

# VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA 2022

## The Organisation Perspective

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Towards a  
National Strategy  
for Volunteering



## About the Volunteering in Australia research

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The Volunteering in Australia research is a series of reports that will serve as a core evidence base on contemporary volunteering in Australia, which will inform the development of the National Strategy for Volunteering.

The Volunteering in Australia reports were developed by the Australian National University Centre for Social Research and Methods, and a consortium of researchers from Curtin University, Griffith University, and the University of Western Australia.

## About the National Strategy for Volunteering

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Volunteering Australia is leading the development of a National Strategy for Volunteering, which will be designed and owned by the volunteering ecosystem and will provide a blueprint for a reimagined future for volunteering in Australia.

The National Strategy for Volunteering project comes at a critical time. Environmental factors such as the changing nature of work, our ageing population, rising costs of living, and increasing digitisation all impact volunteering. These factors, and others, will have both positive and negative implications for volunteering. Despite the challenges facing volunteering, opportunities also exist to do things differently. Volunteers, organisations, and the Australian community have shown great resilience and adaptability during recent crises.

The National Strategy for Volunteering project, including the Volunteering in Australia research, provides an historic opportunity to collaboratively co-design a shared vision for the future of volunteering.

## How to cite this report

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Survey data from the survey of volunteer involving organisations used in this study is available for download through the Australian Data Archive.

## Author Biographies

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learned from organisational psychology to identify ways of improving volunteer attraction and retention and have led to the introduction of new volunteer recruitment and retention practices, including an accessible set of online training modules for volunteer leaders on volunteer management in the emergency services context, and a volunteer recruiting toolkit.

**Leonie Lockstone-Binney** is Associate Professor and Research Director in the Department of Tourism, Sport and Hotel Management at Griffith University, Australia. Leonie's research expertise relates to volunteering, primarily contextualised to event and tourism settings. Leonie has published over 90 peer-reviewed articles, many of these in top-tier journals. She has received competitive research funding from the Australian Research Council and the International Olympic Committee and continues to collaborate with leading researchers from Australia, the UK and New Zealand.

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**Hawa Muhammad Farid** is a Registered Psychologist and a Senior Consultant within the Workforce Transformation team at Deloitte. Previously a Research Officer at the Future of Work Institute, Hawa has a background in organisational psychology and has 4 years of experience working with clients, such as the Natural Hazards Cooperative Research Centre and The Department of Fire and Emergency Services, to conduct research and deliver resources aimed at educating volunteer leaders and organisations on how to improve their volunteer leadership, recruitment, onboarding, and succession planning practices. Hawa contributed her research-driven skills and knowledge of the volunteering sector to this project, and she continues to apply an evidence-based approach and lens in her current role.

**Callan Lavery** is currently completing his Master of Biostatistics at Sydney University, Australia. He completed his Master of Research in Psychology in 2021 and currently has two articles under review. He has participated in a number of volunteering opportunities, including as Charity Development Officer for the non-for-profit organisation Imagine Global.

## Glossary

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Formal volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place within organisations and groups.

Episodic volunteering: This refers to volunteering on a periodic or recurring basis, as opposed to on an ongoing capacity. It could include people who are engaged in ‘project-based volunteering’.

Informal volunteering: Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, taking place outside the context of a formal organisation or group. This includes assisting people in the community, excluding one’s own family members. For example, looking after children, property or pets; providing home or personal assistance; or giving someone professional advice.

Microvolunteering: This describes a volunteer, or team of volunteers, completing small tasks that make up a larger project. Tasks may only take a few minutes to a few hours, and the volunteer does not make a long-term commitment.

Volunteer involving organisations: Any organisation/company/department that engages volunteers may be known as a volunteer involving organisation.

Virtual volunteering, remote volunteering, or online volunteering (e-volunteering): Virtual, remote, or online volunteering allows individuals to work with organisations remotely. Volunteer tasks are completed online, and interaction is through a digital platform or via email.

## Abbreviations

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ABS Australian Bureau of Statistics

GSS General Social Survey

ICT Information and Communication Technologies

# Executive Summary

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As part of the Volunteering in Australia research, this report provides an important contribution to the evidence base informing the National Strategy for Volunteering. The focus of this report is the organisational perspective. We explore the characteristics of volunteer involving organisations and the challenges they are facing. The research draws on a literature review and several data sources. New data collection was undertaken through a survey and focus groups during May-June 2022.

## Current volunteer roles and activities

- The survey included organisations of diverse size, type, and area of focus.
  - Half of the organisations surveyed engaged 50 volunteers or fewer. However, many larger organisations were represented, with around one-in-five (21 per cent) engaging more than 250 volunteers.
  - The most common response to core organisational focus was Community Services / Welfare / Homelessness. These organisations accounted for almost one third (30 per cent) of respondents.
  - 57 per cent of organisations indicated they assisted the general community rather than identifying a specific group their efforts were focused on supporting.
  - For those that did identify target groups they assisted, the top four responses were Children / youth (24 per cent), Older people (aged 65+) (21 per cent), People with disability (18 per cent), and Culturally / linguistically diverse communities (18 per cent).
  - Analysis of the data did not reveal any differences by State/Territory, nor by areas of operation. Differences between States/Territories were very small and thus, overall, it appears that the location of operations is not a key determining factor in the success or struggles of a volunteer involving organisation in 2022.
- There appears to be a disconnect between the level of commitment that volunteers prefer compared to the commitment that organisations require, with most organisations reporting that they still require volunteers on an ongoing, regular basis whilst also acknowledging that volunteers are committing less time. Organisations overwhelmingly (92 per cent) indicated that they involved volunteers in ongoing roles performed regularly (e.g., weekly, fortnightly). However, a large number of organisations engaged volunteers in episodic roles for specific events or activities that occur once or infrequently (63 per cent), or in microvolunteering roles (28 per cent). 80 per cent of organisations indicated their volunteers performed their roles in person at the organisation. 68 per cent of organisations had volunteers

performing their roles in the field/community, and 39 per cent of organisations involved their volunteers remotely over the internet.

- Organisations reported that the top three activities volunteers performed were board / committee work (57 per cent), accounting / finance / administration / management (54 per cent), and fundraising / sales / events (51 per cent).
- Demand for volunteers was high, with most respondents (83 per cent) reporting that their organisations need more volunteers immediately or in the near future. Of these organisations, most reported that they needed between 1 and 20 volunteers. Alarmingly, 11 per cent of organisations reported that they needed more than 101 volunteers in the short-term.
- 60 per cent of organisations reported that they expected to need more or significantly more volunteers in five years' time. Only 8 per cent of organisations reported that fewer volunteers would be necessary.
- These findings were consistent across the board in terms of State/Territory, area of operation, and the size of the organisation.

## Attracting and recruiting volunteers

- Word of mouth referrals (89 per cent) and personal approaches (69 per cent) were the most widely used methods for recruiting volunteers. Both were rated as highly effective by organisations.
- Recruitment via an organisation's own website was also prominently used (75 per cent) but was viewed as being less effective. Referrals from volunteering peak bodies and recruitment through corporate volunteering programs/initiatives were viewed as less effective for recruitment.
- Organisations indicated that they provided a broad range of support to their volunteers, with training (84 per cent), induction (84 per cent), and recognition activities/events (78 per cent) being the most common forms of support provided.
- In supporting volunteers more broadly, almost one in three respondents had either not heard of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement or did not observe them implemented at their organisation. However, 28 per cent of respondents indicated that their organisation's practices were completely or close to completely consistent with the National Standards.
- Organisations that reported greater difficulty recruiting volunteers highlighted the following as key reasons: finding volunteers with available time ( $n = 186$ )<sup>1</sup>, COVID-19 and vaccination status ( $n = 112$ ), difficulties finding people willing to commit ( $n = 94$ ), finding interested volunteers ( $n = 58$ ), and difficulties getting young people to volunteer ( $n = 55$ ).

- The struggle of finding people with available time was noted as a retention barrier ( $n = 89$ ), as was the topical barrier of COVID-19 and vaccination status ( $n = 80$ ). Difficulties finding people willing to commit ( $n = 94$ ) was also noted as a prominent retention barrier ( $n = 54$ ).

## The characteristics of volunteer engagement

- Just over half of the organisations surveyed (51 per cent) indicated they were using technology to manage their volunteers, with databases and social media the most widely used technology solutions. Technology was more widely adopted within the emergency services, health, animal welfare, and education sectors, and less widely adopted within the cultural, environmental, aged care, and sporting sectors.
- There were several indicators of good practice volunteer management with over 70 per cent of organisations offering reimbursement to their volunteers and approximately 70 per cent indicating some adoption of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, although this varied by sector with volunteer involving organisations in the sport, religious, and environment sectors being less aware of the National Standards.
- 30 per cent of organisations involved employee volunteers. A lack of suitable opportunities for employee volunteers was cited as the major reason for not involving this cohort by those who didn't. Employee volunteering is more common among organisations in the animal welfare, environmental, disability, and welfare sectors.
- Organisations suggested that whilst employee volunteers brought a range of valuable professional skills and expertise, there was also an associated rise in the standard of support expected by this cohort.
- Whilst a majority of organisations (80 per cent) indicated they involved a diverse volunteer workforce, barriers to being inclusive were reported. These included physical accessibility limitations, organisational culture, language barriers, difficulties in recruiting a diverse cohort of volunteers, and a lack of resources to support inclusivity.

## Trends in volunteer involving organisations

- Organisations were asked about a series of circumstances that might be affecting their organisations. They were presented with a set of 13 statements describing a positive phenomenon and 7 statements describing a negative phenomenon.
  - The top three positives reported by organisations (on a 5-point scale) were that their operations were inclusive and accessible (mean = 4.19), had effective governance (mean = 4.07), and that volunteers were consistently recognised by the organisation (mean = 4.06).

- There was broad agreement that recent events in Australia had put a financial strain on the organisations surveyed and, compounding recruitment and retention challenges, organisations highlighted that volunteers seemed to have less time to commit than in previous years.
- Organisations reported their top three negative challenges as recent events in Australia putting their operations under financial strain (mean = 3.80), volunteers having less time to commit (mean = 3.69) and their volunteering programs yet to recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (mean = 3.61).

## The future of volunteer involvement

- Organisations reported concerns about recruiting and retaining volunteers, supportive of indications that they would need to persistently continue their recruitment efforts now and into the future.
  - To allow for an informed assessment of the changing nature of volunteering over an extended period, respondents with at least three years' experience in their role were asked to consider the changes they had witnessed over time.
  - The most highly rated responses (on a 5-point scale) were to items indicating that their organisations were facing increasingly complex administration and regulatory requirements (mean = 3.62), their volunteers were unable to volunteer due to COVID-19 (mean = 3.56), overall volunteer numbers were declining (mean = 3.43), and their volunteering programs were no longer operating at full capacity (mean = 3.43).

# 1. Introduction

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The National Strategy for Volunteering project comes at a critical time. Environmental factors such as the changing nature of work, our ageing population, rising cost of living, and increasing digitisation all impact volunteering. These factors, and others, will have both positive and negative implications for volunteering. Despite the challenges facing volunteering, opportunities also exist to do things differently. Volunteers, organisations, and the Australian community have shown great resilience and adaptability during recent crises. To ensure that the volunteering ecosystem is well positioned to deal with emerging demand, Volunteering Australia is leading the development a National Strategy for Volunteering. This report forms part of the evidence-base for that strategy.

The key purpose of the Volunteering in Australia research is to ensure that the National Strategy for Volunteering is informed by contemporary data on volunteering in Australia. This research builds upon a solid body of research that reports on the extent of volunteering in Australia and the broad challenges facing volunteer involving organisations and the volunteer workforce, bringing these findings up to date and analysing how the issues facing volunteer involving organisations are changing over time.

This report addresses the following research questions:

1. Where are volunteers needed and how might this change in the future?
2. How are organisations recruiting and engaging volunteers and what are the challenges and barriers to engaging volunteers?
3. How have volunteer engagement and management practices changed over time, and what have proven to be effective practices for different sectors?
4. How have volunteer preferences for participation changed and how are organisations responding?

In investigating each of these questions, the research team considered variations between different sectors, different geographies, and different types of organisations. Based on the organisation survey, our analyses did not identify any differences by State/Territory, nor by areas of operation (capital city, other city, regional town, rural area, remote area, outside Australia). Differences between States and Territories were very small and thus, overall, it appears that the location of operation is not a key determining factor in the success or struggles of a volunteer involving organisation.

In most cases, where statistically significant differences were observed, they reflected differences that were intuitive. For example, differences between organisations of different sizes were such that larger organisations: reported higher demand for volunteers than smaller ones (both immediately and in five years); had better access to technology;

were more likely to involve employee volunteers; were more likely to have a diversity and inclusion strategy (though the size-strategy relationship is not simple); and were more likely to evaluate their volunteering programs. The research team also examined the impact of COVID-19 on volunteer involving organisations.

## 2. Methodology and Data Sources

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This report uses data from a range of sources. This report draws on four main data sources which are described in this section.

Unless otherwise stated, the data presented in the findings sections below is taken from the organisation survey and accompanying focus groups.

### 2.1 Organisation survey

To better understand the characteristics of volunteer involving organisations and key challenges facing these organisations and their volunteer workforce, the research team surveyed volunteer involving organisations across Australia.

The survey was developed on the online questionnaire platform Qualtrics, which can be accessed on a range of devices to facilitate maximum participation. Information about the survey and a link to the survey was distributed by direct emails to contacts, social media posts, through sector relevant newsletters and via the VIKTOR/VIRA database courtesy of Volunteering Western Australia. The survey opened on 13 May and closed on 22 June 2022.

Overall, 2,575 individuals commenced the organisation survey, however, many of these did not progress beyond the demographic questions, which is very common in questionnaire-based research with an open link. We received 1,218 responses from people who reached the end of the questionnaire and retained a further 133 responses from people who had responded to at least one question after the demographic questions. Several of the responses, despite being marked as complete by the system, were largely blank responses and were removed ( $n = 18$ ). This left a total of **1,345 usable responses**.

The participants of the study were asked to represent the views of their organisations. While we did observe some examples of multiple responses from the same organisation, overall, the survey attracted responses from **1,209 unique organisations**.

Based on total usable responses, ( $n = 1,345$ ), Figures 1 and 2 show the sizes of volunteer involving organisations, both in terms of the number of volunteers (Figure 1) and number of paid staff (Figure 2). As Figure 1 shows, respondents included roughly equal representation of small, medium, and large organisations. Numbers of paid staff were generally lower than the number of volunteers, however, organisations with more volunteers tended to have a greater number of paid staff (Spearman's<sup>2</sup>  $p = .468$ ,  $p < .001$ ), and thus both counts are reasonable approximations for the sizes of the organisations.

28 per cent of respondents reported that their organisation engaged no paid staff. While this indicates that these volunteer-run organisations were reached in the promotion of

the survey, official data from the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission suggests that 51 per cent of charities in Australia engage no paid staff (Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission 2022). While the population is slightly different, including only charities and excluding other volunteer involving organisations such as government agencies or unincorporated organisations, it does provide an official data source against which to benchmark findings on the size of organisations surveyed.

Figure 1 Number of volunteers of respondent organisations

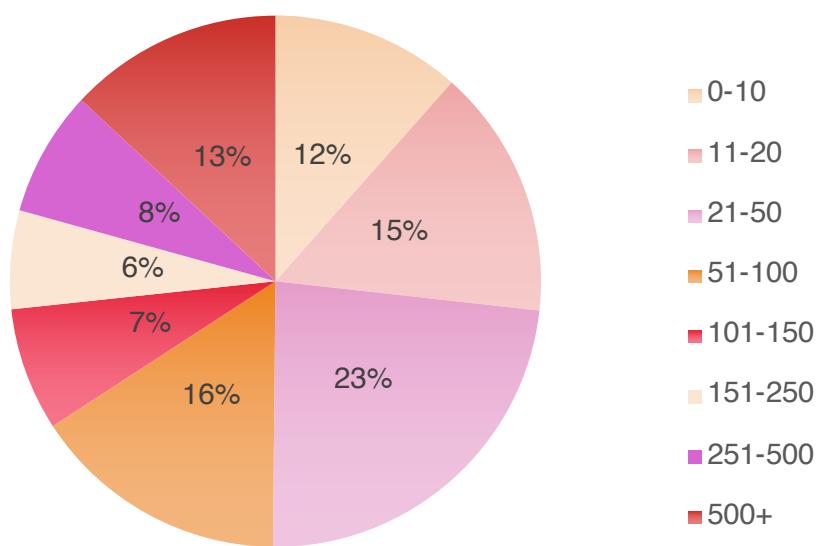


Figure 2 Number of paid staff of respondent organisations

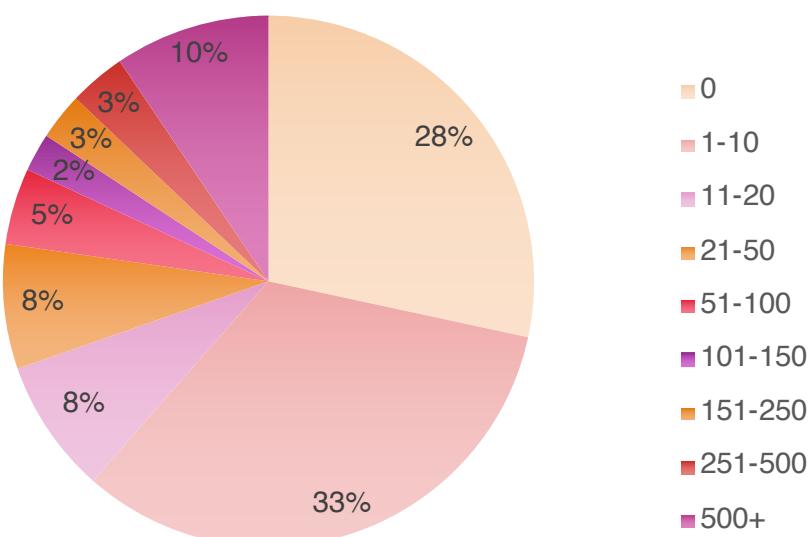
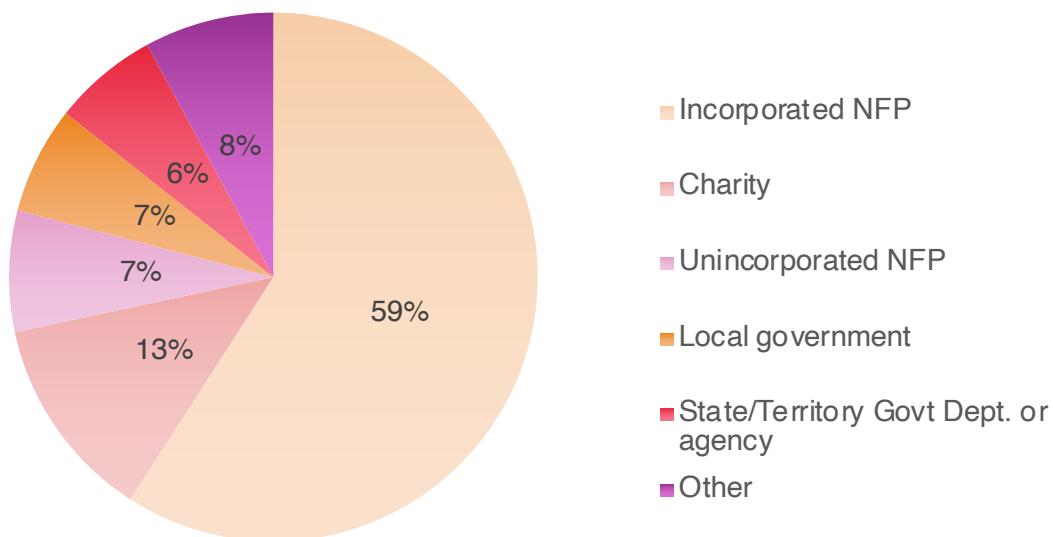


Figure 3 shows respondents by organisation type. The largest category was incorporated not-for-profit (59 per cent), followed by charity (13 per cent). The ‘other’ category includes free text responses (4.3 per cent), informal/grassroots/community groups (1.9 per cent), business/for-profit organisations (1.3 per cent), and Federal government departments or agencies (0.4 per cent).

Figure 3 Respondents by organisation type



Participation across States and Territories varied, likely as an outcome of how the survey was distributed (Figure 4). Although respondents could select multiple jurisdictions, 84 per cent (1,131 respondents) indicated that their operations were exclusively in one State or Territory (a breakdown of these responses is shown in Figure 5). Of those that operated in multiple jurisdictions, 121 respondents operated in more than one State and/or Territory, 85 respondents indicated they were national organisations, five respondents did not provide a response, two reported their operations were outside of Australia, and one reported that their operations were undertaken exclusively in “other territory in Australia”.

Figure 4 Proportion of surveyed organisations by State/Territory

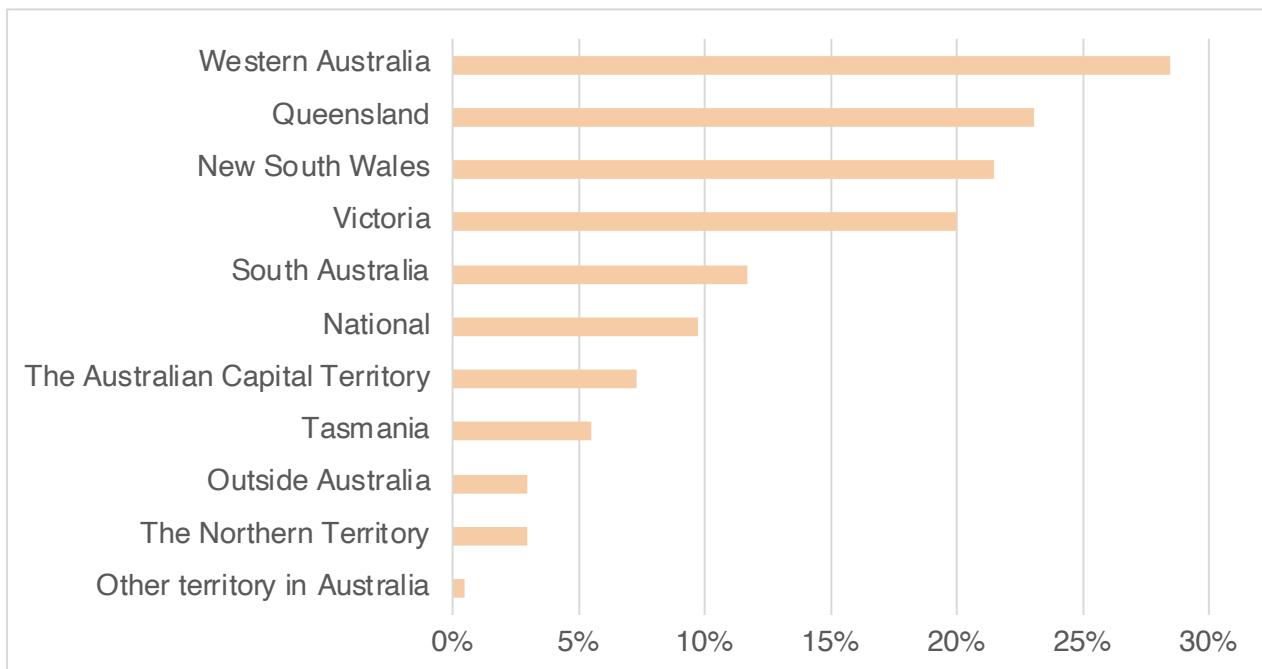
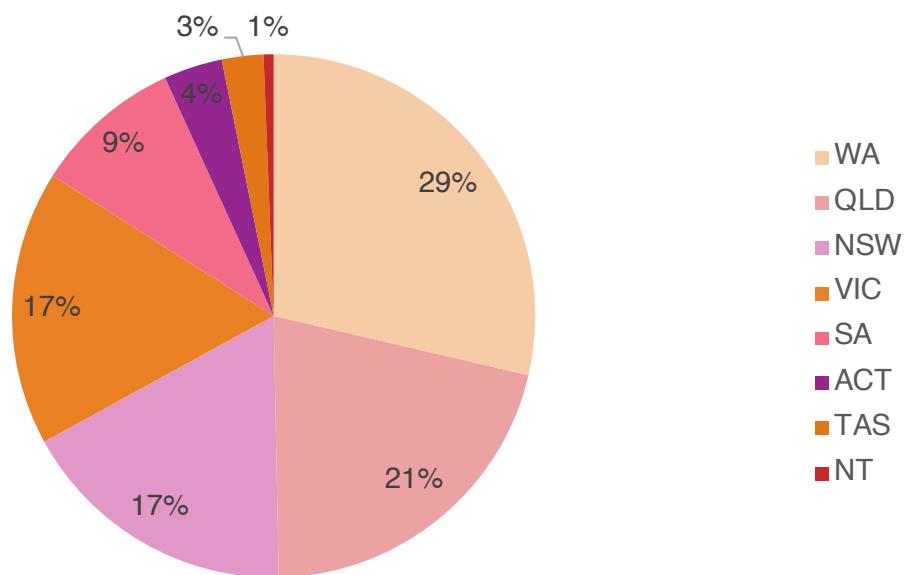


Figure 5 States and Territories of operations (excluding those operating in multiple States/Territories)



Respondents were asked what area they operated in by geographic classification. Respondents could select multiple options, though 62 per cent indicated that they operated in a single area. Of those that indicated they operated in a single area ( $n = 828$ ,

62 per cent of the sample), 51 per cent operated within a capital city, 26 per cent in a regional town, and 9 per cent in a rural area. 38 per cent indicated that they operated in multiple areas.

Figure 6 shows the core organisational service focus areas of respondents.

Organisations separately indicated the groups they aimed to assist as shown in Figure 7. As organisations could identify multiple responses to these two questions the numbers in these figures do not sum to 100 per cent.

Figure 6 Core foci of organisations

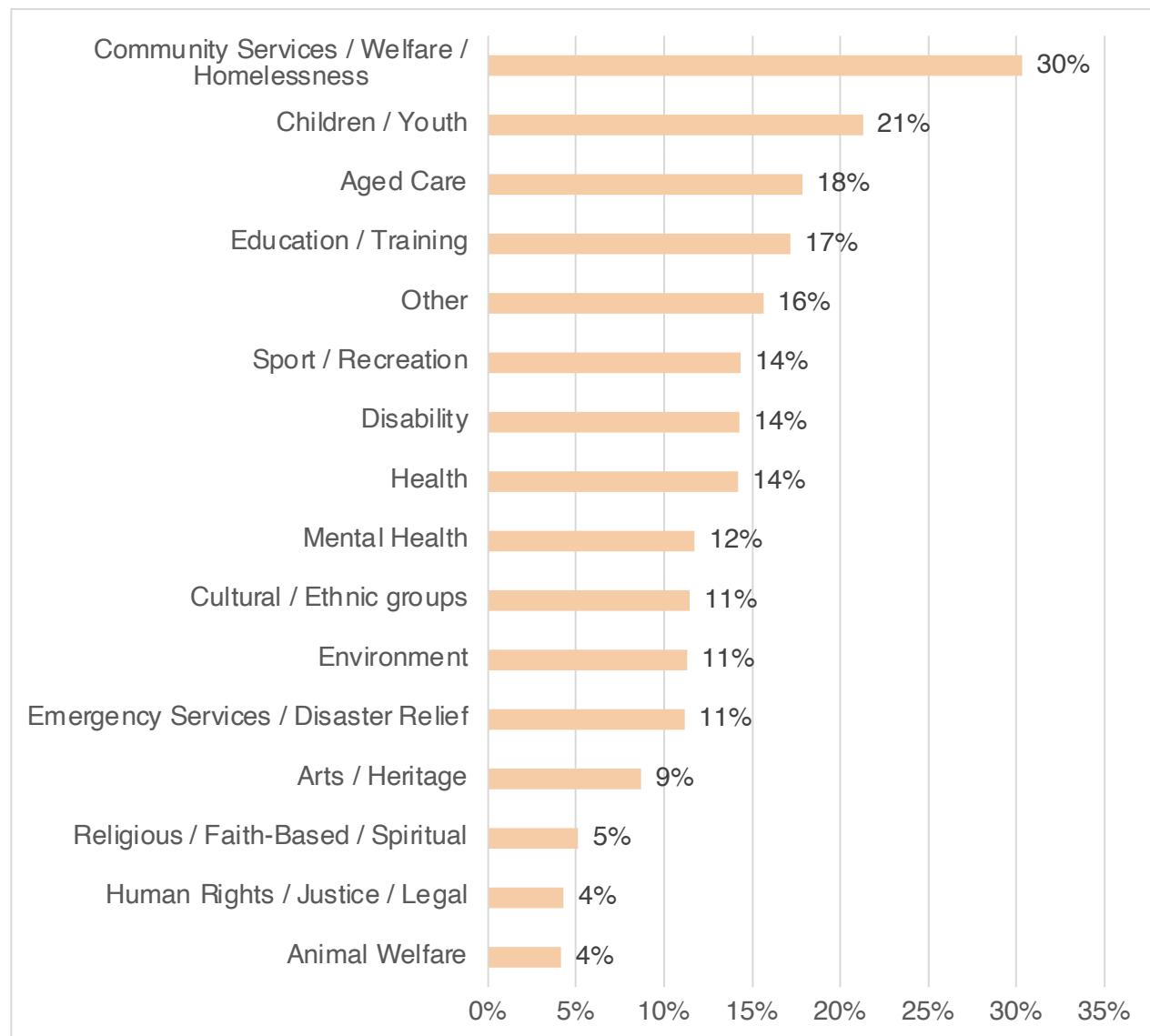
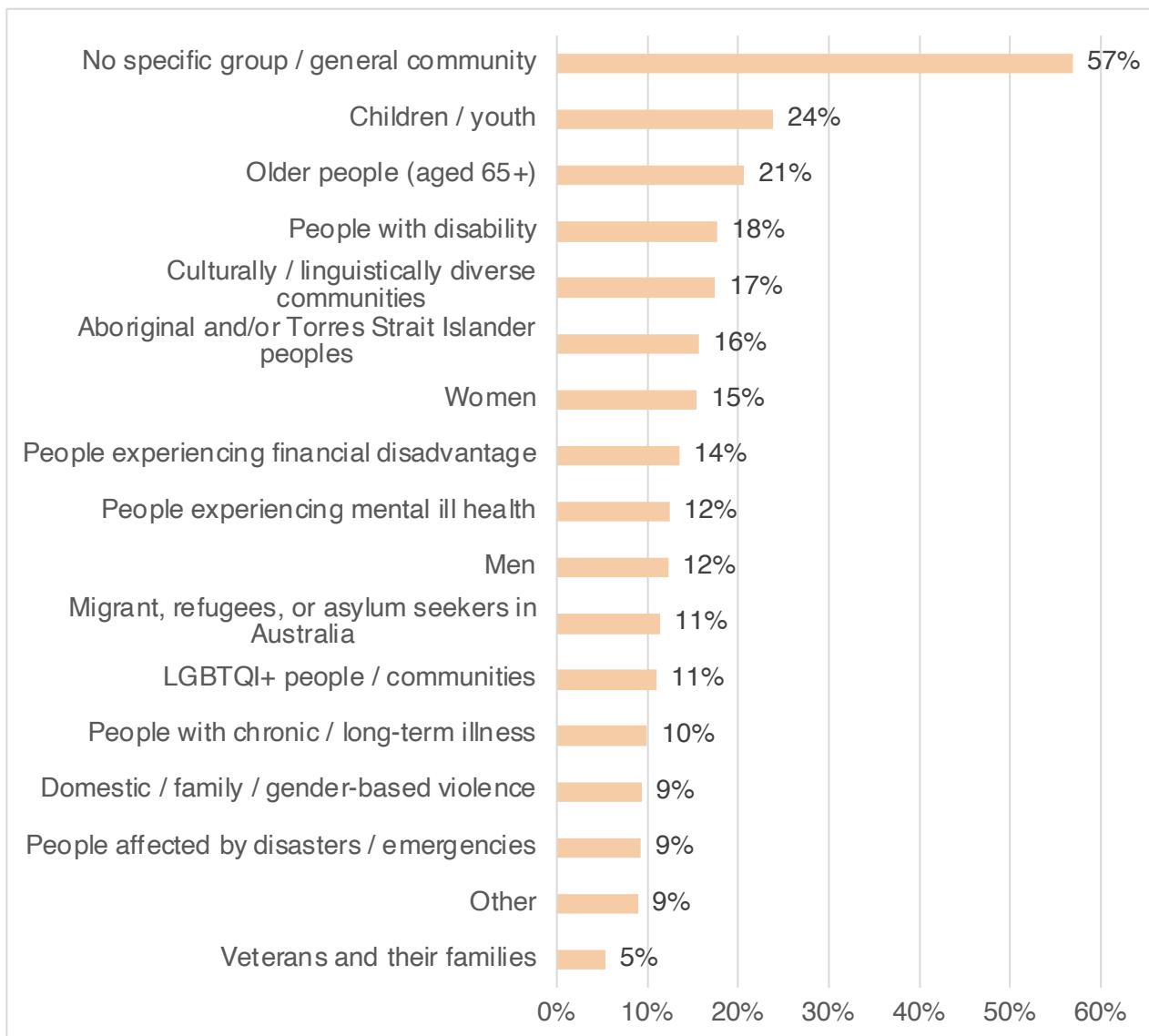


Figure 7 Groups that organisations aim to assist



The survey was designed to provide data to address the key research questions of the study. To that end, frequency and correlation analysis was used to identify key characteristics and trends.

**We do not report comparisons between states, areas of operation, nor size.** The data are available to those wishing to investigate these comparisons; however, **our investigations did not identify any differences on the basis of these variables**, other than intuitive differences based on organisational size (reported on page 12).

The organisation survey collected data on many subjects from volunteer involving organisations. As such, some analysis was beyond the scope of this report, and could be pursued in future research. Possible further analysis includes analysis of the costs of volunteering programs or analysis of volunteer engagement, challenges, and drivers of change in a specific State or Territory.

## 2.2 Focus groups

To supplement the survey data, two focus groups were conducted to explore organisational issues in greater depth. The focus group questions were designed in collaboration with Volunteering Australia and focused on: understanding organisations' need for more and different volunteers; the costs of volunteering programs; the impacts of COVID-19; the future of volunteering and drivers of change; and challenges associated with being inclusive. Focus group participants were recruited from a variety of sources, including survey respondents and recommendations from Volunteering Australia's National Volunteering Research Network. Recruitment sought to include a diverse range of volunteer involving organisations across Australia. The focus groups were held online using Microsoft Teams at 5.30pm AWST to enable participants from across Australia's time zones to join the discussion. The evening slot was chosen as many volunteer program managers and coordinators are volunteers themselves and working in other roles during office hours.

Focus Group 1 had eight participants and Focus Group 2 had 10 participants. The participants were recruited from Queensland, New South Wales, South Australia, Victoria, and Western Australia and represented the following interests: corporate volunteering, cultural organisations, disability organisations, grassroots associations, healthcare, local government, refugee and multicultural organisations, sporting clubs, and youth services.

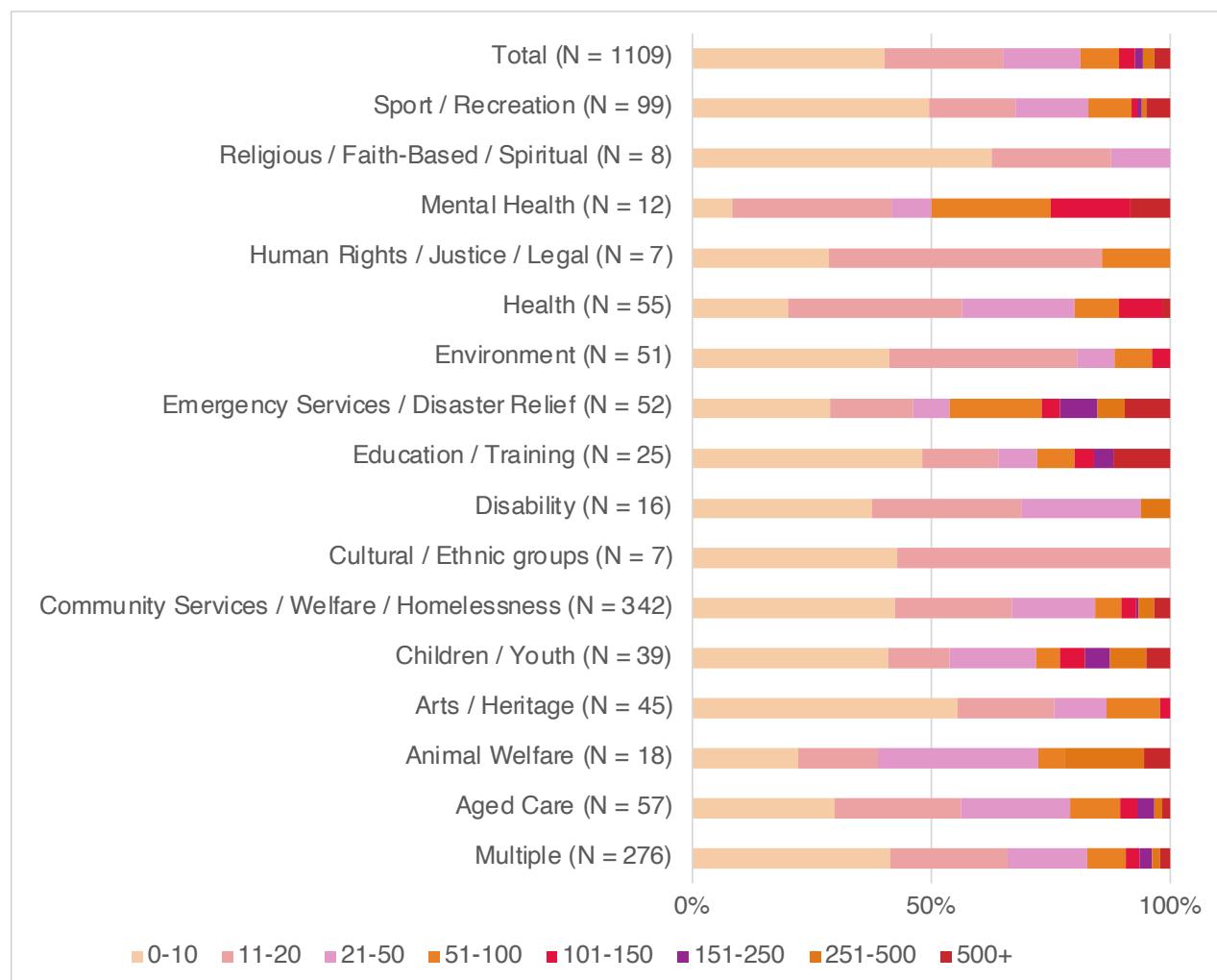
The focus groups were recorded and transcribed for analysis using Microsoft Teams' transcription function and then checked for accuracy by a research assistant. The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2014). The transcripts were read and re-read by the research team to allow themes to emerge from the data.

### 3. Recruitment Needs of Volunteer Involving Organisations

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

Based on this background, the organisation survey used in this research included questions on current demand for volunteers and future recruitment needs. These are compared across sectors and geographies. To better understand the current challenges facing volunteer involving organisations, respondents were asked to report on the extent to which their organisation would need volunteers both in the short/immediate term, and over the longer term. More than 80 per cent of respondents indicated that their organisation needed more volunteers in the immediate term.

Figure 8 Numbers of volunteers that organisations require right now or very soon, by sector



### **3.1 How many more volunteers are required?**

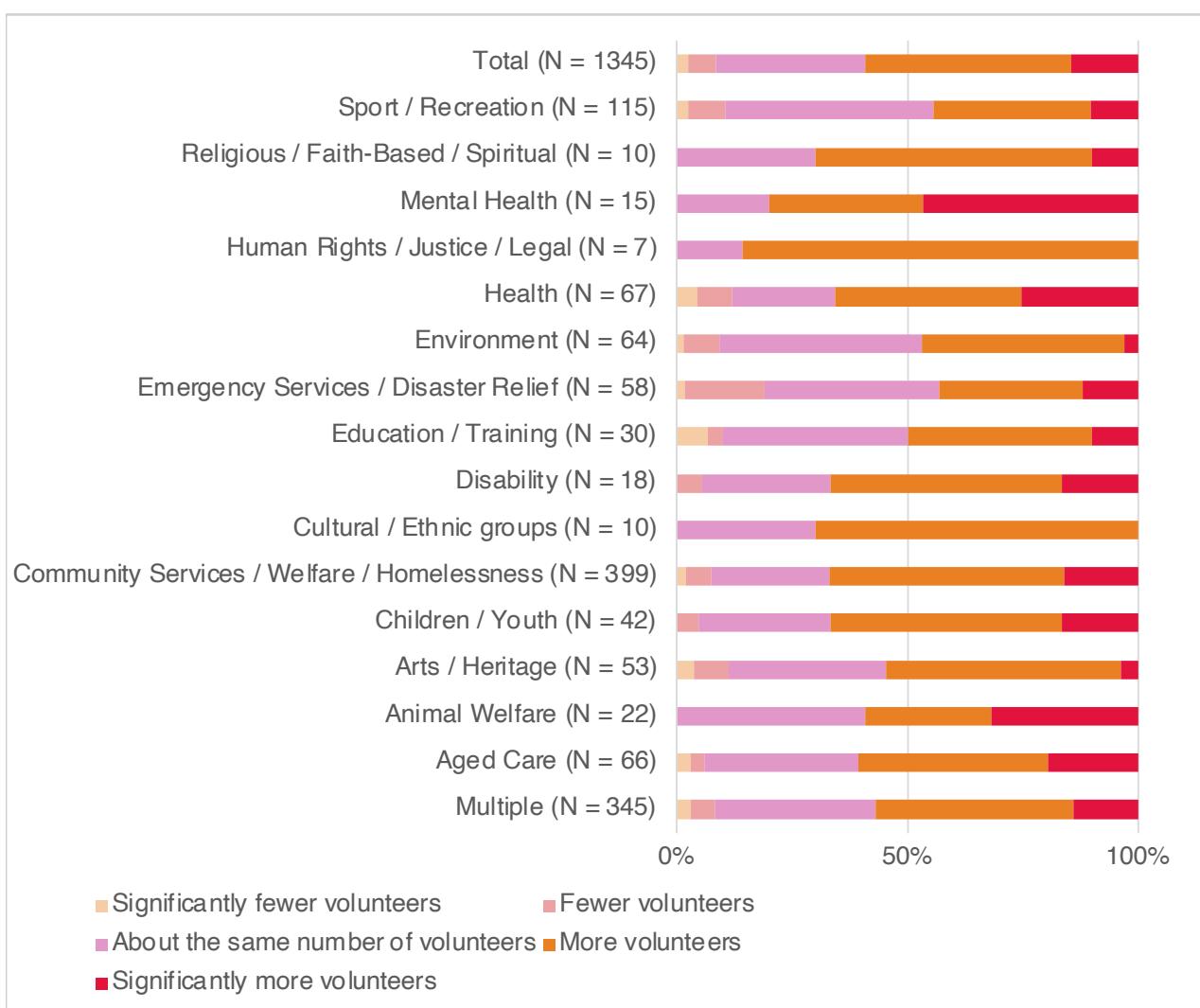
Of those who required more volunteers in the immediate term, most (65 per cent) required between 1-20 more volunteers (Figure 8). However, 11 per cent of organisations reported that they needed more than 101 volunteers in the short term.

There was considerable variability in perceived short term volunteer demand by sector ( $\chi^2 (105) = 166.8, p < .001$ ). It is important to consider, however, that demand for volunteers is constrained by the size of the organisation. For example, a very small organisation is unlikely to report that they need 500 volunteers immediately, and a very large organisation is unlikely to report needing only 10 volunteers. Thus, some of the sector differences observed in demand may reflect differences between sectors in the sizes of typical organisations. Nonetheless, in terms of ‘raw numbers of volunteers’, demand seems to be greatest among organisations in the Mental Health, Emergency Services / Disaster Relief, Health, Education / Training, and Animal Welfare sectors. The demand for volunteers, including the types of roles and degree of engagement required of volunteers in these sectors, requires further exploration.

### **3.2 Recruitment needs over the next 5 years**

Respondents were asked to think about their need for volunteers five years into the future. 60 per cent of respondents reported that they expected to need more or significantly more volunteers in that timeframe (Figure 9). About one-third of respondents felt that roughly the same number of volunteers would suffice. Only 8 per cent felt that fewer volunteers would be necessary. There was, again, variability across sectors ( $\chi^2 (60) = 101.8, p < .001$ ) with greatest anticipated demand reported by the Mental Health, Health, and Animal Welfare sectors.

Figure 9 Numbers of volunteers that organisations expect to need in five years, by sector



## 4. Attracting and Recruiting Volunteers

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The survey investigated recruitment and retention approaches and their perceived effectiveness.

Figure 10 shows the use rates (upper bars) and perceived effectiveness (lower bars) of different recruitment methods used by volunteer involving organisations. Respondents were asked to rate effectiveness on a five-point scale: 1 = not effective at all, 2 = slightly effective, 3 = somewhat effective, 4 = quite effective, 5 = very effective. Participants were only invited to report on the effectiveness of the channels that they indicated that their organisation used. Thus, the effectiveness rates may be biased positively because organisations are likely to only use methods that are at least somewhat effective.

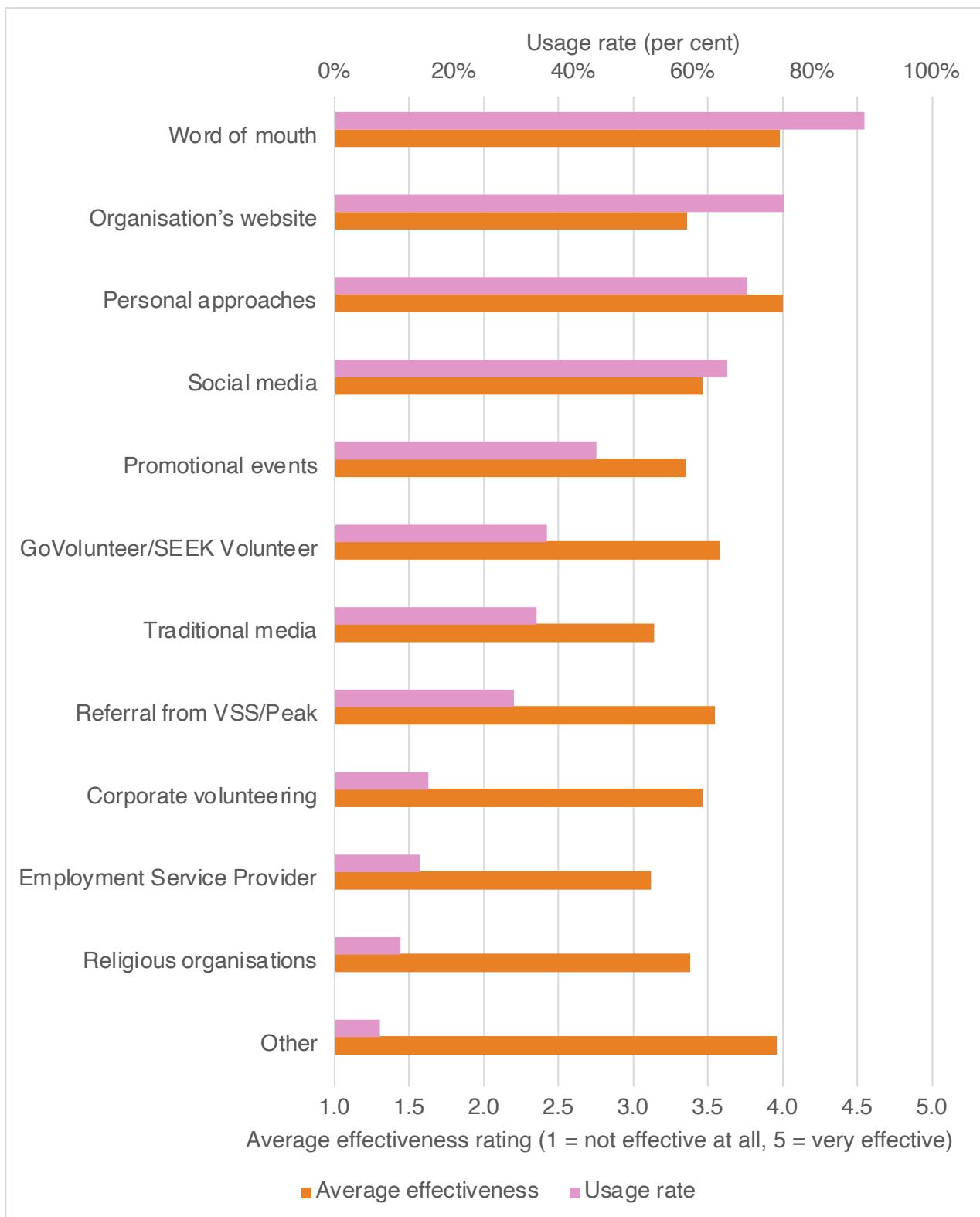
The results show that there was a clear preference for recruiting directly through word of mouth and personal approaches, with both methods heavily relied upon and viewed as being effective. Organisational media such as the organisation's website and social media were widely recognised as viable recruitment channels, with social media being regarded as the more effective of the two. SEEK Volunteer and GoVolunteer were used for recruitment by about 35 per cent of organisations, who tended to regard the method as moderately effective. Traditional media and referrals from Employment Service Providers were regarded as relatively less effective than other methods. Organisations that selected 'Other' described a wide range of methods (for example, recruiting from membership bases), which were generally regarded as effective.

Most organisations reported using ICT to support their recruitment efforts, either through websites (75 per cent), social media (66 per cent), or recruitment platforms (36 per cent). Focus group respondents also expressed positive aspects of contemporary technology in volunteer recruitment. One participant said:

*"We've been able to expand our reach in promoting the volunteering opportunities available in our organisation by including links on our social media and website for people to easily sign up and hear about what's going on."*

Some significant differences in preferred recruitment methods were found across sectors. Traditional media remained popular, with the Emergency Services / Disaster Relief sector favouring this method more strongly than other sectors. In contrast, Cultural services relied heavily upon word of mouth for recruitment. A full table of recruitment methods rated by sector is included in the appendix (Table 1).

Figure 10 Effectiveness of volunteer recruitment methods



## 5. Characteristics of Volunteer Engagement

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A review of literature on volunteer involvement reveals a number of key challenges to engaging and retaining volunteers. Meeting the expectations of volunteers and engaging volunteers in more flexible, temporary roles have been noted as ongoing challenges in the recent literature (eg. Hoye and Kappelides 2021; Dunn et al. 2022). Further, advancing diversity and inclusion remains a complex and challenging issue for volunteer involving organisations (Jeanes et al. 2018). Ongoing changes, such as the recent increase in remote volunteering, also raise questions about the uptake of technology in volunteer involving organisations.

To explore the volunteer engagement practices of organisations, the organisation survey included questions on how volunteers undertake their roles, the use of technology in volunteer management, adoption of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, the supports provided to volunteers, perceptions of the contributions of volunteers, and the involvement of employee volunteers, and perceptions of diversity and inclusion practices.

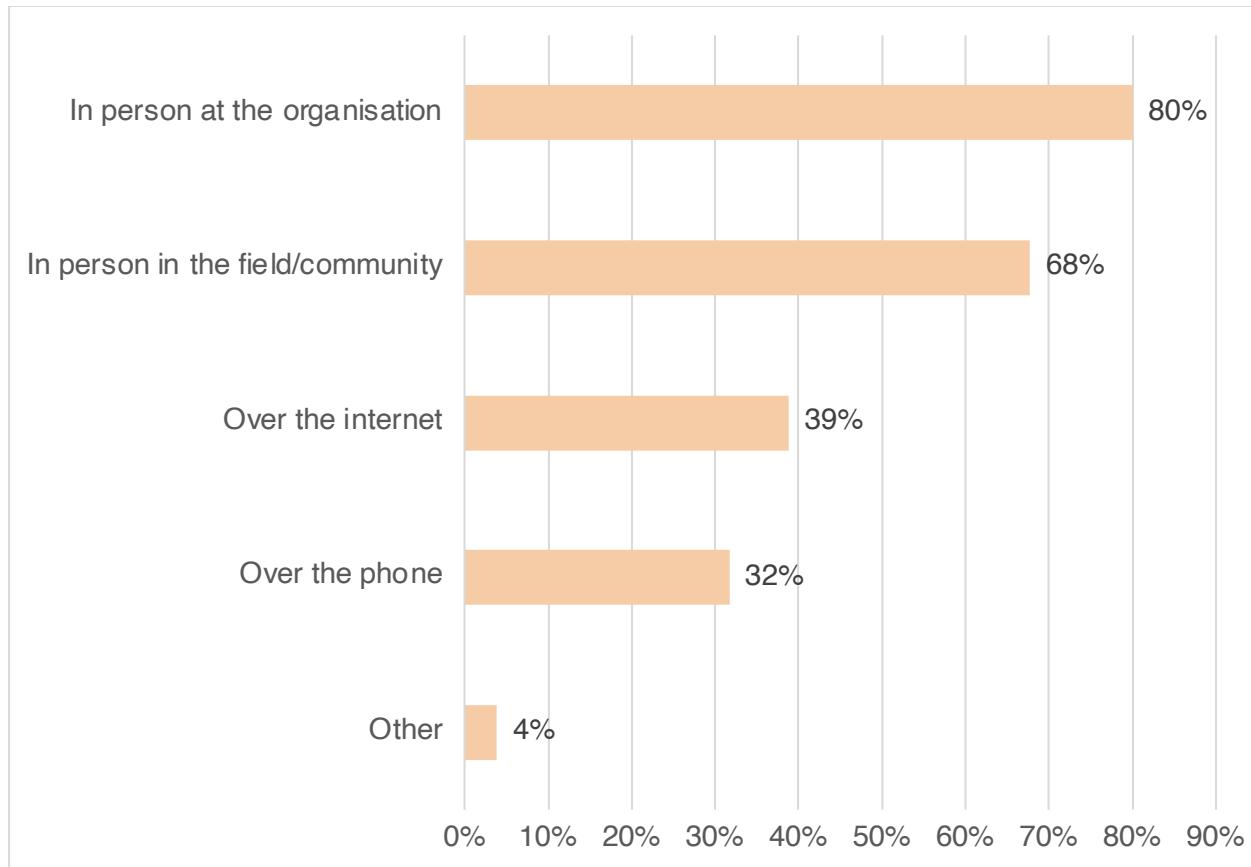
### 5.1 How do volunteers undertake their roles?

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the proportion of volunteers undertaking their roles remotely – either over the internet or over the phone – increased considerably (ABS 2020; ABS 2021). However, prior data collection did not examine the number of organisations that adapted to offer remote volunteering opportunities. In the organisation survey, respondents were asked how their volunteers undertook their roles. As shown in Figure 11, 80 per cent of volunteers undertook their volunteering in person, either at the organisation or in the community, 39 per cent engage in volunteering over the internet, and 32 per cent engage via telephone (multiple responses were permitted meaning that some volunteers may engage in multiple modes of engagement).

Focus group data indicated that COVID-19 facilitated a greater uptake of technology for some volunteer involving organisations. According to one participant:

*“One of the impacts from COVID is [moving] to offer more virtual opportunities. So definitely we’ve invested in some new initiatives there. I think COVID will be an issue for some time, but it has really opened up the doors with hybrid working and technology teams, Microsoft for example, or enabling more virtual volunteering.”*

Figure 11 How volunteers undertake their volunteering



Organisations reported that the top three activities volunteers performed were: board / committee work (57 per cent), accounting / finance / administration / management (54 per cent) and fundraising / sales / events (51 per cent). However, organisations also reported a broad variety of other roles. Figure 12 shows the proportion of respondents that reported each role type. Figure 13 shows sources of funding for the organisation.

Figure 12 Type of activities undertaken by volunteers in the organisation

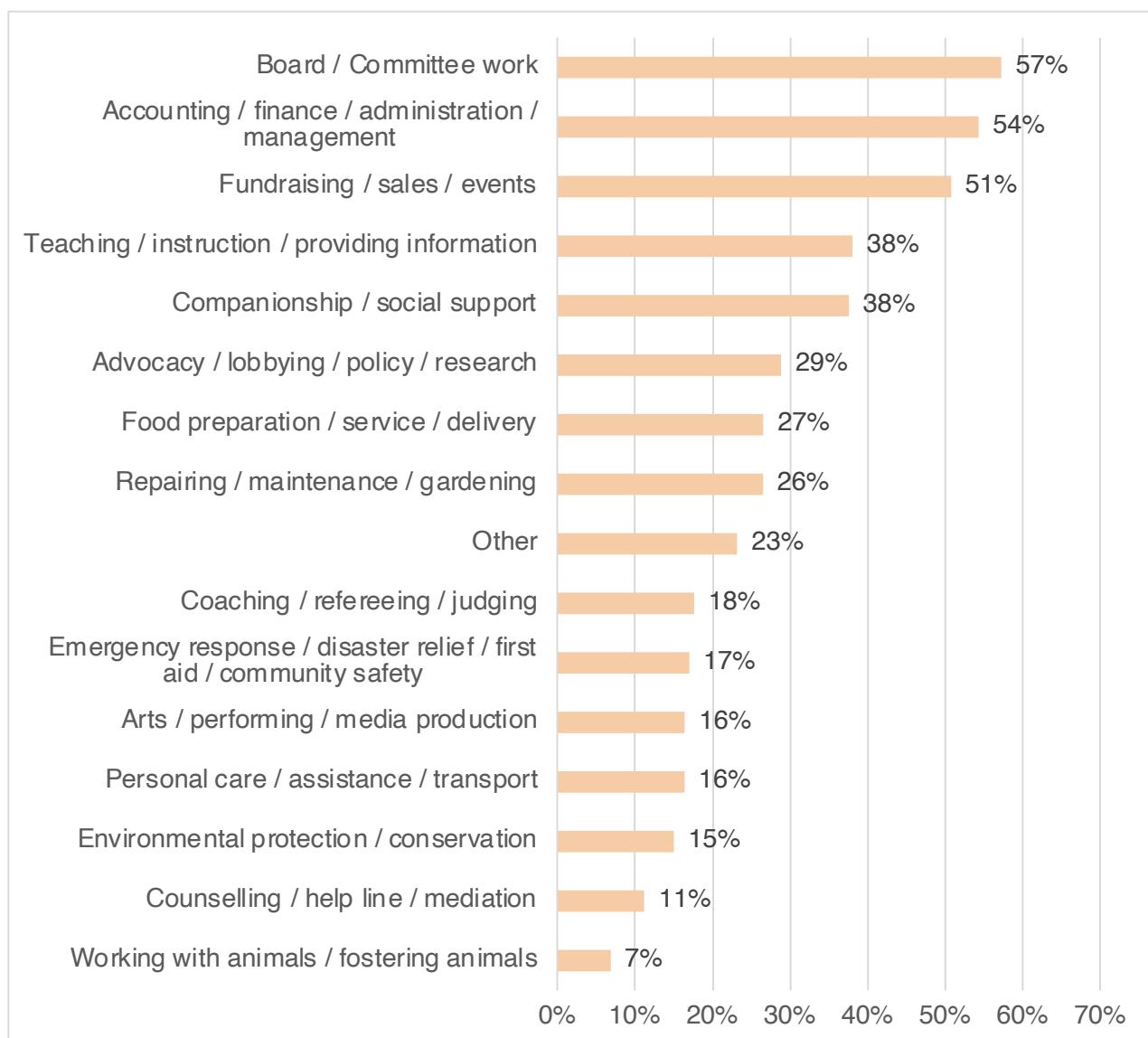
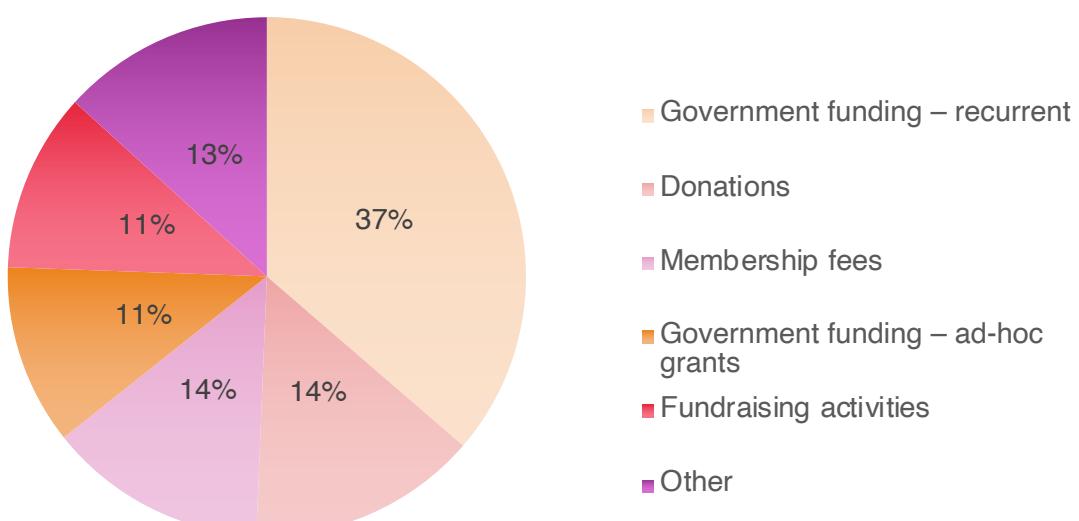
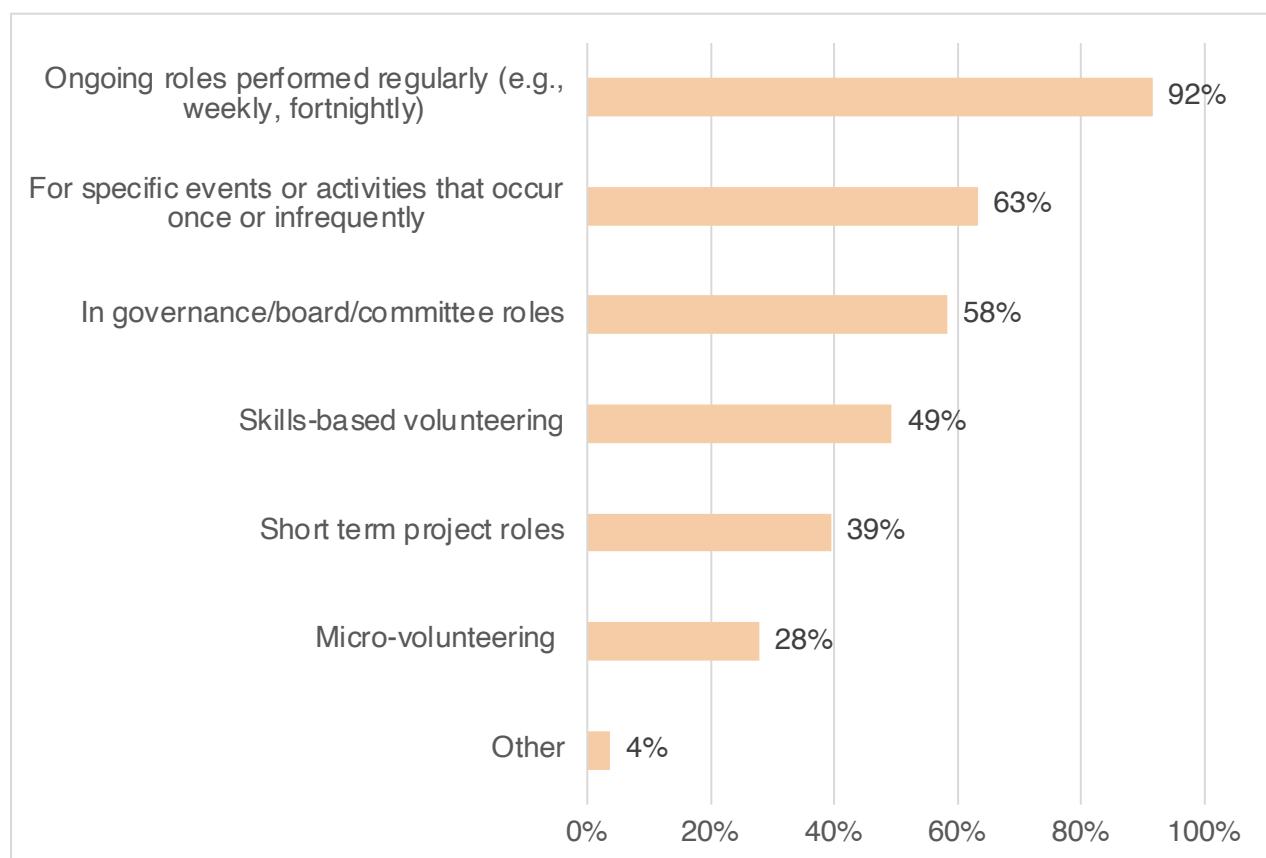


Figure 13 Sources of funding for the organisation



Organisations overwhelmingly (92 per cent) indicated that they continue to involve volunteers in ongoing roles performed regularly (e.g., weekly, fortnightly). However, short-term or episodic roles were also reported at high numbers. The next most prominent response was indicative of episodic volunteering for specific events or activities that occur once or infrequently (63 per cent), and microvolunteering was used as a mode of engagement for approximately one quarter of the organisations surveyed (28 per cent). These results are shown in Figure 14.

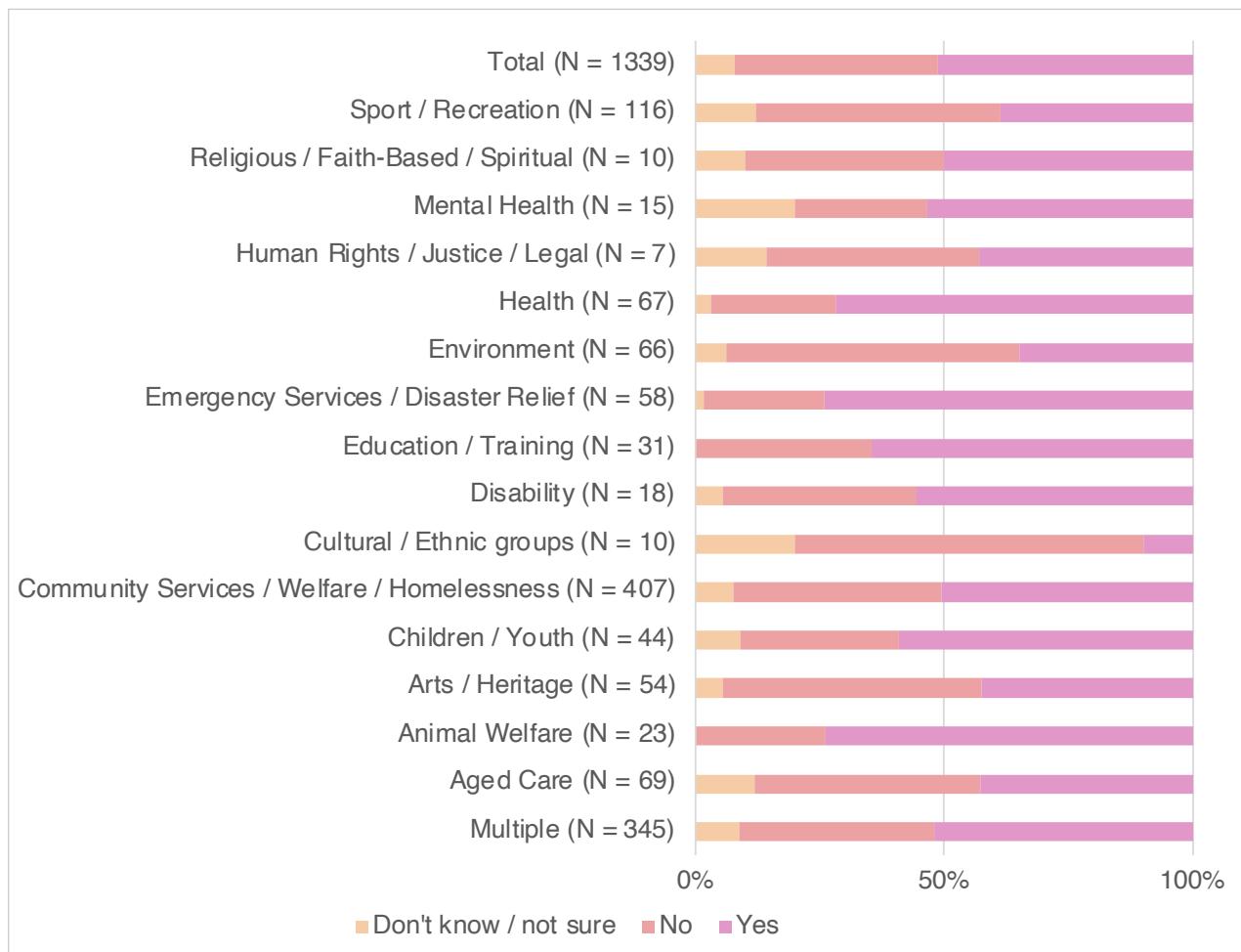
Figure 14 Manner in which volunteers are involved with the organisation



## 5.2 Technology and volunteer management

Just over half (51 per cent) of organisations indicated that they use technology to manage their volunteers, 41 per cent indicated that they did not use technology, and the remaining 8 per cent of respondents were unsure. As shown in Figure 15, there was considerable variability in the adoption of technology to manage volunteers by sector ( $\chi^2 (30) = 69.5$ ,  $p < .001$ ), with technology being more widely adopted within the Emergency Services / Disaster Relief, Health, Animal Welfare, and Education / Training sectors, and less widely adopted by Cultural / Ethnic groups, Environment, Aged Care, and Sport / Recreation organisations.

Figure 15 Usage rates of technology to manage volunteers by sector



An open-ended survey question probed organisations on the technology solutions they used to manage volunteers. Coding of this data indicated that databases ( $n = 132$ ), social media ( $n = 130$ ), Better Impact software ( $n = 102$ ) and applications (various) ( $n = 71$ ) were the most prevalent solutions used. The focus groups also probed about technology use and the responses were mostly of a positive nature as the following participant quote suggests:

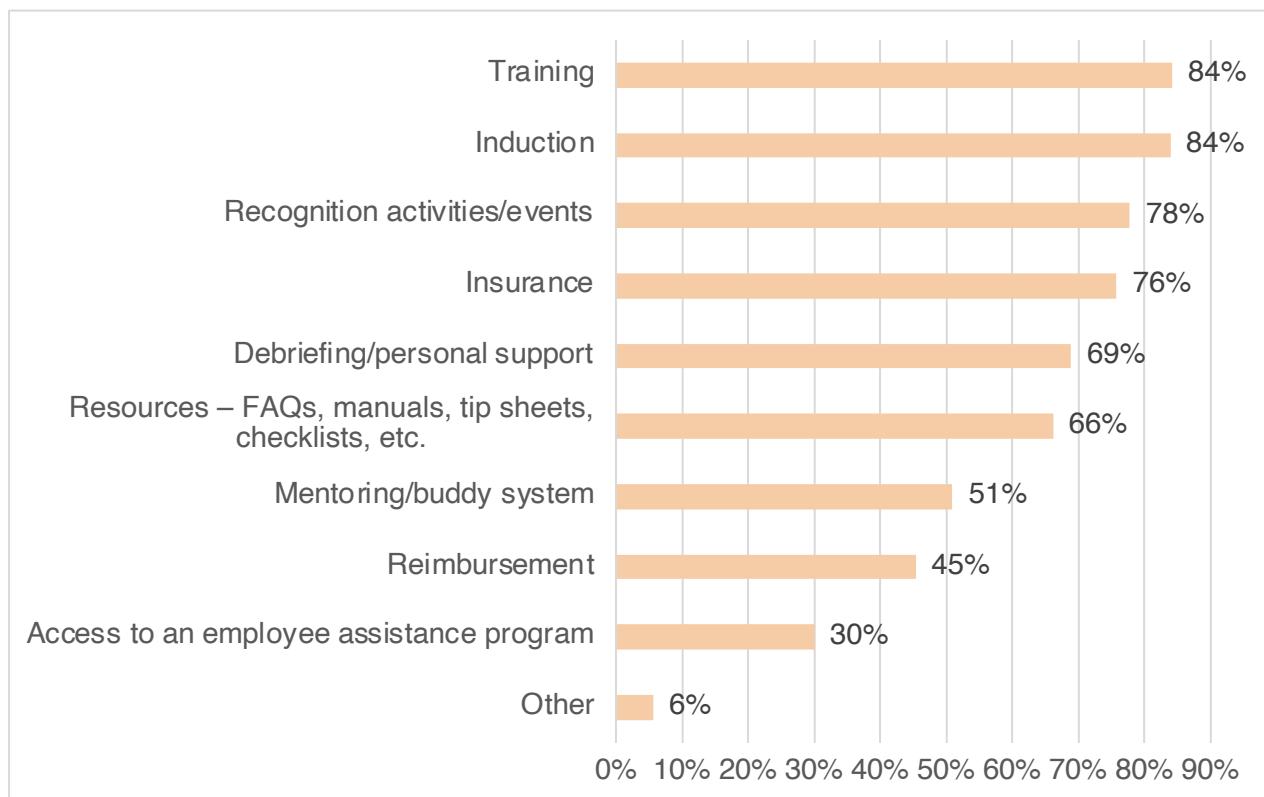
*"I'm going to say one of the things that [sic] that's improved greatly over especially in the last 5-10 years since I've been in Australia is the way we record our volunteers and the databases we have behind that. So to help recruitment and things..."*

### 5.3 Volunteer support and adoption of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Figure 16 shows the different types of support that organisations provided to their volunteers. Respondents were able to select multiple options, hence the sum is greater than 100 per cent. Training and induction were very commonly provided, as was recognition/events. The provision of support programs (debriefings, mentoring,

and access to employee assistance programs) was provided at varying levels. Alarmingly, while insurance was provided by a majority of organisations, almost one in four organisations (24 per cent) reported that they did not provide insurance to their volunteers.

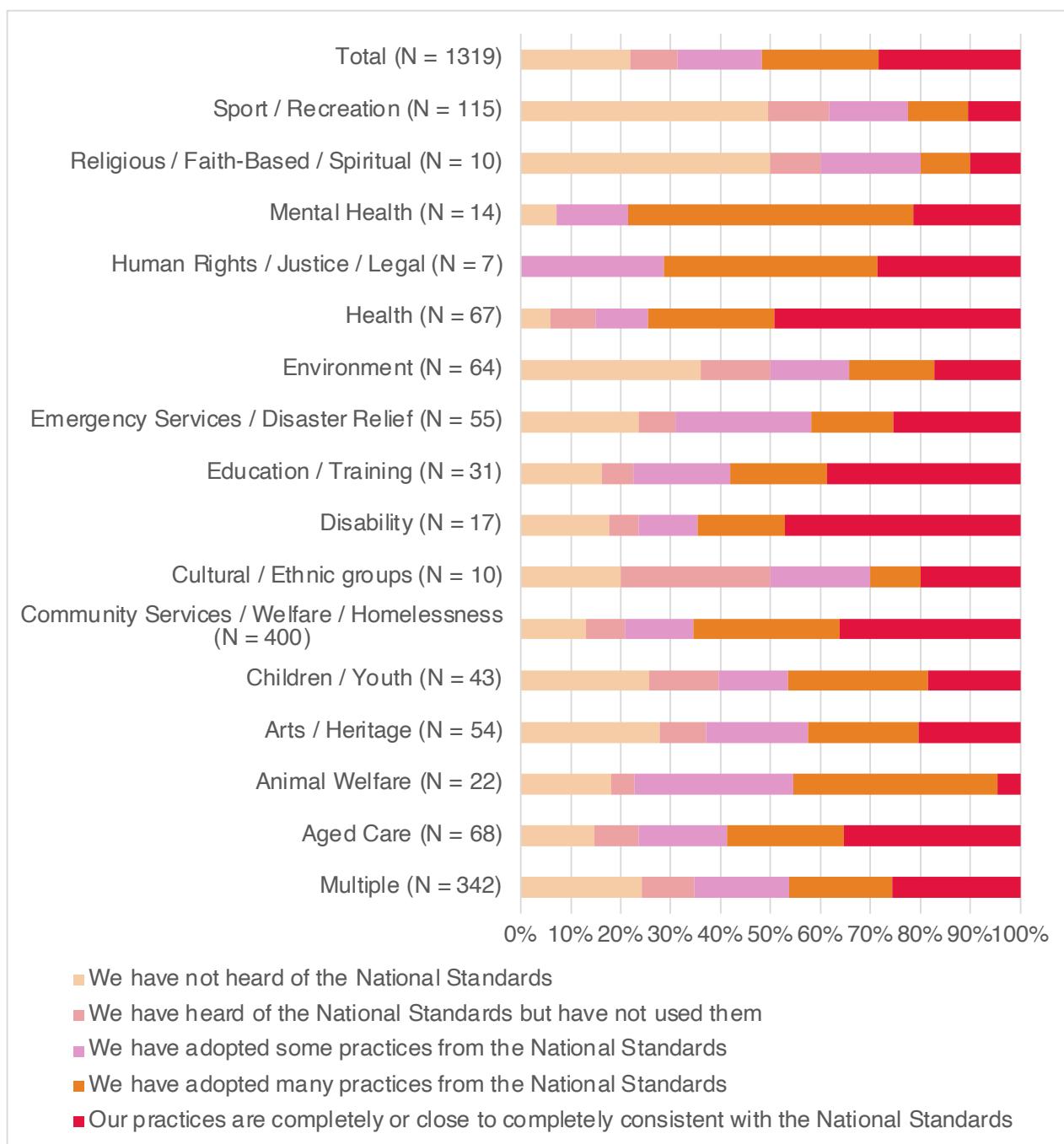
Figure 16 Support provided to volunteers by organisations



When asked directly, 71 per cent of organisations reported that they provide reimbursement to volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses, whereas 25 per cent reported that their organisation does not. The remaining 4 per cent indicated that they were unsure.

Organisations were asked to indicate the extent to which they were aware of and adopted the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. Figure 17 shows the pattern of responses, broken down by sector. Nearly 70 per cent of organisations reported adopting the National Standards to some extent. However, there was considerable variability by sector ( $\chi^2 (60) = 183.2, p < .001$ ), with organisations in the Sport / Recreation, Religious / Faith-Based / Spiritual, and Environment sectors being less aware of the National Standards. By contrast, organisations from the Health, Disability, Education / Training, Community Services / Welfare / Homelessness, and Aged Care sectors were more likely to have adopted the National Standards.

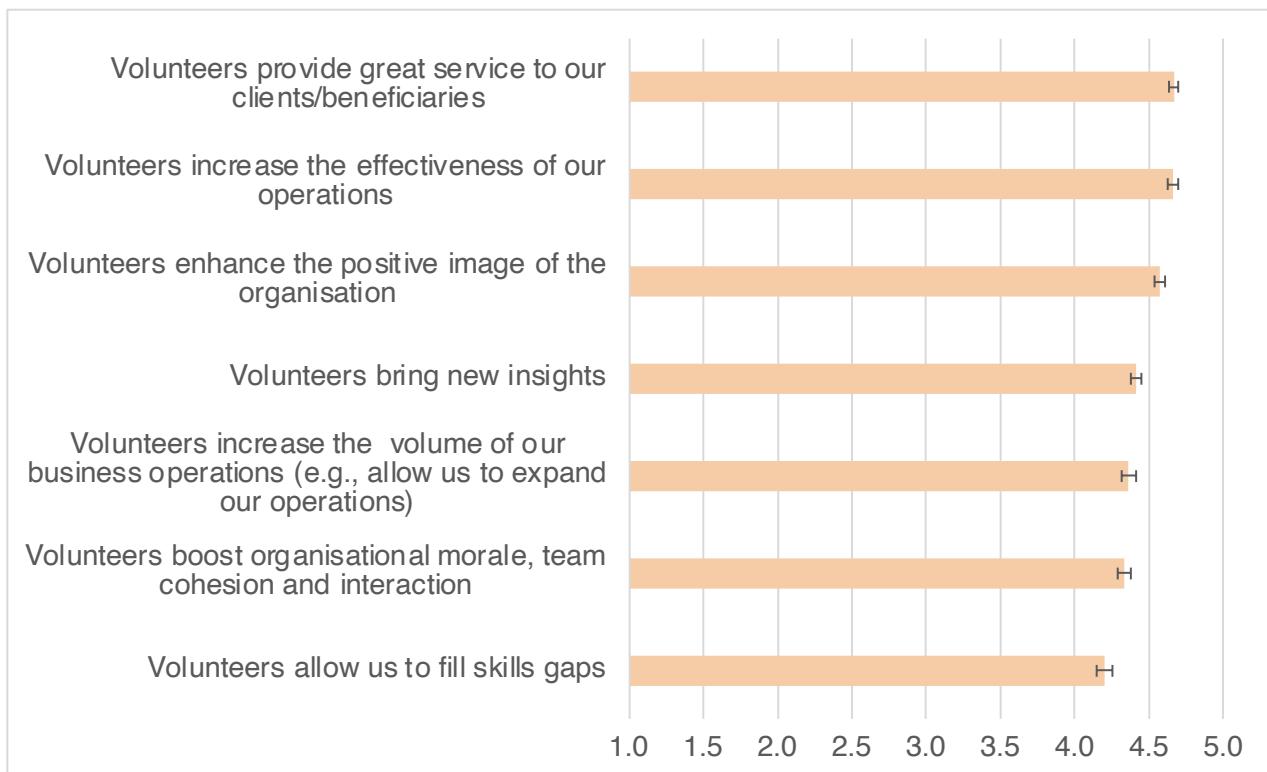
Figure 17 Adoption of National Standards for Volunteer Involvement by sector



## 5.4 The contributions of volunteers

Overall, nearly all respondents reported that their volunteers contributed very positively to their organisations. Figure 18 shows the average response rates to seven statements that describe the contributions of volunteers, with respondents rating each statement on a scale from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Respondents indicated that the most significant benefits of engaging volunteers were the service they offer to clients and beneficiaries and their impact on the effectiveness of operations. By comparison, while still supported overall, respondents were less likely to agree that volunteers allow their organisation to fill skills gaps.

Figure 18 How organisations rate the contributions of volunteers



Error bars are 95 per cent confidence intervals.

Scale 1-5 (1 = Strongly disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neither agree nor disagree, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly agree)

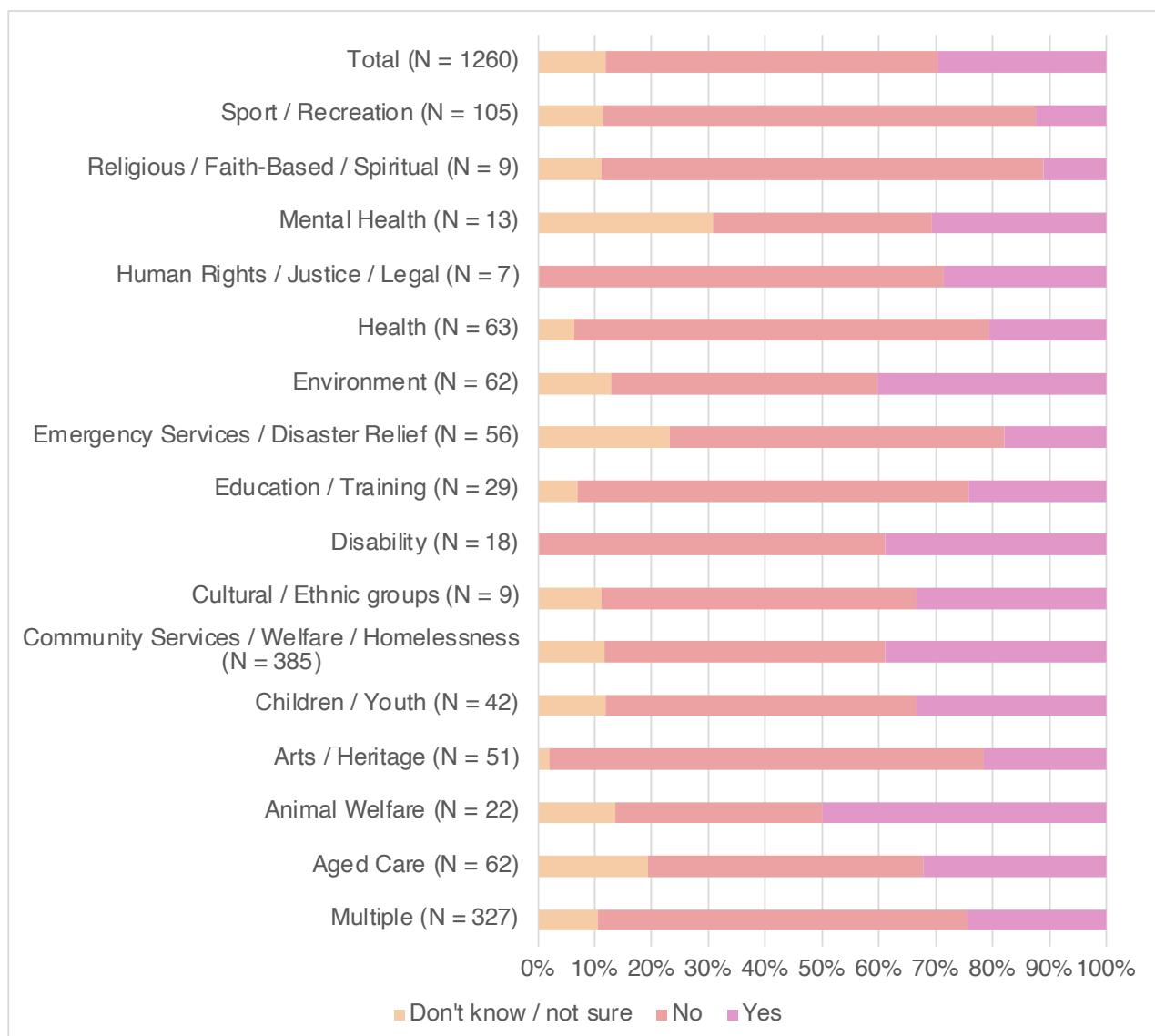
An open-ended question asked respondents about the importance of volunteering to wider Australian society. Respondents highlighted that volunteering is crucial/vital/significant ( $n = 180$ ), vital to a sense of community ( $n = 87$ ), important for giving back to society ( $n = 73$ ), and an important form of community engagement ( $n = 49$ ).

In a further open-ended probe, respondents were asked about the most rewarding aspects of working with volunteers. Respondents identified meeting new people ( $n = 182$ ), friendships/camaraderie ( $n = 117$ ), fostering a sense of community spirit ( $n = 85$ ), seeing volunteers grow and develop, ( $n = 78$ ) and learning new things ( $n = 64$ ) as the most rewarding aspects.

## 5.5 Involvement of employee volunteers

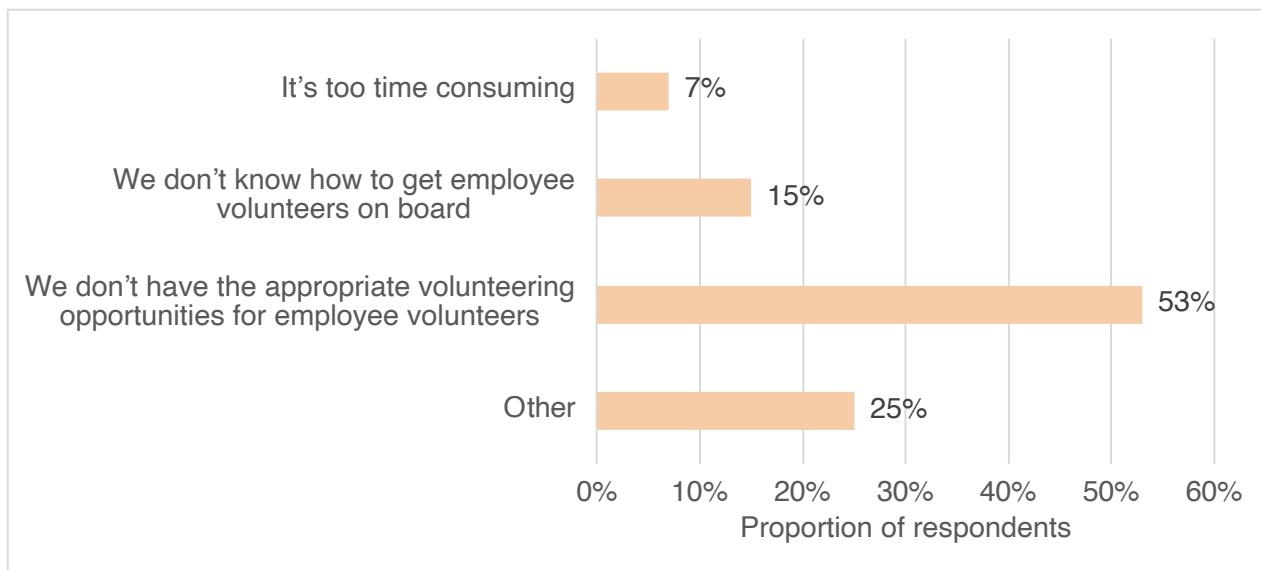
Only 30 per cent of organisations reported that they involved employee/corporate volunteers. Figure 19 shows employee/corporate volunteer involvement by sector, with considerable variation observed ( $\chi^2(30) = 84.4, p < .001$ ). Employee volunteering appears more common among Animal Welfare, Environment, Disability, and Community Services / Welfare / Homelessness organisations. By contrast, Religious / Faith-Based / Spiritual, Sport / Recreation, and Emergency Services / Disaster Relief organisations were the least likely to involve employee volunteers.

Figure 19 Involvement of employee/corporate volunteers by sector



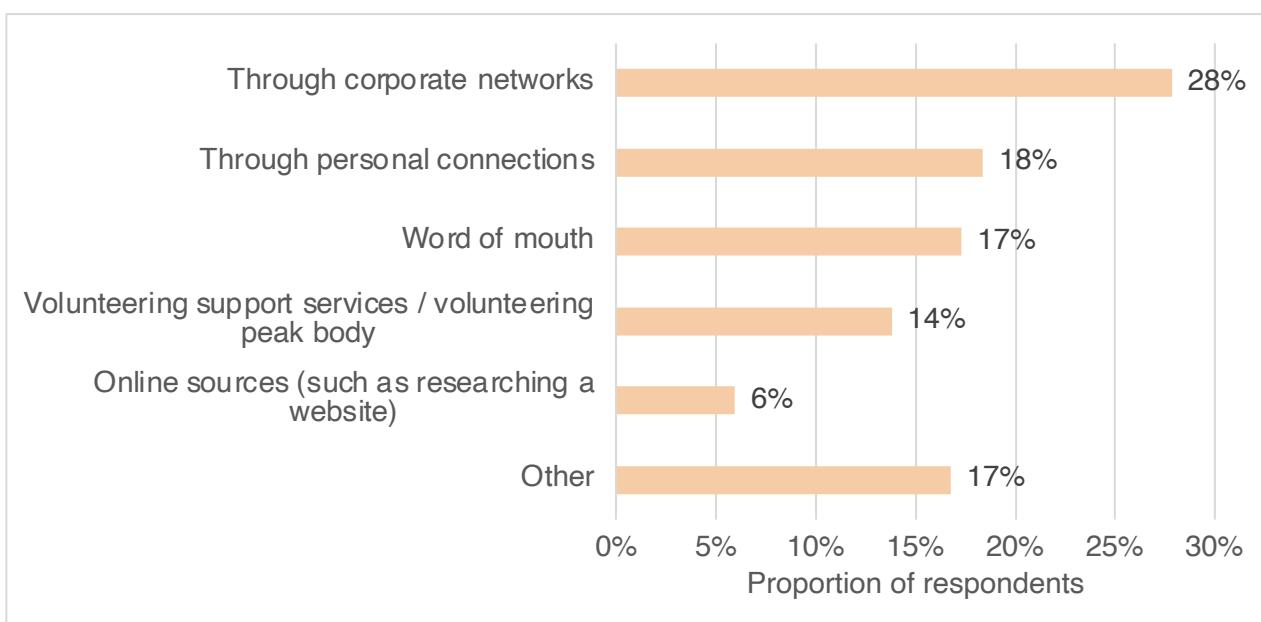
Organisations that did not involve employee volunteers were asked why. Respondents could only select one option, and Figure 20 shows the breakdown of responses. Most respondents (53 per cent) indicated that they did not involve employee volunteers because they did not have the appropriate volunteering opportunities for this cohort.

Figure 20 Reasons for not involving employee/corporate volunteers



Organisations that engaged employee/corporate volunteers were asked how they connected with this cohort. As shown in Figure 21, the most common recruitment method was through corporate networks (28 per cent). Personal connections (18 per cent) and word of mouth (17 per cent) were also prevalent, followed by referrals from Volunteering Support Services and Volunteering Peak Bodies (14 per cent). Relatively few organisations connected with employee/corporate volunteers through online sources, such as the websites of prospective corporate partners.

Figure 21 How organisations connect with employee/corporate volunteers



The focus group data suggested that involving employee/corporate volunteers could be a double-edged sword:

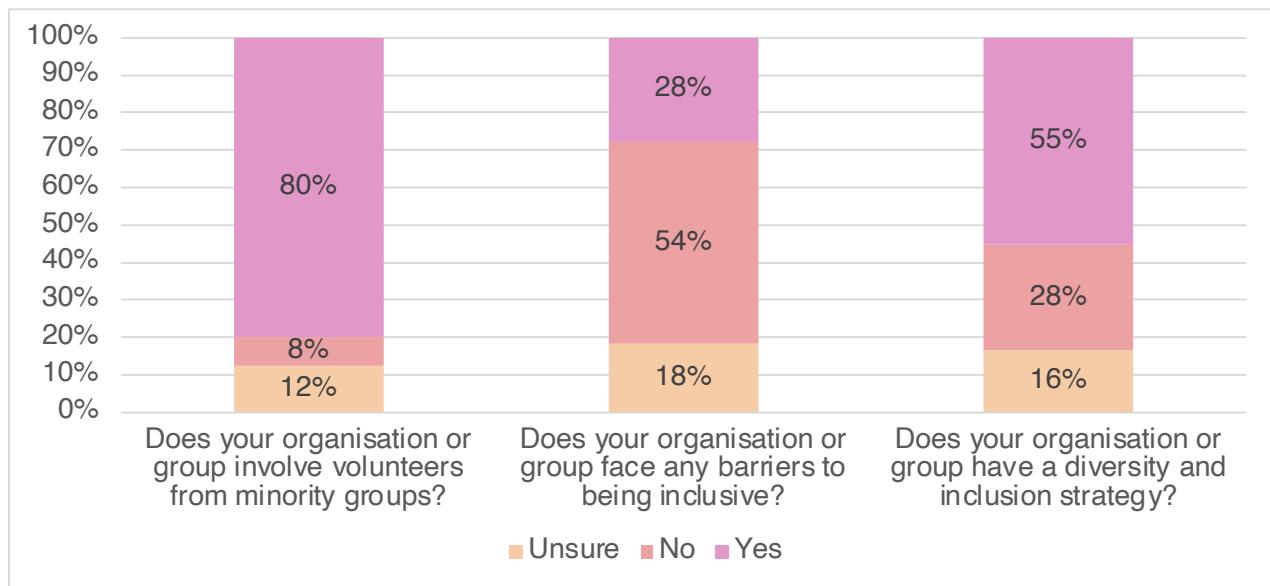
*"I mean our biggest partner is (corporate de-identified) so we have a lot of volties that come through from there, highly professional, organised people, beautiful to work with. But yeah, they just have a set of expectations..."*

*"Very professional volunteers wanting to join us, [and] that brings benefits of IT [sic], willingness, governance, but it also creates a higher standard for us to hit when we support them."*

## 5.6 Diversity and inclusion

Organisations were asked a number of questions about diversity and inclusion, including whether they involved volunteers from minority groups, whether they faced barriers to being inclusive, and whether they had a diversity and inclusion strategy. Responses to these questions are shown in Figure 22.

Figure 22 Diversity and inclusion measures, as reported by organisations



80 per cent of organisations reported that they involved volunteers from minority groups and majority (55 per cent) had a diversity and inclusion strategy in place. It should be noted that, due to the question phrasing, it is not clear whether these organisations had a diversity and inclusion strategy for their volunteering programs specifically, or for their organisation generally. In an optional open-ended question, respondents were asked to report any barriers they experienced to being inclusive of volunteers with diverse abilities or from diverse backgrounds. Analysis of responses revealed that accessibility issues (e.g., physical barriers) was the most common barrier ( $n = 116$ ). Other barriers were

less frequently reported, but included organisational culture acting as a barrier ( $n = 39$ ), language barriers ( $n = 36$ ), difficulties in recruiting a diverse cohort of volunteers ( $n = 35$ ), and lack of resources to support inclusion ( $n = 35$ ).

Organisations were invited to describe how they were inclusive. The most common response was taking an approach by which all are welcome ( $n = 136$ ), the adoption of diversity and inclusion plans ( $n = 48$ ), and having physically accessible venues ( $n = 47$ ). Cultural competency training ( $n = 27$ ) and having staff with non-English speaking or culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds ( $n = 27$ ) were less prevalent responses.

The focus group data highlighted that organisations were adopting tailored approaches to embed diversity and inclusion initiatives:

*"But I think for me it's about creating roles around the individual and not necessarily trying to get individuals to fit into a role."*

*"We've got a youth management team. So they go out and look at the volunteer, their volunteering, they look go out and look at what they want to do and how they can support the organisation and the community. So it's led by the young people and not by us."*

However, resourcing issues were identified as a barrier to diversity and inclusion:

*"I think we're past the awareness stage, particularly in community sport. Everyone is aware of diversity and inclusion. It's now at a stage where we need to provide more educational opportunities and resources to help our volunteers become comfortable and safe with promoting diversity, inclusion 'cause a lot of people are hesitant and maybe a bit scared when it comes to dealing with athletes with a disability, for example."*

*"And being inclusive with our volunteering practices means creating different items that are in another language, even basic stuff like that, but there's no money or funding there to help that..."*

## 6. Trends in Volunteer Involving Organisations

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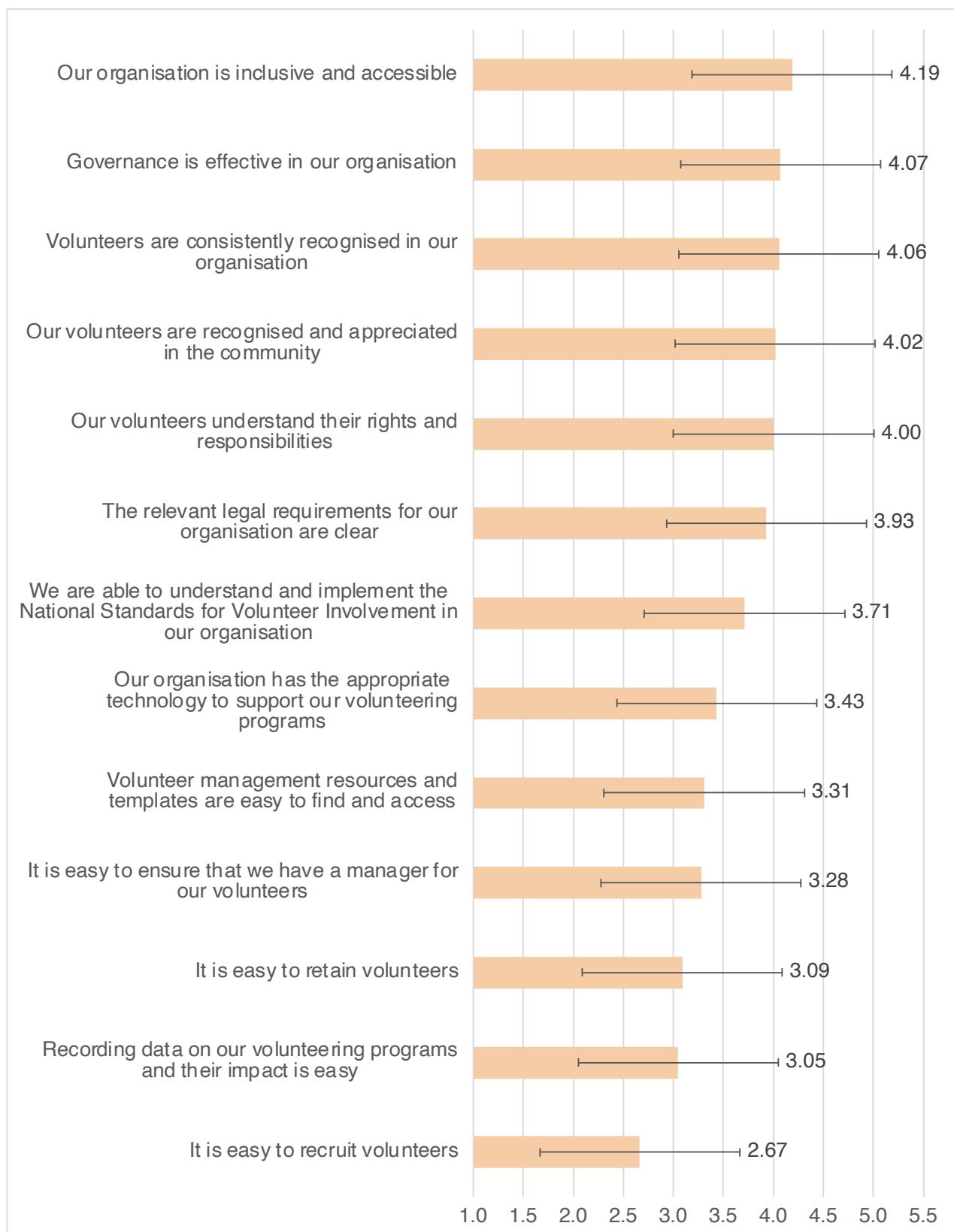
### 6.1 Challenges and changes

Respondents were asked about challenges facing their organisations. They were presented with 13 statements that described a positive phenomenon and 7 statements that described a negative phenomenon. Organisations were asked to indicate their level of agreement with these statements on a 5-point scale, ranging from 1 = strongly disagree to 5 = strongly agree. Figure 23 shows the mean responses to the positive statements. A score above 3 indicates a generally positive sentiment and a score below 3 indicates a generally negative sentiment. Figure 24 shows the mean responses to the negative statements. For these statements, *higher* scores represent more negative sentiments.

Positively, the data suggests that respondents perceived that their organisations were inclusive and accessible, had effective governance, had volunteers who understand their rights and responsibilities, and volunteer effort was recognised by the organisation and wider community. The negative responses to these items highlight stronger disagreement with the statements ‘it is easy to recruit volunteers’ and ‘it is easy to retain volunteers’. Measuring the impact of volunteering programs and ensuring there were enough volunteer managers were also concerns for the organisations surveyed.

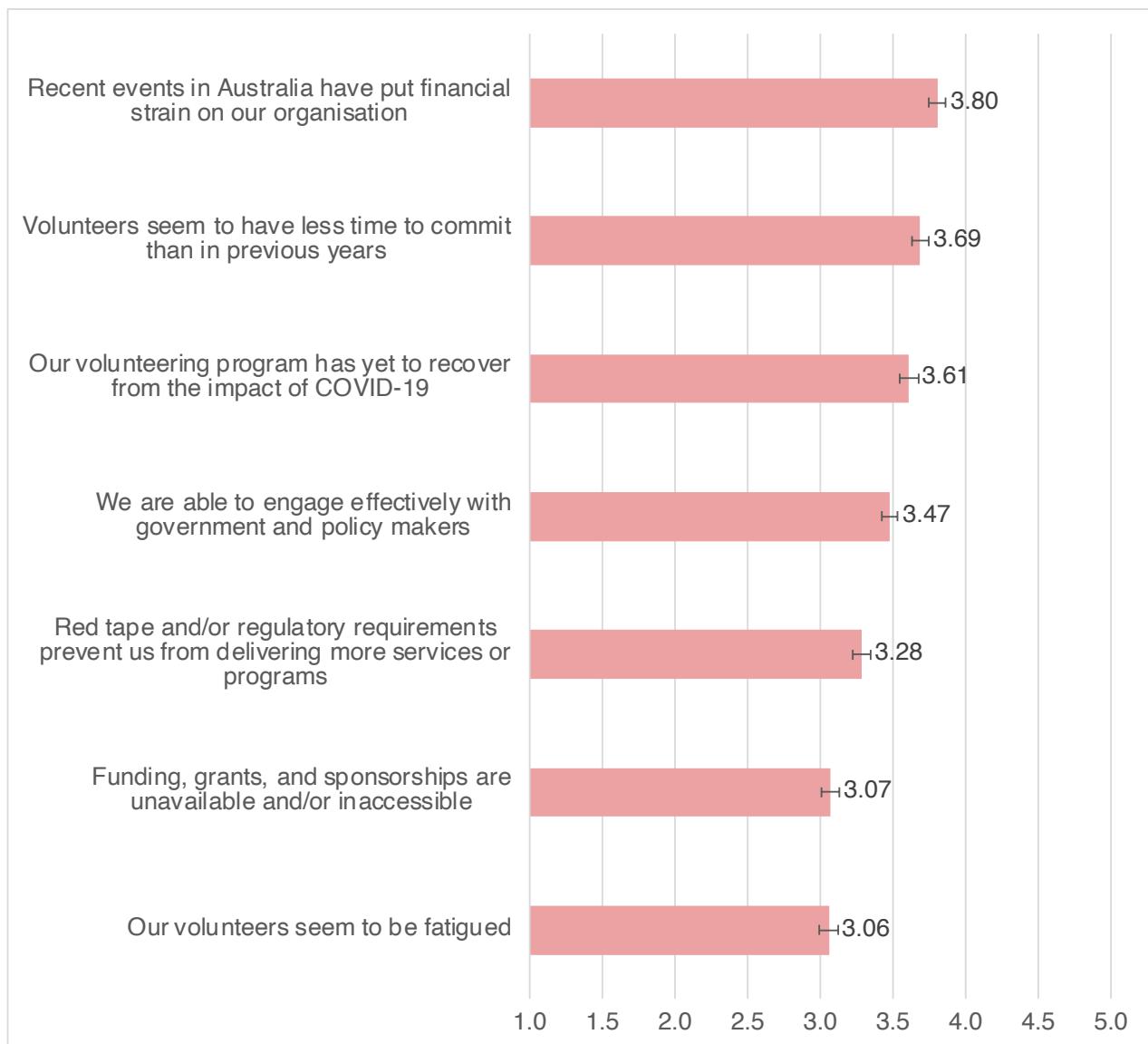
In many of the figures, what are known as 95 per cent confidence intervals are provided. These are an estimated range around each of the estimates, that take into account the uncertainty of the estimates. Estimates that come from a smaller sample will have larger confidence intervals.

Figure 23 Challenges and changes: positive circumstances (mean reports)



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Figure 24 Challenges and changes: negative circumstances (mean reports)



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

Participants who indicated a strongly disagree, disagree, or neutral response to the items ‘it is easy to recruit volunteers’, ‘it is easy to retain volunteers’ and ‘it is easy to ensure that we have a manager for our volunteers’ were prompted to respond to a series of open-ended questions on the barriers they faced in recruitment and retention.

Organisations identified the following as the most prominent barriers to recruitment and retention: finding volunteers with available time ( $n = 186$ ), COVID-19 and vaccination status ( $n = 112$ ), difficulties finding people willing to commit ( $n = 94$ ), finding interested volunteers ( $n = 58$ ), and difficulties getting young people to volunteer ( $n = 55$ ). The struggle of finding people with available time was also noted as a retention barrier ( $n = 89$ ), as was the topical barrier of COVID-19 and vaccination status ( $n = 80$ ).

Difficulties finding people willing to commit (n = 94) was also perceived as a barrier to retention.

The focus group data highlighted a range of more nuanced issues related to volunteer recruitment and retention, including increased demand among volunteers for more tailored roles and flexible assignments:

*"I think we're noticing people being a lot more selective with the volunteer roles they're looking for and wanting to use specific skills if they are volunteering when they're giving back to a connecting with us, whereas I feel like a few years ago it was just come on down and whatever we've got to do, they're more than happy to get involved."*

*"So people... just from what I'm finding, have less and less time to commit particularly in a sport where we may need to be there all day. We need to be flexible as people mentioned with having short chunks that people can volunteer their time."*

Ongoing management challenges including increasing costs and red tape were also highlighted:

*"You know all of that sort of processing that needs to happen working with children's checks and all of that, yes, I guess that's another increased cost as the organisation grows and insurance and that sort of thing, there is an increased kind of admin and management cost too that I think all of that has definitely grown for our organisations."*

*"In aged care every year, I find that there's more and more compliance paperwork that volunteers need to make sure that they have."*

The significant impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on organisations and volunteers was prominently discussed in the focus groups:

*"So we've lost about 20,000 hours so far this year because of COVID and things, which is a considerable amount."*

*"When COVID hit, we had a good number of volunteers, but as the time's gone on, a lot of them haven't returned to the (organisation de-identified) and that's really impacted on our numbers because a lot of our volunteers interact with visitors."*

Some participants also identified positive changes during the pandemic, particularly regarding the uptake of technology and even the opportunity to attract new volunteers:

*"I think with our volunteers they are a bit more receptive to using technology because of COVID, so things like scanning in and out using QR codes rather than signing in has actually helped us a great deal with recording hours and recording who's doing what. So yeah, that changed. The technology has been great."*

*“COVID had an impact for us where our volunteer team grew, by you know, went from a very small pool of people to a very large pool of people.”*

*“And we’ve also seen people moving to the regions from Melbourne and wanting to be involved in [their] neighbourhood...”*

Respondents who indicated they had been with their organisation for at least three years were also asked to estimate the extent to which 16 changes had been observed in their organisation using a 5-point response scale. The mean responses are shown in Figure 25. No rank ordering nor recoding was undertaken as many of the changes could represent positive, negative, or neutral outcomes.

Figure 25 Average perception of changes over the past three years (1 = strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree)



Note: The “whiskers” on the bars indicate the 95 per cent confidence intervals for the estimate.

The key changes identified by organisations over the last three years also varied considerably by sector. The increasing complexity of regulation and administrative requirements was seen as a more prominent change for Religious / Faith-Based / Spiritual, Youth, and Aged Care organisations, while the reduced capacity of volunteering programs was more strongly identified by organisations with a focus on Health, Cultural / Ethnic groups, and Human Rights / Justice / Legal areas.

The focus group participants also highlighted the changing nature of volunteering and how it was impacting their organisations:

*"I think there's a push for more remote roles, but I mean there has been with COVID, but I think there was before that anyway. People just don't want to give smaller amounts of time, less commitment and not have to travel to do it I think. We've... always asked for one year commitment, one day a week in the centre ... [and] that model has to change because we just can't get people to commit to those things anymore."*

*"Still episodic volunteering, but I think the big shift for us in the next two years will be providing more mission-based volunteering opportunities for our corporate partners because it's becoming part of their partnership agreements. So formalising that process more and giving opportunities that are genuine where they feel like they're helping at events and fundraising is so essential to our business".*

*"Services traditionally provided by government are increasingly being filled by charities and volunteers and not-for-profits."*

*"It is a burden on our volunteers or responsibility on our volunteers, and we're continually looking because the amount of compliance has risen over the past few years and it's getting to the point where the volunteers are like "enough already!" And so rather than lose the volunteers, we need to find ways to reduce the amount of burden or time that it takes to fulfill compliance [obligations]."*

## 7. The Future of Volunteer Involvement

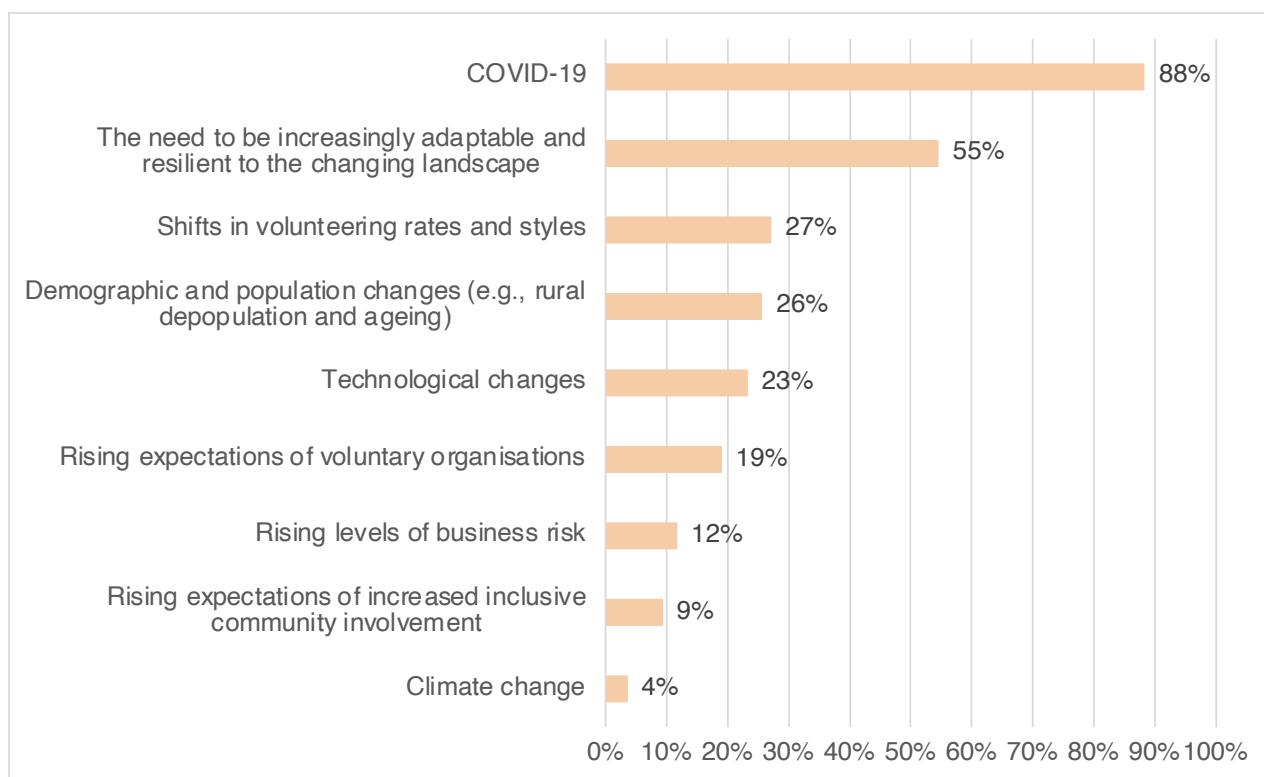
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Respondents who had been with their organisation for at least three years were also invited to inspect a set of nine key drivers of change.<sup>3</sup> Respondents were instructed to identify the three strongest drivers from the set. Figure 26 shows the percentage of organisations that indicated the respective change was in their top three most significant drivers of change.

COVID-19 was a clear driver of change for nearly all organisations (88 per cent). Affecting slightly over half (55 per cent) was the need to be increasingly resilient and adaptable in the face of change. Shifts in volunteering styles (27 per cent), population changes (26 per cent), and technological changes (23 per cent) appeared to each affect about one-quarter of organisations. Rising expectations was a relatively weaker driver of change (19 per cent), as were business risk (12 per cent), and climate change (4 per cent). Given the dominance of COVID-19 as a perceived driver of change in 2022, future research may reveal whether the less prevalent drivers of change emerge as more important concerns for organisations in the coming years.

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Figure 26 Percentages of respondents that placed the corresponding driver of change as one of the top three drivers for their organisation



Examining the data by sector, organisations from the Emergency Services / Disaster Relief and Sport / Recreation sectors were more likely to report rising community expectations as a driver of change, and Mental Health organisations reported that rising levels of business risk and the need to be adaptable were key drivers more so than other organisation types. A breakdown of key drivers of change for each sector is included in the appendix (Table 2).

## 8. Conclusion

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This research highlights significant challenges that will continue to affect volunteering over the ten years covered by the new National Strategy for Volunteering. These include organisations' stated need for more volunteers over the next five years. Recruitment and retention remain significant concerns for volunteer involving organisations for now and into the future, irrespective of organisational size and geographical location. However, some significant differences in perceived challenges, barriers to recruitment and retention, and measures taken to adapt to changing volunteer preferences were found between sectors.

The findings of the organisation survey and focus groups suggest that Australian volunteer involving organisations continue to value the contributions of volunteers. Organisations are coping with a range of short- and long-term challenges, including increasing red tape, an uncertain financial climate, and an apparent reduced willingness of volunteers to commit to regular, formal volunteering roles. They must navigate these challenges in a complex and turbulent environment.

The most significant impact on volunteering in recent years has been COVID-19. As well as reducing volunteer participation, data presented in this report shows that it has also increased the workload and complexity of volunteer management. Conversely, global drivers of change such as the climate emergency did not feature prominently as challenges on the horizon of the volunteer involving organisations that completed this survey. This could be because of the immediate impact of COVID-19, as the survey was administered when many COVID-19 restrictions and public health orders were in place. It would be useful to track how the priorities of volunteer involving organisations change in the coming years, as the challenges of COVID-19 likely become more manageable.

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## Appendix

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### Organisational survey – Additional notes on methodology

#### Data cleaning

Overall, 2575 individuals commenced the organisational survey, however, many of these did not progress beyond the demographic questions, which is very common in questionnaire-based research with an open link. We received 1218 responses from individuals who reached the end of the questionnaire. We also retained a further 133 responses from people who had responded to at least one question after the demographic questions. Several of the responses, despite being marked as complete by the system, were largely blank responses and were removed ( $n = 18$ ). This left a total of 1345 usable responses.

The participants of the study were asked to represent the views of their organisations. While we did observe some examples of multiple responses from the same organisations, overall, the survey attracted responses from 1209 unique organisations. Over half (59.9 per cent) indicated that they were in paid roles at the organisation, although they reported that on average, they would spend roughly 42 per cent of their FTE allocation managing volunteers ( $SD = 33.7$  per cent), and over 90 per cent reported that they had spent at least some time in this manner. The respondents reported that they had been at their organisation for an average of 8.9 years ( $SD = 9.35$ ).

Prior to analyses, a series of data cleaning steps were undertaken on the survey data. First, the research team eliminated any submission that was clearly a test case, and those where the participant had not progressed beyond the first substantive question. Second, the researchers manually inspected the names of the organisations and standardised any identifiable spelling errors or typographical errors that would cause the same organisation to be treated as two unique organisations. Third, the researchers inspected numerical free-text responses and manually converted any such data containing non-numerical characters into numerical data for analyses (e.g., “three” was converted to the digit “3”). Fourth, data from any participant which appeared to be missing responses to all questions, despite being marked as complete, was deleted. Fifth, all responses to the rich qualitative questions (i.e., free-text questions other than the “other, please specify” questions) were transferred from the master data file into an excel workbook. Sixth, where possible, identifying information contained in the qualitative responses were removed.

## Analysis

Analysis of the organisational survey was performed in IBM Statistics (SPSS), and the data visualisations were presented in Microsoft Excel. Analyses of categorical variables were largely undertaken using frequencies, and analyses of Likert responses variables were largely undertaken by calculating means, standard deviations, and standard errors. Exploratory factor analyses were used in some instances. In all cases, we report in the following sections precisely what method was employed to derive our findings.

Where they are relevant, we report on differences we observed across sectors. In doing so, we applied the appropriate test statistic (e.g., ANOVA / F-Test for multiple groups,  $\chi^2$  tests for group comparisons on categorical variables), however, in some cases, these are not presented due to the large volume of comparisons. Respondents were able to select multiple sectors in their response, however, organisations were assigned to one sector only in the case that the respondent identified only one sector. If an organisation belonged to multiple sectors, then it was assigned to a standalone 'Multiple' category. This approach was applied because it allows us to be certain that any sector by sector comparison truly reflects differences between the sectors. For noting, only prominent sectoral differences are highlighted and discussed in the findings section following. Those interested in comparing organisations with any involvement in a particular sector are encouraged to download the raw data file and undertake the relevant comparisons.

## Organisational survey limitations

Whilst the survey proved useful in eliciting data about the characteristics of volunteer involving organisations and the challenges they're facing, there are some limitations that must be noted. Firstly, whilst the survey was widely distributed and a large number of responses were received, it is not possible to determine if the responses constituted a representative sample. This is because it is unknown how many volunteer involving organisations exist (size of the population) and what their characteristics are.

Responses were received from people in different roles in the organisations they were representing. This could mean some respondents may not have had a full view of their organisation's operations. To mitigate this risk, the following message was provided at the beginning of the survey:

*Before we begin, we wanted to mention that we are interested in the views of the person(s) who directly manage volunteers for your organisation or group. If you consider another person in your organisation or group would be better placed to complete the survey, then please forward them the survey link for completion.*

Another limitation resulted from multiple people from the same organisation completing the survey. To mitigate the risk of duplication, the research team carefully reviewed the results and identified at least 70 organisations that were clearly represented more than

once and 93 individual responses from organisations that were represented multiple times. Further, there were numerous cases of ‘fuzzy’ duplication. The prototypical example of ‘fuzzy’ duplication was where respondents from a larger organisation with many branches provided the umbrella organisation’s name, and other respondents provided their local branch’s name. As many larger organisations operate with relatively autonomous branches and each branch may have its own challenges, and because the overall sample size was so large, we elected to treat each of these cases as though they were a unique organisation. In practice, this may mean some of the results are slightly biased towards organisations with a larger number of local branches. We expect the biases to be very trivial given the overall sample size, and the sheer diversity in organisations that were represented.

Finally, it is worth noting that the participant recruitment strategy, which involved heavy online promotion and drawing from personal and professional networks, may have led to under- or over-representation of certain types of organisations. For example, the proportion of respondents from Western Australia was higher than would be expected from a truly random sampling approach, possibly reflecting higher promotion in that jurisdiction. The profile in Western Australia of three of the Chief Researchers may have also influenced participation. As shown in Section 3.2, the survey was completed by a reasonable number of organisations in all States and Territories that delivered a wide range of volunteering programs and services. Nonetheless, some caution should be applied to the extent that organisations of certain types were not represented.

The open-ended responses in the questionnaire generated nearly 198,000 words of text. These data were analysed using content analysis (Neuendorf 2017). The typical steps in content analysis were followed, starting with generating a content dictionary for each open-ended question. The content dictionary of key words was created based on the literature. The open-ended data were exported into an Excel file and the search function was used to count the frequency of the key words in the content dictionary. In some cases, such as the specific online platforms used for managing volunteers, the responses were allowed to emerge from the data.

## Focus group analysis

The focus groups were recorded and transcribed for analysis using Microsoft Teams’ transcription function and then checked for accuracy by a research assistant. The transcripts were analysed using thematic analysis (Miles, Huberman & Saldana 2014). The transcripts were read and re-read by the research team to allow themes to emerge from the data.

## Focus group limitations

The limitations associated with the focus groups was that only two were conducted within the scope of the project. While a diverse group of participants was recruited, not every State/Territory or sector is represented. The timing of the focus groups may have impacted on the ability of some volunteer managers to attend.

## Summary of respondents to the organisation survey

### About the respondents

- Majority of respondents were in paid roles and spent approximately 40 per cent of their time supporting volunteers.
- On average, respondents had worked for their organisations for 8.9 years.

### About the volunteer involving organisations

- 50 per cent of organisations involved 50 volunteers or less.
- 84 per cent of responding organisations were operating exclusively in one State/Territory.
- The most common response to core area of organisational focus was Community Services / Welfare / Homelessness (30 per cent).
- 57 per cent of organisations indicated they assisted the general community rather than identifying a specific group their efforts were focused on supporting.
- Of those that did identify target groups they assisted, the top four responses were: children/youth (24 per cent), older people (65+ years), people with disability (18 per cent) and culturally/linguistically diverse communities (18 per cent).
- Over one-third (37 per cent) of organisations reported that their funding is recurrent and from the government.
- The median number of volunteer programs operated by the organisations surveyed was 3.

## Additional tables

Table 1 Usage rates of recruitment methods by sector (%)

	<b>Word of mouth</b>											
<b>Personal approaches</b>												
<b>Organisation's website</b>												
<b>Traditional media</b>												
<b>GoVolunteer / SEEK Volunteer</b>												
<b>Religious organisations</b>												
<b>Promotional events</b>												
<b>Social media</b>												
<b>Employment Service Provider</b>												
<b>Ref. from vol support service / peak</b>												
<b>Employee volunteering programs</b>												
<b>Other</b>												
Multiple (N = 349)	9	14	25	9	65	43	7	33	34	75	68	84
Aged (N = 69)	7	17	54	20	59	35	26	61	41	80	67	90
Animal (N = 23)	4	17	13	13	70	48		52	17	87	43	87
Arts / Heritage (N = 54)	6	6	24	17	67	44	6	20	32	72	74	93
Youth (N = 44)	11	16	36	16	66	36	14	48	32	77	64	84
Welfare (N = 408)	7	24	41	23	72	50	19	47	38	80	71	94
Cultural (N = 10)		20	20		40			30		30	80	100
Disability (N = 18)	11	22	50	33	61	44		44	28	83	61	89
Education (N = 31)	16	16	35	16	65	42	6	29	32	71	81	90
Em. Services (N = 58)	3	14	29	3	74	79	3	16	50	71	71	91
Environment (N = 66)	3	18	24	9	70	55	2	17	35	73	64	85
Health (N = 67)	4	9	28	12	58	33	7	45	31	88	63	91
H Rights (N = 7)			29		43	43		43		57	71	71
M Health (N = 15)	7	7	27	13	53	47		40	33	93	47	73
Religious (N = 10)		10			20	20	80		20	40	50	80
Sport (N = 116)	11	2	3	3	59	22		5	19	56	79	85
Total (N = 1345)	8	16	30	14	66	44	11	35	34	75	69	89

Table 2 Drivers of change by sector (%)

	<b>Shifts in volunteering rates and styles</b>								
<b>Demographic and population changes</b>									
<b>Rising expectations of voluntary organisations</b>									
<b>Climate change</b>									
<b>Rising levels of business risk</b>									
<b>Expectations of inclusive community involvement</b>									
<b>Need to be adaptable and resilient</b>									
<b>Technological changes</b>									
<b>COVID-19</b>									
Multiple (N = 240)	67	29	49	15	13	7	25	30	29
Aged (N = 37)	73	19	49	11	14		14	27	27
Animal (N = 13)	62	8	54	8	8	15	23	15	46
Arts / Heritage (N = 43)	65	35	37	14	19	0	14	49	23
Youth (N = 28)	71	29	54	18	18	4	7	14	43
Welfare (N = 263)	77	25	59	13	19	2	21	30	32
Cultural (N = 7)	57	29	57	29	29		14		29
Disability (N = 16)	94	19	63	13	13		6	25	31
Education (N = 21)	86	29	67	5	10		19	5	43
Em. Services (N = 46)	46	35	46	15	13	9	48	43	26
Environment (N = 50)	44	28	40	6	14	36	14	38	30
Health (N = 47)	81	36	57	9	17		13	21	30
H Rights (N = 7)	57	71	43		14		14	14	43
M Health (N = 5)	80	20	80		40	20		20	40
Religious (N = 9)	78	44	33				11	44	22
Sport (N = 88)	58	22	47	13	13		45	31	35
Total (N = 920)	69	28	52	13	15	5	23	30	31

## Survey instrument

Ethical clearance for the online survey and focus groups was granted by Curtin University's Human Research Ethics Office (HRE2022-0245).

[Information and consent form appear first]

Thank you for agreeing to complete this survey. We are interested in the views of the person(s) who **directly manage volunteers for your organisation or group. If you consider another person in your organisation or group would be better placed to complete the survey, then please forward them the link for completion.**

In this survey, we will be referring “volunteers”, who are considered anyone who **“willingly gives unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group”**.

We appreciate that not all organisations use the word volunteer in this way, and that some organisations use different words (e.g. “members”) to describe people who provide unpaid time, service, or skills. Please consider any such person as a volunteer when reading the questions presented in the survey.

To start with, we will ask you some questions about your role. You are welcome to skip any question you prefer not to answer. Responding to these questions gives us a better understanding of who is representing the views of the volunteer involving organisations in this survey.

What is the name of the volunteer involving organisation or group you are representing? We are asking for the names of organisations so we can determine if an organisation is being represented by multiple responses. Please note, this information will be removed from the dataset prior to analysis so that your responses are de-identified (cannot be associated with your organisation directly).

---

Which of the following best describes **your role in your organisation or group?**

- Volunteer Manager/Coordinator
  - Program Coordinator
  - Human Resources Manager
  - Board / Committee Member
  - Chief Executive Officer / Executive Director
  - General Manager
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
-

What **type** of organisation or group do you work/volunteer for? (please select the option that best describes the type)

- Unincorporated not-for-profit organisation
- Incorporated not-for-profit organisation
- Charity
- Federal government department or agency
- State/territory government department or agency
- Local government
- Business/for-profit organisation
- Informal/grassroots/community group
- Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

In which states/territories does your organisation operate? Please select all that apply:

- The Australian Capital Territory
- New South Wales
- The Northern Territory
- Queensland
- South Australia
- Tasmania
- Victoria
- Western Australia
- National
- Other territory in Australia
- Outside Australia

In which type(s) of area(s) does your organisation operate? Please select all that apply:

- Capital city
- Other city
- Regional town
- Rural area
- Remote area
- Outside Australia

In a typical week you spend working with your volunteer involving organisation, about **what percentage of time** do you spend in roles that involve directly managing volunteers?

Example 1: If you are the full-time CEO and spend about one day a week dedicated to direct volunteer management, please answer “20” (as in 20 per cent)

Example 2: If you work 3 days per week for your organisation, and spend about 2 of these days in a typical week directly managing volunteers, please answer “67”.

Example 3: If you do not manage volunteers in your role, please answer “0”.

Please **do not include the per cent sign**.

---

For how many years have you been working for your organisation or group?

Please enter your response as a number (e.g., “12” or “2.5”).

Is your role in the organisation or group a paid role?

- Yes
- No

For the remainder of the survey, we will be asking questions about the organisation or group you are representing.

If volunteers are defined as anyone who **willingly gives unpaid help, in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group**, approximately how many volunteers are currently involved with your organisation or group?

- 

#### **How many paid staff work in your organisation or group?**

- 0
- 1-10
- 11-20
- 21-50
- 51-100
- 101-150
- 151-250
- 251-500
- 501+

Which of the following best describes the core focus of your organisation or group?  
Select all that apply:

- Aged Care
- Animal Welfare
- Arts / Heritage
- Children / Youth
- Community Services / Welfare / Homelessness
- Cultural / Ethnic groups, including Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander community groups.
- Disability
- Education / Training
- Emergency Services / Disaster Relief
- Environment
- Health
- Human Rights / Justice / Legal
- Mental Health
- Religious / Faith-Based / Spiritual
- Sport / Recreation
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Which of the following groups does your organisation or group aim to assist?

If your organisation does not aim to assist any specific group, please select the first option. Otherwise, please select all that apply

- No specific group / general community
- Aboriginal and/or Torres Strait Islander peoples
- Children / youth
- Culturally / linguistically diverse communities
- LGBTQI+ people / communities
- Older people (aged 65+)
- Migrant, refugees, or asylum seekers in Australia
- People affected by disasters / emergencies
- People experiencing domestic / family / gender-based violence
- People experiencing financial disadvantage / unemployment / homelessness
- People experiencing mental ill health

- People with chronic / long-term illness
- People with disability
- Veterans and their families
- Women
- Men
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

What activities do volunteers do with your organisation or group? Select all that apply.

- Accounting / finance / administration / management
- Advocacy / lobbying / policy / research
- Arts / performing / media production
- Board / Committee work
- Coaching / refereeing / judging
- Companionship / social support
- Counselling / help line / mediation
- Emergency response / disaster relief / first aid / community safety
- Environmental protection / conservation
- Food preparation / service / delivery
- Fundraising / sales / events
- Personal care / assistance / transport
- Repairing / maintenance / gardening
- Teaching / instruction / providing information
- Working with animals / fostering animals
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

How does your organisation or group involve volunteers? Select all options that apply.

- Ongoing roles performed regularly (e.g., weekly, fortnightly)
- For specific events or activities that occur once or infrequently
- In governance/board/committee roles
- Short term project roles
- Micro-volunteering (describes a volunteer, or team of volunteers, completing small tasks that make up a larger project. Tasks may only take a few minutes to a few hours, and the volunteer does not make a long-term commitment)
- Skills-based volunteering
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

How do your volunteers typically undertake their volunteering roles? Select all options that apply.

- In person at the organisation
- In person in the field/community
- Over the internet
- Over the phone
- Other (please specify)

To what extent does your organisation adopt the **National Standards for Volunteer Involvement?** Please select the best option from the list below:

- We have not heard of the National Standards
- We have heard of the National Standards but have not used them
- We have adopted **some** practices from the National Standards
- We have adopted **many** practices from the National Standards
- Our practices are completely or close to completely consistent with the National Standards

How does your organisation or group recruit volunteers? Please select all that apply.

- Word of mouth
- Personal approaches/self-referrals
- Your organisation's website
- Traditional media (e.g., newsletters, radio, newspapers)
- GoVolunteer or SEEK Volunteer
- Religious organisations or groups such as churches, temples, mosques, prayer groups, etc.
- Promotional events (e.g., open days, community events)
- Social media
- JobActive / Employment Service Provider / Centrelink referral
- Referral from a volunteering support service / volunteering peak body
- Through employee / corporate volunteering programs
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Below is the list of the recruitment methods you just selected. Please rate them according to how effective they are for attracting new volunteers

	Not effective at all	Slightly effective	Some-what effective	Quite effective	Very effective	Don't know
[List is populated by any responses ticked in the previous question]	O	O	O	O	O	O

Which of the following does your organisation or group provide to your volunteers?

- Induction
- Training
- Debriefing/personal support
- Access to an employee assistance program
- Insurance
- Recognition activities/events
- Resources – FAQs, manuals, tip sheets, checklists, etc.
- Mentoring/buddy system
- Reimbursement
- Other (Please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

Does your organisation or group use contemporary technology (e.g., apps, cloud based services, online volunteer databases or resource management services, AI-based systems, social media) to manage your volunteers?

- Yes
- No
- Not sure / don't know

(If yes) What technology do you use?

---

To what extent do you agree with the following statements, as they apply to your organisation or group?

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	N/A
Volunteers bring new insights	O	O	O	O	O	O
Volunteers increase the effectiveness of our operations	O	O	O	O	O	O

Volunteers increase the volume of our business operations (e.g., allow us to expand our operations)	<input type="radio"/>					
Volunteers enhance the positive image of the organisation	<input type="radio"/>					
Volunteers boost the organisation morale, team cohesion and interaction	<input type="radio"/>					
Volunteers allow us to fill skills gaps	<input type="radio"/>					
Volunteers provide great service to our clients/beneficiaries	<input type="radio"/>					

What, if any, other ways do volunteers benefit your organisation or group?

(Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

---

Does your organisation or group need more volunteers right now, or very soon?

- Yes
- No

(If yes) Ideally, how many more volunteers does your organisation need right now, or very soon?

- 1-10 more
- 11-20 more
- 21-50 more
- 51-100 more
- 101-150 more
- 151-250 more
- 251-500 more
- 501 or more

Thinking ahead to the next five years, do you expect your organisation to engage:...

- Significantly fewer volunteers
- Fewer volunteers
- About the same number of volunteers
- More volunteers
- Significantly more volunteers

Below is a list of statements that describe circumstances or issues that volunteer involving organisations can sometimes face. Please indicate the extent to which you agree with each statement. If a statement describes something that is not relevant to your organisation, please select the N/A option.

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
It is easy to recruit volunteers	O	O	O	O	O	O
It is easy to retain volunteers	O	O	O	O	O	O
It is easy to ensure that we have a manager for our volunteers	O	O	O	O	O	O
Volunteers are consistently recognised in our organisation	O	O	O	O	O	O
Our volunteers are recognised and appreciated in the community	O	O	O	O	O	O
Our volunteers understand their rights and responsibilities	O	O	O	O	O	O
We are able to understand and implement the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement in our organisation	O	O	O	O	O	O
Our organisation is inclusive and accessible	O	O	O	O	O	O
Governance is effective in our organisation	O	O	O	O	O	O
Recent events in Australia have put financial strain on our organisation	O	O	O	O	O	O
Recording data on our volunteering programs and their impact is easy	O	O	O	O	O	O
Volunteer management resources and templates are easy to find and access	O	O	O	O	O	O
Funding, grants, and sponsorships are unavailable and/or inaccessible	O	O	O	O	O	O
Red tape and/or regulatory requirements prevent us from delivering more services or programs	O	O	O	O	O	O

Our organisation has the appropriate technology to support our volunteering programs, including appropriate software and stable internet access	<input type="radio"/>					
The relevant legal requirements for our organisation are clear	<input type="radio"/>					
We are able to engage effectively with government and policy making	<input type="radio"/>					
Our volunteers seem to be fatigued	<input type="radio"/>					
Volunteers seem to have less time to commit than in previous years	<input type="radio"/>					
Our volunteering program has yet to recover from the impact of COVID-19	<input type="radio"/>					

[If responses to items one, two, and three in the set shown in the previous table are strongly disagree, disagree, or neither agree nor disagree, the following questions will appear respectively]

#### What, if any, barriers do you face in **recruiting volunteers**?

(Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

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#### What, if any, barriers do you face in **retaining volunteers**?

(Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

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#### What, if any, barriers do you face in **managing volunteers**?

(Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

---

Does your organisation or group face any barriers to being inclusive of volunteers with diverse abilities or from diverse backgrounds?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know / not sure

(if yes) Please describe the barriers you face in being inclusive of volunteers with diverse abilities or diverse backgrounds. (Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

---

(If no) Please tell us how your organisation or group is inclusive. (Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

**(Question is only shown to people who indicated they have been in their organisation for 3 years or longer)**

Please indicate your agreement with the following statements as to how volunteering has changed for your organisation or group **over the last 3 years**

	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neither agree nor disagree	Agree	Strongly agree	N/A
The numbers of volunteers in our organisation has declined	O	O	O	O	O	O
Our volunteering programs are no longer operating at their full capacity	O	O	O	O	O	O
Volunteers want to work fewer hours	O	O	O	O	O	O
Volunteers want more flexible hours	O	O	O	O	O	O
People want to volunteer episodically, rather than on a regular basis	O	O	O	O	O	O
People want to volunteer more for specific projects than in an ongoing capacity	O	O	O	O	O	O
More volunteering is being done online	O	O	O	O	O	O
Volunteers are increasingly claiming for expenses	O	O	O	O	O	O
There are more corporate volunteers volunteering for our organisation	O	O	O	O	O	O

There are more student volunteers volunteering for our organisation	<input type="radio"/>					
Regulation and administrative requirements have become more complicated	<input type="radio"/>					
Our volunteers have been unable to volunteer due to COVID-19	<input type="radio"/>					
There is more conflict management required to manage conflicts between volunteers	<input type="radio"/>					
Volunteers are increasingly taking on work that was previously conducted by paid staff	<input type="radio"/>					
The diversity of our volunteer cohort is increasing	<input type="radio"/>					
Volunteers increasingly want to volunteer in groups (i.e., with their family and/or friends)	<input type="radio"/>					

(Question is only shown to people who indicated they have been in their organisation for 3 years or longer)

The following is a list of drivers of change that may have recently impacted your organisation or group. Please nominate the top three drivers that have impacted your organisation over the last 3 years. To do that, please drag up to three items from the left to the box on the right, placing the most important item at the top and so on.

Ranking
_____ Shifts in volunteering rates and styles
_____ Demographic and population changes (e.g., rural depopulation and ageing)
_____ Rising expectations of voluntary organisations
_____ Climate change
_____ Rising levels of business risk
_____ Rising expectations of increased inclusive community involvement
_____ The need to be increasingly adaptable and resilient to the changing landscape
_____ Technological changes
_____ COVID-19

(only asked to people who have been in their organisation for 3 years or longer)

Are there any other major drivers of change for your organisation or group?

(Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

Does your organisation or group involve employee volunteers (also known as corporate volunteers)?

- Yes
- No

(if no) Why doesn't your organisation or group involve employee volunteers?

- We don't have the appropriate volunteering opportunities for employee volunteers
- We don't know how to get employee volunteers on board
- It's too time consuming
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

(If yes) How does your organisation or group connect with employee volunteers?

- Through corporate networks
- Word of mouth
- Through personal connections
- Online sources (such as researching a website)
- Through a local volunteering support service
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

One goal of this survey is to get an estimate of how much it costs your organisation or group overall, in terms of costs, to run your volunteering program. We appreciate that it will be difficult to arrive at a perfect value, but we would appreciate a rough estimate from you. To help you think about some of the expenses, we have listed some costs that are often mentioned.

- Transport, travel, and motor vehicle expenses
- Food and beverages
- Phone, internet, and communications
- Uniforms and clothing
- Tools, equipment and other resources
- Memberships, licences, and subscriptions
- Self-education and training
- Accommodation
- Staffing costs associated with your volunteer program
- Reward/recognition activities
- Background checks/police checks

Please enter your best estimate from the 2020 / 2021 financial year in the box below (please enter in a number but **do not include the \$ sign**):

---

What is the primary source of your organisation/group's funding?

- Donations
- Fundraising activities
- Government funding – recurrent
- Government funding – ad-hoc grants
- Membership fees
- Other

If you could describe the importance of volunteering to Australian society, what would you say? (Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

---

What has been the most rewarding aspect of working with volunteers? (Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

---

How many volunteering programs does your organisation or group run? Please enter in a number (e.g., 3). If this question is not relevant to your organisation, or you are not sure how to answer it, please skip to the next question.

---

Does your organisation or group have a diversity and inclusion strategy?

- Yes
- No

Does your organisation or group involve volunteers from minority groups / with different abilities?

- Yes
- No

If not, why not? (Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

---

Do you offer reimbursements to volunteers for their out-of-pocket expenses incurred while volunteering?

Expenses may include things such as memberships, transport, uniforms, or background checks.

- Yes
- No

Does your organisation or group evaluate the quality of its volunteering program/s?

- Yes
- No

Please describe the impact your organisation or group has achieved through its volunteering program/s.

(Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

---

How do you think a National Strategy for Volunteering could impact the future of volunteering in Australia? (Please feel free to write as little or as much as you like, but as a guide, 2-4 sentences should be sufficient for our research.)

## Focus group questions

- Where volunteers are needed
  - Does your organisation need more volunteers?  
Where are they needed? What activities? What types of volunteers?
- The costs associated with a volunteer program
  - Tell us about the cost of your volunteer program
  - Is it going up/ down/ about the same? Which costs are changing and why?
- Impact of Covid on volunteer programs
  - (How has COVID changed your volunteer program?)
  - What are you doing differently as a result of COVID?
  - Do you expect this to be a long term change?
- Drivers of change
  - Is/ How is volunteering changing in your organisation?
  - Why is it changing? /What factors do you think are influencing this change?
- The future of volunteering
  - How do organisations think volunteer involvement might need to change in the future?
- Inclusion
  - Is inclusion a challenge in your organisation? Why?
  - Have you been able to improve inclusion in your organisation? How did you do this?
- Volunteer management and leadership
  - What is the role of managers and leaders of volunteers in your organisation?
  - What are the strengths and weaknesses in the way your volunteer program is managed?
  - What roles are designated to volunteers in your organisation and why?

## Endnotes

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- 1 'n' refers to the number of respondents.
- 2 Refers to Spearman's rho correlation coefficient.
- 3 The key drivers were identified by research conducted with the emergency services led by Dr Blythe McLennan (McLennan et al., 2021).