

**Volunteering Victoria's National Volunteer Week forum is an annual opportunity to explore and engage in broad topics relevant to the contemporary environment of leaders of volunteers. In previous years, this forum has explored ethics and leadership in the sector.**

This year, we are delighted to be exploring the theme of **social policy** through our lens of *Leaving no-one behind: Building communities in a changing environment*. Introduced by Parliamentary Secretary for Volunteers, Lizzie Blandthorn MP, Professor Paul Smyth will provide the keynote before a panel of four experienced sector leaders will link Paul's points to their perspective on our sector's current and emerging challenges, opportunities.

*In this blog, Volunteering Victoria Chief Executive Scott Miller discusses some of the themes he sees as being relevant to this year's forum on social policy.*

We all agree volunteering is transforming as rapidly as society is generally. We know this through the tensions we hear in the language of our own organisations and government when members start being referred to as customers and communities start becoming known as client-groups.

In amongst the change in language taking place, there is an increasing malaise towards our government and its architects of social policy. Yet, such institutions are losing trust through their reluctance to include people in the issues that we find volunteers performing their best – contexts where the stakes are high, values are disputed and facts uncertain.

**In 2019 and beyond, volunteering remains the best means of public participation we have available to increase the social capital required to keep pace with the social change.**

Volunteering offers people a sense of agency, responsibility, sense-making, and connection against isolationism and individualism. Volunteering opens the space for people to grow communities and hold fast to supporting those currently being left-behind. During such times, studies have found that social policy improves through better collaboration between government and citizens, government agencies feel more accountable to their citizens, and increased knowledge and information of citizens.

**As leaders of volunteers where do we fit into this shift?**

Too often we are consigned to the administration of programs. Programs that have turned the art of human connectedness from transformation to transaction. KPIs that have turned metrics of volunteers recruited, retained and recognised into graphs devoid of the true outcomes that volunteers often quietly deliver across our communities on a daily basis. While this is not a new challenge, social policy shifts of late mean we, as leaders, find ourselves in the familiar position of advocating for the true value of volunteering to be recognised and remunerated.

**So what is it that we have been missing/ignoring?**

Is it that we are just too busy keeping up with our "customers'" needs that we have forgotten the common *wealth* in common *effort*? What successes have we not been amplifying loud enough to replicate? These are questions I hope you will join with me to explore at our event with Lizzie Blandthorn MP, Professor Paul Smyth, Bernadette Northeast, Nick Tschuck, Penny Aquino and Volunteering Victoria Board member Andrew Coghlan.

**Scott Miller**

Chief Executive, Volunteering Victoria.