



**volunteering** australia

## Inaugural National Survey of Volunteering Issues

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# 06



# Volunteering Australia

## *Inaugural National Survey of Volunteering Issues 2006*

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# 1. Executive Summary

## About the Volunteering Australia Inaugural National Survey of Volunteering Issues 2006

This report presents the findings of the Volunteering Australia Inaugural National Survey of Volunteering Issues 2006.

The aims of this survey are twofold. The first aim is to gather detailed information about how both public policy issues and volunteer management practices are experienced by volunteers and not for profit organisations. The second is to provide an opportunity for volunteers and organisations to raise issues relating to volunteering that may be emerging or new issues.

The report presents data on many issues relating to volunteering, including relationships between paid staff and volunteers, the rate of adoption of best practice volunteer management approaches. It also considers where shortfalls may exist in the provision of information resources which address volunteering issues.

The 2006 survey is the first of what will become an annual national volunteering survey conducted by Volunteering Australia. The survey builds on official statistics and academic research on volunteering to bring the picture of volunteering in Australia into greater focus. While the survey will be reviewed and adjusted over time, it represents an opportunity to benchmark some indicators for comparison over time.

Annual surveys will become an important aspect of Volunteering Australia's ongoing consultation with volunteers and volunteer-involving not for profit organisations. The information collected contributes to the work of Volunteering Australia in advocating for positive public policy outcomes for volunteering, and the provision of information resources to the volunteering sector.

### Key Findings

Six hundred and one volunteers and 572 volunteer-involving organisations commenced the survey, with 373 volunteers and 341 organisations completing the survey. The survey respondents are from all Australian states and territories. Volunteers and organisations from metropolitan areas were most likely to participate in the survey (61% of volunteers and 57% of organisations are from metropolitan areas).

Respondents were drawn from national organisations, locally based organisations and organisations confined to single states or territories. Volunteer respondents were more likely to volunteer with national organisations (44% of volunteers surveyed) while organisations were more likely to be locally based (45% of organisations surveyed).

The number of volunteers involved in organisations surveyed ranged from under 20 to over 300 (see Table 1.5).

Results of interest include:

- 97% of organisations surveyed rate volunteer recruitment as an issue of importance to their organisation.
- 81% of volunteers surveyed 'would personally appreciate' having their volunteer work recognised in the form of opportunities to develop their skills.
- 79% of volunteers surveyed identified flexible volunteering hours as important to them.
- 23% of organisations surveyed identified their organisation as having implemented the National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations
- 42% of volunteers surveyed do not have a clear, written job description for their role.
- 28% of volunteers surveyed said that they have been aware of confusion, uncertainty or conflict between the roles of volunteers and paid employees in their organisation.

Taken as a whole, the survey results indicate that many 'best practice' volunteer management strategies are being adopted by volunteer-involving organisations, but that for many organisations there is some way to go in terms of ensuring volunteers experience the full benefits of these approaches. By way of illustration, selected survey results are explored further in the following sections.

### **Adoption of *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations***

The survey results indicate that messages around best practice volunteer management are having a positive impact, with 23% of organisations surveyed identifying their organization as having implemented the *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations*, and a significant number of other organisations using them as a reference. It should be noted the survey did not provide any instructions by which to measure 'implementation', and there is currently no formal verification process for organisations who have implemented the National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations.

### **Adoption of other indicators contributing to best practice volunteer management**

Organisations involving volunteers reported high rates of adoption of selected sound volunteer management practice that are set out in the National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations. These practices include the purchase of public liability and personal accident insurance for volunteers, the maintenance and periodic review of written volunteer policies and, appointing managers of volunteers.

While many positive volunteering practices have been embraced by volunteer-involving organisations, the survey findings also show that some organisations do not take basic measures to support volunteers in their organisation. The results showed:

- 42% of volunteers surveyed do not have a clear, written job description for their role.
- 20% of volunteers surveyed feel they do not get the information and support they need to perform their role.
- 29% of volunteers surveyed cannot claim reimbursement for out of pocket expenses.
- 16% of volunteers surveyed feel they have not been given enough training to perform their role.
- 15% of volunteers surveyed said the organisation they volunteer with does not involve them in decisions that affect them and their work.

Volunteers were consistently less likely than organisations to identify these processes as being in place in the main organisation they volunteer with. While the volunteers surveyed are not necessarily working with the cohort of organisations surveyed, these results suggest that organisations may have some ground to make up in communicating their processes and policies more actively to volunteers to ensure volunteers in their organisation benefit from them.

### **Job descriptions for volunteer roles**

The survey results indicate one particular area where improvements in the volunteer experience can be made is in the conceptualisation and communication of volunteer roles and responsibilities. Forty-two per cent of volunteers surveyed indicated they do not have a clear, written job description for their volunteer role.

A complete volunteer job description should include the specific roles and responsibilities of the volunteer role, the nature of the time commitment involved and the skills and attributes required of the volunteer.

Written volunteer job descriptions assist at most points of the volunteer management process. They assist organisations to communicate what is expected and required of volunteers, enhance the effectiveness of volunteers and their contributions to organisations' goals, and may reduce incidences

of volunteers acting outside their duties or overlooking their responsibilities. In addition, volunteer job descriptions empower volunteers to measure their performance against the responsibilities outlined in the job description. Volunteer job descriptions, in marking out the responsibilities of the volunteer, can also assist with outlining differences and boundaries between paid workers and volunteers.

Sound job descriptions promote volunteer recruitment and retention because volunteers can assess at the outset, the nature and volume of the volunteer work involved. This approach, combined with the creation of enjoyable and meaningful volunteer roles, promotes the ability of organisations to recruit and retain the most suitable volunteers for their organisation.

Compared to the general volunteer sample, volunteers without job descriptions were more likely to report feeling unsupported in their work, inadequately trained and without opportunities to participate in decisions that affect them and their work. They were more likely to report having experienced uncertainty, conflict or confusion between paid workers and volunteers in their organisation.

Volunteers surveyed who do not have a clear, written job description for their volunteer role are more likely to work for locally based organisations who do not engage a manager of volunteers. Volunteers without clear, written job descriptions are more likely to be found in the sectors of community/welfare, emergency services (though not in direct emergency management duties), and sporting/recreation. Volunteers indicating they have clear, written job descriptions are more likely to be found in the education/training/youth development and volunteering infrastructure sectors.

Duties that are disproportionately likely to be undertaken without a job description include fundraising/retail, working with animals, campaigning /lobbying and professional/management. Volunteer roles more likely to be performed with a job description tend to entail direct service delivery and/or work with children, and include the categories of counseling/mediation/advocacy, administration/clerical work and hospital/allied health assistance.

## **Volunteer recruitment**

Attracting suitable volunteers was the issue most likely to be rated as important to volunteer-involving not for profit organisations, with 97% of organisations rating this as an issue of importance to their organisation.

The ability to attract suitable volunteers to not for profit organisations is an issue of sustainability for many organisations heavily or wholly reliant on volunteer labour.

Despite the importance of this issue, only 44% of organisations said they had accessed quality information about volunteer recruitment, and 16% said they require more information about volunteer recruitment.

## **Managing relationships between paid staff and volunteers**

Both volunteers and organisations recorded striking responses to questions about the relationships between paid staff and volunteers in volunteer-involving organisations. Twenty-eight per cent of volunteers said that they have been aware of confusion, uncertainty or conflict between the roles of volunteers and paid employees in their organisation.

Confusion, uncertainty and conflict between paid staff and volunteers can occur for a number of reasons. These may include a lack of clarity around paid and volunteer roles (perhaps resulting in perceptions that volunteers are doing work that should be paid), that volunteer labour is used to replace paid positions or operational tensions and value judgements about the professionalism of paid staff versus volunteers. Any of these problems can lead to considerable discord within volunteer-involving organisations.

Most of the volunteers who indicated they have experienced confusion, uncertainty or conflict between

the roles of volunteers and paid staff elaborated on the nature of the confusion, uncertainty or conflicts in an open ended survey question. These qualitative responses could be grouped around the following broad themes:

- The skills of volunteers are not recognised and valued as highly as those of paid staff.
- Confusion between roles – paid and unpaid workers performing the same functions.
- Resentment towards paid staff and their roles ('we don't want to be managed').
- Paid staff sometimes feel threatened by skilled, experienced volunteers.

Ninety per cent of volunteer-involving organisations surveyed identified managing the relationships between paid and volunteer staff as an important issue for their organisation. Qualitative data provided from the perspective of volunteer-involving organisations centred on the following themes:

- Power imbalances and struggles between paid staff and volunteers
- Uncertainty around whether certain roles within individual organisations should be performed by volunteers or by paid staff.
- The difficulty of openly addressing these issues within organisations:

*'Relations between paid staff and volunteers is an issue that is often ignored or swept under the carpet. It can be challenging, and further help with it would be good. It can create tensions in an organisation.'*

Nineteen per cent of volunteer-involving not for profit organisations indicated they would like to access further information to assist with managing the relationships between paid staff and volunteers.

## 2. Notes on methodology

The volunteering survey was conducted using separate questionnaires for volunteers and volunteer-involving not for profit organisations. Because volunteers sometimes volunteer with more than one organisation, they were requested to answer according to their main volunteering involvement. Many of the questions were complementary allowing for some analysis of findings on similar themes for both cohorts.

The questionnaire firstly aimed to quantify the experiences of volunteers and organisations of well known public policy and volunteer management issues. Questions on these issues were presented as multiple choice or rating scales. A second aim of the research was to explore emerging, or lesser known, volunteering issues. Open ended questions were used to invite survey participants to nominate areas where they faced barriers to volunteering, where they were unable to access information, expand on answers provided elsewhere in the survey and make any other comments about their experiences.

To enable Volunteering Australia to reach a national audience, the questionnaire was conducted online using a subscription based online survey provider. The survey was promoted to Volunteering Australia's stakeholders through the use of a pop-up survey on the Volunteering Australia website. In addition an email linking to the survey was distributed through the network of volunteer resource centres. In this email the offer of limited hard copies to be provided on request was made. Less than 50 hard copies of the questionnaire were distributed with 16 completed hard copy surveys returned to Volunteering Australia. The survey was also promoted in a number of national e-newsletters targeting not for profit organisations. As a result of these distribution methods, the results of the survey are biased toward volunteers and not for profit organisations with an information and communications technology capability.

Some attrition of respondents occurred over the length of the survey, meaning that the sample numbers vary between questions. All survey respondents for individual questions have been used, even if some respondents did not go on to complete the entire survey.

While it is likely that some of the volunteers surveyed belong to not for profit organisations who also completed the survey, this is by no means guaranteed. Because the survey is anonymous, it is not

possible to correlate volunteers and the organisations that involve them where these both participated in the survey. This places a limitation on what inferences can be drawn around differing responses on the same or similar questions for the two cohorts.

## 3. Tables

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## Respondent Demographics

### 1. Organisation types – national/state/local: volunteers and organisations

Organisation type	Volunteers		Organisations		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
National organisation	210	44%	136	27%	346	35%
State based	145	31%	145	28%	290	29%
Locally based	119	25%	230	45%	349	35%
Total	474		511		985	

### 2. Rural/regional and metropolitan responses: volunteers and organisations

Location	Volunteers		Organisations		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Metropolitan area	292	62%	291	57%	583	59%
Rural/regional area	183	39%	220	43%	403	41%
Total	475		511		986	

### 3. State/territory: volunteers and organisations

State/territory	Volunteers		Organisations		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
ACT	117	25%	56	11%	173	18%
NSW	75	16%	108	21%	183	19%
NT	3	1%	3	1%	6	1%
QLD	73	15%	62	12%	135	14%
SA	61	13%	74	14%	135	14%
TAS	20	4%	23	5%	43	4%
VIC	114	24%	125	24%	239	24%
WA	12	3%	60	12%	72	7%
Total	475		511		986	

\*Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

#### 4. Industry sector: volunteers and organisations

Industry sector	Volunteers		Organisations		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Arts/culture	23	5%	23	5%	46	5%
Business/professional/union	4	1%	8	2%	12	1%
Community/welfare	160	34%	250	49%	410	42%
Education/training/youth development	63	13%	35	7%	98	10%
Emergency services	87	18%	9	2%	96	10%
Environment	14	3%	24	5%	38	4%
Foreign/International	1	0%	2	0%	3	0%
Health	30	6%	93	18%	123	12%
Law/justice/political	12	3%	6	1%	18	2%
Religious	14	3%	10	2%	24	2%
Sport/recreation	46	10%	23	5%	69	7%
Volunteering infrastructure	21	4%	28	6%	49	5%
Totals	475		511		986	

#### 5. Number of volunteers: organisations

Number of volunteers in organisation	Number	%
1-19	125	25%
20-49	107	21%
50-99	76	15%
100-299	82	16%
300+	121	24%
Total	511	

\*Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

## 6. Duties undertaken by volunteers in organisation: volunteers (main involvement) and organisations

Volunteer duty type	Volunteers performing duty type		Organisations with volunteers performing duty type	
	Number	%	Number	%
Administration/clerical	194	41%	339	66%
Arts/crafts/performing	27	6%	110	22%
Campaigning/lobbying	58	12%	75	15%
Coaching/umpiring	37	8%	25	5%
Community/sporting events	84	18%	113	22%
Counselling/mediation/advocacy	51	11%	99	19%
Disability support services	23	5%	121	24%
Education/tutoring/mentoring	113	24%	166	33%
Emergency response/safety/rescue	104	22%	47	9%
Food service	47	10%	97	19%
Fundraising/retail	124	26%	189	37%
Gardening/outdoor activities	35	7%	127	25%
Hospital/allied health assistance	18	4%	76	15%
Information technology/library services	27	6%	89	17%
Marketing/public relations/media	62	13%	106	21%
Material relief	8	8%	28	6%
Professional/management/committee	95	20%	178	35%
Providing information/visitor guiding	49	10%	107	21%
Technical/mechanical/maintenance	28	6%	53	10%
Visit/social support/driving	57	12%	213	42%
Working with animals	30	6%	17	3%
Working with children/youth	136	29%	163	32%
Working with the aged	37	8%	184	36%
Writing/editing/research	41	9%	70	14%
Other	53	11%	82	16%

\*Volunteers may give multiple reasons. Therefore totals do not add up to 100%.

\*Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

## Survey results

### 7. Locating volunteer work: volunteers

Means of locating volunteer roles	Volunteers who located volunteer work this way	
	Number	%
GoVolunteer website <a href="http://www.govolunteer.com.au">www.govolunteer.com.au</a>	24	5%
Other website	31	7%
Through a friend/relative	150	32%
Volunteer centre	21	4%
Advertising by organisation – local newspaper	61	13%
Advertising by organisation – community notice board	15	3%
Advertising by organisation – newsletter	21	4%
Other	152	32%
Total	475	

### 8. Use of volunteer policies in not for profit organisations: organisations

Organisational practice	Yes		No		Unsure	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Organisation has written volunteer policy	292	84%	40	12%	15	4%
Organisation has written volunteer policy and reviews policy regularly	259	83%	29	9%	25	8%
Volunteers participate in reviewing processes/issues affecting them	270	78%	56	16%	20	6%

\*Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

## 9. Use of volunteer policies in not for profit organisations: volunteers

Implementation of volunteer management policies	Yes		No		Unsure	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Organisation has written volunteer policy	287	71%	48	12%	69	17%
Volunteer policy provided to volunteers for reference	270	84%	52	16%	-	-
Volunteers participate in reviewing processes/issues affecting them	300	74%	62	15%	42	10%

## 10. Volunteer involving not for profit organisations assessment of the adequacy of information communication technology (ICT) in their organisation

Adequacy of information communication technology in organisation	Organisations surveyed	
	Number	%
Adequate information communication technology	275	79%
Inadequate information communication technology	36	10%
Unsure	35	10%
Total	346	

\*Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

**11. Volunteer management – adoption of volunteer management processes by organisations: organisations**

Volunteer management process	Process used		Process not used		Unsure whether process is used	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
A designated contact person	329	95%	13	4%	5	1%
Opportunities for volunteers to give feedback	329	95%	10	3%	8	2%
Orientation process	324	93%	19	5%	4	1%
Occupational health and safety measures at the same standard as for paid employees	321	93%	14	4%	12	3%
Training for volunteer roles	317	92%	25	7%	4	1%
Open recruitment/background checking process	312	90%	26	7%	9	3%
Grievance procedures	287	83%	42	12%	17	5%
Volunteer appraisal/performance management processes	192	56%	123	36%	30	9%

**12. Volunteer management – use of volunteer management processes by organisations: volunteers**

Volunteer management process	Process used		Process not used		Unsure whether process is used	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
A designated contact person	366	91%	22	5%	16	4%
Training for volunteer roles	344	85%	45	11%	15	4%
Opportunities for volunteers to give feedback	336	83%	37	9%	31	8%
Orientation process	331	82%	52	13%	21	5%
Occupational health and safety measures at the same standard as for paid employees	269	67%	52	13%	83	21%
Open recruitment/background checking process	295	73%	54	13%	55	14%
Grievance procedures	248	61%	47	12%	109	27%
Volunteer appraisal/performance management processes	179	44%	118	29%	107	26%

\*Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

### 13. Volunteer satisfaction with volunteer management within not for profit organisations involving volunteers

Organisation type	Volunteers		Organisations		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
A designated contact person	336	83%	35	9%	33	8%
Training for volunteer roles	319	79%	54	13%	31	8%
Orientation process	311	77%	44	11%	49	12%
Open recruitment/background checking process	307	76%	23	6%	74	18%
Opportunities for volunteers to give feedback	293	73%	71	18%	40	10%
Occupational health and safety measures at the same standard as for paid employees	265	66%	36	9%	103	25%
Grievance procedures	219	54%	49	12%	136	34%
Volunteer appraisal/performance management processes	190	47%	76	19%	138	34%

### 14. Organisations ratings of importance of volunteering issues to their organisation

Volunteering issue	Important		Not important		Unsure	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Attracting suitable volunteers	336	97%	6	2%	4	1%
Managing Risk	333	97%	6	2%	6	2%
Obtaining appropriate insurance	311	91%	20	6%	10	3%
Managing the relationship between paid and volunteer staff in my organisation	308	90%	26	8%	9	3%
Understanding my organisations insurance needs	304	89%	20	6%	18	5%
Engaging a diverse workforce	301	88%	35	10%	8	2%
Background checking of volunteers, including police checks and working with children checks	301	88%	37	11%	6	2%
Understanding extent of/limits to volunteer liability in your state	294	86%	20	6%	29	8%
Accommodating volunteers who have paid employment and caring demands (including for children)	255	75%	61	18%	26	8%
Taxation/reimbursement of volunteer costs	241	71%	59	17%	41	12%

\*Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

**15. Quality of information accessed on issues relating to volunteer involvement within not for profit organisations**

Volunteering issue	Have accessed quality information on this issue		Have accessed some information on this issue		Require more information about this issue	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Background checking of volunteers, including police checks and working with children checks	203	59%	74	22%	31	9%
Managing Risk	201	59%	86	25%	39	11%
Obtaining appropriate insurance	198	58%	69	20%	36	11%
Understanding my organisations insurance needs	176	51%	90	26%	42	12%
Attracting suitable volunteers	149	44%	118	35%	56	16%
Managing the relationship between paid and volunteer staff in my organisation	130	38%	101	30%	65	19%
Engaging a diverse workforce	114	33%	115	34%	76	22%
Understanding extent of/limits to volunteer liability in your state	109	32%	98	29%	105	31%
Taxation/reimbursement of volunteer costs	91	27%	95	28%	96	28%
Accommodating volunteers who have paid employment and caring demands (including for children)	62	18%	98	29%	82	24%

\*Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

## 16. Recognition of volunteers within not for profit organisation: volunteer satisfaction

Organisation type	Number	%
Volunteers are sufficiently recognised in my organisation	252	68%
Volunteers are insufficiently recognised in my organisation	97	26%
Unsure	24	6%
Total	373	

## 17. Strategies for recognising volunteers: volunteers nominating which measures they would 'personally appreciate' and organisations surveyed which recognise volunteers in these ways

Volunteering issue	Yes – would appreciate	No - would not appreciate	Unsure	Organisations surveyed who recognise volunteers in this way
Opportunities for skills development (e.g. through training)	81%	11%	7%	80%
Social event to recognise volunteers	72%	19%	8%	79%
Acknowledgement by organisation of International Volunteer Day/National Volunteer Week	67%	22%	11%	69%
Recommendation of volunteers to prospective employees	67%	19%	14%	60%
Encouragement from your organisation to participate in organisational processes	62%	23%	15%	64%
Recognition in annual reports	62%	25%	14%	81%
Opportunities for volunteers to take on additional responsibility	60%	27%	13%	57%
Organisational awards with plaques/certificates	60%	28%	11%	72%
Inclusion of volunteers in staff coffee breaks/celebrations	56%	30%	14%	66%
Profile in local media	51%	34%	15%	38%
Giving volunteers birthday and Christmas cards	43%	45%	13%	57%

\*Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%

## 18. Flexible hours for volunteers: volunteer rating

Is flexibility in volunteering hours important to you?	Number	%
Yes	296	79%
No	77	21%
Total	373	

## 19. Accommodating volunteers – volunteer management strategies: organisations

Volunteer management strategy	Organisations surveyed who have used strategy	
	Number	%
Flexible hours for volunteering	234	68%
Short term volunteering	231	67%
Once-off volunteering opportunities	193	56%
Volunteering for youth/children under 18	133	39%
Workplace/corporate volunteering	97	28%
Family volunteering	58	17%
Virtual volunteering (via Internet/telephone)	50	15%

## 20. Insurance held by not for profit volunteer-involving organisations

Insurance type	Yes – organisation has insurance		No – organisation does not have insurance		Unsure if organisation has insurance	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Personal accident insurance	281	82%	26	8%	36	10%
Public liability insurance	327	94%	1	0%	19	5%

## 21. Reimbursements to volunteers by organisations for out of pocket expenses: organisations and volunteers

Reimbursement provided	Volunteers		Organisations	
	Number	%	Number	%
Yes – in full or in part	231	57%	272	78%
No	115	28%	64	18%
Unsure	58	14%	11	3%
Total	404		347	

\*Due to rounding, percentages may not add up to 100%



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