a central element of the campaign. The campaign should:
 - Tell Australians inspiring stories about the impact volunteering can have, aiming to increase participation in volunteering in Australia.
 - Have a clear call to action; and
 - Provide clear, practical information for Australians to make it easy for them to get involved in volunteering in areas that inspire them.
2. Recommend to the Government tangible, practical actions it can take to better encourage volunteering, drawing on international literature and practice.
 - The establishment of the [National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-33](#) is a welcome development. It sets out a vision, broad focus areas and strategic objectives, but does not appear to contain tangible actions to increase the quantity and impact of volunteering in Australia. An early focus of the National Strategy will be the development of a Three-Year Action Plan, so Productivity Commission advice could be timely in helping to create a society in which more people volunteer and do so with great impact.

Rationale

1. EdConnect has an interest because we are Australia's only intergenerational volunteering charity which operates within both primary and secondary schools, targeting lower socio-economic schools. Recruiting, training, placing and supporting volunteers is our business. Schools have strong demand for volunteers, who are essential to support disadvantaged children and young people.
2. Volunteering makes an enormous contribution.... More significant than all other forms of giving combined.

Economic contribution: In 2021, EdConnects 1,500 volunteers returned a value of \$3,456,870 to the Australian community, although a small NFP its impact is significant. In the 2012-13 National Accounts, volunteering was estimated to have an imputed value of \$17.3 billion. A current and revised national figure for the economic contribution of volunteers has not yet been released.

Mental Health and wellbeing: EdConnect annually surveys volunteers and demonstrates a range of direct benefits that are a result of volunteering. Benefits to mental health and wellbeing has consistently been the indicator rated most highly by volunteers in recent years. 2022 data: 89% reported enhanced mental health and wellbeing; 87% were helped to feel part of the community.

Early analysis suggests that people who stopped volunteering during COVID-19 reported lower life satisfaction than those who continued volunteering. The results strongly suggest that the interruption in volunteering has impacted the wellbeing of those who volunteered in the past **The benefits of volunteering are broad and multifaceted.** Volunteering improves mental health and wellbeing, delivers essential services, adds unique value to services, improves community cohesion, provides a sense of purpose and meaning, creates opportunities for civic participation and engagement with Australian democracy, supports Australia's charities and not-for-profits sector, and contributes significantly to the economy.

3. It has been a difficult time for volunteering

The reported rate of formal volunteering in Australia has been steadily declining, from about one

in three people in 2010 to just over one in four in 2022. Covid has further impacted this decline, with the proportion of Australians who volunteer being still much lower than the 12 months preceding late 2019 (i.e., pre-COVID) when 36.0 per cent of adults were estimated to have volunteered. There were ongoing changes in volunteering during COVID-19. Most people who stopped volunteering have not yet returned. Of those who said they had stopped volunteering at some stage since the start of the spread of COVID-19, only 38.0 per cent had volunteered in the 12 months leading up to April 2022. This is a very large proportion of Australians who stopped volunteering due to COVID-19 but have not yet recommenced.

It is estimated that in the 12 months preceding the April 2022 survey, 26.7 per cent of adults volunteered in Australia.

Ref: Volunteers and volunteering during the COVID-era in Australia, Briddle, N & Gray, M 2022

4. A National Giving Campaign can inspire more Australians to volunteer

An enormous opportunity to maximise reach through a multi-channel strategy and widespread distribution through government, philanthropic and not-for-profit organisations: Together, we can galvanise giving in the community with an overarching campaign – e.g., 'Australia Gives' – but tailored for each target audience through multiple channels, distributing material across government, philanthropic and not-for profit organisations.

Most importantly, sustain a campaign for over a decade to enable new behaviours to be imbedded into the Australian national culture.

The approach is for mass market giving and volunteering:

Appealing to all Australians is critical as the mass market is responsible for around one half of all individual giving. Encouraging people to volunteer, as well as give, is important, as volunteering is worth more than all other sources of giving combined and is critical to creating engaged communities. The call to action - regular giving and/or volunteering. Organisations such as Volunteering Australia could be well placed to support information provision, advice and referral for this cohort.

5. Its great to see the development of a National Strategy for Volunteering, but the implementation phase is critical. The Productivity Commission is well placed to advise.