



# Understanding the value of volunteering in Geelong

How volunteering contributes to a better community for all

[Final]



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This report has been prepared by Think Impact on the instructions, and for the benefit, of Volunteering Geelong in relation to supporting the understanding of the value they deliver to the community. It is not to be used for any other purpose.

Think Impact is a specialist social impact and sustainability consultancy based in Melbourne. Our focus is to support organisations, across all sectors, to manage for better impact.

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# Executive summary

## Introduction

Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) (more recently termed Volunteer Navigation Hubs) are organisations that promote and support volunteering. In response to the shifting policy and funding environment that VRCs currently face, the City of Greater Geelong has commissioned this report to identify and communicate the purpose and impacts of volunteering in the Geelong region.

This report aims to provide answers to the following questions:

- What outcomes might be occurring as a result of volunteering in the Geelong region?
- As the major VRC in the region, what outcomes might be occurring through Volunteering Geelong's activities in pursuit of their goal of a better community for all through volunteering?
  - How is volunteering in Geelong contributing to government volunteering policy objectives?
  - Based on the above, how can Volunteering Geelong improve its service delivery?

To demonstrate the value created by VRCs in the Geelong region, Think Impact has developed a theory of change and outlined the outcomes created for stakeholders as a result of Volunteering Geelong, which promotes and supports volunteering in the Geelong, Surf Coast and Colac Otway regions of Southwest Victoria.

## The outcomes Volunteering Geelong - delivers to its stakeholders

Through its activities, Volunteering Geelong delivers a range of outcomes to volunteers, volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) and the community. These activities and outcomes are illustrated in the figures below.



Figure 1 Volunteering Geelong: Activities and outcomes for volunteers

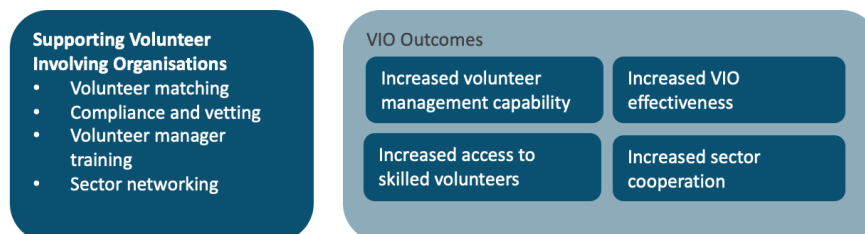
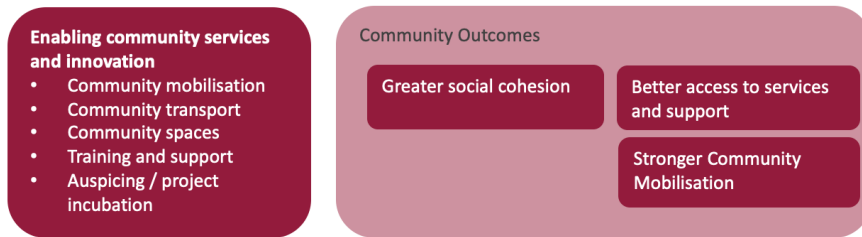


Figure 2 Volunteering Geelong: Activities and outcomes for VIOs



**Figure 3 Volunteering Geelong: Activities and outcomes for the community**

### How Volunteering Geelong contributes to the delivery of government volunteering policy objectives

Volunteering Geelong is making an important contribution to the delivery of the objectives set out in the Volunteering Australian National Strategy for Volunteering and the Victorian Volunteering Strategy. Volunteering Geelong contributes to all objectives in both strategies, including in the areas of:

- **individual potential and the volunteer experience** – contributing to volunteering being safe, inclusive, accessible, meaningful, and not exploitative and contributing to creating connections and pathways for individuals
- **community and social impact** – contributing to the diversity and impact of volunteering being articulated and celebrated
- **the volunteering ecosystem** – contributing to the conditions for volunteering to thrive in their region.

### How Volunteering Geelong can improve its service delivery

Volunteering Geelong is delivering outcomes that contribute to its goal of contributing to a better community for all through volunteering.

The stakeholder engagement and data analysis identified a number of opportunities for Volunteering Geelong to evolve its services to better meet the needs of its stakeholders:

- **Find additional ways to proactively engage priority groups:** There is evidence that priority groups face the biggest barriers to participating in volunteering and yet get the most value from it. Volunteering Geelong can strengthen its work with stakeholders from these groups to help it understand how to best meet their needs.
- **Measure the impact of Volunteering Geelong’s programs:** current data collection and reporting processes at Volunteering Geelong make it challenging to quantify the value of the outcomes it delivers to the community. Developing an outcomes framework will help it to better communicate its impact to potential funders and the community.
- **Provide more targeted support for large VIOs:** Large VIOs currently source most of their volunteers themselves and so get less value from Volunteering Geelong’s volunteer matching than smaller organisations. A specific engagement program with these VIOs will help Volunteering Geelong understand their needs and provide the support that will increase their effectiveness.
- **Increase Volunteering Geelong’s profile as a champion for volunteering in the region:** Volunteering Geelong is the largest and most well-connected volunteer support service in the Geelong region. However, stakeholders feel Volunteering Geelong could be doing more to boost its profile and the value of volunteering in general.

# Glossary

The following social valuation terms are used in this report:

Term	Definition
Activity	An action or effort undertaken which is intended to create change for beneficiaries.
Data	Information in quantitative (for example, numbers, percentage) or qualitative form (for example, stories, quotes). Can include: Demographic data: the characteristics of volunteers and whether the service/initiative is reaching the intended group (for example, age, gender). Output data: the quantities or scale associated with an activity (for example, number of volunteers supported or placed). Engagement data is a category of output data. Feedback data: what people think about the service/initiative. Outcomes data: what has changed for people or entities (for example, Volunteer Involving Organisations) as a result of the service/initiative.
Impact	The total sum or effect of change caused by an organisation, initiative or activity.
Outcome	The change that occurs for stakeholders from an activity. An outcome can be positive or negative, intended or unintended, direct or indirect, long-term or short-term, social, environmental or economic.
Output	The quantities or scale associated with an activity.
Stakeholder	People, organisations or entities that either experience change as a result of the activity that is being analysed or contribute to the change taking place.
Theory of change	A theory of change tells the story of how stakeholders are impacted by an activity, program or initiative.

The following acronyms and terms are used in this report:

Term	Definition
CALD	Culturally and Linguistically Diverse
CEHL	Common Equity Housing Limited, co-tenants of the St Mary's Terrace building with Volunteering Geelong
DGR	Deductable Gift Recipient
G21	Geelong Region Alliance
VIO	Volunteer Involving Organisation
Volunteer manager	Staff members at Volunteer Involving Organisations with responsibilities for managing and coordinating the activities of volunteers
VRC	Volunteer Resource Centre (more recently termed Volunteer Navigation Hubs)
VSO	Volunteer Supporting Organisation

# 1. Introduction

## 1.1 Purpose of this report

The City of Greater Geelong (CoGG) commissioned this report to identify and communicate the impacts of volunteering in the Geelong region. This included looking at the impact of volunteering in the context of a changing Geelong region and specifically at the impact of Volunteering Geelong, the major Volunteer Resource Centre (VRC) (more recently termed Volunteer Navigation Hubs) in the region.

The socio-economic landscape of the Geelong region has changed significantly over time. Over the last decade, the region has seen significant growth in the population and economy. In addition, cost of living pressures and wealth disparity present across the region has resulted in a greater need for volunteers. Despite this, the number of volunteers has dwindled over time and the availability of future funding for VRCs remains uncertain.

Volunteering Geelong is a Volunteer Resource Centre (VRC) that promotes and supports volunteering in the Geelong, Surf Coast and Colac Otway regions in the south Southwest of Victoria. VRC's across Victoria have experienced a shifting policy and funding environment over recent years, making it useful to understand their specific contribution to the impact of volunteering in the Geelong region.

## 1.2 Summarised methodology

The report sought to evaluate the following questions:

- What outcomes are occurring as a result of volunteering in the Geelong region?
- As the major VRC in the region, what outcomes are occurring through Volunteering Geelong's activities in pursuit of their goal of a better community for all through volunteering?
  - How is volunteering in Geelong contributing to government volunteering policy objectives?
  - Based on the above, how can Volunteering Geelong improve its service delivery?

Figure 4 provides a summary of the methodology used to answer these questions.

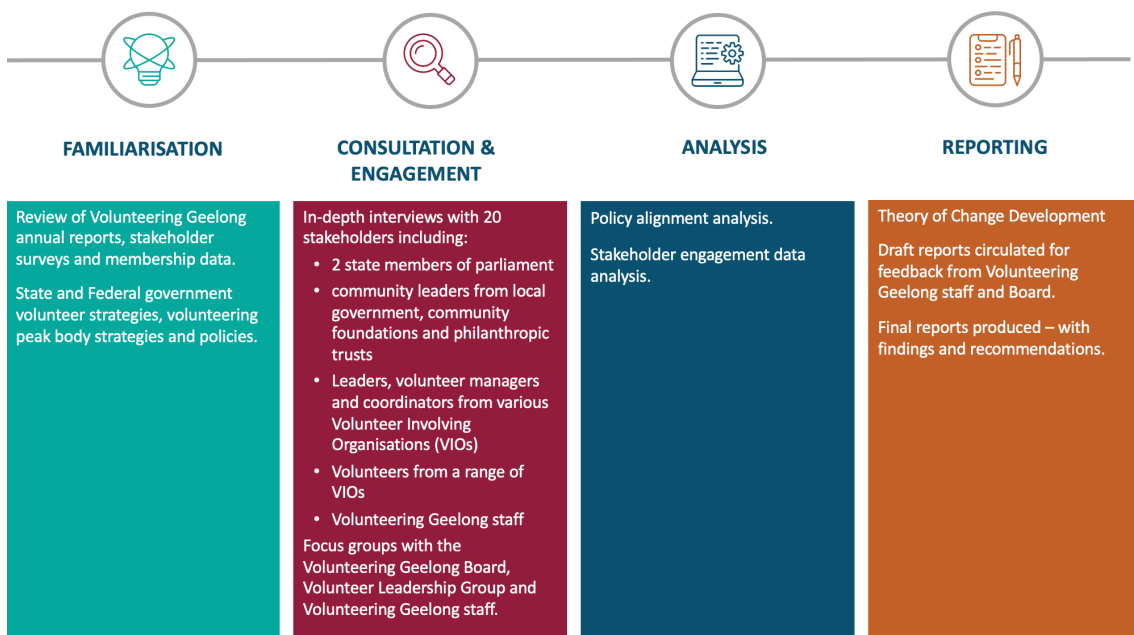


Figure 4: Summarised methodology

The Think Impact team thanks the stakeholders interviewed for this report and acknowledges the many ways their knowledge and expertise has informed our analysis and understanding. We also thank the Volunteering Geelong team for their contribution to this report through their openness, willingness to think critically about their work and rich insight into their community.

## 2. The context to volunteering in Geelong

This section provides context to volunteering in the Geelong region and covers:

- the economic and social changes shaping the region
- the role of volunteering
- the changing landscape of volunteering and its challenges.

### 2.1 Economic and social changes shaping the Geelong region

There are economic and social changes shaping the Geelong region that provide important context for understanding the role and impact of volunteering.

#### Economy

Greater Geelong has experienced significant economic growth in recent years. In 2022, the region had an estimated Gross Regional Product (GRP) of \$17.58 billion, over 135,000 local jobs and over 21,000 local businesses. The 2022 GRP represents a 54 per cent increase since 2012 (Informed Decisions 2023). The region saw a historic low unemployment rate of 2.5 per cent as labour demands reached a record high with 10,500 new jobs advertised in the June 2022 quarter (City of Greater Geelong 2022). This is a significant improvement from the time of the 2016 Census, which recorded an unemployment rate of 4.6 per cent (Informed Decisions 2023).

#### Population and housing

Between 2011-2021, Greater Geelong's population increased by 28.5 per cent, which was largely driven by people aged 25-34 and older people aged 70-84 migrating to the region. As of 2023, the region's population is estimated to be over 282,000 people and this figure is forecast to grow by over 40 per cent to reach a population of over 396,000 residents by 2041. Population growth is most heavily concentrated in suburban Geelong and the Lara, Leopold and Bellarine Peninsula areas. The vastly different roles and functions of different areas within Greater Geelong attracts different population demographics across the region. Geelong, Geelong West and Waurin Ponds have attracted significant numbers of young people due to their availability of affordable rental properties and proximity to retail services and tertiary education institutes. In contrast, coastal resort areas attract families and retirees whilst significant residential development in St Albans Park, Lara and Leopold have attracted couples and families.

Population growth is expected to continue rise as a result of enhanced employment and tertiary education opportunities in the region. As housing opportunities increase, it is expected that there will be significant numbers of families and first-home buyers migrating into the region. Young people aged 20-24 are forecast to have the highest net migration into the Geelong region out of any other age group up to 2036 (Informed Decisions 2023).

#### Socio-economic characteristics

According to the 2021 Census the median weekly household income is \$1,625 and the median weekly rent is \$350, which is a 31% and 25% increase from 2016, respectively (Informed Decisions 2023).

Significant wealth disparity exists across Greater Geelong. According to 2021 Census data, Norlane in Geelong's North is the one of the most disadvantaged suburbs in Victoria, with an Index of Relative

Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) of 788<sup>1</sup>. In contrast, the Greater Geelong local government area (LGA) had an IRSAD of 990 (Informed Decisions 2023).

### The G21 Region Alliance

The Colac Otway, Golden Plains, Greater Geelong, Queenscliffe and Surf Coast municipalities, known collectively as the G21 Region Alliance (G21), are some of the most rapidly growing areas in Victoria, experiencing a 26% per cent increase in population from 2012 to 2022, from 290,000 to 365,000 residents. Compared to the Australian average, residents of the G21 area are more likely to be over 60 years of age, live in a low-income household and be living with a long mental health condition (ABS 2021).

## 2.2 The role of volunteering in Geelong

### Volunteers

*These positive wellbeing impacts for volunteers are particularly important in the context of the widespread prevalence of loneliness*

Volunteers play a critical role in the delivery of activities, events and services that promote social connection and enable communities to thrive. In addition to the invaluable contributions of volunteers in creating positive social change, volunteering also provides opportunities for meaningful connections between like-minded people. These positive wellbeing impacts for volunteers are particularly important in the context of the widespread prevalence of loneliness. However, it is difficult to quantify the true value created by volunteering, as much of it occurs informally (i.e. outside of a formal organisation or group) and therefore, is not visible or well-recognised.

### Volunteer involving organisations (VIOs)

*Many VIOs... provide critical services to communities, such as emergency management, 24-hour helplines and food security programs*

Organisations that engage volunteers, referred to as volunteer involving organisations (VIOs), vary widely in terms of the community needs that they address. While some have a combination of paid employees and volunteers, others may be entirely volunteer run with no paid staff. Many VIOs also provide critical services to communities, such as emergency management, 24-hour helplines and food security programs. Population growth and the cost-of-living crisis has placed significant strain on VIOs to continue their service delivery. 83 per cent of VIOs have reported a need for more volunteers; however, the number of formal volunteers is declining. Between 2019 to 2022, there was an approximately 10 per cent reduction in the proportion of the adult population that formally volunteers (Volunteering Australia, 2023). Without effective action, it is unlikely that formal volunteering rates will return to pre-COVID levels. In addition to the challenge of the paucity of formal volunteers, there is also often a misalignment between volunteer skills and interests and the needs of VIOs.

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<sup>1</sup> The Index of Relative Socio-economic Advantage and Disadvantage (IRSAD) is used to rank areas according to relative socio-economic advantage and disadvantage. The mean index score is equal to 1,000 and the standard deviation is 100. Hence, a higher score indicates a higher level of advantage, whereas a lower score indicates a higher level of disadvantage.

## Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs)

*VRCs ensure that volunteers have safe and positive experiences and that VIOs receive the support they need*

VRCs play a critical role in the volunteering ecosystem by promoting, resourcing and supporting volunteering in local communities. In 2017, it was estimated that VRCs enabled almost 12.3 million volunteer hours with a total value of \$478 million (Volunteering Australia, 2017). By working directly with volunteers and VIOs, VRCs ensure that volunteers have safe and positive experiences and that VIOs receive the support they need.

## Geelong's major VRC - Volunteering Geelong

Volunteering Geelong is a VRC that provides support and resources for volunteers and VIOs in the Geelong, Surf Coast and Otway regions.

One of Volunteering Geelong's stated goals is to **'provide a better community for all through volunteering'**.

Volunteering Geelong's main activities are:

- matching volunteers with suitable opportunities at VIOs
- providing support for VIOs through training, advice and networking opportunities
- providing resources to the community in the form of meeting spaces, community transport and training opportunities
- advocating for volunteers and volunteering in the Greater Geelong region.

Volunteering Geelong has Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR) status and is able to auspice existing and emerging community initiatives.

## 2.3 The changing landscape of volunteering in Geelong and its challenges

### Declining volunteer numbers

The level of participation in volunteering activities has declined over the past 20 years in Geelong, following a national trend. Rates of formal volunteering declined across Australia from 36 per cent in 2010 to 25 per cent between 2010 to 2020 (ABS 2020). This decline has been most notable in working aged people while rates of volunteering for people over 65 have remained steady or increased over this time period (Volunteering Australia 2022a).

*Volunteering Geelong experienced a decline of 50 per cent in their volunteering hours between 2020 and 2021 as a result of the pandemic...*

The COVID-19 pandemic and its associated lockdowns have further impacted volunteering activity as the pandemic's restrictions on movement and association disrupted volunteering activity across many sectors. Volunteering Australia (2020) reported a 65.9 per cent decline in volunteering activity nationally during the early stages of the pandemic at the state level and Volunteering Geelong experienced a decline of 50 per cent in their volunteering hours between 2020 and 2021 as a result of the pandemic. Volunteering activity has been slow to recover as many people are still cautious of in-person interactions and may still be recovering from the financial and emotional impacts of the pandemic.

A deep understanding of volunteer demographics and how these are changing will be critical for VRCs like Volunteering Geelong to adapt to the changing volunteer environment.

## Uncertainty about funding for VRCs

*Volunteering Geelong and other VRCs have faced significant challenges to their financial sustainability as a result of changes in Australian government funding priorities...*

At this time when the volunteering sector needs significant support, Volunteering Geelong and other VRCs have faced significant challenges to their financial sustainability as a result of changes in Australian government funding priorities. The rapid digitalisation of many aspects of our lives as part of the shift to remote working has increased the ability of many volunteer matching activities to be delivered by centralised, online platforms. At the same time, increasing social isolation and changing community needs is increasing the demand for in-person, contextualised support to connect potential volunteers with appropriate opportunities.

Attracting other sources of funding can be challenging for VRCs as there seems to be a lack of understanding of the important role these centres play in their communities. By viewing volunteering through the narrow lens of a replacement for paid work, the value that VRCs provide in terms of community and ecosystem building is not recognised. The National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033 stresses the importance of leadership and support in creating the conditions for volunteering to thrive but the role that VRCs perform in this space is not well understood.

This can lead VRCs to struggle to attract corporate sponsors, partners, and supporters since they are not as well-known as other charitable organisations and their contribution to the volunteering ecosystem is not as well understood. Furthermore, many funding sources require VRCs to demonstrate tangible results to justify continued funding. Measuring these results can be challenging for VRCs as the impact may not be immediately apparent, can be spread over a range of VIOs or is not easy to quantify.

This report aims to provide greater visibility of the significant value delivered by volunteering in the Geelong region.

## 3. Impact of volunteering in Geelong

This section describes the social and economic value that is being created by volunteering in Geelong.

### 3.1 Social and economic impact of volunteering

#### Social impact of volunteering

*...volunteering [is] positively associated with purpose in life and sense of wellbeing...*

Volunteering has been positively associated with improved life satisfaction, increased happiness, improved quality of life, increased purpose and reduced depression and anxiety (Stuart et al., 2020). In addition, the health benefits of volunteering are long-lasting, with a meta-analysis finding that volunteering to be associated with a 24% reduced risk of mortality amongst older people, when adjusted for age, sex and physical health (Anderson et al., 2014). However, the positive impacts are not merely limited to older age groups. A 10-year longitudinal study of the long-term wellbeing impacts of volunteering found volunteering to be positively associated with purpose in life and sense of wellbeing amongst people aged 27-75 years (Son and Wilson, 2012). Moreover, a study by Steptoe and Fancourt (2020) found that volunteering at least once per month is predictive of a higher sense that life is worthwhile two years on.

Volunteers with Cottage by the Sea in Queenscliff experienced a greater sense of purpose, social connection and engagement as they could see the direct impacts of their volunteering and be actively engaged within the organisation's culture and wider community. Through the application of financial proxies to measure the value created by these volunteer outcomes, a social return on investment analysis estimated that \$1.7 million of value was created for the 274 volunteers during the 2017-2018 financial years (SVA Consulting, 2019).

#### The economic impact of volunteering and Volunteering Geelong

Through the coordination and management of volunteering activities in their regions, VRCs like Volunteering Geelong deliver significant economic value to their communities and Victoria as a whole.

A social return on investment (SROI) evaluation of children's camp programs run by not-for-profit organisation, Cottage by the Sea, found that for every dollar invested in the program, between \$2.50 to \$3.80 of social and economic value is generated by the programs. Volunteers were estimated to contribute to 14% of this value. The SROI analysis involved measuring the value created by outcomes of the camps for all stakeholders through the application of financial proxies. Investment into the organisation by volunteers alone was valued at over \$380,000 during the 2017-2018 financial years (SVA Consulting, 2019).

Volunteering Victoria (2020) estimates that in 2019 alone, 2.3 million Victorians, representing 42% of the state's population, participated in volunteering activities, delivering more than \$58.1 billion dollars of value to the state.

This figure includes the cost to VIOs to replace the labour that volunteers provide, the increased productivity that VIOs enjoy as a result of their volunteers' work and the reduced cost to government agencies from the services and support that VIOs provide to the community. Volunteering Victoria estimate that for every dollar invested in volunteering, the community gains \$3.70 of value.

*...volunteering activity in the G21 region delivered \$2.6 billion of benefits to the community in 2017...*

Using data drawn from the Volunteering Victoria's State of Volunteering Report, Volunteering Geelong has calculated that volunteering activity in the G21 region delivered \$2.6 billion of benefits to the community in 2017. This included \$1.4 billion in commercial benefits and \$1.2 billion of civic benefit.

Volunteer Support Organisations like Volunteering Geelong are important for VIOs and the community to realise the economic value of volunteering with 27 per cent of Victorian VIOs using them to recruit volunteers. Volunteering Australia (2017) estimates that organisations like Volunteering Geelong connected an estimated 142,000 volunteers with VIOs in 2017. These volunteers completed approximately 12.3 million hours valued at the equivalent of \$542 million dollars (ABS 2021).

*Volunteering Geelong provided its VIO members with approximately 416,576 volunteer hours during 2021... these volunteers delivered the equivalent of \$19.4million of value to members*

In the 2021 financial year, Volunteering Geelong provided a total of 6,447 volunteering referrals to VIOs. Using statistics provided by Volunteering Australia (2017), an estimated 75% of these referrals are likely to have resulted in a successful volunteer engagement with the average volunteer contributing 86.5 hours of their time annually. Volunteering Geelong provided its VIO members with approximately 416,576 volunteer hours during 2021. By applying the average value of a volunteer hour of \$46.62 as provided by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2021), these volunteers delivered the equivalent of \$19.4 million of value to Volunteering Geelong's VIO members.

It is important to note that the financial value generated by volunteering should not be the primary focus when seeking to measure the impacts of volunteering. As Lisel O'Dwyer from the University of Adelaide (2012) posited: "If a volunteer fire fighter saves the life of a child, what is that worth? If environmental degradation is slowed because of millions of trees planted by conservationists, what is that worth? And if an elderly person receives a hot meal five days a week, what is that worth?". These questions highlight the innate complexity of seeking to place a dollar value on the far-reaching and potentially enduring impacts of volunteering.

## 4. Volunteering Geelong: Powering volunteering in Geelong

VRCs, like Volunteering Geelong, provide the infrastructure and support crucial to enabling safe, effective and sustainable volunteering. These organisations support and resource volunteer roles, whilst also empowering and ensuring the safety of volunteers. By matching volunteering supply with demand, VRCs enable mutually beneficial outcomes for volunteers and VRCs.

*Volunteering Geelong plays a crucial role in improving the service co-ordination and capacity building of the region's volunteering ecosystem*

Volunteering Geelong is a key driver of volunteering in the Geelong region. Through working with VRCs to engage, retain and upskill volunteers, Volunteering Geelong plays a crucial role in improving the service co-ordination and capacity building of the region's volunteering ecosystem.

### 4.1 Volunteering Geelong theory of change

The flow of value from Volunteering Geelong's activities to its stakeholders can be visualised through the theory of change in Figure 5 below. A theory of change tells the story of how stakeholders are impacted by an activity, program or initiative.

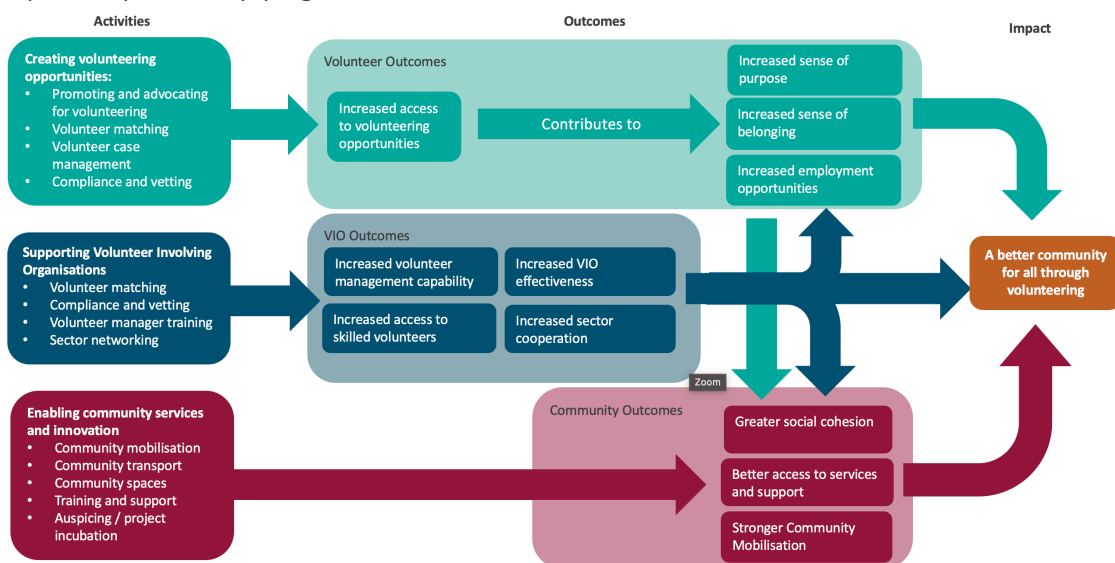


Figure 5 Volunteering Geelong theory of change

#### Value for volunteers

VRCs like Volunteering Geelong help volunteers navigate the volunteering registration and certification process and matches them with roles that meet their needs. As a result people who might struggle with the process themselves have the same access to opportunities for community participation as everyone else. People from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island backgrounds, new migrants, people with a disability, unemployed people and young people can benefit from the high level of support that Volunteering Geelong provides.

Through giving back to the community, volunteers gain a sense of purpose and meaning, and a sense of belonging to their community. For people who are looking for employment the opportunities provided by Volunteering Geelong help them to gain employment skills and experience and build their

professional network. By supporting VIOs, Volunteering Geelong helps their volunteers experience these benefits as well.

### Value for VIOs

Volunteering Geelong also supports VIOs by providing them with pre-vetted volunteers and providing volunteer managers with training opportunities that increase their effectiveness. By providing access to volunteers with specialised skills Volunteering Geelong helps VIOs to increase the scale and scope of their programs and services. Finally, by providing networking opportunities for volunteer managers, Volunteering Geelong enables greater coordination and cooperation across the sector.

### Value for the community

Through its advocacy for volunteers and volunteering the community gains a greater awareness of the value of volunteering. By acting as a coordinator and connector for volunteers and VIOs, Volunteering Geelong helps bind the community together, increasing social cohesion. Through the provision of space, transport and advice, Volunteering Geelong helps community members better connect with services and support. Finally, Volunteering Geelong's extensive database of vetted volunteers helps to mobilise the community in the event of an emergency. The support that Volunteering Geelong provides to VIOs, and volunteers also help contribute to these outcomes.

Together these value pathways contribute to delivering the organisation's goal of **a better community for all through volunteering.**

## 4.2 How Volunteering Geelong builds value for the Geelong community

Volunteering Geelong provides community members with volunteering opportunities through the following activities:

- **Promoting and advocating for volunteering** – through volunteer awards, talks in schools, community organisations, social media and through partner organisations to reach specific groups in the community. In addition, advocating to government bodies on funding and support for volunteering.
- **Volunteer case management** – new volunteers are interviewed to gain a mutual understanding of their volunteering goals, their availability and the skills and experience they can provide. Regular contact with volunteers that have been placed helps to ensure they have a positive volunteering experience.
- **Volunteer registration and matching** – volunteer details are entered into a database of current VIO opportunities to determine if a suitable placement is available.
- **Compliance and vetting** – Volunteering Geelong makes sure that potential volunteers meet the required compliance checks for the role such as Working With Children or police checks. Staff will consider the temperament of the volunteer and the culture of the VIO when making a placement.

### Key outputs

Over the past 10 years Volunteering Geelong has assisted thousands of community members connect with volunteering opportunities through:

- 45,572 referrals to VIOs
- 27,672 personal consultations
- 29,000 expressions of interest registered online.

### In 2022, Volunteering Geelong:

- engaged internal volunteers for 2,507 hours to assist in the delivery of Volunteering Geelong's services
- made 6,447 volunteer referrals (for 2,487 individuals) to member VIOs including:
  - 655 people with CALD backgrounds
  - 200 people living with a disability
  - 63 people with Indigenous heritage
- conducted face-to-face interviews with 266 people resulting in 1,596 referrals
- engaged more than 350 people in talks and presentations promoting the value of volunteering.

## Volunteering Geelong outcomes

As a result of these activities volunteers experience a range of outcomes as shown in Figure 6 below.

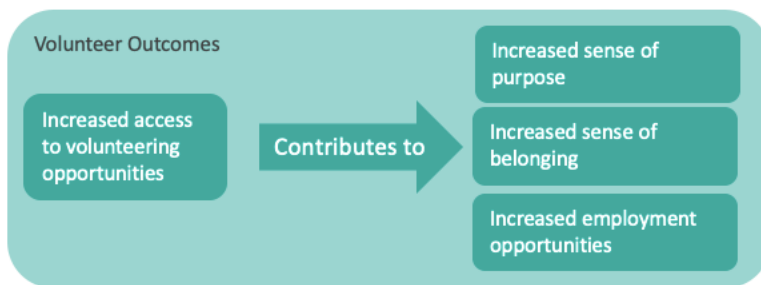


Figure 6 Volunteer outcomes

### 4.2.1 Increased access to volunteering opportunities

Volunteering Geelong is helping ensure all members of the community have equal access to volunteer opportunities by assisting with the application process, providing flexible opportunities, and by providing specific support for priority groups. This early change is crucial for the flow-on outcomes that are achieved by people.

#### Helping people navigate the application process

Studies have shown that the formalisation of volunteering roles can create barriers and exclude people from participation in volunteering. The registration process for volunteering opportunities increasingly resembles that of a formal job application, which can be challenging for people who may have limited time, skills or experience for the roles advertised (Think Impact 2020).

Furthermore, compliance checks such as police checks and Working with Children Checks are a requirement for many volunteer positions and the process for completing them is often online. For some people, especially those that lack English language, digital literacy skills or confidence, navigating the systems and processes to complete these checks can be challenging.

Volunteering Geelong staff help volunteers navigate these processes to make sure they have the opportunity to participate. By employing a case management approach to volunteer matching, Volunteering Geelong is able to meet the specific needs of each volunteer and make sure they provide them with the level of support they require.

*'You see them again and again and help them find a place where they will be a good fit.'* –  
Volunteering Geelong staff member

*'By getting to know the people you can match their temperament as well as their skills. A volunteer's initial experience is so important. If you place someone in a role you want to see them succeed.'* – Community foundation manager

### Making volunteering easier and more flexible

Some volunteers are not able to commit to the long-term volunteering opportunities that many volunteer opportunities require but want to give back to their community. Volunteering Victoria (2020) found that 13 per cent of volunteers felt that the time commitments for volunteering opportunities were a barrier to participation. Volunteering Geelong is often able to match these time-poor volunteers with short-term commitments or opportunities to participate in events and can let them know when new ones become available.

*'Some people just want to volunteer once. We keep them on the books so they can come back later without having to start from scratch. It lowers the barriers to repeat engagement.'* – Volunteering Geelong staff member

*'The great thing [about Volunteering Geelong] is that we think everyone should be able to help others. It's flexible and you are valued for what you are able to do.'* – Volunteering Geelong staff member

### Making volunteering more accessible and inclusive for priority groups

Volunteering Geelong has developed plans and processes to make volunteering more accessible and inclusive for people who live with disadvantage. The National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033 states that people living with disadvantage face significant barriers to volunteering and that these barriers need to be dismantled for volunteering to be genuinely inclusive. The priority groups that have been targeted for additional support include:

- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- new migrants
- people with disability
- people who are unemployed
- vulnerable women
- youth (12–18 years).

Volunteering Geelong is supporting people through community outreach, research to build the understanding of each groups' needs and work to build VIO capability to develop the roles, resources and policies that will support greater access to volunteering for these groups.

*'Some people face barriers to volunteering and need their hand held through the process.'* – Volunteering Geelong staff member

*'Volunteering Geelong lowers the bar (makes it easier) for participating in volunteering.'* – VIO leader

### People with complex needs can benefit the most from volunteering

Often the people who would benefit the most from volunteering are those who may struggle to access it without help. Research shows that older people, unemployed people, neurodiverse people and people living with a disability can experience significant increases in their wellbeing through volunteering (Volunteering Australia 2021).

However, for these people, finding volunteering opportunities that are suited to their needs can often be challenging without help. By providing additional support to people who may face barriers to

participation in volunteering, Volunteering Geelong ensures that the benefits are shared more equitably through the community.

*'My son is neuro diverse. Through volunteering he's gained self-worth, he feels he is contributing something.'* – Volunteering Geelong board member

*'People wander in here and they are lost, they are in a crisis. [Volunteering] gives them a sense of purpose.'* – Volunteering Geelong staff member

#### Flow on effect

Increased access to volunteering opportunities contributes to three key outcomes for people:

- increased sense of purpose
- increased sense of belonging
- increased employment opportunities.

Volunteering Geelong helps volunteers experience these outcomes directly through its own volunteer opportunities, and indirectly through the referrals and support it provides to VIOs.

#### 4.2.2 Increased wellbeing and sense of purpose

Volunteering Geelong provides volunteers with opportunities to contribute to their communities and, in doing so, gain a sense of wellbeing and purpose. For people with complex needs, the support provided by Volunteering Geelong helps to break down the barriers they face in participating in volunteering activities.

#### Contributing to the community

A survey by Australian Unity (2021) found that people who contributed to the community experienced increased mental wellbeing by counteracting the effects of stress, anger and anxiety, as well as increasing confidence and self-esteem. The survey also found that people were able to gain a sense of purpose through volunteering by being able to express the things that matter to them in ways they might not be able to do through their paid employment.

By getting the chance to give back to their community, volunteers gain a sense of purpose and experience feelings of satisfaction and fulfilment. For some volunteers this sense of purpose came from feeling they had an important role to play in supporting their community, while for others it came from the ability to use their skills towards a cause or something they cared about.

*'[Volunteering] gets me out of the house and gives me a sense of purpose.'* – Volunteer

*'Helping people gives me a sense of fulfilment and wellbeing.'* – Volunteer

*'[Volunteering] gives me the opportunity to use and pass on my skills and give back to the community.'* – Volunteer

#### 4.2.3 Increased sense of belonging

Volunteering Geelong provides volunteers with opportunities to build social connections and gain a sense of belonging to their community. By supporting new migrants to access volunteering opportunities, Volunteering Geelong makes it easier for them to build support networks and integrate into the community.

## Building social connections

The Australian Unity survey (2021) found that volunteers were more likely to experience feelings of community connection than people who did not. People with good connections in their community were found to be able to increase their social and relationship skills, and be better able to build a support network.

Volunteering provides community members with opportunities to connect with other people, and build relationships through working together towards a common goal. By providing an open door where anyone can come to access volunteering opportunities, Volunteering Geelong makes it easier for people to feel like a member of the community.

*'The connection element that Volunteering Geelong provides is so important – the fundamental value of volunteering is about connection to community.'* – Community foundation manager

*'Volunteering Geelong provides a place where people can become a volunteer and become a member of the community.'* – Community leader

## The value of community connection for new migrants

For people who are new to Australia the volunteering opportunities Volunteering Geelong and its member VIOs provide are important for integration into their communities. Volunteering Australia (2019) found that while new migrants were very engaged in volunteering with 65% of new migrants volunteering within the first 18 months of their arrival to Australia, many of them faced barriers to participation that required additional support to overcome. These barriers can include limited English proficiency, cultural differences and unfamiliarity with digital systems.

*'When I first came to Australia, I didn't know anyone. Volunteering Geelong helped me to meet people and integrate.'* – Volunteer

*'[Volunteering Geelong] provides opportunities for community members to build social networks, especially people who are new to the community.'* – Volunteer manager

Volunteering Geelong's case study approach to volunteer matching, enables new migrants to overcome these barriers and build social networks to gain a sense of belonging to the community.

### 4.2.4 Increased employment opportunities

Volunteering Geelong supports community members in gaining valuable skills and experience that can make it easier for them to increase their ability to secure paid employment.

#### Providing pathways to employment

Research from Volunteering Australia (2018) shows that volunteers gain valuable skills and develop both personally and professionally as a result of their involvement in volunteering activities. Furthermore, volunteering can play a significant role in assisting people from disadvantaged backgrounds to gain entry to the labour market and build key employable skills. In addition, people from non-English speaking backgrounds have reported that volunteering provided them with the skills, confidence and experience to gain entry to the paid employment.

Volunteering Geelong helps people find appropriate volunteering roles and contributes to them accessing crucial work experience opportunities that can kick-start their careers.

*'For new migrants, a lack of Australian experience can be a barrier to employment. Volunteering can help.'* – VIO manager

*'[Volunteering Geelong] provides a pathway to employment and more opportunities for work.'* – VIO manager

### Support for people who are unemployed

Participating in volunteering is an effective pathway to employment for unemployed people with a majority of recruiters viewing relevant volunteer work as being equally valid as paid work in job applications (Volunteering Australia 2022b). Volunteering can also be a requirement for some people to access their welfare payments.

Volunteering Geelong also liaises directly with employment support agencies to help match unemployed people with volunteering opportunities that meet their needs.

*'Without Volunteering Geelong it would be hard to find work for people with complex issues.'* – VIO leader

*'Volunteering Resource Centres know the organisations that are Centrelink approved so can direct them to the right place.'* – VRC manager

#### **Case Study 1: Impacting Pathways to Employment Program**

The Impacting Pathways to Employment Program (IPEP) is delivered directly by Volunteering Geelong in partnership with the Geelong Community Foundation and the Dawn Wade Foundation. The IPEP is designed to assist young people who have been unable to secure employment, by providing them with targeted training and work experience through a volunteering placement. Training workshops are provided by a range of industry experts who provide their time on a volunteer basis.

The primary beneficiaries of the program are:

- young people between 16–23 years of age
- school leavers or students considering leaving school
- those unable to secure work
- socially disadvantaged people
- new immigrants
- young people with a disability.

Volunteering Geelong has access to 132 VIOs, enabling the program to provide training in a wide range of job types and industries. IPEP participants gain access to volunteer mentors to provide support during and after the program.

Volunteering Geelong has run the IPEP program since 2020. Over that time a total of 41 young people have completed the program.

Participants have benefited from a number of positive outcomes as a result of participating in the program including:

- gaining employment with the organisation they volunteered with
- gaining employment with another organisation
- receiving further internship opportunities with other VIOs in Volunteering Geelong's network
- enrolling in a TAFE course to further their education
- continuing their work placement to gain additional work experience
- increasing confidence to seek employment

- gaining valuable work experience for their resume.

‘[He] loved the program and gained a lot from participating. The program gave [him] the confidence to approach his local fish and chip shop to answer a job advertisement, which he would not have even considered prior to the program. He is now working part time and motivated to pursue his longer-term objective of a career in landscaping.’ – IPEP participant support worker

## 4.3 How Volunteering Geelong strengthens VIOs

Volunteering Geelong supports VIOs through the following activities:

- **volunteer matching** – recording the specific requirements of each volunteer opportunity on the Volunteering Geelong database to enable matching to potential volunteer capabilities
- **compliance and vetting** – ensuring that potential volunteers have the skills, temperament and checks to be successful in the opportunity
- **volunteer manager training** – providing training and support for volunteer managers
- **sector networking** – providing opportunities volunteer managers to come together and share their knowledge, skills, experience and collaborate in ways that supports the local volunteering ecosystem to thrive.

Volunteering Geelong has access to 132 VIOs, of these:

- 18 are individuals or affiliate agencies that do not advertise for volunteers
- 63 are level 2 small agencies with that are entirely volunteer-run small agencies
- 36 are level 3 medium agencies with up to 15 paid staff
- 2 are small local government authorities
- 12 are large agencies with over 15 paid staff
- 1 is a large local government authority.

### Key outputs:

- As of May 2023, Volunteering Geelong has 140 VIO members.
- In 2022, Volunteering Geelong ran five training programs for volunteer managers and the community.

As a result of these activities, VIOs and the community experience a number of outcomes as shown in Figure 7 below.

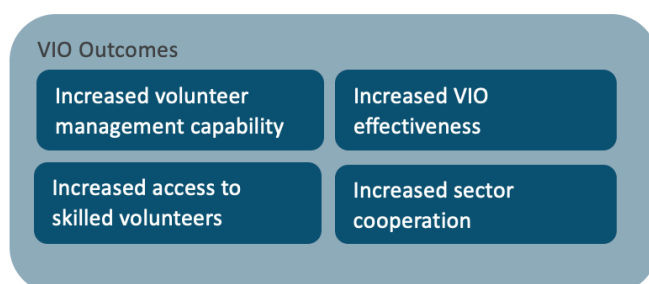


Figure 7 VIO outcomes

### 4.3.1 Increased volunteer management capability

As a result of the increased access to training, networking and support that Volunteering Geelong provides, volunteer managers feel they are more effective in their roles.

### Better access to training

Research from LaTrobe University (2020) found that better trained and supported volunteer managers were better able to provide a positive experience for volunteers leading to greater volunteer retention. However, the organisations that volunteer managers work in do not often have the resources to provide the breadth of training and support they need.

Volunteering Geelong provides access to training that helps to bridge these gaps, either directly or through access to discounted training with other providers. The training that Volunteering Geelong delivers directly covers a wide range of areas including volunteer standards, meeting compliance requirements, disability awareness, first aid and conflict management.

*'Offering training for volunteer managers has added a lot of value.'* – Volunteer manager

*'The training on volunteers' standards that they pushed through to us was really useful. I'm so busy with operational stuff I wouldn't have had the time to find it myself.'* – Volunteer manager

*'Hearing about training that is available online is really useful. There's nothing available in person around here.'* – Volunteer manager

### Access to advice and support

As volunteer managers are often the only person in their organisations that deal with volunteers, they don't have many opportunities to reflect on their work and discuss it with others. Many volunteer managers find themselves in their roles as add-ons to their primary work, and struggle to find other people in their organisation with knowledge in managing volunteers. Furthermore, the available support material for volunteer managers is often not contextualised for the area they operate in (Engage 2014).

By attending Volunteering Geelong's Volunteer Leadership Group, volunteer managers get to come together and talk about the challenges they are facing and connect with people who can help. In addition, they are able to contact Volunteering Geelong directly to ask for advice and support.

*'It can be a lonely job. You don't meet many other volunteer managers in my role.'* – Volunteer manager

*'As a coordinator I benefit from the networking opportunities. As I am the sole practitioner in my organisation, I can feel quite isolated.'* – Volunteer manager

*'It's nice to have a person [at Volunteering Geelong] to talk to [so you can] ask complex or specific questions.'* – Volunteer manager

### 4.3.2 Increased VIO effectiveness

Volunteering Geelong helps VIOs source volunteers to help manage and run their programs. For smaller VIOs, Volunteering Geelong is their main source of volunteers. For larger organisations, who source the majority of their volunteers themselves, Volunteering Geelong is a great source of advice and support.

#### Providing a source of volunteers

The volunteering matching capabilities that Volunteering Geelong provides are essential for some VIOs to be able to deliver their programs. While larger VIOs may have some in-house volunteer management capability, leaders from smaller organisations reported that they are dependent on Volunteering Geelong for attracting volunteers. Research from Volunteering Australia (2017) estimates that nationally, VIOs source 23% of their volunteers through volunteer support services like Volunteering Geelong. The volunteers that are provided by volunteer support services were also found to be better

prepared for volunteering, retained for longer, and to volunteer for more hours than volunteers who were recruited directly.

Volunteering Geelong's case management approach to volunteer matching enables them to better understand the capabilities, commitment and temperament of volunteers and make sure they are matched with a volunteering opportunity that meets their needs.

*'The support that Volunteering Geelong provides is invaluable. We don't have the time or capacity to run our own volunteer recruitment system.'* – VIO leader

*'Without Volunteering Geelong, small groups wouldn't be able to access volunteers. They don't have the capacity or capability to do it themselves.'* – VIO leader

*'There are too many platforms we could be using like Seek, Volunteering Victoria, Go Volunteering. It's easier for us to just use one that Volunteering Geelong manages.'* – VIO leader

*'[Without Volunteering Geelong] smaller community-based groups might not have any volunteers. They don't have the financial capability and people power to get it happening.'* – VRC leader

### Providing support and advice

In addition to listing volunteer opportunities with Volunteering Geelong, many VIOs advertise their volunteering opportunities on multiple online platforms like SEEK and Volunteering Victoria. In contrast to other platforms, they appreciated that they could talk to someone at Volunteering Geelong if they needed an urgent placement or advice. Surveys from Volunteering Australia (2017) found that 87 per cent of VIOs rated the support they received from volunteering support services as being either good, very good or excellent and that 94 per cent were willing to recommend their services to others.

*'It's so nice to have a person to talk to rather than machine.'* – Volunteer manager

*'[The advice from Volunteering Geelong] gives volunteers and volunteer managers the ability to navigate the policy and get on with their work.'* – Volunteer manager

*'[Without Volunteering Geelong] we wouldn't have anywhere to get in contact with people to ask: "we have this issue, what do we do?" I always know there is someone on the end of the line.'* – Volunteer manager

### 4.3.3 Increased access to skilled volunteers

Volunteering Geelong's large volunteer database and wide network of contacts in the community enable it to source volunteers with specific skills to fill specialised roles in VIOs.

Skilled volunteers are valuable as they can bring new skills and insights into a VIO to assist with specific projects or tasks. Skilled volunteers also provide the ability to offer a different perspective on a VIOs programs and activities (Leep 2017). Without the skilled volunteers provided by Volunteering Geelong many VIOs reported they would have to reduce the scale of their operations or stop programs altogether.

*'Our organisation is well respected in our community, and we have a no shortage of local people who want to help out. Without the specialist volunteers that Volunteering Geelong provides we would have no way to coordinate these volunteers. We would have to turn people away.'* – VIO manager

*'Our clients decide what they want to learn or do and then our organisation finds volunteers that can deliver them. We work with Volunteering Geelong and other VRCs to*

*source skilled volunteers like cooks, surf instructors or teachers that we would struggle to find ourselves.’ – Volunteer manager*

*‘Some of our older residents are more comfortable speaking in their native language so one of our programs is trying to find people to come and talk with them regularly. Volunteering Geelong connects us with individuals and cultural groups that can help.’ – Volunteer manager*

#### 4.3.4 Increased sector cooperation

By providing an opportunity for Volunteer Managers to come together and share knowledge and resources, Volunteering Geelong provides a space for cooperation and collaboration to occur.

To be effective, volunteer managers need a shared body of knowledge on working with volunteers that incorporates the local context. Without a constantly growing and adapting body of knowledge to draw on, volunteer managers run the risk of wasting resources in dealing with problems that their peers have successfully dealt with previously. Through networking, volunteer managers are able to connect with experienced peers who have the skills and experience to help new VOIs and volunteer managers move forward and gain valuable mentoring opportunities (Engage 2014).

Volunteer managers who participate in Volunteering Geelong’s Volunteer Leadership Group meetings reported that it was their main opportunity to come together as sector and find ways to align their activities. In addition, the networking opportunities provided by Volunteering Geelong creates a space for VOIs to identify opportunities for cooperation.

*‘Without Volunteering Geelong there would be very little opportunities for interactions between VOIs.’ – Volunteer manager*

*‘Volunteering is under resourced in Geelong. Bringing volunteer managers together to share ideas and resources is really valuable for them to be able to do their job.’ – Volunteer manager*

*‘[Volunteering Geelong’s VIO networking events] give me the ability to access the knowledge and capabilities of other local organisations.’ – Volunteer manager*

#### **Case Study 2: Lockdown Buddies**

Lockdown Buddies is a community-initiated mutual support program that provided assistance to elderly and vulnerable people during the COVID-19 lockdowns. The program focused on supporting people who identified as elderly who did not have family and friends to support them, students who were in isolation and not able to get home, and people who had lost their jobs because of COVID.

The program paired volunteers with vulnerable people in their neighbourhoods who needed support to access basic services such as shopping, collecting mail and taking care of pets. The program also attempted to combat the social isolation of vulnerable people by making sure they had regular contact with their volunteer buddy.

With support from Geelong Legislative Assembly member, Christine Couzens MP, Volunteering Geelong worked with Lockdown Buddies to register the program as a formal agency for providing support. Volunteering Geelong worked closely with Lockdown Buddies to vet potential volunteers by completing interviews, carrying out background checks and registration, as well as ensuring participants were trained in COVID-safe procedures. Volunteering Geelong also provided volunteer drivers and a community vehicle to the program.

As a result of Volunteering Geelong’s support, the program provided many people across the Geelong, Bellarine and Surf Coast areas with access to support when they needed it most.

## 4.4 How Volunteering Geelong activates and connects the community

The activities and outcomes that Volunteering Geelong provides for volunteers and VIOs flow through to benefit the community. In addition, Volunteering Geelong is able to act on opportunities to pilot and trial beneficial services direct to the community as well as act as a facilitator resourcing directly community initiatives in ways that increase their potential for impact. They do this through the following activities:

- **Community transport** – providing transport for community members to access support services.
- **Community spaces** – providing spaces for the community to come together.
- **Training and support** – providing training and support for vulnerable community members.
- **Auspicing and project incubation** – providing new and emerging community groups with advice and the ability to apply for grants.
- **Community mobilisation** – assisting in the mobilisation of the community for events and in response to emergencies in the planning, response and recovery phases.

As a result of these activities, the community experiences a number of outcomes as outlined in Figure 8 below.



Figure 8 Community outcomes

### 4.4.1 Greater social cohesion

By acting as a central coordinator for volunteering activity across the region, Volunteering Geelong helps to keep important community services going and, in doing so, helps build social cohesion.

Social cohesion is defined by the Scanlon Institute (2023) as ‘the willingness of members of a society to cooperate with each other in order to survive and prosper’. As the major coordinator of volunteering in the region, Volunteering Geelong is a vital enabler of the cooperation that builds social cohesion.

*‘As memberships of traditional clubs like Rotary and Lions decrease, what will take their place? Without Volunteering Geelong who would take the role of tying the community together? If we don’t have Volunteering Geelong, then we don’t really have anything at all.’ – Community leader*

*‘Volunteering helps to build an active and mutually supportive community.’ – VRC leader*

*‘Without Volunteering Geelong people wouldn’t have the vehicle to participate in the community. There wouldn’t be a vehicle to coordinate and drive volunteering. Everyone’s job would be harder without community volunteers.’ – Community leader*

*‘Without volunteers the whole world would stop. We [rely on] volunteers in our community so much in the background. The impact is huge.’ – Community leader*

#### 4.4.2 Stronger community mobilisation

Volunteering Geelong's database and its ability to effectively vet and onboard new volunteers, provides Geelong with the capability to mobilise the community in an emergency. This ability was brought to bear in response to the COVID-19 pandemic when Volunteering Geelong's assistance to health organisations helped to save lives.

##### Mobilising the community

The Commonwealth Government's Spontaneous Volunteer Strategy (CESC 2015) reinforces the value of volunteer support services like Volunteering Geelong in assisting the community to mobilise in a crisis. In line with the strategy's recommendations, Volunteering Geelong's ability to coordinate, vet and manage volunteers frees up recovery and response agency resources to focus their efforts on assisting affected community members. Furthermore, with its connections to community groups, Volunteering Geelong can support the engagement of diverse communities (for example, CALD communities) to make sure that they are equally able to contribute and receive support in an emergency.

*'During COVID a lot of Deakin students got stuck in lockdown in Geelong without access to food and necessities. While we had a big response in food donations, we needed people to drive around in cars to do food drops. We were able to respond quickly and provided a lot of volunteers. It's an amazing database to activate in a crisis.'* – Volunteering Geelong board member

##### Saving lives during the COVID-19 pandemic

Volunteering Geelong's volunteer database and their deep connections to community organisations provides Geelong with the ability to mobilise the community in response to emergencies. This was particularly evident during the COVID-19 pandemic when government and health organisations worked with Volunteering Geelong to mobilise volunteers to assist in helping those most affected by the crisis.

In the face of such a widespread crisis, members of the community were desperate to find ways to donate their time to help. However, many community organisations struggled to coordinate this influx of spontaneous volunteers. Volunteering Geelong was able to use its on-boarding capabilities to quickly register and vet potential volunteers. As a result of the support that Volunteering Geelong provided, Geelong health organisations were able to run a highly effective mobile vaccination program that was world leading and saved lives.

*'Volunteering Geelong completely managed the whole transport program for our vaccine rollout and antiviral deliveries. They were in the thick of the response.'* – Health organisation manager

*'[Without Volunteering Geelong's support] a portion of the community wouldn't have been vaccinated. They wouldn't have had access to antivirals so [the program] saved lives. The program was one of the best vaccination programs in the world in terms of providing access.'* – Health organisation manager

#### 4.4.3 Better access to services and support

Volunteering Geelong provides a safe and welcoming space for community members to connect with volunteering opportunities. At the same time, community members are able to connect with other services and support they may be eligible for.

##### Providing a space for the community

Place-based services, such as those provided by volunteering support services like Volunteering Geelong, provide critical infrastructure for safe effective and sustainable volunteering (Volunteering

Australia 2018). Previous research has demonstrated how providing access to community-owned infrastructure where informal volunteering and participation can take place can help build social cohesion in communities (Think Impact 2020).

The stability of Volunteering Geelong's tenure at its premises provides community members with security that they can continue to come to St Mary's Terrace for advice and support long into the future.

*'Having their own space is important as community space is very limited in Geelong. A community hub for volunteering becomes a focal point for the community.'* – Community leader

*'Communities want a base in the community that they can access. We need decentralised infrastructure for participation. Helen and her team know their community and have the relationships to join things up.'* – VRC manager

*'Having the space [St Mary's Terrace] provides the community with a space they can just turn up to and ask questions. New migrants are less likely to be able to access resources through online portals.'* – Volunteering Geelong staff member

*'[Having their own space] provides an option for people to choose how they want to engage. CALD [Culturally and Linguistically Diverse] people might not be so familiar with digital ways of accessing information on volunteering.'* – VRC manager

### Providing an 'open door' for advice and support

Through the stakeholder engagement it was identified that community members have come to view St Mary's Terrace as an 'open door' where they can come to get advice and referrals to other services unrelated to volunteering.

*'People ring us with us with issues that aren't related to volunteering, but you try and help. We have an open-door policy.'* – Volunteering Geelong staff member

*'Sometimes there are things [that community members ask for] that are not our job to do but we try to help. [Online platforms] don't necessarily provide the level of wrap around support that people need to be successful. You need to build up the person so they can do the work.'* – Volunteering Geelong staff member

*'Having a base in Geelong is really valuable. People know of the name – they know its separate – people come to them in a crisis.'* – Community leader

### Case Study 3: Life-saving community transport during COVID

During the COVID-19 pandemic, Geelong health authorities identified a need for a transport option to enable vulnerable people across the greater Geelong region to access vaccination centres. The demographics identified as being most in need of this services were people living in high-risk accommodation or public housing, people receiving disability services and elderly people, who did not have access to their own transport.

Volunteering Geelong was invited to lead a stakeholder group to coordinate a response that included representatives from Barwon Health, the Department of Families Fairness and Housing, the High-Risk Accommodation Response Team, the West Victoria Primary Health Network and City of Greater Geelong. Utilising a donated minivan driven by dedicated volunteers, Volunteering Geelong was able to quickly set up a community transport program to take community members to vaccination centres directly, as well as delivering anti-viral medication to the homes of self-isolating people.

In addition, Volunteering Geelong provided a booking system for vaccination appointments in collaboration with Barwon Health. The logistics of the transport system was managed internally by Volunteering Geelong staff who coordinated up to 20 vaccination appointments a day for the 18 months the program was active for.

Barwon Health staff had high praise for the program with one stakeholder stating the vaccination program was world-leading in terms of its ability to provide a regional area with a comparable vaccination rate to adjacent metropolitan areas. Through the vaccination program the High-Risk Accommodation Response Team were able to connect with vulnerable people and provide them with access to additional support services they may not have been aware of. Barwon Health staff had high praise for the antiviral delivery program which they felt almost certainly saved peoples' lives.

## 4.5 Contribution to government volunteering policy priorities

In addition to delivering value to volunteers, VIOs and the community, Volunteering Geelong contributes to the delivery of the objectives set out in the Volunteering Australian National Strategy for Volunteering and the Victorian Volunteering Strategy.

### 4.5.1 Volunteering strategies

Two key strategies lay out the state and federal objectives for volunteering. They are:

- the **National Strategy for Volunteering 2023–2033** (produced by the peak body Volunteering Australia), a 10-year blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia. It includes three focus areas/aims and 11 strategic objectives each with a linked outcome statement.
- the **Victorian Volunteer Strategy 2022–2027** which sets a five-year vision, priorities (five overarching goals and 14 priority outcomes) for volunteering and provides an action plan to promote, build, support and celebrate all forms of volunteering.

Table 1 below provides a high-level summary of Volunteering Geelong's significant contribution to the policy priorities of each of these volunteering strategies.

Where there is overlap between one of the National Strategy's focus areas and the goals of the Victorian Volunteer Strategy, they have been listed together. For example, goals one to four of the Victorian Strategy sit logically under Focus area one of the National Strategy 'Individual Potential and the Volunteer Experience'.

**Table 1 Summary of Volunteering Geelong's contribution to volunteering policy priorities**

Policy focus area or goal	How Volunteering Geelong's activities and outcomes contribute
<p>National Strategy, Focus area one: <b>Individual Potential and the Volunteer Experience – volunteering is safe, inclusive, accessible, meaningful, and not exploitative</b></p> <p>Victorian Strategy, Goal one: <b>Making volunteering inclusive and accessible</b></p> <p>Victorian Strategy, Goal two: <b>Making volunteering flexible and easier</b></p> <p>Victorian Strategy, Goal three: <b>Supporting volunteers to be resilient, supported and empowered</b></p>	<p>Volunteering Geelong:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ensures experiences are meaningful and not exploitative. This includes ensuring volunteer matching is based on a mutual understanding of the volunteers' goals and experience, personalised case management, client satisfaction feedback and follow-up processes with placed volunteers.</li> <li>• Ensures experiences are safe with both VIOs and the individual volunteers needing to meet compliance and vetting standards.</li> <li>• Makes volunteering more accessible and inclusive including through the strategic focus on increasing access to volunteering for six priority groups through engagement and research to increase understanding of their unique needs and barriers to volunteering and through work to build VIO capability to develop the roles, resources and policies that will support greater access to volunteering for these groups.</li> <li>• Makes volunteering more flexible and easier including through promoting one-off event volunteering for time-poor people and through providing a customised case management approach to volunteer matching (in-person or via phone) for people/groups for whom the online platforms are a barrier or who need a personalised approach.</li> <li>• Supports volunteers to be resilient, supported and empowered to understand their rights and responsibilities directly through their case management approach and through volunteer feedback and follow-up processes for placed volunteers. Indirectly they contribute through the advice, support and training they provide VIO volunteer managers to ensure volunteer rights and responsibilities and volunteering standards are understood and they have access to resources to support good policies and practice.</li> <li>• Contributes wholistically to this focus areas and goals directly through the outcomes experienced by volunteers including 'increased access to volunteering opportunities', 'increased sense of purpose' and 'increased sense of belonging' and indirectly through the outcomes 'increased volunteer management capacity' and 'increased support for VIOs'.</li> </ul>

Policy focus area or goal	How Volunteering Geelong's activities and outcomes contribute
<p>Victorian Strategy, Goal four: <b>Creating volunteering connections and pathways</b></p>	<p>Volunteering Geelong:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creates pathways for potential volunteers through their customised approach to volunteer matching that aligns volunteer goals with VIO needs and opportunities to gain experience and skills (as evidenced in the outcome 'increased sense of purpose').</li> <li>• Creates pathways for specific groups through partnerships<sup>2</sup> and tailored programs. For example, volunteering connections and pathways are created for unemployed people through networking and partnerships with employment service providers and through the Impacting Pathways to Employment Program (IPEP) run annually (as evidenced in the outcomes 'increased sense of purpose' and 'increased employment opportunities').</li> </ul>
<p>National Strategy, Focus area two: <b>Community and Social Impact – the diversity and impact of volunteering is articulated and celebrated.</b></p> <p>Strategic objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversify the understanding of volunteering</li> <li>• Reshape the public perception of volunteering</li> <li>• Recognise the inherent value of volunteering</li> <li>• Enable a community-led approach</li> </ul> <p>Victorian Strategy, Goal five: <b>Ensuring volunteering is recognised and celebrated</b></p>	<p>Volunteering Geelong:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Actively promotes the value of volunteering through regular outreach and promotional talks<sup>3</sup>, through organising National Volunteering Week events that bring together VIOs and the wider community to celebrate volunteering, through local radio and social media, through the annual local Volunteer of the Year awards facilitated in partnership with local partners and through participation in the Victorian Volunteering Awards<sup>4</sup>.</li> <li>• Works to articulate and recognise the inherent value of volunteering through initiatives like this impact report that support volunteering being recognised as an activity with inherent value for its role in facilitating individual and community outcomes.</li> <li>• Contributes to communities being the primary drivers of how volunteering influences their future through their work locally with VIOs combined with their Victorian and National networking, advocacy and</li> </ul>

<sup>2</sup> Partnerships with Cultura and Access Your Support (AYS) support volunteering connecting and pathways for new migrants and people with disabilities.

<sup>3</sup> Volunteering Geelong does regular volunteering outreach talks in schools and with community groups including the Geelong Clinic Mental Health Hospital to promote volunteering and its mental health benefits.

<sup>4</sup> The Victorian Volunteering Awards recognise and celebrate the impact volunteers, volunteer leaders and volunteer programs have in building resilient communities, services and connections. In 2021, Volunteering Geelong were a finalist in the partnerships category for the Vaccination – Community Transport Program.

Policy focus area or goal	How Volunteering Geelong’s activities and outcomes contribute
<p>National Strategy Focus area three: <b>Conditions for Volunteering to Thrive – the right conditions are in place for volunteering to be effective and sustainable.</b></p> <p>Strategic objectives:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make volunteering a cross-portfolio issue in Government</li> <li>• Build strong leadership and shared accountability</li> <li>• Commit to strategic investment</li> <li>• Recognise the importance of volunteer management</li> </ul>	<p>partnerships including participation in the National Network of Volunteer Resource Centres and as the lead agency in the Victorian Regional Volunteering United Consortium<sup>5</sup>.</p> <hr/> <p>Volunteering Geelong:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• supports all levels of governments to consider the needs of volunteers and support volunteering through its networking, partnerships and advocacy work referenced above</li> <li>• advances volunteering through its work to build common agendas, support leadership, shared accountability, and collaboration in its work with VIOs, the National Network of Volunteer Resource Centres and the Victorian Regional Volunteering United Consortium (as evidenced in the outcome ‘increased sector cooperation’)</li> <li>• supports strong volunteer engagement practices through their support, compliance and training work with VIOs</li> <li>• supports and acknowledges the critical role of leaders of volunteers through their direct work with volunteer managers including the facilitation of the Volunteer Leadership Network which builds cooperation across the sector (as evidenced in the outcome ‘increased sector cooperation’).</li> </ul>

<sup>5</sup> The consortium consists of the place-based volunteer resource infrastructure and collective impact of Volunteering Geelong, Albury Wodonga Volunteer Bureau, Ballarat Community Foundation, The Centre for Participation – Horsham and Bendigo Volunteer Resource Centre. They deliver the re-designed Volunteer Management Activity funding 2022–2026.

## 5. Improving effectiveness of Volunteering Geelong

Volunteering Geelong is delivering outcomes that contribute to its goal of contributing to a better community for all through volunteering.

The stakeholder engagement and data analysis identified a number of opportunities for Volunteering Geelong to evolve its services to better meet the needs of its stakeholders.

### 5.1 Find additional ways to proactively engage priority groups

There is evidence that priority groups face the biggest barriers to participating in volunteering and yet get the most value from it. Volunteering Geelong can increase the value it delivers to the community by being more proactive in seeking ways to meet the needs of these community members.

While Volunteering Geelong is implementing action plans to engage priority groups, some stakeholders know nothing about their work in this space. Volunteering Geelong should engage partners, VIOs and the leadership network more proactively in understanding the needs of the priority groups (including diversity and inclusion training) and in developing strategies to remove barriers and promote volunteering pathways for these groups. They could also consider how to engage and empower people with lived experience (from priority groups) directly in their work and strategy development (for example, as volunteers or in a resourced working group/advisory capacity) so approaches are shaped by lived experience. Volunteering Geelong will also need to review its client data collection approach to be able to identify and monitor progress in working with priority groups.

### 5.2 Measure the impact of Volunteering Geelong's programs.

It was clear from the stakeholder engagement that Volunteering Geelong is delivering significant value to the community. However, in the process of developing this report it was difficult to access output and outcome data to effectively quantify this value. Developing an outcomes framework would assist Volunteering Geelong to determine which data is most important to collect to measure the effectiveness of its programs and services.

Many government departments and philanthropic organisations are moving to an outcomes-based approach to determine the value of the funding they provide. Developing an outcomes framework will be essential for Volunteering Geelong to be able to access funding from these sources in the future.

As part of the development of an outcomes framework, Volunteering Geelong should identify the most meaningful metrics to track to monitor their effectiveness in matching priority cohorts with volunteer opportunities. Partnering with VIOs to better understand the outcomes that people from priority groups experience in their placements will be essential for increasing the effectiveness of Volunteering Geelong's matching service.

### 5.3 Provide more targeted support for large VIOs

Large VIOs currently source most of their volunteers themselves and so get less value from Volunteering Geelong's volunteer matching than smaller organisations. There may be the opportunity to develop mutually beneficial partnerships with larger VIOs where Volunteering Geelong utilises their current

support services to meet the needs of these VIOs and save them from having to utilise resources in recruitment.

Understanding the specific needs of larger VIOs will require a specific engagement program. However, some initial suggestions provided by VIOs included:

- working with VIOs to identify specific training resources they require and how they can be contextualised for the local situation
- providing more opportunities for collaboration including mentoring for new volunteer managers
- providing more data and insights on the volunteering landscape in the region to aid collaboration.

## 5.4 Increase Volunteering Geelong's profile as a champion for volunteering in the region

As the largest, and most well-connected volunteering support service in Geelong, Volunteering Geelong is uniquely positioned to be the primary resource for the community for information on and access to volunteering.

However, many stakeholders felt that Volunteering Geelong could be doing more to raise its profile and promote the work it does to support volunteers, VIOs and the community.

Stakeholders provided a number of suggestions for how Volunteering Geelong could boost its profile and the value of volunteering in general. These included:

- being more assertive in ensuring its contribution to VIOs and volunteer involving events is acknowledged
- providing clarity to the community on the services it provides
- improving visibility of the St Mary's Terrace office to encourage casual visits by local residents
- developing a more strategic approach to marketing.

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