

Volunteer Management Program

Retaining Volunteers

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The greatest single impediment to servicing increased participation in sport is attracting, training and retaining volunteers (<<Commonwealth of Australia House of Representatives Standing Committee on Finance and Public Administration 1990). The goal of volunteer retention is to develop a sense of organisational commitment among volunteers. The previous module in the Volunteer Management Program focused on recruiting volunteers. Volunteer recruitment is a necessary and ongoing process for sport and recreation organisations either as the range of programs and services expands, or as volunteers leave an organisation. Recruitment is largely focused on acquiring human resources by bringing new volunteers into a sport and recreation organisation. The focus of this module is on the maintenance or retention of volunteers.

Volunteer turnover is to be expected in sport and recreation organisations and creates opportunities for organisational change and renewal. But high rates of turnover can hinder the capacity of organisations to deliver the quality or range of services and programs clients and members have come to expect. Sport and recreation organisations with high rates of volunteer turnover may have to divert large proportions of limited resources to recruiting, orientating and training new volunteers rather than furthering organisational goals. However, organisations with minimal or zero turnover rates rarely question why they continue to exist and run the risk of failing to confront the need for change. To ensure organisational survival and stability as well as organisational renewal and development, a balance needs to be found between volunteer turnover and volunteer retention. There is no ideal or recommended rate of volunteer turnover except to note that if turnover is either too

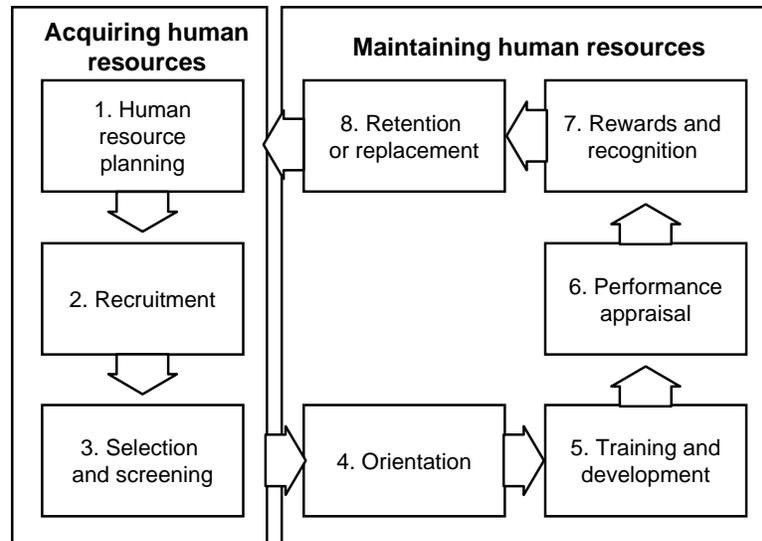
high or too low it can be detrimental to the performance of sport and recreation organisations. The rate of turnover may be quite different for operational level volunteers (eg coaches, group leaders) compared to policy level volunteers (eg board members).

The purpose of this module is to:

- provide an overview of the maintenance and development of human resources
- explain the processes of human resource training and development, performance appraisal, rewards and recognition, and retention or replacement
- outline the rights and responsibilities of sport and recreation volunteers
- explain the nature of organisational commitment and its importance in the retention of volunteers

As discussed in the *Volunteer Recruitment* module, human resource management (HRM) is an essential function in managing sport and recreation organisations (see Figure 1). After bringing volunteers into an organisation, the role of HRM is to develop a sense of commitment to an organisation and to a role; provide or plan for training and development opportunities; offer support; recognise and reward volunteer performance; and replace volunteers as they leave. The performance of volunteers is underpinned by their ability to do the job, the commitment and effort they are prepared to put into the job and the support provided by the organisation.

Figure 1 A traditional view of human resource management << Cuskelly, G and Auld, CJ (1999) People management: the key to business success. In L Trenberth and C Collins. *Sport Business Management in New Zealand*. Palmerston North: Dunmore Press, pp 164-183.>>



The Volunteer Coordinator

Responsibility for organising the maintenance or retention of human resources lies with the Volunteer Coordinator. Although they may not have direct responsibility for the planning, promotion and delivery of all aspects of HR maintenance, they should be integrally involved in decisions that impact on volunteer management. Volunteer Coordinators usually hold policy level positions within organisations because they need to be fully aware of strategic plans and objectives. Whether the position is paid (part or full time) or voluntary depends on the size of the task and the financial resources of the organisation. See *The Volunteer Coordinator* module for more detail about the coordinator's role.

Volunteer training and development

The level of competency of volunteers can have a significant impact on the success of sport and recreation organisations. As discussed in the *Volunteer Recruitment* module, orientation occurs soon after a volunteer is first recruited. It is a socialisation process in which volunteers are familiarised with the organisation and its key people. Training and development are more specific processes that move beyond a general introduction to an organisation. Training is about teaching specific job skills whereas development prepares volunteers for future roles or responsibilities and satisfies individual needs for personal growth. Training and development is not only offered to new recruits. Individuals who have been with an organisation for some time, but who are taking on a new position, or planning to do so, will also need access to appropriate training and development opportunities.

Training and development processes vary widely from one organisation to another and need to be adapted to suit the needs and educational background of individual volunteers as well as an organisation's needs and level of resources.

Training and development may:

- be formal or informal
- take place on or off the job
- be scheduled prior to or after taking up a new position
- take a theoretical or practical approach
- take place on site, off site or via distance learning (eg the Internet)
- be instructor lead or self-directed
- be specific to a sport or recreation organisation, or more generalised

Motivation to take part in training will vary from one volunteer to the next. Some volunteers will be quite enthusiastic and seek out volunteer training opportunities. In contrast, other volunteers might feel as though training is not the best use of their time. The issue of who should pay for training (individual volunteers, the organisation or some combination of the two) needs to be considered particularly when training is considered to be a compulsory requirement (eg officiating). Training for volunteers will often enhance the level of confidence of volunteers and may lead to a willingness to take on additional roles within an organisation. A benefit of formal training is that volunteers may be able to have the training they have completed with a sport or recreation organisation recognised as prior learning if they wish to complete a more formal qualification. The Volunteer Coordinator should consult with new and continuing volunteers about their training needs, but keep in mind how meeting these needs will help the organisation meet its goals.

Training methods need to be relevant and flexible and will be constrained by accessibility, costs, timing, specificity, mode of delivery and pre-requisite knowledge.

Most people learn more effectively by being actively involved (ie by doing).

Training methods might include:

- workshops
- guest speakers
- role plays and simulation exercises
- demonstrations
- self-paced learning resources
- Internet based learning
- audiovisual resources
- conferences, courses and seminars
- small group exercises and discussions
- mentoring

Where to look for training programs

For many sport and recreation organisations that are part of a state and national system (eg AFL clubs) there will be a number of manuals and courses for training coaches, referees, umpires, officials and administrators. Contact your state and national governing bodies before designing and developing an in-house program or approaching outside providers. Increasingly, the Internet is becoming a valuable source for the training and development of volunteers. Such delivery mechanisms

overcome the tyranny of distance and provide flexibility to fit the busy schedules of individual volunteers. Some of the organisations that provide training programs, courses and seminars for sport and recreation organisations are listed below.

Training providers

- National, state and regional sport and recreation organisations
- Local authorities
- State departments of sport and recreation (including regional offices)
- Local TAFE colleges and university campuses
- Private colleges
- Australian Coaching Council (ACC)
- Australian Society of Sport Administrators (ASSA)
- Sports Medicine Australia (SMA)
- YMCA/YWCA
- Regional arts councils
- Youth organisations
- State volunteer centres

Evaluating training programs

Training programs vary markedly in terms of cost, quality and relevance, and may or may not be offered by accredited training providers. Whether the training organisation is accredited or not, it is important to assess the cost, quality and relevance of the training and development programs on offer. Recommendations

from other sport and recreation organisations or individuals who have attended particular programs are a good source of information. The performance of volunteers may be not be enhanced at all if they feel as though a training or development program has been a waste of their time.

Volunteer performance appraisal

Maintaining volunteer numbers is not the only goal of volunteer retention. Successful sport and recreation organisations also seek ways of maximising the performance and satisfaction levels of their human resources. Performance appraisal is a process of evaluating the effectiveness of volunteers and providing them with feedback.

Performance appraisals should be used in a formative way to recognise and reward volunteers who have done a good job and to identify where improvements in a volunteer's job performance can be made. Individual performance is influenced by personal (eg competencies, motivation, time commitment) and organisational factors (eg training, work conditions, management practices) which in turn have an impact on the achievement of organisational goals. Performance appraisal can be subject to bias and inaccuracies and is often either overlooked or a poorly managed aspect of HRM. Paid staff members are provided with legal protection from unfair dismissal through employment contracts and industrial relations legislation. However, the situation is less clear-cut for volunteers. Performance appraisal can be a formal process, particularly for operational level volunteers (eg accredited coaches), or an informal process, particularly where the Volunteer Coordinator (the person responsible for performance appraisals) has worked closely with a volunteer.

Volunteer performance appraisal

The major steps in the performance appraisal process are:

1. Determine the purpose of performance appraisal, eg individual development, identifying training needs, providing rewards and recognition to volunteers.
2. Establish performance expectations, ie what aspects of performance are being appraised?
3. Select appraisal methods; it is best to use more than one method, eg an interview as well as ratings on a checklist.
4. Determine who is responsible for the appraisal; this is usually the Volunteer Coordinator, supported by the board or committee.
5. Conduct the performance appraisal.
6. Schedule a performance appraisal interview with each volunteer; it is important that volunteers who have been appraised are given feedback and have the opportunity to respond to the feedback that they have been given.
7. Agree to organisational and individual level adjustments.
8. Review and revise the performance appraisal process; even processes that work well will need to be adjusted.

Volunteer rights and responsibilities

An important part of the performance appraisal process is to ensure that volunteers are aware of their individual rights and are meeting their responsibilities. Volunteers need to be supported, particularly when they first enter an organisation or move into a larger or more complex position, or when their performance is being appraised.

Providing support to volunteers is more easily achieved when volunteers are given a

clear understanding of their rights and responsibilities. Importantly, any list of volunteer rights and responsibilities needs to be backed up with appropriate policies (see the *Volunteer Management Policy* module). Fulfilling a particular role (eg Coach, Secretary) may confer additional rights and responsibilities on individual volunteers.

Volunteer rights

Volunteers have the right to . . .

- an adequate orientation to the organisation
- a clearly written job description
- be assigned to a job that suits their personal preferences, motivation, skills, experience and qualifications
- be trained to do their job
- a suitable place to work
- a satisfying job
- know their supervisor and how to contact them
- be provided with adequate guidance and supervision
- protection, safety and insurance when carrying out their assigned tasks
- have their personal information held confidentially
- have their out-of-pocket expenses reimbursed
- be involved in decisions that affect their areas of responsibility
- have their concerns and complaints heard
- be respected by co-workers, club members and staff
- feedback about their performance
- be recognised for contributing their time, experience, ideas and skills
- say 'no'; volunteers should not be coerced into doing tasks against their wishes or that they do not feel qualified to do
- to take time off for a holiday or for personal reasons
- to resign from their position

Volunteer responsibilities

Volunteers have the responsibility to . . .

- ensure they have the time necessary to take on a volunteer position
- work within the policies and rules of the organisation
- respect the privacy of staff, clients or members and other volunteers
- be reliable and dependable
- complete agreed hours and tasks
- inform the organisation when they will not be available to volunteer
- be loyal to the organisation
- speak up about important issues or concerns
- attend orientation and training sessions
- follow directions given by supervisors
- be a team player and to support staff and other volunteers
- be considerate about the views of staff, clients or members and other volunteers
- identify their limitations and expectations
- be accountable and to accept constructive criticism

Recognising and rewarding volunteers

Recognising and rewarding volunteers is a key component in the effective management of human resources and is vital in the retention of sport and recreation volunteers. The linkages between motivation, performance, rewards and satisfaction are explained in more detail in *The Volunteer Coordinator* module. This section outlines some of the key considerations and approaches to recognising and

rewarding volunteers with the aim of retaining their services. Recognising and rewarding the efforts of volunteers should be linked to the performance appraisal process. In terms of equity it is important to keep records and to know why volunteers are being recognised (eg length of service) or rewarded (eg going beyond the call of duty).

Volunteer record keeping

Keeping records of such things as volunteer hours, years of service, service awards and performance appraisals enables organisations to document the work it and its volunteers have done and to better manage their human resources. Some of the benefits of keeping up-to-date volunteer records include:

- Taking a more business-like approach to managing volunteers.
- Providing a basis for developing a volunteer recognition program.
- Acquiring knowledge about the amount of volunteer effort required to organise, run and evaluate programs and services (eg volunteer hours to run a carnival or open day).
- Documenting the nature and amount of volunteer work undertaken by an organisation when applying for grants and other forms of assistance.
- Providing a sound basis for terminating the services of non-performing volunteers.

Recognition stems from genuinely valuing volunteers and their efforts within sport and recreation organisations. Everyone who volunteers for a sport and recreation organisation deserves some form of recognition, even if it is a simple thank you for helping out. Rewarding volunteers takes recognition a step further, by providing something tangible and extrinsic to the act of volunteering itself as a way of

commending higher levels of performance among volunteers. Recognition and reward programs tend to work best when they are individualised, varied and open to new and interesting ideas. Recognition and rewards can vary from:

- formal to informal
- high cost to zero cost
- group to individual
- widely publicised to personal.

Guidelines for volunteer recognition

- Be immediate—recognise volunteer effort soon after it is given.
- Be specific—give personal recognition.
- Be consistent—recognise everyone’s achievements; avoid showing favouritism.
- Be sincere—mean what you say.
- Be enthusiastic—being positive and up-beat will build enthusiasm in others.

There are literally hundreds of volunteer recognition and reward ideas. An important aspect of recognition and reward systems is that differences in individual needs and benefits sought by volunteers need to be taken into account (see ‘Valuing diversity’ in the *Volunteer Recruitment* module). Some volunteers seek opportunities for public adulation for their efforts, whereas other volunteers feel uncomfortable under such circumstances. It is important for the Volunteer Coordinator to get to know something about each individual volunteer and find out how best to recognise and reward them. For the most part, the rewards for volunteering are intrinsic and derived from the act of volunteering itself, making it difficult for sport and recreation organisations to

directly motivate higher levels of performance through extrinsic reward systems.

Many volunteers will publicly say that they do not seek recognition or rewards for their efforts. However, equity theories of motivation (see the *Volunteer Management: A Guide to Good Practice* module) suggest that individuals who perceive that the amount of effort they put into an organisation exceeds the rewards that they receive will not perform as well as those who perceive that reward systems are equitable.

These problems are compounded when a volunteer feels as though others volunteers who have put in less effort are rewarded equally. Recognition and reward programs do not have to be complex to establish and administer, but they are an essential component of effectively retaining the services of volunteers in sport and recreation organisations.

Ideas for recognising and rewarding volunteers

The *Volunteer Management: A Guide to Good Practice* module gives details about how some sport and recreation organisations recognise and reward their volunteers.

The list below is not comprehensive but provides a number of widely used recognition and reward ideas:

- Smiling, saying hello and thank you.
- Sending welcome letters when volunteers are first recruited.
- Including volunteers on organisational charts.
- Offering personal praise to the volunteer while on the job.
- Writing letters and postcards of thanks.
- Writing letters of reference and including details of service.
- Giving identification pins, badges, shirts or caps.
- Acknowledging volunteers in club newsletters.
- Presenting volunteer awards at the annual general meeting.
- Giving complimentary tickets to special events and functions.
- Sending get well, birthday and Christmas cards.
- Arranging discounts at recreation and sport stores or restaurants.
- Awarding life memberships.
- Reimbursing out-of-pocket expenses.
- Holding social events in honour of volunteers.
- Acknowledging efforts during committee meetings.
- Farewelling people when they move away from the area.
- Providing meal and petrol vouchers.
- Arranging for free or discounted use of facilities.
- Listening to volunteers' ideas.

- Funding training courses, conferences and seminars.
- Presenting awards for 1, 3, 5, 10, 15 and more years of service.

Developing organisational commitment

Volunteers are more likely to be retained by an organisation when they develop a sense of organisational commitment. Research has found that the level of organisational commitment among volunteers significantly declines prior to leaving a sport organisation.<<Cuskelly, G, McIntyre, N and Boag, A (1998) A longitudinal study of the development of organizational commitment amongst volunteer sport administrators. *Journal of Sport Management* 12: 181-202>> Organisational commitment is the relative strength of an individual's identification with and involvement in a particular organisation. It can be characterised by (a) a strong belief in and acceptance of the organisation's goals and values, (b) a willingness to exert considerable effort on behalf of the organisation, and (c) a strong desire to maintain membership in the organisation.<< Mowday, RT, Porter, LW and Steers, RM (1982) *Employee-Organization Linkages: The Psychology of Commitment, Absenteeism, and Turnover*. New York: Academic Press.>> Volunteers who develop a sense of identification, involvement and loyalty to a sport or recreation organisation are more likely to perform better and are less likely to leave. Volunteers develop differing levels of organisational commitment just as they are willing or able to put differing amounts of time and effort into their roles as a volunteer. Developing a sense of commitment is a complex process but it tends to work best when volunteers are genuinely valued by their sport and recreation organisation. Valuing volunteers means that time is taken to understand the needs

of individual volunteers, the skills and experiences of volunteers are matched to their job assignment, training and development opportunities are made available, and their efforts are recognised and rewarded.

How long do volunteers stay?

The percentage of the population who volunteer is declining, but those who are volunteering are doing so for longer hours<<Lyons, M & Fabiansson, C (1998) Is volunteering declining in Australia? *Australian Journal on Volunteering* 3: 15-21.>> Volunteer turnover seems to be a problem for the about one in two sport organisations which report difficulties with retaining volunteers<<Daly, JA (1991) *Volunteers in South Australian Sport: A Study*. Canberra: Australian Sports Commission.>> More than 40% of volunteers in sport and recreation organisations stay for less than three years (see Table 1).

**Table 1 How long do volunteers stay with sport
and recreation organisations?**

<< Australian Bureau of Statistics (1995) *Voluntary Work-Australia*, Cat. 4441.0. Canberra:
Australian Government Publishing Service.>>

	%
Less than 1 year	17.3
1 to under 3 years	24.3
3 to under 5 years	20.1
5 to under 10 years	22.0
10 years or more	24.6

Why do volunteers leave?

Almost two-thirds of volunteers (64.2%) do not express any concerns about aspects of their voluntary work (see Table 2). However, those who do express concerns feel that there was a lack of support in their volunteer work, are concerned about legal responsibilities, or have concerns about the amount of time that their volunteer work required. An important aspect of volunteer recognition is to listen to the concerns of volunteers. Volunteers may be more likely to be retained by sport and recreation organisations which provide adequate support, openly address concerns about legal responsibilities and find ways to reduce or be more flexible about the time required from each volunteer. Volunteers leave sport and recreation organisations for a variety of reasons. Their reasons for leaving can be voluntary or involuntary, personal or organisational. Although it is important to know just why a volunteer leaves, it is more

important to ensure that the organisation, its management or its volunteer policies are not the cause of volunteer turnover. If a volunteer leaves due to increased family or work commitments there is little that an organisation can do but to recruit a new volunteer. When volunteer turnover results from organisational policies or management, it may be possible to reduce the rate of turnover by implementing better volunteer management practices (see the *Volunteer Management: A Guide to Good Practice* module). Exit interviews can provide a way of finding out just why volunteers leave an organisation and may inform the development of volunteer management policies.

Exit interviews

When a volunteer leaves an organisation it provides an ideal time for the Volunteer Coordinator to gather information about the volunteer's experience and what if anything an organisation should consider changing in relation to its HRM practices. Not all volunteers are willing to participate in an exit interview particularly when they leave an organisation under emotional stress. An exit interview can take place in person, over the telephone or through the use of a brief questionnaire. Exit interviews provide a sense of closure to the volunteer experience for individuals and affords an opportunity to recognise the efforts of volunteers, no matter how long or short their stay might have been.

Table 2 Volunteers' concerns about aspects of voluntary work

<< Australian Bureau of Statistics (1995) *Voluntary Work-Australia*, Cat. 4441.0. Canberra:

Australian Government Publishing Service.>>

	%
Relationship with paid staff	2.1
Amount/adequacy of supervision	2.4
Amount/adequacy of training	4.9
Lack of recognition	5.7
Insurance cover	5.9
Risk of injury/ill health	6.1
Costs	6.7
Travel/distance/location	7.3
Amount of time required	10.4
Legal responsibility	10.5
Lack of support	11.6
No concerns	64.2
* volunteers could give more than one reason	

Retaining or replacing volunteers

Retaining or replacing volunteers is the final step in the human resource approach to managing volunteers. Volunteer retention provides an important sense of continuity and stability within sport and recreation organisations. This module has focused on strategies and processes for retaining volunteers. Replacing volunteers is a natural and inevitable occurrence in sport and recreation organisations and merely moves the HRM process beyond the maintenance functions and back to the process of acquiring human resources. As long as the volunteer replacement process takes place in an orderly and predictable manner the stability and continuity of sport and recreation organisations is rarely threatened. An important aspect of volunteer replacement is succession planning.

Succession planning

Most volunteer turnover occurs at the end of the season or at the time of the annual general meeting (AGM). A succession plan is necessary to provide opportunities for potential leaders within organisations to be identified and developed in readiness to move up into leadership positions. Organisations that plan for smooth transitions of leadership positions are less likely to experience disruptions to their operations and can better position themselves to replace volunteers who leave their current positions.

Summary

Volunteer retention is an essential component of the HRM approach to managing volunteers. Retention is about putting into place a series of processes and procedures that foster a sense of organisational commitment among volunteers.

Volunteers who feel valued, supported, recognised and rewarded for their efforts are more likely to be retained by their organisation. Identifying and implementing training and development programs develops the skills and confidence levels of volunteers.

The Volunteer Coordinator plays an important role in the retention of volunteers.

Volunteer retention is not about maintaining the services of all volunteers.

Performance appraisal is necessary to ensure that sport and recreation organisations have reliable and effective volunteers. Record keeping was identified as a necessary task and provides a basis for recognising and rewarding volunteers. Sooner or later, volunteers leave organisations and turnover should be viewed as an opportunity for organisations to change and develop. As long as sport and recreation organisations plan for the replacement of volunteers, disruptions to operations are usually minimal and are far outweighed by the benefits of bringing new volunteers into an organisation.

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