



A National Agenda on Volunteering:

Beyond the International Year of Volunteers

An IYV legacy

Funded and supported by the Australian Government Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.


volunteering australia



The International Year of Volunteers was declared by the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1997. Australia, and in particular the 4,500 volunteer centres, played a significant role in petitioning for the year.

In June 2000, the two Australian lead community agencies for the International Year of Volunteers established a National Community Council of Advice to ensure that the community voice in the International Year of Volunteers was strong and influential. Over 300 national organisations were invited to join the Council.

One of the Council's most important decisions was to conduct a national consultation to identify the major issues facing volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations in Australia and the outcomes they would like to see as a legacy of this most important year. Face-to-face consultations were conducted in every state and territory and over 15,000 questionnaires were distributed.

A National Agenda on Volunteering: Beyond the International Year of Volunteers is the result of those consultations.

This document was initially produced in 2001 and remains relevant today as an important framework for volunteering in Australia. Several outcomes have now been achieved, but most continue to be ongoing concerns for the volunteering community. It is important to note that the 2006 update of this document has left the content largely unchanged, thereby confirming the significance of the work carried out by the National Community Council of Advice to create the National Agenda on Volunteering.

DEFINITION & PRINCIPLES

Definition of formal volunteering

Formal volunteering in Australia is defined as an activity which takes place through not-for-profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:

- to be of benefit to the community;
- of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- for no financial payment; and
- in designated volunteer positions only.



Principles of volunteering

- Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer.
- Volunteer work is unpaid.
- Volunteering is always a matter of choice.
- Volunteering is not compulsorily undertaken to receive pensions or government allowances.
- 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 not-for-profit sector only.
- Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work.
- 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 definition and principles were developed in 1997 by Volunteering Australia Inc through consultation with the volunteer sector, the unions and government.

Australian volunteers – key facts

- In 2004, 6.3 million Australians over the age of 18 years volunteered in Australia.
- Approximately 836 million hours were volunteered by adult Australians in 2004, with each volunteer donating on average 132 hours of their time.¹
- The largest number of hours, on average, was contributed by older and younger volunteers – 178 hours for the year by those aged 55-65 years and 132 hours for those 18-24 years.¹
- In 2004, 41% of adult Australians volunteered¹ compared with 34% in 2002 and 24% in 1995.²
- A growth in volunteer rates has occurred for both sexes and all age groups.
- The most active age group of volunteers is 35-44 years (47%).¹
- Researchers have estimated that volunteering contributes many billions of dollars each year to the Australian economy.

Scope of Australian volunteering

Volunteers work in all spheres of community and across many sectors including health and welfare, emergency services, arts and culture, heritage, environment and conservation, sport and recreation, education, overseas aid, religious, animal welfare, human rights and youth development.

Volunteers work in all types of environments and under different conditions. Sometimes their issues are unique to the sector within which they work but, more often than not, the issue is shared across all sectors.

¹ Giving Australia (2005) *Research on Philanthropy in Australia* Canberra: Australian Government Department of Family and Community Services

² Australian Bureau of Statistics (2003) *General Social Survey. Summary Results Australia* Cat No 4159.0. Canberra: Australian Bureau of Statistics

THE AGENDA

The community, volunteer-involving organisations, business and government are called upon to work together to:

1. Publicly respect and value in enduring, formal, and tangible ways, the essential contribution that volunteers make to building and sustaining the Australian community.

Australians have a tradition of assisting each other in times of need and hardship. Throughout our documented history we have examples of volunteer effort and its result. What we do not have as a nation is a commitment to accurately measure and value this activity. The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) estimates that nearly 6.3 million Australians provided 836 million hours of voluntary service to the community in 2004. The monetary value of all volunteer work, both formal and informal is estimated to be many billions of dollars per annum. We hope that after this International Year of Volunteers, Australia publicly acknowledges this contribution in, at least, the following ways:

Outcomes Sought

- 1.1** A permanent inclusion of a volunteer question in the Census of the Australian Population.

- 1.2** A regular collection of volunteer data by the ABS.

- 1.3** The economic value of volunteering quantified and included in the national accounts published quarterly by the ABS.

- 1.4** Volunteer-involving organisations acknowledge the work of volunteers and quantify its economic value in their Annual Reports.

- 1.5** Funding for research into issues that affect volunteers and volunteering.

- 1.6** A specific Volunteer Medal in the Order of Australia awards.

- 1.7** Recognition by corporate sponsors that volunteer projects of all sizes and the infrastructure to support volunteers merits funding.

- 1.8** Excellence Awards for volunteer projects, programs or services that involve, manage and deploy volunteers according to excellence criteria.



2. Ensure that volunteers have legal status and are afforded protection through every piece of legislation and public policy that affects them and their work.

Australian volunteers work in many settings and under a variety of conditions. Some work alongside paid employees and under identical circumstances, others work alone or as a group in situations that are less than safe. Unlike paid staff, volunteers are not always covered by legislation that protects or compensates within the workplace. Many volunteers are exposed to risk, injury, discrimination or prejudice in the absence of explicit mention in relevant legislation. Others carry huge financial responsibility or are exposed to legal liability. It is in the interests of all Australians that volunteers are protected under the law.

Outcomes Sought

- 2.1 State governments specifically include volunteer protection in the relevant Occupational Health and Safety Act(s).

- 2.2 The Equal Opportunity Acts around Australia overtly protect the rights of all volunteers, as with paid workers, to be 'employed' in accordance with non-discriminatory practices.

- 2.3 Workers' compensation legislation around Australia is consistent in the level of compensation offered to volunteers injured in the course of their voluntary work.

- 2.4 Anti-discrimination Acts explicitly mention volunteers.

- 2.5 An intergovernmental working group that identifies all of the relevant existing legislation across all jurisdictions and a methodology to address the process of legislative change and amendments.

It is in the interests of all Australians that volunteers are protected under the law.



3. Ensure that all new legislation, by-laws and public policies, developed at any level of government, which may affect volunteers and their work, work only to facilitate and sustain volunteering.

Volunteering has, over a number of years, developed into a significant and important social movement that is recognised worldwide. It is generally accepted that volunteering is underpinned by a set of principles and guidelines that are designed to protect not only the individual volunteer, but also volunteering. Implicit in the principles from around the world, and particularly in Australia, is the notion that volunteering gains strength only if it remains a non-exploitative expression of citizenship that is based on free will.

In Australia, the Principles of Volunteering were developed through consultation with the sector, government and the unions. Although individuals may at times work outside the principles, it is the principles that provide the framework that has assured the long-term viability of the volunteer movement. As Australian volunteers are increasingly relied upon to provide services, it is more important than ever to ensure that any legislation or policy affecting volunteers is firmly based on these principles.

Outcomes Sought

- 3.1** Governments and policy-makers both commit and subscribe to the Principles of Volunteering.

- 3.2** A guarantee from governments in all jurisdictions, to the volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations of Australia, that legislation or policy will not be implemented that has the potential to weaken the community activity of volunteering: this guarantee is ensured by consulting with the sector.

- 3.3** Volunteer peak bodies provide a Volunteer Impact Statement for any legislation or public policy likely to affect volunteers or volunteering.

- 3.4** Volunteer-involving organisations work with the peak bodies to ensure that responses to government policy or proposed legislation are informed and capture diverse viewpoints.



4. Acknowledge that the activity of volunteering is not without cost and develop means by which Australian volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are supported and funded to provide valuable services.

One of the greatest misconceptions about volunteering is that as volunteers are unpaid their involvement has no negative resource implication for either the volunteer-involving organisation or volunteers themselves. Many organisations have, to their dismay, felt the effect of underestimating the cost of involving and supporting volunteers.

Whilst it is proper to account for the considerable dollar value of volunteer contribution, it is equally as important to calculate the financial overheads needed to support volunteers in their work. Many volunteers cover their own costs in addition to providing valuable services for which they are not paid; others are simply unable to afford the outlay required of them.

The work of volunteers cannot be taken for granted by not-for-profit organisations, the community, business or governments and the cost of supporting them in their work should be considered as an investment in the future of Australia.

Outcomes Sought

- 4.1** Access to affordable and adequate volunteer and public liability insurance for volunteer-involving organisations.

- 4.2** Volunteer out-of-pocket expenses dealt with under the taxation system, any anomalies identified and resolved and some equitable means of providing relief for those outside the tax system is found.

- 4.3** Travel concessions for volunteers travelling to and from their volunteer workplace.

- 4.4** Volunteer-involving organisations have adequate allocations for volunteer management in their annual budget.

- 4.5** Government, when funding service providers that rely on volunteers, explicitly requires and provides for an adequate budget allocation for volunteer involvement, management, recognition and reimbursement.

- 4.6** Volunteer-involving organisations and funding providers, such as governments, businesses and trusts, recognise volunteer management as a genuine and necessary expense item in funding submissions and funding allocations.

With almost 6.3 million Australians actively engaged as volunteers, it is timely to ensure that standards for their involvement, management, and conditions of employment are met.

5. Ensure excellence in all levels of volunteer involvement and volunteer management in order to encourage, protect and enhance the work of volunteers.

Australia is a beautiful country that provides unique challenges to the community arising from its vast expanses of uninhabited and dangerous terrain and its susceptibility to natural disasters such as bush fires, landslides, storms and floods. Our successful response to emergencies is heavily dependent on the professionalism of volunteers. Much of our natural heritage is protected and conserved through the dedicated work of volunteers. Volunteers also work in sport and recreation, arts and culture, health, welfare, education, religious, animal welfare, youth development and human rights arenas to build a strong, cohesive society.

Australia has a small, culturally diverse population, a large percentage of which is nearing retirement age. This in itself will pose numerous challenges in the future delivery of volunteer services. Changing technology and the diversification of the volunteer role also has an influence on how volunteers are involved and managed. With almost 6.3 million Australians actively engaged as volunteers, it is timely to ensure that standards for their involvement, management, and conditions of employment are met.

Outcomes Sought

- 5.1 Volunteer-involving organisations comply with the National Standards for Involving Volunteers and other industry standards that impact on volunteers and their work.

- 5.2 Volunteer-involving organisations recognise that volunteers require and deserve training.

- 5.3 Standardised volunteer training by industry type.

- 5.4 Portable training to reduce unnecessary repetition and duplication for volunteers.

- 5.5 A national skills register to ensure recognition of previous training and skills.

- 5.6 Government funding for volunteer training.

- 5.7 A uniform, affordable and effective national system for pre-employment reference checking (police checks).

- 5.8 A positive image of volunteering portrayed through the media.

- 5.9 National youth strategies to ensure that young people are provided with the types of volunteer activities they seek.

- 5.10 Volunteer-involving organisations respect the rights of volunteers.

- 5.11 Shared resources for recruitment, such as online recruitment sites.

- 5.12 Standards of excellence in volunteer referral services.

- 5.13 Trained managers of volunteers.

- 5.14 Training packages for managers of volunteers.

- 5.15 Tertiary courses, for example, social work, sport, recreation and youth work include 'working with volunteers' as an elective subject.

- 5.16 Competency standards for volunteer management training to ensure a level of competence and a career path for managers of volunteers.

6. Ensure that volunteering is a potent, dynamic and unifying social force for community benefit by acknowledging and accepting that it is a diverse and evolving activity.

Volunteering was until recent years regarded as the province of the middle-class, middle-aged woman. So entrenched was this stereotype that it remains one of our greatest challenges to refashioning the image and building an awareness of the true scope and scale of volunteering. Of all the tasks that lie ahead of us, if we are to maintain the relevance of volunteering, the most important is to recognise and celebrate it as a changing, dynamic and inclusive movement for the common good.

Outcomes Sought

- 6.1 Volunteer-involving organisations have strategies in place to involve young people including redesigned job roles, short-term projects, group volunteering, and the needs, aspirations and motivations of young volunteers are accepted as valid.

- 6.2 The concept of corporate volunteering is widely accepted and encouraged as a legitimate way in which skills are transferred from the business sector to the voluntary sector for the benefit of the community.

- 6.3 Volunteer-involving organisations have strategies in place to remove barriers to the involvement of people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

- 6.4 Organisations have strategies in place to address gender imbalance.

- 6.5 The community work and support networks of indigenous Australians are recognised as valuable variations to the more formal activities typically accepted as volunteering.

- 6.6 Innovative forms of online volunteering opportunities are available to volunteers isolated through disability or locality or restricted by paid employment to volunteering outside business hours.

- 6.7 Innovative forms of volunteering opportunities to address complex social problems.



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A National Agenda on Volunteering: Beyond the International Year of Volunteers is the result of a national consultation that Volunteering Australia and Australian Volunteers International conducted on behalf of the IYV National Community Council of Advice to identify the major issues affecting volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

The IYV National Community Council of Advice would like to thank all those individuals and organisations who have contributed to the development of A National Agenda on Volunteering or assisted with organising forums or distributing questionnaires.

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