



April 2010
Workforce Development for
Volunteers in the Service Industries

Introduction

Service Skills Australia (SSA) is the Industry Skills Council for the service industries. Skills councils are the recognised national bodies providing advice on industry training and skills development needs to government and industry.

SSA represents the interests of businesses across sectors including tourism, hospitality and events, sport, fitness and recreation, and retail, wholesale and personal services.

SSA is an independent, not-for-profit body, managed by industry members and funded by the Australian Government to:

- develop a culture within the service industries which promotes and enhances the skills development of its workforce
- develop policies, programs and services, including industry training packages, that support industry needs in relation to skills and workforce development
- achieve quality skills outcomes throughout the service industries
- produce quality workforce development information and use industry intelligence to inform decision making.

In July 2009, SSA released an issues paper to raise and discuss the topic of workforce development for volunteers within the context of the service industries.

In addition to describing current research and data on volunteers and workforce development of unpaid labour, the issues paper included a series of questions for stakeholders to consider and provide feedback on.

In October 2009, SSA held a workshop to discuss the received feedback to the issues paper and recommend further steps.

Background

SSA's Environmental Scan 2009 identified that many sectors of the service industries under the scope of SSA depend heavily on volunteer/unpaid labour in management, development and support roles. This is reinforced in the 2010 Environmental Scan—particularly for the Sport, Fitness, and Outdoor and Community Recreation industry—and includes discussion on the issue of training for volunteers.

In September 2008, the Federal Government commissioned the Productivity Commission to construct a new tool to measure the contribution of the not-for-profit sector to communities and the economy.¹ A report was released early October 2009 to which SSA wrote a submission based on feedback received to the issues paper and during the workshop. The final research report *Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector* was released on February 11, 2010, with a short section devoted to “Volunteers and volunteering”.²

Regarding the final recommendations, SSA supports the following:

¹ <http://www.pc.gov.au/projects/study/not-for-profit>

² Productivity Commission 2010, *Contribution of the Not-for-Profit Sector*, Research report, Canberra, pp.250-259.

Building sector capabilities to improve governance and enhance productivity: Recommendation 9.2

State and territory governments should review their full range of support for sector development to reduce duplication, improve the effectiveness of such measures, and strengthen strategic focus, including on:

- *developing the sustainable use of intermediaries providing support services to the sector, including in information technology*
- *improving knowledge of, and the capacity to meet, the governance requirements for not-for-profit organisations' boards and management*
- *building skills in evaluation and risk management, with a priority for those not-for-profit organisations engaged in delivery of government funded services.*

Addressing workforce issues: Recommendation 10.3

The Australian Government, in consultation with Skills Australia, should commission the Community Services and Health Industry Skills Council to undertake workforce planning for the community services sector having regard to the current and future workforce challenges arising from growing demand and increasing supply constraints.

It must be noted, however, that while supporting the call for workforce planning for the voluntary sector (10.3), SSA emphasizes the importance of considering the large number of volunteers working in the service industries (Sports, fitness, and outdoor and community recreation, Tourism, hospitality and events, and Wholesale, retail and personal services) and not merely restrict workforce planning to the community services sector.

In addition to the above Productivity Commission report, the Volunteering Policy Advisory Group was formed in October 2009 to provide expert advice on Australia's volunteering vision to 2021 and help develop the nation's National Volunteering Strategy. Chaired by the Parliamentary Secretary for Social Inclusion and the Voluntary Sector, Senator Ursula Stephens, this report's release is due to coincide with the tenth anniversary of the United Nations Year of the Volunteer (2011) and will seek to promote new ways to deepen and strengthen Australia's volunteer movement.

Available data and further research needed

Feedback to the issues paper indicated that while research regarding volunteering does exist—namely from Volunteering Australia (VA), the Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (FaHCSIA) and the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)³—remaining reports often cover specific sectors and/or states. Therefore, the information available is not always relevant for each of the sectors in Australia's service industries.

Interest in the following topics was identified:

- Motivation of volunteers (metropolitan vs. regional vs. remote areas, regular volunteers vs. event/on-off volunteers).
- Develop resources for Volunteer Resource Centres and other local service providers to promote existing resources and deliver training in the use of tools such as the Volunteer Motivation Inventory.⁴
- If volunteers want to use their existing skills or are interested in developing new ones, how much of their workplace skills are taken into or cross over their voluntary roles and vice versa.
- Strategies used by Volunteer Utilising Organisations (VUOs) to identify training needs.
- Standard demographics (age, gender, previous education) of different volunteer groups (community recreation vs. guides vs. life savers).

However, the feedback also showed that it may be more important **to promote existing research and resources** and make volunteers and VUOs aware of it and use it (e.g. through Volunteer Resource Centres) rather than conducting new projects.

Furthermore, feedback suggested that many remote and rural VUOs are not formally recognised or established and hence do not have full-time, paid volunteer co-ordinators in place. Generally, community participation groups in these areas provide services to the wider community beyond the scope of their immediate interests (e.g. maintenance and management of local meeting facilities).

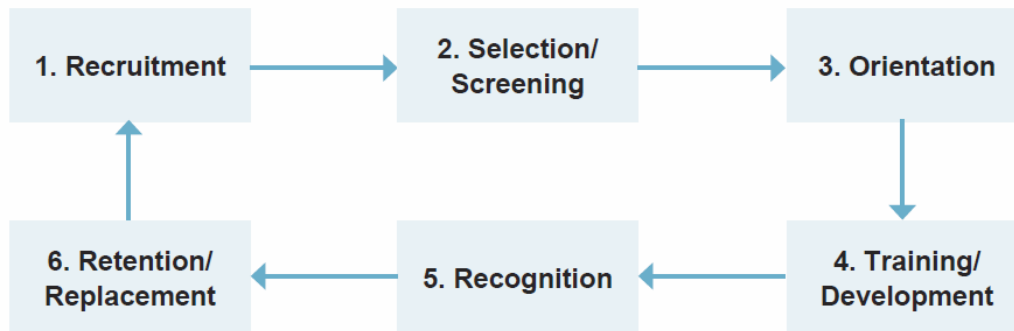
Having said that, we must keep in mind that this is indeed a national issue—for example, 72% of all involvements in sport and physical recreation organisations are with groups fully staffed by volunteers.⁵ Additionally, where paid managers (or co-ordinators) of volunteers are installed, these employees often have other roles and responsibilities attached to their roles.

³ VA 2009, *National Survey of Volunteering Issues*; Commonwealth of Australia/FaHSCIA 2008, *Volunteering in Australia: Changing patterns in voluntary work 1995-2006*; ABS 2007, *4441.0 - Voluntary Work, Australia, 2006*.

⁴ Esmond, Judy and Patrick Dunlop 2004, *Developing the Volunteer Motivation Inventory to Assess the Underlying Motivational Drives of Volunteers in Western Australia*, Community Link and Network Western Australia Incorporated (CLAN WA Inc.)

⁵ ABS 2007, *4441.0 - Voluntary Work, Australia, 2006*, p.6.

Feedback also emphasised that VUOs need to have a clear organisational strategy/story and an understanding of why and how volunteers should be engaged to help achieve this strategy. One such model of volunteer management is provided by the Department of Sport and Recreation in WA⁶ and is broken down into six stages:



There are several training organisations/companies providing training and/or RPL to VUOs and volunteers, however, only a minority are aligned to the national vocational education and training (VET) system, such as the Active Volunteering Certificate offered by TAFEs. Furthermore, feedback also indicated that higher costs required to provide training in remote and rural areas leads to a reluctance by training providers to offer it—although it must also be noted that these challenges are also experienced in some metropolitan areas.

Volunteering and training of volunteers is an important and valuable concept but should not necessarily be seen, in all instances, as an avenue that will lead to paid work (either re-entering the workforce, a career progression or a career change) or for pathways into formal education. Some volunteers treat their volunteering as a hobby and do not want to dedicate their leisure time to training.

The concern is that volunteering becomes seen by the community as a means to gaining qualifications and employment rather than being a freely-given service done in the interests of an individual or for the community. Moreover, not all volunteers need training and it should not be concluded that their work is less valuable for the lack of training.

⁶ Western Australia Department of Sport and Recreation 2004, *Clubs' Guide to Volunteer Management*, The Clubhouse Club Development Booklets, Volume 14, p.6.

Recommendations for next steps:

- Greater promotion of existing information regarding volunteering through articles in SSA e-newsletter and on website.
- Linkages to existing information (e.g. Volunteering Australia website).
- Promote the development of a central, online repository, with easy links to relevant information and links to all appropriate websites e.g. Volunteering Australia and an online list of volunteering organisations, as well as automated email notification for updates to documentation and web-enabled tools.
- Promote the development of hardcopy information packs for less web-enabled volunteers (e.g. elderly volunteers, remote locations) through Volunteering Australia.
- Promote the utilisation of web-enabled tools (e.g. podcasts) that could be used to better engage the audience and communicate information—particularly to the next generation of young volunteers.
- Review final report on the National Volunteering Strategy upon its release.

Policy settings to support volunteer workforce development

It was recognised by workshop participants that volunteering needs to be encouraged as there is an under-supply of volunteers and much volunteering is based on word-of-mouth. Hence solutions for stimulating greater volunteering need to be provided at both a sector and organisational level.

The status and work of volunteers needs to be recognised and the input and value they provide has to be further promoted as they are still not receiving sufficient recognition and support. This is reinforced by the fact that some volunteering activities are not recognised by the volunteers themselves as being volunteering activities and/or the volunteers don't see themselves as volunteers, e.g. parents involved in their children's sport club.

Training should reflect the high importance and value of volunteers and be adequately funded. Feedback indicated that funding was mainly available to large organisations, whereas smaller and marginalised sports or activities enterprises have difficulty accessing funding for training.

Research from People First Total Solutions suggests that 50% of VUOs do not possess the minimum resources required to properly engage volunteers and that many are not adapting to the changing environment.⁷ There needs to be a greater understanding of the effort that is required to ensure that organisations are effectively supporting and looking after their volunteers. Otherwise volunteers who are not engaged will drop out as a result of being dissatisfied. Organisations need to recognise that while there are benefits in having volunteers, there are also responsibilities and costs involved. Furthermore, it is

⁷ People First Total Solutions 2009, *E-News for the Not-For-Profit (NFP) Sector*, August 2009, No. 8 (<http://archive.constantcontact.com/fs055/1100677655792/archive/1102669272546.html>).

important to link recognition programs to motivating factors for volunteering—at both an organisational and sector level.

The main challenges here, however, include the availability of relevant training to volunteer co-ordinators and the resourcing of such training (i.e. purchasing, delivering and providing time for staff and volunteers to attend training).

Recommendations for next steps:

- Consult with a wide range of groups operating in the volunteer sector.
- Lobby to include unpaid labour in funded vocational education and training.
- In co-operation with VA, collate information from existing resources and incorporate into developing a guide on typical motivating factors for volunteering.
- Promote the development of sector-wide solutions to ageing population trends—particularly regarding greater involvement from both younger and older in volunteerism—and lobby government to implement solutions.
- Develop and promote advisory information on pathways, both within organisations and across the sectors in co-operation with Volunteering Australia and the service skills Industry Advisory Committees (IACs).
- Co-operate with other key bodies to create consistent messages around expectations in the volunteering sector.

Workforce development

Feedback enforced the need for volunteer workforce development principles (and their promotion) in order to keep moving forward while providing guidelines and a form of structure. The motivation of volunteers was seen as a starting point together with the economic and social contribution volunteers make.

It was seen as important to not further increase legislative requirements, and hence, time requirements by volunteers. Volunteers need to have some flexibility to be recognised for what they are already contributing without an increase to their commitments.

Feedback also suggested that workforce development for volunteers should include a joint focus on younger and older Australians—with the latter's interest in volunteerism anticipated to rise as Baby Boomers begin to enter their retirement years⁸—and how to interest them in volunteering. Regarding younger Australians, it may well be worth promoting the benefits of having volunteer roles on their resumes as a means to generate greater participation in volunteerism.⁹

⁸ KPMG 2009, *Monash Baby Boomer Study*, p.10; AMP.NATSEM Income and Wealth Report (National Centre for Social and Economic Modelling) 2009, *Don't stop thinking about tomorrow: The changing face of retirement – the past the present and the future*, Nov 2009, Issue 24, p.15.

⁹ Western Australia Department of Sport and Recreation 2004, *Clubs' Guide to Volunteer Management*, The Clubhouse Club Development Booklets, Volume 14, p.4.

Regarding volunteer retention, it was recognised that there were two main segments of volunteers:

- Quality staff who are retained for short periods
- 'Bad eggs' or ineffective staff/board/committee members who remain in organisations for long periods of time.

Several solutions for VUOs were suggested to help retain quality staff:

- Make compliance/process burden for volunteers easier.
- Build awareness of what is required from a volunteer upfront.
- Increase flexibility of work arrangements (e.g. work from home).
- Increase pathways within the organisation and across sectors to ensure volunteers have opportunities to remain engaged and/or develop.
- Considering volunteering opportunities that recognise short staff turnover (e.g. project-based work).
- Focus on recognition, as this is viewed as consistent with volunteer's motivators (e.g. recognising contribution, rather than creating financial gain).
- Investigate mechanisms to increase the participation of corporate employees in volunteering (e.g. time-in-lieu for volunteering, volunteer days per annum).
- Work 'bottom-up' to build alliances with similar organisations (e.g. similar sector, geography) to help people find a suitable organisation to volunteer with.
- Provide access to professional development courses in managing people for volunteer co-ordinators.

Several solutions for VUOs were suggested to help transition out or avoid further ineffective staff:

- Screen new staff upfront and use probation periods as general practice.
- Limit board memberships to a defined time period.
- Ensure consistency of message about what the expectations are of a volunteer and on what liability a volunteer may be subject to due to their volunteering.
- Create mechanisms to transition out ineffective staff into side roles (e.g. alumni groups).
- Create pathways to other organisations (where appropriate) and/or refer volunteers to other volunteering opportunities (e.g. referring people to the Go Volunteer website).

The issue of limited knowledge regarding where and how to access training is seen to narrow the engagement of VUOs and volunteers. Feedback indicated a lack of awareness and understanding of training requirements (e.g. regarding legal issues) as one reason why training is not seen as a priority. Other reasons included:

- non-practical times
- dates
- costs
- length of training
- venues that discourage volunteers to attend
- relevance to the motivations of volunteers
- relevance to the roles and responsibilities of volunteers.

There are also positive examples where training is seen as an investment and was mapped to the national VET system and RPL is promoted.

There is a strong demand for one single access point per state/territory to provide information about and access to training. Currently VUOs need to access several websites, including but not limited to, the Community and Neighbourhood Houses Association, Volunteering Australia and its state specific websites and various local volunteering organisations.

It is important to keep in mind that while training is seen as a motivator to some volunteers and VUOs, it is also seen by some as 'only more time they have to commit' without providing value to their work. Therefore, training needs to be adapted to the needs, roles and location of the VUO and its volunteers in order to encourage participation and add value. This, in turn, requires work and contextualisation/tailoring from the training provider.

Unfortunately, there is a tendency for training programs and requirements to be developed in the first instance for the professional sector and then subsequently extended to volunteers. This may be counterproductive as VUOs find themselves enmeshed by training requirements that were never designed for them, and that impose unwanted burdens on the volunteers themselves. This leads to volunteers withdrawing their services, or simply not coming forward in the first place.

A training model for volunteers needs to be highly modular, and built on the possibility that many people will already have a high level of competence through practical experience and personal interest, demonstrating the need for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) processes.

There is a strong need to promote a greater understanding of the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) and awareness of existing training. Information about the AQTF is often provided by Registered Training Organisations (RTOs) who have their own agenda and do not always communicate how units of competency can be packaged to meet the needs of particular skill sets.

Industry feedback indicated that training can be broken into the following groups:

- Common needs—common across the volunteering sector
- Industry needs—common across industries
- Organisation-specific needs—specific to organisations

Priority common needs were identified as being:

- Being a volunteer/managing volunteers
- Orientation (including OH&S)
- Soft skills
- Governance/Financial/HR training
- Committee process

Governance skills were seen as a priority, as the consequences for non-compliance can be severe and volunteers are not always aware of their responsibilities. However, there were also other areas which need attention like soft skills (e.g. conflict management) and technical skills (e.g. for outdoor recreation) to reach 'grass roots' volunteers.

Due to the broad range of volunteers, it is crucial that different strategies be developed to address their individual needs and that training be tailored in order to meet the needs of both VUOs and volunteers.

Some feedback also identified volunteers do not have the appropriate training tools required, for example in outdoor recreation activities like bushwalking, abseiling and canoeing.

Recommendations for next steps:

- Enhance promotion of available training (e.g. through SSA e-newsletter, links to VA website, promotion of best practice examples, etc.).
- Linkages to existing information regarding guidelines on what regulations/frameworks an organisation must adhere to and for guidelines on developing volunteer position descriptions through links to VA website.
- Expand on the RPL pilot and develop an approach to use RPLs more broadly across different sectors.
- Promote best practice advice/best case examples (online and hard copy) on:
 - Governance/management (e.g. structure, skill sets, etc.);
 - Basics of volunteering (e.g. expectations, available information, etc.).

- Investigate mechanisms to provide and/or promote free, relevant training to the sectors (e.g. online training, training DVDs and workbooks, etc.). This could address and provide leadership-specific professional development to volunteer co-ordinators to assist in:
 - Passing on skills, knowledge and information to volunteers, as well as;
 - Selecting appropriate training for their volunteers.
- Lobby for a national databases/registers (e.g. national working with children card, national volunteering card)—VA noted they have been in discussions with the sector for some time and there are various issues including privacy.
- Alert organisations to VA's *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations* and encourage adoption of these practices as the basis for using volunteers.
- Develop and implement strategies in partnership with peak volunteering bodies as well as sector groups to ensure that these approaches are relevant.

Summary

In light of this paper, Service Skills Australia will continue its commitment to advancing the agenda of volunteer workforce development in the service industries.

Through establishing strong networks and partnerships with other organisational bodies involved with and dedicated to volunteerism, SSA aims to develop greater understanding of this pertinent issue by producing research papers and workshops that further explore the idiosyncrasies of the volunteer cohort and unravel the relationship between volunteerism and productivity.