

# Maroondah Community Volunteering Survey Report

June 2021



**Food  
Donations**

# Executive summary

*“Volunteer engagement decreased, and we’ve seen several of our volunteers decide not to continue with their volunteering”*

- Community centre

In 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic affected our world on every level; economic, social, physical and psychological. Here in Maroondah, the impact was felt strongly, as it was across Victoria. These new conditions impacted directly on volunteering in Maroondah. Maroondah City Council believes that volunteering is critical to the functioning of a healthy community and it is therefore important to support volunteering to flourish.

With many community groups being affected in different ways, a coordinated and cohesive approach to supporting volunteering in Maroondah is required to support organisations with governance and operations, recruitment and retention of volunteers and general support to adapt to the circumstances created by the pandemic.

In late 2020, as part of the COVID-19 response, a working group was established to oversee a Volunteering Support Project and in early March 2021, Maroondah City Council recruited a Volunteering Project Officer as part of the Working for Victoria Initiative. After extensive consultation with community groups and our partner organisation Eastern Volunteers, an online community volunteering survey was created to more deeply understand the impact of COVID-19 on community volunteering. The survey was distributed widely to community groups, clubs, kindergartens, community houses and other volunteer involving organisations (VIO's).

## Key points:

- Volunteering has decreased by 25-50% in a quarter of the organisations who responded.
- 25% of respondents indicated that their future viability was at risk.
- All organisations indicated a desire for further training and support. Amongst these, grant and tender writing and volunteer recruitment and retention were prominent as was mental health and wellbeing.

The survey results were not exhaustive, but gave us a snapshot of the situation amongst mainly sporting, community and environmental groups and clubs. However, we were also able to get an insight into a small sample of kindergartens, youth, aged, arts and cultural groups. The survey showed that many organisations had been impacted by the pandemic and the lockdowns; many sporting clubs could not run their normal seasons, seeing a drop in membership and income; arts groups could not perform and was forced to put all their planned events on hold resulting in lack of motivation; other groups saw more stress placed on volunteers who had to take up the extra work created by the loss of members. Mental health and wellbeing became a big issue and continues to be a burden on many volunteering organisations.

# What we did

An online survey was active from 1 May until 1 June 2021 with the link shared widely amongst Maroondah's community organisations through local networks.

The survey included 13 questions as outlined below:

1. What type of volunteering opportunities do you offer?
2. How do you recruit your volunteers?
3. How much has the pandemic affected your volunteering workforce?
4. In what ways has it affected your organisation?
5. What does your volunteering workforce look like in 2021?
6. How has the pandemic affected the future viability of your organisation?
7. Would your organisation benefit from participation in any of the following potential training opportunities:
  - Community leadership
  - Grant writing
  - Managing & Recruiting volunteers
  - Mental Health
  - Risk Management
8. What type of additional training would your organisation/volunteers benefit from?
9. Would your organisation benefit from participation in any of the following potential initiatives (please tick one or more from the list below):
10. How have you adapted your approach to volunteer management during the COVID-19 pandemic?
11. Would you be willing to share your story and or mentor other local groups?
12. *Would you participate in a Communities of Practice meeting to share your experiences?*
13. Do you have any further comments about how to foster volunteering?

## Summary of responses

The level of interest and responses to the survey were excellent and higher than expected. This gave us a strong understanding about the impact of the pandemic on volunteering groups in Maroondah.

Although there were 89 responses to the survey, there were several responses from the same organisation, giving us 68 organisational responses in total.

| No. of organisations | Sports and Rec | Environment | Community | Arts & Culture | Youth | Kindergarten | Disability | Aged Care |
|----------------------|----------------|-------------|-----------|----------------|-------|--------------|------------|-----------|
| 68                   | 27             | 12          | 12        | 5              | 4     | 3            | 3          | 2         |
| 100%                 | 39%            | 18%         | 18%       | 7%             | 7%    | 4%           | 3%         | 4%        |

The responses were reassuring, with majority of organisations, clubs and associations coping much better than anticipated and showing positive signs of recovery. The results outlined below

show that only a handful of responding organisations are struggling with volunteer numbers. These organisations will be contacted directly to further understand their needs and explore what support is required.

A list of participating organisations can be found on page 14.

## What we were told

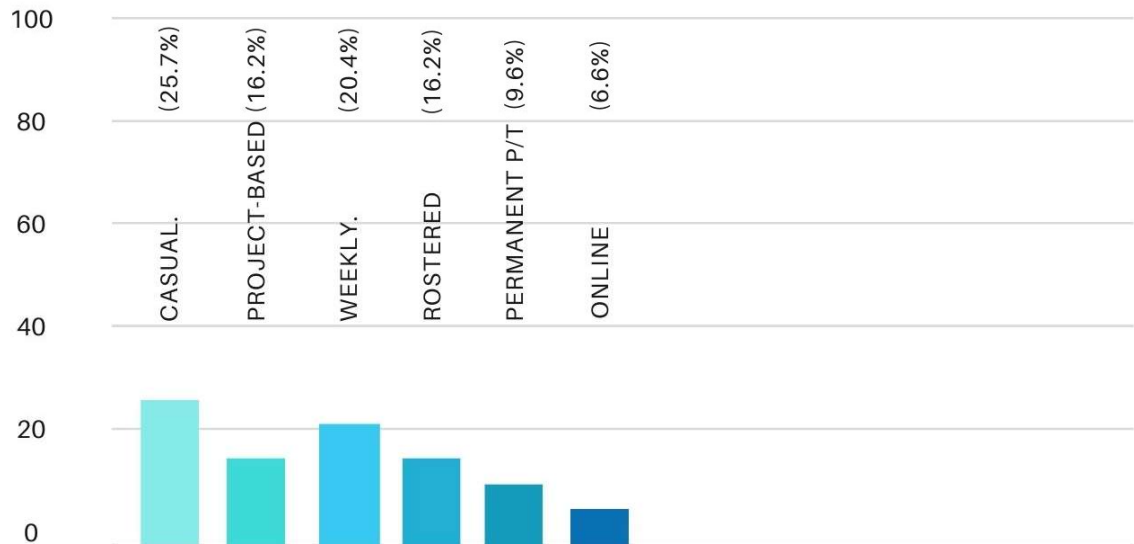
*“Depleted enthusiasm has given people an easy out, an excuse not to be involved.”*  
- Sports club



More than half of survey respondents were from the Sports and Recreation Clubs or Environmental groups, and only a small sample of responses came from Kindergartens, Youth groups, Aged Care and Disability groups. This was not as high as we had hoped, therefore getting a clear picture of how these sectors are faring is difficult. Having a large sporting contingent respond, did skew the results somewhat, however, we can still get an accurate picture of the broader volunteering groups in Maroondah.

## TYPES OF VOLUNTEERING

What type of volunteering does your organisation offer?



We asked this question to ascertain the type of volunteering that is being offered, to understand how this might impact the retention and availability of suitable volunteers.

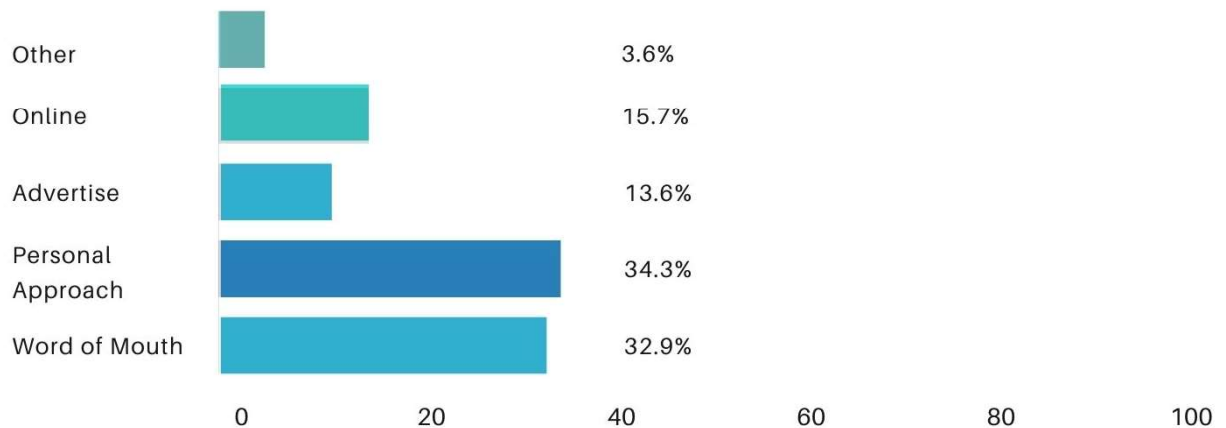
Many organisations depend on a roster to function effectively, and a large number of volunteers work on a casual basis, allowing greater flexibility.

Having a large proportion of responses from sporting clubs did affect the result for this question, for example, sporting clubs tend to have more casual volunteers.



## RECRUITMENT

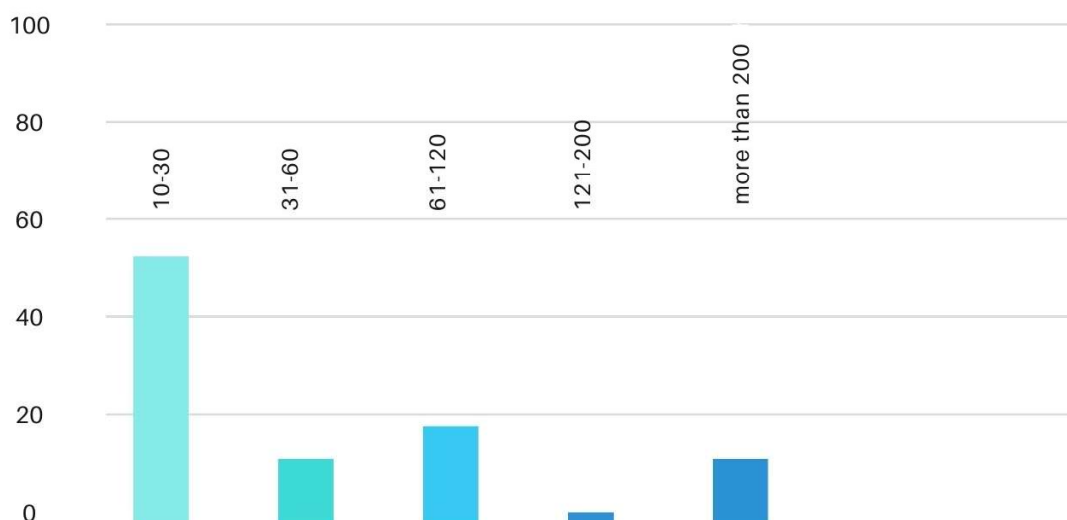
How do you recruit your volunteers?



Recruitment of volunteers is an important challenge arising from the pandemic and needs to be addressed as part of recovery efforts. Most organisations use a word of mouth or personal approach to attract volunteers (over 67%). Online sources are becoming increasingly more popular, however, many people volunteer because they know someone at the organisation or have had some exposure in the past.

## VOLUNTEERING HOURS PER WEEK

How many volunteer hours per week does your organisation coordinate?



This question was included to ascertain the number of volunteer hours that are being offered across different organisations. It appears that most organisations in Maroondah have a modest access to volunteers, averaging between 10-30 hours per week.

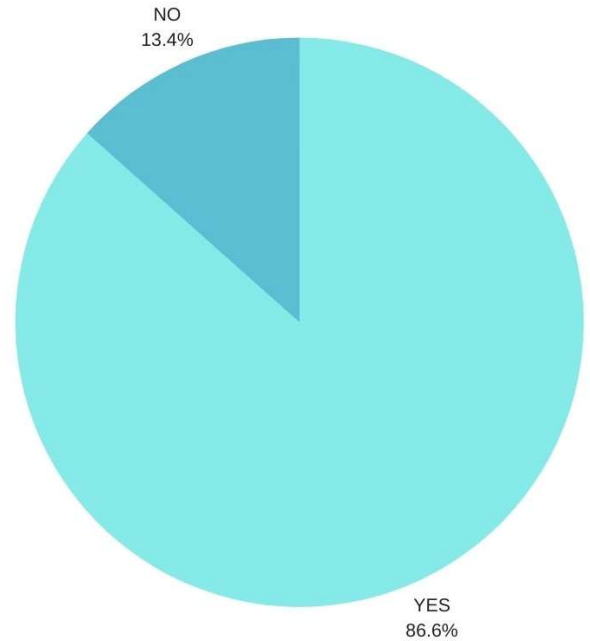
## GENERAL IMPACT OF PANDEMIC

Has the pandemic generally affected your organisation?

- YES
- NO

*"It was the worst year we have had in 4 years in players paying fees."*

- Sports club



The first section of the survey focused more on volunteering (type, recruitment and hours), the next section explored the impact of the pandemic. Unsurprisingly, most organisations reported that they have been affected with more than 86% impacted in some way. This has manifested in different ways.

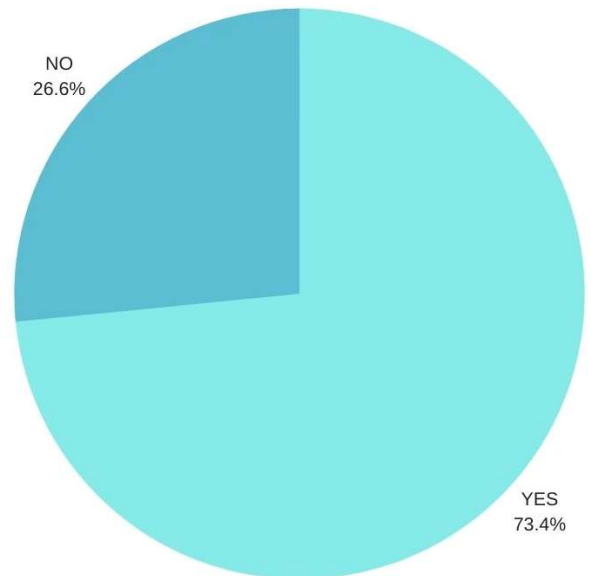
## VOLUNTEERING WORKFORCE

Has your volunteering workforce been affected?

- YES
- NO

*"We went from 8-10 committee members down to 4 members."*

- Sports club



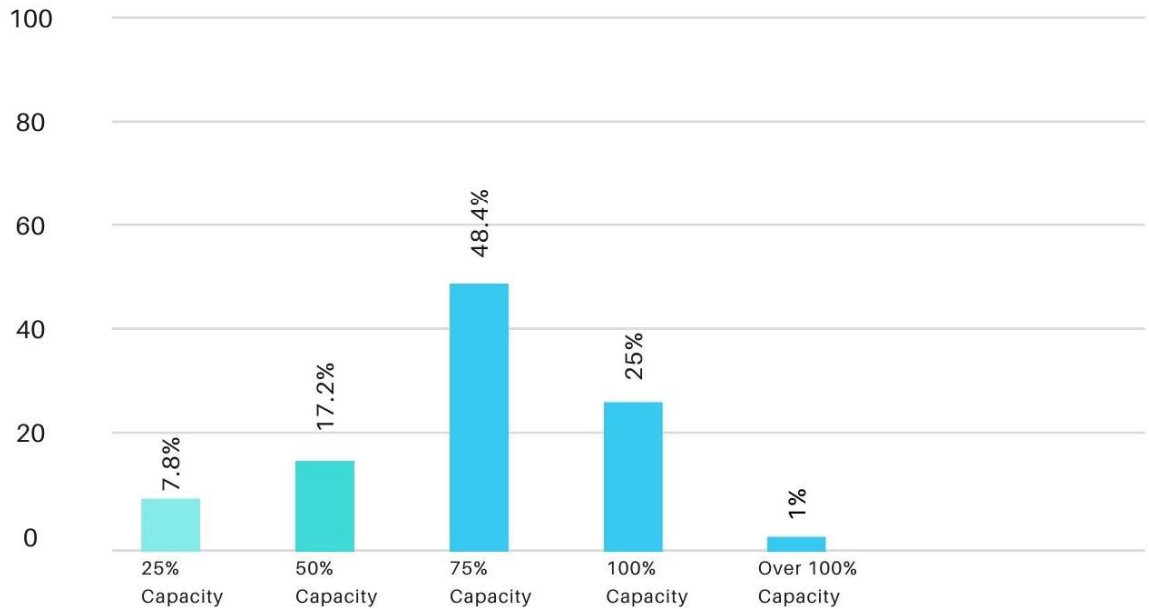
An overwhelming majority of organisations have had their volunteering workforce affected. From these however, only a small number were heavily affected. Within that cohort of 26.6%, many organisations experienced a drop in volunteer numbers.

## CURRENT VOLUNTEERING CAPACITY

What is your current volunteering workforce capacity?

*“There was a drastic drop-off in emergency relief volunteers in 2020.”*

- Community organisation



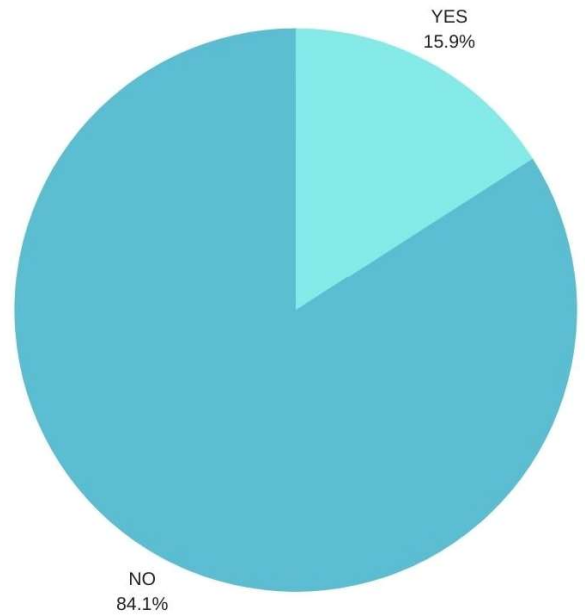
Three quarters of respondents indicated that their volunteering base is operating at either 75% or 100% capacity (or better), which is reassuring. 25% of respondents indicated that they were struggling and that their volunteer numbers had been seriously reduced over the past 12 months.



## FUTURE VIABILITY

Is your future viability affected?

- YES
- NO



*"We have had a year of no fundraising or holding events that contribute to the running of the club."*

- Sports Club

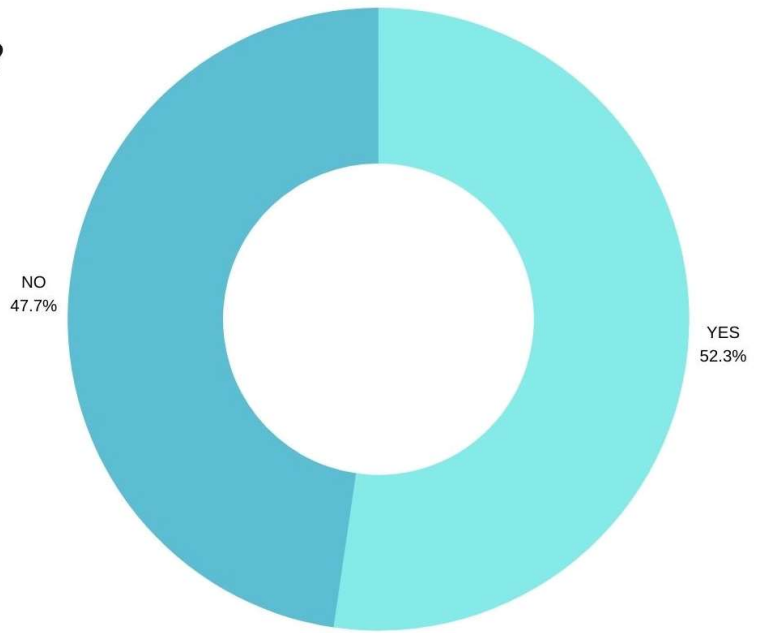
The viability of our local volunteering organisations was a key insight we were hoping to obtain from the survey. Responses were largely positive reflecting that volunteering is in good shape in Maroonah. The 14% who have indicated that their future viability is at-risk come from a variety of sectors; Arts and Cultural groups (2), Youth (1), Community groups (3), Kindergartens (1) and Sports and Recreation (4). There is no particular sector that is more affected than others, it seems that each organisation has been impacted in ways specific to their circumstances. Some organisations have been impacted financially and membership has dropped, others have had a drastic impact on their governance and management and others seem to be struggling with planning and resourcing under an unpredictable future. All these organisations will need further consultation and potentially tailored support.

*"We have shifted all of our sign-ups online where we can. We have worked later in the evenings to facilitate social nights as well as be available for a chat."*

- Sports Club

Are you willing to share your story?

- YES
- NO

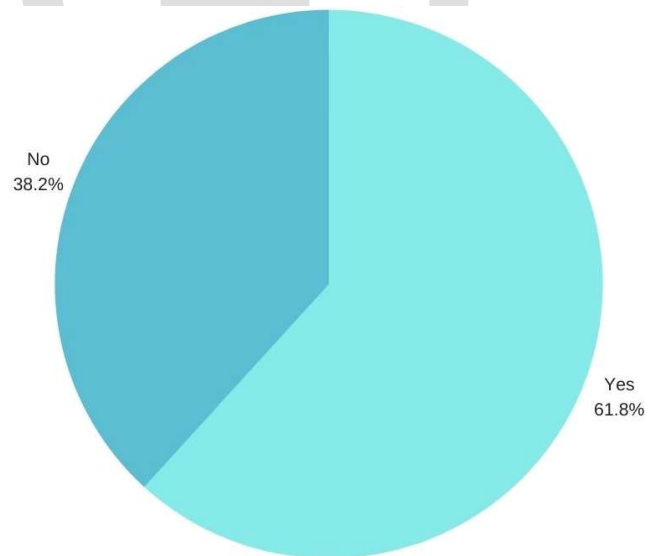


As a part of the recovery process it will be important to hear positive stories of success and resilience. Just over half of the respondents indicated that they are willing to share their stories of success.

## COMMUNITIES OF PRACTICE

Are you willing to attend a communities of practice meeting?

- YES
- NO



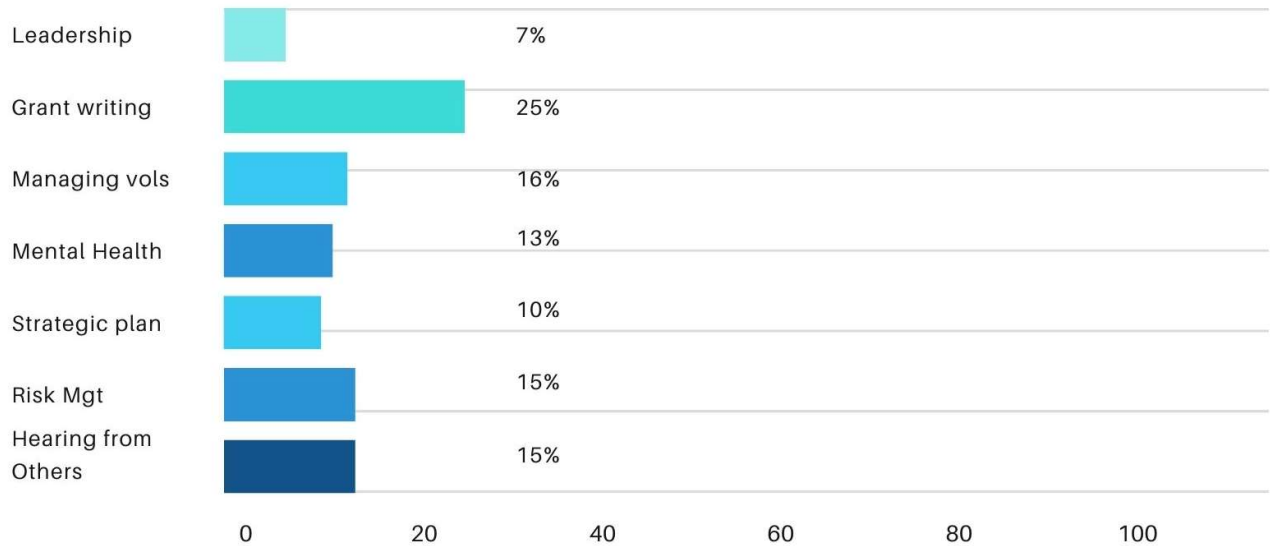
*“Many of our volunteers were stood down during the pandemic peak and many are now still hesitant to return or have chosen not to return at all.”*

Communities of Practice (CoP) are quarterly networking and information sharing opportunities for volunteering organisations that have been hosted by Eastern Volunteers over recent years. The survey was used as a tool to engage organisations who may not have been aware of them. The focus for the most recent sessions has been about sharing stories and experiences during the pandemic and how organisations have been impacted. CoP’s will normally have a theme to each session with a guest speaker and are attended, usually, by 15-20 organisations. Respondents to this question were invited to the most recent community of practice in Maroondah. With more than 60% of groups willing to join the CoP meetings, it will be important to make these accessible to as

many community organisations as possible. This will facilitate shared learning and support for many people who have been negatively impacted.

## TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

What type of potential training opportunities would your organisation be interested in?



The results above suggest that a number of organisations are keen to receive support through grant writing workshops to obtain funds to support their volunteering capacity. Respondents indicated that they would also like more support managing and on-boarding volunteers. Throughout the survey many organisations (both staff and volunteers) reported experiencing stress and anxiety during the pandemic and explains their interest in workshops to support mental health.

# Implications

The survey results show that most volunteering organisations in Maroondah are coping with the pandemic and appear to be adapting to the conditions as they evolve and in the short term, organisations will need to continue operating under the limitations created by the ongoing pandemic.

Following on from this report responses from specific sectors will be explored to identify variations in responses. Further analysis will illuminate issues specific to different types of volunteer organisations. For instance, the sporting sector has seen a drop in membership which in turn has affected parent participation and volunteering. However, in the arts sector the lack of venue space and event opportunities has curtailed their activities altogether. In community organisations there has been more responsibility placed on fewer volunteers resulting in an increase in stress and affecting wellbeing. Kindergartens have seen a drop in numbers which has affected their parent involvement and some loss in revenue. Environmental and bush regeneration groups have been the least impacted by the pandemic, and despite a hiatus during the periods of lockdown, they have not lost many volunteers and are still able to successfully operate.

The survey has helped us to identify several groups in need of support. While a program of activities is being developed to support organisations over the short term, a longer-term plan to help our groups and organisations to fully recover will need further consideration. Supporting residents and groups to build community confidence and appreciate the importance of volunteering will be critical.

Survey data suggests an estimated 10-15% of volunteering organisations have been severely affected by the pandemic and the subsequent lockdowns. While these organisations have had challenges, there are at least another 25% of organisations that have also been affected and have seen a decrease in volunteering numbers. This has significantly impacted their financial position, limited some of their services and added stress and pressure to the organisation and the wellbeing of the individuals involved.

Although many organisations and clubs have been affected financially, it may take some time for these organisations to recover. Volunteering numbers have decreased and more efforts for recruitment and retention will be necessary for volunteering to be at pre-pandemic levels.

# Next steps

Maroondah's community groups have shown resilience and determination to overcome the challenges created by the pandemic. They have generally shown positive signs of recovery through a combination of adaptation, flexibility and external support.

In times like these leadership is an important aspect of an organisation's ability to adapt and continue delivering services. Therefore, providing support and training to committees and community leaders is critical. Many of these organisations depend on volunteer boards and committees of management. Their stewardship, vision and capacity to deal with a crisis is important for the survival of an organisation. Council intends to target strongly affected organisations with Governance Health Checks, which will provide Maroondah community organisations with insights and strategies to support them to into the future.

Special mention should be made of some of the community houses, which have been affected. Community houses which rely on adult education as their main source of income have seen a drop in enrolments. Hirers have also dropped due to the restrictions. As a result of these decreases there has been a significant loss of income streams and subsequent volunteer numbers have also decreased.

Another vulnerable group which has been identified from the survey are the Burmese community which has a large presence in Maroondah. These communities all have their own specific churches and denominations, and some are closely tied to various established churches in Maroondah. Based on survey results and stakeholder conversations, all of these groups would benefit from increased funding, improved governance, an infusion of community volunteers and mental health support. Based on the findings from the survey, these communities would benefit from tailored training and support.

In partnership with Eastern Volunteers, Council will offer a suite of training workshops to the Maroondah community, on managing and recruiting volunteers, grant writing and risk management. Mental Health First Aid training will also be offered from suitable service providers.

The Community Volunteering Survey has shone a light on the current status of volunteering in Maroondah and while not an exhaustive study, it has provided useful insights into how local groups are coping with the challenges of COVID-19. With lockdowns still recurring, it is likely that volunteering will continue to be impacted and recovery will be slow and gradual. Each sector will vary in its ability to recover and some will naturally improve from season to season and as restrictions ease and others will need long term support. As with all aspects of recovery, it will take a collective effort from all parts of our community to support our community groups and organisations to continue providing their invaluable role in creating a strong community.

# Acknowledgements

Special thanks to all of the hardworking volunteers from participating community groups who generously provided their time and experiences at such a challenging time:

Ringwood Horse & Pony Club  
Croydon Ranges Soccer Club  
Croydon North Cricket Club  
East Ringwood Junior Football Club  
Croydon masters athletic Club  
Croydon City Soccer Club  
Croydon ranges Football Club  
Aquinas Old Collegians Football Club  
North Ringwood Football Club  
Heathmont Football Netball Club  
Ringwood Bowls Club  
Croydon Bowling Club  
Gracedale Park Tennis Club  
H.E. Parker Reserve Tennis Club  
Ringwood Cricket Club Inc  
U3A Croydon  
Norwood Junior Football Club  
Maroondah United FC  
Ainslie Park Football Club  
Eastern Sirens Synchronized Swimming Club Inc.  
Croydon Light Harness Club  
South Croydon Cricket Club  
U3A Ringwood  
Croydon Senior Football Club  
Eastern United Soccer Club  
Croydon Tennis Club  
South Croydon Football Club  
Ringwood Saints Baseball Club  
First Friends of Dandenong Creek  
BJ Hubbard  
Friends of Wombolano  
Hume Street Reserve  
Patterson St Environmental Group  
Herman Pump Reserve Community Group

Warranwood Reserve Special Committee of Council  
First Friends of Dandenong Creek  
Maroondah CC Bushland - Sonia Street Volunteer Unit  
Croydon Conservation Society  
Cheong Park Friends  
Community volunteer -Diana Mattea  
Yarrunga Community Centre  
Uniting Vic.Tas  
EACH  
Chin Community Victoria Inc  
Emmanuel Christian Church Melbourne  
Glen Park Community Centre Inc  
Arrabri Community House  
Vision Australia  
MiCare  
Central Ringwood Community Centre  
Urban Life Church Inc  
Scouts Victoria Maroondah District  
MYWA Maroondah Youth Wellbeing Advocates  
MCC Social Inclusion & Wellbeing Program  
Family Access Network  
Maroondah Brass  
Melbourne Welsh Male Choir  
Ringwood Ballet Group  
Maroondah Symphony Orchestra  
Zomi Association Australia Inc  
Lipscombe Park Kindergarten  
North Ringwood CCC  
Pinjarra Kindergarten  
Donwood Community Aged Care Services Inc  
Wellways Australia  
MS Limited  
Interchange Outer East  
iDareU LTD

**To contact Council**


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