

Yarra Volunteer Strategy 2019-2023

“Volunteering is the ultimate exercise in democracy. You vote in elections once a term, but when you volunteer, you vote every day about the kind of community you want to live in” Marjorie Moore

Acknowledgment of Country

Yarra City Council acknowledges the Wurundjeri as the Traditional Owners of this country, pays tribute to all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Yarra, and gives respect to the Elders past and present.

Executive Summary

The Yarra Volunteer Strategy 2019-2023 is a framework to guide Yarra City Council (Council) in promoting, supporting and celebrating the active involvement of volunteering across the City of Yarra. The strategy seeks to add value to existing programs within the community and strengthen the social capital in the municipality.

Council’s vision is to encourage *‘a vibrant, liveable and sustainable inner city that the community can be proud of’*. Volunteering can achieve this vision in Yarra by adding social and economic benefits to the community through the provision of opportunities to connect with and participate in civic life, as well as making people who give their time freely to feel supported and valued for their contributions.

Council provides various types of support towards volunteering and community organisations that run volunteer programs in our municipality. This includes skills development and training, awards and events, networking, community grants, discounted venue hire and facilitating partnerships. There is an opportunity to build on this support and formalise what we do as a whole-of Council approach.

The strategy development process, drawing on research and extensive community engagement, identified three key priority areas where Council can play a role in better supporting a healthy and cohesive volunteer culture in our community.

The priority areas are:



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Introduction

Volunteer involvement is a critical part of Australian society. It contributes to civic life and active participation in building strong, inclusive, and resilient communities. It underlies innovation and social change, our responses to community need and community challenges, and it brings together and supports the local strengths and assets of communities.

For individuals, volunteering provides an opportunity to be involved in activities reflecting their interests and using their skills. Meaningful activity in turn promotes a sense of belonging and general wellbeing. Volunteering can also be a way to develop skills, potential pathways to employment, or a way to contribute existing skills for the common good.

Volunteer involvement is a two-way relationship, providing an opportunity for organisations to achieve their goals by involving volunteers in their activities, and for volunteers to make meaningful use of their time and skills, contributing to social and community outcomes (1).

Defining volunteering

There are many definitions of volunteering used nationally and internationally by government departments, peak bodies and organisations. The definition introduced by Volunteering Australia (2015) states **'volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain'**. This definition includes both forms of volunteering as follows:



Fitzroy Learning Network, Bridges 2 Harmony event

Formal - taking place within organisations in a structured way (including institutions and agencies).

Informal - taking place outside an organisational setting.

People voluntarily donate their time through involvement in their local community in an extensive range of ways, such as:

- Organised sport , recreation and leisure activities
- Community education and learning activities
- Environmental groups
- Community support groups
- Organised groups such as church, community or professional groups
- Civic and political groups

(1) [Volunteering Australia, National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, 2015 \(pg 3\)](#)

- Organised social groups
- Community events, festival and celebrations
- Collective community actions
- Parental participation in schools and children's activities
- Social entrepreneurship
- Corporate volunteering
- Episodic and spontaneous volunteering (eg. emergency assistance)
- Service delivery (eg. individuals giving to or supporting recipients)
- Decision-making (eg. advisory committees)
- Virtual (online) volunteering

Volunteering itself can mean different things to different people. Many volunteers may be unaware that their activities are considered to be volunteering, for instance a family member who provides care to an elderly person or someone who is a member of a sports club committee may not consider themselves “volunteers”. There is also debate across local government on the ‘grey area’ when referring to members of advisory committees and youth groups, for example the FReeZA youth development program, are they considered volunteers?

For the purpose of this strategy Council's volunteer interaction is defined in two distinct ways:

Council managed programs - volunteers are managed directly by Council to deliver programs and/or services. An example of this is the Yarra L2P Learner Driver Mentor Program which is facilitated by Yarra Youth Services.

Volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) supported by Council – organisations that involve volunteers work with or are supported by Council, this can include running activities using Council managed facilities or on Council land. An example of this includes many of Yarra's Neighbourhood House programs such as Men's Shed.



Yarra's L2P program



Men's Shed, Alphington Community Centre

Benefits and value of volunteering

Social, cultural, health and wellbeing

Volunteering is a great way for people to get involved in the community and make a positive contribution. In addition to the satisfaction of helping out for the benefit of others, there are many reasons people volunteer such as:

- Connecting with others and improving social ties and positively engaging and being active within the community
- Experiencing new challenges
- Raising awareness and supporting important community issues
- Interacting with different cultures
- Contributing to social change
- Developing professional networks and exploring different career and job opportunities and finding a pathway to getting a job, course or training
- Developing new skills or gaining experience in a variety of roles
- 'Bridging networks' which is especially important for connecting people from diverse cultural backgrounds (1)

"Volunteers not only make a huge contribution to the lives of the people in our community, they are also essential to connecting people and building social connections through a greater sense of belonging"

Allan McLean, General
Social Survey, Australian
Bureau of Statistics, 2014

Research by Victoria Health (2) has found a significant connection between volunteering and good mental health, showing that volunteering can:

- Alleviate depression
- Increase satisfaction with life
- Develop self-confidence

Economic

Although the community benefits of volunteering are widely acknowledged, it is difficult to quantify the true economic value of volunteer contributions. According to the 2017 Productivity Commission, the national volunteer workforce is over 5.8 million people (this figure does not include informal volunteering). This is an estimated annual economic and social contribution of \$290 billion across Australia (3). The economic value of volunteering in the City of Yarra in 2016 was estimated at \$54.9 million (4). This is significant and it is important that Council recognises that if the hours of volunteering within the Yarra community had to be replaced with 'paid time' there would be a considerable strain on budgets and resources.

(1) [Indicators of Community Strength in Victoria](#), 2011 (pg 10)

(2) [Victoria Health Indicators Survey](#), 2012 (pg 1)

(3) [Volunteering Australia Productivity Commission report](#), 2017

(4) [Cultural Intelligence, City of Yarra Volunteer Strategy](#), 2016 (pg 9)

Investment towards increasing the levels of volunteering may actually reduce the reliance on Council services. Research from Volunteering Tasmania demonstrates that investing in volunteering brings an excellent return on investment; every \$1 spent on a volunteer program brings \$4.2 in benefits to the community (1).

In summary, it is crucial for Council to continually find ways to help our residents feel better emotionally, mentally and physically as well as to consider the fiscal impact of volunteering seeing that it is proven to create a more connected and healthy community a worthy area to invest in.

Emerging trends in volunteering

The National Volunteering Strategy (2) identified the following trends regarding volunteering in Australia:

- Growth in volunteering is uneven. Rates of volunteering have grown in sport, religion and education but have declined in community services and emergency management.
- More volunteers want roles that are flexible, or require shorter hours or a shorter term commitment.
- People are increasingly time poor and volunteering competes with greater work and caring responsibilities.
- People are more mobile than in the past so volunteers are less likely to stay for many years in a single role.
- People aged between 35 and 44 are more likely to volunteer than other age groups, with 45–54 year olds the second most likely to volunteer but 65 years and over volunteered the most hours on average.
- The frequency of natural disasters requires a ready supply of skilled emergency volunteers.
- There are more people volunteering now, but for less time than in the past.
- Social isolation and loneliness have come more into focus in recent times.
- A trend of virtual (online) volunteering has appeared over the past decade, which benefits people with restricted mobility or other special needs that might not be able to undertake traditional face-to-face volunteering roles. Virtual volunteering can include tasks like research, software development and writing articles.
- In Australia, the ageing of the population is likely to have an effect on volunteering, largely on the demand of informal support for adults rather than for children.

Some of the key challenges faced by policy makers, including local government, in relation to the future of volunteering are to make it more attractive and accessible for individuals, to consider the stereotypes around volunteering, and to encourage greater recognition across Australia of the diversity in the volunteering sector.

(1) [*State of Volunteering report for Tasmania*](#), 2014 (pg 1)

(2) [*National Volunteering Strategy*](#), 2011 (pg 12)

Policy context

National

In 2011, the Federal Government developed the National Volunteering Strategy which set out the vision for volunteering in Australia over the next decade. The strategy aims are to ensure that by 2021 volunteering is encouraged, supported and recognised by all Australians. The six key focus areas for this strategy are:

- (1) Respond to trends in volunteering
- (2) Harness technology
- (3) Better regulation and risk management
- (4) Strengthen management and training
- (5) Recognise and value volunteering

These key elements have been taken into consideration in the development of the Yarra Volunteer Strategy.

State

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement were developed in 2015 in consultation with the volunteering sector to support the involvement of volunteers and act as a resource for organisations in which volunteers are involved. It provides a framework for organisations to consider the role of volunteers within the organisation and the impact effective volunteer involvement can have on achieving the strategic goals and aims of the organisation. The National Standards allow organisations to make use of simple, practical criteria across a broad range of volunteering situations. There are eight standards addressing the key areas of volunteer involvement:

- (1) Leadership and management
- (2) Commitment to volunteer involvement
- (3) Volunteer roles
- (4) Recruitment and selection
- (5) Support and development
- (6) Workplace safety and wellbeing
- (7) Volunteer recognition
- (8) Quality management and continuous improvement

Council will support Yarra's community organisations and groups that manage volunteers by promoting and encouraging the use of the National Standards and to develop processes towards best practice approaches for volunteer involvement.

Local

The strategy is guided by Yarra City Council's vision, the Council Plan 2017-2021 (which incorporates the Municipal Public Health and Wellbeing Plan) and links with other Council plans and strategies.

The Council Plan 2017-2021 commits to a set of priorities for future action. These priority areas have been acknowledged through the seven strategic objectives, as below, to reflect and respond to what is important to our community:

- A healthy Yarra
- An inclusive Yarra
- A sustainable Yarra
- A liveable Yarra
- A prosperous Yarra
- A connected Yarra
- A leading Yarra

The Yarra Volunteering Strategy specifically aligns with key initiatives in the Council Plan objective for:

An Inclusive Yarra - Inclusion, diversity and uniqueness are welcomed, respected and celebrated.

Strategy - Build resilience by providing opportunities and places for people to meet, be involved in and connect with their community.

Initiative - Develop and adopt a Volunteer Strategy.

Yarra's whole-of Council approach to supporting an inclusive and connected community is also reflected in multiple Council plans and policies, these include:

- Council Plan 2017-2021
- 0-25 Plan 2018-2022 (Family, Youth and Children Services)
- Active Healthy Ageing Strategy 2018 – 2024
- Access and Inclusion Strategy 2018 – 2024
- Multicultural Partnerships Plan 2015-2018
- Neighbourhood Houses Strategy and Action Plan 2018-2021
- Yarra Libraries Strategic Plan 2017-2020
- Arts and Cultural Strategy 2016-2020
- Economic Development Strategy 2015-2020
- People Strategy and Action Plan 2017-2020 (Internal)

Volunteering in Yarra

About City of Yarra

The City of Yarra is a vibrant inner-metropolitan municipality in Melbourne, home to a diverse community of over 95,000 people, with a dynamic local economy employing over 67,000 people with a gross regional product of \$9,084 billion (1).



Yarra's 19.5 square kilometres include the suburbs of Abbotsford, Burnley, Clifton Hill, Collingwood, Cremorne, Richmond, Carlton, Princess Hill, Fitzroy, North Fitzroy and parts of Alphington and Fairfield.

The City of Yarra consists of a high proportion of residents living with socio-economic disadvantage, in what is otherwise a relatively affluent municipality. The distribution of household earnings in Yarra show great disparity between high and low income households. This brings specific challenges for inclusion and participation in civic life.

Yarra has a youthful profile, with the median age bracket between 25 - 35 years, which is younger compared to Greater Melbourne where the median age is 37 years. Retirees aged 65 years and over make up 10.5% of the population. However it is important to note the City of Yarra is undergoing a period of considerable population growth, which is forecast to triple in size over the next two decades therefore the aging population will significantly increase and have an impact on many sectors, including volunteering.

There are a number of tertiary and technical institutions in Yarra, including the Australian Catholic University (ACU), Melbourne Polytechnic Collingwood Campus and the Kangan Institute Richmond Campus.

More than 13,600 businesses operate within the City of Yarra, making Yarra home to one of the largest economies in metropolitan Melbourne. Healthcare and social assistance is the largest employing industry in Yarra accounting for 18% of total employment, underpinned by the Epworth Hospital and St Vincent's Hospital. The creative sector is also an important emerging industry in Yarra which is associated with innovation and facilitating economic growth (2).

(1 & 2) [City of Yarra Economic Development Strategy 2015-2020 \(pg 10 & 12\)](#)

The Yarra community is culturally diverse, with over 29% of residents born overseas from over 140 countries. Only 70% of residents speak English at home; non-English speaking backgrounds include Vietnamese, Greek, Mandarin, Italian and Cantonese. The City of Yarra, especially the suburbs of Fitzroy and Collingwood, hold special historical significance for the Aboriginal community and is a preferred place for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to live, meet up, work and access services.

All figures above are derived from the 2016 Census data (Australian Bureau of Statistics), therefore statistics may have changed since then.

Snapshot of volunteering in Yarra

Volunteering is an integral part of civic life in Yarra. In fact, the City Of Yarra was recognised as Melbourne's healthiest local government area in 2018, according to the Domain Healthy Melbourne Study (1). Volunteering in the community was used as a metric for this research in terms of a determinant of mental health and a community that volunteers more is expected to be more highly connected socially.

Below is a snapshot of volunteering in Yarra municipality using data from the most recent Census in 2016:

- More than 21% of Yarra's population were volunteering in a formal capacity, which is slightly higher compared to Victoria as a whole.
- Those 21% contributed an estimated \$55 million of economic benefit to our community if the contributions of volunteers were to be replaced by paid staff.
- That same year a quarter of our 18 to 24 year olds were participating in volunteer work.
- There are more than 500 charity organisations listed in the City of Yarra (2).
- The top six areas for volunteering in Yarra's community organisations and groups are sporting clubs, activities with children and young people, visual and performing arts, court and legal support and community gardening/ sustainability related activities.
- Volunteering roles include offering professional expertise like IT services, marketing/PR, writing/editing and business/legal advice.
- Many people in the Yarra community volunteer in an informal capacity, therefore it is difficult to quantify the true extent and value of their impact.

(1) [*Domain Healthy Melbourne Study Deloitte Access Economics and Tract Consultants, 2018*](#)

(2) [*The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission, 2018*](#)

Yarra City Council has previously provided various types of support and resources towards volunteer involving organisations and community participation across the municipality including:

Yarra Gives online portal

From 2006-2010, Council partnered with Our Community to provide Yarra Gives; an online portal “giving centre” to assist local community groups in their fundraising efforts and provide the opportunity for local residents, traders and businesses to support their own community through donations. It also acted as a matching service between individuals and groups seeking volunteers and organisations/individuals that can provide volunteer services.

Yarra Volunteer Support Program (YVSP)

In late 2007, the YVSP was set up as a pilot project with a one off funding grant from the then Department of Victorian Communities (now Department of Planning and Community Development). The program was auspiced by North Yarra Community Health and overseen by a steering group of Yarra stakeholders including Council and ran successful activities for a period of 20 months with the aim to support, extend and sustain volunteer participation in the City of Yarra.

Yarra Volunteer Recognition Events

The first Yarra Volunteer Recognition Event was held in 2009, as part of the aforementioned Yarra Volunteer Support Program pilot project. Council then hosted this as an annual event from 2011 – 2016, however there has been a gap in the last few years due to lack of resourcing.

Council is committed to Yarra’s community being connected, included, valued and engaged and therefore recognises that supporting volunteering in our municipality is crucial. The Yarra Volunteer Strategy and action plan is an important framework to base this support on.

Development of the Strategy

The methodology used to develop the strategy included both qualitative and quantitative approaches including:

- A benchmarking analysis and desktop review into other Victorian municipality’s strategies and support for volunteering.
- Consultation with internal Council staff across relevant departments, Councillors and a broad representation of the community - including volunteers, people who manage volunteers and people wanting to volunteer - to determine the strengths, gaps and opportunities for Council to better support volunteering in the City of Yarra and to ensure a range of stakeholder’s views are reflected in the strategy.
- Research to identify best practice approaches in Australia in relation to the volunteer sector, referring to Federal and State policy.
- Review of existing Council plans and support approaches.

From this research, it is considered that there is no 'one' best practice but rather a combination of relevant strategies/policies, systems, processes and structures are required in order to provide meaningful support towards a healthy culture of volunteering and participation in the community.

A common message that rang clear and distinct throughout this analysis is that valuing volunteerism requires support and resourcing.

Strategic direction

Key priority areas

In the development of the Yarra Volunteer Strategy, the most common themes identified through the community consultation process found that:

- Our community don't know what volunteer opportunities are available.
- Our community are seeking more innovative, informal and flexible ways to participate in civic life.
- Our community want more ways for social connection.
- Our community members who manage volunteers want more support.
- Our community groups and organisations want ways to build capacity through relationships and linkages.
- Our community volunteers do it because they want to, but they also appreciate being acknowledged and valued.

These issues from the community, and analysis of demographic data, current trends, national, state and local policies, have been used to inform the three key priority areas and the related strategic directions where Council can play a role in supporting volunteering across the municipality.

The key priority areas are:

Priority area 1: Promote, Participate and Connect

Council has a key role to play in terms of promoting opportunities for residents to connect with and participate in community life to enhance social and mental wellbeing. Council will build on the promotion of and information about volunteering in Yarra through a range of media and activities.

Priority area 2: Support and Strengthen

Council will provide opportunities to support and strengthen the capacity of volunteers and people who manage volunteers, and assist with developing collaborative, sustainable relationships to support volunteering in the community. The building of networks and partnerships between Council and the volunteering sector is essential for increasing capacity to deliver better outcomes for the community and enhance the experience of volunteers.

Priority area 3: Recognise and Value

Volunteers and people who manage volunteers are central to the success of volunteering; so it is imperative that these roles are recognised and the impact of their contribution is valued. Council will continue to provide meaningful ways to acknowledge and celebrate volunteers and those who actively contribute to the Yarra community. Promoting the value and positive benefits of volunteering will help attract a diverse range of ages, cultures and abilities, in addition to facilitating growth of the local sector.

Strategies

The following sets out the broad strategies under each of the priority areas.

Promote, Participate and Connect

1.1 Promote volunteer opportunities in the Yarra community

1.2 Encourage volunteering as a way for people to connect with and participate in their community

Support and Strengthen

2.1 Support people who manage volunteers in the Yarra community

2.2 Strengthen relationships and create linkages

Recognise and Value

3.1 Promote the value and benefits of volunteering

3.2 Recognise the contributions by volunteers and people who manage volunteers in the Yarra community

These strategies will guide the development of key actions over the coming four year period (2019-2023) that will promote, support, strengthen and celebrate volunteering across the Yarra municipality.

Council will continue to engage with the Yarra community and other stakeholders to ensure that we continue to respond to emerging trends and issues and deliver a meaningful volunteering strategy.

"I have a simple but important proposition. And that is that 'volunteering' is the single most important factor that drives successful communities within Australia and most likely beyond. Not only that but I also argue that the role and importance of volunteering is increasing as the 21st century advances"

Bernard Salt, futurist and social commentator

Action plan

Priority area 1: PROMOTE, CONNECT & PARTICIPATE				
Council has a key role to play in terms of promoting opportunities for residents to connect with and participate in community life to enhance social and mental wellbeing. Council will build on the promotion of and information about volunteering in Yarra through a range of media and activities.				
Strategy	Action	Who	When	Resources
1.1 Promote volunteer opportunities in the Yarra community	1.1.1 Improve promotion of volunteering opportunities through a range of multi-media channels	Community Partnerships Communications Community Grants	Year 1	New
	1.1.2 Improve promotion of volunteering opportunities through a range of events and activities	Community Partnerships Library Services Youth Services Neighbourhood Houses	Year 1	Existing
	1.1.3 Continue to promote Council's existing volunteer programs and make it clear what Council does and does not provide	Community Partnerships Communications	Ongoing	Existing
	1.1.4 Develop a directory of Yarra's community organisations, groups and agencies to promote the services offered and contact details	Community Partnerships Communications	Year 1	Existing
Strategy	Action	Who	When	Resources
1.2 Encourage volunteering as a way for people to connect with and participate in	1.2.1 Identify ways to encourage volunteering and community participation, across a range of cohorts in Yarra, to include innovative and flexible	Community Partnerships Multicultural Partnerships Library Services Aged & Disability Service Family, Youth & Children's Services	Year 1	Existing

their community	options and how to access them	Neighbourhood Houses Access (Customer Service) Communications		
	1.2.2 Deliver and support a range of community activities and events	Community Partnerships Neighbourhood Houses Library Services Community Grants	Ongoing	Existing
	1.2.3 Develop a policy on corporate volunteering options for Yarra City Council staff	People & Culture Community Partnerships	Year 1	Existing

Priority area 2: SUPPORT & STRENGTHEN

Council will provide opportunities to support and strengthen the capacity of volunteers and people who manage volunteers, and assist with developing collaborative, sustainable relationships to support volunteering in the community. The building of networks and partnerships between Council and the volunteering sector is essential for increasing capacity to deliver better outcomes for the community and enhance the experience of volunteers.

Strategy	Action	Who	When	Resources
2.1 Support people who manage volunteers in the Yarra community	2.1.1 Improve support for volunteer involving organisations and groups to manage volunteers	Community Partnerships Community Grants	Year 1	Existing
	2.1.2 Provide ways for people who manage volunteers to connect	Community Partnerships	Year 1	Existing
	2.1.3 Assist with skills development for people who manage volunteers	Community Partnerships Community Grants Communications	Year 1	Existing
	2.1.4 Advocate for volunteer's rights and responsibilities	Community Partnerships	Year 1	Existing

Strategy	Action	Who	When	Resources
2.2 Strengthen relationships and create linkages	2.2.1 Mobilise resources on joint initiatives to strengthen partnerships and link Yarra's volunteers, organisations and groups	Community Partnerships Library Services Neighbourhood Houses	Year 2	New
	2.2.2 Develop pathways to volunteer and employment opportunities in the Yarra community	Youth Services	Year 1	Existing
	2.2.3 Continue to find innovative ways to keep up-to-date with current and emerging trends and respond to changes in the volunteer sector	Community Partnerships Communications	Ongoing	Existing

Priority area 3: RECOGNISE & VALUE

Volunteers and people who manage volunteers are central to the success of volunteering; so it is imperative that these roles are recognised and the impact of their contribution is valued. Council will continue to provide meaningful ways to acknowledge and celebrate volunteers and those who actively contribute to the Yarra community. Promoting the value and positive benefits of volunteering will help attract a diverse range of ages, cultures and abilities, in addition to facilitating growth of the local sector.

Strategy	Action	Who	When	Resources
3.1 Promote the value and benefits of volunteering	3.1.1 Review and highlight the economic and social value of volunteering in City of Yarra	Community Partnerships Community Grants	Year 1	Existing
	3.1.2 Promote the benefits of volunteering to build on the local sector	Community Partnerships Communications	Ongoing	Existing
Strategy	Action	Who	When	Resources
3.2 Recognise the contributions by volunteers and people	3.2.1 Acknowledge Yarra's volunteers and managers and celebrate their achievements	Community Partnerships Communications	Ongoing	Existing

who manage volunteers in the Yarra community				
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