

A NEW PARADIGM FOR VOLUNTEERS GET YOUR POLICY RIGHT AND USE IT WELL.

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Both state and federal governments have spent considerable resources developing frameworks to increase volunteering across Australia. While the frameworks have merit, if we are to make volunteering work and create an impact, we urgently need to apply them to local policies and put them to use.

Introduction

Like many of you, we may be described as hyper-volunteers. According to the 2006 Australian Bureau of Statistics Survey, 67% of volunteers volunteer for one organisation, 25% for 2 and 12% for 3 or more. We are both in the latter category, with a mixture of direct service delivery, business development and management roles – and today we are volunteer researchers and advocates for the sector.

So this paper emerges from reflections on our recent experiences as volunteers in a range of settings – mostly human services – amidst our busy lives as full-time workers and family members. We are hoping it will add a new dimension to the myriad of papers at previous conferences on the necessity of engaging volunteers and motivate you to adopt some simple and practical tools to gauge your success.

Our question is: How can we maximise the value of the “gift” time that volunteers bring to your organisation – and why do we need to?

The New Paradigm

In the last decade, the proportion of people who volunteer in our community has increased, but the number of hours they each make available for volunteering has diminished. So we not only need to compete with every other organisation involving volunteers, but we also compete with all the other demands on everyone’s time. In marketing terms, there are thousands of substitutes and volunteers are easily informed about them. So what will help us maintain the commitment of volunteers we have invested in when the usual financial incentive is not present?

We will look at this in four steps:

1. Assessing the value of volunteers and what it costs to lose them
2. Understanding the value proposition using a program logic model
3. Simple policy Framework (and Policy Statements that are linked to the Volunteering Australia National Standards (VANS))
4. Providing a checklist for monitoring your implementation of your policy

1. ASSESSING THE VALUE OF VOLUNTEERS AND WHAT IT COSTS TO LOSE THEM

Valuing our Volunteer Resource – The Cost of Replacement

In the world of paid work, the cost of replacing a staff member is recognised as being equivalent to anything from 50% to 150% of their annual salary¹. Hence staff churn is seen as business cost that needs to be minimised by good recruitment practices and a sound retention strategy based on a workplace culture reflecting values that respect each staff member's contribution and expectations of work. In HR terms, this is called the *value proposition*: What the worker will do for the benefits they receive from the job?

“I’m not sure my contribution matters. If I am not there the job just doesn’t get done and no one seems to notice, I’ve been sick and not been there for 6 months. Nothing happened.”

***We engage
volunteers for
real roles***

VANS3, VANS4,
VANS6

As a volunteer's salary is zero, how do we consider the cost of volunteer turnover and churn?

The bare costs of replacement and holding a volunteer include:

- advertising and promoting the organisation and its needs to gather enquiries
- selection of the volunteer
- establishing a relationship, determining the volunteer's interest and skills and suitability for available roles
- supporting, training, mentoring, supervising, providing feedback to the volunteer
- accompanying administration for insurance, safety checks, accountability and risk management processes.

From our experience in a human services setting, based on the assumption that it is paid staff doing these tasks to find and place the volunteer and the volunteer is doing a fairly well-known and highly valued community job that requires 10 hours initial training, limited supervision and minimal materials, our costing is \$1200 (see Attachment 1). We could assume the cost would be higher for roles that required more specialist skills, a stronger campaign to educate the community of the need, and higher ongoing costs. So a loss of 10 volunteers at \$12 000 may well impact on the bottom line.

¹<http://www.lifeworksolutions.com.au/news/staff-turnover-facts/>;
http://www.eowa.gov.au/Developing_a_Workplace_Program/Six_Steps_to_a_Workplace_Program/Step_2/Calculating_Turnover_Calculator/calc_home.htm;

*We engage
volunteers
based on their
skills, interests
and experience*

VANS2, VANS5

The ABS Voluntary Work survey found that around 45% of volunteers incurred expenses without reimbursement. So their involvement includes an unseen amount of financial donation.

And there is more. Just like the departure of an unhappy staff member, a disappointed volunteer who has had a neutral or negative experience, can damage the organisation's reputation and influence others not to volunteer. So engaging the public requires more effort and time.

Each volunteer is, in effect, like finding a nugget of gold in a stream – or a small opal in the rubble. A gift of time is just as precious as the hard-earned donation.

“I don't mind helping – It just bugs me that they don't seem to understand the issue however they don't consider my professional advice – which I am normally paid to provide - I'm seen as only a volunteer”

Valuing our Volunteer Resource – The Equivalent

It seems to be hard for us to value things without a monetary equivalent – so how do we put a monetary value on a volunteer? One way of doing this that has been suggested by the Association for Research on Nonprofits Organizations and Voluntary Action (ARNOVA) is to calculate the cost of the volunteer based on the labour costs of an equivalent role².

So let's have a look at some equivalents in the commercial world – at very modest rates

<i>Service delivery</i>	<i>Hourly rate</i>
Delivery – driver	\$20
Youth worker	\$22
Telephone Counsellor	\$26
<i>Business development and management</i>	
Web designer	\$55
Business analyst, data analyst	\$55
Data system developer	\$150
Strategic planner	\$120
Board of Directors	\$500
Legal advice	\$390
Senior Researcher	\$55
Events manager	\$35
Bookkeeping	\$45
Treasurer (Chief Financial Officer)	\$75

² Mook L, Handy F, Ginieniewicz J, Quarter J 2007 *The Value of Volunteering for a Nonprofit Membership Association: The Case of ARNOVA*. Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly 36 (3): 504-521

We engage volunteers when their contribution is valued by the organisation and/or the community

VANS2, VANS8

So each time the volunteer designing your data management system comes to talk to you, they are effectively sending you a cheque – or transferring to your bank account an amount of \$150 per hour. If it was a taxi outside your door with the metre ticking, you would be anxious about the time it was costing you. So how is that different from keeping the volunteer with these valuable skills waiting?

Valuing our volunteer Resource – How They Value Their Time

Often we can't afford to pay for these roles so there is a tendency to think of them as a luxury that we don't actually have a need for. It is like giving a \$100 bottle of wine to someone who is used to \$10 wine and can't tell the difference.

And the volunteer is not looking for money – but do they regard their time as actually “free”? What is the non-monetary value of their time to them?

We know from surveys that there are many reasons people volunteer. I want to focus on a few. In the national survey of volunteers, 2009 *Volunteering Australia*, 80% of respondents chose “knowing that my contribution would make a difference” as the most important decision to volunteer. These volunteers identified benefits to themselves as 'personal satisfaction' (44%) and “to do something worthwhile' (36%). Volunteers said that in recognition of their effort what they wanted most was “being accepted as a valuable team member”. Eighty-two per cent increased their “sense of community belonging” from their volunteering experience.

“Arriving for a meeting that is actually costing me work time, waiting for half an hour and then finding the manager is double-booked and won't be available. Not the first time – maybe the last.”

Being accepted as a valuable team member was the most frequently mentioned form of recognition that volunteers said was most important to them feeling valued (38%), while a personal thank you was the form of recognition most organisations reported giving volunteers most often (69%).³

Our very small survey for the purpose of this paper found that the most important thing for volunteers to achieve from volunteering is to “use my skills productively” and “contribute to the community” (83%). Seventy-two percent did not agree that paid time was worth more than “free” time. One third had left an organisation where their skills were not recognised.

³ National Volunteering Survey pp 16

We engage volunteers when we have the resources to provide appropriate resources

VANS1, VANS7

So far we have given into the notion that unless it is represented in dollars it cannot be counted. In the commercial world, a dollar value is also assigned to reputation and “book”. Is it possible that we should actually value our volunteers at a higher level because of their willingness to work without pay? Does this indicate an enthusiasm and commitment that is worth more than a standard staff member? Does it show an alignment of values with the organisation that does not always come with hired staff?

“While it doesn’t seem like much I’m glad the organisation had volunteer insurance because when the chair broke and I hurt my back, I was able to receive physio until I could return to my paid job”

So perhaps there is a premium on volunteers. These comments from volunteers indicate what they value and expect⁴:

- Just to have people acknowledge your presence instead of looking through you
- Having my advice accepted and considered for implementation
- Continue to use my professional skills and feel confident I am not losing any skills while being out of the workforce
- Respect for the fact that a volunteers gives of their time as they are able, not on demand. They are sometimes criticised when not available due to work or family and very often when unable to complete training. Many valuable volunteers leave because the powers that be are trying to turn them into unpaid professionals.

Implications for Policy and Practice

Organisations usually engage volunteers in order to provide a more extensive service than they could without them. If we assume that it is an important part of your organisation’s service model to include volunteers as part of your team, we can also assume that you wish to do so as efficiently as possible. That is, you want to use the least amount of resources possible to gather and retain the volunteer workforce you need.

We are proposing a very simple policy setting that will guide your volunteer program, based on the National Volunteer Standards.

2. UNDERSTANDING THE VALUE PROPOSITION USING A PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

Firstly, we have used program logic model from the volunteer’s perspective to understand how we can meet the volunteer’s value proposition.

⁴ Volunteering Australia 2009 *National Survey of Volunteer in Issues 2009*

Program logic is important in demonstrating why and how policy will work. The focus on program logic demonstrates the link between the thinking of volunteers and the policy framework, and allows people who work with volunteers or are developing a new volunteer program understand the rationale in developing a Volunteer policy framework (and policy statements) and the link between the vision of the Volunteer.

It clearly outlines the logic and supports the continuous improvement framework that the Volunteering Australia National Standards are based on.

After speaking to several volunteers who are professionals in their field, the following program logic was developed:

Vision	<i>(I volunteer in order to achieve)</i>	Community benefit in line with the host organisation's vision/mission
Goal	<i>(So I help the organisation to)</i>	Achieve outcomes to meet the NFPs vision (eg more is achieved)
Outcome for this volunteer activity	<i>(So I want to know that)</i>	My contribution makes a difference
Output	<i>(So I want to experience)</i>	Quality volunteering time
Inputs	<i>(So this depends on)</i>	Energy, skills, knowledge that I bring and share; Organisation's policy and practices that enable my effort to be productive

3. SIMPLE POLICY FRAMEWORK (AND POLICY STATEMENTS THAT ARE LINKED TO THE VOLUNTEERING AUSTRALIA NATIONAL STANDARDS (VANS))

To support the Volunteering Australia National Standards, careful planning with a focus on inputs is essential. A policy framework that is a 'ready to go' resource is valuable because a community organisation is required to comply with:

- State association regulations
- The Federal Tax legislation
- Sector based standards

Community organisations have struggled to implement Volunteering Australia National Standards by either developing specific policies that are not connected to other processes and over time cannot be maintained or the other extreme not developing policies at all.

***Volunteer
Policy
Framework and
policy
statements***

The proposed policy framework (and policy statements) allows the organisation to be certain that they have included the National Standards for involving volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations, and a tool to verify policies over time.

Proposed Policy Statements:

1. We engage volunteers for real roles (VANS 3, VANS 4, VANS6)
2. We engage volunteers based on their skills, interests and experience (VANS2, VANS5)
3. We engage volunteers when their contribution is valued by the organisation and or the community (VANS2, NVS8)
4. We engage volunteers when we have the resources to provide support (VANS1, VANS7)

4. PROVIDING A CHECKLIST FOR MONITORING YOUR IMPLEMENTATION OF YOUR POLICY

Monitoring Progress Over Time

With a clear policy framework and policy statements linked to the Volunteering Australia National Standards, the next step is regular monitoring. Over time it becomes easier to address areas of policy to make sure that changes are made to meet the changing needs of volunteers and service delivery.

Effective mapping of a clear policy framework and policy statement provides a way to track progress over time.

Ask for feedback!! Give your volunteers a range of ways to provide feedback. This requires more than the “How is it going?” as you walk past them – which can actually be condescending. If you cannot afford the time for a face-to-face session as you would for an employee, provide a regular feedback form (see Attachment 2) to make sure volunteers (and staff) have an opportunity to comment on their experience.

Survey results clearly suggest that there is a new paradigm that we need to work – Volunteers have changed the way they are involved in Community Organisations and the contribution that they make.

With a clear approach to monitoring change over time, organisations will understand what they need to do to find and retain effective volunteers. The proposed policy framework linked to the standards enables community organisations to respond to the changing needs of volunteers.

Community Organisations find that “One satisfied volunteer = many volunteers”

Unlike our day jobs, it is often possible for us to work with family and friends in our volunteer roles. So one volunteer who is satisfied that their contribution is valuable is the best way to get more volunteers. This can add to the volunteering experience as people can benefit from social and family time at the same time.

A win - win all round!

Attachment 1 – Volunteer Policy Framework (and policy statements) with Volunteering Australia National Standards (VANS) Mapping

1. We engage volunteers for real roles (VANS3, VANS4 and VANS6)

- Do your volunteers have job descriptions?
- Does your organisation include volunteers in their recruitment and selection policies?
- Do you have a specific orientation process for volunteers?
- What are the differences in roles for volunteers and paid staff?

TIPS:

- 1.Include any variation of process with Volunteers into your recruitment, selection and service delivery policies;
- 2.Check that your job descriptions explains the purpose, time, skills required, skills gained and on the job support;
- 3.Include the volunteer roles as part of your team and organisation structure.

Key areas to consider:

VANS3 Recruitment and Selection

- Policy and planning (3.1, 3.2, 3.3, 3.4, 3.5, 3.6)
- Selection procedures (3.7, 3.8, 3.9, 3.10, 3.11, 3.12, 3.13)
- Volunteer orientation (3.14, 3.15, 3.16, 3.17)

VANS4 Work and the Workplace

- Volunteer Roles (4.1, 4.2, 4.3, 4.4, 4.5, 4.6),
- Work satisfaction (4.7, 4.8, 4.9, 4.10, 4.11, 4.12, 4.13)
- Health and safety (4.14, 4.15, 4.16, 4.17, 4.18, 4.19)

VANS6 Service Delivery

- Management responsibility (6.1, 6.2, 6.3, 6.4, 6.5, 6.6)
- Service Review (6.7, 6.7, 6.8, 6.9, 6.10, 6.11, 6.12, 6.13, 6.14)

2. We engage volunteers based on their skills, interests and experience (VANS2 and VANS5)

- Do you actively ask about volunteer interests?
- How do you manage a volunteer who wants to volunteer based on their interest rather than experience or known skills?
- Do you know what factors motivate each of your volunteers to attend your organisation?
- How do you look for ways to increase the volunteers' motivation to be part of your organisation?
- Do you use a strength based approach to volunteering?
- What do you do to make sure that roles include flexibility particularly in relation to availability for the organisation and the volunteer?
- Do you recruit volunteers with a suitable fit for the required skill set and the organisational culture?

Do you recruit volunteers with 'differences' to add to organisational culture and reflect the community you work in?

TIPS:

1. Consider how you can ask and record skills and experience in the interview process;
2. Identify a regular review process to check that skills, interests and motivation are recognised;
3. Include opportunities to find people who have differences not just similarities to others that are part of your organisation.

Key areas to consider:

VANS2 Recruitment and Selection

- Management system (2.1, 2.2, 2.3, 2.4, 2.5, 2.6, 2.7)
- Authority and responsibility (2.8, 2.9, 2.10, 2.11, 2.12)

VANS5 Training and Development

- Policy and resources (5.1, 5.2, 5.3, 5.4, 5.5)
- Training and Development (5.6, 5.7, 5.8, 5.9, 5.1, 5.11, 5.12, 5.13, 5.14)
- Work Appraisal (5.15, 5.16, 5.17)
- Volunteer Recognition (5.18, 5.19)

3. We engage volunteers when their contribution is valued by the organisation and or the community (VANS8)

- How do you link volunteer contributions to your organisation's goals?
- What process do you have in place to make sure that the activity is valued by the organisation?
- What process do you use to review your organisation's engagement within a community?
- How do you include volunteers in a way that is valued by the community?

TIPS:

1. Identify how roles within your organisation are linked with your strategic plan (it's an easy way to do staffing reviews);
2. Identify how each role within your organisation contributes to the community sector;

Key areas to consider

VANS8 Continuous improvement

- Policy and resources (8.1, 8.2, 8.3)
- Data collection and analysis (8.4, 8.5, 8.6, 8.7)
- Quality improvement (8.8, 8.9, 8.10, 8.11, 8.12, 8.13, 8.14, 8.15, 8.16)

4. We engage volunteers when we have the resources to provide support (VANS 1, VANS2, VANS7)

- Does your Volunteer Insurance and Public Liability Insurance meet the needs of your current volunteers?
- Do volunteers have access to the physical space and resources they need to do their job (example desk and computer)?
- Do your volunteers have access to the information that they need to do their job (including appropriate electronic files)?
- Do your confidentiality and privacy policies treat volunteers differently?
- Do you have a staff member or volunteer with authority to manage volunteers?
- Are your volunteers provided with appropriate reimbursement (ie transport) if needed or funded?
- What training do you offer volunteers (especially in service delivery) and is it appropriate?
- Do you provide appropriate mentoring and support?

TIPS:

1. Develop an organisational structure that has a person whose role is to support management of volunteers and make sure that this role is filled temporarily when staff take leave.
2. Review Volunteer Insurance and Public Liability Insurance levels are appropriate each year.
3. Allocate appropriate resources including space and funding to allow volunteers to participate in activities in the same capacity as paid staff.

Key areas to consider

VANS1 Policies and Procedures

- General policy (1.1, 1.2, 1.3)
- Management system policies (1.4, 1.5, 1.6, 1.7)
- Operating procedures (1.8, 1.9, 1.10 1.11)
- Policy and procedure reviews (1.12, 1.13, 1.14, 1.15)

VANS2 Management Responsibility

- Social responsibilities (2.13, 2.14, 2.15)
- Management Review (2.16, 2.17, 2.18)
- Resources (2.19, 2.20, 2.21, 2.22, 2.23, 2.34, 2.25)

VANS7 Documentation and Records

- Personal Records (7.1, 7.2, 7.3, 7.4, 7.5, 7.6)
- System documentation and control (7.7, 7.8, 7.9, 7.10, 7.11, 7.12)

Attachment 2 – Policy Statements Review (For Volunteers)

1. I was engaged for real roles (VANS3, VANS4 and VANS6)

Did you know what was expected of you?

Question	Strongly disagree			Neither		Strongly agree	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Overall I am satisfied working in this organisation							
2. I understand what is expected from my work							
3. I am working in a job that needs to be done							
4. I feel like I am part of a team							
5. I am involved (directly or indirectly) in providing the services that this organisation delivers							

2. When I volunteer, I use my skills, interests and experience (VANS2 and VANS5)

Question	Strongly disagree			Neither		Strongly agree	
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
6. I am able to use my skills and experience in my role							
7. The organisation knows what I am interested in							
8. The people I work with understand my motivation to work here							

3. When I volunteer, I know my contribution is valued by the organisation and or the community (VANS8)

	Strongly disagree			Neither		Strongly agree	
Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
9. I understand where I fit in to the organisation							
10. I clearly understand the benefit that my project and job provides to the community							
11. I feel like what I do is understood and important to my community							

4. As a volunteer, I have the resources that I require to do my job (VANS 1, VANS2, VANS7)

	Strongly disagree			Neither		Strongly agree	
Question	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
12. I have a key person who supports us as volunteers and helps us when needed							
13. I know how the organisation manages injuries and know that they have appropriate insurance and plans							
14. I have received adequate training to work in my role							
15. I can access the information I need (including on the computer) and understand my privacy obligations							
16. I know what process is needed for reimbursement when I need to spend money for my role or project.							

Attachment 3

Estimate of the cost of volunteer turnover

We estimated the cost of replacing a volunteer in a not-for-profit organisation with 200 volunteers.

We assumed:

- The organisation is large (over 100 staff), however the particular service the volunteers provide is a small program with two paid staff.
- Volunteers are sourced through the internet and word of mouth.
- Volunteers undergo a preliminary information interview, mandatory pre-service training and criminal history checks and then operate somewhat independently off-site. Contact is made on an “as needs” basis.
- Occasional and optional meetings are provided for volunteers.
- Staff maintain contact through regular emails and newsletters.

Projected volunteer turnover costs for a year

Task

	Admin Officer CETS award Level C	QCSCA A CSW 3	CETS trainer 2E	QCSCA A CSW 6 Manager	CEO Corporate Manager
Hours	4	2	10	11.8	0.2
Rate	\$29.61	\$34.43	\$33.07	\$54.55	\$91.09
Advertising and promoting the organisation and its needs to gather enquiries (actual intake of 30 from website, word of mouth and community radio)	\$29.61	\$17.2	0.0	\$13.6	\$9.1
Selection of the volunteer process	0	\$8.6	0.0	\$27.3	0.0
Establishing a relationship, determining the volunteer’s interest, skills and suitability for available roles	0	\$8.6	0.0	\$27.3	0.0
Supporting, training, mentoring, supervising, providing feedback	\$29.61	0.0	\$330.7	\$545.5	\$9.1
Accompanying administration for insurance, safety checks, accountability and risk management processes	\$59.22	\$68.9	0.0	\$27.3	0.0
TOTAL	\$118.44	\$103.3	\$330.7	\$640.9	418.2