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1A The nature of volunteering

Volunteers are motivated to provide service to others for reasons other than financial or material gain.

Volunteering is a unique activity because it:

- ▶ directly benefits the community and the person volunteering
- ▶ is unpaid work undertaken by choice and of the volunteer's own free will
- ▶ is undertaken in designated volunteer positions.



Volunteer work

There are two main categories of volunteering, formal and informal.

Informal volunteer work	Unpaid care or assistance provided to family, friends and members of the wider community.
Formal volunteer work	Unpaid service through an organised group, typically involving a commitment over time.

Informal volunteer work is generally not included in broader definitions because of the pre-existing relationship between the volunteer and the beneficiary (e.g. family member, friend). In these circumstances, the person may be volunteering because of obligation, rather than genuine free choice.

Other circumstances where the person is not doing unpaid work by choice are not considered to be volunteer work. This includes:

- ▶ jury duty
- ▶ community service work ordered by a court
- ▶ requirements of a course of study, such as hours of work placement.

The focus of this *Learner guide* is on formal volunteer work unless otherwise specified.

Motivations for volunteering

People are motivated to volunteer for a variety of reasons.

According to Volunteering Australia, some of the most common reasons people give for becoming a volunteer are:

- ▶ to help others
- ▶ to help their community
- ▶ for personal satisfaction
- ▶ to do something worthwhile
- ▶ for social contact
- ▶ to use their skills and experience
- ▶ to be more active
- ▶ because of their religious beliefs.

For more facts and statistics about volunteering in Australia, see: <http://aspirelr.link/volunteering-in-australia-statistics>.

Rights and responsibilities of clients

You have a responsibility to respect the rights of clients.

Depending on the service provided by the organisation, you may be required to interact with clients or customers in a customer service role. The rights of clients or customers will be outlined in organisational policies and procedures, such as the customer service policy. Ask your supervisor if you are unsure where to access these.

For example, if you volunteer in the healthcare sector, you may be expected to uphold the Australian Charter of Healthcare Rights. According to the Charter, clients have the right to:

- ▶ access healthcare, regardless of their ability to pay
- ▶ receive considerate, quality, respectful and safe care, regardless of social status, gender, race, sexual preference, religion, political belief, mental health or any disabilities
- ▶ receive clear, easy-to-understand information about their care, condition, treatment options, expected outcomes, potential side effects and costs
- ▶ have their privacy and confidentiality respected
- ▶ access personal information about themselves, in accordance with legislation
- ▶ make suggestions, give positive or negative feedback, ask questions and make complaints about their care
- ▶ engage someone to represent them, including external advocacy groups
- ▶ access an interpreter.



Clients may also have certain responsibilities. For example, clients accessing healthcare services have the responsibility to:

- ▶ show consideration and respect to all staff, volunteers, clients and visitors
- ▶ provide sufficient information to enable staff to provide the appropriate service, advice and/or care
- ▶ respect the privacy of others attending services
- ▶ participate in making decisions about their care and to ask for more information if they don't understand something
- ▶ carry out a treatment program or tell their healthcare worker if they are not intending to do so
- ▶ observe safety procedures that may be requested while attending a service
- ▶ provide at least 24 hours' notice if they are unable to make an appointment.

Adapted from: Your Community Health, *Your Rights and Responsibilities*, <https://www.yourcommunityhealth.org.au>

Expectations about volunteering

Before they become volunteers, many people make assumptions about what the volunteering experience will be like.

Personal expectations will be unique for every volunteer and some people build up a picture in their mind long before they interact with a VIO. For example, you may expect that you will be able to make a big difference on an issue you feel strongly about. In reality, the impact you have may be quite small.

Valuing yourself as a volunteer

Many people find their volunteer roles can be physically and emotionally demanding.

For example, volunteering can cause people to spend extended time away from paid work or socialising with family and friends. Some people find that their contribution as a volunteer can go unrecognised. This is partly because it is unpaid and does not have the same status as paid work that is rewarded with a salary.

Here are some tips to avoid becoming fatigued and to value yourself as a volunteer.

Know your limits	You may want to make a difference, but you are only one person. Recognise that there are limits of your energy, time and skills.
Learn to recognise stress	Recognising how you respond to stress will help you manage it in the long-term.
Learn to say no	Supporting your team mates is important, but sometimes you will need to say no. Prioritise your tasks and commitments. Recognise that you just won't be able to help someone out with tasks that fall outside the scope of your role.
Remember to have fun	Volunteering should be something that you find enjoyable, even if it's challenging.
Treat yourself occasionally	Schedule some time to do things that make you feel relaxed and positive.
Get support when you need it	Don't be afraid to ask for help and support when you need it.

You can read more about ways to look after yourself here:

- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/looking-after-yourself-volunteering>
- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/resources-for-volunteers>
- ▶ <http://aspirelr.link/preventing-volunteer-fatigue>

Applying your volunteer rights

Ask questions so you can make a well-informed decision on your volunteering commitment.

A position description (PD) is an organisational document that defines the expectations and responsibilities of a worker or volunteer. A typical PD includes the following sections:

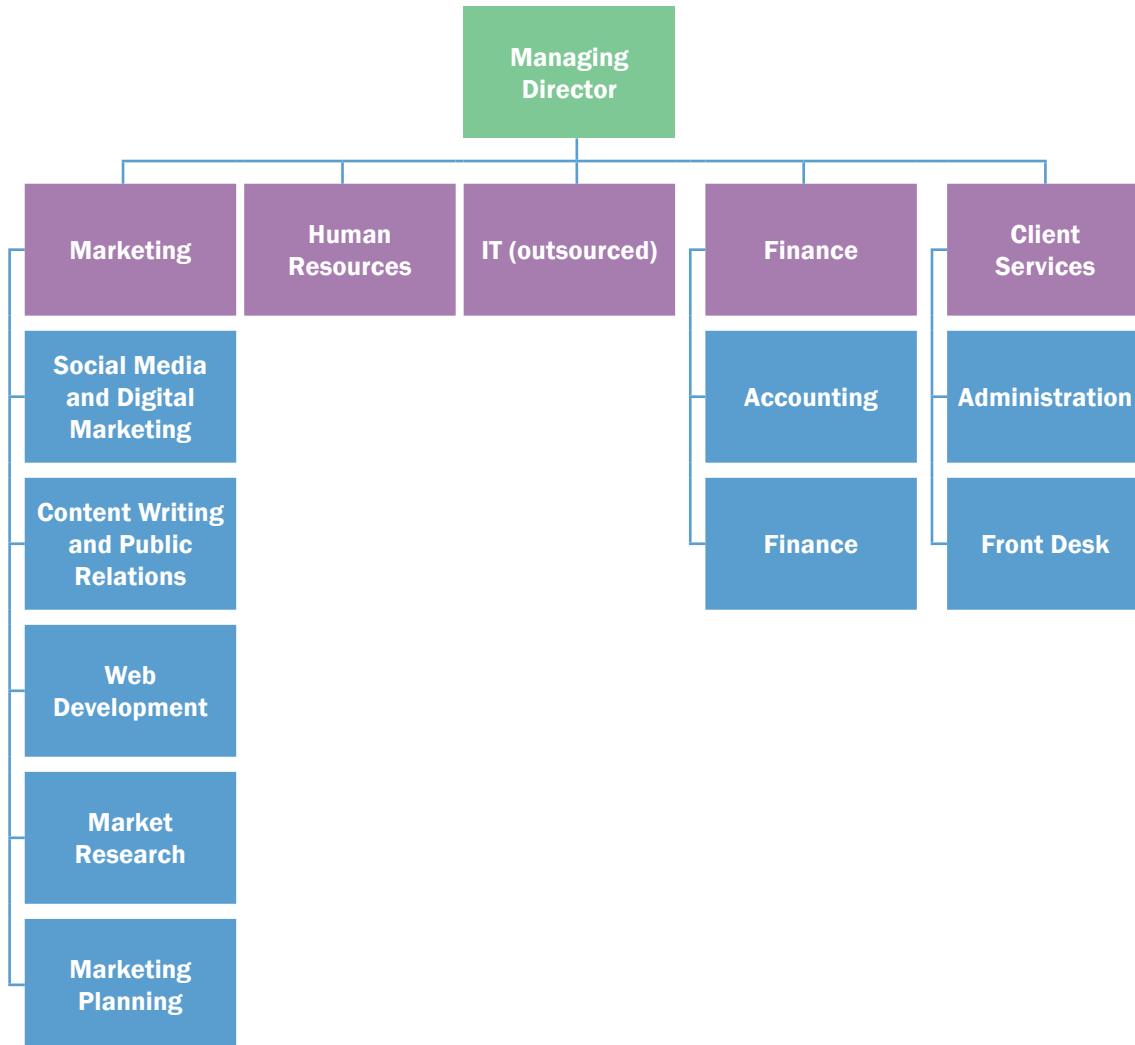
- ▶ description of the role, including role title, reporting lines and work hours
- ▶ information about the company, such as its values or strategic goals
- ▶ purpose of the role – a general description of what the role does and what it is responsible for
- ▶ job duties and responsibilities – a list of what the work tasks and responsibilities of the role are
- ▶ essential skills and qualifications – any qualifications, training and/or experience needed to perform the role.

Organisational chart

An organisational chart outlines the structure of an organisation, including reporting lines and the arrangement of different departments.

An organisational chart can be particularly useful if you are new to the organisation and want to see how your role fits into the roles of others in the team and organisation.

For example, you may volunteer as a marketing and social media coordinator, and may wish to see how this role fits in with the marketing team and wider organisation. The following organisational chart can help you understand how the various departments and teams fit together.



In some organisations, each team member is assigned a specific role with responsibilities depending on the department they work for. Here is an example of different areas and the roles of those departments.

Area of organisation/ functional area	Role
Research and development	Developing new products and services
Sales, marketing and communication	Sales and marketing activities (e.g. social media management and public relations)



Summary

- ▶ Volunteer work is a choice that has reciprocal benefits for the community and for volunteers themselves.
- ▶ Codes, standards and principles inform the rights and responsibilities of volunteers and the organisations that employ them.
- ▶ Volunteers have many of the same rights as paid workers in Australia and some of the legal responsibilities, such as laws regarding privacy, mandatory reporting and background checks.
- ▶ To undertake your role effectively, you need to understand the policies, procedures and processes of the organisation where you are volunteering.
- ▶ Your personal values and attitudes will influence the choices you make about volunteering, such as which organisation you volunteer for and which type of role you undertake.
- ▶ Many volunteering roles are physically and emotionally demanding. You need to take care of your physical and mental health to manage stress and avoid burnout.
- ▶ When you begin volunteering, you will receive an induction and training in the way the organisation operates, including the policies, procedures and processes used by the VIO.
- ▶ You may be required to undergo background checks and learn about the requirements and responsibilities of your role before becoming a volunteer.



Topic 2

In this topic you will learn about:

2A Managing and organising yourself

2B Working as part of a team

2C Communication and positive relationships

Work effectively as a volunteer

To be an effective volunteer, you need strategies to manage your time and tasks.

One of the most rewarding and challenging aspects of your role as a volunteer is to work as part of a team. You need to understand how your team contributes to the organisation's overall objectives, and how your role as a volunteer contributes to the team.

The following actions can assist you to prioritise your work:

- ▶ Keep your workspace organised. This gives you a sense of control.
- ▶ Check your emails at the beginning of the day and then only at set times throughout the day to minimise interruptions. This may involve turning off email notifications.
- ▶ Work according to your most productive period. For example, if mornings are your most productive time, complete complex tasks in the morning and plan to do easier tasks in the afternoon.
- ▶ Take breaks to recharge your mind and have your meals away from your work area. Try not to work at the same time as eating; you need time to reset.
- ▶ Review your list of things to do if anything changes, such as being assigned an urgent task.
- ▶ At the end of each day:
 - review your to-do list
 - tidy up your work area
 - check how the day went with your teammates
 - draft a to-do list for the next day.

Scheduling time efficiently

Managing time effectively is a skill that is key to the success of any task or project.

Developing a work schedule is an important component of assessing and keeping track of your work tasks. A work schedule lets you see at a glance the tasks you are required to do over a specific period. You can use a diary or a wall planning calendar to keep track of these tasks and their completion dates. Some workplaces have a set procedure or template for recording work tasks and tracking people's schedules. This can be useful if you volunteer on irregular days and can use a schedule to see what has happened on the days you were not at work.

Make use of software tools on your computer, such as a calendar, reminders and notes to check appointments and organise your tasks. Some file-sharing programs save time and allow multiple team members to work in a document at the same time. Scheduling software can be used to help you set up appointments and view your tasks. Some organisations use software programs to share information and coordinate tasks in a team. This enables a team leader to identify which tasks have been completed at any one time.

2B Working as part of a team

A team is a unit of two or more people who work together towards a common goal.

In order to function effectively, team members must commit to the overall goals of the team and accept mutual accountability.

Organisations arrange for people to work in teams so they:

- ▶ can complete a project and accomplish specific objectives
- ▶ have a mix of skills and knowledge in the organisation, such as providing input and ideas to help make decisions
- ▶ share the workloads among multiple people
- ▶ distribute tasks according to the skills and capacities of each team member
- ▶ obtain feedback and improve on work practices.

Organisational requirements impact the way the team operates. When you begin as a volunteer in an organisation, you are expected to become familiar with its requirements to perform your work and contribute to an effective team.



Types of teams

There are many different structures and types of teams.

Functional team	Permanent team in the organisation that reports to a supervisor (team leader, coordinator or manager), usually in a specific department of the organisation.
Self-managed team	Team without a manager that determines its own rules and expectations to achieve the objectives set by the organisation.
Cross-functional team	Composed of team members from different teams in the organisation who work together for a portion of their time to deal with a specific task or activity requiring a diverse range of skills and knowledge.
Task force team	This is a team that is assembled to complete a specific task, usually at a time of emergency.
Project team	Formed for an arranged period to complete a project. Projects have a start and end date with a set of clear goals to achieve within an agreed budget.
Virtual team	Team members work from different locations, making use of technology to connect and share tasks.
Outsourced team	This is a team that has been contracted by the organisation to perform a specific task, but it is not formally part of the organisation.

Benefits of seeking advice

Although there are many benefits of seeking advice or assistance, some people are reluctant to ask for help.

Reasons people may be reluctant to ask for advice or assistance

- ▶ It is seen as a sign of weakness. Some people believe they should be able to complete tasks on their own and if they can't, they will be negatively judged or viewed as incompetent.
- ▶ If they let someone else help with a task, they think they will lose control or ownership of it.
- ▶ If they receive assistance from someone, they believe there will be an obligation to assist that person in the future.
- ▶ They might think the other person is too busy to help and doesn't have time to answer their questions.
- ▶ They believe it will be quicker and easier to do the task without the input of others.

However, you should always keep in mind the benefits of receiving advice and assistance, which include:

- ▶ It can make the task easier.
- ▶ It can help you maintain your focus and energy.
- ▶ It demonstrates that you trust the other person, which will help to strengthen relationships.
- ▶ You are acknowledging that you're not perfect. This makes it easier for other people to relate to you because it shows them that you're only human.
- ▶ You are acknowledging the knowledge and skills of the other person.

Example

Seeking advice and assistance

Shea is a volunteer visitor at an aged care service. For an hour every week, Shea visits Gladys – a 91-year-old who is lonely and socially isolated. Shea has noticed that Gladys especially enjoys conversations about the garden she had when she was living independently.

Shea would like to take Gladys to an upcoming flower festival for her birthday, but she knows that the facility will be reluctant to let her take Gladys outside the service. Shea would like some advice on what she can do to prepare the paperwork to explain the benefits to Gladys and planning the excursion. She speaks to an experienced volunteer, Roni, who is happy to help. Together they work out a schedule and complete the documentation that Shea can present to her supervisor.



Completing workplace documentation

The documents you are required to complete in your volunteering role will depend on the type of organisation you are working for and your role in it.

Some examples of workplace documents are listed below, along with a brief description of their purpose.

Timesheets	Used to record the amount of time spent at work and/or time spent on specific tasks.
Progress reports	Used to inform and update managers, supervisors and other relevant stakeholders (e.g. funding bodies) about the progress of a project or activity.
Data collection documents	<p>These help to evaluate activities or services and/or fulfil funding or legislative requirements. These documents record information such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▶ the number of clients attending an activity or using a service (e.g. the number of parents attending a playgroup or the number of people calling a helpline) ▶ the outcome of an activity (e.g. the number of clients who completed a course or the number of birds tagged during a field trip).
Expense claims	These allow workers to claim out-of-pocket expenses.
Incident reports	These are used to report accidents and injuries in the workplace.
Satisfaction surveys	These measure the satisfaction of staff and/or volunteers in an organisation, monitor workplace morale and gain insight into any improvements that could be made to enhance staff/volunteer satisfaction.
Complaint forms	These are a record of customer complaints.
Grievance forms	These allow staff and volunteers to record their grievances or complaints as part of the organisation's grievance policy.
Performance management forms	<p>These are used by workers to outline goals and objectives for their performance and report on their progress towards meeting these.</p> <p>Managers and supervisors may also comment on worker performance, such as successes and areas in need of improvement.</p>

Documentation processes

A failure to complete documentation properly can have serious ramifications for an organisation.

It is important to follow any instructions, policies or processes you are given in your organisation for completing relevant documentation. Each organisation will have standards that must be followed for note-keeping, storage and security of personal information. For example, all personal information should be kept in an area that is not accessible to individuals and members of the public. This is because documentation is often used to fulfil an organisation's legal, ethical and professional responsibilities.