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Family and Community Statistics Team

On behalf of the Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership (the Partnership) I welcome the opportunity to respond to the *Discussion Paper*: *Information needs for Volunteering data*.

The Partnership has been appointed by Government to advise on practical strategies to foster a culture of volunteering, giving and social investment in Australia. The Partnership's role in sustaining and growing giving and volunteering was reaffirmed by our Chair, Prime Minister, the Hon Malcolm Turnbull and Deputy Chair, Minister for Social Services, the Hon Christian Porter at our most recent meeting on 18 April 2017. This commitment acknowledges the critical role volunteering plays in delivering effective programs and key services across local, state and territory and federal governments, the not-for-profit (NFP) and charitable sectors and communities more broadly.

The *Discussion Paper* successfully summarises the key issues and picks up on several of the Partnership's particular concerns about current gaps in measuring the full range of volunteering activity and giving in Australia. Specific issues are summarised below.

- *Time series:* We agree that it is critical that the Australian Bureau of Statistic (ABS) continues to systematically capture population level data on volunteering and giving in Australia so that rates can be measured over time. It is absolutely necessary to evolve data collections to meet emerging needs, but it will also be important to preserve historic time series. It is recommended that measures are taken to identify a 'break in the series' and to enable comparison of equivalent data through the transition.

- *Equitable access to information:* When considering future options, please be aware the data collected by ABS is an irreplaceable asset for the not-for-profit sector. It is evidence at a scale that would not otherwise be provided through other means. Given the NFP sector is not necessarily well-resourced and/or may not have high levels of capability in terms of data literacy, collection, warehousing and analysis, it is important to both continue to collect this data and also to report on and disseminate it as flexibly as possible. Access to reliable evidence base and measurement is particularly relevant in light of the rapid social and economic change and for communities that are being actively encouraged by Government to become more self-reliant and work collaboratively to address complex issues.

- *Robust data:* Periodic collections such as *Giving Australia 2016* play a role in broadening our understanding but can't substitute for the ABS's scale, frequency, reliability and the confidence that results from access to large sample frames.

- *The economic value of volunteering:* Accurately measuring the significant economic contribution volunteering makes to the Australian economy allows us to understand the true cost of not investing and sustaining a thriving volunteering culture. The Nonprofit Institutions Satellite Account which relies on data on volunteer activity collected through the General Social Survey provides important analysis and measurement of the value of the NFP sector and provides the most reliable international comparison of the sector. Continued access to this type of information is critical.

- *Diversity:* The ABS review is an opportunity to consider how to capture broader areas of volunteering that are not well understood such as volunteering within different cultural groups and Indigenous communities. Stereotypes of traditional volunteering can be a barrier to encouraging people from diverse backgrounds to volunteer in formal volunteer settings which is likely to have a long term detrimental effect in our social capital. The Partnership has recently explored these issues with CIRCA and the report is available on the Partnership website. Additional comments on data collection in multicultural and Indigenous communities is provided in the appendix.

- *New patterns:* The rise in emerging forms of volunteering such as online and digital could be captured in future data collections. Currently the volunteering that is measured is predominantly traditional 'physical' volunteering undertaken through NFPs but the extensive volunteering that takes place in other types of organisations such as social enterprise, for purpose, business and government also needs to be considered.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to comment on the review of current methods and scope of collecting volunteering and giving data. I am happy to discuss these issues in more detail and would appreciate being kept up-to-date about progress.

Yours sincerely

Alexandra Gartmann
Prime Minister's Community Business Partnership

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APPENDIX 1

Cultural and Indigenous Research Centre Australia (CIRCA) are experts in culturally sensitive research, policy and evaluation. They have an extensive national team of highly-skilled bilingual and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander research consultants. Their research methodology is rigorous, culturally sensitive and centres on fruitful community consultation. They ensure a diversity of community voices are heard, and are committed to culturally specific research methods based on mutual respect and cooperation.

CIRCA have provided comments on data collection issues around volunteering and giving for CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, provided below.

Issue 1:   Group Priority

There is a need to elevate the considerations around volunteering and giving in CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities within the thinking of the ABS. The current discussion paper pays very little attention to the issues around these two subgroups with only one reference under the section *Understanding Volunteering.*

Both the relative large size of the CALD group which the ABS enumerates through its data capture of Language Spoken at Home (LSH), and the particular issues around disadvantage and service delivery in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities in urban, rural, remote and very remote settings, should demand a far higher level of consideration in this discussion.

This is especially the case as volunteering data is and has been used as an indicator of social cohesion and civic participation.

Issue 2:   Formal v Informal Volunteering

The current collection of data around formal volunteering skews the CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander results given:

Issues around definition and self-identification as a volunteer;

The range of practical impediments which our research found serve to inhibit these two groups from volunteering in more formal structures in the broader population;

Strong behavioural norms in both groups in activities which are best captured as informal volunteering. While ABS 2014 data indicates that the LHS group volunteering at 23% of the cohort against 33% of the broader population; Volunteering Australian data indicates that 72% of the LSH group involved in informal settings as opposed to only 21% in formal settings (Volunteering Australia 2006)

There is a need to broaden the data capture around activities that are specific to cultural maintenance and community support as well as ensuring that carers in both of these cohorts understand that their caring role is indeed identifiable as unpaid work, and by definition **volunteering.**

There is also value in considering a question which asks whether people have attempted unsuccessfully to volunteer and the associated reasons for this. One possible interpretation of declining formal volunteering numbers could be the increased administrative burden around employing people on a voluntary basis leading to higher order thresholds for volunteering.

Therefore, the question that could be asked is, "*Have you been unsuccessful in attempting to volunteer? and Why?* (This could utilise pre-coded answer options).

Issue 3:   Defining CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Volunteering

CALD and Indigenous participants reported being involved in a variety of volunteering and giving activities, including childcare, care of older people, care for people with long term illness and disabilities, working with young people, participation in boards of management, involvement in sporting activities, providing food and goods and cash for those in need, fundraising and providing interpreter and translation services.

CALD participants described a variety of motivating factors for giving and volunteering, such as:

Cultural maintenance: Participants consistently described volunteering as an inseparable element of their culture that needed to be passed on to their next generation and shared with other Australian communities. For many participants, maintaining cultural and linguistic traditions was an important element in many volunteering activities.

Religious and social ethics: Many CALD participants described their culture of origin as one that placed a high religious or social value on the giving of personal time 'for the common good', though some participants described being motivated by social or political ethics.

Community wellbeing and connection: Many participants described their own settlement experiences as having been difficult and said they were now motivated to volunteer and give in order to reduce the kinds of settlement trauma that many experience.

Meaning and personal satisfaction: Many CALD participants described their participation in volunteering in altruistic terms, yet volunteering was also seen by many participants as providing meaning in life and self-esteem.

Employment opportunities: Many CALD participants described a loss of career and a need to find new kinds of work in their transition to life in Australia. Volunteering was described by many participants as a way to update skills or acquire new ones.

Indigenous participants described a variety of motivating factors for volunteering and giving, including:

Responsibility for community wellbeing: Participants noted that high levels of need in Indigenous communities meant there is an imperative to spend one's spare time helping others or giving to those in need. Many were not interested in volunteering or giving outside their community when their own communities faced daily struggles to survive.

Cultural maintenance and survival: Sharing, giving and helping others are integral to Indigenous culture and play a key role in maintaining culture and traditions. Some voluntary activities relate specifically to cultural practices (e.g. organising funerals). Maintaining culture was also linked by participants to specific cultural and community activities, such as storytelling, dance and music.

Making a difference: Being able to make a difference was a significant motivator for Indigenous participants in terms of both volunteering and giving. These were seen as an important part of 'giving back' to community and to those who have helped them or the community in the past.

The literature suggests that people from both CALD and Indigenous communities tend to indicate a preference for volunteering to be of benefit to their own communities and are more likely to participate in informal settings. This is often related to feelings of comfort, trust and familiarity but is also a reflection of community need. Volunteering outside the cultural group is often a result of an interest in skills-building and increasing employment opportunities, and, particularly for new and emerging communities, a desire to engage in broader Australian life and to learn English.

Issue 4:   Broadening Volunteering Data

It is suggested that there is a need to broaden the data capture around volunteering and informal volunteering to allow both CALD and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities to record their contributory behaviour to the community; therefore, the following questions should be considered.

What:

- Have you provided care to a family or community member which was not paid?
- Have you worked in the fundraising activity for which you are not paid?
- Have you been part of an organisation as a committee member or office bearer in an unpaid capacity?

Why:

- to help other community members with settlement and family needs;
- as a requirement of being part of the cultural group;
- as required by your faith;
- to assist in cultural and linguistic maintenance in the community.

Who for:

- language or cultural group specific to your country of origin or area of birth;
- religious/faith community;
- extended family/kinship network;
- immediate family.

Issue 5: Secondary Giving

In CALD and Indigenous communities, the kind of giving as captured in the concept of philanthropy is part of traditional culture and concern for the wellbeing of the community. Participants explained that the giving or sharing of time, belongings, food and money was part of their culture and traditions (including religious traditions for some people) and included a responsibility for the health and prosperity of their communities. For most participants there was little distinction between giving, sharing and volunteering, as they were all seen as part of supporting one's community and/or people in need. In Indigenous communities the distinction was virtually meaningless.

While this is the case there is a growing behaviour in CALD communities in which individuals contribute to a giving process as a secondary giving approach. That is they participate in community-based activities which often serve the function of cultural maintenance which results in CALD specific organisations acquiring resources which are then gifted more formally. Examples of this are organisations such as the Chinese charitable foundation, Co.As.It. the Italian education and welfare organisation, and so on.

This secondary giving is a consistent behaviour within CALD communities across Australia.

As such, a useful addition to the question set would be:

Have you participated and paid for community activities designed to raise funds for charitable and community purposes?