



Toolkit

RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING

Everything volunteers and managers need to know
to apply for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)



NVSC is a project of Volunteering Australia

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



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Note: This toolkit contains advice primarily for volunteers, but is also written with other parties in mind, such as managers of volunteers, team leaders and trainers.

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Published by Volunteering Australia
First Published June, 2006

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ARBN 062 806 464 ISBN 10: 0-9757386-2-3 ISBN 13: 978-0-9757386-2-7

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INTRODUCTION

Welcome to this toolkit. This toolkit has been designed to support volunteers and managers of volunteers in learning about Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) and the process involved in attaining RPL for existing competency – knowledge and skill. Our goal in designing this toolkit is to make the RPL process as effortless as possible for all concerned: volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations and Registered Training Organisations (RTOs).

This resource will take you through the steps required to:

- Understand what Recognition of Prior Learning is, and its place within the Vocational Education and Training (VET)¹ system;
- Understand what competency based learning is and why it is important;
- Gather the evidence required to have existing skills and knowledge recognised by RTOs through the RPL process;
- Understand the types of evidence which RTOs will accept as sufficient and convincing demonstration of existing competency.

The nature of the information and templates in this toolkit is generic and can be applied to all the skill sets or 'competencies' within the VET system. Volunteering Australia, through the National Volunteer Skills Centre Project, has also created toolkits of modifiable templates specifically for the core competencies of three courses:

- *40408SA Certificate I in Active Volunteering;*
- *40409SA Certificate II in Active Volunteering;*
- *40410SA Certificate III in Active Volunteering.*

Details of these courses and the accompanying templates can be downloaded free of charge from Volunteering Australia's website, at: www.volunteeringaustralia.org

Alternatively, for assistance please call Volunteering Australia's free help line: 1800 008 252.

1 Consequent upon a meeting of the Ministerial Council in November 2005 there is a possibility of transition to new terminology – Vocational and Technical Education (VTE).



WHAT IS RECOGNITION OF PRIOR LEARNING?

Recognition of Prior Learning, also known as RPL, is a form of assessment that acknowledges skills and knowledge (known within the VET system as 'competencies') gained through:

- formal training conducted by industry or education institutions;
- work experience;
- life experience.

RPL can only be granted by qualified assessors working with or on behalf of RTOs. RTOs and their assessors are only able to grant RPL (if proven deserved through the assessment process) for courses and competencies they are authorised by their State Training Authority to deliver.

RPL is sometimes referred to as Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC).

The main principle underpinning RPL is that for competency based training the focus should be on the outcomes of learning, rather than how, when or where the learning occurred.

In order to grant RPL, the assessor must be confident that the candidate is currently competent against the endorsed industry or enterprise competency standards or outcomes specified in Australian Qualifications Framework accredited courses.

For example, if you regularly volunteer as a librarian or a manager of a canteen at community events (or if you are a library or hospitality student and you have already worked in these fields), you will have some skills and knowledge that may form part of the learning outcomes of an accredited training course. This example is important and particularly relevant to volunteers: you do not actually have to be a student to apply for

...evidence of your skills and knowledge may take a variety of forms and could include certification (formal qualification or statement of attainment), references from past employers, testimonials from clients and work samples.

RPL. If you have volunteered or worked in a field that is relevant to a formal course of study, you may be able to demonstrate competency through your experience that will be acceptable for RPL purposes.

It may help for you to have in mind that competency-based training is concerned with outcomes – i.e. you being able to demonstrate competency. Under these conditions, you are not required to undertake studies for those parts of a qualification where you are already competent. But you are required – if seeking RPL – to *prove* that you already have these competencies irrespective of how they have been achieved.


There are many ways to prove competency, which are discussed in this toolkit. As a quick example, you may be a farmer or a handy person and able to operate a chainsaw safely and proficiently. For duty of care and insurance purposes, however, the local conservation organisation with which you volunteer can only allow volunteers to use chainsaws if they are formally deemed by the VET system as ‘competent’ to do so and have a Statement of Attainment for *RTC2304A Operate and maintain chainsaws*. A Statement of Attainment might be arranged in this instance by organising for an assessment to take place. You could demonstrate your competency in the presence of a qualified assessor who would probe your underpinning knowledge as well as observe your application of skill.

Similarly, due to new legislative requirements the local school tuck shop with which you have been volunteering may require all their staff and volunteers to have certified food handling skills and complete the unit of competency, *CHCT3B Apply safe food hygiene Practices*. A Statement of Attainment could be granted by arranging a qualified assessor to visit and assess the knowledge and skills of staff and volunteers through demonstrations and interviews.

Following is a different scenario: as part of your ambition for a career in the arts and entertainment industry, you may volunteer at your local theatre company as the stylist and make-up artist. To strengthen your resume you might decide to apply for RPL for the competency, *CUFMUP01A Design, apply and remove period and specialised make-up* and put together a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate your skill and knowledge. Promotional flyers and theatre programs with photos of your work would form key pieces of evidence to support your application, along with third party reports and references from directors, stage managers and the like.

A fourth scenario might involve a community health organisation seeking to improve its operations and assure quality services by standardising its training for volunteers and staff. The organisation may decide to encourage all volunteers and staff to undertake the qualification *CHC20499 Certificate II in Community Services*. Several volunteers and staff have undertaken some formal training in the past and have Statements of Attainment for a range of competencies, such as *CHCT12A Assist client/patient with nutrition care*, *CHCAC2A Assist with aged people's personal needs*, *CHCAOD4C Support people with alcohol and/or other drugs issues*. Certified copies of these Statements of Attainment are provided to the RTO. Volunteers and staff are granted credit for these units of competency, leaving them with only the outstanding competencies to complete to attain the qualification.

As can be seen from the above, evidence of your skills and knowledge may take a variety of forms and could include certification (formal qualification or statement of attainment), references from past employers, testimonials from clients and work samples. The assessor must ensure that the evidence is authentic, valid, reliable, current and sufficient:



Authentic means that the information and evidence provided is genuine and trustworthy;

Valid means that the information and evidence relevant to the qualification or competency being applied for, is well-founded, and adds weight to the RPL application;

Reliable means that the evidence can withstand scrutiny, has integrity and reasonably indicates that the applicant is able to perform a task to a specified standard with regularity and consistency;

Sufficient means that an adequate amount of evidence must be provided. An 'adequate' amount is to an extent a matter of judgment and will depend on the type of evidence provided; if an application for RPL is compelling, then the evidence provided is adequate.

RPL can result in a full qualification, or a statement of attainment for partial completion of a qualification. Statements of attainment are awarded when an applicant is granted RPL for a particular unit of competency or units of competency. Both forms of certification are recognised nationally.

RTOs throughout Australia must accept the decisions and qualifications or partial qualifications (units of competency) awarded to a student by another RTO.



WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF RPL?

There are a number of benefits of RPL for volunteers and for volunteer-involving organisations.

Benefits for volunteers

RPL gives you credit for your life skills – skills and knowledge you have learnt at home or through clubs, hobbies, work and the like. Importantly:

- 1. RPL allows you to complete formal education in a shorter period of time and usually at less cost;
- 2. RPL means that you do not have to repeat or waste time learning what has already been learned;
- 3. RPL increases your career and education options through recognising skills and knowledge;
- 4. RPL allows for fairer access to studies that you wish to undertake by enabling people without prerequisite qualifications to enter the VET system at a level commensurate with their skills and knowledge.

Benefits for volunteer-involving organisations

As a volunteer you will know that there are a number of reasons why people volunteer, and there is an increasing range of volunteering options and organisations from which to choose.

A volunteer-involving organisation which encourages and supports volunteers to attain RPL directly contributes to its ongoing viability, is in line with best practice, and can gain an edge over funding competitors.

The RPL process can be a powerful awakening and confidence boosting experience

In particular, an organisational commitment to support volunteers attain RPL can:

1. Enhance the performance of a volunteering organisation by recognising, valuing and better drawing upon the skills and knowledge of its volunteers

In accordance with Volunteering Australia's *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations*, 'an organisation that involves volunteers shall ensure that volunteers obtain the knowledge, skills, feedback on work, and the recognition needed to effectively carry out their responsibilities.'

RPL can contribute to achieving all aspects of this standard. The process of attaining RPL involves making explicit knowledge and skills which an individual may tacitly hold. It is not unusual for people to be unaware of the extent and depth of their existing knowledge and skills.

The RPL process can be a powerful awakening and confidence-boosting experience for those who take for granted their competence and go about their daily activities without realising the value of the skills and knowledge underpinning their actions.

Additionally, the act of making knowledge explicit is valuable because this knowledge can then be shared with others and proliferated throughout the organisation. According to the National Standards, 'a well trained and developed work force of volunteers is more critical to the successful performances of the volunteer management system than any other single factor.'

2. Foster a strong and vibrant organisational culture by improving morale

RPL is a powerful way to recognise and value the contribution volunteers make because it has currency within the organisation, and is valued and recognised nationally by all industries and businesses.

As well as contributing to achieving the National Standard mentioned above, recognition of this kind can positively impact the motivation of volunteers and staff, and increase confidence and commitment to the organisation, its purpose and activities. Although difficult to measure, this yields untold benefits for the organisation, and in all probability adds to volunteers' sense of contribution.

3. Encourage the standardisation of training and development of volunteers

There is increasing pressure for volunteer-involving organisations to standardise the training of their volunteers and, in this respect, volunteers have a core role to play.

Quality improvement initiatives demand higher standards of service (for example in community health, aged care and disability sectors), and legislation and regulations stipulate that some services be delivered only by people with recognised skills (food hygiene, privacy, child care). RPL is one way of meeting these standards.



Additionally, building a volunteer program with competency standards embedded in organisational policy not only has intrinsic value but is a compelling indicator of organisational effectiveness. This will considerably strengthen grant and funding applications because the skills of proposed service deliverers will be recognisable, and the organisation will be able to demonstrate best practice in the training and development of its volunteers.

4. Increase the attractiveness of the organisation to prospective volunteers

There is a range of people who are attracted to volunteering because of the new skills and experiences it affords. It is thought that RPL opportunities will appeal to these groups, and in particular the following:

- volunteers who find themselves unemployed and have a renewed interest in consolidating existing skills or garnering new skills and evidence of competency;
- people who are navigating a kink in their career trajectory or considering a significant change;
- young people seeking skills and experience as they move from school to the workforce;
- people who are contemplating retirement or who are newly retired and are seeking exposure to new experiences and skills development opportunities.

As a volunteer, do you feel that these beliefs are well founded? And do you agree that offering RPL opportunities will give volunteers a reason to choose one volunteering organisation above others?

Your feedback on this to your organisation and to Volunteering Australia will be helpful in its endeavour to support volunteers and organisations gain full advantage of available training opportunities and learning pathways.

A number of pieces of research on the subject of motivation and links to the national training system are accessible through Volunteering Australia's library.

ABOUT 'COMPETENCY'

In the Vocational Technical and Education system (VET), there are hundreds of qualifications that a person may choose to complete because they are relevant to their career or interests. Each of these qualifications is made up of a number of competencies.

Competency standards define the competencies for effective performance in the workplace, and are statements of key functions or tasks in a particular job or occupation. Standards are expressed in outcome terms and have a uniform format comprising title, unit descriptor, elements, performance criteria, range statement and evidence guide. They are also referred to as units of competency. These units of competency are the building blocks for VET sector qualifications and are nationally recognised.

The structure of units of competency:

National Code	Each unit of competency has a unique, alphanumeric identifier. This consists of the three-letter identifier of the Training Package to which it belongs. The Training Package developer then assigns an identifier for each unit of competency. This identifier can include both numbers and capitalised letters. Version control for coding units of competency is indicated by a single end letter. The code for the original version of any competency ends in 'A', and any subsequent versions are marked in alphabetical sequence.	<p><i>Example:</i> SRXORG001A Organise Work</p> <p>National Code</p>
Unit title and description	The title is a short statement of the competency covered by the unit expressed as an outcome. The description expands on the title and states the broad application of skills and knowledge in the workplace. It may also note relationships with other competency units.	<p><i>Example:</i> SRXORG001A Organise work This unit covers maintenance of work area and organising a basic daily routine.</p> <p>Unit Title</p> <p>Description</p>
Element of competency	A basic component of a unit of competency which describes the key activities or elements of the work covered by the unit. They describe, in outcome terms, functions a person is able to perform in a particular aspect of work.	<p><i>Example:</i> SRXORG001A/01 Plan and organise a personal daily work routine.</p>
Performance criteria	Specifies the standards of performance in terms of a set of outcomes which need to be achieved in order to be deemed competent. Used by assessors to judge whether the combined unit and elements have been performed to the required standard.	<p><i>Example:</i> a. Tasks are allocated by nominated person; b. Tasks to be completed for the day are identified; c. The daily tasks are prioritised as directed.</p>
Range statement	Specifies the range of contexts and conditions to which the performance criteria apply (also called Range of Variables).	<p><i>Example:</i> 1. Cleaning: a. Counters/benches; b. Walkways; c. Fixtures and other working surfaces.</p>
Evidence guide	Provides guidance to the interpretation and assessment of the unit of competency, including the aspects which need to be emphasised in assessment, relationships to other units, and the required evidence of competency.	<p><i>Example:</i> 1. Critical aspects of evidence to be considered: a. Assessment must confirm sufficient knowledge of organisation of personal workspace and organising work routines in the work environment.</p>

Standards for all units of competency can be found on the National Training Information Service (NTIS) website: www.ntis.gov.au

Log on to the above website, click on 'to search Training Package competencies (units) click [here](#)', under the heading [Search NTIS](#), and you can search by key word or national code. Details of the standards of the core competencies of the three Active Volunteering certificates can be found on Volunteering Australia's website and are also contained within the kit of modifiable templates mentioned in the introduction to this resource.



THE RPL PROCESS

How are skills and learning demonstrated?

(Advice for volunteers and those assisting them to make an RPL application)

Anyone can apply for RPL but not everyone will get credit for their skills and knowledge.

A typical successful applicant is someone who has a reasonable amount of experience in the area their course or unit of competency covers and can demonstrate current competency.

This might mean working in that field. Life skills can earn credits but these must be shown to be relevant to the course or competency.

If an applicant is continuing on from secondary school or has limited work or life experience they should consider their claim carefully before applying for RPL. If the applicant is a mature age student with relevant experience their skills are likely to have some value for credit through RPL.

If the applicant has gained qualifications in completing a course or has a statement of attainment for completed units of a course they may gain credits.

An applicant is considered competent when they demonstrate the skills and knowledge specified in the competency standards.

Some skills require refreshing after only one to two years (IT) other skills are retained for life (riding a bike), so an applicant should ensure that the skills and knowledge they use as evidence are relevant to their RPL application. In particular, an RPL applicant must be able to show that their knowledge and skill is current – i.e. where the knowledge and skill was first acquired some time ago, the applicant has maintained currency of this knowledge and skill by use or other means and can provide evidence of this.

RTOs' services and the way they work can differ markedly – it is important to find a RTO who can meet your needs.

Demonstrating competency can be broken down into ten steps, listed below. Modifiable versions of all templates within this resource can be found in the kit of templates mentioned earlier. These will assist you with each of these steps and are available free of charge from Volunteering Australia's website.

Step 1. Review the relevant competency standard/s and ensure that you have a sound understanding of the elements, performance criteria, range of variables and evidence required.

Whether you are a volunteer applying for RPL or a manager or coordinator wishing to support or coach a volunteer through the RPL process, you should read carefully the information on the units of competency and learning outcomes, as applicants will be assessed against these. The volunteer's knowledge and skills should be compared to the competency standards before making a decision about submitting an RPL application.

Log on to the National Training Information Service (NTIS) website and download the appropriate competency standards. To locate these, click on 'to search Training Package competencies (units) click [here](#)' and search by key word or national code if this is known. As mentioned earlier, details of the competencies standards of the Active Volunteering courses can be found on Volunteering Australia's website.

Step 2. Identify a Registered Training Organisation which is authorised to grant RPL for your chosen competency and/or course and can meet your needs.

There are industry rules and regulations to assure quality in the VET system.

As mentioned earlier, RPL can only be granted by qualified assessors working with or on behalf of RTOs.

RTOs and their assessors are only able to grant RPL for courses and competencies they are authorised by their State Training Authority to deliver.

For each course or unit of competency a RTO wishes to deliver, they must demonstrate to their State Training Authority that they have the right personnel, training and assessment strategies, and resources to ensure quality outcomes for all stakeholders. If they are successful in demonstrating this, the State Training Authority registers the RTO as a provider of the course or competency. All RTOs have an individual file or record of the courses and competencies they are registered to deliver – this is known as their 'Scope of Registration'.

To find a RTO who is able to assess and grant RPL for your particular competency or course, log on to the NTIS website and find the relevant competency (located at the top left of the screen). Click on 'Training Providers' and then search for a registered provider.

When choosing your RTO, there are several factors you will need to consider. RTOs' services and the way they work can differ markedly – it is important to find a RTO who can meet your needs.

The RPL process will probably be more rewarding and you will be more likely to have a successful outcome if you have a good rapport with your assessor and feel comfortable contacting them to discuss issues and ask questions. This is especially true if RPL is new to you. You may wish to ask the RTO what kind of support their assessors offer during the RPL process, and if they are readily available.

As a volunteer, you may wish to choose a RTO which has a proven interest in volunteering and the not-for-profit sector

In addition to the above, you may wish to find out the following before deciding which RTO to go with:

- Some RTOs may require students to first enrol in the relevant course before offering RPL. If you are interested in gaining a Statement of Attainment for a unit of competency (rather than a whole qualification), ask the RTO if they will assess this type of application.
- If you have timelines you need to meet, ask the RTO what their RPL process is, and how long it might take between submitting your application and, all going well, receiving your Statement of Attainment.
- Find out what the RTO charges for RPL. If you find a large variation between fees, there is no harm in exploring why this is the case. Sometimes lower costs are an indication of the level of service that will be provided. At other times, this may not be the case. RTOs sometimes access government funding to subsidise their services so that they can offer training and RPL at a reduced rate to the public. Also, bear in mind that RTOs will have different cost recovery thresholds, depending on their size, the services they deliver, and their business strategies. This may impact the fees they charge for RPL.
- Ask about the RTO's RPL process. Do you need to complete any administration forms? Is there a particular style or format your portfolio of evidence needs to adhere to? Are there any additional or special requirements you need to meet? You may wish to send them this toolkit, and draw to their attention the templates you intend to use in your portfolio of evidence.
- If you need to arrange for an on-site assessment of your knowledge or skills to prove your competency, the location of the RTO may be an important factor.
- Does the RTO provide on-line support via the internet, face to face support or telephone support? Which style of support suits you best?
- As a volunteer, you may wish to choose a RTO which has a proven interest in volunteering and the not-for-profit sector, and has values similar to your's and/or your volunteering organisation. You can sometimes find this information by looking at the 'About Us' section on RTOs' websites, or reading about the types of services they deliver and their purpose or mission statements. Annual reports are a good source of organisational information and can give you a flavour of the RTO's philosophy and what they are committed to achieving.

Step 3. Consult other available resources to help you make your case for RPL for the competency (for example, the Learning Guides for the core competencies of the certificates in Active Volunteering).

There are a number of resources which are available. If you are interested in applying for RPL for any of the competencies of the Certificates in Active Volunteering we strongly recommend that you work your way through the relevant Learning Guides for Volunteers. These resources have been designed to support volunteers in learning and to build particular competencies. They are self-paced and contain a number of useful tools. In particular, you will find the Work Record Portfolios, Third Party Report and Self Assessment checklists very useful.

Step 4. Construct a Statement of Generality.

An effective way to obtain an indication of whether you are competent or not is to construct what could be called a 'statement of generality'. This is a brief statement which describes in general terms whether or not you believe you are competent, what leads you to believe this, and, in broad terms, how you might demonstrate this belief. This statement is usually not much longer than a few paragraphs (see the example on page 15). It may be taped and presented to the assessor in audio format, it may be a written statement, or the statement may be transcribed by someone acting in a supporting role.



Your Statement of Generality should complement the evidence you provide against each element of competency and performance criteria. It is usually the first piece of documentation that an assessor will read and is an opportunity for you to make a good first impression on the assessor.

A 'good first impression' is one that gives the assessor confidence that you understand the learning outcomes you need to demonstrate, and that you have a compelling set of evidence in your portfolio which proves this.

When drafting your Statement of Generality, you might find it useful to look closely at the Evidence Guide within the competency standard, remembering that this will help you interpret which aspects of the Unit of Competency need to be emphasised for assessment purposes, and what evidence is required.

Also, there are some traps which students often fall into when drafting these statements. Check out [Item 6](#) of this toolkit, 'Tips and Traps', to help you prepare the strongest Statement of Generality possible.

Templates to assist you to complete Statements of Generality for the core competencies of Certificates I, II and III in Active Volunteering are available via the Volunteering Australia website.

Following is an example of a Statement of Generality for *SRXORG001A Organise work*. Note the structure of this statement, and the key points which are made. You may wish to reproduce this structure and cover the same key points in your own statement.

Sample statement of Generality

Name of RPL applicant:	(Insert details)
Contact details:	(Insert details)
Volunteer-involving organisation:	(Insert details, including website address, if available)
Manager / coordinator / third party support person:	(Insert details)
Contact details:	(Insert details)
Name of competency / course:	Organise Work
Course / competency code:	SRXORG001A

To the assessor of competency *SRXORG001A Organise Work*:

I have been volunteering 8 hours each week as an office assistant at (*name of volunteer-involving organisation*) for the past year. I started with (*name of volunteer-involving organisation*) on (*insert date*). The purpose of my role is to support the other volunteers and staff in the office so that the office runs smoothly, and our Community Program Managers have more time to get on with the more complex parts of their jobs. The tasks I perform include data entry, filing, answering the phone and assisting visitors when the receptionist is unavailable, ordering stationary, and organising large mail outs.

I have reviewed the elements of competency, performance criteria, range statement and evidence guide for the competency *SRXORG001A Organise Work*. I believe that I am competent at organising my work and that I can prove this.

My portfolio contains pieces of evidence for every performance criteria, but I would like to provide an overview of why I believe I am competent at organising my work: when I am at work the office is tidy, the photocopier and printers run smoothly, and we always have enough stationary supplies and general office items. After identifying my priorities for the day with my manager, I make plans so that I can deliver these as agreed, and then go about doing my work. My plans allow me to do my work without needing direct supervision. Because I always get the most important things done first, I usually have enough time to help out with unexpected tasks. My manager can always rely on me to complete my work within agreed timeframes, and is happy to attest to this. She has authenticated several pieces of evidence in my portfolio, including this Statement of Generality.

I have also provided a checklist against all of the performance criteria, which also serves as an index for my portfolio, to make it easy for the assessor to locate the relevant pieces of information.

I look forward to hearing feedback on my application for RPL and am happy to provide additional information if required.

Sincerely,

Name and signature of RPL applicant:	Name and signature of manager:
--------------------------------------	--------------------------------

Introduce the assessor to your manager at the outset of your application.

Provide the exact title and code of the competency or course.

Note that this paragraph briefly details:

- the extent (amount of time) of your experience;
- your role title and the purpose of your role – remember, effective performance is all about producing an intended or expected result. Showing that you understand the outcome you are expected to produce is the first step to demonstrating competency;
- the typical tasks you perform.

Show that you have read and understood the specifics of the competency.

Provide an overview of the outcomes of your work. These should touch on each of the elements of the competency. If you are writing a Statement of Generality for a course, you should touch on each of the competencies within the course. Let the assessor know that your application has been authenticated and you know this to be important.

Give the assessor confidence in the thoroughness of your application, and indicate that it is well organised and easy to navigate.

Authenticate the Statement of Generality itself, by having your manager sign the statement.

If you are considering applying for RPL you will need to identify evidence which demonstrates that you have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills.

Step 5. Review each element of the competency and the performance criteria, and identify and document evidence which demonstrates your competence against each performance criterion.

If you are considering applying for RPL you will need to identify evidence which demonstrates that you have acquired the necessary knowledge and skills. Evidence may include:

- your resume – supported with evidence of its authenticity which may be a statutory declaration;
- certificates (originals or, preferably, certified copies) of completed courses and qualifications;
- awards and prizes;
- references from employers outlining your responsibilities;
- letter from clients;
- evaluations from supervisors;
- job descriptions – supported with evidence that these tasks were competently performed;
- actual examples of your work (for example, minutes you have taken at meetings, with appropriate permission and supported with evidence of their authenticity; a report you have written, supported with evidence of its authenticity; a process you have designed, again, supported with evidence of its authenticity);
- authenticated Work Record Portfolios, which might include notes that demonstrate you have thought about, understood and addressed various aspects of a competency, or that you have undertaken a task and learned from this. Samples of Work Record Portfolios are provided in the Learning Guides for the Active Volunteering competencies. Modifiable versions of these can be downloaded free of charge from the Volunteering Australia website.
- a demonstration of your skill and knowledge, pre-arranged with your assessor.

The template located under Step 6 might be helpful in documenting and ordering your evidence.

Refer also to Item 6 of this document, 'Tips and traps for preparing your RPL application' to help you identify, gather and present compelling evidence which proves your competence.

Step 6. With the information collected for Step 4, identify the elements of competency where you do not have sufficient evidence and/or you do not feel confident that you can meet the performance criteria.

The Learner Checklist template might be helpful in completing this step. This has been designed as a checklist to make sure you have all the required pieces of evidence, and to make it easy for assessors to see the comprehensiveness of your evidence at a glance and navigate your portfolio of evidence with ease. It is recommended that the assessor receive only the final version of this template, once you are confident that the combined weight of evidence in your portfolio meets the five characteristics discussed earlier: authentic, valid, reliable, current and sufficient.

If you have a manager or team leader who is supporting you through the RPL process, you may wish to have them make this initial assessment as they are likely to bring an objectivity which is difficult to achieve when assessing your own work..

If you have a manager or team leader who is supporting you through the RPL process, you may wish to have them make this initial assessment as they are likely to bring an objectivity which is difficult to achieve when assessing your own work..

It is possible that you have the requisite skills and knowledge to apply for RPL, but your evidence is not compelling and needs some further work. Review this guide and discuss any issues with your manager or team leader. If you are still struggling, you may wish to contact your assessor. Remember that sometimes evidence can only be in the form of a demonstration, and will not be documented in a portfolio.

Step 7. Create a learning plan to bridge any Performance Criteria gaps that you may have.

If you are to submit a successful RPL application you will most likely need to prove your competency against all the Performance Criteria. Take heart, even if you have several gaps to fill: while creating a learning plan may sound like a daunting task, it is actually quite a straightforward thing to do.

The purpose of creating a learning plan is to list your skill gaps, and the steps you are going to take to address these gaps. This can be as simple as filling in a template and then acting on it. You may find the following example of a Learning Plan helpful.

Step 7. Learning Plan

Which performance criterion are you unable to meet?	How will you gain the required knowledge or skill?	Date to review progress

By completing the template under Step 5 you will have already identified your skill or knowledge gaps.

Discuss this with your manager or team leader. It might be possible to gain this skill or knowledge by slightly reshaping one of your regular volunteering activities in a way that includes support for learning. Or, there may be an opportunity coming up at your volunteer organisation that would help you gain this skill or knowledge.

Your assessor may also be able to offer advice about the sorts of activities that will help you build your knowledge and skills, and produce appropriate evidence for your portfolio.

Step 8. With the assistance of your manager or team leader, compile your portfolio of evidence. Discuss this with your assessor, as required.

A portfolio of evidence is the sum of all your pieces of evidence, assembled in a logical format which is easy for the assessor to navigate.

It is always best to have a second party check through this to see that nothing has been missed and your portfolio items have been labeled correctly. Your manager or team leader will be in a good position to assist you with this.

Ideally, you will be in touch with your assessor as you commence the development of your portfolio, and you will feel comfortable getting their input and feedback. It is best not to develop your portfolio in isolation from your assessor. If you understand their expectations and receive input and feedback from them early in the process, it may save a lot of time and effort.

You may wish to use the template under Step 6 as a contents or index page for your portfolio. The templates created for the core competencies of Certificates I, II and III in Active Volunteering also include an optional template which your assessor may or may not wish to use, when appraising your portfolio.

Step 9. Submit your application for RPL to the assessor.

When you and your manager or team leader feels confident in the quality and substance of your evidence and your portfolio is in order, you are ready to submit this to your assessor.



Step 10. Receive feedback from the assessor. RPL is granted, or feedback from the assessor indicates further learning and/or evidence is required.

Congratulations! At this stage you will have either been granted RPL, or you may have a minimal amount of additional work to do in order to meet your assessor's requirements. Don't be discouraged if your assessor has asked for further evidence, or recommended some activities to strengthen your knowledge and skills. You will surely be close to achieving a successful outcome and enjoying those benefits which inspired you to learn about RPL and prepare an application in the first place.



6. TIPS AND TRAPS FOR PREPARING YOUR RPL APPLICATION

As mentioned earlier, there are some common traps that people fall into when preparing an application for RPL which can weaken the quality of the Statement of Generality and the evidence proffered in the Portfolio of Evidence. Below is a list of some of the traps that you should bear in mind, and tips that will help to strengthen your application.

 Traps	 Tips
<p>Assuming that performing a particular task regularly over a long period of time means that you can perform that task competently.</p> <p>Following is an example related to the competency SRXORG001A <i>Organise Work</i>:</p>	<p>Remember that ‘competency’ is about effective performance.</p> <p>You may be competent at undertaking certain tasks even if you have only been performing these for a short period of time.</p> <p>Following is an example in contrast to Eg 1.</p>
<p>Eg. 1. <i>‘As part of my role as volunteer receptionist I organise my own work load. I believe I am competent at organising my work because of my long history of experience: I have been doing this for two days a week for the past seven years.’</i></p>	<p>Eg. 2. <i>‘I have been volunteering as a receptionist for two days a week for the past six months. I believe I am competent at organising my work because I finish my allocated tasks within agreed timeframes and I am often able to make the time to help out with other unscheduled tasks as they arise, such as mail outs. Evidence of this is contained in a third party report, Item no. 3 in my Portfolio of Evidence.’</i></p>
<p>Making assertions of competency, rather than using an example which demonstrates competency. This is also a common trap that people fall into when providing evidence against elements of competency and performance criteria.</p> <p>Below is an example of an assertion of competency against a performance criteria specified in the competency SRXORG001A <i>Organise Work</i>:</p>	<p>In human resource management theory, past behaviour is often thought of as the most reliable indicator of future behaviour. Consequently, when interviewing a candidate for a job or volunteer position, a skilful interviewer will probe for detailed examples of how a candidate has conducted themselves in the past. This is one way to authenticate claims, and is based on the assumption that real detail can only be known if it is true.</p> <p>This principle can be applied to your Statement of Generality and your evidence for elements of competency and performance criteria. Concrete, specific examples of when and how you have performed a task well will be more powerful than claiming you can do something well, with no example to back this up.</p> <p>Below is a specific example of demonstrating competency, in contrast to that provided in Eg. 1. This would, of course, carry more weight if it was authenticated (signed as being true and accurate) by your manager or coordinator.</p>
<p>Eg. 1. <i>‘I am mindful of potential work hazards and am quick to remove these from work area.’</i></p>	<p>Eg. 2. <i>‘I am mindful of potential work hazards and am quick to remove these from my work area. For example, we had workmen in our office last month who had neglected to tape their power cords to the floor. This could have caused someone to trip and injure themselves. Our organisational policy states that all power cords must be taped to the floor, no matter how briefly they are in use. I mentioned this to the workmen who then promptly taped down their cords.’</i></p>



Traps

While specific examples of when and how you have performed a task well are weightier than assertions of competency, try not to populate your portfolio of evidence solely with these examples. Remember that your combined evidence must be authentic, valid, reliable, current AND sufficient.

If your portfolio of evidence contains only examples of past performance claimed and authored by you personally, an assessor may question the authenticity of your evidence. Specificity when describing examples will help, but your portfolio must also contain some evidence which verifies the authenticity of the content. Third party reports, and (even better) awards or prizes will strengthen your portfolio. Take heart, though, if you have not received any awards or prizes. Very few people have these things to offer as evidence and it does NOT mean that your application for RPL will be unsuccessful.

Describing how and when you have done something well, without getting to the heart of the purpose (the intended or expected result) of that activity and what was actually achieved by your good performance.



Tips

The above tip can be taken one step further.

When thinking of examples which demonstrate your competency, try to think how these can be proven.

Your word is the weakest form of evidence. Indisputable, authentic evidence is that which is provided by an objective third party. For example: prizes and awards; a formal qualification or statement of attainment; quality produce or service applauded in a newsletter or paper.

Third party reports such as references are also often used to demonstrate competency. However, these are slightly weaker forms of evidence (although they are perfectly acceptable) because the objectivity of the third party is difficult to verify, whereas to award a prize or statement of attainment due process must be followed. This assures equity, objectivity and the deservingness of the recipient.

Remember that actual examples of your work – such as reports you have written, minutes documenting a decision you have been instrumental in bringing about, letters you have crafted, and processes you have created – will be very weighty additions to your portfolio, provided that they have been authenticated by a third party.

Effective performance is all about producing an intended or expected result.

Try to think of positive outcomes that you have achieved as a direct result of your competency.

This is more difficult than it sounds, but if you can master this your portfolio of evidence will be very powerful. This principle can be applied to any other situation when you need to influence or impress a third party. For example, when writing a resume or preparing a funding proposal or tender submission.

Similar to the tip above, if you can prove these results or outcomes your competency will be indisputable. Statistics (published or otherwise), evaluation studies, winning tenders or awards; these are all ways that of proving positive outcomes or results.

The examples over the page in the right hand column illustrate how powerful evidence can be when you draw attention to outcomes.



Traps

Below are two contrasting excerpts from third party reports, provided as evidence of an element of competency of *HLTCOM7A Provide reception services for a practice*. The second excerpt is more powerful because it illustrates the positive impact achieved by the RPL candidate as a result of her competency:

Eg. 1 *'Chantal has excellent communication and administration skills. She always provides patients with accurate information about our services and payment structure, and her record keeping is faultless. Our practice runs far more smoothly since Chantal's appointment as our receptionist.'*

Eg. 2 *'Thanks to Chantal's excellent communication and administration skills, our practice is able to attend to an average of 10 additional patients per day than we did prior to her appointment. This is because our doctors no longer have to spend time searching for incorrectly filed records or answering administrative enquiries during appointment time. Chantal ensures that patients are fully aware of all the information they need about our payment structure, appointment procedures and services as they check in at reception.'*



Tips

The example below is related to the competency *HLTCOM7A Provide reception services for a practice*:

'I have been working as a volunteer receptionist at a large community health centre on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the past three months. Since I have been on reception duties, an internal evaluation has found that complaints about indirect transfer of calls and holding time on these particular days have dropped by 50%.'

The example below is related to the competency *CHCNET2B Maintain effective networks*:

'I commenced work as a recruitment officer for overseas community development projects seven months ago. One of my priorities has been to build relationships with key personnel in organisations with mutual and complementary interests, with the view to boosting the numbers in our recruitment pool, and educating the community about our work. I have developed relationships with universities offering international development courses and multi-cultural volunteer-involving organisations.'

As part of our normal practice we ask all applicants how they heard about our services and programs. Our most recent report shows that we received 20% more applications during the month of November than we did in the November of the previous year. Of these additional applications, 25% of applicants have been referred to us by the universities and organisations I have established relationships with.'

7. OTHER USEFUL RESOURCES AVAILABLE ON VOLUNTEERING AUSTRALIA'S WEBSITE

- Foundation documents which capture the formal definition of volunteering, the principles and ethos of volunteering, and volunteers' rights;
- Learning Guides for Volunteers for the core competencies of Certificates I, II and III in Active Volunteering;
- A range of information and resources on best practice for volunteers and managers of volunteers;
- A range of statistics, research pieces, and policy submissions.

8. YOUR SUGGESTIONS

Volunteering Australia is always keen to improve the resources we develop and we encourage our readers to send us feedback. If you have any suggestions or comments which will help us improve this toolkit, please contact:

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