

Quick Guide to Volunteer Management



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About the Quick Guide

Overview

The Quick Guide to Volunteer Management provides volunteer management professionals with an introduction to key topics in volunteer involvement. Each section contains links to further resources housed in the Volunteering Resource Hub, which provide additional information and tools.

About the National Standards

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement (National Standards) are a best practice framework to guide volunteer involvement. They are an essential resource for all organisations and groups that engage volunteers. The National Standards were refreshed in 2024 to ensure that they reflected the contemporary environment and to ensure that they support volunteering to thrive into the future.

The National Standards highlight eight key areas for effective volunteer involvement. They are designed to:

- Allow flexibility in implementation, recognising that volunteering takes place in highly diverse settings and modes, which for example includes growth in virtual and micro-volunteering.
- Demonstrate best practice in structured organisations and programs or as a guide to more organic or informal community-based groups aspiring to best practice without creating barriers, curtailing flexibility and creativity.
- Support diversity and inclusion in all types of organisations and groups.

Organisations and groups can use the National Standards in several ways:

- As a general guide to improving practice.
- As guidelines or a checklist to help identify opportunities for making improvements.
- As a framework to assist in planning and establishing a new volunteering program.
- As an audit tool that provides a snapshot of organisational performance.
- As a baseline from which progress in making improvements can be monitored and measured.

The standards are intended to be flexible enough to apply to organisations and groups of different sizes, with varying levels of resources, in both urban and rural settings, led by employees or by volunteers.

National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Standard 1: Volunteering in embedded in leadership, governance and culture

The governing body and organisation leaders promote volunteering and implement effective systems to support volunteer participation.

1.1 Responsibilities for engaging, leading and managing volunteer participation are defined and supported.

1.2 Governance and risk management arrangements facilitate safe and meaningful volunteer participation.

1.3 Policies and procedures applying to volunteers are developed with volunteers and communicated and implemented across the organisation.

1.4 Volunteer records are maintained, and volunteers and employees understand their obligations on information sharing, record keeping and privacy.

1.5 Processes are in place to manage relationships with partner agencies in collaborative volunteering activities. (This criterion only applies to organisations or groups working with other organisations in a collaborative activity involving volunteers and/or sharing responsibility for volunteers).

Standard 2: Volunteer participation is championed and modelled

Commitment to volunteer participation is set out through vision, planning and resourcing, and supports the organisation's or group's strategic direction.

2.1 The organisation publicly declares its commitment to volunteer participation.

2.2 A volunteering culture is championed and modelled at all levels of the organisation.

2.3 Volunteer participation is part of the organisation's vision, purpose, goals and objectives and is developed through engagement with volunteers.

2.4 Volunteering programs are supported by adequately resourced volunteer managers or officers.

2.5 Resources (including time, funds, equipment and technology) are allocated for volunteer involvement.

Standard 3: Volunteer roles are meaningful and tailored

Volunteers are engaged in meaningful roles which contribute to the organisation's or group's purpose and meet volunteer interests and preferred style of participation.

3.1 Volunteer roles are designed and negotiated with volunteers, considering the needs and interests of volunteers.

3.2 Volunteer roles contribute to the organisation's purpose, goals and objectives.

3.3 Volunteer roles are defined, documented and communicated.

3.4 Volunteer roles are reviewed regularly including through feedback and engagement with volunteers about their experience.

Standard 4: Recruitment is equitable and diversity is valued

Volunteer recruitment and selection strategies meet the needs of the organisation and volunteers; they facilitate and value diversity and promote equity and accessibility.

4.1 Organisations and groups engage volunteers using planned and innovative approaches to attract people with relevant interests, knowledge and skills.

4.2 Potential volunteers are provided with information about the organisation, how volunteers contribute to its purpose and vision, available opportunities and the selection process.

4.3 Volunteers are selected based on their interests, knowledge, skills and suitability for the role, and consistent with anti-discrimination law.

4.4 Diversity, inclusivity and accessibility principles are built into recruitment activities,

reflecting and promoting awareness of, and respect for, diversity and inclusion and the inherent value this brings to the organisation.

4.5 Screening processes maintain the safety and security of service recipients, employees, volunteers, and the organisation, in line with legal requirements and regulations.

Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed

Volunteers understand their roles and gain the knowledge, skills and feedback needed to participate safely and effectively.

5.1 Volunteers are provided with relevant induction and training.

5.2 Volunteers' knowledge and skills are reviewed to identify support and development needs.

5.3 Volunteers are engaged with throughout their time with an organisation or group and provided with supervision and support that enables them to participate fully.

5.4 People with responsibility for volunteers have sufficient time and resources to engage with and provide appropriate and required support.

5.5 Changes to the role of a volunteer are fair and consistent and achieved through engaging with the volunteer.

Standard 6: Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected

The health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers is protected and volunteers understand their rights and responsibilities.

6.1 Effective working relationships with employees, and between volunteers, are facilitated.

6.2 Organisations and groups meet their legal and ethical obligations to protect volunteers from harm.

6.3 Processes are in place to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers in their capacity as volunteers, including relevant insurances.

6.4 Volunteers understand and have access to complaints procedures.

6.5 Complaints, concerns and safety incidents are analysed to identify causes and inform continuous improvement.

Standard 7: Volunteers are recognised

Volunteer contribution, value and impact are understood, appreciated and acknowledged.

7.1 How volunteers add value to the organisation, service recipients and the community is clearly understood.

7.2 Volunteer effort is measured and acknowledged in the organisation's reporting and used to demonstrate impact.

7.3 The organisation regularly engages with volunteers about the impact of their contribution.

7.4 Volunteer acknowledgement is appropriate to the volunteer and respectful of cultural values and perspectives.

Standard 8: Volunteer policies and practices are continuously improved

Effective volunteer involvement results from a system of best practice, regular review and continuous improvement.

8.1 Policies and procedures are designed and implemented to effectively guide all aspects of volunteer involvement.

8.2 Volunteer involvement is regularly reviewed in line with the organisation's evaluation and quality management frameworks.

8.3 The organisation's performance with volunteer involvement is monitored and reported to the governing body, employees, volunteers, and other stakeholders.

8.4 Opportunities are available for volunteers to provide feedback on their experience and relevant areas of the organisation's work.

Volunteer Management Cycle

Planning

Overview

Planning for volunteer involvement sets an organisation up for success. Considering the entire lifecycle of volunteer involvement during the planning stage ensures you have the human and financial resources to support volunteer involvement. A holistic approach that considers the entire volunteer management cycle also ensures you have thought through the requirements of each stage of the cycle.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture, covers the first aspect of planning for volunteer involvement – promoting a culture and volunteering and implementing effective systems to support volunteer involvement. This National Standard encourages organisations to define responsibilities for leading and managing volunteers, consider how volunteers fit into the organisation’s policies and procedures and risk management processes, and implement a document management system for volunteer records.

National Standard 2: Volunteer participation is championed and modelled covers both strategic and operational planning for volunteer involvement, and considers intent, purpose, goals, and resources.

Planning for volunteer involvement

The first step in planning for volunteer involvement is considering how volunteers can add value to your organisation and the community you serve. Identifying the tasks you need completing will inform the scope of your volunteering roles. Roles may be internally focused, such as office administration support, or externally focused, such as direct client support. Volunteer involvement can be an important part of meeting funding, grant and sponsorship agreements so strategic investment during the planning stage is often important to your organisation’s strategic and operational objectives.

Paid versus unpaid work

One of the fundamental considerations when planning for volunteer involvement is whether a role should be paid or unpaid. There are no black and white rules that define the difference between a paid and unpaid role. Whether an unpaid work arrangement is lawful under the *Fair Work Act 2009* (FW Act) depends on:

- whether an employment relationship exists, or
- whether the arrangement involves a vocational placement.

Navigating the difference between paid and unpaid work can be challenging. Important considerations include:

- The nature and purpose of the arrangement, including whether there is an intention to create a legally binding relationship.
- The length of the relationship.

- The level of responsibility associated with the role and the significance of the role to the organisation.
- The person's obligations.

Read the [Fair Work Ombudsman's Unpaid Work Factsheet](#) for more information on unpaid work.

The Volunteer Management Plan

Your organisation may choose to implement Volunteer Management Plans, which capture the duties, responsibilities, and outcomes for each stage of a volunteer's involvement in each role. The Volunteer Management Plan can also be linked to supporting documentation, which can be useful if responsibility for managing volunteers is shared amongst staff. How many sections there are in your Volunteer Management Plans will usually be dictated by the complexity of the role. You may choose to capture your risk assessment of a role in the Volunteer Management Plan, or document this separately.

Writing a role description

Overview

Role descriptions (also known as position descriptions or duty statements) are essential for volunteer recruitment and ongoing management. A role description outlines the tasks associated with a volunteering role and other pertinent information related to the role. Role descriptions are also a useful tool for managing expectations on both sides: they help the volunteer and the organisation understand what is in scope and out of scope for the role.

Good role descriptions are a fantastic recruitment tool. They demonstrate to prospective volunteers that your organisation is professional and organised. Further, the information in a role description correlates directly with the fields on GoVolunteer, Volunteering Australia's national volunteer referral database. This reduces the workload of volunteer recruitment, meaning Managers of Volunteers can focus their time on getting new volunteers through the door.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 3: Volunteer roles are meaningful and tailored covers role descriptions. Role descriptions are a wonderful tool to help with volunteer recruitment and manage expectations. Further, they provide a tool for ongoing support and development of volunteers. Role descriptions should be provided for all volunteering roles. They are a key mechanism for ensuring volunteers are suited to the role they have applied for, and they enable your organisation to effectively plan for volunteer engagement by thinking through the requirements of any given position. Finally, role descriptions are an important tool for meeting your work, health and safety obligations to your volunteers and ensuring you are complying with insurance requirements by clearly providing a scope for the role.

Writing a role description

When writing a role description consider the following fields:

- Position Title
- Time Commitment
- Location
- Tasks
- Training (if applicable)
- Background Checking Requirements (if applicable)
- Qualification Requirements (if applicable)
- Benefits
- Point of Contact

For a more detailed description of the above fields download our resource on [Writing a Role Description](#).

Not a contract

A volunteer role description is not a legally binding contract. It serves as a document that clearly outlines the expectations of the volunteer, the tasks to be performed as part of the role and defines the scope of the role. It is important the role description balances what your

organisation requires from volunteers with the benefits they will gain through their involvement.

Position descriptions during recruitment

Your role descriptions are a useful recruitment tool because they enable prospective volunteers to understand the requirements of the role before applying. After receiving applications for a role, you can use the role description as a screening tool to help you find the most suitable volunteers. Consider which aspects of the role are non-negotiable and which ones may be open to compromise. For example, if a role takes place at a particular location or at a specific time, those two aspects of the role are unlikely to be negotiable. The more information you can provide up front, the easier it is for volunteers to self-screen if the role does not fit their skills or motivations.

Insurance

Role descriptions are an important mechanism of meeting your insurance requirements as they stipulate what a volunteer can and cannot do. For certain roles, especially those that take place off site without direct supervision, your insurer may require volunteers to be provided with a written list of the tasks that are in scope and out of scope. Your role description can encapsulate all of this information in one place. In the event an incident occurs, your role descriptions can serve as evidence that you have risk management processes in place to protect volunteers and service users in your programs.

More information

For more information on volunteer role descriptions, including a template see Part 5 of the [National Volunteer Guide](#).

Recruitment

Overview

Having a planned approach to recruitment will help your organisation find the right volunteers for the roles you need filled. Depending on the roles you are recruiting for you are likely to engage in different recruitment processes. Implementing a broad recruitment strategy will help your organisation to understand how to approach different audiences to get the right outcome for your volunteering programs and projects.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 4: Recruitment is equitable and diversity is valued covers volunteer recruitment. This National Standard suggests that organisations should use equitable and innovative approaches to volunteer recruitment and ensure prospective volunteers are provided with relevant information about the organisation, role, and the recruitment process. Organisations should ensure that diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility principles are built into recruitment activities, reflecting and promoting awareness of, and respect for, diversity and inclusion and the inherent value this brings to the organisation. It is important to comply with anti-discrimination legislation during volunteer recruitment.

Where to advertise

Volunteering Australia provides [GoVolunteer](#), a free, online volunteer recruitment platform, which enables volunteer involving organisations to advertise for volunteers. This national database can be searched by location, key word, and other filters, making it a simple way for prospective volunteers to find their perfect role. Volunteers apply online and their application comes directly to your organisation for action.

In addition to GoVolunteer, Volunteering Australia's counterpart Volunteering WA run VIKTOR Online. This is a more comprehensive online volunteer recruitment tool available for a small fee. Any advertisements uploaded to VIKTOR Online also appear on GoVolunteer and SEEK Volunteer, tripling your audience for no extra effort. More information on VIKTOR online can be found [here](#).

Outside dedicated volunteer recruitment platforms your organisation can advertise for volunteers in the following ways:

- Through your website
- Via your social media, such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn and TikTok
- Word of mouth
- Through local news media (digital and print)
- By leveraging your existing networks
- Through local schools, universities and other education providers
- Through your local Volunteering Support Service or Volunteer Resource Centre

Recruitment tips

1. Ensure you have enough information available for prospective volunteers to understand the role and the commitment you're looking for. This will reduce the

frequency of people contacting you for more information. Additionally, some people will self-screen away from a role if the information available to them is unclear.

2. Have a dedicated contact point for volunteer recruitment. This ensures prospective volunteers know who to contact for more information and ensures all applicants receive the same level of information about the role. It also makes the recruitment process more personable, setting relationships with new volunteers up for success.
3. Be clear about the recruitment process, including next steps. Prospective volunteers want to know the timeline for recruitment, what is expected of them, and when they can start if they are selected.
4. Respond to applications quickly. Volunteers are motivated to give their time to your organisation. Take advantage of this motivation by contacting them as soon as possible after they apply to confirm the next steps and to get an understanding if the role is a good fit for you both. If you don't reply promptly you are likely to lose interested volunteers.
5. Ensure your ads are accessible and easy to understand. Be clear about the requirements of the role and what can be compromised. Invite people with barriers to contact you to discuss how the role might be able to be adapted for their circumstances.
6. Get feedback on the process so you can improve your recruitment practices over time.

More information

For more information on recruitment, including an overview of relevant legislation, see Part 5 of the [National Volunteer Guide](#).

Selection and screening

Overview

Selection and screening are two fundamental tasks of volunteer involvement that form part of the recruitment process. Depending on the nature of the role you are recruiting for you may wish to put positive barriers in place during volunteer recruitment that enable you to find the right volunteer for a role. For simple volunteering roles, such as general event volunteering, your selection and screening process will be less stringent than for roles that involve direct client interaction. Try to keep selection and screening processes simple where possible, but ensure you follow all necessary legal and compliance requirements for your individual roles.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 4: Recruitment is equitable and diversity is valued covers selection and screening. This National Standard suggests that volunteer recruitment and selection strategies should meet the needs of the organisation and volunteers, ensuring they facilitate and value diversity and ensure equity and accessibility. Further, *National Standard 4* covers the importance of screening processes that maintain the safety of service recipients, employees, volunteers, and the organisation, in line with legal requirements and regulations. It is important to ensure that your organisation is aware of and complies with any background checking requirements in your state or territory. These requirements are usually legislated and may also be dictated by industry-specific standards. Sometimes, grant and funding agreements stipulate the background checking requirements expected by program volunteers.

Background checking

Background checking processes are an important aspect of selection and screening. In different states and territories there is legislation dictating background checking requirements, which often refer to 'workers' and include volunteers. It is essential that you are familiar with background checking requirements in your jurisdiction and understand how these apply to your volunteers.

Keep things simple

Depending on the role, you may also require volunteers to provide proof of certification, such as a current First Aid qualification, or evidence the volunteer can perform a certain skill. For other roles, there may be opportunities for volunteers to learn new skills on the job. All this information should be stated up front in your volunteer role description and discussed with prospective volunteers when they apply.

Be cautious not to apply all the same screening processes to volunteers as you would for employees. For example, reference checking is likely unnecessary for most volunteering roles and adds a layer of complexity for both your organisation and the volunteer. Remove unnecessary barriers to involvement with your organisation where possible to ensure you capture the interest of prospective volunteers.

Interviewing volunteers

In general, interviewing volunteers is usually unnecessary and may make a prospective volunteer feel anxious. Instead, try talking to prospective volunteers over the phone or inviting them for a casual chat prior to formally engaging them in your organisation. This enables you to understand if the volunteer is a good fit for your organisation and provides them with an opportunity to ask questions about the role and the organisation more generally. Sometimes, volunteers may opt out at this point if they realise the role doesn't meet their motivations. Conversely, this conversation may help you realise the role won't be a good fit for the volunteer.

Trial shift or tour

Your organisation may choose to invite prospective volunteers to attend a trial shift or do a tour of your premises. This is another mechanism, like the informal chat, for both parties to decide if the role is a good fit. It also provides an opportunity for prospective volunteers to meet each other as well as existing volunteers in your organisation, which can help them feel more comfortable if they choose to proceed with their application.

More information

For more information on selection and screening, including an overview of background checking requirements in different jurisdictions, see Part 5 of the [National Volunteer Guide](#).

Induction

Overview

Induction is a new volunteer's first formal introduction to your organisation and their role. It is a critical part of the onboarding process and is a key function of organisational compliance. Induction ensures new volunteers start off with the right information and provides instructions on safety requirements relevant to their role.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed covers induction. This National Standard suggests that volunteers should be provided with role-specific orientation, which is the first step in their engagement with your organisation. Induction is an opportunity to familiarise volunteers with the supervision and support processes in your organisation.

Induction Checklist

An Induction Checklist is a great way to ensure you are covering off all relevant information as well as providing a consistent approach to all new volunteers. Your Induction Checklist will likely apply to both employees and volunteers, with some sections that only apply to one or the other.

An Induction Checklist should include:

- General information such as an overview of your organisation, including vision, mission, and values.
- Office and facilities information such as information about workstations, parking, location of facilities and first aid kits, and emergency exits.
- Security information such as alarm codes, passwords, storage of information, and what to do in an emergency.
- Policies and procedures overview, including work, health and safety requirements, privacy and confidentiality requirements, and information on anything else relevant to the volunteer's role such as information on reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.
- Practical requirements such as how to cancel a shift, who to go to for support, and any perks of the role that can be accessed by volunteers.

Policies and procedures

There is likely to be a suite of policies and procedures that are applicable to volunteers. It is important that legislative and other compliance requirements are communicated with volunteers from the outset. At a minimum, volunteers are likely to have rights and responsibilities under work, health and safety legislation. Further, volunteers must also comply with privacy and confidentiality requirements, background checking requirements (if relevant to their role), and anti-discrimination. Further, there is likely direction from your insurer about what volunteers can and cannot do to be covered by insurance.

It is important to go through all these things during induction; however, it might not be practical to have volunteers go through all policies and procedures at once. Induction usually involves an overwhelming amount of information so it can be prudent to assign volunteers

‘further reading’ to be done at a later stage. Ensure your volunteers have ready access to policies and procedures and the most relevant ones have been communicated and understood before they commence their first shift.

Sign off

Including sign off on induction can be included at the end of the Induction Checklist or somewhere on the Volunteer Agreement. This represents that both parties (the volunteer and the organisation) agree that all necessary information was conveyed to and understood by the volunteer. Such sign off helps to mitigate risk, meet work, health and safety requirements, and meet the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. It also demonstrates to volunteers you take their involvement seriously and are committed to protecting their physical and mental wellbeing in the workplace.

Training

Overview

Different volunteering roles require different amounts and types of training. Sometimes volunteers may be recruited because they have already undertaken training or have a specific qualification, and other times volunteers will need to be provided with the training required to undertake their role safely and effectively. Training requirements are generally dictated by the duties of a role but may also be stipulated in grant or funding agreements. Training may also be part of a professional development plan for volunteers as they grow in their role.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed covers training. To meet this National Standard, organisations must provide training and development opportunities to meet volunteer needs and identify needs for further development. A key imperative of volunteer training is ensuring that volunteers have the skills and information required to perform their role safely. Such training may include things like manual handling and is also an important part of meeting work, health and safety requirements. Training can be aimed at practical skill development and more general skill development.

Determining training needs

Before recruiting volunteers it is important to understand the training requirements of the role you are recruiting for. Depending on these requirements you may choose to target volunteers with an existing skillset or qualification, or you may choose to provide volunteers with such training. Oftentimes training takes place 'on the job' as volunteers learn their various duties. It is imperative your organisation resources this aspect of volunteer involvement to maximise the value of volunteer engagement for both the organisation and the volunteer.

Ongoing personal or skills development

Your organisation may decide to invest in ongoing professional development for volunteers. This may include internal training, training provided by an external provider, or a combination of both. Such training may not be essential, but it helps to upskill your volunteer workforce and recognises their importance to your organisation. Enhancing the skills of volunteers often has direct benefits for the organisation and clients/service users.

Resourcing volunteer training

The cost of training can often be a barrier for organisations; however, there are usually low and no cost options available. Many volunteering support services and volunteer resource centres as well as the State and Territory Peak Bodies for Volunteering offer free or subsidised training for volunteers. Additionally, registered training organisations and vocational education providers often have low-cost options for not-for-profit organisations. Another way to fund volunteer training is to build the cost into grant/funding applications. Finally, there are many avenues for free training online from simple YouTube videos right the way through to open access universities.

Training does not have to be based on formal education and can include things such as cross-pollination of skills across programs, guest speakers, coaching, mentoring, and other practical

skill-building exercises. When considering professional development opportunities for volunteers it is good practice to involve volunteers in the process and get their feedback on what training they would like to participate in. Some volunteers are not interested in further training, so it is important to be clear about what training is negotiable, and what training is the requirement of a role.

Recognition

Overview

Volunteer recognition is a critical part of volunteer involvement. Volunteers give their time willingly and without expectation of a reward; however, appropriately recognising volunteers demonstrates how much your organisation values their contribution. Volunteer recognition should be considered during the planning stage of volunteer involvement, rather than being an afterthought. Recognition does not have to be a costly exercise and the level of formality of your recognition strategies might relate to the specificities of a role. Recognition can be both individual and done in groups.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 7: Volunteers are recognised covers volunteer recognition. To meet this National Standard, organisations need to demonstrate that volunteer contribution, value, and impact is understood, appreciated, and acknowledged. National Standard 7 has four sub-standards that demonstrate how it can be met, including recognition of the value of volunteers at all levels of an organisation, recognition of volunteer effort in an organisation's reporting, feedback processes that inform volunteers about the value of their contributions, public acknowledgement of the value of volunteers, and recognition that is appropriate to the volunteer and respectful of cultural values and perspectives.

Principles of recognition

There are three principles of good volunteer recognition:

1. Recognition is an ongoing and integral part of the volunteer management process.
2. Recognition can be formal or informal and given on more than one occasion.
3. Recognition should be meaningful to the person being thanked and given in a timely manner.

One of the best ways to approach recognition is to ask volunteers to how they would like to be recognised. If a volunteer says they do not want recognition that does not provide a license to do nothing. Instead, consider simple, low-key approaches that won't make the volunteer feel uncomfortable. It is important to remember that formal, scheduled recognition does not replace a daily thank you.

Ideas for volunteer recognition

Volunteer recognition can take a variety of forms, including:

- Aligning recognition with National Volunteer Week or International Volunteer Day
- Events such as morning teas and lunches
- Organising an activity outside the workplace paid for by the organisation
- Providing certificates
- Providing references (written or verbal)
- Commemoration pins
- Recognition in newsletters or on social media

Many organisations may not have a budget for volunteer recognition, but recognition does not need to cost money. Simply finding opportunities to recognise volunteer impact and provide volunteers with feedback on how their involvement makes a difference is a great way to start.

Gifts, honorariums and reimbursements

Gifts and honorariums may be used as recognition strategies for volunteers but need to be approached with caution. The Australian Taxation Office provides information on honorariums, including when an honorarium would be considered assessable income. If your organisation provides honorariums, it is important you understand your taxation obligations and any volunteers receiving an honorarium seek advice on their individual circumstances. When it comes to gifts, it is recommended that your organisation has policies and procedures that guide to provision, acceptance, and disclosure of gifts. This should cover gifts your organisation provides to volunteers (if any) and your process for gifts given to volunteers by service users.

Reimbursements are generally provided for pre-approved, out-of-pocket expenses. It is recommended that your organisation has a reimbursement policy and this is clearly communicated to volunteers. It is Volunteering Australia's position that volunteers should not be out-of-pocket as a result of volunteering. Consider how your organisation can reduce or remove financial barriers to volunteering and be up front about any costs that may be associated with volunteering.

Gifts and honorariums align with *National Standard 7: Volunteers are recognised* and reimbursements aligns with *National Standard 2: Volunteer participation is championed and modelled* and *National Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed*.

Gifts

Providing gifts to volunteers can be a fantastic way to recognise their contribution; however, the provision of gifts should be approached with care. The Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission expects that gifts provided to volunteers will be of a token nature. It is up to the Responsible Person in an organisation to consider the issues associated with gifts and understand any implications of providing or receiving gifts.

It is recommended that your organisation has a policy on gifts, which identifies a monetary threshold, a decision-making process, and a disclosure process. It can be common for service users to provide gifts as tokens of their appreciation, especially if they have close relationships with volunteers. Sometimes this can create an awkward situation for volunteers who may feel rude rejecting a gift. Providing volunteers with a clear policy on gifts will enable them to communicate this effectively in the event someone tries to gift them something that breaches your policy, the threshold of an acceptable gift, or ATO/ACNC requirements.

Honorariums

Honorariums are usually provided as a reward for voluntary service and can be paid in money or as property. Often, they are used to recognise a substantial contribution from a volunteer or to compensate volunteers for sharing their lived experience. If your organisation provides honorariums, it is recommended that you seek independent legal and taxation advice. Large honorariums could be assessed as taxable incomes, and ongoing honorariums could be assessed as payment for work. In the case of the latter, this may breach Fair Work regulations if it is found that the honorarium is provided in lieu of a wage.

Reimbursements

Volunteers should not be out-of-pocket as a result of volunteering. An important consideration prior to the involvement of volunteers is whether your organisation has sufficient resources, both human and financial, to effectively support volunteers to deliver programs and services. It may be the case that volunteers procure items for your organisation in their role. Where possible, provide petty cash for small purchases. It is recommended that your policy clearly stipulates the conditions for reimbursements, and it is suggested that any out-of-pocket expenses incurred by volunteers are pre-approved by the organisation.

More information

For more ideas on how to recognise your volunteers see [Volunteering Australia's 101 Ways to Recognise Your Volunteers](#).

More information on the Australian Taxation Office's guidance on the relationship between honorariums and taxable income can be found [here](#).

The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission guide on gifts and honorariums can be found [here](#).

Other topics in volunteering

Complaints handling

Overview

Handling complaints made by or about volunteers is a highly sensitive issue. Organisations need to balance the goodwill of their volunteer workforce with the need to provide efficient, inclusive, and valuable services to the community. It is advised that volunteer involving organisations have a clear complaints handling policy and procedure that accounts for the nuances of managing a volunteer workforce.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 6: Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected stipulates that volunteers should have access to complaints procedures. To meet this National Standard, volunteers must not only have access to appropriate procedures, but must have complaints dealt with consistently, transparently, and equitably.

More information

Volunteering Australia, in collaboration with national peak bodies across Australia, has developed a complaint handling resource for the sector. The resource includes a model policy and procedure and can be accessed [here](#).

Conflicts of interest

Overview

Conflicts of interest arise in everyday life. When a person or organisation has multiple, competing interests there is a possibility that independent decision-making can be impaired. Volunteer involving organisations are usually balancing a significant number of interests and are trusted to manage these ethically and transparently.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Processes for managing conflicts of interest are contained within organisational policies and procedures and form part of an organisation's risk management plan in alignment with *National Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture.*

What is a conflict of interest?

A conflict of interest arises when a personal interest conflicts with a responsibility to act in the best interests of an organisation. Conflicts of interest can be real or perceived and can happen at every level of an organisation. Conflicts of interest are particularly relevant to the governing body of an organisation as this body has a duty to act in the best interest of the organisation.

There are three types of conflicts:

1. Actual – a conflicting interest is influencing decision-making.
2. Potential – a conflicting interest may influence decision-making.
3. Perceived – there may be an appearance a conflicting interest is influencing decision-making.

Each type of conflict should be considered and managed appropriately.

Managing conflicts of interest with volunteers

Volunteers come from all walks of life and bring their personal experiences and values to their role. Most people are motivated to volunteer to give back to their community or a cause they care about. Generally, there is no issue with volunteers having personal experience with a cause or volunteering for multiple organisations they care about. If they are honest with you about their motivations and goals and declare any interests that might conflict with their role, issues will rarely arise. It may be advantageous to have a simple register to capture any conflicts of interest with volunteers. Consider including a conversation about conflicts of interest and boundaries in your induction with all volunteers and provide training where necessary.

More information

The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission has produced a [Managing Conflicts of Interest Guide](#) to help organisations understand and manage conflicts of interest.

Continuous improvement

Overview

Effective volunteer involvement should be underpinned by a commitment to continuous improvement. Volunteering programs are dynamic and role requirements are likely to change over time. Regular reviews should consider the effectiveness of existing volunteering roles and opportunities for new roles that could add value. Obtaining regular feedback from volunteers, paid staff, and service users about what is working well and what could be improved will enable your organisation to ensure its volunteering programs are providing a return on investment. Importantly, regular reviews are critical for volunteer engagement and wellbeing.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 8: Policies and practices are continuously improved is dedicated to the review and improvement of volunteer involvement. Continuous improvement is relevant to the other seven National Standards, as it provides an impetus for change and ensures that the other functions of volunteer involvement are relevant, necessary, and effective.

Volunteer feedback

Getting regular feedback from your volunteers is the best way to understand what is working well and what could be improved in your volunteering programs. Further, actively seeking feedback from volunteers shows you take their involvement seriously and you are committed to providing roles that are engaging and meaningful. Volunteers often have practical experience that paid staff are not privy to on a daily basis and volunteers may be the primary interface with service users.

Your organisation should provide both formal and informal opportunities for volunteers to provide feedback. It is critical to communicate with volunteers how your organisation intends to incorporate their feedback, and this includes reporting back to volunteers on whether their suggestions have been implemented or not, and why. Your organisation should also have a mechanism for volunteers to provide feedback anonymously.

Reviewing Your volunteering program

Volunteering Australia recommends reviewing your volunteering programs against the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. Each National Standard is underpinned by criteria and examples of evidence are provided to demonstrate how each National Standard can be met. Information on implementing the National Standards can be found [here](#).

The regularity of formal reviews will usually be dictated by the number and complexity of your volunteering programs. An annual review will enable you to benchmark your current state and work towards progress over time.

Corporate or employee volunteering

Overview

Corporate or employee volunteering takes place when employees of a company perform volunteer work through their workplace. Corporate volunteering is a fantastic way for organisations to give back to their local community. Generally corporate volunteering takes two forms: activity-based volunteering and skills-based volunteering. Depending on the nature of the role, such activities may be undertaken by one employee or a team of employees. Corporate volunteering activities may be organised internally by liaising directly with volunteer involving organisations, or through an intermediary, such as a volunteering support service, who plan and manage the activity.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Although corporate volunteering generally consists of one-off or short-term opportunities, the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement should still be applied to the volunteering engagement. Any roles should be accompanied by position descriptions, an induction, support throughout the activity, and recognition for the contribution.

Insurance

One of the important things to clarify in any corporate volunteering engagement is who is responsible for insurance. Generally, because employees are undertaking volunteering through their workplace, they are covered by Worker's Compensation provided by their employer. It is important to clarify any insurance expectations up front, including coverage for after hours and weekend work. Public liability insurance will not usually extend to employee volunteers because they are formally engaged by your organisation, and not a third party. To be sure you have the right insurances in place it is best to contact your insurer directly.

Activity-based corporate volunteering

Activity-based or team volunteering is the most popular form of corporate volunteering. This usually involves a team of employees attending an organisation, service, or program to help out for a set number of hours doing a specific list of duties. This type of volunteering is attractive to companies because it is a good team building exercise and is often easier to organise. It is important to ensure that activity-based opportunities add value to your organisation and to the employees who are participating.

Skills-based corporate volunteering

Skills-based volunteering involves someone volunteering their professional skills to your organisation to contribute to a defined project. Skills-based volunteering can be undertaken individually or in teams, depending on the nature of the project and the work required. Skills-based volunteering may be one-off, short-term, or long-term and can be performed on site or remotely.

To get the most out of skills-based volunteering it is recommended that you provide a comprehensive brief about the desired outputs and outcomes of your project. This will enable prospective volunteers to understand the volume of work required and whether they have the expertise to contribute.

How to approach a corporate volunteering arrangement

A strategic approach to involving corporate volunteers will ensure any arrangements are beneficial for both parties. It can be advantageous to identify suitable corporate volunteering opportunities in advance that companies can select from if they are interested in working with your organisation. There is no obligation to provide corporate volunteering opportunities and your organisation is within its rights to decline offers of assistance if there is no clear value proposition to either party.

When scoping corporate volunteering activities consider the following:

- What roles/tasks does your organisation need help with that can be completed in a short amount of time?
- What skills are required to undertake the role?
- What supervision is your organisation able to provide?
- What does your organisation need to do to comply with work, health and safety, insurance, legal, and other compliance requirements?
- If the activity requires supplies is your organisation in a position to provide them?
- Will you charge a fee to the participating company to cover your organisation's costs in organising and supporting the activity?

This list of questions is not exhaustive, but it is important to remember that all volunteering activities require some degree of volunteer management, and this comes at a cost to your organisation. Scoping activities in advance will allow you to understand whether you are in a position to resource the involvement of corporate volunteers.

Emergency recovery volunteering

Overview

Volunteers are integral to the response and recovery phases of an emergency. The involvement of volunteers in emergencies usually includes both trained volunteers and spontaneous volunteers. Trained volunteers are those who are formally affiliated with an organisation, undertake a specific role, and have received training on how to undertake their role safely. Examples include volunteer firefighters and state emergency service volunteers. Spontaneous volunteers are people who offer their assistance in response to an emergency. These volunteers are not usually formally affiliated with a volunteer involving organisation and have not been trained for a specific role. Such volunteers often undertake general roles that arise in response to the unique circumstances of an emergency. Examples include volunteers that assist with processing financial aid applications and volunteers who help with general clean up following a natural disaster.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteer involvement during and following emergencies should still adhere to the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, though some functions may be streamlined to increase expediency. If your organisation is likely to be involved in providing assistance during or after an emergency this should be planned for in advance. Of particular importance is understanding any legal or insurance obligations your organisation has that may relate to volunteers.

Managing spontaneous volunteers is very different to managing trained volunteers. Spontaneous volunteers generally offer time-limited assistance and may have no desire to work with your organisation on an ongoing basis. Due to the uniqueness of spontaneous volunteering the Federal Government has worked with disaster management organisations to provide guidance on how to involve spontaneous volunteers safely and effectively.

[Click here](#) to access Australian Disaster Resilience's Planning for Spontaneous Volunteers Handbook.

Coordination of Spontaneous Volunteers

The State and Territory Peak Bodies for Volunteering have various arrangements with their local, state, and territory Governments to coordinate spontaneous volunteers. More information about these responsibilities can be found on their respective [websites](#).

Ending the volunteer relationship

Overview

Many volunteering roles have a natural lifecycle and volunteers leave for a variety of reasons. In most cases volunteers leave for positive reasons such as interstate moves and gaining paid employment. Sometimes there may be an underperformance or personnel issue with a volunteer that may require ending their relationship with your organisation. Having exit processes in place for all scenarios will enable your organisation to provide a respectful end to any volunteer relationship irrespective of the circumstances.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed discusses changes to volunteer involvement, including the need for fair and transparent procedures for ending the involvement of a volunteer.

When a volunteer decides to leave

Attrition is a normal part of any volunteering program. Volunteers come and go for many reasons and their departure can often be cause for celebration. If your volunteer is leaving for positive reasons, consider how you can recognise them for their contribution. Don't forget to provide exiting volunteers with the opportunity to provide feedback that may help you improve your volunteering programs going forward. Having an exit procedure also ensures that you remove any access to organisational systems and platforms once the volunteer has moved on.

Sometimes volunteers may indicate a desire to leave but be open to suggestions for staying. If your organisation is interested in retaining the volunteer it is worth exploring the underlying reasons for their desire to leave. There may be personnel issues you are unaware of that are resolvable or the volunteer may simply be looking for a new challenge. You may be able to deploy them into another role or create a new role that meets their changing motivations.

Reasons for ending the volunteer relationship

Sometimes your organisation may be in a position where it needs to end a volunteer's engagement. Such reasons include:

- There is no need for their services (e.g., when a program ends).
- The volunteer is underperforming.
- The volunteer is not working within the scope of their role, creating a risk for the organisation.
- The volunteer is breaching policies or procedures.
- The volunteer is bullying or harassing other volunteers or paid staff.
- The volunteer's conduct is unacceptable.
- The volunteer has done something unlawful.

Volunteers have the moral right to fair grievance procedures; however, they do not legally have standing under unfair dismissal laws. Whilst your organisation has no legal obligation to engage in due process with volunteers and is within its rights to terminate a volunteer relationship at any time, it is considered good practice to work with the volunteer to get to the bottom of any issues.

Remember that your organisation may be legally responsible for the conduct of your volunteers, so any serious issues need to be dealt with promptly and in accordance with law. Depending on the nature of a conflict involving a volunteer, they may have legal rights such as the right to work in safe environment. Be sure to seek independent advice about your legal obligations based on the specific circumstances of any disagreement.

Be as fair and transparent as possible when working towards ending a volunteer relationship. Insofar as practicable, provide an opportunity for the volunteer to have their say. Sometimes underperformance or misconduct might be masking a deeper issue the organisation is unaware of.

If your organisation has taken reasonable steps to resolve any conflicts with a volunteer and it is apparent that a mutually agreeable outcome is not feasible, it is still possible to end the volunteer relationship with dignity and respect. You and the volunteer can decide for them to retire as a friend of the organisation in recognition of their service.

More information

Part 5 of the [Not-for-profit Law National Volunteer Guide](#) has a section on ending the volunteer relationship.

Impact measurement

Overview

Measuring the impact of volunteering programs is a powerful way to highlight how the involvement of volunteers makes a difference. Volunteers contribute significant social, cultural, and economic value to Australian society and are an indispensable resource that make volunteering programs more inclusive and effective. Volunteers are essential to delivering critical services and programs in the community and their work contributes to a more connected and resilient Australia. Impact measurement is an important part of telling this story and will enable your organisation to communicate to volunteers the importance of their work. Additionally, impact measurement reports are vital for securing ongoing funding and marketing your organisation to your stakeholders.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Measuring impact can assist your organisation to meet all of the National Standards. Firstly, understanding the value of volunteers in your organisation contributes to *National Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture*, and *National Standard 2: Volunteer participation is championed and modelled*. Having a broad picture of the role that volunteers play in your organisation's ecosystem is essential and enables your organisation and/or board or committee to strategically invest in volunteering. Impact measurement reports also provide information on what is working and what could be improved, allowing you to re-design volunteer roles as necessary. Insights gained through impact measurement will also enable your organisation to streamline your volunteer management processes. Impact measurement is a critical part of volunteer recognition as the findings enable you to communicate with your volunteers how their involvement makes a difference. Finally, benchmarking your impact measurement is a critical tool for continuous improvement.

How can my organisation measure impact?

Impact measurement can take many forms and there are tools available to support this activity. There are some resources on impact measurement housed in the Volunteering Resource Hub. Further, a simple google search reveals a suite of tools that explain what impact measurement is and how it can be done. This is also an activity that skilled volunteers can assist with or a service your organisation can procure through an expert if you have a budget for this activity. To prepare for measuring impact it is worth considering what data you need to collect that will enable you to undertake this work. Remember, there is no 'one size fits all' approach to impact measurement and even small efforts to understand the inputs, outputs, and outcomes of your volunteering programs will help you demonstrate your value to the community you serve.

Inclusion and diversity

Overview

Volunteering is a powerful mechanism for fostering inclusion and creates ripple effects across entire communities. Building a volunteering program with inclusion at the forefront provides opportunities for all members of your community to be involved in your organisation and bring with them a multitude of experiences and insights. It is important to remember that there is no 'one-size-fits-all' approach to inclusion, and inclusive practices tend to take a person-centered approach.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Inclusive practices underpin each of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement. Firstly, effectively designing volunteer involvement to be accessible contributes to *National Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture* and *National Standard 2: Volunteer participation is championed and modelled*. Secondly, creating volunteering roles that are inclusive, with equitable recruitment processes that are based on the interest, knowledge, and skills of volunteers shows your commitment to *National Standard 3: Volunteer roles are meaningful and tailored* and *National Standard 4: Recruitment is equitable and diversity is valued*. Providing individualised supervision, support and development opportunities for volunteers supports *National Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed*. Lastly, ensuring recognition is appropriate to volunteer being recognised and respectful of their personal and cultural preferences, and providing opportunities for volunteers to provide feedback on the organisation's volunteer involvement contribute to *National Standard 7: Volunteers are recognised* and *National Standard 8: Policies and practices are continuously improved*.

What does an inclusive volunteering role look like?

Inclusion occurs when all people feel valued, respected, and can contribute to an organisation. The below is a list of considerations for thinking about inclusion and inclusive practices in your volunteering roles or programs. When considering how to improve inclusivity in your organisation it can be advantageous to connect with other organisations and advocacy groups who are experts in inclusion. Most importantly, if you are looking to involve a volunteer who may require additional supports in their role, ensure you ask them what they need rather than making assumptions.

Inclusive considerations include:

- Is your workplace premise accessible? Are there any ways you can increase accessibility?
- Do your policies and procedures reflect a culture of equality and diversity? Are they accessible for persons with all abilities and from all backgrounds?
- Does your organisation utilise inclusive language and are all staff aware of the value and importance of inclusion?
- Do you encourage applications from people with lived experience and from diverse backgrounds?

- Are volunteering roles and role descriptions flexible and easily adjusted to support people with diverse needs?
- Are recruitment and onboarding processes flexible and easily adjusted to support people with all abilities and from all backgrounds?
- Are your recruitment procedures accessible? Do you avoid using jargon or acronyms in your recruitment documentation?
- Do you have an equitable recruitment process?
- Do you have systems in place to support new volunteers? Do you have the capacity to buddy volunteers?
- Are you actively seeking feedback from your volunteers on their volunteering experience?

It is important to remember that inclusion is an outcome, not an activity. It requires a dedicated and ongoing commitment to improving access to opportunities and providing supported volunteering experiences.

Insurance

Overview

Volunteering Australia recommends all volunteer involving organisations obtain insurance for their volunteers. Whilst this is not a legal requirement, it is an important aspect of providing a safe volunteering experience and demonstrates a commitment to best practice. The types of insurance your organisation requires will be dictated by the services and programs you deliver.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Having adequate volunteer insurance is an important part of meeting *National Standard 2: Volunteer participation is championed and modelled*. It shows your volunteers you take their involvement seriously and you are invested in their safety. More importantly, volunteer insurance is critical to meeting *National Standard 6: Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected*. Having appropriate insurances is one way your organisation can meet its work, health and safety requirement of providing a safe workplace.

What insurance does my organisation need?

There is a range of insurance instruments that your organisation may require. At a minimum, Volunteer Personal Accident Insurance ensures your volunteers are covered whilst completing their general duties. However, it is important to discuss with your insurer the exact roles and responsibilities being undertaken by your volunteers to ensure the entire remit of activities can be covered by insurance. Generally, the riskier an activity is, the more likely you will need a specific insurance to cover it. For example, volunteers who use their private motor vehicle while volunteering may not be covered in the event of an accident where they are at fault.

Where can I go for advice about insurance?

Aon are experts in not-for-profit insurance and are Volunteering Australia's approved insurance provider. Their website provides a suite of useful information about the range of insurance instruments that may be required for your organisation. Aon's handy Insurance Puzzle Solver takes you through the different insurances you should consider based on your organisation's circumstances. The friendly team at Aon can also provide bespoke advice about the best suite of insurance for your organisation.

More information

Getting insurance right can be tricky. There are many ways you can find out more, including by visiting the [Not-for-profit Law website](#) or by seeking independent legal advice.

Legal requirements

Overview

When it comes to volunteering the legal landscape can be incredibly complex. From corporations law, to fundraising regulations, to working with vulnerable people, there is a raft of information your organisation needs to consider when involving volunteers. The extent of the legal obligations conferred on your organisation will be dictated by your entity type, the programs and services you deliver, the demographics of your clients, and the jurisdiction in which you work. It is important to remember that community organisations and not-for-profits often have significant legal and compliance obligations.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Complying with your legal obligations has crossover with all of the National Standards. If your organisation has a governing body they will have explicit obligations and fiduciary duties. More information on the relationship between the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement and the law can be found in the [Not-for-profit Law National Volunteer Guide](#).

Not-for-profit Law

Not-for-profit Law, a program of Justice Connect, is a free specialist legal service for community organisations. They provide free or low cost, high quality, practical legal help for not-for-profit community organisations and do extensive work to advocate for the sector. Not-for-profit Law can help your organisation in several ways including:

- Building capacity through free resources and training (online and face-to-face).
- Free legal advice delivered through Justice Connect's member law firms and barristers.
- Law and policy reform work to ensure the best possible framework for the sector.
- Tailored legal training on a fee-for-service basis.

Visit the [Not-for-profit Law website](#) and select your jurisdiction to find helpful resources and access free training.

National Volunteer Guide

To help volunteer involving organisations better understand their legal obligations, Volunteering Australia partnered with Not-for-profit Law to create the [National Volunteer Guide](#). This six-part guide covers the following key issues:

- Glossary of common terms and overview
- Understanding the legal differences between a volunteer, employee and independent contractor
- Understanding your organisation's legal obligations in relation to the safety of its volunteers
- Protecting volunteers and other people your volunteers are interacting with from unlawful workplace behaviour

- Recruiting, inducting, managing performance and ending the volunteer relationship, and
- Organisational issues applicable to volunteers.

The Guide also contains practical examples and template documents and is an indispensable resource for volunteer involving organisations.

Do volunteers have legal rights?

Volunteers have a number of legal rights, but these can differ across jurisdiction. The most important rights pertain to:

- Work, health, and safety
- Anti-discrimination
- Intellectual property

In addition to legal rights, volunteers also have moral rights. These are things that volunteers may not be legally entitled to but should be able to expect from the organisation they are giving their time to. See our [Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities resource](#) for more information.

More information

Understanding your legal obligations can be tricky. There are many ways you can find out more, including by visiting the [Not-for-profit Law website](#) or by seeking independent legal advice.

Media and communications

Overview

Charities and not-for-profits are some of the most trusted institutions in Australian society. Media and communications activities are a critical business function for most volunteer involving organisations. These activities engender public support for important social and environmental issues, they enable organisations to recruit volunteers to support their services and programs, and they enable much needed donations to keep organisations running. Volunteers are an asset to charities, not-for-profits, and community groups, and can be a powerful advocate. Organisations should consider how to include volunteers in their media and communications activity as well as communicate with volunteers about their opportunities and obligations in this regard.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Media and communications delegations, opportunities and responsibilities should be considered in *National Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture* from both a risk and policy perspective. Involving interested volunteers in public relations activities can be a powerful way to recognise their contribution in alignment with *National Standard 7: Volunteers are recognised*.

Internal communications

Keeping volunteers up to date on things going on inside your organisation as well as in the broader ecosystem is a critical aspect of keeping them engaged and ensuring they feel part of the team. Your organisation should consider how it plans to communicate with volunteers. Most volunteer workforces are diverse, and volunteers will have varying communication preferences. Consider how you can facilitate different modes of communication to ensure all volunteers feel valued and heard. Group supervision, peer support, staff meetings, and recognition events are mechanisms your organisation can introduce to enable engagement and provide opportunities for feedback.

External communications

Your organisation may involve volunteers in the design and delivery of external media, marketing, and public relations activities. This may include contributing to policy and advocacy work, writing content for your website or social media platform, or acting as a spokesperson for your organisation. It is important for you to have robust policies and procedures that dictate what volunteers are authorised to do with regards to external communications.

Intellectual property

It is important to bear in mind that volunteers have a legal right to their intellectual property. This means that if they are creating collateral for your organisation they retain ownership of their work unless they assign their intellectual property rights to you. Some volunteer agreements include a clause that asks volunteers to assign their intellectual property rights to an organisation. If your organisation intends to do this it is important to communicate what that means for the volunteer, and provide them with the opportunity to say no. In the event that such an agreement is not reached, a volunteer has a legal right to request your organisation cease using any intellectual property they have created.

More information on intellectual property of volunteers, including a sample volunteer agreement, can be found in the [Not-for-profit Law National Volunteer Guide](#).

Social media and online communication

Volunteers have the right as ordinary citizens to engage in social media and other online activities such as contributing to blogs and writing opinion pieces. You should be clear with volunteers what your organisation's expectations are regarding the use of social media. This should form part of your Media and Communications Policy and should be accompanied by a procedure that clearly outlines what volunteers can and cannot do with regards to communicating their involvement with your organisation. It is important to convey that volunteers are bound by the same privacy legislation and principles as paid staff and they should not share any personal or confidential information, either personally or publicly, they have obtained through their volunteering role.

Policies and procedures

Overview

Volunteer involving organisations should have policies and procedures that govern their volunteering programs. Similarly, there may be aspects of your organisation's general policies and procedures that apply to volunteers. It is best practice to provide volunteers with a copy of all organisational policies and procedures and include an overview during induction. Volunteers should always have access to relevant corporate documentation, physically or electronically. The level of detail in your policies and procedures will usually be dictated by the nature of your volunteering programs.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Policies and procedures underpin all eight National Standards. Your organisation may choose to use the National Standards as a basis for your policies and procedures on volunteer involvement. The sample evidence that accompanies each National Standard is a useful guide for the content of your policies and procedures.

What to include

There is no minimum or maximum amount of information your volunteering policies and procedures must include. It is recommended to be comprehensive, but succinct. Include all the information volunteers need to know about the expectations of the organisation, particularly highlighting legal, insurance, and compliance requirements.

Two common structures for volunteering policies and procedures are:

1. Using the National Standards as a guide
2. Using the volunteer management cycle as a guide

It is likely that your volunteering policies and procedures will sit alongside your broader organisational policies and procedures. Depending on the size of your organisation, these documents may be condensed together. If there are certain policies and procedures that relate to employees, but not volunteers, or vice versa, make this very clear throughout. When writing policies and procedures keep your audience in mind and reduce or remove jargon wherever possible. The inclusion of a glossary can be very helpful, especially if your policies and procedures are complex.

Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct sets out the standards of behaviour expected of staff and contractors, including volunteers. It is a list of behaviours that guide people on how to perform their duties in a professional or ethical way. A Code of Conduct forms part of your organisation's broader suite of policies. For guidance on how to draft a Code of Conduct and what to include, see Volunteering Australia's [Writing a Code of Conduct](#) resource.

More information

There is a suite of resources on the Volunteering Resource Hub that may assist your organisation with writing or reviewing policies and procedures. The Not-for-profit Law National Volunteer Guide is also an excellent resource to consult for guidance around legal

obligations. If you need assistance with writing policies and procedures or have specific questions your local Volunteering Peak Body or Volunteering Support Service will be able to provide place-based support.

Policy and advocacy

Volunteering Australia does extensive policy and advocacy work to advance volunteering in Australia. This work advocates for volunteers and volunteer involving organisations with the aim to create a more connected and resilient Australia through volunteering.

To view Volunteering Australia's recent work in this area, visit [our website](#). If you are interested in providing information or case studies to support Volunteering Australia's policy and advocacy work, please [contact us](#).

Research

In recent decades, there has been a surge in research on volunteering at a local, national, and international level. Some of this research is currently hosted on the Volunteering Resource Hub and can be accessed [here](#).

This research can help inform and strengthen your strategic and organisational commitment to volunteering.

If you are aware of research that could be included in the Volunteering Resource Hub please [contact us](#).

Risk management

Overview

Risk management is an important part of any volunteering program. Risk is defined as ‘the effect of uncertainty on objectives’ (AS/NZS ISO 31000:2009). Risk is usually measured in terms of likelihood and consequence. Risk management is ‘the coordinated activities to direct and control an organisation with regard to risk.’ Staff at all levels of an organisation are responsible for managing risk, and volunteers may have key responsibilities when it comes to reporting and managing risk. Many organisations have a Risk Appetite Statement, which sets out the appetite for risk across key areas. Based on this, organisations then create strategic and operational risk management plans.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Risk management is most relevant to *National Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture*. *National Standard 1.2* states: ‘Governance and risk management arrangements facilitate safe and meaningful volunteer participation.’ Suggested evidence for this Standard includes:

- Risk management systems are in place to identify, assess and respond to risks relating to volunteer participation.
- The governing body and senior leadership oversee volunteer risk management.
- Volunteers are informed of potential risks and are supported to manage or mitigate risk factors.

Risk management is also relevant to *National Standard 6: Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected*.

Key considerations

The complexity of your risk management documentation will usually be dictated by your entity type, the activities of your organisation, the environment in which you operate, and the stakeholders you engage with. Managing risk is the responsibility of all staff, including volunteers and the governing body of your organisation. Good risk management involves continuous monitoring and regular reporting.

Documents you may consider creating to support your risk management activities include:

- Risk Appetite Statement
- Risk Management Framework
- Strategic Risk Management Plan
- Operational Risk Management Plan
- Risk Policy
- Risk Procedure

Risk appetite and risk tolerance

Risk appetite is the amount of risk the organisation is willing to accept or retain in order to achieve its objectives. It is a statement or series of statements that describes the organisation's attitude towards risk taking.

Risk tolerance is a measure of the levels of risk taking that are acceptable to achieve a specific objective or manage a category of risk. Risk tolerance represents the practical application of risk appetite.

Both risk appetite and risk tolerance are usually set by the governing body of the organisation in collaboration with the CEO.

Creating a risk matrix

Risk matrices are one of the primary ways to manage risk in an organisation. They define likelihood ratings (e.g. low, medium, high) and consequence ratings (e.g. low, medium, high, severe). The number of ratings across these two metrics will likely be dictated by the complexity of your organisation and your volunteering program.

Risk management plan

Risks are usually grouped into key categories, which may include:

- Strategic risks
- Financial risks
- Reputational risks
- Human resources risks
- Client risks

The first step in creating a risk matrix is identifying the key areas of risk your organisation is likely to encounter. From there, it is important to identify all the risks that fall within each category. Each risk should be allocated a likelihood rating and a consequence rating. Following the categorisation of risks, the next step is to apply mitigation strategies that lower the likelihood of the risk occurring and/or the consequence should the risk occur. After applying mitigation strategies you should be left with a residual risk rating against each identified risk. In an ideal world, mitigation strategies lower both the likelihood and consequence of an identified risk; however, there are always risks that cannot be mitigated or eliminated. These generally form severe risks and should be monitored appropriately.

Risk reporting

Continuous monitoring and regular reporting are integral parts of effective risk management. It is not enough to simply create a risk management plan and never revisit it. New risks will arise over time and will need to be added and circumstances within your organisation may change, which reduce or remove existing risks. Risk reporting should occur at both a strategic and operational level. As a general rule, the governing body will monitor all high and severe risks on an ongoing basis. Lower classified risks are usually managed operationally.

The best way to ensure risk reporting, including the identification of new risks, is happening effectively is to create a risk culture within your organisation. Empower volunteers to identify and report potential risks and communicate your risk management procedures with them. Make reporting easy and accessible.

Volunteers and risk

Volunteers are often deployed in client-facing roles and may work without direct supervision. Many volunteering programs provide programs and services to people in the community, and this is often enabled through the involvement of dedicated volunteers. Additionally, your volunteers will likely have access to private and confidential information such as client data, logins and passwords, and sensitive corporate documentation. Risk management should form part of the policies and procedures for your volunteering programs.

Ensure that risk management is discussed with volunteers during their induction, and they are provided with clear direction about the expectations of your organisation regarding risk. Be specific about what volunteers are required to do to contribute to risk management. An important part of this conversation is outlining the boundaries of a volunteering role, including what is in and out of scope.

Insurance and risk

Insurance and risk go hand in hand. Insurance is one mechanism of managing risk, and in some cases your organisation may choose to invest in insurances that protect you in the event of an accident or injury. It is critical to be aware that not all risk can be outsourced, and most insurances have liability limits and claim conditions. Volunteering Australia recommends having an in-depth conversation with your insurer about risk and seeking their advice on the best insurances to put in place to provide protection.

More information

There is a wealth of information online about risk management, including tools and templates to support the creation of your risk documents. You can see the full suite of Risk Management resources on the Volunteering Resource Hub [here](#).

Volunteering during a pandemic

Overview

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound effect on volunteering. Research conducted by Volunteering Australia found that a staggering 60% of volunteers across the country ceased volunteering at the height of the pandemic. Yet, despite a downturn in volunteer availability, many services reported an increase in service demand. This forced organisations to adapt the delivery of their volunteering programs, with many turning to remote or contactless delivery. A key concern for organisations has been how to ensure volunteering is safe for both volunteers and service users.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Each of the eight National Standards is relevant to volunteering in a pandemic. Of particular importance are *National Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture* and *National Standard 6: Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected*.

More information

In response to COVID-19, Volunteering Australia and many of the State and Territory Volunteering Peak Bodies created resources to support volunteering in a pandemic. These resources are hosted on the Volunteering Resource Hub and can be found [here](#).