

# **The Volunteers Handbook**

**Volunteering North Queensland Inc.**



**Shop 16B Hyde Park Centre Woolcock Street  
Hyde Park 4812  
Phone 4721 4775 Fax 4772 7860**

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Sandy McIntyre, John Zohn

Volunteering Definitions, Principles, Rights and Responsibilities are as defined and documented by  
Volunteering Australia

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While reasonable effort has been taken to ensure the accuracy of the information in this booklet. It is intended to provide information of a general nature. The contents should not be taken as qualified legal advice and any matter wherever specific advice is sought, the reader should obtain this from a source appropriately placed to provide such information. The authors and Volunteering North Queensland Inc. expressly disclaim all responsibility for any damages whatsoever that may arise from acting or not acting in accordance with the contents of this booklet.

You can keep abreast of current issues and information about volunteering by visiting our web-site at:

<http://www.volunteeringnthqld.org.au>

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# **Volunteering in the 21st century**

## **What does it mean?**

It has always been in people's nature to help. Volunteering is a fundamental building block of civil society, has been present in one form or another for centuries. It brings to life the noblest intentions of humankind – the pursuit of peace, freedom, opportunity, safety and justice for all people.

The face of volunteering and volunteers has undergone considerable change, and continues to change. In today's modern 'hi-tech' world, the range of tasks and the diversity of people participating reflect the dynamic nature of society itself. The community is now recognising the value and benefits of volunteering.

## **What is Volunteering?**

The term 'volunteering' has the potential to mean different things to different people.

## **So, what is Volunteering...?**

Volunteering Australia defines formal volunteering as an activity, which takes place in not-for-profit programs or projects and is undertaken:

- To be of benefit to the community and the volunteer
- Of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion
- For no financial payment
- In designated volunteer positions only

Under this definition, there are some forms of 'work' that are not considered to be volunteer work, such as Work Experience; Community Service Orders; Student Placements; Unpaid Work Trials; Work for the Dole Schemes and Carers.

More broadly speaking, volunteering is a way for people to connect with community, for whatever reasons. Some may have traditional altruistic reasons; some may wish to meet people in the area; some join because they are asked or a friend is involved; and others may want to try something new or learn a new skill.

**Volunteering is a pathway for people to get involved.**



## **The Essential Elements of Volunteering**

### ***Volunteers work in not-for-profit organisations and services***

This includes organisations such as public hospitals and schools, charities, cultural organisations, activist and self-help groups.

However, many businesses are taking the notion of corporate social responsibility very seriously and are actively encouraging and supporting their staff to make a contribution to their community through volunteering. Sometimes staff are encouraged to volunteer with a not-for-profit organisation with which the business has an established relationship. But more often companies seek team opportunities outside these relationships.

### ***Volunteers' work benefits the community***

In some way, small or large, directly or indirectly, the outcome of any work in the not-for-profit sector has an altruistic quality of benefiting the community.

Illegal activities, although freely chosen, and believed by those involved to benefit the community are excluded from the definition of volunteering. Revolutionary and planned violence is not volunteering!

In deciding what is, and what is not 'of benefit to the community' Chris Sidoti (1998, p7) gives us a measuring tool:

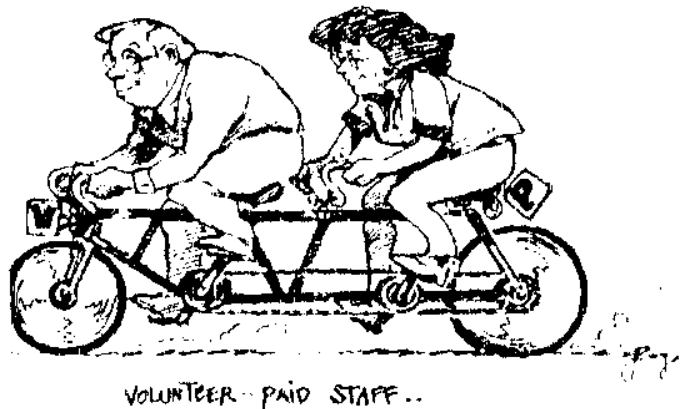
**'Organisations that support, promote and coordinate volunteer activity are challenged to ensure through their leadership and educational roles that volunteer effort promotes human rights and positive social change, not the violation of rights'.**

### ***Volunteers' work must be based on free choice***

Volunteering can exist outside the framework of formal organisations. Volunteers can form ad hoc groups to promote a cause or provide mutual assistance, or provide regular neighbourly support to individuals in need of assistance – commonly known as ‘informal volunteering’.

### *Volunteers are not paid*

This includes salaries and wages, any regular allowances such as ‘fees’ or ‘contract’ payments. These payments change volunteers’ status in relation to taxation and insurance requirements. Volunteers can be given reimbursements of expenses and travel, as well as refreshments or lunch allowances.



### *Designated Volunteer positions only*

*Volunteer motives vary, but depriving paid workers of an income is not one of them.*

In some community organisations, the employment of a paid worker may be desirable, but lack of funding is the prohibiting factor.

*In such cases volunteers may agree to carry out the work.* However as service demands increase and there is a chance that the

service recipients would be seriously disadvantaged, all efforts should be made to obtain further funding to employ staff.

Volunteers have traditionally forged the way in calling for additional services involving the employment of paid workers, and they continue to raise funds to maintain paid workers' employment. Any calls for volunteers to replace paid workers will not come from volunteers, but from funding bodies that have reduced funding, or from organisations that are anxious to reduce costs.

### **Principles of Volunteering**

1. Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer
2. Volunteering work is unpaid
3. Volunteering is always a matter of choice
4. Volunteering is not compulsorily undertaken to receive pensions or government allowances
5. Volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community
6. Volunteering is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs
7. Volunteering is an activity performed in the not-for-profit sector
8. Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work
9. Volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others
10. Volunteering promotes human rights and equality

# **VOLUNTEER RIGHTS AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

Volunteers are a vital resource in any community organisation. Volunteering is about freedom of choice to work without monetary reward. However, volunteers can expect other rewards such as recognition for the work that they do. The volunteer contracts to perform a specific job with certain responsibilities, and in return is entitled to certain rights. Both the volunteer and the organisation have obligations to each other.

## **Volunteer Rights**

The right to .....

- A job description clearly stating the aim of the job and tasks to be undertaken by the volunteer
- To be interviewed in accordance with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination legislation
- Be treated as a co-worker, not just free help
- Know as much about the organisation as possible, its policies, its people and its programs
- Continuing education on the job as follow-up to initial training, providing information about new developments
- Training for the job, thoughtfully planned and effectively presented
- Sound guidance and direction by someone who is experienced and well informed and who has the time to invest in giving support and supervision
- A place to work which is an orderly designated place, conducive to work and worthy of the job to be done
- Promotion and variety of experience through advancement to greater responsibility or by transfer from one activity to another
- Be heard, to have a part in planning, to feel free to make suggestions, to be shown respect for an honest opinion.
- To work in a healthy and safe environment and to be adequately covered by insurance

## **Volunteer Responsibilities**

Examine motives and be sure that they match the volunteer job  
Understand purpose and philosophy of the organisation before committing to it  
Understand rules and guidelines of the organisation  
Be loyal to the organisation  
Be willing to train for the job and take part in ongoing training when offered  
Accept support and supervision  
Participate in planning and feedback about the job  
Be reliable  
Work as a team member  
Keep information of a sensitive nature, confidential

## **How many people are involved?**

In 2000, 4.4 million Australians over 18 volunteered (this excluded Sydney Olympic and Paralympics volunteers). \*

Volunteers are worth an estimated \$45 billion/year to the Australian economy. \*

Approximately 704.1 million hours of voluntary work is carried out by Australians each year. \*

Australia's not-for-profit sector adds more to Australia's GDP than the mining sector. \*

There are about 700,000 not-for-profit organisations in Australia, most of them small and entirely dependent on volunteers. \*

The most active age groups of volunteers is 35-44 years (40%)  
\*(ABS 2001)

These figures from the Australian Bureau of Statistics demonstrate the major contribution that volunteers make to Australian society. Without volunteers Australia's economic, social and cultural infrastructure would collapse.

## What do they do?

Volunteers do an incredible range of tasks including:

Clerical administration	Shop assistants
Reception	Warehouse workers
Museum assistant	Information provision
Public relations	Counselling
Fundraising	Environmental activities
Activity assistants	Home visitor

The most common areas of volunteering are community/welfare (39.1%) and sport and recreation (34.1%).

50.3% of males are involved in management and committee work, while 61.9% of females are involved in fundraising and sales voluntary jobs.

\* (ABS 2001)

Volunteering Australia's– GoVolunteer is the first free not-for-profit national volunteer matching website in Australia. It currently advertises approximately 5,000 volunteer positions nationally.

Go on-line, go to



[www.govolunteer.com.au](http://www.govolunteer.com.au)

## Who Needs Volunteers?

The not-for-profit sector covers nine main areas:

Arts	Health
Education	Recreation/Sport
Emergency Services	Welfare
Environment	Community Services
Conservation	

## Why Do People Volunteer?

47% of people volunteer to help others in the community, regardless of their employment status. \*

Only 10% of people are volunteering to gain work experience or to learn new skills. \*

For 18-24 year olds, the major factor in becoming a volunteer is for personal satisfaction (40%), whereas in people over the age of 65 years, their greatest motivation is to help others and the community (54.2%). \*

\*(ABS 2001)

The benefits often become the reasons people volunteer – or the ongoing motivation to volunteer.

Here are some points to consider:

- People enter at different points
- People often enter into volunteering at a time of change in their lives
- People may begin volunteering for one reason, but continue for other reasons
- Volunteering is the longest career you can have
- Volunteering is an educational activity
- Job-seeking volunteers may intend to be short-term volunteers, but can stay longer
- Most long-term volunteers also have paid work

- Try not to focus only on skills if you are also looking for paid work.

No reasons to volunteer are “better” than others, however it is important to realise the reasons you are looking for volunteer work. Only you know the reasons why you have become, or are thinking of becoming a volunteer. Perhaps you can relate to the following comments by others who have become volunteers.

- To increase my confidence and self-esteem
- To fulfil personal needs and goals
- To maintain skills and learn new ones
- To have social contact and relieve boredom
- To help those in need and to assist others in the community
- To be active and involved in the community
- To meet new people
- To promote the goals of the organisation

## **How does volunteering benefit the community?**

Recipients of volunteer services are widespread and include:

- Children/youth (eg. in schools and sporting programs)
- Clients (eg. in health/welfare services)
- Residents and patients (eg. in nursing homes and hospitals)
- Citizens (eg. visiting festivals, galleries, museums, information services)
- The community at large (eg. land care programs, increased human rights).

## **Preparing to Volunteer**

Once you have decided to commit yourself to a volunteer position, please contact **Volunteering North Queensland Inc.** to arrange a

suitable time to speak with a trained Referral Officer about volunteering opportunities. Allow approximately 40 minutes for your interview.

Interviews are conducted face-to-face, via telephone or through Email. During the interview, provide as much information as possible to ensure an enjoyable and mutually beneficial referral.

A position description is provided by the organisation listing key areas of responsibilities, special requirements (eg. Working with children check – blue card, or police check), skills/qualifications required (essential and desirable) and days and times required. This ensures the Referral Officer has all the relevant information pertaining to the volunteer position available to discuss with the potential volunteer before referral.

Once a position has been decided upon, a letter of referral will be provided listing the organisation contact details. It is the responsibility of the volunteer to contact the organisation to arrange a time to speak with the volunteer coordinator about a possible placement.

## **Process for Interview**

There are a number of points to consider when attending an interview for a volunteer placement:

- Be punctual
- If you cannot keep the appointment, ring and advise. Remember, you may be speaking with a volunteer whose time, like yours, is valuable
- Dress appropriately
- Know your limitations – think about the amount of time you are giving. Volunteering is about achieving a balance. Take into consideration things such as:
  - family commitments
  - paid employment or your ability to look for it
  - household commitments

- regular annual trips
  - school holidays
  - other leisure and recreational activities
- 
- Ask questions:
    - What is the role of your organisation in the community?
    - What is required of me? What is the purpose of my job?
    - Who can I go to with questions and problems?
    - Do you offer any orientation training or job specific training?
    - What kind of supervision will I have?
    - What are the opportunities for advancement and variety?
  
  - Enjoy you placement!

***Remember, you are not just a volunteer***

***‘YOU ARE A VOLUNTEER!’***

“In the quiet hours when we are alone and there is nobody to tell us what fine fellows we are, we come sometimes upon a moment in which we wonder, not how much money we are earning, nor how famous we have become, but what good we are doing.”

(A.A. Milne)

# **Organisation Responsibilities and Provision of Support**

A well-managed volunteer program will ensure volunteers stay with organisations for as long as possible, and leave only through personal reasons and not as a result of mismanagement. There are a number of ways in which volunteer contribution can be well managed.

***Provide orientation.*** Orientation usually takes place at the beginning of your volunteer placement and is a time when you adapt to your new organisation and job. Orientation is provided to make volunteers feel welcome, to inform and instruct, and to demonstrate the value placed in volunteers. This session could cover the following topics:

**Philosophy of the organisation**

**Information about services/programs/projects**

**Expectations of volunteers**

**Types of positions, role descriptions and reporting channels**

**Education and training opportunities**

**Staff – who they are and what they do**

**A review of Organisational policies, procedures (including emergency) and informal routines**

***Supervision.*** Proper supervision enables volunteers to be more effective. At all times, volunteers must be able to locate their supervisor, and vice versa. The organisation must have an **emergency** telephone number for each volunteer, and volunteers should be aware of the organisation's rules and regulations.

***Support.*** Good support helps the volunteers to work more effectively. This can be achieved by providing job descriptions that give a clear understanding of the volunteer's duties. A job description acts as a guide for negotiating the volunteer's role. One of the common pitfalls of volunteer work is an inability to say 'no' when asked to perform a task. It is important to remember that it is acceptable to say 'no' when a task is out of your job description or

duty statement, is beyond your capabilities or clashes with other commitments.

Time should be set aside to discuss issues of concern to volunteers, along with providing opportunity for giving and receiving feedback.

***Personal or Professional Development.*** There may be a need within your job for specialised knowledge or skills that enables you to perform your work effectively. Training may be essential in some roles to ensure that you can perform your job without injury to yourself and others.

## **Policies and Protocols**

***Policies.*** Most organisations will have developed policies about volunteer involvement. Policies provide guidelines to people in management, and ensure a healthy, well-functioning volunteer program. Policies should cover issues such as:

- the reasons for volunteer involvement within the organisation
- paid/volunteer staff relations
- reimbursement of out-of-pocket expenses
- insurance
- industrial issues.

An understanding of these policies will give you a greater appreciation of the organisation's perspective on volunteering, administrative guidelines and your place in achieving its objectives and mission.

***Protocols.*** All organisations have a code of ethics or behaviour that their staff is required to abide by. This sets the standard for the organisation and ensures that the rights of individuals and the organisation's reputation are both protected. Some of these protocols may be recorded in policy and procedures; others may be less formally recorded but nevertheless expected. Some of the things that may be covered include -

- Code of Behaviour
- Code of Dress
- Confidentiality
- Record keeping and reporting
- Availability
- Personal Care

## **Perils and Pitfalls of Volunteering Work**

Ending a position does not necessarily mean that the position or organisation was not suited to you. Your reasons for wanting to end your volunteer involvement may relate to factors within the organisation. For example:

- Over-work
- Under-work
- Under-challenged
- Out of your depth
- Over-involved
- Poor staff relations
- Lack of opportunity for advancement

If you have concerns about your placement, they can usually be addressed by negotiating with the manager of the volunteer program. Try to resolve the issues as they arise, in open and honest dialogue.

On the other hand, you may have reasons for leaving which are unrelated to the organisation such as:

- Family reasons
- Ethical dilemmas
- Changing paid employment status
- Changing interests

A change may simply involve a break from your role, or a full severing of ties with the organisation.

Ending a volunteer position may be difficult, but continuing in a position that no longer meets your need is negative for you, the organisation and its customers. Discuss the situation with your manager, as it is always important for the organisation to understand why you are leaving.

If you always do  
What you've always done  
You'll always get  
What you've always got

(Albrecht)

## **Reward and Recognition**

Volunteers often say recognition and thanks are not important, but organisations can demonstrate just how important volunteers are to them by celebrating their efforts in a number of ways.

### **National Volunteer Events**

*National Volunteer Week.* Provides a national focus for organisations wanting to recruit volunteers and promote the value of volunteering to the community.

Each year, Volunteering Australia adopts a different theme for the week. In Australia, National Volunteer Week is always celebrated in May, and starts the Monday immediately after Mother's Day and runs through to the following Sunday.

The first National Volunteer Week was celebrated in 1989.

**International Volunteers Day.** The United Nations General Assembly declared December 5 as International Volunteer Day in 1985. The first International Volunteer Day was celebrated in 1986 by dozens of countries. Activities ranged from clean-up campaigns, roundtable conferences, competitions and exhibitions.

In Australia, International Volunteer Day has been designated as a day for the recognition of volunteer involvement; a day in which organisations can thank their volunteer staff.

