



volunteering australia

volunteering

policy consultation framework





Volunteering Australia, the national peak body for volunteering, develops policy on volunteering that influences public policy and volunteer management practices.

The range of publications and resources Volunteering Australia provides to its stakeholders is underpinned by policy. Volunteering Australia policy itself contributes to and is informed by the growing suite of foundation documents, such as the *Definition and Principles of Volunteering* and *A National Agenda on Volunteering: Beyond the International Year of Volunteers*.

Our role as leaders in volunteering policy requires that our policy positions on issues affecting volunteering, volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations are based on Volunteering Australia's accumulated knowledge on volunteering issues as well as the current experiences of our stakeholders. The *Volunteering Policy Consultation Framework* sets out how Volunteering Australia stakeholders contribute to the development of volunteering policy.

The role of consultation in policy development

Consultation is an important component of the policy development process. Volunteering Australia consults for the following reasons:

- to grow our knowledge
- to determine issues of importance
- to inform our decisions on policy
- to help us provide information to stakeholders.

Information gathered through consultation supplements literature reviews and our organisational knowledge. These diverse sources of information form the evidence base from which Volunteering Australia develops the policy positions that influence our advocacy and information provision activities. The broad range of participants and inputs reviewed means that consultation does not guarantee the adoption of particular viewpoints. However, these viewpoints do form part of the information base from which policy development proceeds.

Principles for effective policy consultation

The following principles guide the Volunteering Australia policy consultation process:

Proactive – consultation will seek to identify new issues as well as increase knowledge of established ones.

Timely – consultation will take place in a timeframe where Volunteering Australia can make the best use of the results in influencing outcomes, raising the profile of volunteering or providing information resources to stakeholders. Information about the consultation process will be imparted in a timely and professional manner.

Ongoing – the knowledge and experiences of our stakeholders change and so consultation on policy will be an ongoing process.

Achievable – our processes will be streamlined so that they do not ask too much of our stakeholders.

Acknowledged – participation in consultation will be recognised appropriately.

Communicated – feedback regarding the outcomes of policy activity will be provided to the stakeholders who were consulted.

Volunteering Australia stakeholders

- **Volunteer resource centres – whether Voluntary Work Initiative and/or Volunteer Management Program funded or unfunded**

- **State peak bodies for volunteering**

- Volunteering ACT
- Volunteering New South Wales
- Volunteering Queensland
- Volunteering South Australia
- Volunteering Tasmania
- Volunteering Western Australia
- Volunteering Victoria

- **Not for profit organisations involving volunteers (differentiated according to sector)**

- Arts/culture
- Business/professional/union
- Community/welfare
- Education/training/youth development
- Emergency services
- Environment/animal welfare
- Foreign/international
- Health
- Law/justice/political
- Religious
- Sport/recreation

- **Key users of Volunteering Australia information resources and publications, including:**

- Government
- Academics/researchers
- Volunteers
- Not for profit organisations (including other peak bodies)
- Business
- International organisations



A framework for policy consultation

What drives Volunteering Australia's policy development?

The impetus for policy development arises from within Volunteering Australia, volunteering centres and from the not for profit sector generally. This happens on both a proactive and reactive basis.

Volunteering Australia is working to proactively identify issues impacting on volunteering, the volunteer sector and volunteers in order to develop policy. Each year Volunteering Australia will conduct an annual survey to seek out issues that require a response or to be considered in developing resources.

Policy may also be developed in response to external events, particularly:

- reform to legislation or government policy, which often triggers requests for submissions or other input,
- changes in industry or sector practice, and
- new trends in volunteering.

In addition, issues requiring policy development or revision come to light via the following channels:

- records of inquiries from volunteers and not for profit organisations received and answered by Volunteering Australia,
- notification of issues by stakeholders,
- research,
- monitoring publications and websites,
- newsletters,
- media, and
- forums and events across the volunteering sector.

All stakeholders can bring information about policy issues directly to Volunteering Australia.

Finally, the policy development process is underpinned by key Volunteering Australia publications. Some are foundation documents, such as *A National Agenda on Volunteering*, *Beyond the International Year of Volunteers*, and the *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations*. Another key document is our *Volunteering Research Framework*, reflecting the close and mutually enriching relationship between policy and research.

Factors influencing consultation

The extent of consultation (who we consult and how much) and the methods we use will vary according to a number of factors. The main factors are:

- the type of issue (does it touch on volunteering as an activity in itself or is a sector-based issue?)
- the relative importance of the issue (is it core business?)
- time constraints (whether externally imposed or not)
- what is already known about the issue (how much research is required to understand it?).



Extent of consultation

Nationally, by state and by sector

Consultation will usually occur at a national level across one or more of the following stakeholder categories:

- state peak bodies for volunteering,
- volunteer resource centres (VRCs),
- volunteer-involving organisations,
- volunteers,
- sectors (e.g. emergency services)
 - peak bodies
 - volunteer-involving organisations
 - volunteers,
- academics and researchers,
- partner organisations.

Consultation may occasionally be confined to one state, where a policy response is required for a state-based issue that has a broader, national significance.

When Volunteering Australia needs to respond to a state-based issue, for example where there is an impact on a Volunteering Australia-run program, it will usually be appropriate to approach the state peak body in that state to consider a joint response, or to canvas opinion on the issue.

Our policy work on sector-based issues is likely to involve consultation with the relevant peak bodies for these sectors. Volunteering Australia may also collaborate on policy with peak bodies or other organisations within the relevant sector.

Through reference groups

The aim of reference groups is to explore volunteering issues in detail and develop policy responses and resources, while accessing a range of views, skill sets and experiences.

The composition of these groups will change over time to involve a range of stakeholders and access new perspectives.

In order not to burden participants, these groups will have a clearly defined role and are to be provided with a timeframe for completion.

Where possible, the reference groups will include volunteer centres, representatives from relevant not for profit sectors, and other external stakeholders.

Consultation strategies

Depending on the nature of the issue, the stakeholders affected and any time constraints that may apply, policy consultation on specific issues may include the following measures:

More than one month for policy development:

- Invite written submissions from stakeholders on issues of major importance.
- Conduct a brief survey (optional – frequency of surveys will be monitored to keep these information requests manageable for stakeholders).
- Form reference groups among stakeholders to explore volunteering issues and develop policy responses and resources.

Less than one month for policy development:

- Use online survey to pose questions/select issues of importance.
- Identify relevant stakeholders and consult with them by phone.
- Where the issue is sector-based, canvas a range of perspectives within the sector in a targeted way – such as small organisations, large (including national) organisations and organisations with an advocacy function (including peak bodies).

Ongoing consultation

Some consultation will occur on an ongoing basis in order to proactively identify issues that impact the volunteer sector.

- Annual policy survey. This survey will be distributed to all Volunteering Australia stakeholders. The survey will feature both guided and open ended sections in order to balance the need to obtain detailed responses as well as gather numerical data.
- Brief online surveys. The results will be used to support communications activities, such as media opportunities, and will also feed into the organisational knowledge base.

Recognising involvement in consultation

Except in the case of online surveys, participation in consultation is to be recognised in the following ways.

Where information is provided, Volunteering Australia will:

- acknowledge receipt of information;
- provide information about expected outcomes and next steps;
- provide access to relevant information resources and submissions; and
- inform of outcomes.

Participation in reference groups will be acknowledged similarly, with participants also acknowledged in appropriate publications and our annual reports.

The framework sets out the formal junctures at which Volunteering Australia's stakeholders can participate in setting the policy agenda on volunteering in Australia, as well as informal means of participation, such as raising issues directly with Volunteering Australia.

Volunteering Australia's *Volunteering Policy Consultation Framework* is our blueprint for initiating and engaging in policy debate into the future. It provides the means for synthesizing information about emerging policy issues, and deepening our understanding of existing issues. This synthesis of information allows Volunteering Australia, the peak body for volunteering in Australia, to engage in timely and informed policy interventions.





Volunteering Australia Inc.

Suite 2, Level 3
11 Queens Road
Melbourne VIC 3004

P: 03 9820 4100

F: 03 9820 1206

E: volaus@volunteeringaustralia.org

W: www.volunteeringaustralia.org

ARBN: 062 806 464

Published 2006

ISBN: 0 9767386 0 7

