



Subject Guide

EVENT VOLUNTEERING – TAKE A CLOSER LOOK

For people who would like to volunteer for events; who plan and manage events; who train volunteers for events; and for researchers interested in learning about event volunteering.



NVSC is a project of Volunteering Australia

Funded by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs

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Published by Volunteering Australia
First published December 2006

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These learning materials are published by Volunteering Australia for the National Volunteer Skills Centre and funded by the Australian Government department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs.

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ARBN 062 806 464

ISBN 13: 978-1-921213-15-1
ISBN 10: 1-921213-15-9

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Front cover image: The Yackandandah Folk Festival's Sunday Market in the Historic Main street draws a huge crowd.

Courtesy of the Yackandandah Folk Festival. 2006 NAB Award State winner: Art and Culture (VIC).

Event Volunteering – Take a closer look can be used in conjunction with the online Subject Guide – Event Volunteering on Volunteering Australia's website. The Subject Guide lists free resources that can be accessed on the internet and is divided into four sections:

1. *Fast facts*, to give you an understanding of issues related to event volunteering.
2. *Training materials*, more in-depth resources to help you build your skills and knowledge, and help you to train others in your organisation.
3. *Research findings, reports and journal articles*, to extend your understanding of this subject.
4. *Event Volunteering – Take a closer look*, is also available in PDF format as the final section of the online Subject Guide.

The online Subject Guide is accessible at <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org> > Publications.



Carclew's Off the Couch volunteers involved in the Adelaide Fringe 2006 Parade.

Courtesy of Carclew Youth Arts
– Off the Couch. 2006 NAB Award State
Winner: Art and Culture (SA).

In the past, not-for-profit organisations have primarily relied on the long-term, continuous involvement of volunteers who undertake tasks that, while helping the organisation to meet its goals, are part of the ongoing, day-to-day work of the organisation. This is traditional organisational volunteering. A recent trend to emerge is a demand for finite volunteer roles with an obvious beginning, middle and end. These volunteering experiences are variously called:

- event volunteering;
- short-term volunteering;
- episodic volunteering;
- one-off volunteering;
- 'done in a day' volunteering; or
- project volunteering.

While these terms are often used interchangeably, it's worth bearing in mind that there are some differences, especially between project volunteering and event volunteering. Project volunteering can include activities – large and small – other than 'events'. Some of these might be focused on the organisation's day-to-day work, but packaged into a discrete set of activities with a particular outcome in mind. Examples include the development of a promotional brochure, the review of an organisation's policies, and the creation of an organisation's annual report.

The focus of this resource and the accompanying online Subject Guide is event volunteering. While events are usually regarded as projects themselves, they also occur 'in a certain place, during a particular interval of time'.¹ An event volunteer is a person who volunteers for a particular role within a particular type of project. These projects could be a one-day event such as a sporting carnival, the launch of an artistic or cultural exhibition, a school fete, a music festival, a rally for a social cause, or a conference.

So what is it that makes an event volunteer experience different to an ongoing, traditional volunteer position? Differences between these experiences include:

- event volunteering has a definite start and finish time;
- effort may be focused on the event or project rather than on the organisation's day-to-day work;
- the event volunteer may derive satisfaction from participation in the event, while the ongoing volunteer may derive satisfaction from their long-term involvement and being part of the evolution and development of the organisation of which events are only one component;
- recurring events may attract the same people year after year but always only for a fixed period of time.

¹ Macquarie Dictionary, revised 3rd ed.

Emerging trends in volunteering

There has been a steady increase in volunteering in Australia over the past decade which suggests that Australians value volunteering and are increasingly choosing volunteering as a way to contribute to the community. Coupled with this strong volunteering ethos are the general sense that we are busier than ever and a cultural belief in the need to maintain a good work/life balance. It is possible that this accounts for the growing demand for short-term volunteering roles, as these can enable family involvement, have a set time commitment and can be accommodated alongside other competing demands for time.

A wider range of volunteering roles has become available as organisations endeavour to respond to these environmental trends. As the situation evolves, different volunteer management practices emerge and the ways volunteers source appropriate roles also change. Generally, we are seeing:

- not-for-profit organisations encouraging volunteers to be explicit about why they are volunteering and what they want to get out of the experience;
- volunteers being more aware that they have rights which should be upheld, coupled with plenty of organisations, causes and experiences to choose from. This may contribute to volunteers becoming more selective about their volunteering experiences; and
- the advent of 'corporate/employee volunteering' where organisations provide one or two days for employees to volunteer with not-for-profit organisations.



Courtesy of Victorian Seniors Festival, 2005.

Volunteering stereotypes and the reality of event volunteering

The word 'volunteer' conjures different images. Ask a random group of people who have not given the term 'volunteering' much thought and you might hear volunteers described as:

- fire-fighters;
- people who deliver meals;
- people who raise money for good causes;
- retirees; or
- people who 'rattle tins' (i.e. fundraising).

The myths surrounding volunteering have begun to be dispelled as public awareness of volunteering and volunteers has grown following high-profile events such as the Sydney Olympic Games 2000, Melbourne Commonwealth Games 2006, the emergency response to the tsunami disaster, and global events involving volunteers, such as World Environment Day and International Women's Day.

This higher visibility not only helps us to dismantle myths and break down barriers but also gives us greater understanding of one of the fundamental ways we interact with each other as part of a vibrant community. Event volunteering suggests that many people are willing to embrace non-traditional, more transient volunteering roles that are achievement-orientated and more intense in terms of their time commitment, which is collapsed – sometimes into days – rather than spread out across a year or several years.

Interestingly, research indicates that there is no particular demographic group that is particularly attracted to event-volunteering. It is a form of volunteering that attracts people of all ages, cultural backgrounds and gender. This has implications for recruitment campaigns and the distribution of advertisements that organisations may want to consider.

- It is easier to reach a small, defined target group with promotional materials, but harder to reach the right people within a vast number of demographic groups.
- Ads should be explicit about the particular benefits of the event and what a volunteer will find rewarding about being involved in that event.
- Website advertising is an effective way of reaching large numbers of people, especially if other organisations are willing to provide a link to your website.
- Advertising through relevant interest groups is another way to reach volunteers who may be interested in participating in an event.



DPA members in action on a parkcare day restoring a hillside over the former tip site.

Courtesy of Darebin Parklands Association. 2006 NAB Award State winner: Environment and Wildlife (VIC).

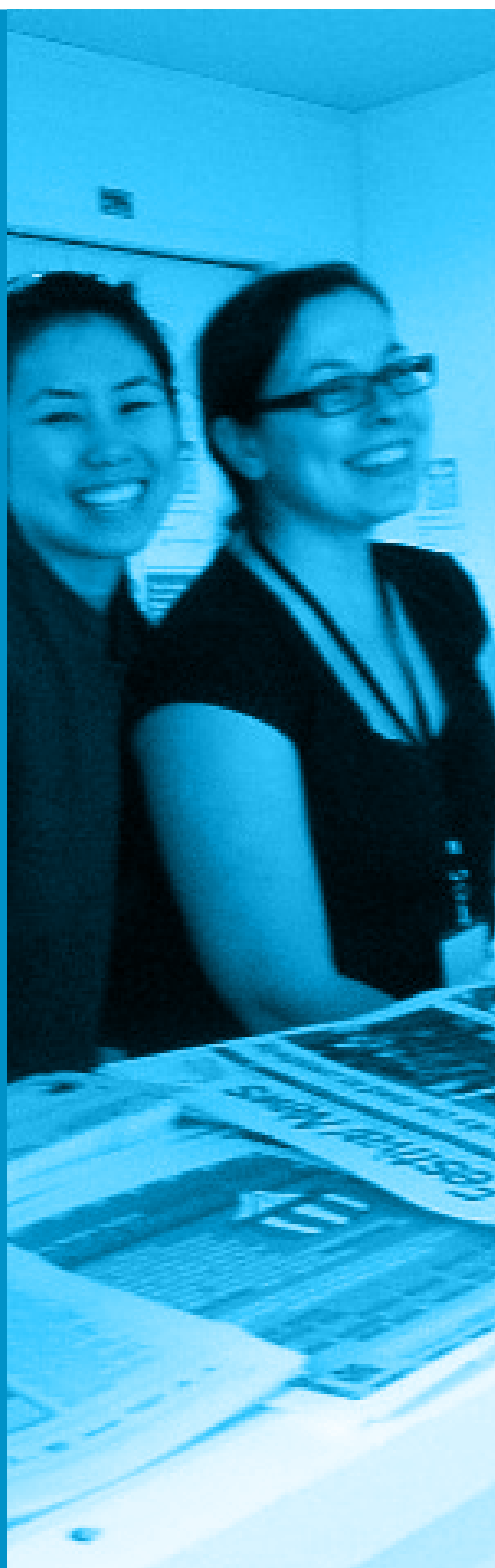
The success of your event may depend on the success of your volunteer program

After big events such as the Sydney Olympic Games, people congratulated volunteers for their efforts by having a street parade in their honour. People who attended the Games were heard to say that the volunteers made their experience more enjoyable.

Bear in mind that event volunteers represent your organisation, especially if they wear uniforms or badges which identify them as such, and are perceived as your 'public face'. This has training implications – well-trained volunteers will be influential ambassadors for your organisation and can enhance its reputation.

- Ensure that volunteers understand and are willing to adhere to your organisation's code of conduct.
- Your volunteers may need to be able to talk about your organisation's goals, its core activities and any other key messages that you want conveyed to the public.

The value that volunteers add to your event or short-term project may extend further than the obvious reward of holding a successful event that benefits the community, and of raising the profile of your organisation. For instance, there may be a skills exchange between paid and volunteer staff and amongst the volunteers themselves. Volunteers may learn new skills that enhance their paid work and their social life. Their sense of self-worth may also be enhanced through the interaction with others and the pride gained from taking part in a successful event. Volunteers may also build the skills of paid staff, or show the organisation new ways of approaching project management.



Sydney Writers' Festival volunteers Amy Shi, Kim Bennett and Jennifer Jackson.

Courtesy of Sydney Writers' Festival – 2006
NAB Award State Winner: Art and Culture (NSW).



What volunteers are being asked to give up when they become event volunteers

One of the differences between traditional volunteering roles and event volunteering roles relates to the intensity of the experience. Volunteers in an ongoing role may be able to negotiate the hours and the dates when they perform their volunteering tasks at the organisation. This is not the case for event volunteering.

By its very nature, an event occurs at a certain time of the year and lasts for a certain number of hours and days. If a volunteer wants to be involved, they may need to think about arranging time off from their paid work to take part in the event. They may have to make arrangements for childcare or organise alternatives for their other caring responsibilities. It may have an impact on their social life. This may cause inconvenience to the volunteer's workplace, family and friends.

People need to think about the logistics of how they can be involved. They also need to think about their rights in the volunteering situation. Some of the things volunteers may want to know are:

- Is it a not-for-profit organisation?

- Are the volunteer's tasks clear?

- Are the expectations of the volunteer clear?

- Will they have adequate insurance cover?

Events can cause inconvenience and disruptions and the organisation will need to make clear to prospective volunteers what is being asked of them, what it will entail and what supports the organisation can offer them.

Can't go back now!

The whole event experience is 'time-collapsed'. Everything from planning to evaluation happens in a short space of time. For the organisers this heightens the importance of the planning stage of the project. If you are halfway through a project and notice that something has been left out, the event may suffer enormously. It is worth considering having a team to look at the risk of running the event, from all sorts of angles.

One obvious risk to look at is the sort of insurance cover you have for volunteers. For instance, are there age limits? If so, you might be able to negotiate with your insurance company to change those age limits so that your event can recruit from the broadest age range of people. If this is not possible, you may have to consider how you will tell people they cannot volunteer for your event.

People may have to pull out

You may decide that the success of your event requires the involvement of a certain number of volunteers and so you develop a program for that specific number. However, for all sorts of reasons – illness, fatigue, and other external factors beyond their control – people may need to pull out of the event. It is harder to arrange childcare, for example, for an entire day or several days than for a couple of hours. Be prepared for attrition to your volunteer numbers in the lead-up to the event and factor this into your planning.

When and whether this is likely to happen are hard to predict so it is sensible to think about the potential attrition rate and decide how many extra people you will recruit to lessen the risk of not having enough volunteers to carry out all the tasks needed to make the event successful. This also means training multiple volunteers for each position. This then also has implications for rosters, budget, and identifying material such as uniforms and badges.

Returning volunteers

Even though people agree to volunteer for a certain amount of time for one particular event, they often enjoy the experience so much that they want to take part in the same event again or in other projects, or they may consider volunteering in an ongoing capacity instead.

Think about keeping contact information up-to-date as well as what other opportunities you might be able to offer volunteers. One possible way of keeping people interested and informed on the work of your organisation is to ask if they want to receive your newsletters when the event is over.

Volunteering Australia would like to thank all organisations and authors who have given us permission to include their resources free of charge in this Subject Guide. We also acknowledge and thank Dr Russell Hoye, Senior Lecturer in Sport Management at La Trobe University, who volunteered his time and expertise to contribute to the reviewing and evaluating of materials for this Guide.



Volunteers ready for duty at the Noosa Beach.

Courtesy of The Noosa Long Weekend Inc. 2005
NAB Award State Winner: Art and Culture (QLD).