



## **BACKGROUND PAPER**

# **The Review of the National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations**

## **PHASE 1**

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**REVIEW OF  
VOLUNTEERING AUSTRALIA'S  
NATIONAL STANDARDS FOR INVOLVING VOLUNTEERS  
IN NOT FOR PROFIT ORGANISATIONS**

**PHASE 1**

**1. Objective and Expected Outcome**

Volunteering Australia's objective is to evaluate the effectiveness and improve the application and accessibility of the eight national standards for involving volunteers in not-for-profit organisations by thorough and targeted consultation with a broad range of stakeholders. During Phase 1 neither the Implementation Guide nor the Workbook will be examined.

The expected outcome of this first phase of the review is that a Feasibility and Impact Study, including recommendations compiled of the feedback from the consultation process, will be available to guide the next phase of the review. This will include consideration and incorporation of recommendations, drafting revised National Standards and piloting them.

**2. About the National Standards**

The *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations* (the 'National Standards') were developed and endorsed by Volunteering Australia ('VA') in 1997 following an extensive national consultation process. The development of the National Standards was a spin-off outcome of a Home and Community Care project undertaken by Volunteering Victoria, which focused on the role of volunteers in food services and identified the need to develop best practice standards for the management of volunteers involved in food service delivery.

Together with the *Definition and Principles of Volunteering*, and the *Model Code of Practice*, the National Standards are considered one of VA's foundation documents setting the benchmark for best practice and providing detailed guidance for organisations involving volunteers. The standards cover the following aspects of volunteer involvement:

1. Policies and procedures
2. Management responsibilities
3. Recruitment
4. Work and the workplace
5. Training and development
6. Service delivery
7. Documentation and records
8. Continuous Improvement

Though it is not known exactly how many organisations have implemented the National Standards sales have exceeded 20,000, it is known that they are highly regarded within the not-for-profit sector, as well as government and the for-profit sector, as an accepted framework for advancing volunteering in Australia. In VA's *National Survey of Volunteering Issues 2008*, 48% (419) of organisational respondents reported that they had implemented the National Standards. These organisations ranged in size from small to large (in terms of numbers of volunteers managed), in all states and territories. Highest reportage was in the community/welfare, health and volunteering infrastructure sectors.

### **3. Why Review?**

A decade on since the National Standards were first introduced, and in a climate of development in the volunteering sector, it is timely to engage in a review process of the National Standards. This is particularly important in terms of emerging trends in volunteering, such as episodic and project volunteering, spontaneous volunteering, demographic changes and expectations, the engagement of volunteers outside the not-for-profit sector and an increasing focus on the importance of quality management of volunteers – at both an individual manager level and an organisational level.

Through a review of the National Standards, the not-for-profit sector, including organisations, managers of volunteers and volunteers, can have input into the continuous improvement of the National Standards. By testing their ongoing application and relevance, it provides the opportunity to increase future uptake of the National Standards, which in itself supports volunteering and volunteers across Australia.

### **4. Purpose of the National Standards – has it changed?**

Over the course of 10 years, the application of the National Standards appears to have shifted from an individual volunteer perspective to an organisational focus.

In their early development, in recognition of Australia's volunteer workforce making a significant contribution to gross domestic product, it was stated that 'the need for standards to protect their (volunteer) rights is becoming increasingly important'. The National Standards were developed as a sound set of management practices, their primary purpose being to ensure that volunteers:

- are not exploited because of their commitment
- work in healthy and safe environments; and
- have the right to have their role clearly articulated

In the Foreword of the National Standards (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition 2001) it was stated that ‘the standards are also designed to help organisations involve and retain the services of volunteers on whom they so depend<sup>1</sup>’.

Today, we might identify the primary purpose and application of the National Standards as supporting organisations to develop, implement and refine quality, sustainable management practices that effectively engage, support, value and protect the volunteer workforce. The shift is subtle, but has relevance for the process of review of the National Standards.

## 5. The Extent of the Review

The National Standards are currently provided as a bound document and are part of a purchased resource pack from VA which includes:

- ***The National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations***
- The Implementation Guide
- The Workbook and Resources Kit

While it is recognised that these three complementary resources are often utilised as a complete toolkit for implementation of the National Standards, the extent of this review will be limited to the single resource that is the National Standards. The associated resources and their ongoing relevance will be considered in light of the recommendations emanating from this first phase.

A further limitation of the current process is that, in the timeframe that is available and with the funding that has been granted by the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, a Feasibility and Impact Study will be the outcome of this phase of the review. The next phase of considering and incorporating recommendations, drafting revised National Standards and piloting them will require additional resources, including time and funding.

## 6. Devising a thorough Consultation Process

One of the first stages in coordinating a review of the National Standards has been to seek feedback from volunteering infrastructure organisations across Australia. This includes State Centres and Volunteer Resources Centres, who are considered to have expert working knowledge of the National Standards through having implemented them in their own organisations, as well as supporting the implementation of them in not-for-profit organisations involving volunteers. Input was sought from a state, regional, rural and remote perspective through the Volunteer Management Program (VMP) forum (volunteering infrastructure

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<sup>1</sup> Ric Holland, Chairperson, Standards Review Panel, Volunteering Australia, 2001

funded through the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs) facilitated by VA in December 2008.

In a workshop format, participants were asked to consider the proposed timeline and ways in which they, as VMP providers, could facilitate and have input to the consultation process. From this feedback VA has devised a thorough and comprehensive consultation process that aims to be inclusive and considerate of all facets of diversity across the sector and community. This can best be summarised as follows:

### ✓ **Background Paper and Guidance from Volunteering Australia**

VA has compiled this background and brief overview of the National Standards to include a clear objective and expected outcome of the review. Feedback indicated that precise clarity about what is being reviewed, how that will occur and the timeline within which participants must work were imperative to facilitating a thorough consultation process.

### ✓ **Survey Design Panel to Support Phase 1**

VA is inviting organisational representatives and individuals with expertise in volunteering and implementation knowledge of the National Standards to nominate themselves to provide a guiding role in this stage of the review process. This will include providing constructive feedback to VA on the development of the data collection tools (see below) consistent with a developed Terms of Reference and the agreed timeline. Communication with the Survey Design Panel will be via telephone, email, e-forum as well as selected visits of VA staff to states and territories.

### ✓ **Inclusive Consultation Process**

Maximising inclusiveness in the consultation process is imperative. Engaging organisations and individuals who are representative of the following broad areas of diversity is required:

- Volunteering infrastructure (State Centres / VRCs)
- Small / medium / large organisations (in terms of volunteer numbers)
- Metro / regional / rural and remote organisations
- Volunteer-managed organisations
- Volunteers
- Government
- Sector diversity
- Individual diversity: disability, indigenous, CALD

### ✓ **Clear, simple and accessible data collection tools and supporting resources**

A variety of data collection tools that are clear, simple yet comprehensive, and easy to understand will be developed by VA with support from the Survey Design Panel. These survey tools will include:

- an on-line survey hosted on the VA website
- a paper survey that can be downloaded from the VA website
- an information resource package that will inform groups through networks and memberships etc, and will include a powerpoint presentation
- communication articles for use in organisational members' newsletters, websites, communiqués etc.

These resources will be available on-line through VA's website and distributed broadly through volunteering infrastructure eg: State Centres, Volunteer Resources Centres, local governments, state government volunteer offices/secretariats, respondents to VA's National Survey, organisations who have purchased the National Standards, via VA's monthly e-newsletter InVOLve, and others who may wish to take part in the process.

✓ **Specified Timeframes for Respondents to work within**

Key Tasks	Start Date	End Date
Invitation to Survey Design Panel distributed and response received	Feb-27	Mar-05
Draft questions (all survey modes) sent out to Survey Design Panel	Mar-10	
Feedback from Survey Design Panel on draft questions	Mar-10	Mar-20
VA prepares final questions for survey modes	Mar-20	Mar-30
Information resource kits sent to State Centres / VRCs / local govt etc	Mar-30	
On-line survey goes live	Apr-06	May-25
All data analysed and collated by VA	May-26	Jun-20
Feasibility and Impact Study compiled by VA		Jun-30

✓ **Benchmarking against other Standards Frameworks**

As part of the review process, VA will be investigating similar standards frameworks, nationally and internationally, to benchmark the National Standards. This will also include an analysis of the Standards Australia framework.

For further information email your enquiry to [nationalstandards@volunteeringaustralia.org](mailto:nationalstandards@volunteeringaustralia.org) or contact Annette Maher, Research Officer or Sandra Wilson, Policy Officer (03) 9820 4100