

Media Release

Monday 11 May 2015

Launch of the new National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's new **National Standards for Volunteer Involvement** (the Standards) were launched today to mark the beginning of National Volunteer Week 2015, which runs from 11-17 May.

The Federal Minister for Human Services, Senator the Hon Marise Payne, launched National Volunteer Week at the Museum of Australian Democracy at Old Parliament House in Canberra.

The new Standards incorporate significant changes to the original standards in order to reflect best practice in volunteer management in Australia's current work environment.

Volunteering Australia CEO Brett Williamson said: "The new Standards provide an exceptionally sound framework for supporting the volunteer sector as it is today and into the future. They have been designed to adapt to different types of organisations and the many different forms of volunteering which reflect the growing diversity of this sector. The Standards are easy to understand and use and provide clear guidance for planning volunteer programs. They also place a responsibility on organisations to ensure their management practices are continually reviewed and improved.

"Importantly, the Standards will lead to an improved volunteer experience, which is critical, given the vast number of Australians who volunteer – approximately six million. The value of their efforts to the Australian economy was most recently estimated at \$290 billion (*O'Dwyer 2014*). It makes sense then, to ensure volunteers are happy and fulfilled in their roles.

"I would like to thank the CEOs of Volunteering SA&NT, Volunteering Tasmania and Volunteering WA who worked for many years to develop these new Standards on behalf of Volunteering Australia. I would also like to thank Breaking New Ground, our principal consultants."

The benchmarks contained in the Standards are specifically designed to help organisations attract, manage, recognise and retain volunteers, and to manage risk and safety with respect to volunteers.

According to Evelyn O'Loughlin CEO of Volunteering SA&NT who spearheaded the project: "The review of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement has been a critical project. The original standards were written in 2001 and since then the Australian work environment has changed considerably, including changes to the *Work Health and Safety Act* covering volunteers.

"Volunteers' expectations and attitudes have also changed over time. They have stronger views on how they expect to engage with an organisation, and how they expect to be treated by an organisation to which they commit their time and skills. Innovative social change has also influenced the way volunteers can engage with organisations, with technology and corporate volunteering creating more opportunities. Significantly, the volunteer sector has also changed in that time, having adopted a professional approach towards volunteer management.

“These are all significant changes and they have been reflected in the Standards to ensure they provide a relevant, quality framework to support the volunteer sector and guide best practice in the recruitment, management and recognition of volunteers.”

Guidance on applying the Standards will be provided via comprehensive implementation resources.

Additionally, Volunteering Australia will be developing a flexible, tiered voluntary certification, or ‘Quality Mark’ system to enable organisations to check how they are tracking in implementing the Standards.

Process

The development of the new Standards has been an inclusive project led by the CEOs of Volunteering S&NT, Volunteering Tasmania and Volunteering WA. Following the establishment of this working group, and a sector wide reference group comprising representatives from all states and territories, a draft document was prepared and presented to the sector for feedback via a survey and series of consultations across Australia.

From that process a set of revised Standards was created that were easier to understand and use, contained clear criteria and relevant content, and had wide applicability to different types of organisations and volunteer situations.

History

The first Australian National Standards were developed for Volunteering Australia by Volunteering Victoria in 1996. Sector consultation took place in 1996 and 1997 and the Standards were formally adopted in February 1998.

Following that time Volunteering Australia actively sought feedback on the functionality of the first set of Standards and as a result of feedback Volunteering Australia developed a new second set of standards that truly embraced the full diversity of volunteer-involving organisations and of volunteering.

This second set of standards was launched in 2001, the International Year of Volunteers, and remained in use until today.

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