

National Volunteering Guide Part 1

Introduction

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Introduction

What this guide covers



Introduction

This part covers:

- ▶ what does this guide do for volunteer involving organisations?
- ▶ what is the National Strategy for Volunteering?
- ▶ what are the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement?
- ▶ the key legal issues covered in this guide



Disclaimer

This guide provides general information about involving volunteers. This information is a guide only and is not legal advice. If you or your organisation has a specific legal issue, you should seek legal advice before deciding what to do.

Please refer to [the full disclaimer](#) that applies to this guide.

Volunteers are a vital resource to most community organisations.

Most volunteers provide their services because they want to contribute to their community in a useful and meaningful way.

The relationship between an organisation or group and the volunteer should be managed in a way that is mutually respectful, safe and healthy.

Adopting 'best practice' principles around the involvement of volunteers will help volunteer involving organisations attract, manage, retain and recognise volunteers, and improve the volunteer experience.

About this guide



What does this guide do?

One way your organisation can ensure its relationship with its volunteers is meaningful, and managed in a respectful, safe and healthy way is by understanding the legal issues around the involvement of volunteers.

This guide aims to strengthen your understanding of these legal issues.



What this guide covers



Note – this guide mostly deals with formal volunteering

This guide is intended for volunteer involving organisations engaging ‘formal volunteers’.

Formal volunteers are people who give their time willingly for the common good and without financial gain to an organisation (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.

This is distinguished from ‘**informal volunteering**’ which is also time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, but which takes place outside the context of a formal organisation or group and excludes one’s own family members.

Sometimes community organisations attract ‘spontaneous volunteers.’

Spontaneous volunteers are people without a formal association with a volunteer involving organisation who seek out or are invited to help with various volunteering opportunities, often in connection with a community response to disasters. These informal volunteers create certain challenges for organisations. For more information on spontaneous volunteers, see part 4 of this guide (volunteer safety).

This guide is designed for use by volunteer involving organisations across Australia and provides an overview of the key legal obligations of volunteer involving organisations.

The guide is divided into six parts.

You can download the full guide from our [volunteers webpage](#).

Part 1.	• Introduction
Part 2.	• Volunteer, employee or independent contractor – The legal differences between types of workers and the main legal obligations an organisation owes to volunteers, employees and independent contractors
Part 3.	• The volunteer relationship – Recruiting, inducting, managing performance, managing grievances and ending the relationship
Part 4.	• Volunteer safety – Responsibility regarding negligence, work health and safety, managing risk, insurance and child safe standards
Part 5.	• Unlawful workplace behaviour – Protecting volunteers and other people your volunteers interact with from behaviour such as sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying and victimisation
Part 6.	• Other relevant legal issues – Intellectual property, privacy and record-keeping



This guide includes practical tools (for example, checklists and tips) and links to other reliable sources of information which you may find helpful.



For useful information published by Volunteering Australia, explore the [Volunteering Resource Hub](#), which includes a guide to volunteer management.



Volunteering Australia and the National Strategy for Volunteering



Who is Volunteering Australia?

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community.



Note

This guide is informed by Volunteering Australia's National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033 (National Strategy for Volunteering).

The National Strategy for Volunteering was funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, led by Volunteering Australia, and co-designed in collaboration with the entire volunteering ecosystem.

What are the focus areas and strategic objectives of the National Strategy for Volunteering?

Focus area 1 – Individual potential and the volunteer experience

Aim – Volunteering is safe, inclusive, accessible, meaningful and not exploitative. The strategic objectives to achieve this aim:

- focus on the volunteer experience
- make volunteering inclusive and accessible
- ensure volunteering is not exploitative

Focus area 2 – Community and social impact

Aim – The diversity and impact of volunteering is articulated and celebrated. The strategic objectives to achieve this aim:

- diversify the understanding of volunteering
- reshape the public perception of volunteering
- recognise the inherent value of volunteering
- enable a community-led approach

Focus area 3 – Conditions for volunteering to thrive

Aim – The right conditions are in place for volunteering to be effective and sustainable. The strategic objectives to achieve this aim:

- make volunteering a cross-portfolio issue in government
- build strong leadership and shared accountability
- commit to strategic investment
- recognise the importance of volunteer management



The National Strategy for Volunteering

Volunteering activities take place across all domains of public life in Australia. Volunteers are involved in a myriad of services and activities including the arts, aged care, mental health, disability support, animal welfare, food and emergency relief, environment, sports, education, international development, and more.

In many cases, the contributions of volunteers are crucial to the survival of the sectors they volunteer in.

(page 56 of the strategy)



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

This guide also refers to the [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement \(Standards\)](#) developed by Volunteering Australia.

The Standards are a best practice framework to guide volunteer involvement that:

- help improve the volunteer experience and ensure that the wellbeing of volunteers is supported and their contributions are valued, and
- provide best practice guidance and benchmarks to help organisations attract, manage and retain volunteers and support effective risk and safety practices

Where relevant, throughout this guide we refer to the Standards, recognising that 'best practice' sits alongside and in addition to the legal issues that volunteer involving organisations need to consider.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) include two Standards that are particularly relevant to the overall management of a volunteer program:

Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture – The governing body and organisation leaders promote volunteering and implement effective management systems to support volunteer participation.

Standard 2: Volunteer participation is championed and modelled – Commitment to volunteer participation is set out through vision, planning and resourcing, and supports the organisation's or group's strategic direction

State and territory peak bodies

In addition to Volunteering Australia, each state and territory has peak bodies which facilitate volunteer opportunities and support volunteer involving organisations:

- [VolunteeringACT](#)
- [The Centre for Volunteering \(NSW\)](#)
- [Volunteering Queensland](#)
- [Volunteering SA & NT](#)
- [Volunteering Tasmania](#)
- [Volunteering Victoria](#)
- [Volunteering WA](#)

