

Money, Volunteers & Disability



MONEY & VOLUNTEERING...

Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain. Though payment to volunteers is not required or expected, organisations often cover out-of-pocket expenses and some organisations may reward their volunteers in the form of reimbursements, allowances, honorariums or small gifts.

Economic context for people with disability

While every person's experience is unique, in general people with disability face more obstacles to paid employment. As a volunteer manager you should not make assumptions about a person's financial situation and you should also respect your volunteers' privacy.

The ethos of volunteering is for there to be an equal relationship between the volunteer and the organisation. Truly meaningful and effective volunteering is mutually beneficial. In addition to being a welcoming and supportive volunteer manager overall, it helps to be aware of potential power imbalances.

With this in mind, in the volunteering context you should be aware that:

- There is an historic legacy and ongoing issues of surrounding the exclusion of people with disability from the labour market. Volunteering is a good opportunity for people with disability to build pathways to paid employment
- Some volunteers with disability might have a limited budget that mainly covers their cost of living, for example they may be recipients of the Disability Support Pension or rely on support from their families.
- Some volunteers with disability may have mutual obligations with Centrelink to complete.
- Some volunteers with altruistic motivations will likely cover out-of-pocket costs themselves if you do not properly communicate your reimbursement policies and any financial support available.





Procedures for payments

Organisations should document policies around payments to volunteers. Having consistent policies will ensure fairness among your volunteers and will reduce the risk of conflict or bad feelings. Make your policies available to your volunteers and ensure they understand your procedures and how to follow them.

Key information for volunteers includes:

- Where to obtain and submit expenses claim forms
- Who can approve cost-incurring activities and subsequent claims
- Time frames for claims
- Caps on claims
- How reimbursements will be paid.

Reimbursements

If a volunteer is required to purchase an item on behalf of the organisation, and they are promptly paid the exact amount after handing over a receipt, this is a reimbursement and will not affect any government payment.

Common reimbursements are travel costs (approximately \$0.78c per kilometer) or materials the volunteer might need for the role. Purchases and reimbursements should be agreed upon ahead of time.

Ensure that you are clear that any reimbursements are directly for the purposes of the volunteer role and not related to a volunteer's other work or personal expenses.

Sample reimbursement policy

The details of your organisation's policy on out-of-pocket expenses will depend on the circumstances of your volunteer program. Build on this sample to develop your policy:

- Volunteers will be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses incurred when undertaking authorised activities on behalf of the organisation.
- Volunteers may be reimbursed for the use of public transport to or from approved activities, such as meetings and training.
- The use of private vehicles for approved activities will be reimbursed at the rate of \$ __. __ per kilometre.
- Reimbursement will be made only where prior approval has been given and where relevant receipts and/or other documentation are produced.



Honorariums



An honorarium is either an honorary reward for voluntary services, or a fee for professional services voluntarily performed. An honorarium may be paid in money or as property.

If a volunteer is rewarded with a once-off fee as recognition of their time and expertise, this is an honorarium, the exact amount of which can be negotiated. If the activity for which the honorarium is received is related to the way a volunteer usually makes their income, it may be classified as taxable income.

Allowance

A payment to your not-for-profit organisation's volunteers is an allowance when it is a definite, predetermined amount to cover an estimated expense. It is paid even if the volunteer does not spend the full amount.

Whether an allowance is included as assessable income for the volunteer depends on the facts surrounding the payment and the relationship between the volunteer and your not-for-profit organisation.

If a volunteer receives an allowance with no regard to actual expenses and there is no requirement to repay unspent monies, the allowance may be treated as assessable income.

Small gifts

Many organisations show their appreciation for volunteer efforts through small gifts. Small but kind gestures can go a long way. Things like celebrating birthdays and end of year celebrations help volunteers feel included and recognised. Small gifts such as flowers, chocolates or a book will help reinforce a welcoming and inclusive message. Some organisations arrange for a small tab with the local café to cover the cost of a coffee or drink for a volunteer's shift.

Other allowances

If the volunteer does not qualify for the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) or does not have an NDIS plan in place yet, and they are over 16 years old, they may be eligible for the Mobility Allowance to cover travel costs to and from volunteering. If they are volunteering for at least 32 hours every 4 weeks on a continuing basis, they may be eligible for at least \$97.90 a fortnight.

<https://www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/mobility-allowance>

Disability Advisory Committees and Consumer Advocates

Disability advice and consumer advocacy are valuable services for your organisation. If your organisation establishes a Disability Advisory Committee or user Consumer Advocates, you should actively consider whether you will offer payment for these services. To help your decision-making you might consider the value of these services and how they would be remunerated through the SCHADS classification system or another relevant classification system

Further help

For more information on paying volunteers visit the Australian Tax Office website: www.ato.gov.au/non-profit/your-workers/your-volunteers/paying-volunteers/

For more information on Mobility Allowance visit the Centrelink website: www.humanservices.gov.au/individuals/services/centrelink/mobility-allowance

See also the Volunteering Victoria guide on Money and Volunteers: www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Money-and-Volunteers-PDF.pdf