



WACSSO

Partnering with P&Cs to
advance public education

WACSSO SUBMISSION

Developing a Not-for- Profit Blueprint

*Responses to the
Not-for-Profit Sector Development Blueprint
Issues Paper Questions*

December 2023

Acknowledgments

Acknowledgement of Country

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations pays respect to First Nations and Traditional Custodians throughout Australia, recognising their connection to land, waters and sky.

We acknowledge parents, families, Elders and communities as sharers of culture and knowledge; and recognise the value this learning holds for children and young people.

The Voice of Parents

WACSSO acknowledges parents* as the first educators in their child's life. We celebrate and honour the diversity of families and recognise the vital role they play in supporting children and young people throughout their learning journeys.

This submission is informed by the experiences and feedback we receive from Western Australian Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs) and the parents of children attending WA public schools.

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* WACSSO recognises the term "parent" to also include a child's primary carer.

Introduction

The Western Australian Council of State School Organisations (WACSSO) is the peak body representing parents of public school students in Western Australia. We provide services and representation at the State and National level to more than 650 Parents and Citizens Associations (P&Cs) across WA.

Together with the P&C community and all our stakeholders, WACSSO works tirelessly to advance public education in WA so that every student has the best chance to realise their potential and live the life they deserve. Our vision is for Western Australian schools to provide world-leading education to every student.

For over a century, we have worked passionately with school organisations across this State to improve the public education system, all the while never losing sight of a simple principle: that we are stronger together.

WACSSO's response to this paper is informed by WACSSO Policy and by interactions with our networks of parents located across WA.

What is your vision or aspiration for the NFP sector over the next 10 years?

WACSSO's vision for the NFP sector for the next decade includes the following outcomes:

- A thriving network of volunteers of all ages who are gifting their time and energy into for-purpose projects and organisations.
- Clear guidelines for volunteers and people managing volunteers.
- Training and support centrally available on topics such as human resources, financial management, cyber security and work health and safety.
- Volunteers supported by employers to commit time to volunteer (eg. allocated time in the year or month to spend volunteering).
- Legislation that supports an effective, accountable, and relevant NFP sector instead of hindering it.

What core values and considerations should guide a 10-year vision for Australia's NFP sector?

There are a number of core values that WACSSO feels could guide a vision for Australia's NFP sector:

- Contribution
- Supportive network
- Unique development opportunities
- Community connection
- Personal wellbeing and fulfillment
- Uniqueness- NFP organisations provide services to specific groups of people and causes. Often NFPs step into the gaps where government has failed, and they do this by using volunteers who have lived experience and unique understanding of the challenges their clients face.
- That profit is not a 'dirty word' and organisations need to understand profit is necessary to ensure ongoing sustainable delivery of mission to future generations. The responsibility of NFPs to reinvest profits into their vision and mission (rather than to shareholders) sets them apart.
- That investment in internal skills/capability (employees and volunteers) is necessary.

What core themes for action should be prioritised in realising this vision? What will be the consequences of no action on these?

Based on WACSSO's observations of P&Cs across WA over a significant period of time, we have identified several themes for action, which, when prioritised, will aid in the realisation of the above vision. Lack of action will see the sector remain stagnant:

- It is important to engage people early and often, celebrating the positives of volunteering and acknowledging the self-rewards that come when one gifts time and expertise (the internal glow felt when you give back).
- Multi-modal training and development on good governance would be very useful for NFPs.
- The competitiveness of access to government funding means in an imbalance of access to resources, resulting in less money available for client services or to meet the objectives of the NFP. This should be addressed by reviewing the processes for applying for government funding, what services are eligible for funding and the selection criteria for grants.
- Government and philanthropic funding both need a change of mindset to include sufficient coverage of overhead/corporate costs in funding arrangements to ensure well-run organisations.
- It would be highly beneficial to improve the timeliness and timeframes for funding agreements, with the goal of reducing uncertainty for NFPs. For example, government departments can't expect NFPs to await funding decisions in late June that relate to the coming year. There also shouldn't be an expectation that NFP organisations will work with yearly extensions and/or limited indexing to cover the true cost of delivery particularly in times of high inflation/economic hardship (these are the times NFP services are most often called upon to support communities under pressure)
- It is essential to ensure that resources for applications/reporting/information and data collection regarding outcomes is proportional to the grant funds on offer. For example, requiring organisations to establish a partnership as part of grant requirements for a small amount of funding is disingenuous.

What core principles of service design and delivery might a sector Blueprint commit to?

Suggested core principles:

- Support innovation and fund projects in NFPs that improve productivity and/or efficiency.
- Provide sufficient funding to allow co-design: co-design takes time, consultation, and skilled people to co-ordinate and respond to collaborative program design. Additionally, engaging with CaLD or people with disability can require additional support regarding culturally appropriate spaces/engagement, understanding the cohort/s involved, translators/interpreters and so on.

What would an outcomes-focused approach look like in your area(s) of work? What would be needed to move towards this and what unanticipated consequences should government and the sector consider?

From the WACSSO perspective, an outcomes-based focus would need to:

- Be project based (either by item or time) and be guided by good governance, turn taking, equality of value and consequences. It should be noted that societal expectations, changes, desires can move on before formal sectors realise this to be the case.
- Account for the fact that measuring outcomes and impact requires a holistic approach from the design of a program and the capture necessary information, through to the skills/expertise required to collect/compile/analyse to demonstrate outcomes have been achieved. Note that not all service participants/cohorts can easily engage with online/electronic content/data collection and/or are hesitant to do so.

What role(s) should government play in helping NFPs become data capable and informed by evidence?

There are many areas in which the government can assist NFPs in becoming data-capable. These include:

- Training and development
- The creation of a secure and FREE platform/resources that is sympathetic to the needs of various NFPs.
- Assistance with evidence of program efficacy and reputable service providers. There is much misinformation and confusion regarding consultants and service providers and to NFPs. It would be beneficial to have a register or selection criteria advice on how to know which ones are rigorous/professional/evidence-based.
- Ensure legislation and regulations (or resources regarding them) provide clear guidance on compliance requirements and expectations for NFPs. For example, the Privacy Act – there is still confusion over whether an NFP is in or out as it is based on the data/info held, turnover threshold/employee numbers. and so on. Plus, if you opt in, there is confusion regarding liability. Clarity on this, and items of this nature, would be beneficial.

Could common resources or platforms support the technical aspects of outcomes measurement? What might these look like?

Yes, there are resources and platform options that would support NFPs outcomes measurement. These include:

- Data security resources and platforms
- A central record that captures volunteer time so it can be traded in for items (eg gift vouchers) to encourage and recognise volunteers

WACSSO recommends that NFP needs are taken into account when developing resources as there may need to be a few different categories with different user needs explored. It is unlikely there will be a one-size-fits-all set of resources or platforms for the sector.

How can the role of advocacy by NFP organisations be better embedded and preserved in policy and legislation?

Some actions to consider to embed and preserve the role of advocacy by NFPs:

- When formulating policy and legislation, ask the question: 'how will this make volunteering/NFP better, easier or more appealing to others?'
- Conduct a sense-check: does the legislation create barriers to diversity, engagement, responsiveness?
- There is still a view in NFPs that they cannot advocate or make strong public statements without risk to their funding. Providing the lobby action is aligned with their vision/mission, NFPs should feel empowered to lobby without fear of negative repercussions on funding. Lobbying should not be seen as activity limited to business and industry.
- The impact of policy and legislation on the NFP sector – it is not the same as small business and often needs specific response. For example, legislation will often have a carve out to accommodate small corporations/small employers, suitable thresholds could also be carved out for NFPs to ensure they are not penalised.

What mechanisms are needed so that the expertise of the NFP sector is better used in designing policy and services?

- Genuine engagement and consultation pathways.
- Ensure engagement also brings smaller NFPs into the discussion: the goal should be to have diverse organisations as well as diverse individuals represented/participating in the process

What could NFP organisations and networks be doing better to ensure their systematic advocacy directly involves the people and communities they serve?

- NFPs should also offer genuine engagement and consultation pathways for volunteers and staff managing volunteers.
- Smaller NFP struggle to be heard over larger NFPs. Where there is a collective of small groups such as P&Cs, sporting associations etc, peak body representation must be supported to raise the concerns of the members.
- Ensure that peak bodies, are representatives of who they say they are.

How could the assets of the sector – for example, the research expertise of larger organisations, including public universities – be better used to build the evidence base for systemic advocacy and reform?

- Research barriers to volunteering to make them better understood so they can be overcome.
- Develop resources, informed by research, to improve attraction and retention of volunteers and advise on protocols such as good governance.
- Provide professional advice on how to clearly communicate with stakeholders with targeted, simple and applicable messaging that is compelling.
- Where research is government funded, it should be accessible to smaller organisations.

How can the NFP sector further mobilise and access philanthropy in support of its work?

- With regards to philanthropy, it can be hard to get a foothold without already being known – finding ways to open up networks to NFP organisations would be advantageous.
- There is competition for grant funding and donations – organisations with resources to market themselves and engage (eg through staff or consultants with grant writing skills) with philanthropic funders have access to these opportunities and are more competitive, while others are not.

How can philanthropic and volunteering resources be effectively targeted to community needs?

- Co-ordinate pro bono services for NFPs (eg more services through model such as Pro Bono Australia and Justice Connect to allow NFPs to access professional services).
- Value volunteering – with the goal of changing the culture around volunteering, encouraging it to be seen as a civic duty, we need to encourage employer support (such as through special leave) and genuine value placed on the skills, experience and generosity of individuals who volunteer by current and prospective employers.

What might a regulatory framework for the sector that overcomes the complexity of our federation look like?

There are many aspects to regulation which makes the landscape complex, particularly in WA. There are various regulatory bodies (AssociationsOnline, DMIRs, Work Cover, ACNC and so on), some of which are State-based and some with Federal components. Additionally, some aspects of the Commonwealth Corporations Act are applicable to Incorporated Associations under the State Act. Essentially, the landscape is cluttered and confusing and needs unravelling. It would also be beneficial if government agencies that deal with NFPs connected with each other and shared data (eg AssociationsOnline and ACNC).

Are currently available legal structures, governance standards and tax concessions fit for future purpose? How might these be improved or changed?

- Work Health and Safety Act (WA) needs to give more templates and guidance for volunteer-run organisations that have employees (eg P&Cs that employ canteen staff). It needs to be clear if there are different standards/liabilities for NFPs.
- Banking sector – banks choosing to close business and NFP accounts with little to no notice is causing big issues.
- There is a general lack of understanding of how NFPs operate (for example, decision making processes, accountability and governance requirements). Clarity in the sector could improve understanding.
- Impact of change on NFPs – change in regulation often requires careful assessment of change in processes/operations, but NFPs are not necessarily able to access legal advice/support to understand and implement.
- ATO requirement to self-assess - NFPs need some guidance and reassurance as many operate without finance professionals who can provide advice on what is required.

What does the sector need in its boards to be effective?

- Access to quality and good value/free Director training – with recognition
- Expectations that a NFP directorship is not just a 'stepping stone' to a paid board role in the private sector – eg access directors who volunteer from a values base rather than a career/monetary motivation.

How could regulatory data be better used and shared with the NFP sector and wider public to support future practice?

As one example, the ACNC could provide a service where data can be grouped and summarised according to the needs of one of the groups of organisations that it governs (for example, WACSSO could get national information regarding all P&Cs, that we could then analyse to better understand trends specific to our people and comparison to other jurisdictions). Assistance with analysis may also be required, depending on the data set.

Governments, and the NFP sector, could use collective data (such as that collected by the ACNC) to demonstrate the size of the NFP sector, its contribution to the economy and society. Useful data sets include employee numbers, volunteer hours contributed, services provided.

A regular review of the monetary value of volunteer work would be useful. The current valuation is around \$40-\$45, which undervalues professional and highly skilled people working as volunteers. A more rigorous approach that takes into account the volunteer work being done would be useful to assist in quantifying impact.

What should the priorities be for future leadership in the sector and developing the sector's paid workforce and volunteers?

- Designated and recognised time allocated by employers that employees can use to volunteer.
- Recognition of volunteering – not at national award/public recognition level but at local, employer and community level. Local governments do undertake some of this work (although not consistently) and it would be good if workplaces could be more active in this space.

What can the sector do to change understanding of the role of overheads in the value it creates for people, society and funders?

If not already reviewed as part of the Issues Paper research, we recommend this resource: <https://www.socialventures.com.au/work/paying-what-it-takes-report/>

How can we make employment opportunities attractive and build career pathways to develop the paid NFP workforce of the future?

Allow salary packaging more widely in NFPs, and increase the threshold which has been the same for nearly a decade (possibly more).

How could government funding, tendering and contracting drive a good balance of collaboration and competition to support innovation in the NFP sector?

NFPs responding to commercial tenders should have access to a list of reputable, trusted service providers with an understanding of the sector who they can go to for pro-bono support.

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