

**GOVERNMENT-VOLUNTEER  
PARTNERSHIPS:  
*Background Discussion Paper***

September 2006

**Volunteering Secretariat  
Office for Seniors Interests and Volunteering  
Department for Community Development**

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## Overview

This background discussion paper supplements the 2006 [Guidelines for Successful Partnerships between Public Sector Agencies and Volunteers](#). It provides an overview of current trends and issues in volunteering in Western Australia and details the evolution of partnerships between volunteers and the public sector from a hierarchical relationship to a range of partnership approaches.

This discussion paper:

- Describes the current socio-economic environment in which these partnerships operate;
- Highlights the direct and indirect benefits of involvement with, and in, volunteering; and,
- Outlines different models of how government works in partnership with volunteers;

## Introduction

WA public sector agencies are increasingly looking at ways to engage citizens in the communities in which they live and to encourage active participation in the processes and services that affect them. With a greater emphasis by government on enabling individuals and strengthening local communities to enhance social capital, volunteering is an ideal vehicle through which these connections and capacities can be achieved. This is true of volunteering in all aspects of our society, including volunteers working in partnership with public sector agencies.

Recent figures indicate that 37.3% people in Perth volunteered in the last 12 months, with a rate of 49.4% in rural areas of Western Australia. This equates to an estimated value of over \$800 million. In the public sector, volunteers facilitate the delivery of significant government information and services to the community. Volunteers are involved in areas such as fire and emergency services, sport and recreation, fisheries, culture and the arts, justice services, health, community development, tourism, and the environment. From the public sector agencies represented on the reference group alone, it is estimated that over 77,500 volunteers participate in the work of government.

The past decade has seen a greater focus by agencies on engaging in a partnership approach to working with and involving volunteers and volunteer groups. Further, public sector agencies report the dual benefits of such partnerships in also achieving organisational objectives such as engagement with the community, increasing public education and awareness of social, health and environmental issues, and in building the capacity and connectedness of local communities throughout the state.

A reference group of key public sector agencies worked collaboratively over a six month period to update the Guidelines to reflect this approach and to provide a useful and relevant guide to developing and working with government-volunteer partnerships. The guide is designed to provide an overview of pertinent issues for public sector agencies, with links and references to further sources of detailed information.

This Background Discussion Paper examines the different ways government and volunteers work in partnerships which range from the direct involvement of volunteers in the delivery of government goods and services to the involvement of government in providing financial support, governance capacity and organisational development to volunteer groups. This spectrum of government-volunteer partnership models is described in detail in the next section.

## Volunteers and Volunteering

These Guidelines focus on formal volunteer involvement with public sector agencies. In keeping with the previous editions of these Guidelines, it is recognised that volunteers participate:

- of their own free will;
- without financial reward (except for the reimbursement of reasonable expenses incurred, if agreed by the agency and the volunteer);
- in undertaking clearly established tasks in positions not designated to paid staff; and
- in the delivery of government and non-government services.

In discussing how to define 'volunteers', the Reference Group felt it important for agencies to set the context in which government–volunteer partnerships now operate. Importantly, volunteerism is seen to be a dynamic concept with traditional definitions limited in their capacity to capture and describe the different types of volunteers involved and the complexity of situations in which partnerships are developed. Volunteering is evolving in nature and volunteers now participate as active contributors to the work of many agencies in a range of different ways. Rather than seeking to define volunteers in terms of parameters of involvement, agencies should consider defining the partnership in terms of the outcomes and benefits being sought by both parties.

It is recommended that Volunteering Australia's [definition](#) and [principles](#) of volunteering should underpin all partnerships.

## Volunteering Rates and Patterns

- The practice of volunteering is strongly valued in Australian communities. Almost eight in ten (78%) respondents in a recent survey believed volunteering is more important for the community now than it was five years ago<sup>1</sup>.
- Rates of volunteering are highest for those middle aged, in particular for women aged 35-44 years. Age is also a determining factor for the type of volunteering, eg young people are highly represented in areas such as sport and recreation, with the 35-44 year age group participating in education related fields, and older people volunteering with community and welfare groups<sup>2</sup>.
- 37.3% of people living in Perth volunteered within the last 12 months, with 49.4% in rural Western Australia<sup>2</sup>.
- In WA, volunteers contribute over 70 million hours a year, worth an estimated \$800 million<sup>3</sup>.
- Although baby boomers account for 40% of the WA adult population, they accounted for almost half the number of volunteers in 2000<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> Volunteering Australia and the AMP Foundation, *Snapshot 2004: Volunteering Report Card*, Volunteering Australia, Melbourne 2004

<sup>2</sup> Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services, *Giving Australia: Research on Philanthropy in Australia*, Commonwealth of Australia 2005.

<sup>3</sup> Department for Community Development, *Western Australia's Volunteers: Topic Sheet No. 1*, Government of Western Australian 2004.

- Volunteer rates are highest for people already working. Of these, managers and administrators are the most likely to volunteer (56%) followed by professionals (46%)<sup>3</sup>.
- The most common reason Western Australians volunteer is 'to help others/community' (49%)<sup>3</sup>.
- The most common reason for Western Australians becoming involved in volunteering was 'they knew someone involved' (32%)<sup>3</sup>.

## Government-Volunteer Partnerships

Volunteers contribute to the work and deliverables of public sector agencies in areas including fire and emergency services, sport and recreation, fisheries, culture and the arts, justice services, community development, health, education, tourism, and the environment.

**Table 1: Benefits of government-volunteer partnerships**

There are many benefits of government-volunteer partnerships for all stakeholders including the public sector agency, volunteers and/or volunteer organisation and the wider community as a whole. Benefits include:

- Greater participation of government in the community, and the community in government policy development and service provision
- Enhanced social capital and community capacity through the development of networks, relationships and connectedness within the community
- Increased understanding of volunteers as community members about community issues
- Increased capacity for the not-for-profit sector through strategic governance and resourcing support

A variety of models of government-volunteer partnerships have evolved as a result of factors including:

- The changing role and focus of government (at Federal, State and local level) towards facilitating, resourcing and enabling local communities to respond to local issues
- New funding arrangements as a result of program priorities, federalism, and policy shifts
- Volunteer instigated involvement with public sector agencies driven by commitment to a particular issue or interest
- Agency developed volunteer programs and involvement of volunteers for a specific purpose
- Evolving core business objectives and operations of public sector agencies.

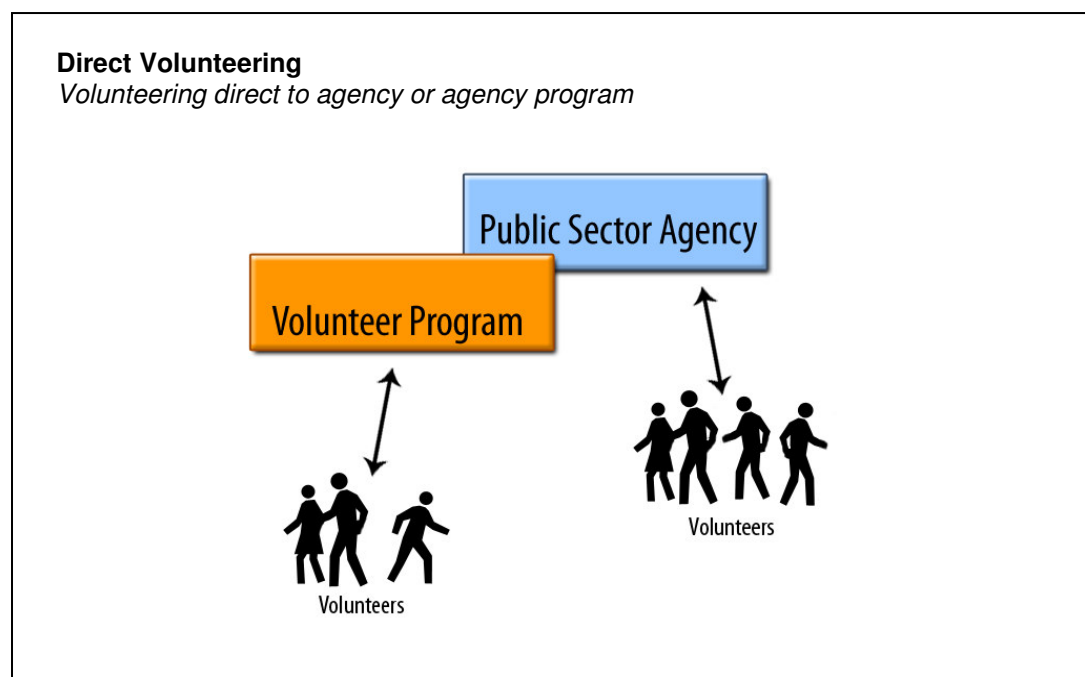
## Models of Government - Volunteer Partnerships

Within the reference group of public sector agencies, partnerships with volunteers and volunteer groups took a number of forms. It was considered important to highlight this evolving nature of government-volunteer partnerships. Agencies should examine which model their involvement with volunteers fits, or will fit into and implications of this for partnership management. It is also important to note that some agencies involve volunteers in ways that fit into, or can transition between, a number of the models. The models identified via the reference group are described below.

The first two models involving direct and indirect partnerships with volunteers are the primary focus of these Guidelines. However, it is important to understand that government-volunteer partnerships develop, evolve and exist in a variety of relationship structures. The principles, policy framework and recommendations in these Guidelines are broadly applicable to public sector agency involvement in all partnership models described above.

### **Model 1: Direct Volunteering**

Volunteers are directly involved with the public sector agency, either as an individual volunteer or through an agency established volunteer program. They provide a prescribed service as developed by the agency and are supervised by an allocated staff member within the agency.



## Case Studies

### Department of the Attorney General

The Department of the Attorney General recruits volunteers for three volunteering programs including the Victim Support Services (VSS), the Office of the Public Advocate's Community Guardianship Program (CGP) and the Justices of the Peace (JPs).

Volunteers at the VSS support victims of crime, as well as their families and help people become familiar with the court process and to understand their rights in the criminal justice system.

Volunteers in the CGP are appointed as guardians to make personal, medical and lifestyle decisions in the best interests of people who have decision making disabilities.

JPs are voluntary but statutory positions that involve various judicial and administrative functions in the justice system such as presiding over restraining order matters in the Magistrate Courts throughout the State, authorising warrants and witnessing statutory declarations.

The Department of the Attorney General's volunteers are appropriately trained and supervised by staff to effectively complete their roles in each of these programs.

### Department of Corrective Services

The Department of Corrective Services involves volunteers in volunteering programs operating at the Community Work Support Unit (CWSU) and Boronia Pre-release Centre for Women.

Volunteers in the CWSU provide individual support and work with offenders undertaking community work, especially assisting with arts and crafts groups and helping to transport offenders to work sites.

Volunteers at Boronia provide support to prisoners in a variety of ways including organising recreational programs, educational tutoring, linking prisoners with area employment providers and providing opportunities for mothers to develop strong relationships with their children.

The Department of Corrective Services works collaboratively with volunteers to ensure volunteers have the skills and confidence to provide a positive influence to prisoners at Boronia and to offenders undertaking community work. The Department ensures that all volunteers receive a formal induction and relevant training so that they are properly equipped to carry out assigned tasks.

### Department for Community Development

The Department for Community Development is committed to improving social wellbeing for all individuals, families and communities in WA – and community members themselves play a vital role in its work. Volunteers work directly with the Department, supervised by staff, in areas including working with seniors – Seniors Telephone Information Service and Volunteer Speakers Program; parent services and ParentLink; crisis care – phonenumber counselling and women – telephone information service.

### Tourism WA

The West Oz Welcomers (WOW) volunteer program illustrates the direct volunteering model. This program was established in August 2003 by Tourism Western Australia and is managed by a volunteer coordinator. The program offers a "meet and greet" service to arriving tourists at the Domestic Airport, International Airport and East Perth Rail Terminal. It provides basic directions, tourist information, endeavours to rectify problems for arriving visitors and also gives a warm and caring welcome to WA. During the cruise ship season they offer the same service to arriving cruise ship passengers coming into Fremantle. From time to time the WOW volunteers assist with special events as requested by Tourism Western Australia.

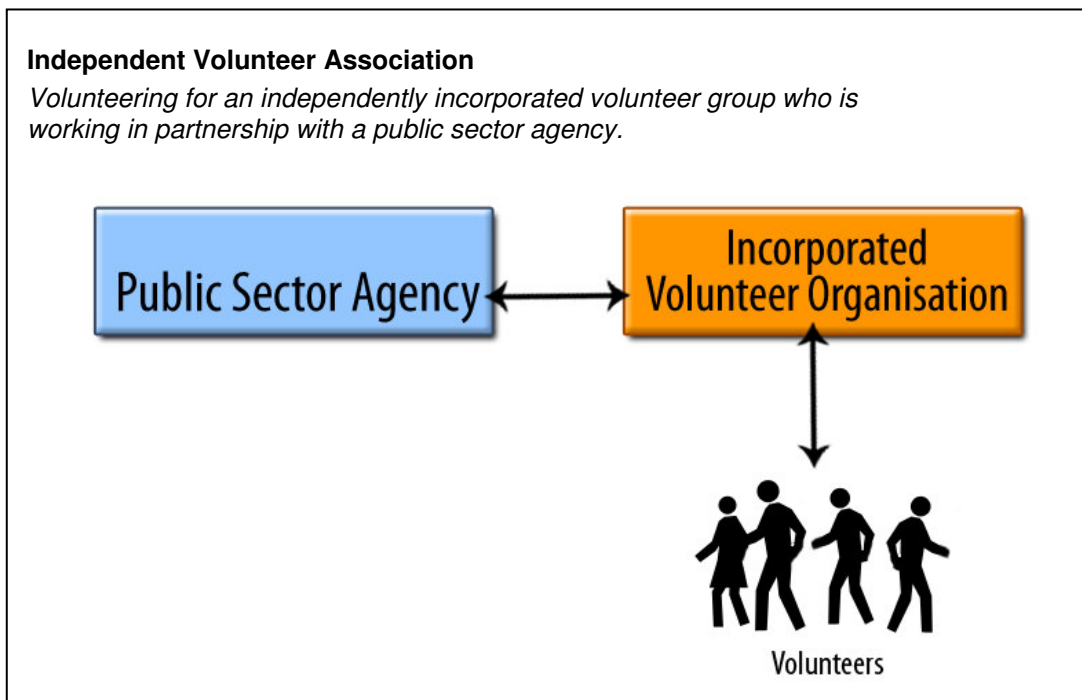
## **Model 2: Independent Volunteer Association**

In this model, volunteers are involved with an incorporated volunteer association or not for profit organisation, which in turn contributes to the work or outcomes of a public sector agency.

The incorporated group may be initiated by interested volunteers or by the public sector agency itself and may or may not be directly linked to the work of the agency. For example, Perth Zoo's "Docents" directly contribute to the work of Perth Zoo in terms of community education through their separately incorporated volunteer organisation. Other not for profit organisations work in parallel and contribute to the outcomes of the agency. For example, Starlight Children's Foundation operates independently within a governmental hierarchy with their work in supporting children in hospital contributing to the outcomes of the Department of Health.

The program is designed by the organisation to assist children, and is not a program developed by the Department. Necessarily though there is liaison between the independent voluntary association and the PSA within whose facilities it operates. The School Volunteer Program is another example of this – it is a non-government organisation operating within the facilities with some liaison with the Department of Education and Training but remaining relatively autonomous.

A number of government volunteer programs begin as Model 1 and move to Model 2 as volunteers become more coordinated and want to become involved in the management and development of volunteer programs and activities.



## Case Studies

### **Perth Zoo & the Perth Zoo Docent Association**

Incorporated in 1982, the Perth Zoo Docent Association (PZDA) helps Perth Zoo to meet its core objectives relating to conservation education. The PZDA operates parallel to the Zoo as a partner and has its own executive members, charter and code-of-conduct. Docent volunteers provide a range of educative services to Perth Zoo's visitors and add value to the Zoo experience. Docents also actively raise funds to support Zoo fundraising projects. The PZDA has one of the most intensive training programs for zoo volunteers in Australia and opportunities to enter the training program are highly competitive.

Perth Zoo provides support to the PZDA through provision of human resources, governance support and in-kind and direct financial contribution. The Zoo has clear guidelines on how volunteers are to be utilised and what limits are placed on their involvement. The Zoo's CEO maintains a close relationship with the Association and the Zoo considers the PZDA as a key stakeholder.

### **Fire and Emergency Services Authority (FESA)**

FESA works in partnership with a variety of volunteering associations to deliver emergency services. These are the WA Volunteer Fire & Rescue Services Association, Association of Volunteer Bush Fire Brigades, State Emergency Service Volunteers Association of Western Australia (Inc), Volunteer Marine Rescue WA (Inc) and the Emergency Services Volunteers Association (Inc).

These associations are all incorporated bodies with their own President, Secretary and Executive Membership. In an operational and training sense, FESA staff have a direct working relationship with the volunteer brigades, groups and units. Non operational support such as recruitment and retention strategies is also provided by FESA staff

Volunteers across all these emergency services make a tremendous contribution. FESA relies very heavily on their efforts to protect and support the community of Western Australia in times of need. FESA also relies on them to promote safety messages like the importance of smoke alarms, getting prepared for storms, cyclones etc. FESA also relies on and thanks the families of volunteers and their employers for their support.

### **Department of Fisheries - Volunteer Fisheries Liaison Officer (VFLO) Program**

The long-running Volunteer Fisheries Liaison Officer (VFLO) program operates throughout the State to help deliver the *Fish for the future* message. VFLOs make a valuable contribution to our fisheries and aquatic environment by raising community awareness of the need to protect and conserve fish stocks and habitats; encouraging community stewardship of this vital resource; influencing sustainable fishing behaviour; and providing a link between the Department of Fisheries and recreational fishers.

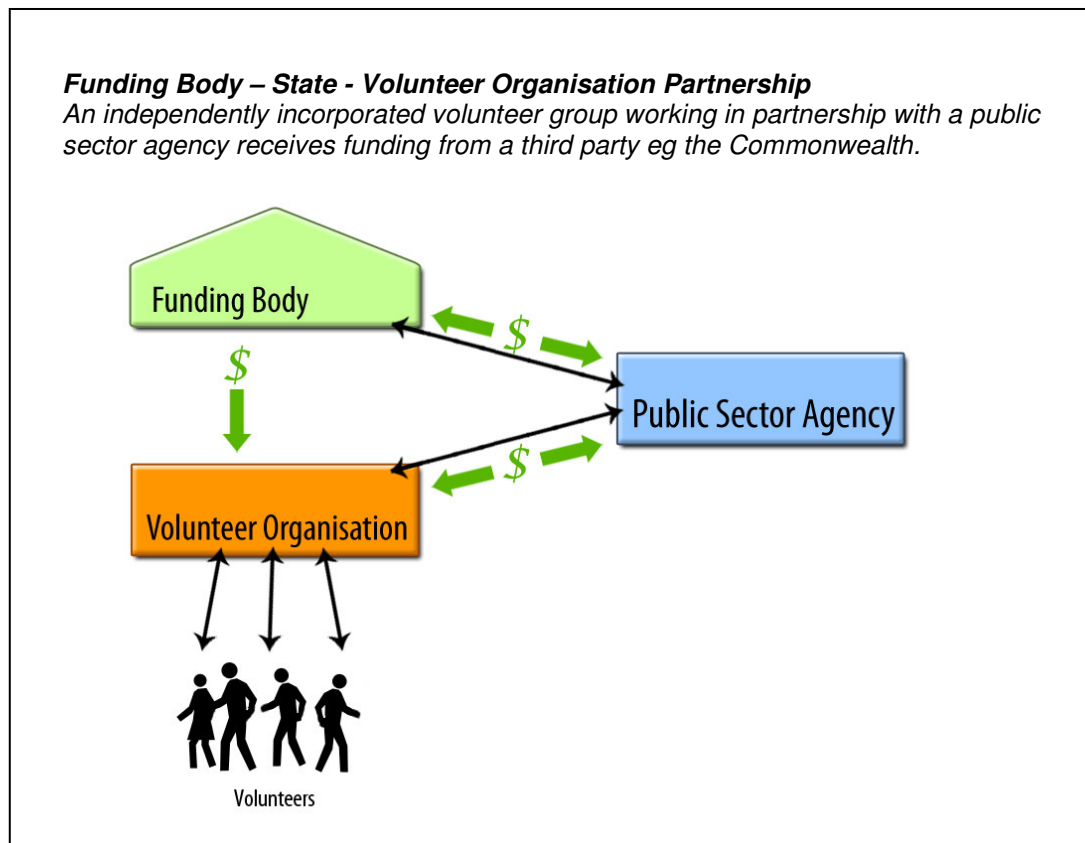
VFLOs can be seen at beaches, estuaries, boat ramps, jetties and popular inland waterways. They carry out education patrols to inform fishers about the current recreational fishing rules and regulations, gather research data and give practical tips on how to care for your catch. VFLOs also take part in Department of Fisheries' displays, shows and expos, school holiday interpretive activity programs, fishing workshops and research programs. They deliver educational programs to school and community groups.

The VFLO coordinators at the Department of Fisheries provide the VFLOs with training, uniforms and equipment. The Department also organises an annual state conference, which provides an opportunity for VFLOs from across the State to get together and discuss a wide range of issues. The program is a vital component of the Department's overall community education program.

### **Model 3: Funding Body – State – Volunteer Organisation Partnership**

Recent years have seen the emergence of a new partnership arrangement between State public sector agencies and volunteer organisations. In some areas, volunteer organisations receive funding from external parties, including the Commonwealth, that can impact on the partnership with the state public sector agency.

In particular, this is increasingly being seen with Federal Government policy and funding arrangements leading to situations where volunteer groups receive funding direct from the Commonwealth to deliver projects and services. State public sector agencies are often partners in this arrangement either as a funding provider or recipient, or in the process of service delivery.



## Case Study

### **(Department of Environment and Conservation (DEC)& Natural Resource Management (NRM) Councils**

In this example, nine regional NRM councils were set up in WA as independent incorporated bodies. The Councils are responsible for coordinating and managing the natural resources within their catchment areas in accordance with national priorities. The State works cooperatively with the Commonwealth to jointly set policy direction and provide funding to the Councils. In some instances, the NRM Councils fund State public sector agencies to implement projects they have been funded to achieve. Further, in some instances, DEC bids for project funding through the Council and volunteers are involved in this process and implementation.

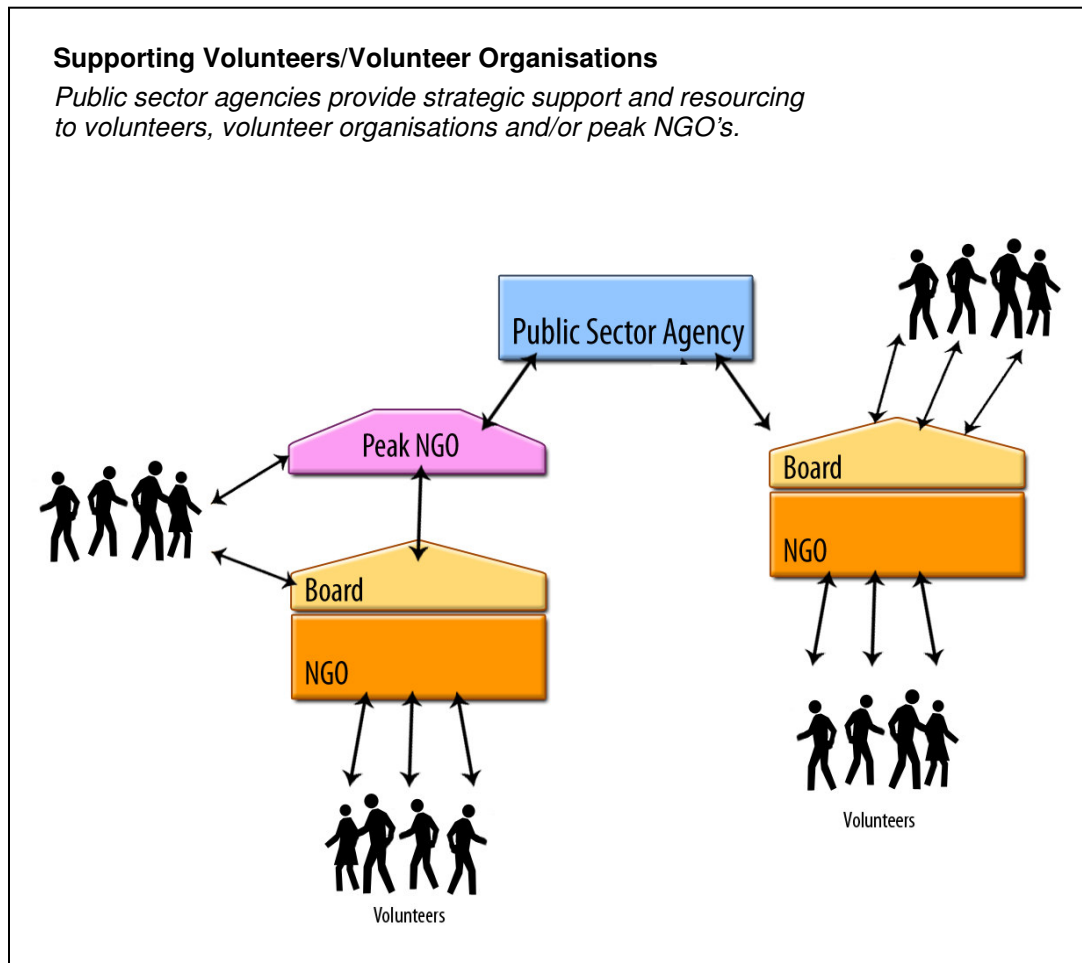
### **State Library of Western Australia and The Friends of Battye Library (Inc)**

The Friends of Battye Library (Inc) was established in July 1981. Its objectives are to assist and promote the interests of the J S Battye Library of West Australian History and the activities of the Library Board of Western Australia concerned with the acquisition, preservation and use of WA archival and documentary materials. The Friends of Battye Library operates under a constitution, has funded numerous publications and produces a quarterly newsletter. The organisation also currently supports 32 Battye Library volunteers who work with State Library of Western Australia collections staff to help organise, index, list, preserve and research materials. Over the past 25 years, the Friends of Battye Library has attracted valuable grants and bequests to assist with the work of the library..

The three models described above delineate ways in which volunteers and volunteer organisations directly contribute to the work and outcomes of public sector agencies. In addition to these partnerships, government-volunteer partnerships exist whereby government provides support and resourcing to the not-for-profit sector. This capacity support can indirectly contribute to the outcomes of an agency. These models are described below.

### **Model 4: Support and Resourcing of Volunteers and Volunteer Groups**

A number of public sector agencies provide strategic support and resourcing to the voluntary sector through policy setting, funding arrangements and governance support. Volunteer organisations are increasingly funded to deliver projects and services in line with government priorities. Public sector agencies support this trend by assisting in organisational development, fostering good governance and enabling the capacity of volunteer organisations. This is achieved by providing financial and in-kind support, policy development, sector initiatives and strategic advice.



### **Case Studies**

#### **Department of Sport and Recreation**

The Department provides industry support and governance advice/development to State Sporting Associations and individual clubs and sporting groups. Volunteers run these organisations and the government invests in the development of these volunteers to ensure they have the skills, knowledge and capacity to be able to run complex and at times very sophisticated organisations in an ever changing world. Critical initiatives such as the Club Development Scheme, the Sport Sustainability Program and the Disability Education Program, underpinned and supported by funding schemes such as the Sports Lottery Account, the Sport and Recreation Community Grants Scheme, and the Community Sporting and Recreation Facilities Fund are examples of the Departments support for and interaction with the volunteers involved in the industry.

### Perth Theatre Trust Volunteers - The Friends of His Majesty's Theatre

The Friends of the Theatre are a dedicated group of volunteers committed to assisting visitors to His Majesty's Theatre. Located in the main foyer of the venue, The Friends offer guided tours of the Theatre, and provide historical information about the building together with information of upcoming events.

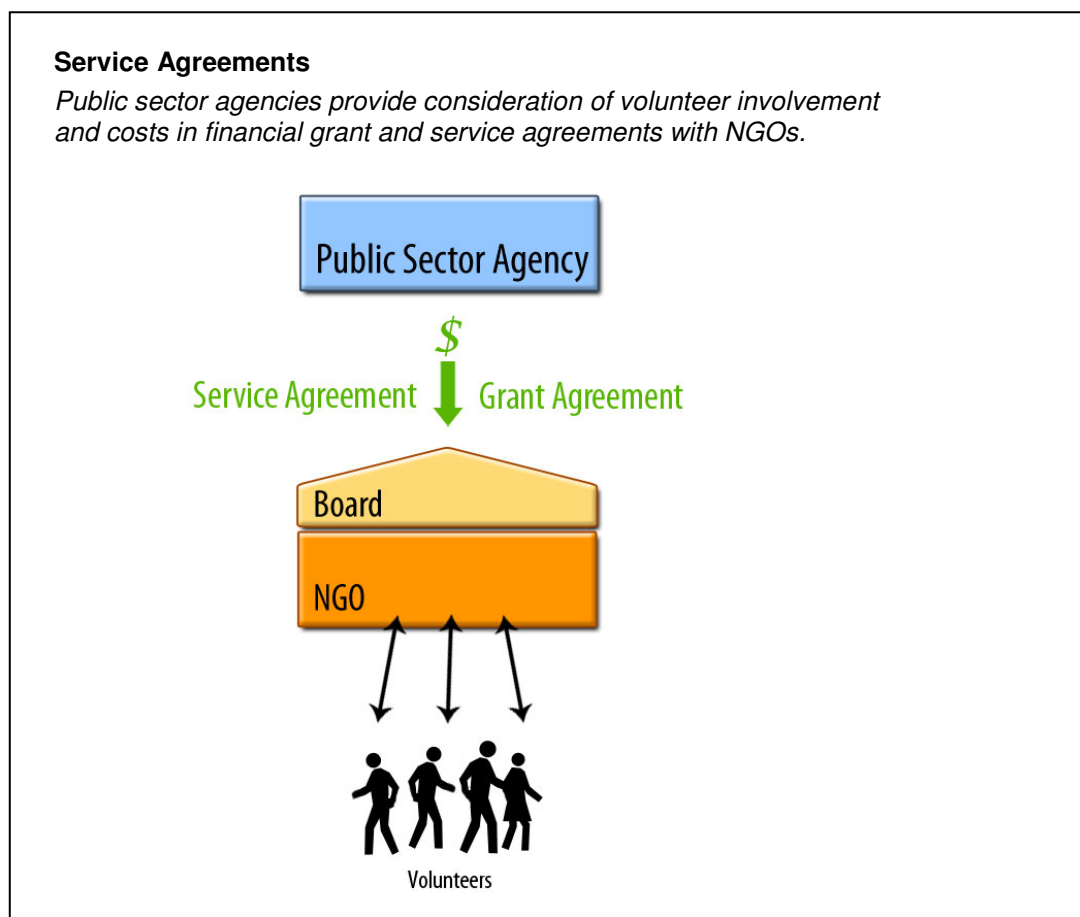
The Friends assist in a volunteer capacity with the Museum of Performing Arts, which opened in February 2001. The Museum houses more than 30,000 catalogued items of theatre memorabilia collected by the theatre's historian. Items such as costumes, photographs, press clippings, scripts, scores and other historic pieces are publicly exhibited at the Museum, DownStairs at the Maj, with a new exhibition to view every six to eight weeks.

The Friends also assist in a volunteer capacity with His Majesty's Theatre Foundation, which was established in 1993 to preserve and enhance His Majesty's Theatre as one of Australia's great theatrical landmarks through the support of donations and sponsorship. The Foundation is also committed to supporting Community Service Programs within the theatre, including MajKidz, Lunchtime Concerts and Morning Melodies.

The membership of The Friends of His Majesty's Theatre is currently 40 persons.

### Model 5: Service Agreements with NGOs that Involve Volunteers

Many public sector agencies provide funding to non-government organisations (NGOs) for services and projects that align with organisational objectives. Funding of NGOs through grant and service agreements with due consideration to the involvement and cost of volunteers in the operation and delivery of services is one way in which public sector agencies can support a collaborative relationship. Guidance on funding and purchasing arrangements is outlined in the State Supply Commission *Supply Policy and Guidelines Manual* and the government policy statement on *Funding and Purchasing Community Services*. See Appendix 4.



## Case Study

### Department for Community Development

The Department meets many of the organisation's objectives of improved social well-being and community capacity building by funding the non-government sector to deliver an array of services. With each service managed by a Voluntary Board and very often also engaging volunteers in service delivery, the partnership is a significant one.

## Emerging Issues and Trends

Emerging issues and trends which may impact upon government-volunteer partnerships in the future include demographic changes, geographical population shifts, technological developments, and changing political directions.

### 1. *An ageing population*

WA is facing a significant increase in the number of seniors in our community with over half a million baby boomers turning 60 over next 15 years. This will impact on the government in terms of reorientation of information and services and the way these services are delivered. The ageing of our population will provide a pool of potential volunteers and creates challenges for organisations and agencies to develop engaging, well-managed and meaningful partnerships.

The Productivity Commission report [\*Economic Implications of an Ageing Australia\*](#) estimated that there will be significant growth in the number of volunteers, primarily in the 60-65 years age group which is set to more than double from 598,000 in 2000-02 to 1.6 million in 2044-45. Similarly, volunteers in the 45-54 and 55-64 years age groups are expected to increase. This provides an enormous resource of potential volunteers for our community. The challenges are to engage these people in volunteering and to meet their needs and expectations in providing an engaging volunteering experience.

### 2. *Baby boomers on the move*

With many baby boomers retiring in the near future, there will be a large number of retirees keen to become involved in volunteering and give something back to the community. Some may seek 'sea' and 'tree' changes in lifestyle and move to live in the country. This shift will have an enormous impact on the dynamics and services of some rural towns, and similarly will impact on the city leaving a gap in their absence. A number may choose to travel around Australia. Capturing the involvement of these grey nomads will require capacity to engage in a flexible, short term way.

### 3. *Volunteering in country areas*

Rural WA currently has one of the highest rates of volunteering in Australia. However, country areas have unique issues to address. The influx of retirees may change the structure in some communities. At the same time, there is also a retirement trend of seniors away from farms and small rural towns towards larger regional centres. The trend for young people to move away to the city will impact on volunteer numbers for this age group and for specific roles. WA's mining industry provides rich economic resources to the state in many direct and indirect ways. However, shift work and fly in/fly out working conditions provide challenges for towns for recruiting and more importantly, retaining volunteers.

#### **4. Young people**

Young people are important to the sustainability of volunteering and community contribution. Current trends, along declining numbers in this demographic, indicate no future growth in the number of young people that will be volunteering. This has implications for organisations that rely on young volunteers, such as sport and recreation and emergency services.

At the same time, a number of initiatives are currently in place that aim to increase participation by young people. The Department of Education and Training's Community Service Program, currently being piloted, will require students in years 10 and 11 to undertake 20 hours of service to the community to be able to graduate and will have an enormous impact on the involvement of young people. Thus, while no increase in the actual number of young people in our society is anticipated based on current trends, programs are in place that aim to develop a sense of contribution to the community and facilitate greater engagement of young people with volunteering. This will have far reaching benefits as research has shown that early positive experiences with volunteering lead to increased involvement through a person's life.

#### **5. Technology**

The rapid development of information and communications technology (ICT) has led to many changes in the way society operates and has also created new ways for people to volunteer their skills, time and knowledge. Online or virtual volunteering enables contribution from home or work to local areas or communities throughout the world. ICT is also changing the way government does business and the way it delivers information and services to the public. Frameworks for how the public sector will move towards e-government and electronic engagement with citizens are already in place. Government-volunteer partnerships will evolve with this shift in core business.

#### **6. Volunteering activity trends**

With people increasingly busy, working longer hours and reporting less time to commit regularly to volunteering, developing innovative and flexible ways to participate will be important. Corporate and family volunteering is increasing, particularly in the private sector. One-off, short term and flexible opportunities for involvement in a variety of roles will enhance capacity to attract and retain volunteers.

#### **7. Commonwealth Welfare to Work Reforms**

In the 2005-06 Budget, the Federal Government announced a package of measures aimed at increasing the movement of current income support recipients into employment. Main groups that will be affected by this are mature aged people, parents, people with a disability and the very long term unemployed. The Welfare to Work initiatives were introduced on 1 July 2006.

Under the reforms, mature aged job seekers (aged 50-54 years old) will no longer be able to meet their Activity Test requirements by participating in voluntary and/or part-time work. This may have a negative impact on people in this group who experience difficulty in sourcing employment and find value in contributing to their community through volunteering. Anecdotal evidence indicates that people aged over 45 years continue to have much more difficulty in obtaining employment, should they lose their jobs, than younger age groups. Volunteering provides an avenue for these people to engage productively with society and lead meaningful lives. The removal of this option has the potential to severely limit opportunities for these people and may have longer term impacts on the skills and mental health of this ageing cohort.

## **8. Public policy**

Volunteering is increasingly central to a number of public policy issues. There has been increasing focus on the importance of citizen engagement, enabling individuals, building capacity, and strengthening connectedness within, and of communities, as fundamental to social and economic wellbeing. Notions of social sustainability, community capacity building and social capital are increasingly integral components of current political, social and economic policies.

Robert Putnam's social capital theory, which links social networks to economic health, has been effective in refocusing government policy not only on engaging communities, but in designing policies and services that deliberately foster the development of connections and networks within local areas. Volunteering is a key contributor to social capital and can enhance engagement in community life including democratic participation. Through creating connections and networks in the community, volunteering can establish a greater sense of trust and contribution within a society. This has positive outcomes for individuals and the communities in which they live.

Discussions held by the reference group in the redevelopment of these Guidelines highlight the value of volunteers, not just directly for the purpose of direct program involvement, but in their role of broader individual and community education and awareness, connectedness and participation. For example, voluntary public participation in Clean Up Australia contributes to reducing litter, but at the same time has a greater impact in promoting messages about the environment, pollution and obligation to contribute to the society in which we live.

## **9. Relevance to public sector agencies**

Public sector agencies involving volunteers need to be aware of these emerging trends, and tailor volunteer partnership and management strategies to effectively recruit, develop, retain and value volunteers.

## **Conclusion**

This background paper captures the emerging trends in volunteering and identifies evolving partnerships between public sector agencies and volunteers. It is designed to supplement the [\*Guidelines for Successful Partnerships Between Public Sector Agencies and Volunteers\*](#), relating to the Premier's Circular.