Volunteering Victoria position statement
about
Replacing paid staff with volunteers
12 March 2014

Background

In the current economic climate, many not-for-profit organisations (NFPs) are faced with a difficult dilemma: they need to reduce costs because of funding constraints but they also need to maintain service provision due to the level of need in the community. In this situation, some NFPs may consider whether they could replace some paid staff with volunteers.

Determining what work should be done by paid staff and what work could be done by volunteers is increasingly complex. There are no longer any hard and fast rules about this: what is properly paid work in one NFP may be legitimate volunteer work in another; what was traditionally paid work in the past may now be widely accepted as volunteer work, and vice versa.

Volunteering Victoria’s position

Volunteering Victoria’s position about replacing paid staff with volunteers is:

1. Organisations must comply with the law

   NFPs must comply with the laws of Victoria and the Commonwealth at all times. In particular, NFPs must comply with legislative requirements about termination of paid staff and redundancy of paid positions.

   Further information is available on the Fair Work website:


2. We recommend compliance with the Definition and Principles of Volunteering and the National Standards for Involving Volunteers

   We recommend that NFPs comply with the Volunteering Australia Definition and Principles of Volunteering and the Volunteering Australia National Standards for Involving Volunteers in NFP Organisations. In particular, we recommend that NFPs comply with:
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- the definition that volunteering is an activity done in a position not designated as paid
- the principle that volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers.

Compliance with the definition, principles and standards is not mandatory but is broadly accepted as ‘best practice’ by volunteering stakeholders across Australia.

Further information is available at Appendix A.

3. We acknowledge it is a business decision

We recognise that despite their best efforts to comply with the Definition and Principles of Volunteering, sometimes NFPs just cannot afford to continue having paid staff perform particular roles. In those circumstances NFPs may have to choose between reducing services and engaging volunteers to perform those roles.

We acknowledge that (provided they comply with the law) NFPs are entitled to make a business decision about when they will engage volunteers and what roles they will engage volunteers to perform.

4. We recommend consideration of relationships with stakeholders and consultation

Before deciding to replace paid staff with volunteers, we recommend that NFPs carefully consider how this might affect relationships with paid staff, volunteers, clients and other stakeholders. We also recommend that NFPs consult appropriately with all relevant stakeholders. Some issues to consider include:

- Will this result in industrial action by staff or trade unions?
- Will paid staff continue to support and work harmoniously with volunteers if they perceive them as ‘a threat to job security’?
- Will volunteers want to perform these roles if they are perceived as ‘undermining staff’ or as ‘taking advantage of volunteers’?
- Will clients perceive they are receiving a ‘second-rate’ service if volunteers now perform these roles?
- How will other key stakeholders react (e.g. funders, donors and partner organisations)?
- Will there be bad publicity if the changes are perceived as inconsistent with the NFP’s values?

5. We recommend consideration of risk management issues

NFPs have legal and ethical responsibilities to protect clients, staff, volunteers and others from harm. The nature and extent of risks, and the strategies for addressing them may be different when roles are performed by volunteers rather than paid staff.

Before deciding to replace paid staff with volunteers, we recommend that NFPs carefully consider how this will affect risk management. Some issues to consider include:
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- insurance and liability for volunteers
- health and safety of volunteers
- qualifications and training of volunteers
- money handling by volunteers
- police checks and Working with Children Checks of volunteers
- privacy and intellectual property of volunteers
- dealing with conflict and complaints about volunteers
- preventing bullying and sexual harassment of volunteers.

Further information is available on our website:


6. We recommend consideration of the motivations and expectations of volunteers

Roles for paid staff mainly focus on meeting the NFP’s needs. In return for salary, staff are expected to meet selection criteria and performance requirements. Roles for volunteers are different because they must balance both the NFP’s needs and the needs of volunteers. In lieu of salary, volunteers have different motivations and expectations, which may not always align with the needs of the NFP.

Before deciding to replace paid staff with volunteers, we recommend careful consideration of the motivations and expectations of volunteers, and how they impact on the needs of the NFP. Some issues to consider include:

- Many volunteers prefer one-off, short-term or periodic roles and are less willing to commit to long-term or ongoing roles. Some volunteers may resign on short notice. What impact will turnover have on the quality, consistency and timeliness of service delivery? Will it affect the continuity of relationships with clients and knowledge management?
- Few volunteers are willing to work full-time and most have limitations on what days and times, and how frequently they are willing to volunteer. Some volunteers may be absent from work on short notice. What impact will part-time workers have on rostering, office space and other equipment requirements, and service delivery?
- Some volunteers have transport difficulties, or prefer to work from home or via the internet. What impact will this have on the location of service provision?
- Some volunteers expect to gain skills and experience from the role, and may be unable to perform some tasks. What impact will this have on service delivery, and training and supervision needs?
- Increasingly volunteers expect to use high level skills and experience, and may be unwilling to perform some roles. Who will do the mundane or unpleasant tasks?
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7. We recommend consideration of resources for volunteer management and other costs

Many people see volunteers as ‘free labour’ but running a volunteer program can require significant resources, in terms of management time and other support costs. Managing volunteers is becoming increasingly complex and, as discussed above, may be very different to managing paid staff. We believe that investing in appropriate volunteer management and providing adequate volunteer support (in compliance with the National Standards for Involving Volunteers) is critical to the success of any volunteer program.

Before deciding to replace paid staff with volunteers, we recommend careful consideration of the resources required for volunteer management and volunteer support. Some costs to consider include:

- employing a professional volunteer manager
- recruitment and induction
- training and development
- supervision and quality assurance
- insurance
- office overheads
- other equipment requirements
- reimbursing volunteer expenses (e.g. travel)
- employing staff to cover volunteer absences.

### Sample considerations for health sector NFPs

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legal: Are there any legal issues/requirements about who can provide these health services?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Principles of volunteering: Does having volunteers perform these roles comply with the definition, principles and standards of volunteering?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Business decision: Do we normally bill patients/Medicare/health insurers for these services? If so, is it appropriate to provide these services for free to some patients via volunteers? If not, can we fund them some other way?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Relationships: How will this change be perceived by staff, volunteers, patients and funders? What impact will it have on those relationships? Have we consulted appropriately?</td>
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<td>Risk management: How will we address risk management issues in relation to volunteers – especially professional indemnity insurance, liability for medical negligence, access to confidential patient information and the vulnerability of our patients?</td>
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<tr>
<td>Motivations/expectations of volunteers: Will the turnover of volunteers and/or having lots of part-time volunteers interfere with the continuity of therapeutic relationships with patients? Can we get enough volunteers with the right qualifications and experience?</td>
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<td>Resources: What are the costs involved in managing and supporting additional volunteers?</td>
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Inquiries about this position statement should be directed to:

Tonye Segbedzi
Manager, Policy & Advocacy
03 8327 8505
t.segbedzi@volunteeringvictoria.org.au

About Volunteering Victoria

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering. We provide support to volunteers and not for profits, and represent the interests of volunteering in Victoria.

Level 2/491 King Street
West Melbourne VIC 3003
www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au
Ph 03 8327 8500
Fax 03 8327 8599

ABN 79 378 017 212 Volunteering Victoria is endorsed as a Deductible Gift Recipient (DGR)
APPENDIX A: Volunteering Australia Definition and Principles of Volunteering and National Standards for Involving Volunteers

Definition

Volunteering is an activity which always takes place through a NFP organisation or project and is:

- of benefit to the community and the volunteer
- undertaken of the volunteer’s own free will and without coercion
- done for no financial gain
- in a position not designated as paid
- underpinned by the Principles of Volunteering.

Principles of Volunteering

- volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer
- volunteering is always a matter of choice
- volunteering is an activity that is unpaid and not undertaken for the receipt of salary, pension, government allowance or honorarium
- volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community
- volunteering is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs
- volunteering is an activity performed in the NFP sector only (N.B. those in the business sector and corporate organisations now also engage in volunteering for the benefit of NFP organisations and communities)
- volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers
- volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others
- volunteering promotes human rights and equality.

The National Standards cover:

- policies and procedures
- management responsibilities
- recruitment
- work and the workplace
- training and development
- service delivery
- documentation
- continuous improvement.

Further information about the definition, principles and standards is available on our website:
