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Introduction

There is no doubt that Tasmanians love sport. Approximately 58% of Tasmanians aged 15 years and over are participating in physical activity at least three times per week, with 21.3% of these individuals involved in a sporting club. A further 15.3% of Tasmanian adults are involved in sport in a non-playing capacity in roles (such as umpires and coaches). There is also no doubt that volunteers are the lifeblood of Tasmanian sport.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that in 2010 there were 123,700 Tasmanians volunteering in sport at least once a year.

In 2010, research commissioned by the Tasmanian Government estimated 38,000 Tasmanians were regularly (more than once a year) volunteering in sport. With very few paid staff, sporting organisations rely on volunteers to give their time willingly (and for no financial gain) to support the health and lifestyle activities of communities across our island.

However, despite the large number of Tasmanians volunteering in sport and the sector’s dependence on volunteers, there is a lack of information regarding how Tasmanian sporting organisations are supporting them and/or responding to changes in volunteer and community expectations.

To increase our understanding of these issues, Volunteering Tasmania in partnership with the Tasmanian Government through Communities, Sport and Recreation, consulted with a range of Tasmanian sporting organisations to get their perspective.

More than 230 Tasmanian sporting organisations provided their views.

This report provides a summary of those views and delivers powerful insights into how volunteers are recruited, supported, and recognised by Tasmanian sporting organisations.

In 2010

123,700 Tasmanians volunteered in sport.
Like many other states and territories in Australia, sport is a key part of community life for many Tasmanians, whether it be as a player, coach, umpire or spectator.

With recent estimates indicating that over 140,000 Tasmanians (roughly two thirds of the island’s population) are participating in organised sport at least once per week\(^1\), it’s understandable why Tasmania has a reputation for being obsessed with sport.

Similar to the rest of the nation, Tasmanians gravitate towards ‘mainstream’ sports with AFL, golf, netball, soccer and tennis being popular across the island\(^5\).

Despite a small population compared to the rest of the nation, Tasmanians are not starved for choice when it comes sporting options. Whilst there is no definitive number on how many sports are active in Tasmania, it is conservatively estimated to be approximately 90 different sports delivered through 1,700 sporting organisations across the island.

These sporting organisations range in size from community clubs, to regional associations and peak bodies (commonly known as state sporting organisations). Regardless of the size of the sporting organisation, they all rely on volunteers to survive.

In 2010, the Australian Bureau of Statistics estimated that there were 123,700 Tasmanians volunteering in sport at least once a year\(^6\). In the same year, research commissioned by the Tasmanian Government\(^7\) estimated 38,000 Tasmanians were regularly (more than once a year) giving their time willingly to a sporting organisation, for no financial gain.

With no information available providing a break-down of paid staff and volunteers in Tasmanian sport, the sector is commonly known as one where ‘volunteers manage volunteers’.

Volunteers are the lifeblood of Tasmanian sport and whilst there is no evidence to suggest that Tasmanian sporting organisations are struggling because of a lack of volunteers, gaining a better understanding of the health of volunteering is critical to ensure the Tasmanian sporting sector remains vibrant.

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5. ibid
Research methodology

How was the research conducted?
Volunteering Tasmania reviewed existing national and international literature and research on sport volunteering. The findings from these research documents were compared to the findings Volunteering Tasmania obtained through an online survey, then supplemented with face to face interviews.

When was the research conducted?
The project commenced in February 2017, with the online survey and face-to-face interviews conducted between March 2017 and June 2017.

Who was invited to participate?
The online survey was distributed broadly to the Tasmanian sport and recreation sector through the networks of Volunteering Tasmania and Communities, Sport and Recreation, Department of Premier and Cabinet.

Face-to-face interviews were held with a range of organisations selected to ensure a balance of size, region and sport.

Who participated in the research?
In total, the perspectives of 237 Tasmanian sporting organisations have informed the findings in this report. This represents approximately 14% of the sporting organisations believed to be active in Tasmania.

This figure includes 222 Tasmanian sporting organisations that completed the online survey and 15 organisations that participated in the face-to-face interviews. A list of these sporting organisations and breakdown of the sports (including regional location) that responded to the online survey is outlined in Attachment B.

Based on the responses received, Volunteering Tasmania is able to make informed findings about the nature of volunteering in Tasmania’s sporting sector.

What questions were asked?
Participants were asked a series of questions ranging from how volunteers engage with their organisation, how they recruit, retain and manage their volunteers, and what volunteer-related challenges they faced.

Participants were able to provide free text comments to include context to their answers and present a wide-range of challenges and opportunities. This approach ensured that there was scope to understand participant perspectives regardless of the organisation’s size or structure.

A copy of the participant questions is attached in Attachment A.

Limitations of the research approach
The key limitation to this research project is the over-representation from particular sports, with AFL and netball representing over a third of the online survey responses.

The risk of particular sports dominating the number of responses was identified in the survey planning phase and was mitigated by including a qualitative approach (face-to-face interviews and open text answers in the online survey). This approach ensured that the results weren’t skewed towards any particular sport/s by enabling each response to be contextualised and ensure that the findings were relevant across all sports, not just the ones with the highest response levels.

237 Tasmanian sporting organisations.
Research findings

Who participated?
Total number: 237 participants (222 online survey and 15 face-to-face interviews)

![Graph showing response by location and sport](image)

Answered question: 214
Skipped question: 8

How many volunteers do they have?
Total number of volunteers represented:

18,578

Almost half of the sporting organisations that participated indicated they had between 10 and 30 volunteers.

8. Several respondents were peak bodies for their sport and their numbers were between 500 – 10,000. These have been grouped into the 100+ to avoid an artificial skewing of results.
Do they have enough volunteers?
Only 18.5% of participants indicated that they had sufficient volunteers to manage the day to day running of their sporting organisation (see Table 1). The remaining participants (194) noted that they needed more volunteers, with 12.6% (29) indicating that they urgently required volunteers to maintain their operations.

Do they have any paid staff?
Over a third of participants (36.2%) reported that they had paid staff. The interpretation of ‘paid staff’ ranged from casual umpires through to full-time administrators and coaches, with a minimum of 335 paid roles reported (with a minimum of one role counted in the absence of definitive numbers).

| TABLE 1: VOLUNTEER NUMBERS |

**WHICH OF THE STATEMENTS BELOW WOULD BEST DESCRIBE YOUR SPORTING ORGANISATION?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We have more volunteers than required</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We have sufficient volunteer numbers</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We require more volunteers to replace normal turnover</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We require more volunteers to grow</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We require more volunteers urgently in order to continue to function</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
How are they finding their volunteers?
The approach used for finding volunteers was diverse and varied according to the capacity of each sporting organisation.

Traditional methods of recruitment including word of mouth and the engagement of parents/partners/family members of participating athletes were the most popular.

36% of respondents indicated that they are now using social media to extend their reach to potential volunteers, which is consistent with the international trend of using social media to recruit volunteers in the wider not-for-profit sector.9

60% of sporting organisations were not collecting information about their volunteers (such as age, gender or location), with sporting organisations with less than 50 volunteers, less likely to have volunteer workforce development initiatives included in their strategic plan.


Why is finding volunteers so challenging?
58% (137) of participants said that they are currently experiencing major challenges in recruiting sufficient volunteers to their sporting organisations.

‘Major challenge’ is defined as being one which puts the ongoing viability of the organisation at risk in the short and medium term.

There were five key volunteer recruitment challenges identified as detailed below.

· 73% said that potential volunteers are becoming increasingly time poor
· 12% said that there is a reluctance to join boards/committees because people are wary of the liability that is attached
· 8% said the cost of volunteering has become prohibitive due to compliance, accreditation and out-of-pockets expenses
· 5% said that there are low numbers of potential volunteers in rural/regional areas
· 2% said that the expectations of new volunteers don’t match the volunteering culture of the organisation

How long are their volunteers staying?
The majority of participants (52%) indicated that their volunteers stay with their sporting organisation for between five and 10 years.

41 sporting organisations (22%) reported that their volunteers stay for less than five years, and a small group of 21 (11%) noted that their volunteers stayed for 10+ years.

Whilst many of the sporting organisations surveyed for this project indicated significant challenges to retaining volunteers, few indicated that they had implemented strategies to address this challenge.
Why do they think they’re leaving?
The top three challenges for retaining volunteers were identified as:

· high reliance on a core group of volunteers;
· large involvement of informal volunteers or sporadic volunteers; and
· high dependence on the parents/carers of the athletes.

The dependence on parents/carers of participating athletes was considered a significant issue due to the large portion of volunteers who leave after approximately five years. It is at this point when junior participation transitions to a senior level and sporting organisations start to lose the volunteers who are the parent/carers of their participating junior athletes. This challenge highlights the difficulty in engaging volunteers outside the family structure.

Additionally, the difficulty in engaging volunteers who work full time, or have other commitments was evident in the participant’s responses:

“Being a regional sporting club we rely on the family members of those playing. When they stop playing the family members stop volunteering.”

“We depend a lot on the busy Mums!”

“We find that it’s quite difficult to get commitment, can get a few ‘one offs’ but not regulars.”

How are they managing the volunteers they have?

Volunteer managers?
More than half of the participants (55%) indicated that they have a dedicated member of their sporting organisation responsible for the management of their volunteers. Of these sporting organisations, 18 had specific ‘volunteer coordinators’ with the remainder allocating the responsibility of volunteer management as an ‘extra’ task/s to an existing board/committee member or coach.

In the face-to-face interviews, the topic of volunteer management was discussed in depth. Whilst many participants agreed that a dedicated volunteer manager would positively impact upon their sporting organisation, it was widely held that it was a challenge to allocate resources to this approach:

“We’d love to have a dedicated membership officer at each club to track the movement of participants as they move from regional areas to Hobart for uni/work. We lose a lot of people to the sport because of this.”

“It’s done on an ad hoc basis via the committee but it’s always been on the wishlist to get someone to look after the volunteering as their sole job. I know half our problems would be solved if we did it.”

“We’ve tried before but most of our members just want to come and participate. They’ll cook snags and shovel sheep poo to help fundraise but they run a mile if they get asked to take on a job like managing the volunteers in the club. A lot of them do that for a job and they don’t want to do it on the weekends too.”

“I think we’d be able to implement it if there was some help available. A bit like a ‘how to’ booklet for volunteer managers.”
Policies and procedures?
37% (87) of participants indicated that their sporting organisation had an orientation/induction program for new volunteers. Of these sporting organisations, 20 noted that these policies and procedures were informal and not documented.

This indicates that approximately 72% of the sporting organisations that responded do not have documented volunteer management policies and procedures.

However, of those that do, they were more likely to be the sporting organisations with an average volunteer length of service of more than 10 years, and a sporting organisation that had a person responsible for their volunteer management program.

Conversely, of the 35 sporting organisations that had volunteers staying for less than three years, the majority of these organisations did not have a dedicated person in their organisation responsible for volunteer management.

Training and development?
Most participants had a high level of compliance with relevant statutory requirements for their individual sports. For example:

- 86% said that they had a process in place to track accreditation
- 92% said that they were compliant with Working With Children requirements
- 62% encouraged and supported compliance that was over and above the minimum requirement (such as higher level coaching courses, ASADA online courses and sports medicine training).

Of those sporting organisations that had processes in place to track compliance, 75% indicated that they felt their approach was at a very basic level and could be improved if more sophisticated tools were available.

Reimbursement of expenses?
More than three quarters of the participants were reimbursing their volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses.

Reward and recognition?
Most participants had a reward and recognition program (235 out of 237), ranging from appreciation certificates, annual awards, life memberships, vouchers/discounts from sponsors and honorariums and gifts.

Anecdotal evidence gathered also showed that participants were keen to compare their recognition and reward programs against other sporting organisations.

“We do a few things but we’re not sure how that compares with other clubs. We don’t know if we do enough or not.”

“...To be honest we’ve had to roll it back a bit. Volunteers were doing one activity a year but getting free entry every week to games. We had to make the rewards proportionate to the level of commitment by the volunteers.”

75% reimburse their volunteers for out-of-pocket expenses.
What about the volunteers on sporting Boards?

Participants raised two key challenges relating to volunteer Board members:

- 72% said that they felt their Board members had served for too long and they had difficulty in finding suitable volunteers to replace them.
- 63% had an average length of Board service in excess of five years, and of these 28% were in excess of 10 years.

Whilst participants were aware of good governance practice (including the regular rotation of Board members), they stressed that attracting new volunteers to the Board was a challenge.

Additionally, information provided by participants highlighted a range of knowledge gaps for existing Board members, which appears to be deterring new volunteers from taking up Board or committee positions, including a:

- lack of clarity about what a Board member’s responsibility is
- lack of knowledge on how to effectively manage a committee process
- concerns over what personal liability a volunteer Board member has in the event of something going wrong

What strategies or resources do they believe could help?

Over two-thirds of participants (159) provided suggestions on the strategies and resources they believed could help find and keep volunteers, with a small number (47) indicating they were unsure or didn’t believe they needed any.

The diversity of suggestions indicate the complexity of the challenges facing individual sporting organisations, with few commonalities across responses. Suggestions noted more than once ranged from improved communication, processes and procedures for volunteers, more training and increased recognition for the contribution of their volunteers.
Key findings and recommendations
There are four key findings from this research:

1. **Tasmanian sporting organisation volunteers are time-poor and there is an over-reliance on a core group of volunteers.**

   Volunteers in sport are time-poor and Tasmanian sporting organisations rely on a core group of volunteers, especially on their Boards. However, these issues are not unique to sport and are impacting all Volunteer Involving Organisations across Tasmania, regardless of sector.

   The changing community expectations of volunteers is widely recognised and discussed in research and the media, with Volunteer Involving Organisations no longer able to be complacent in their volunteer recruitment and retention strategies. This research confirms that Tasmanian sporting organisations are not immune to these issues.

2. **More volunteers are needed to support Tasmanian sporting organisations and they need help to find volunteers and keep them (particularly the smaller sports).**

   The responses from participating Tasmanian sporting organisations confirmed they need more volunteers, with a small number noting an urgent requirement. In particular, Tasmanian sporting organisations with less than 50 members/volunteers were more likely to experience the greatest level of challenges with their volunteer programs.

   However, there were mixed perspectives on how best to find and keep volunteers, with limited evidence of any active workforce planning strategies being implemented. This was particularly evident with only 38% of sporting organisations collecting information on their volunteers that could inform workforce development and planning processes.

   Workforce planning fits well within the need identified by sporting organisations for growing the recruitment and retention of volunteers and there is research that confirms that volunteer recruitment is most effective when organisations are clear on the motivation and aspirations of their volunteers, and target accordingly. Research also shows that adapting recruitment strategies to suit different groups is required if a sustainable volunteer workforce is to be achieved.

   However, the challenge for sport is that the key motivations for volunteering in sport tend to be very aligned with the sport itself. Therefore it is imperative that Tasmanian sporting organisations be cognisant that their membership recruitment strategies, need to also be recognised as volunteer recruitment strategies.

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10. Independent Sport Panel, *The Future of Sport in Australia*
Sporting organisations that have volunteer management policies and procedures keep their volunteers longer.

Tasmanian sporting organisations appear to be highly comfortable and competent in managing compliance requirements specific to the administration of their sport (e.g. police checks) but the same cannot be said for volunteer management.

Managing volunteers in sport is challenging and despite international research indicating that sporting organisations are moving towards “professional management systems and structures”\(^\text{14}\), this does not appear to be translating to how the majority of Tasmanian sporting organisations are managing their volunteers.

This research indicated that a large number of Tasmanian sporting organisations did not have volunteer management policies and procedures in place. For the majority of organisations their policies and procedures were informal, not documented and not contained in operational or strategic plans. These organisations were more likely to report low volunteer retention rates.

Conversely, those Tasmanian sporting organisations that did have volunteer management policies and procedures in place, reported strong volunteer retention rates. This result is not surprising with sporting organisations that apply basic human resource principles being able to successfully adopt and implement sound volunteer management practices\(^\text{15}\).

However, the number of sporting organisations that reported having these processes in place were low.

Tasmanian sporting organisations are rewarding and recognising their volunteers.

Almost all Tasmanian sporting organisations that participated in this research had a volunteer reward and recognition program in place. This finding is highly positive, and aligned with current research that highlights the connection between reward and recognition programs and volunteer retention.

The manner in which Tasmanian sporting organisations are rewarding and recognising their volunteers is varied, with no ‘one size fits all’ approach.

Whilst information on the types of approaches is not widely shared amongst organisations in the Tasmanian sport sector, the use of diverse approaches is positive, and aligns with international research that cautions against standardised approaches to reward and recognition, programs\(^\text{16}\) arguing that personalised and targeted approaches best support the involvement of volunteers.

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\(^{16}\) ibid
Recommendations

From the key findings the following three recommendations are proposed:

1. **INFORM** Tasmanian sporting organisations on changing volunteer and community expectations.

   The need for more volunteers, people being time poor and an over reliance on a core group of volunteers are not issues specific to sport. The volunteer management issues and challenges facing Tasmanian sporting organisations are no different to other Tasmanian Volunteer Involving Organisations. Like all Volunteer Involving Organisations, ensuring they have access to up-to-date information and research on volunteer trends and motivations will be fundamental to ensuring the sector is well informed to respond, alongside other sectors competing for a finite pool of volunteers, particularly community services.

2. **PROMOTE** existing volunteer workforce planning resources to the Tasmanian sporting sector.

   Resources promoting the benefits of volunteer workforce planning currently exist, encouraging adoption of best-practice volunteer management policies and procedures (including the appointment of dedicated volunteer managers and/or coordinators). There are also resources specific to sport available, including volunteer position descriptions.

However, it is evident that there is an opportunity to do more to increase awareness of these resources and the benefits of their application, which is encouraged by peak sporting organisations such as the Australian Sports Commission. Service Skills Australia notes that: “[without a] clear co-ordinated approach to planning and developing the Sport and Recreation workforce, the industry may face future challenges in recruiting a skilled labour force.”

3. **ENCOURAGE** the sharing of best-practice examples within the Tasmanian sporting sector.

   Tasmanian sporting organisations that report strong volunteer retention rates, supported by volunteer management policies and procedures need to be showcased. Sharing these examples will provide other organisations with examples of what can be done in a Tasmanian context. In doing so, this will offer the opportunity to share broader examples of volunteer management practices, including reward and recognition, which research participants indicated they are interested in.

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17. Ibid
Thank you for completing our survey on volunteering in sport! The information that you give us will help us develop a stronger understanding of the health of volunteering in Tasmanian sporting organisations. As the peak body for volunteering, the team at Volunteering Tasmania will use this information to develop specific resources, programs and services for volunteers in sport.

1. What is the name of your sporting organisation? (optional!)
2. How would you best describe your organisation?
3. Which sport do you represent?
4. Please select your region
5. How many volunteers do you have? (we understand you may not know the exact numbers so an estimate is fine!)
6. Do you have any paid staff? Please tell us how many? (skip this question if you have none!)
7. Do you collect any information about your volunteers? (age, gender, location etc)
8. If yes, what information do you collect?
9. How long do your volunteers stay with your organisation? (we realise this information may not be available, so an estimate is fine!)
10. Do you have someone in your organisation responsible for managing your volunteers? (e.g. you might have a volunteer coordinator on your Board, or multiple volunteer coordinators across coaching, umpires or your juniors who are responsible for looking after these volunteers?)
11. If yes, please describe this position/s and how it fits within your organisations structure (board position, paid employee or volunteer position etc?)
12. Do you have any policies and procedures relating to how volunteers are managed?
13. If yes, can you tell us what they might be?
14. Which one of the statements below would best describe your sporting organisation?
   - We have more volunteers than required
   - We have sufficient volunteer numbers
   - We require more volunteers to replace normal turnover
   - We require more volunteers to grow
   - We require more volunteers urgently in order to continue to function
15. Has your club experienced any major challenges to recruiting volunteers?
16. How do you recruit volunteers?
17. Do you provide any orientation / induction for volunteers?
18. In addition to your sport specific training needs – do you offer other training to your volunteers (Play by the Rules, Drugs in Sport, other accreditation and licences)?
19. How do you recognise volunteer’s contribution to your club/organisation?
20. Do you reimburse out of pocket expenses for volunteers?
21. What resources and strategies do you think you need with regard to finding and keeping your volunteers?
22. What are the reasons you think your volunteers leave? Do you think that some would stay if there were more structured volunteer management systems in place?
23. Do you have any final comments?
The following is a breakdown of responses by sport and region.

**Total responses by sport**

**Which sport do you represent?**

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<tr>
<th>Answer Options</th>
<th>Response Percent</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>0</td>
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<tr>
<td>Basketball</td>
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<td>BMX</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cycling</td>
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<td>MTB</td>
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<td>Canoeing</td>
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answered question 214
skipped question 8
## Responses by Region and by Sport

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<tr>
<td>Surf Lifesaving</td>
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<tr>
<td>Netball</td>
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<td>Triathlon</td>
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<td>Sailing</td>
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<td>Swimming</td>
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<td>Other (please specify)</td>
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</table>
FACE-TO-FACE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED

1. Canoe Tasmania
2. AFL Tasmania
3. Little Athletics Tasmania
4. Golf Tasmania
5. South Launceston Football Club
6. Rowing Tasmania
7. North Esk Rowing Club
8. Special Olympics
9. Netball Tasmania
10. Football Federation Tasmania
11. Bowls Tasmania
12. Burnie Surf Lifesaving Club
13. Swimming Tasmania
14. Triathlon Tasmania
15. Launceston Tornadoes Basketball Club


Australian Bureau of Statistics, Survey of Voluntary Work (2010). Cat. 4441.0


