



Why Use this Resource?

This information sheet discusses some issues in involving volunteers in your organisation. It covers topics including developing a rationale for volunteer involvement, resourcing the program and obtaining board support.

[Links to National Standards for Involving Volunteers - No. 2 Management Responsibility]

The first question you need to ask in planning your volunteer program is:

What is the rationale/primary aim for involving volunteers in your organisation?

Reasons for wanting volunteers vary across organisations and indeed in an organisation over time. It is certainly good practice for an organisation to have considered and identified why they seek to involve volunteers and to review this periodically.

An organisation's rationale for utilising volunteers forms the philosophy for volunteer involvement and informs all decisions and actions the organisation and its staff make, which may impact volunteers within the organisation.

A clearly stated philosophy for involving volunteers in the organisation shows management has taken the time to think about this and considers volunteers as part of the organisation and crucial to achieving the organisation's mission.

There are several principle reasons for involving volunteers, and each has very different implications for the roles and responsibilities volunteers will undertake. These include:

- 1. To enhance and extend the work of paid staff within the organisation.** In these organisations, volunteers work primarily to assist paid staff in their work. In planning volunteer involvement, a key approach is to work with the paid staff to ascertain how volunteers can assist them: by taking on work currently undertaken by the paid staff person to free them up, by working on projects the paid staff would like to do but does not have the skills or the time, or by working together on a range of projects to provide additional person power.

In this type of program, significant time will be spent working with the paid staff to address their concerns, develop their skills in working with volunteers and support them in their new role.
- 2. To improve the quality of life of consumers/service recipients.** Volunteers often play this vital role in nursing homes, hospitals and various disability services. In planning for this type of volunteer involvement, adequate research must be done to ascertain the needs of the service recipients, the type of volunteers who will be most appropriate in skills and in temperament and to ensure that adequate training and an effective policy framework is provided so the volunteer can provide a professional and useful service. Consumers should be involved in every stage of the program. It is important to consider what the most appropriate relationship between consumer and volunteer is and how to best facilitate this relationship.
- 3. To develop and work in new areas of operation for the organisation.** Many funded services and innovative programs were initially developed and staffed by volunteers. When involving volunteers in this type of project, it is important to carefully consider how decisions will be made, how scope can be provided for innovation and responsibility while ensuring accountability and what is the relationship of this new service to existing programs.



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Involvement of volunteers in all aspects of the initial program planning and visioning is essential if they are to work effectively and feel ownership of the program.

- 4. As part of a philosophy of community involvement/development.**
Volunteer programs within community and neighbourhood centres are often developed with this reason in mind. Volunteering is a key vehicle for those who wish to participate and develop their community.

The challenge with this type of program is ensuring that volunteers are engaged in meaningful work and can partake in decision making processes and are not involved simply to fulfil a tokenistic commitment to community participation.

- 5. To assist in the major fundraising, promotional or outreach events held by the organisation.**

This is an increasingly common rationale for volunteer involvement. Volunteer event management is a very specific form of volunteer program. The way volunteers in traditional programs learn about the culture of the organisation and their role within it is not available to event volunteers. Particular emphasis must be given to providing adequate information, training, recognition and support, for volunteers who may only be involved in short-term or irregular activities. Remember to spend the time and resources to develop an effective infrastructure especially around communication and leadership to assist volunteers provide their best for the event.

- 6. Volunteers are the organisation.**

Many organisations are comprised entirely of volunteers. These organisations often believe that they do not need to consider certain aspects of their volunteer program. This is simply not true. For these organisations to be most effective they need to consider the same areas of systems, training, support and recognition although they may approach these very differently to formally structured organisations which have a majority of paid staff.

It is important to note that in many organisations the rationale for volunteer involvement may cover more than one of these areas. What is important is that everyone in the organisation is aware of the rationale for volunteer involvement. Often this is done through developing a philosophy or a vision of volunteer involvement.

Once you have agreed on the rationale for your program, there are a series of further questions that are useful to consider.

There are many possible stakeholders in a volunteer program including the consumers, the board, paid staff, funding bodies, various levels of government and the broader community. Involving volunteers will impact on every part of your organisation's work. Consider the views and roles of paid staff when considering these issues.

The organisation's philosophy

It is essential to consider how volunteer involvement fits with the mission and goals of your organisation.



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What is your organisation's view of volunteerism and those who volunteer? This will determine not only if volunteers are appropriate, but also will provide vital clues to what roles volunteers may be involved in and the way the volunteer program will be structured.

The organisational culture

What are the attitudes and beliefs that are fundamental to your organisation? These attitudes and beliefs inform the way the work of the organisation is approached, how individuals relate to each other and work together and how the world is viewed. It is critical that the organisational culture is welcoming and valuing of volunteers if the program is to be successful.

Job roles and responsibilities

How is the work of the organisation structured into the job roles and responsibilities of the staff? In considering how volunteers can be effective in assisting the work of the organisation, job roles and responsibilities will point to areas where volunteers may need to be involved and in what way these volunteers will need to be managed. Will staff manage volunteers or will they work alongside the volunteers in complementary roles? The additional responsibilities of staff working with volunteers must be adequately recognised and resourced. What jobs are appropriate for volunteers who will only work for one or two days a week? In best practice volunteer programs organisations have identified why they need volunteers, in what roles and numbers.

The relationships

Relationships in organisations are very complex. Relationships play a vital role in how decisions are made, how people work together and how volunteers will fit in the organisation. Consider if there is an atmosphere of trust and openness in your organisation. Do all staff value new ideas and fresh input? How do the staff treat newcomers? Particular consideration should be given to those who are consumers of the organisation and the type of relationship they expect with the organisation. Volunteers acting in helping roles may be perceived as disempowering and inappropriate by some consumers.

Resources

Volunteer programs require substantial resources to be effective. Consider resources such as physical space, resources to do the job, financial resources for everything from insurance to recognition events. Perhaps the least recognised resource requirement is that of time. Significant staff time will be involved if volunteers are to be adequately trained, supported and valued.

Barriers

Consider the barriers volunteers face in joining and working within our organisations. What are the costs of volunteering and can the organisation assist volunteers with these costs. Is your program physically or in some other way difficult to access? Have challenges for those with literacy issues or from different cultural backgrounds been considered? What messages does the organisation send through the language and images used in promotional materials? Is there enough flexibility to cater for the diversity of volunteers?



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Developing Board Support for the Volunteer Program

A critical factor in the long-term success of the volunteer program is a commitment to the program by senior management and the board.

Decision-makers need to understand the value of the volunteer program, not simply in dollars and cents, but in the many qualitative ways volunteers add to the organisation. They also need to recognise the amount of effort involved in facilitating volunteer involvement and the importance of getting it right.

Here are some practical strategies of how you can encourage this understanding.

- Identify the benefits for the organisation. Consider not only the immediate benefits but also the value added benefits of the volunteer program such as community promotion and education, future donors who once volunteered and the development of greater capacity within your organisation and community.
- Ensure systems are put in place to collect data which demonstrates the contribution to the organisation including number of hours worked, roles undertaken and dollar value of volunteers.
- Tell volunteer stories. Actively seek out stories about how volunteers made a difference and promote these to your board.
- Act as a leader within the organisation. Approach organisational issues as a problem solver. Be pro-active in ways volunteers can assist the organisation. Look for opportunities to assist.
- Demonstrate a commitment to the National Standards for Involving Volunteers (*Volunteering Australia 2002*) and involve your management team in developing a standards implementation team.
- Make a professional presentation including all the above points to your management committee.

Resourcing the Volunteer Program

In planning for involving volunteers it is essential to develop an appropriate budget that identifies and reflects the required resources to effectively coordinate, support, motivate and recognise volunteers.

One way for an organisation to demonstrate its commitment to the volunteer program is to acknowledge that these expenses are real and plan for them in the organisation's overall budget.

It is essential to consider all of the real costs of involving volunteers in the organisation. Here are *some* of the basic operational items that you may need to include in your volunteer program budget:

Administration

- Accounting costs
- Phone and fax
- Photocopy supplies
- Postage
- Printing
- Stationary
- Computer supplies and equipment
- Internet (e-mail)



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Volunteer Management

- Insurance – Personal accident, public liability, directors and officers
- Promotion and advertising
- Recognition
- Recruitment
- Reimbursement
- Staff amenities
- Subscriptions (newsletters, journals, peak bodies)
- Superannuation
- Travel costs
- Uniforms and badges
- Volunteer Manager – wages + on-costs
- Work Cover

Professional Development

- Training/Education/Professional Development – volunteer supervisors
- Training/Education/Professional Development – volunteers

Other Considerations

- Child Care
- Cleaning
- Electricity
- Rates
- Repairs and maintenance
- Resources & Publications
- Venue and equipment hire

Do not overlook other essential resources for the program that will be dependent upon the type of role that the volunteer will undertake including:

- equipment including telephones/computers (so that volunteers are able to complete assigned tasks)
- work space
- storage space
- facilities (e.g. toilets, staff room, parking, access)
- staff support
- role specific resources (e.g. motor vehicles, parking fees)

It is essential that all the costs of the volunteer program are identified and that they are adequately resourced in order for the program to be sustainable and effective.



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