

As many not-for-profit (NFP) organisations operate with the assistance of volunteers, it is considered **good governance** to have clear policies and guidelines in place for the management of volunteers.

A useful definition of volunteering has been developed by Volunteering Australia¹, stating that volunteering 'is time willingly given for the common good without financial gain'. It notes that it includes activism and recognises corporate volunteering by an entity — companies that organise employee volunteers. The definition includes formal volunteering that takes place within organisations (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way and informal volunteering — acts that take place outside the context of a formal organisation.

Governance

It is **good governance** for the board to develop an appropriate set of policies governing volunteer management, which could include:

- a policy on the reimbursement of expenses
- a policy on the receipt of gifts and hospitality
- a policy on the use of motor vehicles, including the position with insurance
- a code of conduct — it needs to extend to volunteers as well as the board and employees
- the directors' capacity to access professional advice and consultants where a board is comprised of volunteer non-executive directors.

The board needs to have oversight of:

- the insurance coverage for volunteers. Volunteers may be covered under the existing NFP insurance scheme or separate cover may need to be purchased. Where the board is comprised of volunteer non-executive directors, the board charter or other relevant document should clarify the extent of D&O insurance coverage. Personal civil liability legislation in all Australian jurisdictions may also provide immunity from civil liability in some circumstances.

- the workplace health and safety of volunteers, who are workers under the workplace health and safety legislation (and their safety needs to be ensured).

Application to become a volunteer

It is **good governance** to ensure that a volunteer interview program is established and conducted by an experienced person. This would include:

- an application form
- whether it is appropriate to contact referees
- whether approval is required to conduct a police check (this will be necessary where volunteers are dealing with children).

If accepted, the organisation should provide a letter of acceptance by the volunteer for signing. This should include a statement that the organisation reserves the right to terminate the volunteer's service if the volunteer proves to be unsuitable.

Induction

It is **good governance** to prepare an induction manual for volunteers. This could include:

- a letter of welcome from the chair or chief executive
- a copy of the mission and values statement
- a plan of the organisation's structure
- a physical plan of the building
- a brief history of the organisation
- a statement of the principles of volunteering
- a statement of the volunteer's rights and responsibilities
- a statement of expectations of volunteers, including confidentiality in respect of the organisation's information, respect of clients' privacy and respect of clients in all client involvement
- access to relevant policies
- details of training

1 <http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy-and-best-practise/definition-of-volunteering/>

- reporting lines
- information on the review/appraisal program
- protection in case of disclosure/whistleblowing.

Communication

It is **good governance** to establish systems and processes for communicating and engaging with volunteers. This could include:

- suitable initial and ongoing training sessions
- a buddy/mentor system
- a regular volunteers' get-together, such as a lunch or afternoon tea, in order to encourage teamwork and good feeling, and to allow the board and/or the chief executive an opportunity to recognise the contribution of volunteers to the organisation.

For volunteer non-executive directors, it is good practice to consider providing access to a board development program, to allow directors to keep up-to-date on their duties and responsibilities as directors and also any changes in an evolving NFP landscape. Reference can be made to the websites of organisations such as Governance Institute and the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission.

Risks to be wary of

While most contributions by volunteers are usually constructive and productive, there are risks in using volunteers that need to be managed such as:

- poor or misleading advice given to clients — this can be particularly a problem in health organisations where individuals with a particular complaint give advice on the complaint
- wasteful practices — particularly related to some fundraising activities where the supervisory costs or the risks to reputation exceed the return.

There are also particular risks with some traditional voluntary committee/director jobs where payments of fees are made to those directors/committee members:

- loss of protections from civil liability under the civil liability acts of the Commonwealth and of each state and territory

- loss of rights related to the use/non-use of 'Limited' in the name of companies limited by guarantee registered with the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission under s 150 of the *Corporations Act 2001*
- requirements for ministerial approval under s 48 of the *Charitable Fundraising Act 1991*
- prohibition on paying directors under s 83C of the *Education Act 1990*.

Review and recognition

It is **good governance** to establish:

- a review/appraisal program for volunteers at the close of an agreed probation period. This should include the right of the volunteer to air any grievances
- an annual review/appraisal of a volunteer's performance
- a recognition program, to ensure that volunteers continue to feel engaged and that their contribution is valued.