

# Reviewing Your Volunteering Program

Regularly reviewing your volunteering program is important for ensuring the program is achieving its objectives, and that volunteers feel engaged and satisfied in their roles. Reviewing your organisation's volunteering program does not occur independently of broader organisational functions. Developing a strategic approach to your review process will ensure it is considered in a broader organisational context.

## What is a Review?

A review is a formal assessment of your program that intends to highlight the strengths and weaknesses of your program. When conducting a review, it is important to consult with a range of stakeholders to gain comprehensive, insightful data into your program. Reviews can be aimed at different facets of your program, or at the program more holistically. A review may consider how effectively a program is meeting its outcomes, the engagement of volunteers, or whether the program continues to align with organisational priorities.

## The Importance of Reviewing Your Volunteering Program

There are significant benefits to regularly reviewing your volunteering program, these include:

- Ensuring volunteers feel supported and satisfied in their role
- Boosting productivity
- Supporting ongoing volunteer recruitment
- Increasing volunteer retention rates
- Ensuring the program aligns with organisational purpose planning (vision, mission and values)
- Ensuring the program is delivering outcomes for the organisation and the intended beneficiary
- Investing in continuous improvement

## The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement (National Standards) provides a framework for your organisation to use in designing, implementing and reviewing volunteering programs. Further, the National Standards prompt you to consider the role volunteers play in your organisation and how effective volunteer involvement can have a positive impact on achieving the strategic goals of your organisation.

Reviewing your volunteering program against the National Standards involves undertaking a gap assessment and identifying areas for improvement. This includes comparing how volunteer involvement is currently managed in your organisation against the criteria in the National Standards. Your gap assessment will identify where improvements need to be made in line with the eight National Standards and allow you to prepare a plan for how you will address any identified gaps.

To view the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement and find out more about conducting a gap assessment, [click here](#).

## Reviewing Your Volunteering Program

There are many considerations when reviewing your volunteering program, including the following:

### Review Against Organisational Strategies and Business Planning

When reviewing your volunteering program, it is important to consider its objectives against the strategic and business planning of your organisation. Understanding organisational context will inform your key priorities and allow you to better communicate the purpose of your volunteering program to your volunteers and service users.

Some key questions to consider include:

- Does your volunteering program align with your organisation's vision, mission and values?
- How can your volunteering program better support and align with the broader objectives of the organisation?
- What is in scope for your volunteering program, and what falls out of scope?
- How does your volunteering program enable your organisation to deliver on its objectives?

### Consult with Volunteers

Volunteers are vital to the operation of volunteer involving organisations. Without understanding the needs and experiences of your volunteers, you will not be able to effectively review your volunteering program. Understanding the experience of volunteers is especially important if you do not always have direct contact with your volunteers or your organisation has volunteers across several locations. Understanding volunteer perspectives on service delivery and outcomes will provide valuable insight into the effectiveness of your program. Further, understanding the needs of your volunteers will inform you on how well-supported, or otherwise, volunteers feel in their role.

Volunteers also bring new insights and new ideas on how to do things that you may not have considered. Their unique experience means they may understand the program from a different perspective to employees or service users. Encouraging volunteers to openly discuss their experience of the volunteering program with you will help to ensure your program is self-reflective and focused on continuous improvement.

There are several ways that you can consult with volunteers. These include:

- Informal conversations, whether it be in the workplace or over coffee
- Formal meetings and reviews
- Surveys
- Feedback/suggestion boxes

It is important to remember that not all people are comfortable providing feedback directly. Consider ways that volunteers can provide feedback anonymously. This could be an anonymous online survey, or by implementing a feedback box that is regularly checked by staff.

### Consult with Employees

Speaking with other employees in the organisation can provide insight into how effectively they feel the program is running and provide an opportunity for them to make suggestions for improvement. Getting input from employees who work within volunteering programs, as well as those who have no direct

involvement with volunteers, enables you to understand what is working and if there are any pain points. It also provides an opportunity for you to educate employees with no volunteer involvement on the importance and impact that volunteers have on your organisation.

### Review the Data

If there is a high turnover of volunteers in your organisation or your volunteering program is not meeting its objectives, it can be a reflection that something needs to change. Investing in data collection and reviewing the data is a great way to understand where your program is performing, and areas for improvement. If you are experiencing a high turnover of volunteers, implementing exit interviews and/or surveys is a great way to get feedback from exiting volunteers. This will help you to understand if volunteers are leaving because of something within your control to fix, if there is a more systemic issue, or if volunteers are leaving for reasons beyond your control.

### Analysis and Reporting

Once you have collected relevant data and consulted with relevant stakeholders, it is prudent to analyse your findings and consider what could be improved, what needs substantial change, and if any activity should cease. The Gap Analysis tool that accompanies the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement is a useful tool to inform your analysis and document any recommendations. Following the analysis it may be advantageous to write a formal report that documents the steps taken as part of the review, includes a summary of the findings, and includes any recommendations made. This report can be used as a tool to inform stakeholders about the findings of the review and may assist with implementing recommendations. Further, the report, including the analysis, will enable you to benchmark progress over time and will provide a precedent for future reviews.

### Keep Records of the Review

Store the data from each of your reviews. Keeping records of your conversations and other review mechanisms such as surveys will provide data that highlights what is or is not working in your program. This data can be used to support your review and justify any changes to be made to the volunteering program. This information can also be used to support recommendations to the CEO or Board of Governance.

Further, by reflecting on the review data at regular intervals, you can ensure you are addressing highlighted issues effectively and supporting your program to deliver outcomes. Consider:

- Are you addressing key concerns of volunteers?
- Are you making sure recommendations are taken up by the organisation?
- Are you communicating with relevant parties where recommendations are not possible and why?
- Are you on track with addressing viable concerns regarding the volunteering program, or has the review and follow-up crept down on the list of priorities?
- Is there a continuous loop of feedback between yourself and volunteers?

### Conduct Regular Reviews

Always have the next review scheduled in your calendar. You may choose to do reviews on a quarterly, bi-annual or annual basis. Adding this into your calendar makes sure it stays at front of mind and doesn't fall through the gaps. Regularly reviewing your organisation's volunteering program will not only ensure you are following best practice, but also ensure the program stays relevant to organisational priorities and helps to create a more supported and engaging experience for your volunteers.

Through regular reviews and comparing the data recorded from previous reviews, you will be able to track your progress, as well as identify areas that have not been addressed effectively.

## Supporting Continuous Improvement

### [Liaise with Colleagues in Other Volunteer Involving Organisations](#)

Who better to seek advice from than those sharing similar experiences? Speaking to colleagues in other volunteer involving organisations and attending networking events can help you to gain an understanding of the challenges faced by other volunteer involving organisations and what they are doing to address these challenges. Shared knowledge is invaluable, as is the opportunity to understand how other Managers of Volunteers structure their programs, how they approach their review process, and any other key learnings.

Further, the Peak Bodies for Volunteering in each state and territory as well as regional Volunteering Support Services can provide advice or consultation on methods of best practice.

### [Attend Training](#)

Attending training on volunteer management will strengthen your understanding of how to engage with volunteers, and in turn, how to effectively manage your volunteer team. It also provides an opportunity to network with other volunteer involving organisations and understand how different organisations approach volunteer management.

Information regarding volunteer management training can be accessed through the Peak Bodies for Volunteering in each state and territory as well as regional Volunteering Support Services. If cost is a barrier for your organisation when it comes to attending training, look out for free webinars, ebooks, and take advantage of the resources on Volunteering Australia's [Volunteering Resource Hub](#).

## Conclusion

Reviewing your volunteering program is important for ensuring the program is achieving its objectives and that the program supports its volunteers and continues to align with organisational priorities and planning. Developing a strategic approach to your review process will ensure your organisational has continuous improvement at the forefront of its processes. Strengthening your understanding of effective volunteer management and consulting with a range of audiences on an ongoing basis will allow you to develop a holistic perspective of how your programs meets its needs and objectives.