

Volunteer Management Program: The Volunteer Coordinator

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The modules that make up the Active Australia Volunteer Management Program reveal the scope and complexity of managing human resources in sport and recreation organisations. Volunteering does not simply happen. Volunteers who are unsupported, uncoordinated and not well managed are unlikely to feel positive about their volunteer experience and are likely to find other things to do with their free time. The work of volunteers needs to be coordinated if organisations are to be effective in achieving their goals and volunteers are to be satisfied that their time and efforts have made a difference.

People who volunteer tend to be busy people. The rate of volunteering (Australian Bureau of Statistics 1995) among people working full time (18.3%) or part time (27.4%) is higher than those who are unemployed (14.5%) or who are not in the labour force (17.0%). The rate of volunteering is higher for family members with dependent children (26.4%) compared to family members without dependent children (18.2%) or non-family members (16.6%). Furthermore, rates of volunteering are higher among people who work as professionals (31.4%), managers or administrators (29.1%) than they are for tradespersons (13.3%) or people who work as labourers (13.8%) or plant and machine operators (12.4%). These findings suggest that volunteers are generally 'time poor' and are potentially quite discerning about having their skills and experience matched to their role as a sport and recreation volunteer. Appointing a Volunteer Coordinator is recognition of the importance of volunteers to the effective operation of a sport and recreation organisation. A key role for Volunteer Coordinators is matching the skills,

experiences and expectations of volunteers to available positions within sport and recreation organisations.

The purpose of this module is to:

- clarify the position and role of the Volunteer Coordinator within sport and recreation organisations
- outline the skills and attributes that may help in being successful as a Volunteer Coordinator
- detail the responsibilities of the Volunteer Coordinator as a human resource manager in sport and recreation organisations

The position of Volunteer Coordinator

The position of Volunteer Coordinator is analogous to that of a human resources manager or personnel officer in a private or public sector organisation. While such positions do not carry line management responsibilities, meaning that there is no direct supervision of volunteers or staff, HR managers have an important and essential role to play in ensuring that human resources are planned for and managed effectively in a manner consistent with established policies. In much the same way the Volunteer Coordinator acts as the link between the management committee or board of a sport and recreation organisation and the volunteers themselves. The Volunteer Coordinator does not necessarily supervise or manage volunteers but manages the volunteer program and volunteer policies for their sport and recreation organisation. Because every organisation functions differently and has different needs, the position and role of Volunteer Coordinator may need to be adapted to suit the needs of a particular organisation and may well change as an organisation grows and develops.

At times the Volunteer Coordinator will need to balance the interests, needs and effort that volunteers are willing to contribute with the demands and expectations of the management committee or board. It is important therefore, that the Volunteer Coordinator holds a position on the management committee or board. Having policy level status in an organisation helps to ensure that the ideas and interests of the operational level volunteers are given a voice.

Budgeting the volunteer effort

Most sport and recreation organisations are aware that in order to survive, their finances need to be planned and monitored closely and would not think twice about having the position of treasurer or finance director on their management committee or board. Human resources are valuable and finite just like the financial resources managed by most organisations. Sport and recreation organisations may have to become as prudent with the management of their volunteer resources as they are with their financial resources. There may be a need to budget for the volunteer effort by applying planning and budgeting techniques to the available supply of volunteer hours. A starting point would be to estimate the amount and timing of the volunteer hours required to undertake the various tasks that make up the annual program of events for an organisation. This may require setting priorities, in consultation with volunteers and members, as is routine when budgeting financial resources. This is not to deny the complexities of recruiting, motivating, retaining and generally managing volunteers. However, a positive outcome for volunteers is that before deciding to commit time and energy they will be better informed about the size of the task ahead of them. The outcome for sport and recreation organisations is that they

will have a better understanding of the extent of the volunteer effort, and the Volunteer Coordinator will be in a better position to project and manage future demand for volunteer labour.

The role of the Volunteer Coordinator

Once the position and status of the Volunteer Coordinator has been established as a member of the management committee or board, the individual who takes on the position will need to know what they are required to do and how their performance will be evaluated. Just as the positions of President, Secretary, Treasurer each have job descriptions so does the position of Volunteer Coordinator. Below is an example of a job description for a 'Volunteer Involvement Coordinator' adapted from the *Volunteer Coordinator's Kit*.¹<< Australian Sports Commission (1994) *The Volunteer Coordinator's Kit*. Canberra: The Commission.>>In addition to the responsibilities and tasks listed, the Volunteer Coordinator might also be expected to:

- promote volunteering through community meetings and the media
- develop a budget for the volunteers in consultation with the Treasurer
- ensure that volunteers are reimbursed for their approved out-of-pocket expenses.

It might also be helpful in developing a job description for a Volunteer Coordinator to include information such as:

- immediate supervisor's name
- benefits for the volunteer
- qualifications and specialist skills required for the position
- main responsibilities and tasks
- hours, frequency and days volunteer is required, or to be negotiated

- start and end date for position.

Job title: Volunteer Involvement Coordinator²<<Bevan, P (undated) *Australian Rugby League Volunteer Management Handguide*. Sydney: Australian Rugby League.>>

Responsibilities: Locate volunteers for the club, look after their interests, introductions and induction, and work towards a reward and recognition policy for all volunteers.

1. Assess the human resource needs for the club for general running and special events.
2. Recruit and recommend the appointment of volunteers to roles that suit them.
3. Organise orientation and the induction of volunteers.
4. Overview and support the progress of volunteers.
5. Maintain good communication channels between volunteers and the rest of the club.
6. Develop policy on volunteering in conjunction with the rest of the club.
7. Ensure that voluntarism is addressed in the club's development plan.
8. Work with the Secretary organising volunteer rosters and maintaining records.
9. Submit regular reports to the Secretary and club committee.
10. Make volunteers feel recognised, needed and supported.
11. Ensure that the right person is found for the particular job.
12. Know the nature of volunteering and what motivates people to volunteer.
13. Know the role volunteers play in the organisation and the principles of managing people.
14. Have a sound understanding of the Junior League Rules and Regulations.
15. Have a good working knowledge of the club's constitution and rules.
16. Be aware of the future directions of the club.
17. Work with the Club Secretary and the District VIP Coordinator on training and educating officials.
18. Always keep the Secretary informed of various developments and provide a copy of any documentation issued to club members.
19. Ensure that all activities related to the Volunteer Involvement Program conform to the rules and regulations of the club.

Given its extensive nature, it is important that the Volunteer Coordinator does not feel isolated in their role. A review of the tasks and responsibilities of the Volunteer Involvement Coordinator given above reveals that more than two-thirds of their responsibilities involve some form of communication or consultation with other individuals or groups. As a Volunteer Coordinator learns more about their job they may discover areas in which they feel that they need further training or development. It is important that the management committee or board supports the needs of its Volunteer Coordinator because of the pivotal role the coordinator plays in managing an organisation's human resources. It would be unusual for a sport and recreation organisation to appoint an unaccredited coach or a first aid officer without offering training. In the long term, members or clients will benefit if an organisation coordinates the work of its volunteers more effectively. The performance of the Volunteer Coordinator will be judged not only on their contribution to the management committee or board, but on whether the volunteers they coordinate are effective and satisfied in their respective roles.

Skills and personal attributes of the Volunteer Coordinator

The Volunteer Coordinator needs conceptual, management and interpersonal skills more so than technical skills. A Volunteer Coordinator is more likely to be effective and enjoy their role if they exhibit personal attributes such as being positive and enthusiastic, and have an ability to communicate, consult and negotiate effectively. At the conceptual level, the Volunteer Coordinator should have or be supported by their organisation to acquire:

- An understanding of the nature of volunteering, what motivates people to volunteer and what benefits people gain from volunteering. Within the context of a

particular sport and recreation organisation a question that the Volunteer Coordinator should ask is 'Why do people volunteer for this organisation?'

- Knowledge about the organisation, its structure, plans, goals and program of activities. This will be specific to different sport and recreation organisations.
- A basic understanding of management concepts and processes, policy development and implementation, and group dynamics.

While the array of conceptual skills required to be an effective Volunteer Coordinator seems daunting, much of what is outlined above is discussed in the Volunteer Management Program modules. Some knowledge is specific to a particular organisation and will be learned 'on the job' after accepting the position of Volunteer Coordinator. Of benefit to the Volunteer Coordinator is that many of the concepts and skills they need are transferable to other organisational settings. They may help in securing paid employment or contribute to the career development of those already employed.

Based on a list of skills developed by the Volunteer Centre of South Australia,<< Volunteer Centre of South Australia (1993) *Volunteer Management: A Resource Manual*. Adelaide, SA: The Centre.>> the Volunteer Coordinator should have or be trained in the following skills:

- planning and goal setting
- interviewing volunteers
- consultation and negotiation
- rostering and organising volunteers
- decision making

- delegating projects and tasks
- communicating with people from diverse backgrounds
- Conflict resolution
- dealing with difficult people
- conducting meetings
- time management
- report writing.

The Volunteer Centre of South Australia also developed a list of personal attributes for Volunteer Coordinators, which has been adapted to develop the following list:

- sensitivity to individual needs
- patience and persistence
- respect for the privacy of individuals
- initiative and assertiveness
- optimism
- commitment
- flexibility
- creativity
- honesty and trust
- a sense of humour.

This list of skills and personal attributes is extensive but not exhaustive. Each and every Volunteer Coordinator will bring a different set of skills, knowledge, experiences and personal attributes to their position. Some Volunteer Coordinators will be well skilled from previous volunteer or work experiences while others will grow

into the role. An individual should not be considered unsuitable as a Volunteer Coordinator simply because they do not have all of the skills and attributes listed. Given adequate support from an organisation and access to training, someone with appropriate personal attributes and a willingness to learn will in most cases develop into an effective Volunteer Coordinator.

The Volunteer Coordinator as a human resource manager

Up to this point we have outlined the position, skills and attributes of the Volunteer Coordinator but said little about what the person does. In the remaining sections of this module we examine the role of the Volunteer Coordinator as a human resource manager in sport and recreation organisations. Recalling the HRM approach to managing volunteers, the Volunteer Coordinator has broad responsibility for:

- human resource planning
- recruiting volunteers
- selecting and screening volunteers
- orientating volunteers
- training and developing volunteers
- volunteer performance appraisal
- recognising and rewarding volunteers, and
- retaining or replacing volunteers.

Many of the HRM tasks and functions will have implications for the development of volunteer management policies(see the *Volunteer Management Policy* module). The term broad responsibility has been used because the Volunteer Coordinator would be overwhelmed if they were personally accountable for the entire HRM function

even in a small organisation. As discussed previously, it is important that the Volunteer Coordinator does not feel isolated in their position. Frequently, other volunteers are willing to help and only need to be asked. For example, the Volunteer Coordinator might, in consultation with other volunteers, draw up an outline for an orientation program for new volunteers. Responsibility for developing the program and its delivery might be delegated, perhaps through the management committee or board, to a small group of volunteers with responsibilities in key areas (eg coaching, facility and equipment maintenance, canteen supervisor).

It is important that the Volunteer Coordinator does not 'reinvent the wheel'. Many of the resources, such as job descriptions, orientation programs and performance appraisal checklists, may have already been developed within the organisation or are readily available from other organisations or state or national bodies. The major functions and processes of HRM have been discussed in the *Recruiting Volunteers* and *Retaining Volunteers* modules. The following section outlines some of the main tasks of the Volunteer Coordinator in each of the key HRM areas.

Human resource planning

A clear plan is necessary to make good use of the Volunteer Coordinator's time and to clearly communicate to others what is realistically achievable and which areas should be prioritised. The Club/Association Management Program includes the *Club Planning* module, which may be helpful as a starting point to preparing a HR plan. Planning will need to take place at two levels—strategic (long term) and action (short term) planning. The strategic HR plan should be discussed and approved at the

management committee or board of the organisation and reviewed annually. The strategic plan should outline:

- Mission: a brief explanation of the purpose of coordinating the efforts of volunteers within the organisation.
- Goals: statements that outline the broad directions of the HR plan.
- Objectives: what it is that the Volunteer Coordinator wants to achieve in each of the major areas of HRM, including recruitment, selection, orientation, training, recognition, rewards, performance appraisal, retention and replacement. There may also be some objectives written about policy development in the volunteer management area.

Objectives form the basis of short-term action plans. Each objective needs to be written in terms that are specific, achievable and measurable within the context of a particular organisation. Some objectives and tasks will overlap. This is not a problem as long as it is recognised and may in fact be an advantage. A plan that is well designed usually improves the efficiency and effectiveness of an organisation and if one task can contribute to achieving more than one objective, then resources may be saved. A brief example of an action plan for volunteer retention (assuming volunteer turnover that is greater than 10%) appears below.

Volunteer Management Program

The Volunteer Coordinator

| Objective | Tasks (action) | Who | When | Resources | Performance measure |
|--------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|
| Decrease volunteer turnover rate to 10% by next season | Design and implement an orientation program | Volunteer Coordinator | By start of season | 8 hours | Turnover rate reduced to 10% by start of next season |
| | Design a volunteer recognition program | Volunteer Coordinator | By middle of season | 12 hours | |
| | Implement volunteer recognition program | Volunteer Coordinator | End of season | 3 hours and \$100 for awards | |
| | Invite volunteers to a social function to celebrate their efforts | Social Coordinator | End of season | 16 hours \$200 for food and drinks | |

Budgeting is also a part of the HR planning function. Budgeting is covered in more detail in the *Financial Management* module. In consultation with the Treasurer, the Volunteer Coordinator should ensure that funds are set aside for managing volunteers. Some of the expenses that might need to be considered include:

- honorariums—a stipend for performing services to the organisation (eg Honorary Treasurer or Registrar who has a relatively high workload). Depending upon the amount, honorariums might be considered taxable income
- reimbursement for approved out-of-pocket expenses (eg private telephone use, use of motor vehicle, postage)

- insurance for volunteers—see *Legal Issues and Risk Management* module (eg accident, loss of income, directors' and officers' liability)
- volunteer recognition and rewards
- equipment and clothing for volunteers
- catering and social functions
- communication (eg telephone, newsletters, web site)
- recruitment (eg advertising, criminal checks)
- other expenses.

An important part of the HR planning and budgeting process is to budget the volunteer effort (see 'Budgeting the volunteer effort' **page ##**). Because many sport and recreation organisations rely heavily on volunteers to manage and deliver their services, it is important that the Volunteer Coordinator measures and/or estimates the total amount of volunteer hours which are put into various operations of the organisation. Besides having this information available for inclusion in grant applications (see 'Volunteer record keeping' in the *Retaining Volunteers* module), the organisation will acquire knowledge about the amount of volunteer effort required to organise and run programs and events. Where volunteer labour is in short supply, such information may help in prioritising programs and events and in targeting for the recruitment of volunteers.

Recruiting volunteers

As discussed in the *Recruiting Volunteers* module, most volunteers first become involved in sport and recreation organisations through a personal contact. Being

asked to volunteer, having family already involved in an organisation or knowing someone involved are the ways that a vast majority of volunteers first become involved. Therefore, a key responsibility of the Volunteer Coordinator is to build and use a network of contacts. It would be a difficult task for the Volunteer Coordinator to be personally responsible for recruiting all volunteers. Communicating with others within an organisation, particularly those in key positions (eg the coaching coordinator) and encouraging them to talk to potential recruits enables an organisation to maximise its use of personal contacts. Providing accurate and up-to-date job descriptions (see the *Recruiting Volunteers* module) is a good way of ensuring that potential volunteers are given realistic previews of what will be expected of them if they decide to volunteer. Publicity and promotion campaigns may be useful in raising awareness and projecting an image of being professional. However, very few volunteers are successfully recruited through such approaches. Furthermore, the costs of promotions can be high and their effectiveness difficult to judge (see the *Marketing and Promoting Sport and Recreation* module).

Selecting and screening volunteers

A constant challenge in sport and recreation organisations is that there may not be much choice about the selection of some volunteers. However, in circumstances where volunteers are appointed rather than elected, the Volunteer Coordinator should develop a screening and selection process that helps to ensure the individual who best meets the requirements of a position is the one who is appointed. A key consideration in appointing volunteers who will be working with vulnerable members or clients of an organisation (eg children, the elderly or people with learning disabilities) is that there may be statutory requirements to check their criminal history

(see the *Legal Issues and Risk Management* module). Aside from such checking the selection and screening process might be as follows:<<McSweeney, P and Alexander, D (1996) *Managing Volunteers Effectively*, Aldershot, England: Ashgate Publishing.>>

- Prepare a list of interview questions
- Arrange place and time for interviews
- Greet potential volunteer(s) and put them at ease
- Introduce interview panel
- Introduce the organisation and the volunteer position (ie job preview—refer to job description)
- Find out what the potential volunteer wants from voluntary work
- Find out the interests, skills, and experiences of the potential volunteer
- Clarify the availability and commitment of the potential volunteer
- Ascertain any training or development needs
- Conclude the interview and farewell the potential volunteer
- Rank the volunteers from the most to the least suitable person for the job
- Follow-up and ensure that successful/unsuccessful volunteers have been notified.

It is important that potential volunteers are given ample opportunities to find out as much as possible about the organisation and that the organisation learns as much as it can about the person. An informal atmosphere with a small but appropriate interview panel (eg Volunteer Coordinator, a person who the potential volunteer will be working with and another senior person), who are encouraged to listen more and talk less. Consideration needs to be given to the diversity of people serving on interview panels (see 'Valuing diversity' in the *Recruiting Volunteers* module).

A constant challenge for the Volunteer Coordinator

The HRM approach to managing volunteers has many advantages, but its major drawback is that it is modelled on work organisations. In workplaces, labour demand is estimated and suitable employees are recruited. Employees are appointed to their positions because of their particular skills and abilities and are paid to fulfil the requirements of what are often quite clearly specified positions within work organisations. A problem for volunteer coordinators is that volunteers are sometimes elected to positions, particularly at the management committee or board level. They may not have the necessary skills or abilities to fulfil a particular role, which sometimes is not clearly defined in the first place. In other situations, a volunteer might be recruited because the organisation needs an extra 'pair of hands' and not because of their particular skills or abilities. These circumstances are difficult to control and are often exacerbated by an under-supply of volunteers.

Volunteer Coordinators can help alleviate this problem by helping prepare accurate job descriptions, ensuring that potential volunteers are given a realistic 'job' preview, and locating appropriate training opportunities. The performance appraisal process also provides an opportunity for individuals to recognise and discuss their strengths and areas in need of development, and where they feel as though they have been effective or ineffective in their role. Even though a volunteer may have been recruited initially to fill a 'gap', they can, with the right kind of support and encouragement, grow into a role and become an effective volunteer.

Orientating volunteers

An orientation program checklist was included in the *Recruiting Volunteers* module.

The role of the Volunteer Coordinator is to ensure that an orientation program is developed for their organisation and is delivered in a timely manner. The Volunteer Coordinator may not be solely responsible for delivering the orientation program,

particularly in large sport and recreation organisations, but they should be involved in some parts of the process as a way of initially getting to know the volunteers. New recruits need to be made to feel welcome and valued, and need to understand where they fit within the organisation, what their role is and how the organisation operates on a day-to-day basis. Volunteer policies (see the *Volunteer Management Policy* module), legal responsibilities and insurance coverage (see the *Legal Issues and Risk Management* module) should be a prominent part of an orientation program. Developing an orientation kit will help to ensure that important information is not lost and serves as an important back up for new volunteers. Orientation may involve several follow-up meetings, either in small groups or individually, after an initial orientation session. The orientation program itself should be evaluated to identify things that are well done and areas which need to be further developed.

Training and developing volunteers

Volunteers tend to be more confident and satisfied in their roles if they feel competent. Training and development programs and activities are an excellent way to enhance the competencies of volunteers. Such opportunities should take into account the qualifications, skills and experience that volunteers bring with them to a sport and recreation organisation. One way of developing volunteers to their full potential is through mentoring. The Volunteer Coordinator would not usually be responsible for designing and delivering training and development programs for volunteers. The main responsibilities for the Volunteer Coordinator in the area of training are to:

- document and regularly update the qualifications, skills and experience of volunteers

- establish or update policies about training and development (see the *Volunteer Management Policy* module)
- consult with new and continuing volunteers about their perceived training needs
- prioritise training and development needs, taking into account organisational and individual needs
- search for and gather information about training and development programs and activities
- match volunteers to training and development programs and activities
- evaluate the cost, effectiveness and relevance of training programs and activities.

Mentoring³ <<Active Australia (1999) *Mentor as Anything! Guidelines for Developing and Implementing a Mentoring Program for Women in the Sport and Recreation Industry*. Canberra: Australian Sports Commission.>>

Good mentoring involves the development of a relationship between two people which is based on mutual trust and respect, recognition of one another's skills or potential, clear expectations about the mentoring process, and a willingness to learn and share. Mentoring is a process that can be used in sport and recreation organisations to provide volunteers with support, training, advice, encouragement, inspiration and networks that assist them in achieving their goals. There are many opportunities for volunteers and organisations to benefit from the mentoring process. Mentoring can create opportunities for skill and leadership development, networking, building self-confidence, improving communication and increasing productivity.

The process of mentoring is interactive, and occurs between volunteers of differing levels of experience and expertise. It generally involves one-to-one relationships between a more experienced person (the mentor) and a less experienced person (the mentee). Mentoring can also take place between peers. Mentoring relationships can be formal or informal, long or short term. Formal mentoring is usually guided by a third party, such as the Volunteer Coordinator. The Volunteer Coordinator endeavours to match the interests and expertise of mentors with the needs and aspirations of mentees. Informal mentoring develops when someone shows an interest in contributing to the personal or career development of another volunteer. Often these types of relationships develop through mutual interests or friendships.

See the Active Australia *Mentor as Anything!* booklet for further information on:

- the benefits of mentoring
- the roles of facilitators and coordinators in the mentoring process
- the characteristics of someone who would make a good mentor
- action lists which can be used to establish mentoring relationships and programs.

An issue which will sometimes confront the Volunteer Coordinator is that some volunteers will react negatively to the suggestion that they undertake training. One way around this issue is to explain the necessity of training for the successful operation of the organisation. If a volunteer is still not convinced, it may be necessary, through consultation, to redeploy the volunteer to an alternative position within the organisation. There is little to be gained by pressuring or coercing volunteers to undertake training. Volunteering is a free-choice activity and the same principle should apply to training.

Performance appraisal

When volunteers have had an opportunity to settle into their position it is important to appraise their performance. Using a formative or developmental approach, performance appraisals can provide insights for the volunteer and the Volunteer Coordinator about what aspects of a volunteer's role are being performed well and what areas might need to be further developed. The Volunteer Coordinator, in consultation with other board members, should develop a brief evaluation proforma that corresponds to each volunteer's job description. This process assumes that volunteers have been given a job description, have been given clear expectations about their rights and responsibilities (see the *Retaining Volunteers* module), and have been provided with access to appropriate training. Having volunteers complete their own appraisal form before an interview gives them an opportunity to reflect on their own strengths and weaknesses. When the appraisal interview is conducted (see the *Retaining Volunteers* module) the focus can be on valuing the volunteer and their strengths as well as finding ways to improve aspects of their performance that

appear to be lacking. Both the volunteer and the Volunteer Coordinator should agree about what corrective action is necessary, if any. There can be several beneficial outcomes from the performance appraisal process:

- The volunteer can consider whether their needs are being satisfied through their volunteer experience.
- The volunteer can resolve any ongoing problems and can re-assess their future commitment to their position and to the organisation.
- The Volunteer Coordinator can gather feedback to help with the development of orientation and training programs.
- Volunteer records can be updated and used to provide information for recognising and rewarding the efforts of volunteers.
- The organisation can be made aware of how it might better support its volunteers and improve service delivery to members and clients.

The performance appraisal process needs to be handled sensitively and with respect for individual rights to privacy. Most volunteers will feel threatened when their performance is being evaluated. A negative experience may result in an otherwise confident and committed volunteer becoming dissatisfied and possibly withdrawing their services. The Volunteer Coordinator must exercise a high degree of discretion with any information that is gathered through the performance appraisal process.

Recognising and rewarding volunteers

An important role for the Volunteer Coordinator is to get to know the volunteers in their sport and recreation organisation and to learn about how best to recognise and reward them for their efforts. The *Retaining Volunteers* module provides some

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guidelines for recognising volunteers and outlines the importance of record keeping. The ultimate recognition bestowed upon volunteers in sport organisations is life membership. Often the organisation or the state or national body will have a policy and criteria for awarding life memberships. The task of formally recognising and rewarding volunteers may be the responsibility of the President, a patron or sponsor. However, the Volunteer Coordinator is responsible for maintaining the records that are used as a basis for formally recognising and rewarding volunteers. They need to document details about volunteer hours, years of service, service awards, and performance in crisis situations or beyond the call of duty. The Volunteer Coordinator should also have a role in developing policy for volunteer recognition and reward programs. Informally, they should encourage the development of an organisational culture that values volunteers. Calling volunteers by name, saying 'thank you', buying an occasional drink, or asking volunteers about things that are important in their own lives (eg family, holidays, work, study or hobbies) are ways of developing an organisational culture that genuinely values the efforts of volunteers.

Retaining or replacing volunteers

Organisationally, the management committee or board has broad responsibility for retaining or replacing volunteers. The Volunteer Coordinator would normally be expected to coordinate the procedures involved in sorting out which volunteers will be staying with the organisation and which volunteers will be leaving, as well as updating the organisations' volunteer records. Putting into place a process that allows this information to be gathered well in advance of critical dates, such as an annual general meeting, enables the Volunteer Coordinator to use a planned approach to the task of retaining or replacing volunteers. In this respect, there are

several situations that the Volunteer Coordinator might have to deal with on a regular basis. These are:

- A volunteer who decides to stay with the organisation and in the same position.
- A volunteer who stays with the organisation but decides to take on a new position.
- A position that is left vacant by a volunteer who decides that they will be leaving the organisation when the season or year ends.
- A position that is left vacant through the resignation of a volunteer at short notice.

There is not a great deal that the Volunteer Coordinator has to do when a volunteer decides to stay with an organisation in their existing position, provided their past performance has been satisfactory. If someone stays, but is recruited into a new or vacant position (eg a coach moving to the position of Coaching Coordinator), then the Volunteer Coordinator would be responsible for orientating the volunteer to the new position, providing them with a job description, helping them access relevant training opportunities, as well as updating the organisations' volunteer records. The Volunteer Coordinator might also verify that the volunteer who is moving to a vacant position has the appropriate qualifications, skills, experience and personal attributes that would facilitate a good match between them and their new position. The position vacated by the volunteer would also need to be filled by implementing the volunteer recruitment process.

When a volunteer indicates that they will be leaving the organisation at the end of the season or year, it is up to the Volunteer Coordinator to plan for the smooth transition of the position to another volunteer. The new volunteer could be recruited internally (as discussed above) or externally to fill the position. External recruitment means that

the Volunteer Coordinator will have to work through the processes of human resource planning, recruitment, selection, screening and orientation. At times volunteers decide to resign at short notice, many with good reason such as a change in employment or family circumstances. Sometimes major conflicts or disputes cause one or more volunteers to resign at short notice. Both of these circumstances are difficult for the Volunteer Coordinator to anticipate because they tend to be crisis situations. Under such circumstances the Volunteer Coordinator may have to appeal to other volunteers to temporarily assume the most important duties of the position. Volunteer Coordinators who have developed and maintained a strong network of contacts should not take a great deal of time to fill temporarily vacant positions. If the position left vacant at short notice is an elected position, then the Volunteer Coordinator may have constitutional requirements about how the position is to be filled. Under such circumstances the Volunteer Coordinator would defer to the management committee or board.

Irrespective of the circumstances under which a volunteer leaves an organisation it is important that the Volunteer Coordinator retrieves any files, equipment, keys and other resources that belong to the organisation (see the *Retaining Volunteers* module). Regardless of how or why or under what circumstances a volunteer leaves, the Volunteer Coordinator should ask if they would agree to an exit interview. Exit interviews are an important feedback mechanism that can be used to make adjustments to successful volunteer management programs.

Volunteers tend to drift away from sport and recreation organisations, particularly during low or off seasons. Since retaining volunteers reduces the overall workload of

the Volunteer Coordinator it is important that they devise simple and cost-effective measures to keep volunteers involved. Occasional volunteer newsletters or social functions might help to maintain contact with volunteers and ensure that their attachment or commitment does not wane.

Summary

It is well established that volunteers are the backbone of Australia's community sport and recreation system and the management and delivery of sport and recreation services and programs relies on the effective recruitment, management and retention of volunteers. A sport or recreation organisation that appoints a Volunteer Coordinator has recognised the importance of coordinating and managing their volunteers in the delivery of programs and services. This module has tried to clarify the position and role of the Volunteer Coordinator, to outline the skills and attributes that may help Volunteer Coordinators be successful in their role, and to detail the responsibilities of the Volunteer Coordinator as a human resource manager in sport and recreation organisations.

Endnotes

¹ Australian Sports Commission (1994). *The Volunteer Coordinator's Kit*. Canberra: Author.

² Bevan, P. (not dated). *Australian Rugby League Volunteer Management Handguide*. Sydney: Australian Rugby League.

³ Active Australia (1999). *Mentor as Anything! Guidelines for Developing and Implementing a Mentoring Program for Women in the Sport and Recreation Industry*. Canberra: Author.

Further information

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