
Advancing the Community Together Partnership Review Report 2010

Reassess and Renew

17 September 2010

**The second biennial review of the partnership between the Volunteer Sector and
the South Australian Government**

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PART 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This review evaluates the partnership between the Volunteer Sector and the Government of South Australia. It aims to ensure the relationship remains current, focussed, and relevant to the volunteer community and viewed as a dynamic framework for progressing the ongoing partnership between the two sectors.

The volunteer community faces far-reaching change. As we navigate that change, our challenge is to maintain our strengths, sustain our values and fulfil our promise. This review looks forward to the next three years, where we can expect:

- An ageing and growing population, raising the costs of health, aged care and dependency
- The transformation of business, commerce and personal lives by technological advances, especially in digital electronics and communications
- Strong growth and cultural diversification of our population, with high demands for economic infrastructure, education and social infrastructure spending
- Deepening stresses between human activities and wider ecosystems, globally and locally

The Office for Volunteers undertook this second review of the *Advancing the Community Together: A Partnership between the Volunteer Sector and the South Australian Government* in 2010 in that context.

As a key part of the review, opinions of a range of stakeholders from around the state were sought, incorporating targeted questionnaires, reports and community consultation workshops with volunteers and volunteer managers from the sector.

Whilst there was a high level of satisfaction with the Advancing the Community Together Partnership and achievements to date, collective experiences and feedback from the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, Volunteer Partnership Action Committee, community organisations and volunteers indicated a capacity for improvement.

There were three particular areas where comments and suggestions indicated an opportunity to improve the partnership:

- Training to meet local needs
- Addressing legislation issues (reducing red tape)
- Improving funding arrangements

Areas where improvements are suggested include:

1. Streamlining the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group to ensure it's more accessible to the community and high level strategic advice is provided to the Minister
2. Remodelling the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee to provide for better cross-agency communication and cooperation when dealing with volunteering issues
3. Updating and modernising the partnership document
4. Reviewing the regulatory impact on the sector with the aim of reducing "red tape"
5. Reviewing the current models of resourcing the sector to improve effectiveness of outcomes
6. Ensuring the state is well positioned to contribute on a national and international level

PART 2. THE PARTNERSHIP BACKGROUND

2.1 THE PARTNERSHIP

In 1999 organisations involving volunteers voiced their interest in the development of a strong and proactive relationship between the Volunteer Sector and the State Government.

In 2002 the Premier and Minister for Volunteers assigned the Compact Development Taskforce to consult widely with representative groups and organisations across the volunteer community. The consultations focussed on developing a partnership between the South Australian Government and the Volunteer Sector and the elements it might contain.

Advancing the Community Together: A Partnership between the Volunteer Sector and the South Australian Government was signed onto by the Premier Mike Rann and 29 leaders from across the volunteer community on 12 May 2003.

The partnership was designed to:

- Acknowledge the value of volunteering in our community
- Develop a vision for the future of volunteering in South Australia
- Establish a framework for an ongoing partnership
- Promote and facilitate volunteering in a manner that benefits the community

As partners, the South Australian Government and the Volunteer Sector committed themselves to work together to ensure there would be an effective relationship that realised the commitments made in the document.

It was anticipated that amongst the many benefits delivered from a strong and ongoing partnership, between the volunteer community and the government, the following four direct outcomes would result:

- Advancement of volunteering: ensuring the ongoing promotion and recognition of volunteering whilst raising awareness of its value
- Redressing of issues that impede volunteering: actively identifying and responding to issues that impede volunteering
- Establishment of communication protocols: developing and improving communication and information processes between organisations involving volunteers and public sector agencies
- Development of appropriate policies and practices: ensuring future government policy decisions take into account any potential effects on the volunteer community

2.2 MECHANISMS TO IMPLEMENT THE PARTNERSHIP

2.2.1 The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group

Mechanisms were put in place to implement the partnership, including the formation of the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group providing the volunteer community a direct voice to government. The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group presents recommendations, information and advice on issues involving volunteers and volunteering to the Minister for Volunteers and the Office for Volunteers.

2.2.2 The Volunteer Partnership Action Committee

A Volunteer Partnership Action Committee was also established to meet the needs of public sector volunteers and to coordinate implementation of the partnership. With representatives from across government departments, the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee identified and prioritised government commitments for implementation and set specific targets and timeframes for implementation. The Volunteer Partnership Action Committee worked in partnership with the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group in implementing agreed areas of priority for the volunteer community.

2.3 THE REVIEW

2.3.1 Purpose of the Review

It was agreed to review the partnership every two years to ensure it continued to reflect the views of the Volunteer Sector and to take into account changes in government policy or legislation that may impact on the partnership and the sector itself. A list of policy changes made since 2003 can be viewed in Attachment 1.

In 2003, the South Australian Strategic Plan was introduced and contained a key objective for volunteering:

“Objective 5: Building Communities:

Volunteering

A healthy community relies on its social networks. These connections help to share burdens and build a sense of community trust. In turn, this creates a more efficient society. Strong communities encourage social inclusion, contribute to the state’s overall quality of life and create opportunities for development and growth for every South Australian. The level of volunteering is a good indicator of the cohesion of a community and its active interest in identifying and solving problems.

T5.6 Volunteering: *maintain the high level of volunteering in South Australia at 50% participation rate or higher.”*

The target is consistent with the aims and ideals of the partnership and was subsequently endorsed by Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group members.

2.3.2 The Partnership Review 2005

After extensive consultation, the partnership was first reviewed in 2005. Results showed that:

- There was overwhelming support for it and its effectiveness
- The achievement of outcomes was on track
- It proved strong support for the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group and Volunteer Partnership Action Committee
- There were a number of major developments over the past two years which impacted on the partnership

The 2005 review recommended:

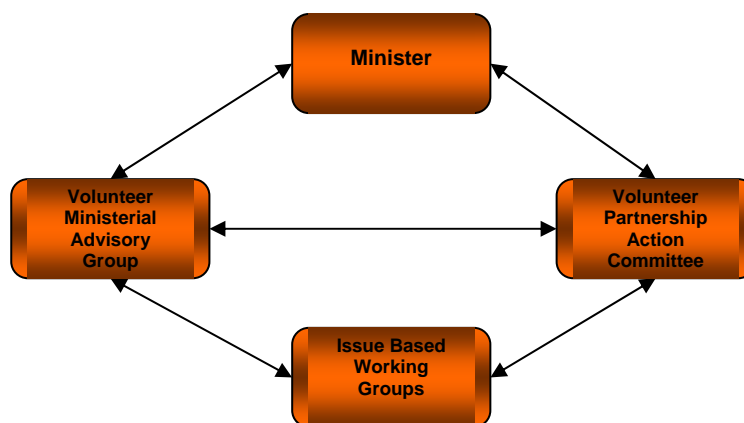
1. Implementation of a new operational model that was project based
2. An improved approach to communication

These recommendations were embraced by the volunteer community and contributed to many of the achievements highlighted in the **Success Stories** found in Part 4.5 of this report.

2.3.3 Internal Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group Review 2009

In July 2009 Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group was internally reviewed by the Minister for Volunteers and members to reset its direction, examine its purpose, processes, performance and evaluation. Seven recommendations were unanimously agreed to by members and the Minister:

1. The Terms of Reference be refreshed.
2.
 - a. Members express their views and opinions based on their knowledge and experience.
 - b. Views and opinions put forward should be for the best interest of the sector as a whole.
3.
 - a. Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group be retained as the direct voice to the Minister on volunteering issues.
 - b. Ratified that membership be based on experience and knowledge of the sector.
 - c. Membership reflect the diversity of the sector.
4. Agreed to the following [communication] model:



5.
 - a. The Volunteer Task Force be disbanded.
 - b. The above [communication] model replace the existing model with working groups being formed, as needed, to address particular issues.
 - c. Selection for working groups be based on the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group/Volunteer Partnership Action Committee member's experience, availability and skills needed to address the particular issue.
6.
 - a. Issues based topics be addressed at each meeting with recommendation(s) to the Minister.
 - b. The Minister and Office for Volunteer canvass the views and opinions of Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group when developing policy impacting on the volunteer community.
 - c. Members meet quarterly with the option of increased numbers of meetings as necessary to meet work load commitments.
7. The issue identification template be utilised to identify and raise volunteer sector issues.

In 2010 these recommendations were all agreed to by the Minister and were consequently implemented by the Chair, Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group.

PART 3. 2010 REVIEW METHODOLOGY

The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group and the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee agreed to a review methodology in April 2010. A Partnership Review Reference Group was formed to oversee the review process.

3.1 PARTNERSHIP REVIEW REFERENCE GROUP

The Reference Group was chaired by the Member for Light and Chair of Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group and included representatives from both the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group and Volunteer Partnership Action Committee:

Chair	Tony Piccolo MP	Member for Light Chair of Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group
Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group Representatives	Dr Kathryn Zeitz Janet Stone	St Johns Ambulance Volunteering SA&NT
Volunteer Partnership Action Committee Representatives	Kosette Lambert Mark Groote Justin English	Department for Environment and Heritage SA Fire and Emergency Services Commission (SAFECOM) Department for Health

3.2 SCOPE OF THE REVIEW

It was agreed that the review of the Advancing the Community Together (ACT) Partnership would involve consultation with a broad range of stakeholders, providing opportunities for the discussion and recording of issues, concerns and priorities reflecting the diversity of the volunteer community.

The consultation process with the community was to be as broad as possible in the time available and encompass targeted questionnaires, reports and workshops with volunteers and volunteer managers from the sector.

From December 2009 to June 2010, the following steps were used in the review to gain information from the volunteer community:

- Step 1** Communicated to the community that the review was happening and advised on how to have input.

Through the office for volunteers existing State of Volunteering On-line (e-newsletter) and an announcement at the State Volunteer Congress in December 2009 the volunteer community was advised of the review, the review process and how people could get involved.

The Minister for Volunteers wrote to the 14 Councils who operate a Volunteer Resource Centre, Information Hub and independent Volunteer Resource Centres outlining the review process.

- Step 2** Undertook an environmental scan to ensure any changes since the partnership was last reviewed were taken into account. This included examining alternative operational models and identifying approaches to coordinate with the Australian Government national agenda and National Compact.

This step identified changes and factors that may have influenced the ACT Partnership or its operations. It also explored approaches being utilised elsewhere and allowed comparison between models to identify alternative approaches.

Step 3 Information was collected including a questionnaire of the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group and Volunteer Partnership Action Committee and other key stakeholders on the effectiveness of the ACT Partnership and suggestions for improvement.

Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group and Volunteer Partnership Action Committee members and key stakeholders were asked to provide their views on:

- *The ACT Partnership document and whether/what changes were needed*
- *The effectiveness of the partnership and the operational structure e.g. Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group and Volunteer Partnership Action Committee*
- *The effectiveness of the “project based” operational model as a mechanism to implement partnership commitments*

And make recommendations on:

- *Future directions and any new issues and priorities*
- *Suggested operational model etc.*

Step 4 Office for Volunteers staff hosted workshops in the following towns/regions, providing and receiving information: Participants were volunteers, volunteer managers, and people with an interest in the community sector.

Region	Location
<i>North</i>	1. <i>Copper Coast</i> 2. <i>Pt Augusta</i>
<i>West</i>	3. <i>Streaky Bay</i> 4. <i>Pt Lincoln</i>
<i>Fleurieu</i>	5. <i>Yankalilla</i>
<i>South East</i>	6. <i>Mt Gambier</i>
<i>City</i>	7. <i>Volunteering SA and NT</i>
<i>Southern</i>	8. <i>Southern Volunteering (SA) Inc</i>
<i>Northern</i>	9. <i>Gawler</i> 10. <i>Northern Volunteering (SA) Inc</i>
<i>Eastern</i>	11. <i>Hills volunteering</i>
<i>Western</i>	12. <i>West Torrens</i>

3.3 QUESTIONNAIRES – ONLINE, PRINT AND SEND

Three questionnaires were created to collate responses from:

1. The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group members
2. The Volunteer Partnership Action Committee members
3. The general volunteer community - volunteers, volunteer managers, and people with an interest in the community sector.

Both the online and print versions were promoted through the Office for Volunteers' fortnightly e-newsletter, by email link and by forwarding onto peak bodies to send onto their networks. The questionnaires were open for three weeks.

During the consultation period, volunteers were also invited to provide a written submission if they wished to comment or make suggestions for improvement. None were received.

A summary of the results follows in Part 4. Copies of the three questionnaires, and responses from the workshops are attached as follows:

Attachment 2	Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group Questionnaire responses
Attachment 3	Volunteer Partnership Action Committee Questionnaire responses
Attachment 4	Volunteer Partnership Review Questionnaire responses
Attachment 5	Community Consultation Feedback

PART 4. CONSULTATION FEEDBACK SUMMARY

The following is a summary of the feedback received from consultation with the volunteer community. Specific comments are found in Attachments 2, 3, 4 and 5.

4.1 VOLUNTEER MINISTERIAL ADVISORY GROUP

Following the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group review in 2009, members were asked to provide feedback on the partnership. Overall, feedback from members was extremely positive and all respondents considered the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group was the most effective mechanism to represent the sector. However, a few members identified areas where improvements to the partnership could be made. It was considered that:

- Communication protocols, policies and practices needed further work as desired outcomes.
- The diversity of sector representation on the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group could be improved e.g. to include Indigenous, new migrants, youth, the disabled and “not for profit” community service.

Members also considered that changes in the broader volunteer community needed to be reflected in the partnership, including:

- Introduction of the National Compact, creating a formal partnership between the Australian Government and Volunteer Sector nation-wide
- Productivity Commission’s Review, measuring the contribution of the not-for-profit sector
- Henry Tax Review, looking into taxation regimes affecting not-for-profit groups
- Intergeneration Report 2010, assessing the challenges Australia will face over the next 40 years
- National and international directions in volunteering strategy

4.2 VOLUNTEER PARTNERSHIP ACTION COMMITTEE

The Volunteer Partnership Action Committee respondents were from a number of government agencies, including the Department of Primary Industries and Resources SA; Department of Further Education, Employment, Science and Technology; Department for Environment and Heritage; South Australian Fire and Emergency Services Commission; County Fire Service; State Emergency Services; and the Office for Recreation and Sport.

The majority of members felt that the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee was :

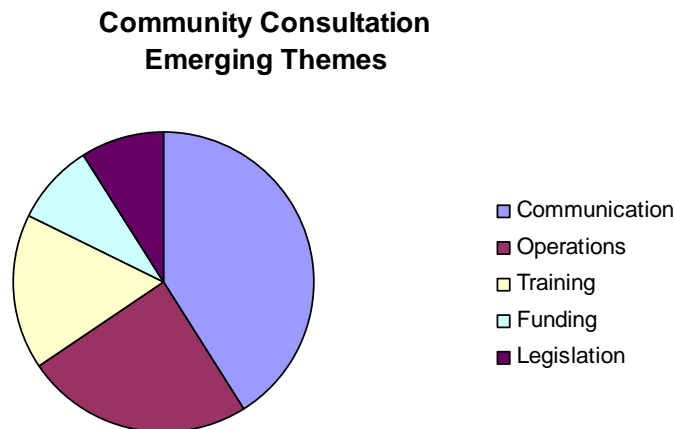
- Effective in implementing the partnership across government particularly when focussed working groups were utilised to address specific issues with members from relevant agencies
- However, it’s performance had been limited in achieving broad cross agency results due to the Committee’s low profile and/or members not being the key decision makers in the department they represent.

4.3 COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

A number of emerging themes came through as a result of in-depth discussions during the twelve community consultation workshops (see page 8 for list). They were:

1. Communicate more effectively
 - To be two way, sustainable and ongoing
 - Increase advertising/promotion/public relations for the sector
 - Increase volunteer recognition, awards, thanks and praise
 - Develop guidelines/training for communicating with culturally and linguistically diverse communities
 - Develop a structure for communication between volunteers and the Minister
2. Operational matters becoming more costly and time consuming
 - Administration – too much paperwork and government red tape such as the need to create databases for volunteer statistics and reporting, additional management requirements, cost and time involved in building the future capacity and skills
 - Human Resources activities - recruitment, retention, training of volunteers, issues around paid versus volunteer staff
 - Occupational Health Safety and Welfare activities –developing policy, training, appointing officer, providing volunteer meal breaks, etc
 - Risk Management – developing operating guidelines, organising police checks, ensuring regulations are met
 - Insurance costs – personal accident, public liability and for items volunteers borrow
3. Target training subjects, access and cost by local needs
 - Targeting local needs eg regional, program variety, skill sets, register of local skills
 - Access and portability so it does not need to be repeated in another group
 - Additional costs associated with regional training
 - Need for accreditation – recognised by TAFE (Technical and Further Education)
4. Provide ongoing, sustainable, timely funding
 - To remain financially viable
 - Funding for National Volunteer Week
 - Timing of grants and need to apply each year
 - Regional versus city costs of volunteering
 - Access to feedback on successful applications with grant providers like the Office for Volunteers
 - Increased funding for volunteer managers
 - Improving resourcing of small volunteer organisations
5. Strategically manage the effects of legislation
 - Police checks – free vs not free, transferable, under age, enforcing, barrier to volunteering ie. migrants
 - Responsible Officers
 - Rules and regulations, eg: Healthy eating plan, applications for functions, no smoking rules, job ready program

The following chart summarises the number of responses in each emerging theme area:



Specific feedback collected during the consultation workshops highlighting areas above can be found in Attachments 5.

4.4 VOLUNTEERS PARTNERSHIP REVIEW QUESTIONNAIRE

An online questionnaire was developed and administered through the Office for Volunteers website. Volunteer managers, and people with an interest in the community sector were invited to participate in this questionnaire via the Office for Volunteers website, fortnightly newsletter and at the State Volunteer Congress. 44 people responded.

Respondents were in agreement that all of the desired outcomes of the partnership were still very relevant. However, respondents believe the following outcomes could be improved:

- Actively identifying and responding to issues that impede volunteering and
- Establishment of communication protocols

The need to improve communication protocols is also supported by how few respondents who could comment on the effectiveness of VMAG. VPAC, the State Congress or the Annual Report.

There were some comments in the responses asking for more support for small volunteer groups and accessing/obtaining grants

Volunteers and groups indicated they had benefited from:

- Improved access for community groups to government facilities
- Streamlined state government grant requirements
- Help for groups to advertise their service through the Office for Volunteers Sustainable Online Community Engagement (SOCE) program and the television advertising campaigns

Participants indicated the partnership could also seek to support: local government volunteers; sustainability for Volunteer Resource Centre's; and increased free training access in rural areas. They also believed that there were opportunities for improving the partnership through improved or increased:

- Marketing
- Communication
- Funding
- Representation from the whole sector

4.5 SUCCESS STORIES

The consultation feedback summarised in Parts 4.1 to 4.4 suggests strong support for the ACT Partnership and a clear recognition of the advances made due to its implementation. There have been significant practical outcomes in the seven years since the inception of the Partnership. The following were specifically mentioned as success stories:

- Free websites, promotional materials (including DVDs, e-newsletters and brochures), and assistance planning events and creating marketing plans through the Sustainable Online Community Engagement Program
- Funding for groups to freely develop short films and television commercials to promote their services through the Community Voices program
- Corporates4Communities partnering businesses and staff to provide services to assist volunteer organisations
- A variety of free training specifically for volunteers to improve skills and knowledge
- Free police checks for volunteers working with vulnerable groups
- Establishment of the largest volunteer infrastructure program in the state's history, with the launch of numerous Volunteer Resource Centres across the state
- Increasing access for community groups to government facilities through the new Volunteer Partnership - Accessing Resources Initiative
- Better information for volunteer groups via the Office for Volunteers website, e-newsletter and fact sheets
- Streamlined State Government grant requirements to provide easier access to grants and simplified application and acquittal processes
- Television campaigns to promote volunteering and increase public recognition of volunteering activities.

4.6 OVERVIEW OF INFORMATION ANALYSIS

Information collected from the questionnaires and workshops was reasonably consistent.

Whilst many of the issues raised during the workshops related to the operational activities of volunteer groups they present challenges requiring a broader more strategic response.

Overall when looking at the information collected from the questionnaires and workshops following conclusions may be drawn:

- Models developed for communication between the volunteer community and public sector, Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, Volunteer Partnership Action Committee, Office for Volunteers and the Minister for Volunteers need to be improved
- The partnership should continue with a revised and modernised document
- Volunteers be given input into government policies that affect their sector
- Funding for resources such as training be reviewed
- Legislation be examined with the aim to reducing regulation

These challenges are examined in more detail in Part 5 of this report.

PART 5. FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Whilst there is a high level of satisfaction with the Advancing the Community Together Partnership and achievements to date, collective experiences from the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, Volunteer Partnership Action Committee members, community groups and volunteers, indicated a capacity for improvement and an ongoing need for the partnership.

Following in 5.1 to 5.3 is discussion of the key areas along with some suggested areas of action for consideration.

5.1 THE PARTNERSHIP

The questionnaire responses and consultations revealed that the formal mechanisms such as the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, Volunteer Partnership Action Committee and the State Volunteer Congress are strongly supported. However, responses also indicated that there are a number of areas where their operational effectiveness could be improved.

In particular, a common thread throughout the questionnaires and workshops was the view that:

- A more formal communication structure needs to be developed between the volunteer community, the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group and the Minister for Volunteers so that a broader range of viewpoints can be considered
- The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group membership needs to be more accessible and reflect the views of the whole volunteer community
- The Volunteer Partnership Action Committee's cross agency role needs to be strengthened so there is more consistency across government agencies in dealing with organisations involving volunteers and to ensure there is proper consideration given to the impact of government regulation and policies on the volunteer community
- Communication protocols between public sector agencies and the volunteer community need to be improved, so community organisations are provided with the necessary resources (e.g. information/training) to help them understand/adapt to changes (e.g. policy/legislation), which impact them
- The partnership document needs to be updated and modernised to meet the new challenges facing the volunteer community and government

5.1.1 The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group: The volunteer community's direct voice to government

The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group was supported in all responses as the most effective mechanism to represent the diverse views and interests of the volunteer community and provide advice to the Minister for Volunteers.

However, some responses indicated that the group is not representative all sectors of the volunteer community and could be improved by:

- Including 'hands on' volunteers, not just 'volunteer managers'
- Involving all sectors, including people from: Local Government, Indigenous and Torres Strait Islander, culturally and linguistically diverse, disabilities, youth, etc
- Involving different generations eg Baby Boomers, Generation X and Y

In contrast, it has been argued that Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group membership and diversity in representation is 'about right' and any additions would make it unwieldy and difficult to engage in effective dialogue.

Other concerns raised in the workshops indicate improvements could be made to communication and consultation between the advisory group and sector organisations with comments like: “The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group representative of my sector has never corresponded or consulted with my organisation.”

Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group: Discussion

a. Expectations and the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group member’s role

It appears there is a difference between people’s expectation of Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group membership and their actual role and responsibility. History plays a part in this. When developing the partnership in 2003 there were 29 sector specific representatives involved because all sectors of the volunteer community wanted to participate. In practicality however, this structure proved cumbersome and a smaller task group was created to do the work, negotiate with the government and report back to the larger group.

The initial Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group was based on the larger group of sector specific representatives and to be effective it broke up into three working parties to look at specific actions.

Following the inaugural review the number of Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group members was reduced to 20 so it could be more constructive and manageable. However, confusion over the member’s role has continued to be raised as some members were selected from specific organisations, such as Sport SA, whilst others were selected following a public call.

Traditionally, members of the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group represented a sector so when its size was reduced members were uncertain whether they still represented a sector or were being asked to bring their knowledge and experience of volunteering to the table. This change has not been clearly understood within the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, let alone the broader volunteer community and needs to be articulated better. The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group itself took action last year to clarify this and it was agreed, with the Ministers endorsement, that they do not represent any particular sector but are, as individuals, to put forward their views and provide advice in the best interest of the sector as a whole. Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group members have indicated that they have operated more effectively since that time.

Also general discussion about the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group’s effectiveness indicates there is still some confusion over the type and level of advice to be provided to the Minister. This confusion arises over what is seen as two often conflicting roles. Firstly, there is an operational aspect to volunteering and issues that arise from operational activities and secondly, there is a broader strategic need in the level of advice provided. For example, operational issues around police checks can sometimes hinder conversation about the more strategic and long term considerations around risk management in the community sector.

b. Operational versus the strategic role of the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group

The current Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group membership, has been selected from within the volunteer community and is generally from a management level. However, Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group discussion tends to focus more on operational aspects rather than advise on strategies that impact across a number of issues. This was particularly apparent when the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group members were asked to identify South Australia’s areas of concern to inform the Productivity Commission Report into the not-for-profit sector. Issues presented were generally operational and it required significant additional work, with the support of the Office for Volunteers, to distil the information into key strategic areas for the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group to present to the Minister.

It is apparent this occurred because of the conflict between their operation and strategic role. Therefore, it may be necessary to create a mechanism where the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group is split into two groups. For instance, one could focus on providing advice to the Minister on operational problems and issues whilst the other focuses its attention on providing broader strategic advice. The first 'operational' group could be from the community sector and the other more 'strategic' group broadly represent the community as a whole and contain members from the three sectors (business, community and government).

c. Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group - Accessibility

It is apparent from the feedback in the questionnaires and workshops, that an approach needs to be developed, which, allows grass roots volunteers and volunteer managers to input information to the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, raise issues that are of a concern, and generally make the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group more open and accessible to all. Whilst these concerns would, in many instances, be around operational matters, that impact on the particular community group carrying out their role, it is apparent that groups want to know they are being listened to and something is happening to address their issues.

The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group: Suggestions for the future

1. Membership

Ultimately membership selection of any ministerial advisory group is at the discretion of the Minister for Volunteers and what the Minister considers will provide the best advice needed for effective government policy making.

However, based on the questionnaire responses and feedback received it is suggested that selection for Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group membership should continue to be based on the individual's experience and knowledge of the sector rather than on representation of a particular sector. It is considered important that members bring a level of expertise to allow them to provide high level advice to the Minister on issues affecting volunteering.

Further, to meet the future directions of volunteering developing nationally and to encourage strategic policy advice to the Minister for Volunteers, consideration should also be given to streamlining/restructuring the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group to enable greater debate and involvement of members. This may require the creation of two groups as mentioned previously in the discussion.

2. Access to the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group

To alleviate issues in regard to sectors of the volunteer community feeling as though they are not being represented, or having their viewpoints considered, the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group needs to become more open and accessible to the volunteer community.

It needs function so that volunteers and volunteer managers can raise issues, input suggestions and have better access to the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group members. To do this it is suggested that:

- The "Issues Template" currently being used by the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group be placed on the Office for Volunteers website so it can be completed and returned by anyone who wants to raise a matter for discussion. (Attachment 6)
- The Office for Volunteers would oversee this process: contact the person submitting the suggestion for clarification/explanation etc and ensure issues are included on the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group agenda. The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group would then report back on the outcomes to the individual

- Other web based forums or blogs be investigated that would allow broader discussion of issues and which could be utilised by the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group in their advice to the Minister
- If there is a need to canvass broader volunteer community opinion on behalf of the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, that this is done by conducting community consultations. For instance, electronic surveys placed on the Office for Volunteers website and/or by holding community meetings across the state
- To allow regional volunteers to be involved in discussing issues and canvassing opinions with the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, that consideration be given to the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group meeting in at least three regional locations annually (in a similar vein to Community Cabinets)

5.1.2 The Volunteer Partnership Action Committee: Partnership implementation within government

The perception of the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee has (as in the last review) rated much lower than the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group in regard to effectiveness. A contributing factor to this could be that those outside of government do not see the work that is undertaken behind the scenes within government agencies.

However, responses from within the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee indicates, there is a need to strengthen the cross agency role in implementing partnership objectives and in taking action on issues.

The Volunteer Partnership Action Committee - Discussion

Traditionally, the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee's key roles have been to:

- Ensure volunteering activities are considered in policy/legislation development
- Take action to deal with volunteering issues that arise
- Ensure the impact of legislation on volunteer groups is reduced
- Oversee any ACT Partnership implementation activities occurring within government

However, in rating their own performance in these areas, the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee members felt they had not been as effective as they could have been. That, rather than addressing issues across government, the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee had become more of an information sharing body.

In practice, cross government work around improving the development/reducing the impact of legislation affecting volunteer groups, is usually initiated by the Office for Volunteers in discussion with the lead agency and representatives from concerned agencies.

It is apparent that, even with Volunteer Partnership Action Committee members' influence across their agencies, ensuring all policy officers across government understand volunteer community issues is quite a challenging undertaking. Other approaches are therefore needed to ensure volunteering is considered during the policy development process.

One such approach has recently occurred, with the inclusion of additional information in the *Cabinet Guide* on Cabinet submissions, to remind or provoke people drafting submissions to consider the potential impact of their proposals on volunteering and the community sector.

Where the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee has been particularly valuable has been in establishing a contact in each agency with responsibility for the volunteering issues in that agency. This provides all agencies, and particularly the Office for

Volunteers, with a point of contact that can generally take immediate action to resolve issues or internally activate the agency to take action in some way.

Most government departments have multiple areas involved in policy development so understandably there is considerable difficulty in keeping policy officers informed and aware of the need to consider volunteers and volunteering. Natural attrition and turnover of staff also adds to this difficulty. Therefore, if the partnership's aims are to be achieved, structures will need to be developed within the public sector to increase awareness of the community sector, the government's partnership responsibilities and the need to consider this sector in policy development.

The Volunteer Partnership Action Committee - Suggestions for the future

Cross agency coordination is vital to the success of the partnership if the desired outcome of reducing red tape for volunteer groups is to be achieved.

It is therefore suggested that Volunteer Partnership Action Committee activities and responsibilities be restructured into two skill sets and involve different groups of people. The first group would be mainly involved in information dissemination and sharing and the second group would be involved in policy development coordination across public sector agencies.

Group 1 role – information exchange

The sharing of information has been a useful key function of the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee. It is therefore suggested that the existing Volunteer Partnership Action Committee membership approach be retained and each agency involved continue to nominate an agency representative responsible for volunteering issues in that agency.

This group would be a "contact group" on volunteering issues and would share information electronically. It would also meet as a group on a needs basis to discuss major whole of sector issues and/or to receive detailed briefings relating to volunteering and community sector issues, such as the development of the national volunteering agenda.

It is further suggested that this group be renamed to make its role more obvious.

It may also be appropriate for this group (or members from it) to be involved in joint working parties assigned to work on volunteer issues with the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group members. For example, negotiating the content and structure of a new partnership document. Also, from time to time, it would be expected that they meet with the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group to discuss strategic directions and expectations of the partnership.

Group 2 role - action on specific issues

The second group (which may or may not involve 'group 1' members) would address specific issues requiring cross agency input or action. Members would be selected based on the need to address a particular issue that has impacts beyond one agency.

The Office for Volunteers would coordinate meetings and arrange for the involvement of the necessary and appropriate officers from agencies. Membership of these cross agency action groups would be retained only until the specific issue is addressed.

There may need to be more than one group operating at one time depending on the number of issues requiring resolution across government.

This approach was successfully utilised when appropriate agency representatives were involved in informing the Department for Families and Communities *Children's*

Protection Act 1993 legislation changes and the Office for Volunteers Small Grant Review.

5.1.3 ACT Partnership document redesign

All groups surveyed indicated that the ACT Partnership document should be modernised and upgraded to meet the new challenges facing both parties to the agreement. There was also strong support for commitments, as currently included in the partnership, to be included in any new document.

Discussion

The current Advancing the Community Together Partnership document has provided an effective partnership framework and set the scene for the successful partnership to date. It has now been in place since 2003.

Modernising the partnership will have the potential to create additional interest in the community and government about working together to advance volunteering. It also has the potential to relaunch partnership activities and to allow the government and volunteer community to demonstrate that it takes the partnership seriously. This would help alleviate some of the concerns mentioned earlier in the report.

Suggested action

As there are strong views that the document should be modernised it is suggested that a Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group / Volunteer Partnership Action Committee working party be developed to work on a proposal for a new document.

5.2 AREAS TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE PARTNERSHIP

The review has highlighted that there are still a number of areas where the partnership is needed to develop effective strategies. The following areas that were raised at the workshops indicate the major concerns of community groups. All relate to their long term viability to effectively maintain their activities, and the effect on their local community if they were not there to provide those services and/or activities.

The workshops around the state indicated that the partnership needs to do more work to support volunteering in the community and address issues that have negatively impacted in terms of:

- Recruitment and retention of volunteers
- The viability of volunteer organisations to provide services
- Accessing the skills available to maintain their services

Feedback throughout the consultation process stressed the following areas needing urgent attention:

- Volunteers access to appropriate and cost effective training to better meet local needs
- Legislation issues (particularly, reducing regulation and red tape for community groups)
- Improving funding arrangements for the community sector, particularly in regard to community sector costs for implementing government legislation

5.2.1 Training

Training is seen as a major challenge with responses indicating the training made freely available through government is often basic “introductory level” and generic rather than targeted to the local communities needs. Therefore, the training being offered is seen to be doing little to improve skill sets needed locally or improve the organisations ability to carry out its role.

Feedback also indicates that the existing delivery model is currently limited in it's geographic reach and hence does not provide the same level of access to free training for many groups across the state.

At present the Government invests \$80,000 to provide free training to volunteers. Based on the comments made the program is not being as effective as it should be in providing relevant training where needed.

Suggestion for the future

Therefore, it is suggested a different model be considered that includes local involvement, so that the training is better targeted to the needs of local communities and is provided locally.

5.2.2 Regulatory Requirements

Feedback from workshops also indicates the regulatory burden on volunteer organisations is increasing following the tightening of legislation to meet community demands. Two areas often mentioned are:

- Occupational Health and Safety requirements including the need to have a “responsible officer” if carrying out a business.
- Child Safe Environments requirements, including mandatory policy documentation and reporting, having a nominated person and member protection information officer, formal codes of conduct etc.

This regulatory burden adds enormously to the administrative requirements and costs of volunteer organisations. It also impacts particularly on the smaller organisations, such as sporting groups, who may have fewer resources to help them deal with the new demands placed on them.

There are two issues here. Firstly, volunteers have to spend considerable time putting regulatory requirements in place. Secondly, it adds a large financial burden to the organisation to train people on these regulatory requirements, prepare and print booklets for participants and volunteers and spend time ensuring all legislative requirements are met.

Volunteers have become frustrated at spending too much time on administration rather than doing what they joined the organisation for. Therefore they leave. New people then have to be recruited and trained - and the cycle begins again.

Consequences are:

- Volunteers become harder to recruit as people are more reluctant to do the administrative tasks
- Retention of volunteers becomes more and more difficult
- Recruitment costs increase because of the additional training required particularly if it is not provided locally
- Financial viability of the organisation reduces

Suggested Action

To identify approaches to reduce the regulatory burden on volunteer groups it is suggested that there be a review of regulatory requirements to identify how red tape and the monetary and resource costs involved for volunteer groups can be reduced.

This would need to entail a community consultation process that identifies:

- The regulatory requirements impacting on groups
- A costing of each regulatory requirement to implement and maintain by a volunteer group
- Alternative approaches to reduce red tape and the administrative burden
- Funding models to cover any costs for community groups involved in carrying out the regulatory requirements imposed

5.2.3 Funding that supports the community

Another area that has sector wide implications is government funding arrangements. A number of questions have been raised in the consultations about funding for community organisations and whether it is done in the best way for the sustainability of the community sector. These questions relate to:

Government grant programs

It is considered that whilst grant programs offer an opportunity for groups to improve their financial position and allow them to improve outcomes, they can also be detrimental as community groups often have to compete for the limited funds on offer. This competition is believed to not always ensure the best outcome or provide a long term benefit for the local volunteer community.

For example, competition for Australian Government funding has in some instances even contributed to regional Volunteer Resource Centres closing, leaving their community with fewer local support services for volunteer groups.

Cooperation not competition

In line with the above, competition between organisations within the community sector often means the groups do not share information and knowledge. Feedback indicated that more work could be done to bring groups together so they can share information, rationalise resources, put in joint funding applications or even to better position themselves to access funding particularly that on offer from the Australian Government.

An example was given where a regional community group network worked together successfully to reduce overall training costs and to make training more easily accessible for volunteers. This was achieved by pooling funds so the groups could bring a trainer to the community. By sharing the costs to bring the trainer to their locality they saved the cost of transporting their volunteers to Adelaide and at the same time made the training more accessible to local volunteers and ensured it was relevant to local needs.

Service agreements, grant funding terms and conditions

At present most service agreements and grant programs are provided with one year terms. It was felt this did not help community organisations with long term planning and created an environment of uncertainty.

Examples were given where there have been delays in funding approval. This has meant the particular groups need to make a difficult choice. Continue with the activities, pay staff etc. in the hope that the funding will be approved and provided or stop the activity, retrench staff, lose goodwill etc. only to find the funding has been approved a few weeks/months later and have to re-establish the program, recruit staff etc.

The annual government budgetary process at times lead to delays in gaining funding approvals and often can create the above situation for community groups. Therefore, rather than work on an annual grant arrangement, consideration should be given to providing three year terms for all standard operating funds to allow community groups to better plan for the future and in a more sustainable way.

It has also been mentioned that grants for operational funding are not always increased in line with the Consumer Price Index. This adds to the pressures on organisations to effectively deliver the programs on an ongoing basis. Consideration should therefore be given to mandating CPI increases to ongoing operational funding.

There is also a view that the government is only part-funding services and expecting community organisations to make up the shortfall. This is viewed as undermining viability, making it difficult for community groups to plan, invest in developing their capabilities, and attract and retain staff. Whilst this appears to relate more to Australian Government funding arrangements it is an aspect for consideration.

It is important to recognise that volunteers play an enormous role in building strong, supportive and inclusive communities across Australia. Governments therefore have an important social responsibility to invest in and support our volunteers and their organisations, so they can continue their important work in the community.

Whilst many respondents asked for more money to be invested in the sector, at this time rather than considering an increase to funding it may be better to look more strategically at the funding arrangements such as the approaches used for the distribution of existing funding and the effectiveness of funding models in supporting the sector's sustainability.

Suggested action

So that a more strategic approach to community sector funding arrangements can be developed a review is suggested of the existing approaches used for the distribution of funding and the effectiveness of funding models in supporting the sector.

The review of government funding that supports the sector will need to be all encompassing and therefore will need to take into consideration the purchased service, the small grant program and discretionary grant models currently being utilised by government agencies.

The review will need to identify:

- What existing investment is made to the community sector and its appropriateness to achieve government goals and community sector sustainability
- If a reallocation of existing funding is needed to more appropriately target areas that support the sustainability of the volunteer community
- What models are currently being used and if these are appropriate to effectively support the community sector's needs
- If there are alternative models that would be more appropriate and better match the circumstances and outcomes to be achieved. This would include investigating approaches that encourage joint ventures to support community groups to work together rather than compete against each other; and canvassing alternatives such as compensating volunteer organisations through government discounts or tax relief etc.
- If the funding arrangement complements a national approach and Australian Government funding initiatives and models

5.3 NATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Furthermore, consideration needs to be given to national and Australian Government developments. These include:

- The National Compact - Working Together
- National Volunteering Strategy
- Productivity Commission Research Report into the Not for Profit Sector

The new national approach currently in development is anticipated to provide an overarching framework within which all levels of government can:

- Work together in their support for volunteering
- Provide opportunities to undertake activities to complement and add value to the work of other jurisdictions
- Allow local communities to benefit from greater alignment and cooperative effort between jurisdictions

As the South Australian Government will be involved in ongoing discussions with Australian, State and Territory Governments about issues raised through this process, it is vitally important for the partnership to provide the Minister for Volunteers with a clear South Australian perspective on volunteering issues. This will allow appropriate consideration of innovative policy options and the opportunity to take a lead role in developing approaches to resolving national and local volunteer sector issues.

This section of the *ACT Partnership Review* document focuses on one key area that has been raised in the review workshops and questionnaires, which is also being considered nationally. This is - insurance and risk management.

5.3.1 Insurance and Risk Management

During consultations insurance and risk management costs were regularly raised as an area of concern for volunteer groups in terms of cost and business understanding.

The State Government has undertaken considerable work with the insurance industry, to reduce the costs of insurance following the HIH Insurance Group collapse, when premiums rose sharply. Whilst it has reduced as an issue, and costs have reduced from earlier in the decade, the issue of insurance is still considered a major impost on community groups and can often require significant fundraising efforts just to cover this cost.

Also, earlier in the decade the State Government provided free risk management training across the state. This was highly valued by community groups at the time. However, as it is now again being raised as an area where there is a lack of understanding of how to go about it and uncertainty about what needs to be done, it may be necessary to reintroduce some kind of training program and/or guide to assist community groups.

As insurance has been raised as an issue across the nation, earlier this year Senator Ursula Stephens, Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector, convened a roundtable meeting of sector and industry specialists. The group met to gain a better understanding of the depth and breadth of the insurance issues that affect volunteer groups. The outcomes of this discussion will feed into the development of the National Volunteering Strategy, which will articulate the government's vision for volunteering, identify key barriers to volunteering and seek to develop appropriate policy responses to address these barriers.

As the South Australian Government will be involved in ongoing discussions with Australian, State and Territory Governments about this important issue, it would be useful to collect up to date information on the impact of insurance on the South Australian volunteer community. This would provide a clear South Australian perspective for the Minister for Volunteers to take to discussions with the Australian Government, allow the Minister to consider innovative policy options, and to take a lead in developing approaches to resolve the issue.

Suggested action

Therefore, it is suggested that a state wide consultation be conducted on the topic of insurance in the volunteer community, to identify the particular issues. This consultation could be led by the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group so that they have a greater visual presence in the community and are seen to be more representative. (This will help to address issues of accessibility mentioned earlier in this report).

Following the consultation, and armed with the information collected, it is further suggested that the Minister convene a 'think tank' bringing insurance, government and community representatives together to look at the issues collaboratively. This will provide an opportunity for the sectors to work together to identify potential approaches and solutions to implement locally or to take to national discussions in addressing insurance related issues.

PART 6. RECOMMENDATIONS

As mentioned previously, there is a high level of satisfaction with the *Advancing the Community Together (ACT) Partnership* and the achievements to date. However the review has also identified some specific areas that could be improved. The following recommendations are made to build on the strong foundations created in the past seven years of the ACT Partnership.

6.1 THE PARTNERSHIP

6.1.1 The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group: The volunteer community's direct voice to government

The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group was supported in all responses as the most effective mechanism to represent the diverse views and interests of the volunteer community and provide advice to the Minister for Volunteers.

However, some concerns were raised over accessibility to the membership, and the capacity of the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group to represent a whole of sector view to government. Also a level of conflict was noted between the 'operational' versus the 'strategic' role of the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- a. The Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group be retained as the volunteer community's direct voice to government
- b. At the conclusion of the existing term for Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group membership, in February 2011, that the Minister give consideration to restructuring the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group to better meet the future directions of volunteering developing nationally, encourage strategic policy advice and enable greater debate and involvement of members
- c. To ensure the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group is open and accessible and to allow the volunteer community to raise issues of concern, that an "issues template" be developed and placed on the Office for Volunteers website. The template could be completed and returned, for consideration by the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, by any member of the volunteer community who wants to raise a matter for discussion
- d. To ensure advice provided to the Minister by the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group encompasses the viewpoints of the broader volunteer community, that the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group utilises mechanisms such as electronic surveys placed on the Office for Volunteers website and/or community meetings across the state to consult with the community on issues to be addressed
- e. Other web based forums or blogs be investigated to allow broader discussion of issues and for possible use by the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group in reporting their advice to the Minister
- f. To allow regional volunteers to be involved in discussing issues and canvassing opinions with the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group, consideration be given to the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group meeting in at least three regional locations annually

6.1.1 The Volunteer Partnership Action Committee: Partnership implementation within government

Responses from within the Volunteer Partnership Action Committee indicate there is a need to strengthen the cross agency role in implementing partnership objectives and in taking action on issues. Therefore it is recommended that:

- a. Volunteer Partnership Action Committee activities and responsibilities be restructured into two distinct skill sets and involve different groups of people to ensure firstly, effective information dissemination and sharing across government, and secondly, strategic policy development coordination in regard to volunteering issues across public sector agencies

6.1.3 ACT Partnership document redesign

All groups surveyed indicated that the ACT Partnership document should be modernised and upgraded to meet the new challenges facing both parties to the agreement. Therefore it is recommended that:

- a. The partnership document be modernised and updated to incorporate national considerations
- b. A working party be created with representatives of the volunteer community and government to work on a proposal for a new document

6.2 AREAS TO BE ADDRESSED BY THE PARTNERSHIP

6.2.1 Training

Responses indicate the free training, made available through State Government, is often at a basic “introductory level” and generic rather than targeted to local communities needs. Also it was reported that, at the current levels of service delivery, the training can be difficult to access. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- a. A new model be developed to better target the free volunteer training provided by the government to meet the needs of local communities.

6.2.2 Regulatory requirements

Feedback from the community consultation workshops also indicates that increasing regulatory requirements on volunteer organisations are adding substantially to their administrative tasks and costs. This impacts directly on recruitment and retention of volunteers and organisational viability. Therefore, it is recommended that:

- a. A review take place to identify the regulatory requirements currently placing pressure on volunteer groups and propose strategies to alleviate their operational impact

6.2.3 Community sector funding

A number of questions have been raised in the consultations about funding for community organisations and whether it is done in the best way for the sustainability of the community sector. It is therefore recommended that:

- a. A review be conducted to map the nature and effectiveness of existing funding distribution models employed to support the volunteer community and, if appropriate, propose a more strategic approach to community sector funding arrangements. (It is noted that this review may need to be conducted at an appropriate time to coordinate with any changes made at the federal level)

6.3 NATIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

The new national and Australian Government approaches currently in development are anticipated to provide an overarching framework within which all levels of government can:

- Work together in their support for volunteering
- Undertake activities to complement and add value to the work of other jurisdictions
- Allow local communities to benefit from greater alignment and cooperative effort between jurisdictions.

6.3.1 Insurance and risk management

One key area consistently raised in the partnership review workshops and questionnaires, which is currently being considered nationally, is insurance and risk management.

Therefore it is recommended that:

- a. A state wide consultation be conducted (led by the Volunteer Ministerial Advisory Group), on the topic of insurance and risk management in the volunteer community, to identify the particular issues.
- b. Following the consultation, and armed with the information collected, the Minister convene a 'think tank' bringing insurance, government and community representatives together to identify potential approaches and solutions. These solutions could then be implemented locally and/or taken to national discussions in addressing insurance and risk management issues.