



CONTRIBUTION OF THE NOT FOR PROFIT SECTOR

LIONS AUSTRALIA SUBMISSION

Introduction

This submission makes some broad observations about the role of Lions Australia specifically, and Service Clubs generally, as part of the not-for-profit sector within Australia. It reflects a desire by our Association to take a place in the Australian community as a partner in local service delivery, rather than in isolation.

Lions Australia has a proud history of service to the Australian community. Many Australians see the products of our endeavours – the town parks, the children with a disability with new wheelchairs, the older Australians cared for, and the advances in medical research into the cervical cancer vaccine, spinal cord repair and children's cancers that are the result of Lions efforts.

When disasters strike, during the Victorian Bushfires, the Newcastle Earthquake, and Cyclone Larry – Lions were there, at every level contributing their energy, their resources and their hearts to their communities. Indeed Lions Australia has answered the call since 1947.

Each year, Lions around Australia put in 500,000 hours of voluntary time into Lions projects and activities, at all levels including management, training and leadership, trade skills and professional skills, labour and creativity. Lions invests more than \$22 mill. each year into our humanitarian work. Our diversity in skill, gender and geography is our great strength.

The purpose and objective of Lions Clubs is to create understanding and friendship within the world, promote good citizenship, and engage in service projects to support the community – without personal financial reward. Lions fund our own infrastructure through member fees and are proud of the fact that 100% of community donations support these philanthropic goals.

Response to the Terms of Reference

1. Measurement: Lions has a well-developed and long-standing system measuring the outputs of volunteer activity including;
 - a. Volunteer hours contributed each month
 - b. Funds raised
 - c. Types of projects where volunteer hours are invested.

Data entry into the system is carried out by local clubs and given the diverse nature of our organisation and the large geographic spread the quality of the data can be variable.

Data recorded is most often used to promote membership and giving to our organisation and it would be useful if there were a pathway to capturing this data in a broader understanding of the contribution of the service club sub-sector. Lions reliably estimate that more than 500,000 hours of volunteer time are contributed each year, and other service club organisations would record similar contributions on a per-head basis.

2. Burdens and impediments to operations: Service clubs face the same impediments in carrying out their business as the broader not-for-profit sector; legal requirements of incorporation and annual reporting, necessity to obtain appropriate approvals for fundraising, public risk management etc. Unlike some other not-for-profit organisations, service clubs usually rely 100% on volunteer efforts to deliver all management, administrative and operational requirements. Lions Clubs operate leanly, and almost



exclusively without government funding. The pace of change in regulation, more stringent requirements with respect to financial accountability, risk management and business legislation means increasing diversion of volunteer resources from operational to administrative roles.

This is particularly burdensome on smaller clubs. In some cases, these volunteer resources are lost when small clubs choose to close when management of their legal requirements becomes too onerous.

3. Recognition and acknowledgment: Service Clubs are home to thousands of individuals engaged in a lifetime of community work through volunteering. Many have 40 year + contributions and as others ease into retirement, they escalate their contribution - volunteering hours well above the paid employment contribution of many others in their communities.

Largely, they do not seek acknowledgement or reward. However when it is received, this can be extraordinarily motivating to current volunteers, and provide great encouragement to others to do the same.

All volunteer organisations face great challenges to their sustainability, to renew their human resources and small gestures are important and helpful to ensure experienced volunteers remain to transfer knowledge to their successors.

Government can support service clubs by:

- a. Offering tax deductibility for member dues: Lions fund our own operating costs and proudly proclaim that 100% of funds donated by the community to our humanitarian causes. Members come from all occupations and for those on fixed and low incomes, payment of member fees can sometimes be difficult. We would like government to consider offering relief through the tax system by making service club member fees tax deductible. The cost of this measure would not be significant but would be valued by volunteers as an acknowledgement of their contribution.
- b. Promotion: The not-for-profit sector generally, and service clubs specifically focus their energies on the particular tasks and causes that are their objective. Membership renewal is largely dependent on individuals within communities understanding the role and contribution of these organisations, and being able to identify them as a target for their volunteer efforts. This is a particularly an issue in our cities, where competition for attention in local and state media is substantial, and service clubs are largely unrecognised.

We would like to see government invest in continuing and ongoing promotion of volunteering through a national media campaign, or by supporting not-for-profit sector promotion through grants for the purpose of advertising and promotion.

4. Opportunities to enhance relationships with not-for-profits
 - a. Service Clubs are important 'community connectors'. Their members are individuals who are intrinsically motivated to help. Their members often have multiple associations with helping groups in the community. Particularly in rural areas, members of Lions Clubs are often also members of the Progress Association, Local Council and sporting groups.

This offers government the opportunity to work with clubs to deliver government programs, distribute resources during emergencies, consult broadly on issues



- affecting communities, etc. Lions would like service clubs to be considered as a potential collaborator in government program delivery.
- b. Government grants: Governments and private organisations sometimes exclude service clubs as potential applicants for grants without explanation. Given that Lions funds its own infrastructure costs this is a curious phenomenon, since a far larger percentage of government grants would be allocated to their intended purpose, rather than to defray base costs.
 - c. International Cooperation: Many service clubs are either directly affiliated with, or have close relationships with international organisations. Lions Australia is part of the Lions Clubs International with 1.3 million members in 205 countries worldwide. Lions works directly within some of the most disadvantaged communities in the world, as do other major service clubs. There are opportunities for government to improve the delivery of international aid and support through partnerships with service clubs, to ensure aid is delivered as intended.

Service Clubs, although intrinsically valued by the Australian community, are somewhat invisible. They do attract, by their very nature, individuals who are inclined to 'get on with the job', and perhaps do not invest sufficiently in promoting their activities, or in connecting better with other significant organisations in the not-for-profit sector.

They do, however, provide a substantial human and intellectual resources within Australia and it is our view that with some attention, and favourable consideration by government, could add substantially to social capital within communities.

Thank you for the opportunity to contribute to this investigation.

Yours sincerely,

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Connections, influence, friendship, philanthropy - we serve our communities every day
<http://www.lionsclubs.org.au>