

**SUBMISSION
to Productivity Commission**

'Future Foundations of Giving' draft report

About this submission

This submission responds to the draft report 'Future Foundations of Giving' ("the Draft Report") released by the Productivity Commission ("the Commission") on 30 November 2023 as part of the Philanthropy Inquiry ("the Inquiry").

Volunteering WA notes and supports the overall objectives of the Inquiry.

In May 2023 we provided a formal submission¹ to the Commission on the Inquiry, which included an overview of the current state of volunteering in Western Australia and our role as the peak body for volunteering in Western Australia.

In September 2023, Volunteering WA co-hosted a roundtable in Perth with the Commission with leaders from volunteer involving organisations to discuss how to recover and grow volunteer participation across Australia.

We thank the Commission for the investment of their time, interest, and knowledge in the important and pressing challenge of helping to shape the future of volunteering in this country.

This submission is focused on the major recommendations in the Report which pertain to volunteering.

Overall comments

Volunteering WA welcomes the Report's acknowledgement of:

- the distinction of volunteering from financial philanthropy
- the considerable time given by volunteers in all sectors of Australian society
- the value of volunteering to the economy and
- its contribution to social capital.

Draft recommendation 7.5

Explicitly consider the effects on volunteers when designing policies and programs

"To support volunteering, Australian, state, territory and local governments should give greater consideration to how changes to policies and programs would affect volunteers. This includes adopting measures that may mitigate any adverse effects on volunteer participation and identifying opportunities for volunteers as part of policy or program design." Excerpt from Report, page 44

Volunteering WA **fully supports** this recommendation and the rationale provided.

Draft recommendation 9.5

Improve the usefulness of public information sources on volunteering

"The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) should improve the usefulness of public information sources on volunteering by amending the questions on volunteering in the Census to capture:

- *whether respondents engaged in informal volunteering (in addition to whether they engaged in formal volunteering with an organisation)*
- *the amount of time the respondent engaged in formal or informal volunteering (for example,*

¹ [Submission 64 - Volunteering WA - Philanthropy - Public inquiry \(pc.gov.au\)](https://www.pc.gov.au/inquiries/public-inquiry/philanthropy/submissions/64)

hours each week).

Following engagement with communities, the ABS should develop methodologies that enable better measurement of volunteering by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and culturally and linguistically diverse communities.” Excerpt from the Report, page 49

Volunteering WA **agrees** with the need for the Australian Government to urgently address and improve data gathering and publication of information pertaining to volunteering.

However, we have **significant reservations** regarding the use of the Census as a vehicle for this, due to:

- The infrequency of reporting
- ABS’ own advice to not rely on the Census for volunteering data (due to persistent under-reporting due to the size of the survey), other than local area trends over time
- The limited scope of data proposed / possible through this vehicle, which is at odds with the ABS recommendations for data gathering on volunteering, published in 2018, after extensive consultation².

Volunteering WA recently commissioned work³ to understand, among other issues, the size of the volunteer workforce in WA. The findings include:

- The replacement value of volunteer labour in Western Australia (and avoided by governments) is \$16.5 billion per annum
- The size of the volunteering sector is more than twice that of the entire public sector in WA, and over half of the size of the private sector.

The ABS has published the Labour Force Survey (LFS) since 1960. It is conducted monthly and includes approximately 24,000 dwellings resulting in a sample of approximately 50,000 people⁴. The scope includes the public and private sector employment (in civilian settings).

Given the size of the volunteer workforce, 6-year intervals of incomplete data, is highly inadequate for government, the not-for-profit and volunteer sectors.

We believe that there needs to be a single-purpose survey, with data validity at national and state / territory resolution (at a minimum) collected much more frequently, which meets the scope recommended by the ABS in 2018. In addition, there is a need to collect information on volunteer organisations and volunteer management to inform policy direction and sector practice.

In closing

Volunteering WA very much appreciates the opportunity to provide this submission for consideration.

We look forward to the publication of the Final Report for the Inquiry from the Commission and thank you again for your contribution to this vital policy area.

² [Collection of volunteering data in the ABS | Australian Bureau of Statistics](#)

³ WA’s State of Volunteering Report 2023, to be published in March 2024

⁴ [Labour Force, Australia methodology, December 2023 | Australian Bureau of Statistics \(abs.gov.au\)](#)

If we can be of further assistance, please contact our Executive Manager Policy and Research,
Meredith Blais at

Kind regards,

Tina Williams
Chief Executive Officer

Volunteering WA

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Empowering people and communities to enrich Western Australia

 Level 1, 3 Loftus Street, West Leederville WA 6007

 9482 4333

 info@volunteeringwa.org.au

 volunteeringwa.org.au

