

## How the Government can make a difference

Volunteering is central to the social development, economy and environment of New Zealanders. As a nation we have a proud tradition of donating our time; around one third of New Zealanders undertake voluntary work for an organisation, and about two thirds undertake unpaid work outside their home. Contributing 157 million hours of their time per annum through organisations, volunteers are a vital element of the non-profit sector and our wider economy, providing the equivalent of approximately \$3.5 billion to the country's gross domestic product.

However, there are many changes occurring within the volunteering sector making it essential that our sector remains well supported and future-proofed. The 2017 election provides an opportunity to look at how the Government can ensure volunteering remains a strong part of our nation's identity.

## 1. Government agencies better valuing and recognising the contribution made by volunteers to service delivery and social capital

### An updated Government Policy on Volunteering

#### *Our View*

The current Government Policy needs to be recalibrated to ensure it retains an all-of-government relevance that attests its commitment to volunteering and its crucial role in society, and give the policy real voice to make a difference for the sector.

#### *Our Recommendation*

The updated policy should recognise the important role of formal and informal volunteering in society (community building and promoting social cohesion, as well as service delivery), the provision of natural justice to conflict situations, and to appropriately resource the engagement, support and reimbursement of costs of volunteering.

### A reinforced Government commitment to volunteering

#### *Our View*

An updated Policy on Volunteering would ensure a stronger commitment from Government agencies to supporting their own volunteer involvement. There is a need for the Government to lead by example, including

the modelling of excellent volunteer management by the agencies that engage volunteers.

#### *Our Recommendation*

Government agencies can reinforce their commitment to volunteering by:

- Becoming a member of Volunteering New Zealand (if their agency involves volunteers)
- Ensuring their managers of volunteers are demonstrating best practice
- Reducing barriers associated with volunteering in policy and practice
- Encouraging good practice in volunteer programmes which government directly manages

## 2. Making it easier for people to volunteer

#### *Our View*

There are many complex changes occurring in volunteer engagement in New Zealand which create barriers for people who want to give their time and skills to the community. These include:

- financial pressures and costs of volunteering,
- time pressures,
- increased compliance requirements, and
- increases in travel time.

#### *Our Recommendation*

If the Government is serious about reducing inequity, its agencies could consider offsetting the various financial barriers associated with volunteering, particularly those who are unemployed, retired or studying.

For example, in our 2015 State of Volunteering report, we found that only 26% of responding organisations offered reimbursement of expenses to volunteers, indicating this is an area which needs addressing.

## 3. Support for more effective volunteer management

#### *Our View*

For effective volunteering to take place, organisations need adequate infrastructure and to have the elements of good volunteer management practice in place. This includes adopting best practice around volunteer engagement. Better trained, informed and supported, organisations can respond more positively and flexibly to the large-scale changes currently occurring in the nature and motivations of volunteers.

#### ***Our Recommendation***

While we are pleased the Support for Volunteering Fund has recently been doubled, we believe most Government agencies can do more to support volunteering infrastructure at their agency (e.g. by becoming a member of Volunteering NZ; sufficiently supporting their own managers of volunteers etc.)

## **4. Looking after the welfare of volunteer workers**

### **Volunteer welfare through mental injury sustained while volunteering**

#### ***Our View***

Volunteers are currently unable to access ACC in the event of a mental injury while/following volunteering.

#### ***Our Recommendation***

An amendment to the Accident Compensation Act 2001 could cover volunteers who are mentally injured in the course of their volunteer work should have such an injury deemed a 'work-place injury'. This would allow such volunteers the same provisions of welfare relating to costs of medical procedures and earnings related compensation for their paid employment.

### **Supporting the sector to better manage conflict**

#### ***Our View***

Conflict is costly and disruptive. If conflict is left unresolved, or resolved poorly, it can have significant financial, social and impacts on individuals, families and communities. Therefore, when 79% of organisations responding to our 2016 State of Volunteering report recorded challenges in conflict involving volunteers, we believe more work can be done to support volunteer-involving organisations.

#### ***Our Recommendation***

VNZ believes the Government can take a lead role in supporting better processes and procedures to resolve conflict efficiently and effectively in our workforce. Resourcing VNZ and volunteer centres to offer conflict resolution programmes would go a long way to increasing the outcomes of conflict in volunteer-involving organisations.

## **Conclusion**

Volunteers play a vital role in strengthening our communities and must therefore be supported and celebrated. VNZ and the network of volunteer centres have an important role in promoting, supporting, and encouraging volunteering which is central to our identity as New Zealanders. We are committed to working with the Government to ensure the volunteering sector is strong, resilient and thriving.

## **Contact VNZ**

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