

weVolunteer

# FINAL EVALUATION REPORT



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## Introduction

The emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic brought an array of ongoing challenges; some familiar and some entirely unprecedented. Although lockdowns and mask mandates were new, the need to support community recovery during a crisis – and in the aftermath – were not.

The following report evaluates the weVolunteer program and the context in which it was both commissioned and delivered. With the aim of bringing together volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) and volunteers to support community recovery through an established credentialing technology platform, the focus of the evaluation then moves to developing a better understanding of the key deliverables. Together with insight from interviews with key stakeholders, reflections on both the successes and challenges of weVolunteer are presented.

Finally, a framework for designing a more collaborative approach to supporting community recovery through volunteering is presented to translate the findings into tangible learnings.

## About weVolunteer

*“weVolunteer is a Volunteering Victoria initiative designed to bring together volunteers and local community organisations to help communities recover in times of need.”*

weVolunteer was launched by the Premier of Victoria in August 2020 in response to the growing social impacts of COVID-19 and the need to mobilise volunteers to support local communities. weVolunteer was designed to help build community resilience and aid social recovery through volunteering.

The weVolunteer Steering Committee<sup>1</sup> [identified the project aims](#) as:

<b>POOL</b> Build a network of volunteers with a credentialed Volunteer Passport, ready to assist with recovery in their local community.	<b>PASSPORT</b> Empower volunteers to create their own portable volunteering record, provided by MyPass technology.
<b>PREPAREDNESS</b> Support communities to recover and build back better following a crisis through prepared volunteers and VIOs.	<b>PLACE</b> Improve collaboration between VIOs, local government, and Emergency Management organisations to help address regional needs.

<sup>1</sup> Josephine Beer (DFFH), Debra Abbott (EMV), Jan Bruce (VLGA), Scott Miller (Volunteering Victoria)

The initial period of funding was allocated until June 2021, with an additional 12 months of funding then secured (until 30 June 2022) following the success of the pilot phase. A summary of the outcomes from the first year of operation can be found in the [Pilot Evaluation Report](#), prepared in October 2021.

weVolunteer was delivered by Volunteering Victoria, in partnership with the Department of Families Fairness and Housing (DFFH), as the funding provider and [MyPass](#) (the technology provider). MyPass is an Australian technology company that, through its partnership with the weVolunteer program, provided:

*“an award winning, Australian-owned software platform and the first volunteer credentialing system of its kind in Australia.”*

Volunteering Victoria worked with VIOs across the state to help them connect with a pool of community recovery volunteers through MyPass to support local communities seeking additional volunteers to deliver their services.

## **weVolunteer in context**

### **Impact of COVID-19 on volunteering**

Historically, volunteers are at the [forefront of community crises](#). But COVID-19 is, and remains, different as it is not a single event, nor a single crisis. During the early stages of the pandemic, communities came together to support each other through isolation and reach those who were vulnerable. But there was not the corresponding increase in formal volunteering usually seen at times like this.

Released by Volunteering Victoria in October 2020, the recent [State of Volunteering in Victoria report](#) found that the initial impact of COVID-19 saw a 50 percent decline in the volunteering participation rates across all volunteer sectors and programs, with a net decline in volunteering hours of almost two thirds. Lockdowns, uncertainty and fear of COVID-19, particularly before vaccines became available, are some of the possible reasons explaining this trend. The reported shortage of volunteers continued throughout 2021, when the community need for additional support was as high as ever. At a time when many were seeking stability and security, the overall feeling was much the opposite. Many volunteers and potential volunteers were isolated and community services had to recalibrate, adjusting their support to meet changing needs. During this time, VIOs had to adapt to new models of delivering, funding and engaging volunteers.

## Filling a gap

In times of crisis there is usually significant goodwill from people wanting to help, but often too little co-ordination. Like others, Victoria lacks a dedicated system to manage both the influx of volunteers during a crisis and the management of volunteers for ongoing community recovery.

This gap had been highlighted by previous inquiries into bushfires and floods, such as the [Inquiry into the 2019-2020 Victorian Fire Season](#), which stressed the importance of co-ordinating and managing volunteers during and after emergencies. The need for greater co-ordination and management is also part of the three-year rolling [Emergency Management Strategic Action Plan](#) (SAP) that aims to provide state-wide infrastructure and co-ordination.

The lack of co-ordination and management was also highlighted in the [HelpOUT](#) evaluation; an emergency service delivered by Volunteering Victoria in 2016, and funded by the federal government's Natural Disaster Resilience Grants Scheme.

weVolunteer was seen as part of the solution to bridge this gap, by helping manage and co-ordinate volunteers to support community recovery throughout the COVID-19 crisis. It is what one interviewee described as getting volunteers 'match-fit' to be effectively deployed at times of crises.

However, the experience of a health pandemic was very different to 'traditional' emergencies like bushfires and floods. Inevitably, the emergency response was not about responding to the aftermath of a specified disaster, but rather centred on supporting local communities through recurrent snap lockdowns and restrictions, where needs continued to change and evolve through these periods of isolation and uncertainty.

As detailed throughout the following program evaluation, the design and commissioning of the weVolunteer program didn't necessarily reflect this differing landscape, limiting the potential impact for communities and volunteers.

## Program evaluation

The following provides an evaluation of the weVolunteer program. Insights and data presented are based on:

- analysis of documents provided by Volunteering Victoria
- an evaluation workshop with the weVolunteer team
- interviews with key stakeholders at DFFH
- interviews with representatives from three participating VIOs
- insight from a participant of the weVolunteer User Testing Group
- an interview with a representative from MyPass
- data and feedback provided by the weVolunteer team.

A summary of key program deliverables is presented in Table 1, with further insights drawn from conversations with key stakeholders.

It should be noted that given the program’s rapid start-up, many of these targets were set by the weVolunteer team following the initial pilot phase. Particularly from the perspective of DFFH as the main funding provider, the indicators for success were largely focused on the number of volunteers recruited and matched with roles through the weVolunteer portal. While this may be a useful starting point to guide learning for future iterations of similar programs and funding, a purely quantitative focus fails to capture the true impact of weVolunteer. This evaluation seeks to explore more of the qualitative measures of the program’s success and the real-world implications of an established community recovery platform.

**Table 1: Summary of key program deliverables**

		Total	Target
<b>1.1</b>	<b>Registered volunteers</b>	<b>2,571</b>	<b>3,000</b>
	Regional volunteers	204	500
	Role applications	781	1,000
	Credentials verified	1,468	1,500
<b>1.2</b>	<b>Registered VIOs</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100</b>
	Regional VIOs	36	40
	Roles developed	119	150
	Roles fulfilled	72.2%	75%
	Volunteers onboarded^	222	-
<b>1.3</b>	<b>Website</b>		
	Page views	59,052	50,000
	Users	25,964	-
	Users via Volunteering Victoria website	4,228	-
	Users via Facebook	6,194	-
<b>1.4</b>	<b>Newsletters &amp; EDMs</b>		
	Volunteer newsletter – Open rate (average)	39.5%	40%
	VIO newsletter – Open rate (average)	40.1%	40%
	Role Sharing – Open rate (average)	38.4%	40%
<b>1.5</b>	<b>Social media – Paid ads</b>		
	Facebook – Total campaigns	16	-
	Facebook – Reach	834,424	-
	LinkedIn – Total campaigns	8	-
	LinkedIn – Reach	123,641	-
<b>1.6</b>	<b>Training</b>		
	Sessions held	15	-
	Total participants	169	-
	Participant satisfaction (average)	98%	80%
<b>1.7</b>	<b>Stakeholder Engagement</b>		
	Presentations delivered	45	-

- No target set

^ Onboarded volunteers understated by the reliance on VIOs to manually report back to weVolunteer

## Successes

### Defining community recovery

Community recovery from the impacts of COVID-19 remains complex and unfinished. Other emergencies such as bushfires and floods often have a much clearer roadmap, with emergency services responding to the initial crisis and followed by support services, including volunteers. With no equivalent roadmap for a health pandemic – especially as it was unfolding in real time – the weVolunteer team needed to reconfigure some of the program parameters.

First, it was important to recognise that a different response was needed for community recovery in this context. There was no single event, and the nature of the pandemic and lockdowns was entirely unprecedented, with few organisations having navigated that type of terrain before. This inevitably caused some confusion, and at times conflation, between different types of crisis responses and where weVolunteer was ultimately positioned. Boundaries soon became blurred between emergency response and community recovery, as well as the types of volunteering opportunities considered to be in aid of community recovery. In practical terms, this meant that VIOs didn't always know whether the weVolunteer program was relevant for them, and volunteers didn't necessarily know how to best support their local community.

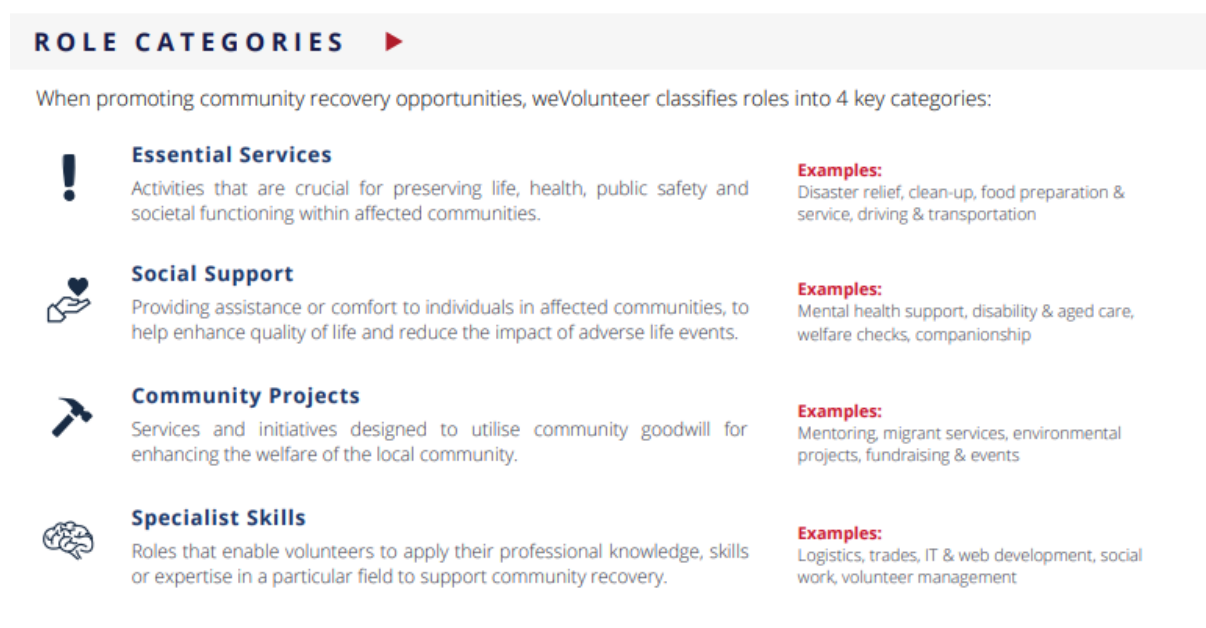
Responding to this ambiguity, the weVolunteer team redefined the scope with a particular focus on the volunteering roles that could be included as part of community recovery (see Figure 1), while also avoiding duplicating the existing work of place-based Volunteer Resource Centres. It was a very practical way to offer clarity.

In their guide, weVolunteer defined community recovery as:

*“The process of resolving the impacts of a crisis for the individuals and communities affected.”*

Within this definition, community recovery is viewed as a long-term process and can include both **'shocks'** (sudden events that can threaten a community) and **'stresses'** (chronic issues that weaken the fabric of communities). Role categories were also developed (see Figure 1) that could be shared with prospective VIOs to generate interest, as well as with interested volunteers to provide examples as to the type of roles to expect through the weVolunteer program.

**Figure 1: weVolunteer Role Categories**



The development of these categories with a clearer definition of community recovery was a turning point for the weVolunteer team. It provided much-needed clarity for not only the program team in promoting weVolunteer, but also for potential VIOs and volunteers.

## Relationships matter

Throughout the two years of the program's operation, VIOs reflected positively on the supportive relationships built with the weVolunteer team. The customer service and wrap-around care were particularly beneficial for smaller VIOs, through building their capacity, providing them with tailored support to attract volunteers and advice on processes to ensure volunteer safety. As one of the Volunteering Victoria team said:

*"weVolunteer did a good job with very small organisations who would otherwise [not] have the resources. That's the biggest impact [of the program]."*

Connections, confidence and sector capacity matters and this emerged as a common theme through interviews with volunteer managers and co-ordinators from participating VIOs. For some, the benefit was about knowing that there was help available. For others, it was direct support for registering and onboarding volunteers.

Some of the positive feedback included:

*"[I] love that [the team] was in touch all the time... It was a personal relationship."*



*“The support was fantastic – they’re a great team and they have put a lot of work into building it.”*

The positive feedback also extended to MyPass, with many VIOs grateful for the technical support available in navigating the online portal, especially in the early project stages.

The impact of these relationships can also be observed in individual [weVolunteer stories](#), where the contributions of volunteers and local organisations were shared through the weVolunteer website. Some of the reported benefits included building skills for volunteers, enabling vulnerable members of the community to overcome isolation and providing free hot meals to families in need. These local community stories are a tribute to the hard work and commitment of the weVolunteer team and partner organisations.

Capturing the impact of these types of relationships can be difficult and is often most effective when it is part of an evaluation framework at a program’s inception. In this case, understanding the value of relationships wasn’t prioritised by DFFH and as a result, wasn’t embedded nor captured by the program’s success indicators.

Failure to embed these insights into wider program indicators has meant that these achievements are less visible and seemingly undervalued. It also means that these stories remain ad-hoc rather than contributing to evidence for wider and longer-term reform in community recovery.

## **Training**

The training offered by Volunteering Victoria as part of this work was particularly well received, with post-session surveys reporting an overall average satisfaction rating of 98% across all participants.

In total, fifteen sessions were offered to almost 170 participants (see Table 2). A range of providers delivered on diverse topics including psychological first aid, and volunteer management and recruitment. All training was provided free of charge to volunteers, volunteer managers and leaders of volunteers registered to weVolunteer. The offer of free training proved to be a definite drawcard for increasing engagement with – and ultimately recruiting – more volunteers and VIOs.

**Table 2: Summary of Training Courses**

Topic	Provider	Area of focus	Audience	Date/s offered
Accidental Counsellor	Elite Counselling	Supporting others	Everyone	Piloted in June 2021
Supporting the Supporters	Australian Red Cross	Self-care	Everyone	Piloted in June/July 2021
Understanding Psychological First Aid	Australian Red Cross	Supporting others in crisis	Everyone	Piloted in June/July 2021
Making your Volunteer Program COVID-Safe	Volunteering Victoria	COVID-safe volunteering	Volunteer Leaders	Piloted in July 2021
3R's - Recruitment, Retention and Recognition	Volunteering Victoria	Safe and effective recruitment	Volunteer Leaders	Piloted in July 2021 Tues 1 Feb 2022
A-Z of Volunteer Management	Volunteering Victoria	Safe and effective volunteer management	Volunteer Leaders	Part 1: Tues 1 Mar 2022 Part 2: Tues 8 Mar 2022
Volunteer Screening Deconstructed	Volunteering Victoria	Safe and effective recruitment	Volunteer Leaders	Wed 27 Apr 2022
Volunteering Rights, Responsibilities and Boundaries	Volunteering Victoria	Volunteer safety	Volunteers	Tues 24 May 2022
Psychological Preparedness	Volunteering Victoria	Supporting others, volunteer safety	Everyone	Tues 22 Feb 2022 Thurs 10 Mar 2022

Since first launching in June 2021, the training program evolved over time, responding to internal and external changes such as:

- being unable to confirm additional training sessions with Australian Red Cross
- having new internal capacity through weVolunteer staff to deliver training.

Online training was highly valued by organisations and volunteers, especially during lockdowns when other activities were limited. However, as time went on and lockdowns began to ease, it seemed that people were wanting to engage less online, with a preference for face-to-face training returning. It is very likely that after almost two years of online meetings and training, many were experiencing 'online fatigue'. Particularly throughout 2022, some sessions had to be cancelled due to low numbers. Other possible factors could have been the resumption of face-to-face activities and the need to register before being able to access training.

Overall, the feedback on the quality of training was overwhelmingly positive. The vast majority (over 96% of those surveyed) reported being satisfied, with the free offering being a definite drawcard.

*"[The] training was amazing. It was four free sessions a month."*

*“Thank you for making this training freely available, much appreciated. Well spent time on valuable [content].”*

Training was also a way for the weVolunteer team to maintain a connection with volunteers, even at times when there was a decline in volunteer roles available.

Had funding continued, the weVolunteer team were already scoping potential pathways for a hybrid approach to training together with Emergency Management Victoria (EMV) that combined self-directed learning, face-to-face and online sessions. It was being discussed to capitalise on volunteer interest when a crisis hit and ensure that they were prepared with valuable skills for when relevant volunteering roles emerged.

## Challenges

### Insecure funding

The lack of secure funding was identified as a constant and consistent barrier, and one that is not unique to weVolunteer. Like so many other projects, insecure funding was a significant barrier to securing stakeholder engagement throughout the project: including registering through the MyPass portal, participating in training, and volunteer managers learning how to use a new platform. VIOs were particularly hesitant to engage given the potential limited timeframe of the program’s operation. The weVolunteer team recounted conversations they had with prospective VIOs and local government areas (LGAs) where there had been interest in registering, but the time needed for registration and ongoing participation outweighed the potential or perceived benefits. This lack of clarity on future funding was an ongoing cause of uncertainty for both the program team and prospective VIOs.

### Engagement with EMV

EMV initially showed interest in the weVolunteer program and participated during the pilot phase as part of the Steering Committee, which was established to guide the strategic direction of weVolunteer. Through this engagement, EMV provided additional funding following the pilot phase through a signed Memorandum of Understanding with DFFH to explore how weVolunteer could better support the coordination of spontaneous volunteers during and following emergencies, with particular emphasis on preparedness training pathways for volunteers.

Unfortunately, due to various factors, including a Victorian Emergency Management reform and internal restructuring, EMV were unable to commit to ongoing engagement throughout the year that followed. This was despite the weVolunteer team meeting regularly with EMV to develop a plan, including drafting a training framework and additional resources focused on spontaneous volunteer coordination.

## Extending reach in regional Victoria

At the conclusion of the pilot phase the weVolunteer program had generated interest from around 2,000 volunteers, however only a small proportion of these volunteers (approximately 20%) were based in regional Victoria. This was despite there being an equal – and potentially even greater – need for additional support across remote and rural areas. As a result, the weVolunteer project team dedicated effort and resources in stakeholder management to target organisations and volunteers in regional Victoria.

During 2021/2022, weVolunteer presented to 15 partnership networks across regional Victoria, with the aim of extending the program into regional communities. Likewise, alongside regular social media promotion, advertisements were placed across nine regional newspapers in the hope of attracting more volunteers in regional areas.

This focus was welcomed, particularly regarding the offer of free training as an incentive for registering. Some informal feedback suggested that there was sufficient training provision in metropolitan areas, but people were “*crying out for training*” in regional areas.

Unfortunately, many of the same challenges were shown to impact the potential uptake across regional communities. As was the case in metropolitan Melbourne, uncertainties associated with lockdowns, service closures, and insecure funding also contributed to a challenging environment for driving up engagement in regional Victoria.

## Adapting existing technology

When weVolunteer was first commissioned, DFFH had already secured MyPass as the technology partner from the outset. Despite MyPass’ reputation and skillset, it wasn’t clear that the solutions they offered – credentialling primarily for paid oil and gas workers – could be easily adapted to volunteers for community recovery. Nor was it clear whether the lack of a digital passport was a gap for the sector.

A member of the Volunteering Victoria team reflected:

*“This technology platform had been provided and it was about us adapting so that we could fit into the platform, rather than develop what we needed.”*

The potential of a digital passport for volunteers was particularly appealing to DFFH, with a political commitment being made to the concept prior to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Department was keen to test the promise of technology to support VIOs. As a reputable technology provider, MyPass was already engaging with the Victorian Government and were seen to be offering a high-quality product at a relatively low cost. According to interviewees, MyPass also offered high levels of data security and had a strong corporate social responsibility policy, as well as being willing and able to engage with the public sector.

The rationale for supporting digital passporting and credentialling was that it could better match volunteers to VIOs. Portable credentials also offered VIOs a safe way to work with volunteers, while reducing the administrative burden of the onboarding process. For volunteers, there was a perceived advantage that they could easily share their required information and engage with multiple organisations at once.

While there did not seem to be any resistance to adapting to the technology, it wasn't clear whether this was the right technology. Although DFFH referred to stakeholder engagement work they had done showing the demand for credentialling, this was not necessarily aligned with feedback from Volunteering Victoria and other VIOs who reflected that there were too many assumptions about what the sector wanted and needed.

This limited experience of working with the volunteering sector led to several operational and technical limitations. For example, the MyPass platform did not integrate with other platforms commonly used like Better Impact or Salesforce, which helps smooth administration processes. One volunteer manager explained that:

*“Salesforce has all the integrations on administration and SEEK [Volunteer] has all the recruitment potential – so not sure of the value if you have a CRM. Maybe other organisations would have more interest. If we didn't have Salesforce, then this would be handy.”*

MyPass also recognised the disconnect. Not being able to effectively integrate between platforms had a negative impact on meeting the indicators set for participation and exposed them as being too narrow. Each volunteer coordinator interviewed also reflected that MyPass was not configured to send notifications, but instead they were required to log in and manually check for updates. This was highlighted as a constraint. As one volunteer manager said:

*“The fact that there are no notifications is a headache. You need to remember to log back in, but that's a hassle.”*

From the volunteers' perspective, one of the main system limitations was roles having to be advertised state-wide, often with no connection to a person's postcode. It was expected that prospective volunteers would prefer to engage in roles close to home, particularly given the recommendations around limiting travel throughout the pandemic. With this in mind, the weVolunteer team commissioned MyPass to implement a range of system developments, aimed at improving the platform's compatibility with the volunteering sector and thereby enhancing the weVolunteer user experience.

As a key aspect of the developments requested, enhanced search capabilities were seen to be essential for providing more tailored and targeted communications to the weVolunteer pool of volunteers, in that notifications of newly available roles would only be sent to those in the relevant geographical area. Unfortunately this work was not delivered prior to the program's closure, but is

likely to have made a significant impact on volunteer role engagement; the metric of most significance to DFFH as the main funding providers.

Another potential drawback for volunteers was the requirement to register with MyPass before being able to see available opportunities. Comparable platforms such as SEEK Volunteer work the other way around, in that registration occurs upon seeing an interesting opportunity, thereby driving up engagement. The weVolunteer project team later reflected that this was a potential oversight and could have been resolved by having available roles publicly listed on the weVolunteer website.

MyPass and the weVolunteer team had a strong working relationship, but it was not enough to overcome the fact that some key foundational steps had been skipped; most importantly engagement with the sector to understand needs.

There was also a push seemingly from DFFH to start matching volunteers to roles quickly, squeezing timelines and losing any opportunity to test viability or user journeys. In theory, passporting and credentialling solutions could be beneficial for the sector and may well respond to an existing need, but there was so much work to do before being confident that was the case. With the onset of the pandemic, there was an attempt to shoehorn this existing promise into solutions when there wasn't yet a clear purpose and hadn't been sufficient engagement with the sector, nor testing of products. Inevitably, it meant that delivery would be bumpy.

In **summary**, despite the positive working relationship between MyPass and weVolunteer, the potential impact of weVolunteer was stifled due to:

- a lack of clarity on whether passporting and credentialling was the core challenge to be solved,
- MyPass not being configured to be easily applied or integrated with the existing infrastructure across the volunteering sector,
- resources – time, people, skills, money – not being adequate to respond to emerging challenges, and
- fixed indicators focusing on the number of volunteers registered to the weVolunteer portal.

## Key learnings

weVolunteer started with a proposed technology solution and the aim of adapting it to the wider volunteering sector to support community recovery and resilience. However, technology alone rarely offers the solution; rather how it is designed and applied in responding to an existing need tends to be more effective. MyPass has a positive and credible reputation in offering a digital passporting solution, having been developed and refined to respond effectively to a particular need in highly

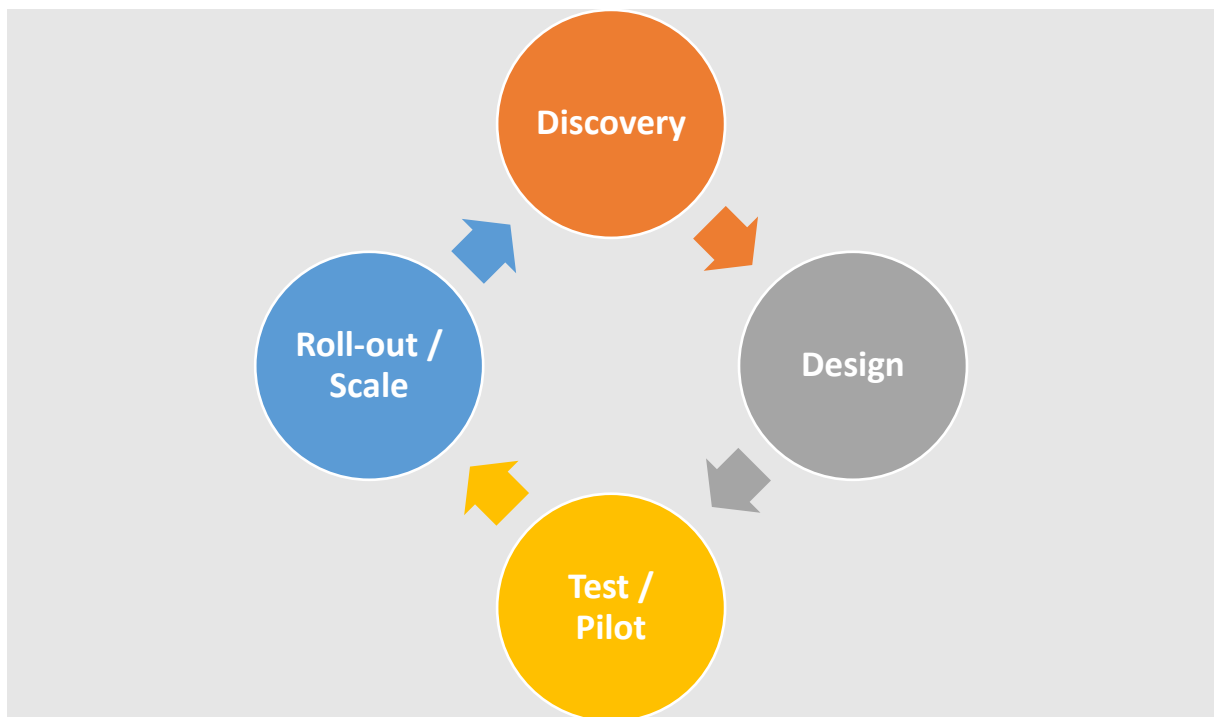
regulated industries. But that need is undoubtedly different to the needs of VIOs and volunteers, and without a deeper understanding of these unique needs, weVolunteer would always be limited in scope. It doesn't mean that MyPass or a similar platform cannot be adapted, but the assumption is limiting.

Although there are many ways to scope a project of this nature in the future, most service design or 'tech for good'<sup>2</sup> design processes outline a similar core foundation (see Figure 2). Ideally, future projects would benefit from adopting the following stages in planning:

1. **Discovery** – understand the problem you are trying to solve and the outcomes that would indicate success
2. **Design** – scope a program that responds to the identified problem, which is both robust (responding to the challenge and evidence) and flexible (to respond to emerging insights)
3. **Test / Pilot** – test the feasibility and applicability of the design and continuously learn from it
4. **Roll out / Scale** – roll out and appropriately scale an intervention based on evidence and insight.

The process is important as it provides an opportunity to be both robust and flexible. It also allows a shared focus on outcomes – the change you want to see for volunteers, VIOs and wider communities – to remain central. This is not always easy, is often iterative and non-linear.

**Figure 2: Outline of proposed project cycle**



<sup>2</sup> The use of technology to affect deliberate, positive social benefit

This process is highlighted below in a hypothetical scenario, based on the findings, to explore how a project like this could be approached in future through responding to the insights generated (see Table 3). Whilst the hypothetical scenario is indicative, it provides a practical application and methodology for the future.



**Table 3: Translating project cycle into a hypothetical project**

Phase	Key activities	Hypothetical application
<b>Discovery</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Explore drivers and define project parameters</li> <li>• Synthesise qualitative and quantitative insights</li> <li>• Develop resources (money, time, people) pipeline</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Insights from VIOs and volunteers could include:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Many VIOs spend too much administrative time collecting the same information</li> <li>○ Lack of confidence, especially in small VIOs, in holding sensitive information</li> <li>○ Volunteers often need to provide the same information to multiple VIOs and can be a disincentive to participation</li> <li>○ In times of crisis, there is often an influx of people wanting to volunteer that can be difficult to manage and translate that goodwill into meaningful community recovery</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Identify funding sources for pilot phase and the potential for wider scaling</li> </ul>
<b>Design</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Draft working hypothesis based on the insights uncovered through discovery and what is possible with the resources available (budget, people, time)</li> <li>• Together with partners shortlist potential options, get feedback from relevant partners and continue to iterate</li> <li>• Scope an evaluation framework to capture impact on outcomes</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working hypothesis could be that passporting would save VIOs admin time, and help volunteers register with more than one VIO creating better matches for both VIOs and volunteers</li> <li>• Test the hypothesis with different types of VIOs and volunteers – to better understand where and what the gaps are – e.g. work with partners to interrogate where in the VIO and/or volunteer journey there are barriers / opportunities</li> <li>• Scope current technology landscape to see what already exists, what adaptations would be needed, resource implications, other wrap around services needed</li> <li>• Ensure that potential funding sources are engaged throughout</li> <li>• Design a governance framework for accountability</li> <li>• Develop an evaluation framework that captures the outcomes you seek with qualitative and quantitative measures and clear indicators</li> </ul>
<b>Test / Pilot</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Test and gather data to monitor</li> <li>• Analyse results in light of evaluation framework</li> <li>• Plan iteration with stakeholders based on learning</li> <li>• Test / pilot again if necessary</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work with other stakeholders to deliver a pilot</li> <li>• Create a project group with a clear remit and responsibilities to test and iterate</li> <li>• Perhaps commission / work with a technology provider and develop MOU that is robust with flexibility; and has clear expectations and responsibilities.</li> </ul>
<b>Roll-out / Scale</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Translate results into action with partners</li> <li>• Update evaluation framework to capture iteration</li> <li>• Identify who / how / when of roll-out</li> <li>• Implement, monitor, improve, report, repeat</li> <li>• Appropriately scale based on findings.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Work to secure longer term funding so that effective solutions can be scaled appropriately</li> <li>• Develop a dissemination plan to widen access to learning and success</li> <li>• Share failure so that others learn from the process.</li> </ul>

## Conclusion

In time, much will be written and debated about the short, medium, and long-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. In response to the immense effect on local communities, weVolunteer was commissioned to provide a dedicated platform for coordinating volunteers looking to support community recovery.

The findings present a mixed picture. The support provided to VIOs – especially smaller ones with limited resources – ultimately contributed to increased confidence and capacity, while at the same time the limits of adopting a technological fix with little user testing were exposed. Although weVolunteer was developed with a technology solution as the initial focus, it was the wrap-around services and personalised support provided that became most significant to the program's success. Conversely, insecure funding, technological incompatibilities, and an ever-changing climate of lockdowns and restrictions were consistent barriers to maximising engagement.

Despite significant differences between COVID-19 and other emergencies, many of these findings echo conclusions from previous community recovery programs at times of crisis and have been shared before. Without continued government backing, it will now be challenging for VIOs to sustain any gains beyond the defined funding period. Likewise, the lack of a dedicated system for coordinating the influx of volunteers following a crisis remains a significant gap in Victoria's emergency management strategy.

As Victorian communities continue through the prolonged process of resolving the impacts of the pandemic, an opportunity exists to learn from the experience of weVolunteer to better prepare for the inevitability of future crises.