The Principles of Volunteering

Guide

All volunteer programs benefit from a written design outlining how the program will run, what it will deliver and expectations of both the organisation and volunteers.

As a first step, make sure you can articulate the value volunteers will bring and their status within the organisation.

What is volunteering?

First, consider what we mean by volunteering.

The definition of volunteering is: 'time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain'.

'The term 'volunteering' covers a wide diversity of activities in Australian society. It includes formal volunteering that takes place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way and informal volunteering, acts that take place outside the context of a formal organisation.

While the vast majority of volunteering is undertaken by individuals, entities also donate employee time and this is included within this definition of volunteering.

Consideration of the term volunteering needs to also note best practice guidelines. Volunteering should not be exploitative or be used to replace paid employment. While volunteering provides substantial benefits to society, importantly it also provides significant benefits to the volunteers themselves. The personal benefits of volunteering need to be recognised and fostered.

Further information regarding best practice and the appropriate involvement of volunteers in organisations and more widely is available on the VA website.

Volunteer rights

Volunteering practice is not regulated by law like paid employment therefore it is particularly important that the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement are followed to ensure the best practice for all concerned. According to these standards, a volunteer has the right to:

- information about the organisation they are volunteering with
- a clearly written job description
- know to whom they are accountable and to whom they should report

- be recognised for your contribution and as a valuable member of the team you are part of
- be supported and supervised in their role
- a safe and healthy workplace, and be covered by insurance
- say 'no' if they are being exploited
- be reimbursed for any out-of-pocket expenses they may incur
- be advised of all relevant organisational policies that affect them in their role as a volunteer
- be informed and consulted on all matters affecting their work
- be made aware of the organisation's grievance procedure

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
- 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

"We'll just get volunteers to do it"

Given the definition of volunteering, what is your rationale for involving volunteers in your work?

If you are clear about why you want to engage volunteers, it will be much easier to design your volunteer program with the processes and shared expectations that will make it work.

Ask yourself:

- Do paid workers in other organisations carry out the work?
- Is the work covered by an industrial award or agreement?
- Is the suggested role or task unpopular with paid staff?
- Would the placement of volunteers in this role add value to the organisation?
- Would a volunteer offer a different relationship to the organisation's customers than a person who is paid?
- Does the suggested volunteer role have intrinsic value, and can it offer something to a volunteer?

Your answers to these questions will most likely highlight the kinds of things that only volunteers can do for your cause. These can include:

- personal attention in one-to-one relationships with clients
- the 'humanisation' of your organisation's services
- an opportunity to tap into different generations, cultures or life experiences
- closer contacts with the community in which your organisation provides its services
- new ideas, perspectives and input into the way the organisation and its services are run
- specialised skills and knowledge
- flexibility in the provision of services
- greater quality to the services you provide.

Volunteers' responsibilities

In addition to their rights, volunteer have responsibilities. The best-practice standards include:

- being reliable
- respecting privacy and confidentiality
- carrying out their volunteering job as specified in the job description
- being accountable for their own actions
- being committed to the project or organisation they are working for
- undertaking orientation and training as requested
- asking for support or assistance when needed
- giving notice beforeleaving
- valuing and supporting other members of the team
- carrying out the work agreed to, responsibly and ethically.

- Are volunteers sought solely in order to save money on salary?
- Have paid workers within the organisation ever carried out the work?

More information:

www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Definition-of-Volunteering-27-July-2015.pdf