BUILDING INCLUSIVE BRIDGES

A Guide to Facilitating Inclusive Referrals



Contents

About this resource	3
Section 1: Facilitating Inclusive Volunteering	
Getting Started	6
First Point of Contact	8
Making a Good Match	11
Managing Expectations	13
Keeping in Contact	14
Section 2: Practical Tools and Tips	
Creating an Accessible Environment	16
Inclusive Language	18
Conclusion	21
Appendix 1.	22
Appendix 2.	24
Appendix 3.	28

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VOLUNTEERING and CONTACT ACT

Introduction

Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) play an essential role in our community. They create a bridge between members of the public who are looking for opportunities to contribute to their community and the local volunteering sector, which is often in need of volunteers to carry out its vital work.

This resource provides a number of tools to assist VRCs to help people who may have barriers in their lives find volunteering positions. These barriers may include communication difficulties, mental health issues, or disabilities. However, often the greatest barrier people face is the negative presumptions that others make about their capabilities. In reality, these often overlooked people can prove to be reliable, keen and generous volunteers - they just need to be given the same opportunities as everyone else.

Inclusion in the Volunteering Sector

Being inclusive can take many forms. When we become inclusive, we notice more, connect more, and grow more. Inclusion calls on us to stop, notice, listen and respond more fully to the many people we encounter, and the diverse world we live in.

The volunteering sector can be a powerful setting for promoting inclusion. By supporting and providing opportunities for people who experience exclusion, volunteering can assist them to participate more fully in their community. Volunteering allows individuals who may have traditionally been service users to become service providers. Empowering individuals through volunteering can have an immeasurably positive impact for someone, giving them confidence, satisfaction and community connection.

Likewise, volunteer involving organisations (VIOs) can experience considerable benefits when adopting a more inclusive approach to recruiting volunteers. VIOs gain new and enthusiastic volunteers, are able to learn from others, and facilitate community links. For more information about the benefits of promoting inclusion check out our 'Let's Talk About Inclusion' resource available for download on the Volunteering and Contact ACT Website.



In the State of Volunteering Report released in April 2016 it was found that:

Volunteer involving organisations generally lack resources, both human and financial, and this can inhibit their ability to engage volunteers with barriers (e.g. people with a disability, people with language barriers). Of the volunteer involving organisation respondents, 46 per cent of respondents were unable to recruit or engage volunteers with barriers, most commonly stemming from organisations not having the requisite resources (51 per cent).

We hope that this resource will assist VRCs to support VIOs in engaging and supporting volunteers with barriers.



Thank you!

Thank you for taking the time to access this resource. We hope it proves to be beneficial in encouraging personal reflection, organisational conversations, and practical developments that will advance inclusion in your community.

SECTION 1:

Facilitating Inclusive Volunteering



Getting Started

There are many different ways to foster inclusion in your VRC, with this resource focusing primarily on how to facilitate inclusive referrals. It is important to consider the resources that are available to you and to be realistic about what you can achieve. For example, you may want to create a new, formal program for inclusive referrals or you may want to absorb them into your existing system. Always keep in mind that any step in a more inclusive direction is great progress.

If you have the capacity it is worthwhile to consider creating a formal program for inclusive referrals. This will ensure that you are providing the best possible service to everyone with whom you interact. If you do not have the capacity to institute a formal program the following will assist you to be more inclusive in your general referral services.

Most importantly, the culture of your organisation needs to breed inclusion, and all staff must be passionate and excited about assisting people with barriers to find volunteering roles. The steps below are designed to assist you with implementing an inclusive program in your VRC.

Before embarking on creating an inclusive referral program here are several questions for you to consider:

■ What are you hoping to achieve?

Try be as specific as possible. Are you aiming for a certain number of participants to be successfully placed in volunteering roles? Or to increase inclusion within VIOs in your community? Being explicit and mindful of the goals of your program will enable you to ensure that you are channelling your resources effectively.

Po you have the necessary resources to create a formal inclusive referral program? You do not want to create a new program at the cost of the other services you offer. Be realistic in what you can and cannot achieve and consider how your existing volunteer workforce can assist you with your programs.

Why are you doing this?

What is the core motivation behind facilitating inclusive volunteering? Understanding why you are doing this will help guide your decision-making in the future.

How to create a formal Inclusive Referral Program:

• Appoint an Inclusive Referral Officer

Consider creating a designated position for someone to look after your inclusive volunteering portfolio. This person may be paid or unpaid depending on the nature and responsibilities of the role. Take a look at the *Desigining Volunteering Roles*Resource avaliable for download on the Volunteering and Contact ACT website.
See Appendix 1 for an example position description for an Inclusive Referral Officer.

Create a set of referral forms

Once people know about your inclusive program organisations may want to refer people to you. It is useful to have two sets of referral forms: one for organisations to refer participants, and one for people to self-refer. See Appendix 2 for Referral Form templates.



Important

It is important to ensure that individuals consent to being part of your inclusive referral program, and that they agree to you passing on their personal information to VIOs. It is a good idea to include a section in your referral forms for volunteers to consent to their participation in the program. It is also important to ask what personal information, if any, the individual would like you to disclose to other organisations.



First Point of Contact

VRCs are often the first port of call for people who want to volunteer. It is important to consider how people experience their first 'welcome' to the volunteering sector. People who experience barriers in their lives are often quite vulnerable. A kind welcome, combined with genuine interest and care, can make a world of difference. It is important for front office staff and all staff handling calls from prospective volunteers to always be respectful and sensitive.

Asking the Right Questions

A volunteer referral process has the primary aim of helping individuals find volunteering roles that correspond with their interests and skills. When an individual indicates that they have barriers in their lives, the referral process may need to be modified and more information about the individual may be required. Obtaining all relevant information will help set the individual up for success.

Setting up the Meeting

When organising an inclusive referral appointment there are several things to keep in mind:

Allow enough time for the meeting

You do not want the individual to feel that their meeting is rushed and that they are being hurried. Make sure you give yourself enough time to prepare for the referral meeting and to talk to the individual. Some appointments may only take 20 minutes while others may take an hour.

Book a quiet and private area for the meeting

It is important that you choose a space in your office that is safe, quiet and comfortable.

Offer assistance in filling out any forms

In some cases individuals might need assistance filling out the referral form. The key is to provide positive assistance without giving undue attention to the person's barrier.

Ask Practical Questions

It is a good idea to have some pre-written questions to ask during an inclusive referral. You may like to create a set of general questions and then ask only those questions that are relevant to the particular individual. Asking practical questions is important as they can provide helpful information that will assist with placing the participant in the right volunteering role.

Here are some examples of questions that may be asked during an Inclusive Referral:

"Do you want to volunteer?"

A seemingly simple question; however, you will be surprised with the answers you receive! For example, some people may have been referred to your VRC, but do not actually want to volunteer.

"Why do you want to volunteer?"

Understanding a person's motivation to volunteer is essential to placing them in the right role. It also assists you to manage their expectations from the beginning.

- "Do you have access to your own transport? Or do you use public transport?"

 This may restrict where the individual is able to volunteer.
- "Would you require any supports/aids when volunteering?"

This is important information to know when talking to a VIO. For example, if the participant requires a support person to be with them when they volunteer, that person may also need to fill out an application form or obtain a background check depending on the VIO's policies and procedures.

- "Have you volunteered in the past? If so, how was that experience?"

 This will enable you to get a better understanding of the types of volunteering activities the individual does or does not like. It will also help you to understand if the person's barrier has been an issue with volunteering in the past, enabling you to better overcome any difficulties in future roles.
- "Do you have any particular goals you would like to achieve through volunteering?" This allows you to understand what the participant would like to get out of volunteering. For example, if their main goal is to develop their office administration skills, a volunteering position in gardening may not be appropriate.
- "Are there any environments or situations you find difficult?"
 This may include noisy or crowded places, or working with particular groups of people.
- "Do you prefer working with other people or doing a job on your own?"
 For some participants working in large groups of people may be overwhelming and for others it is exactly what they are looking for.
- "Do you prefer a predictable structured routine or a role that involves a lot of change and variety?"
 Some participants may find unstructured environments with unclear expectations very stressful and this may prevent them from undertaking certain tasks. Whereas others may get bored easily and want great diversity in the tasks they perform.
- "Would you prefer a volunteering job that mainly involves sitting or a lot of movement?"

Here, it is important to take into account all of the preferences and capabilities of an individual.

"How do you like to receive instructions?"
For example, verbal, written or by demonstration.

See Appendix 3 for a Questionnaire template.

Making a Good Match

Once you have completed the appointment you will need to think about appropriate volunteering opportunities for the participant. Depending on the situation you may discuss these volunteering opportunities during your initial meeting, or at a later time. If in doubt ask the individual what they would like to do. It is important to note that the process of a referral meeting can be very overwhelming for some people and you do not want to overload them with information, turning them off volunteering altogether.



Remember!

It is important to always use a person-centred approach. This means listening to the individual and following their direction in the search for volunteering opportunities. Don't just push them in the direction you think would be best.



How to Find the Right Volunteering Opportunity



Note

You may choose to limit your volunteering search to opportunities offered by your member organisations only. This would ensure that the VIOs have been screened by your VRC and have the appropriate insurances in place for their volunteers.



Look at positions advertised on your website or GoVolunteer

As you would with any volunteer referral, check what positions are already available. Identify a position which may be of interest to the individual and then consider whether it would need to be adapted for them based on their barrier. For example, the amount of time spent volunteering may be reduced, or the volunteer duties may need to be altered. When you contact the VIO this can be something you discuss.

Have a conversation!

Sometimes the best way to find a volunteering role for someone is to pick up the phone and call a VIO, especially if you know the organisation is committed to being inclusive. Often organisations will overlook seemingly small tasks that could be undertaken by a volunteer, such as photocopying, when in reality it may be the perfect opportunity for someone to build on their office skills.

Things to Consider about the Volunteer Involving Organisation

It is important to gain as much insight as possible about a VIO's commitment to inclusion before referring someone to their programs. There are various ways of gaining these insights, from the information that's asked when the organisation first becomes a member of the VRC, through to ongoing liaison.

Apart from general knowledge related to how a VIO is broadly positioned in relation to inclusion, it is also helpful to find out specific information about the volunteering roles that are advertised at your VRC. Questions to consider in relation to specific volunteering roles include:

- Is the location of the volunteering role wheelchair accessible? Is it accessible by public transport?
- Does the work environment involve being mainly alone or with others?
- Does the role involve heavy lifting?
- Is the position suitable for volunteers with a disability/limited English/mental health issues?

Here, open communication about the expectations of both the VIO and the participant is essential. You want to refer participants to volunteering roles that you believe they will be to undertake and enjoy in a safe and welcoming environment.

Connecting Individuals and Organisations

Often people with barriers have difficulty taking the first step in contacting a VIO. For help with this you may refer participants to Volunteering ACT's resource *The Volunteering Journey* as it covers practical issues for prospective volunteers. This resource can be printed and given to the individual at the conclusion of their referral meeting.



Idea

Think about the scope within your role to provide extra assistance to participants, such as calling an organisation on their behalf, or setting up an introduction meeting between the individual and the VIO. Sometimes this brief act of introduction can make a huge difference in opening the way for a volunteering opportunity.



Managing Expectations

A great range of people visit VRCs. Their expectations about the VRC, and volunteering in general, can be highly varied.

It is important to understand your role, how you can help, and what the boundaries are in terms of what can be reasonably expected of your service. Overall, be mindful of the resources you have available and try not to take on more than you can handle. This may involve creating reasonable and achievable targets and capping the number of referrals taken at any given time.

When talking with prospective volunteers be very clear about what your inclusive program can and cannot do. It is best to give people realistic information about what can be achieved and communicate this with them in a clear and friendly manner.

It may also be worthwhile clarifying with prospective volunteers some key aspects of volunteer work, such as:

- Volunteering is unpaid work;
- There is no guarantee that a volunteering role will lead to paid employment;
- VIOs are usually not in a position to provide intensive one on one support on an ongoing basis;
- Volunteers are expected to adhere to the VIOs workplace policies and procedures.

Check out the workbook *The Volunteering Journey* for further ideas related to discussing volunteering with an individual, available for download on the Volunteering and Contact ACT website.

Keeping in Contact

Make sure you check in with both the individual and the VIO once you have assisted with a placement. You may find that the individual has had some difficulty with the role, from getting to the location, to the general working environment. In such cases you may have to start again and look at new roles, taking on board any feedback from the previous placement.

This could be a formal follow-up procedure that may include developing evaluation forms. These forms can then be sent both to participants and VIOs, and will become a great learning tool for you to identify areas for improvement.

Now you have some ideas and practical guides on how to facilitate inclusive volunteering in your VRC, continue on to Section Two to learn more about being an inclusive VRC.

SECTION 2:Practical Tools and Tips



This section is designed to provide you with some practical tools to become a more inclusive VRC. It will encourage you to improve the accessibility of your physical workplace, and communicate effectively. It could also be a useful tool to provide to your referral officers during their induction or ongoing training to ensure they are armed with the information and tools to undertake an inclusive referral.

Creating an Accessible Environment

There are a few practical issues, particularly about the physical environment of your VRC, that are worth considering. When these issues are addressed they further enable people to feel welcomed by the volunteering sector.

Below is a checklist that will enable you to assess your workplace accessibility.

Workplace Accessibility Checklist:

Is your workplace clutter free?

Making the communal spaces in your workplace clutter free can be done by removing any unnecessary boxes, wires, or items of furniture.

Do you have an appropriate sitting area?

Make sure you have a strong chair in your waiting/reception area so that people may sit down. Preferably, opt for chairs that are not too close to the ground and that have arm rests as this will make it easier for people to sit down, and then stand up.

How heavy are the doors?

Heavy doors can create a real challenge for people. If possible, investigate methods of having the doors lightened. This may be done by simply wedging doors open during business hours.

Is there accessible parking near your workplace?

If so, think about putting a map on your website locating these parking bays and how to get from there to your workplace.

Are there accessible bathrooms near your workplace?

If you do not have any accessible bathrooms in your workplace, you should have information on your website about where the nearest accessible bathroom is. Also have printouts of this information at your reception desk.

Do you have stairs and steps in your workplace?

Is it possible for smaller steps to be removed? Investigate ways you can remove these or alter them to make your workplace more accessible. Additionally, look into putting Tactile Ground Surface Indicators (TGSI) at the top and bottom of staircases.

- Do the stairs/ramps in your workplace have rails?

 It is important for stairs/rails to have rails, preferably on both sides.
- Do you have simple and easy to read signage directing people to and around your office?

Having adequate signage can be a real help for people trying to navigate new areas and buildings.

For a more detailed checklist have a look at the Disability Confidence Canberra 'Manual and Checklist'. This can be downloaded from http://actinclusion.com.au/.



Activity

Walk through your workplace, moving along the frequently used travel paths. Consider the following:

- Would a person using a wheelchair or mobility aid be able to walk along this route?
- Are the corridors wide enough?
- Are there any unnecessary blockages that can be easily removed?
- Are there uneven ground surfaces? Are they slippery? Do they create a trip hazard?



Idea

Think about dedicating a certain amount of your budget to improving access in your workplace. This may include paying for a certified access audit of your office, or installing TGSIs and handrails.



Inclusive Language

Inclusive language is the use of words and expressions that are free from bias or discriminatory tones, and do not inadvertently exclude people or groups. It is important to be mindful of the words we use and consider how they may be interpreted by others.

Simple Tips on Talking to People:

Introduce yourself and any other people in the room

Not only is this a polite thing to do, but it will also allow an individual with vision impairment to know who is in the room.

Ask the individual!

If in doubt, ask the individual about the best way to communicate with them and whether they require any particular aids.

Always address the individual

If an individual has a support worker, or advocate accompanying them, make sure you direct your questions to the individual and not the support worker or advocate, unless appropriate to do so. There may be some situations where individuals have communication barriers and someone else communicates on their behalf. Even in this case, endeavour to keep a sense of focus on the individual who will be volunteering.

Face the person to whom you are speaking

This will allow a person with a hearing impairment the opportunity to lip read.

Minimise background noise

This includes: music, machines, and office conversations. Always try to have conversations in a private and quiet space.

Set out the expectations for the conversation

This may include: how long the meeting will go for, what will be discussed, what is expected of the individual (for example, any paperwork that will need to be filled out), and what the next steps will be.

Speak clearly and use simple language

This does not mean speaking overly slowly, shouting, or speaking in a condescending manner.

Be patient and allow the individual sufficient time to respond to your questions

Do not rush them, or attempt to answer for them.

Allow for silence

Silence does not have to be awkward. Silence can allow the individual time to consider the question and formulate an answer. Let the person you are talking to determine the pace of the conversation.

Ask the individual if there is anything they would like you to explained further

Investigate the use of a hearing loop

If possible, explore whether there is a working hearing loop in the venues you use for meetings, or whether one may be installed.

Consider using an interpreter

Does the individual need an interpreter? If so, would it be best to meet the individual at a venue that has an interpreter onsite, or does anyone in your office speak a second language, or could you use an interpreter via phone connection?

Consider providing written materials

If you provide accompanying written material such as an agenda, make sure you stick to its order. Additionally, if you are speaking from notes you may wish to offer them for people to follow.

Using Inclusive Language

Be sure to use language that separates an individual from their disability – for example:

NOT a disabled person, INSTEAD TRY a person with a disability NOT wheelchair bound, INSTEAD TRY a person using a wheelchair

Be sure to use gender neutral language

NOT he/she INSTEAD TRY a person

Avoid using umbrella terms when referring to the cultural background of people

For example: using the term 'Asians,' which ignores the different ethnic groups within Asia



ldea

Consider providing writing utensils at all meetings and at your reception desk. This will allow you to have written communication with an individual who may have difficulties with verbal communication.





How to be an Active Listener

- Make sure you are dedicated to the conversation and that your mind is not on other things
- Face your body toward the person that you are talking to
- Indicate to the person that you are listening to what they are saying, you may do this verbally or non-verbally
- Make sure the tone of your voice is in line with the conversation





Conversation Starters

If you are having trouble thinking of what to say or do, some people find it helpful taking a calming breath or having some general questions up their sleeve such as, "How's your day been so far?" or, "Did you have any trouble finding us?" A simple, friendly question can be a great way to break the ice and connect with the person who is in front of you. Sometimes a simple gesture of hospitality, such as offering a glass of water, can also be a good way to bring ease to a situation.



Simple Tips for Written Communication:

Use plain English

Consider creating different versions of your written resources: one in great detail, and the other written in plain English.

Use images and visual aids

Where possible, include images and visual aids to accompany text.

Use clear contrast

This may mean using black text with a white background.

Use a readable text

Do not use fonts that are hard to read. Consider developing your writing materials in different font sizes.

Conclusion

We hope this resource has helped to generate some positive reflection, new ideas and constructive conversations about inclusion.

In particular we hope it has helped you see that you can make a difference. You can be that inclusive person who provides a warm welcome, helps a person find their way to a new opportunity, or keeps the message of inclusion on your VRC's radar.

Good luck and remember to celebrate each and every successful step towards greater inclusion, as every step makes a difference.

Appendix 1.

Inclusive Referral Officer Position Description:

Position Title:

Reports to:

Location:

Role Description

As an Inclusive Referral Officer you will assist people with barriers to find suitable volunteering roles. People may present with any number of barriers to volunteering and it is the Inclusive Referral Officer's responsibility to ensure that they feel welcomed into the volunteer resource centre, and feel comfortable to being their volunteering journey.

Outline of Responsibilities

- Conduct interviews for potential volunteers at agreed times
- Undertake VIKTOR online training
- Exhibit inclusive practices at all times
- Assist in mentoring other staff, including other referral officers, in how to be more inclusive in their practices
- Adapt referral processes based on individual needs
- Liaise with volunteer involving organisations about possible placements
- Provide additional information to prospective volunteers such as transport options and information on any regulatory requirements.

Outcomes/Goals

- Successfully assist individuals to find volunteering roles through an interview process
- Promote the benefits of volunteering
- Assist people with barriers to achieve their goals through volunteering
- Enhance relationships between the volunteer resource centre and volunteer involving organisations in the community.

Training and Support Plan

- Initial induction and orientation session
- Attendance at staff meetings
- VIKTOR online training
- On-the-job interview training
- Opportunities for ongoing in-house professional development
- Invitation to in-house events
- Support from other staff.

Reporting

Time Committment

The time commitment for this role will vary as the person will be responding to the needs of the organisation; however, it is estimated at approximately 9 hours (3 appointments) per week.

Qualifications and Experience Needed

- Must have an inclusive attitude and be willing to work with people of all backgrounds
- Good interpersonal skills
- Demonstrated initiative and ability to work with minimal supervision, but also have a willingness to take direction
- Demonstrated computer literacy
- Must be willing to attend training for the VIKTOR database on an ongoing basis
- Must be trustworthy and reliable
- Ability to liaise with people at all levels
- Ability to work as part of a team
- The ability to work within the guidelines and legislation appropriate to the reception position, e.g. Privacy Act, WH&S and Fire & Safety
- A genuine care and respect for community organisations and services users.

Benefits

- Be part of a team environment
- Participate in organisational training and events
- Assist individuals to find meaningful volunteer roles
- Play a key role in making the community more inclusive
- Assist people with barriers to achieve their goals through volunteering.

Appendix 2.

General Referral Form:

Participant Details:											
Title:	First n	ame:				Surno	ame:				
Date of birth:				Gender:	N	//ale	Fe	male	Oth	er	
Email:				•							
Phone (home):				ione nobile)	:						
Contact Ado	dress.										
Comacinac	ai 033.	State:						Pos	tcode:		
Do you have access to transport?				Public	transp	oort	Priv	rate Ve	hicle [No Transport	
Participant Er	merge	ncy Co	ntact	Details:							
Name of person to be contacted in the case of an emergency and relationship to participant:											
Best contact number:											
Referring Organisation Details:											
Referring Organisation:					Date of eferral:						
Organisation Contact Person:											
Organisation Address:											
Email:											
Phone (work	:):						Pho	ne (m	obile):		

Does the participant identify	as: (Please tick all that apply)
a person from a non-Englis	sh speaking background	Country of Origin:
an Aboriginal or a Torres S	trait Islander person	
a person with a disability		Type of disability:
Further Details:		
Does the participant have ar	y specific support requireme	ents?
Yes No		
Further Details:		
Reasons for referral: (To be co	ompleted by participant)	
Why do you want to voluntee	erŝ	
What do you hope to gain fro	om volunteering?	
In what areas would you like	to volunteer?	
Prospective Volunteer Agree	ment to the Referral Program	ո։
I,	agree to participating	in the Inclusive Volunteering Program.
Signature:		
Date:		

Self-Referral Form:

Volunteer De	etails:							
Title:	First r	ame:				Surn	ame:	
Date of birth:				Gender:		Male	Fen	male 🔲 Other
Email:								
Phone (home	e):					none nobile)):	
Contact Ada	drace:							
Confider Add	aress.	State:					Postcode:	
Do you have access to transport? Private Vehicle No Transport								
Emergency (Contac	t Detai	ls:					
Name of per contacted in emergency of to you:	the c	ase of a						
Best contact Number:								
Do you identify as: (Please tick all that apply to you)								
a person from a non-English speaking background Country of Origin:								
an Aboriginal or a Torres Strait Islander person								
a person v	a person with a disability Type of disability:				Type of disability:			
Further Detai	ls:							

Do you have any specific sup	port requirements?
Yes No	
Further Details:	
Reasons for referral:	
Why do you want to voluntee	r?
What do you hope to gain fro	om volunteerina?
The second secon	
In what areas would you like	to volunteer?
Prospective Volunteer Agree	ment to the Referral Program:
l,	agree to participating in the Inclusive Volunteering
Program.	
Signature:	
Date:	

Appendix 3.

Participant Questionnaire:

Nan	ne:		Date:	
	Do you want	to volunteer?		
1.	☐ Yes ☐ No Comments:			
	Why do you	want to volunteer?		
2.	Comments:			
	Have you vo	lunteered in the past? If so, how was that expe	rience?	
	□ Yes □ No			
3.	Comments:			
	Would you re	equire any supports/aids when volunteering?		
4.	Comments:			
	Do you have	e access to your own transport? Do you use pul	blic tran	sport?
5.	Comments:			
	Do you have	any particular goals you would like to achieve	through	n volunteering?
6.	Comments:			

	Are there any environments or situations you find difficult?
7.	□ Yes □ No Comments:
	Do you prefer working with other people or doing a job on your own?
8.	Comments:
	Do you prefer a predictable and structured routine or a role that involves a lot of change and variety?
9.	Comments:
	Would you prefer a volunteering job that mainly involves sitting or a lot of movement?
10.	Comments:
	How do you like to receive instructions?
11.	Comments:
	Is there any other information you would like us to know?
12.	□ Yes □ No
	Comments: