



# Volunteer Co-ordinators Network Manual

A guide for managing  
environmental volunteer programs



## DISCLAIMER

*The Volunteer Co-ordinators Network manual is intended to give general information and some practical examples. It is not a substitute for obtaining independent legal information and advice about your organisation's responsibilities for managing volunteers. All liability arising directly or indirectly from the use of or any omissions in the information given is expressly disclaimed.*

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# Foreword

It is 21 years since a small group of local council co-ordinators got together in Sydney to share their experiences and tips on managing volunteers working in bushland areas. From that first meeting evolved the Volunteer Co-ordinators Network (VCN) - a network that now supports thousands of regular volunteers working in bushland, restoring native vegetation in urban parks, along beaches, rivers and estuaries and working on a wide range of other environmental activities.

The commitment to sharing ideas, problems and solutions resulted in the first VCN publication "Developing a Bushcare Volunteer Program – A Guide for Organisations" (1998). Since then, environmental volunteer programs in Australia have expanded and developed but that commitment to sharing has remained. In Sydney, volunteer co-ordinators still meet regularly and their knowledge and experiences make a rich contribution to this latest edition of the VCN manual.

Volunteers have become a crucial and highly valued part of the efforts to conserve and protect natural areas all over Australia. Those who manage volunteer programs for local councils, state and federal governments and private groups have developed wide ranging skills and expertise over the years – skills which need to retain their core integrity but be constantly adapted and refreshed to ensure Bushcare programs remain successful and relevant to their community partners. The VCN manual provides a reader-friendly distillation of the expertise and skills needed to maintain and grow successful volunteer programs and restore and regenerate our bushland.

The Australian Association of Bush Regenerators (AABR) has supported the VCN for many years, hosts its electronic network and looks forward to sharing in the future growth and development of this important movement.

Tein McDonald  
President  
Australian Association of Bush Regenerators



# About this manual

This is a best practice guide for not-for-profit organisations that manage long term environmental volunteer programs. It has been developed by the Volunteer Co-ordinators Network (Natural Areas), an information sharing network of people from government and non-government organisations throughout Australia who work with environmental volunteers.

This 3rd edition of The VCN manual, updating previous editions in various formats, is a practical working guide containing information and advice on managing volunteers and volunteer programs, legislation, safety and insurance requirements and examples of successful initiatives from current environmental volunteer programs. Many of the examples provided here are from environmental volunteering programs in Sydney. It is recommended that readers also look at initiatives happening in other cities and regional areas across Australia. Good examples include the Department of Environment and Conservation's Urban Nature Program in Perth and Habitat Brisbane, the volunteer environmental restoration program managed by Brisbane City Council.

This manual can benefit organisations starting a new environmental volunteer program or those that are reviewing and building on existing ones. This manual does not aim to be a standard for what every volunteer program should look like. However, it contains information that managers of environmental volunteering programs should consider when aiming to make their programs manageable, support their volunteers and keep themselves skilled as professional volunteer program managers.

Most organisations and volunteer programs are at different stages of their development and the information and tips presented here may save you from "reinventing the wheel".

## TIP

Developing a successful environmental volunteer program is an evolving process as it takes time to put procedures in place, spread the word in the community and get things working properly. Remember that many of the larger and successful environmental volunteer programs operating today have evolved in different ways and over many years.



Lane Cove Council Bushcare volunteers

Lane Cove Council

# Introduction

In Australia 36% of the population volunteer their time and expertise to many types of not-for-profit organisations involved in environment, social welfare, sport, recreation, education, training, religion, fundraising, fire fighting and community development. Just under 7% of these volunteer for activities involving environmental protection. These people volunteer for environmental programs at local, regional, national and global levels (Australian Bureau of Statistic, Australian Social Trends 2008. Article 4102.0: Voluntary work).

In NSW, according to “Who Cares about the Environment in 2012”, (OEH Social Research Series) 17% of survey respondents said they had taken part in a Landcare, Bushcare, tree planting or other restoration project in the previous 12 months (OEH, 2013, page vii).

In Sydney and many coastal areas of NSW and South East Queensland, environmental volunteer programs are commonly known as Bushcare, although Landcare, Urban Landcare, Coastcare and Parkcare and other names are also used across Australia.

Of most relevance, in terms of the information in this manual, are the environmental volunteering programs that involve on-ground restoration work that volunteers do on public land in urban and coastal areas. This on-ground work is mostly done at regular intervals, over long periods of time, and driven by people who are connected with and care for their local places. Even where a land manager organisation initiates a project or new volunteer group, it is this ‘sense of place’ and connection with the local patch of bush, beach or creek that is most frequently the driver for people to join environmental volunteering.

Environmental volunteering programs have steadily grown throughout Sydney since the 1980s, and are now an accepted and successful partnership between many land management organisations and community members. Local councils support the majority of the work done by environmental volunteers. Many of these organisations now make an ongoing commitment to support volunteer participation. The volunteers in turn make a commitment to contribute labour and local knowledge towards caring for these natural areas.

## SNAPSHOT

### Environmental volunteering surveys in the Greater Sydney region

The contribution of Sydney region volunteers undertaking environmental activities including bush regeneration, revegetation, community nursery work, native flora and fauna monitoring and water quality monitoring has been measured regularly since 2005. The surveys collect data from over 50 organisations including local councils, non-government organisations, community groups and NSW National Parks.

[www.greatersydney.ils.nsw.gov.au](http://www.greatersydney.ils.nsw.gov.au)



## Other programs that involve volunteers working in natural areas

There are many other programs and organisations that support people working without paid remuneration in natural areas, which are not specifically covered in this manual. These programs are managed differently, can have different objectives to ongoing environmental volunteering, as described above, and are subject to particular arrangements for insurance and supervisory requirements. Examples include corrective services programs, employment programs, traineeships, work experience programs for secondary and tertiary students, award/badge programs for young people and volunteers working with volunteer provider organisations. There is also a growing new area of volunteering known as “voluntourism”, often one-off activities in remote or less accessible places, which have a cost involved for participants.

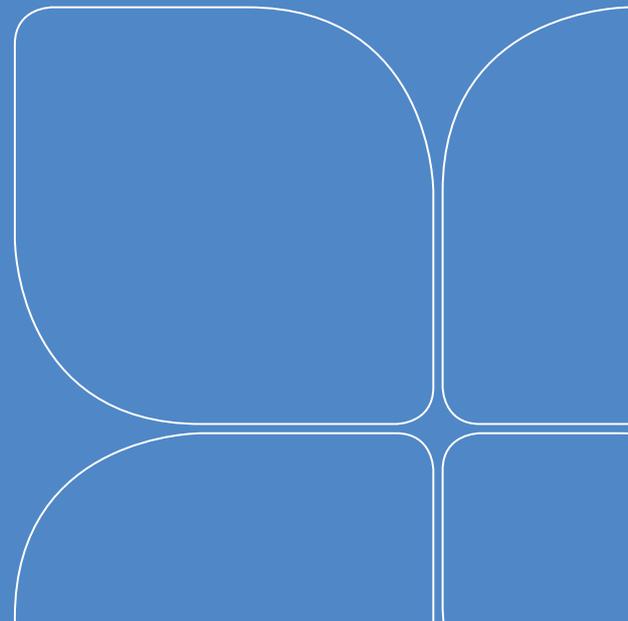
Information on working with volunteers as part of these other programs is best sourced from the specific organisations involved.



Stotts Reserve Bushcare group hard  
at work, Wollie Creek Valley  
*Laura Zusters*

# Part 1

# Managing the program



# Values and benefits of an environmental volunteering program

Before identifying the practical management issues involved in a volunteer program it is also important to recognise the value of your program at a broader level. Environmental volunteer programs are not just about getting the job done on the ground for the best value for money. They are about bringing the whole community forward to a position where it values the environment and accepts responsibility for its protection. Once volunteers are aware and skilled, volunteers can be a powerful lobbying force for advocacy and change within their community. Many environmental volunteer programs and community groups started as a result of advocacy and lobbying from community members. Volunteers themselves, the organisation and the whole community can benefit from well managed environmental volunteering programs.

**“Each motivated volunteer past or present is a potential educator of his/her neighbourhood on the need to care for the environment. Volunteers can act like a ripple, spreading their concerns throughout different localities and so they bring about changes in social attitudes. The level of pride and satisfaction they have in their work affects their influence.”**

Joan Modder, School of Volunteer Management  
Quoted in the VCN manual (1st edition, 1998)

## **Social, educational and health benefits for the volunteers**

- Feeling a sense of pride about making a contribution in the local community
- Growing self esteem, self confidence and personal satisfaction
- Creating opportunities to have fun and spend time with like-minded people
- Meeting new people and making new friends
- Getting to know the neighbours
- Participating in a healthy activity, keeping the mind and body active
- Learning more about environmental problems and proactive solutions
- Learning new and practical skills for protecting natural areas and biodiversity
- Inspiring others and creating interest about issues within the local community
- Gaining on-the-job experience before doing further education or making a career change
- Making contacts with potential employers

“You are not just asking people to work for free.  
It is about giving them an opportunity to make their lives richer.”

Lynne Richards, Director, School of Volunteer Management.  
Motivation and Recruitment course, 2003

### Benefits for the whole community

- Environmental volunteering brings groups of people together and promotes a sense of stewardship for the environment
- Natural areas are being looked after for present and future generations to enjoy
- Contributions into decision making processes by volunteers which help develop consensus solutions to local environmental problems

“Participation in Bushcare is educational, it is community building and it contributes millions of dollars worth of on-ground environmental improvement each year.”

Judy Christie, Senior Land Services Officer, Greater Sydney Local Land Services

### Benefits for the organisations

- Organisations and community members have the opportunity to work together. This helps dispel the perception of ‘them’ or ‘the government’ being the ones responsible for the problems and solutions
- Volunteers are a source of labour to complement the work of paid staff and contractors
- Volunteers may have specialised skills or knowledge that contributes to better understanding and management of the local environment. For example the Sydney Fungal Studies Group identified a Threatened Hygrocybeae (Fungal) Community in Lane Cove and contributed to its listing under the *NSW Threatened Species Conservation Act 1995* and later the National Estate

### The monetary value of environmental volunteering

Volunteers work for free but are not free labour. There have been different methods and values used to measure the in-kind value of volunteer time. For example in 2005 the Australian Government set the value of volunteer work at the equivalent of \$20 per hour for the purposes of matching grant funding provided through the Envirofund Program of the Australian Government’s Natural Heritage Trust. Later this was raised to \$30 an hour. An hourly rate can be used to estimate the monetary value of volunteer work as a matching in-kind contribution to budgets, grants and other cash contributions.

Example: A group of 6 volunteers work for 3 hours once a month for 10 months of the year @ \$30 per hour  
= 6 people x 3 hours x 10 months x \$30  
= The equivalent of \$5,400 worth of work for that year.

### TIP

Sometimes the work done by volunteers may be slower than using paid staff or contractors.

Look at the whole picture and weigh up all of these benefits.

### TIP

Matched with some realistic statistics and photos of volunteer projects, these calculations create powerful information for justifying new or continuing funding and grants for the volunteer program.

# Environmental volunteering roles and tasks

Do not underestimate the range and diversity of tasks that environmental volunteers can be involved in. Some of the many examples include:

## **On-ground work**

- Bush regeneration and weed removal
- Parkland, streetscape and garden maintenance
- Rehabilitation and revegetation
- Erosion control
- Fencing and livestock management around native vegetation
- Boardwalk and bird hide construction
- Walking trail and step construction
- Fire hazard reduction (hand clearing)
- Track maintenance and construction
- Beach clean ups and litter collection
- Wildlife rescue and rehabilitation
- Seed collection and plant propagation
- Assembling herbariums
- Drain stencilling for stormwater education

## **Surveys and Monitoring**

- Site assessments
- Wildlife monitoring, data collection and data entry
- Bird watching
- Bat and bird counts
- Underwater diving and aquatic life surveys
- Installing and monitoring nesting boxes
- Biodiversity surveys
- Native flora and fauna recording
- Water quality sampling and analysis
- Mapping
- Taking photos

## **SNAPSHOT**

### **Georges River Community River Health Monitoring Program**

This program began in 2009 and has a core group of around 70 volunteers who undertake aquatic sampling at over 40 sites in freshwater and estuarine areas of the Georges River catchment. The data collected from these sampling events is used to produce six monthly River Health Report Cards. The report card interprets and presents the results, providing an overall indication of the River's health on a sub catchment and site by site basis. The sampling involves a robust scientific methodology and the volunteers are trained and supervised at all events. The involvement of the volunteers and the information communicated in the report cards creates greater community awareness and understanding of the environmental issues for the Georges River and catchment. The project was the 2011 NSW Landcare Award winner in the Urban Landcare Award category.

[www.georgesriver.org.au](http://www.georgesriver.org.au)



GRCCC Riverhealth

GRCCC

### **Office work**

- Administration - phone calls, filing, data entry, mail outs
- Writing of grant applications and reports
- Running information seminars and workshops
- Organising annual celebratory events and catering

### **Education**

- Leading guided walks
- Being on information stalls at festivals, open days and expos
- Distributing educational brochures
- Working on websites, signage and brochures
- Research
- Writing newsletter articles and fact sheets
- Photography/ artwork for displays, posters, brochures and photo competitions
- Distributing information and promoting membership of the volunteer program

### **Advocacy**

- Campaigning and raising awareness of local issues
- Fundraising
- Representation on advisory groups, management committees and project steering committees

## SNAPSHOT

### Fishcare

This is a successful volunteer program in NSW and other states that contributes to the success of many of recreational fishing education programs. Fishcare volunteers talk directly to anglers about fishing rules and responsible fishing. They also help with a range of activities such as fishing workshops, surveys, school excursions and community fishing events. Funded by the recreational fishing licence, the NSW Fishcare Volunteer Program continues to recruit volunteers in many inland and coastal areas around Sydney and other parts of the state.

[www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/recreational/info/fvp](http://www.dpi.nsw.gov.au/fisheries/recreational/info/fvp)



Wolli Creek Valley Bushcare group, Bray Ave Wetland

*Laura Zusters*

## SNAPSHOT

### Wolli Creek Preservation Society

This is an example of the many environmental volunteer groups in Sydney that were started at the grassroots by concerned members of the local community. The Society was originally formed in 1983 to actively oppose the construction of the M5 East motorway through the Wolli Creek Valley, which contains the only bushland of substantial size left in inner south-west Sydney. The Wolli Creek bushland is now protected and the Society has turned its focus to on-ground work and educational activities including bush regeneration (Bushcare), guided walks, talks, school resource kits, kayak trips, bird surveys, bat counts and water quality monitoring of the creek. The Society is an incorporated community organisation that works in partnership with the local councils, National Parks and Wildlife Service and other government agencies.

[www.wollicreek.org.au](http://www.wollicreek.org.au)

## Volunteer activities without leaving home!

There are also opportunities that enable people to be involved and contribute, and in some cases they don't even need to leave their property. For example:

- Backyard wildlife monitoring and recording
- Growing native plants for local revegetation projects
- Planting native species in the garden to help create a habitat corridor

## SNAPSHOT

### Wildlife Watch

Local councils such as Willoughby and North Sydney run Wildlife Watch programs that encourage local residents to become the "eyes and ears" of their local bushland. The Wildlife Watch volunteers are given training and instruction to assist them with making accurate records of any sightings, sounds or signs of wildlife. The information collected is used for making decisions about bushland management and environmental planning, and inclusion in the Atlas of NSW Wildlife.

[www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au](http://www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au)

[www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au](http://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au)



Bev Debrincat accepting a Regional Award for innovation on behalf of the Habitat Network

SMCMA

## SNAPSHOT

### Habitat Network

This is a grassroots network of local people in the Ryde and Hunters Hill area. Working in partnership with the local councils, state government agencies and other local environment groups, the volunteers organise educational events, walks and talks. Other volunteers involved in the network are encouraged to plant native species in their gardens to help conserve existing populations of small birds and their habitat ranges. The network's website is a hub of local information relating to small native birds and habitat, and includes photos and YouTube videos.

[www.habitatnetwork.org](http://www.habitatnetwork.org)

# Program management fundamentals

Environmental volunteering programs vary significantly in size. Large councils cannot be compared to smaller councils, national parks or incorporated community groups. The availability of resources, hectares of natural areas managed, the local politics and the level of commitment from each organisation can be very different.

There are however some essentials for any environmental volunteer program, no matter how many volunteers are involved.

## TIP

Environmental volunteer programs that have a clear purpose and good procedures are likely to be more attractive to prospective volunteers, decision makers and grant funding bodies.

## A clear purpose and plan for involving volunteers

Set out from the start what needs to be achieved and how the involvement of volunteers will assist in the achievement of this goal.

Link the aims of the volunteer program to the organisation's purpose and broader vision statements for fostering community participation and managing the natural environment.

Then set some achievable and measurable objectives. For example:

- To recruit 30 community volunteers over the next 12 months
- To support 10 volunteer groups this year
- To start 2 new volunteer groups next year
- To plant 2000 trees
- To treat weeds and stormwater erosion at 5 sites
- To organise 4 community awareness activities
- To deliver 3 volunteer training workshops each year
- To train 25 volunteers in bush regeneration techniques and safe work practices
- To obtain a grant for a specific site
- To develop and evaluate work plans for each volunteer work site
- To survey and record the flora and fauna species in 3 reserves

**“It's important that your objectives are measurable because that's how you prove and track success and provide feedback.”**

Enabling Ecoaction: A Handbook for Anyone Working with the Public on Conservation, Les Robinson & Andreas Glanznig, (2003).

## Policies and procedures

Clearly articulated plans and policies are essential when working with volunteers to protect both the volunteer and the organisation. Having good clear procedures shows professionalism and can help reduce unnecessary administration and hiccups later on.

Policy and procedure documents don't need to be long and wordy. Keep them practical, reader-friendly and detailed enough to guide the day-to-day operations of the program. Be flexible and regularly update these policy documents as the volunteer program expands or contracts and legislation or other external factors change.

### TIP

Streamline the procedures and forms when possible to avoid "reinventing the wheel". Some forms and procedures used for paid staff may be adapted for use by volunteers, such as accident reporting and injury procedures, grievance procedures, petty cash claims etc.



Grant Reserve volunteers decontaminating their boots

*Randwick City Council*

## SNAPSHOT

### Procedures to avoid spread of pathogens in natural areas

In some natural areas special precautions must be taken to prevent the spread of pathogens. Many councils and National Park managers in Sydney have developed protocols that must be followed by all volunteers and contractors working in bushland to prevent the spread of Phytophthora and Myrtle Rust. The procedures include making volunteers aware of the pathogens and their threats to bushland and training in identification and specific hygiene protocols to prevent spread (cleaning boots, equipment, machinery, tools etc).

## TIP

Many local councils have their volunteer program policy documents on their websites. If you are developing or reviewing your procedures you can also seek advice from other co-ordinators through the "Volcoord" email list server. See details in Part 3, page 75.

## TIP

Keep a sturdy folder with plastic sleeves in the volunteer supervisor's kit. The folder can have copies of site procedures, site risk assessments, spare copies of relevant forms, safe work method statements etc.

Senior managers, staff and volunteers (when appropriate) should also be involved in the development of policies and procedures. At the very least, make sure that everyone involved in the volunteer program is aware of how things are done - other staff members, supervisors, new staff members who come on board and of course, the volunteers.

Many procedures will have an associated form. Forms for things such as volunteer attendance and reporting injuries need to be readily available at volunteer work days. Examples of procedures include:

- Registering new volunteers into the program
- Reporting injuries or accidents
- Reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses
- Volunteer attendance (to keep written records of hours worked by volunteers)
- Permission to use photos of volunteers
- Grievance procedures
- Hygiene procedures such as cleaning tools and footwear when entering specific sites

## SNAPSHOT

North Sydney Council's Bushcare Program Guidelines are available online. The document includes a description of their program, aims and guiding principles as well as other useful information for volunteers.

[www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au](http://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au)

(Search under 'Environment - Get Involved')

## OTHER RESOURCES

See the Volunteering section on the website of the Office of Environment and Heritage. Links include volunteering opportunities in National Parks as well as a policy and procedures document.

[www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/Volunteers/09797DECCWVolPolProc.pdf](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/Volunteers/09797DECCWVolPolProc.pdf)

## Good administration and communication with volunteers

Good administration and communication with volunteers underlies every successful volunteer program. Poor management and administration wastes resources and frustrates volunteers. Good record keeping helps keep track of everyone and everything, and it can also help with receiving ongoing funding and support for the program. For example:

- The information collected from volunteer attendance records will come in handy when calculating the total number of hours worked by volunteers for reports, surveys, grant applications and evaluations of the program
- The tools inventory will help keep track of how much money is needed in the next financial year for extras, repairs and replacements

Keeping good records and documentation will improve the day-to-day administration that is part of running any program involving many people, several sites and activities. Examples of good records include:

- A file for each work site with list of volunteers, maps, site assessments, work strategies, species lists, progress reports etc
- An inventory of all tools and equipment
- A register of tools and equipment loaned to volunteers
- A supervision roster
- A calendar of training and events (planned well in advance)
- Newsletter or website information updated with work days
- Photo library
- Supervisor reports from volunteer work days
- Records of chemical use and training
- Statistics: number of volunteers, groups, sites, hours worked by volunteers
- A user-friendly database with volunteer records

Good communication with volunteers about the work they will be doing, the organisation's expectations, training required, start and finish times, as well as procedures for such things as for wet weather etc, is also a fundamental of good program management.

## TIP

Before using a photo of a volunteer or community member in a publication or website, always seek their permission in writing. Children under 18 need to have written permission from their parent or guardian.

## SNAPSHOT

### Calendar of events shared by neighbouring councils

Willoughby City Council produces an annual calendar of environmental workshops and events. This is a partnership program with its neighbouring councils Lane Cove, Mosman and North Sydney, and pre-planned community events from all four councils are advertised in the calendar. The calendar brings together a myriad of interesting events and workshops in the region that relate to sustainable living and caring for natural areas and their inhabitants. Bushcare events are advertised alongside community garden events, composting workshops, river boat tours, bicycle maintenance days and a workshop on how to recycle a jumper and convert it into a scarf!

[www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au](http://www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au) (Search under Environment & Sustainability/Bushcare)

[www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/greenevents](http://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au/greenevents)

Good administration is also about being mindful of the confidentiality of a volunteer's personal information and photographs. All volunteers have a right to have their confidential and personal information dealt with in accordance with the national *Privacy Act 1988* and Privacy Regulations 2001.

A database should contain detailed and confidential information about a volunteer's contact details, medical issues related to their duties as a volunteer, the site/project they work on, special interests and skills, special needs, date commenced, participation in training and results of skills assessments.

## Volunteer insurance

Environmental volunteers do a wide range of tasks that can inadvertently cause harm to themselves, other people or to property.

In many cases the risks are low, however, volunteers have the right and need to be covered by insurance that is provided by the organisation they are working with.

Depending on the type of organisation that is managing the environmental volunteers, there are various requirements for acquiring volunteer insurance.

### **Volunteers working in an incorporated community group**

Incorporated volunteer groups are responsible for providing their own insurance because they are operating as independent entities. Volunteer groups need to be incorporated if:

- They are working on private property or across various land tenures
- They apply for and manage their own grant funding
- They want to employ staff, consultants or contractors

To get around this, many councils administer grants and engage contractors on behalf of a volunteer group in funding partnership agreements.

### **Volunteers working in a non-government not for profit organisation**

Non-government environmental organisations are responsible for providing insurance for their environmental volunteers.

### **Insurance for volunteers working on public land**

In the Sydney region, the majority of environmental volunteers work in areas that are under the care and control of local councils or NSW Government agencies. The council or agency is responsible for providing insurance for the volunteers. The most common types of insurance for volunteers are:

#### **Public liability insurance**

Covers an organisation's legal liability if a volunteer causes personal injury and/or property damage to a third party. This insurance provides coverage in circumstances where the volunteer or group is found to be liable.

#### **Personal accident insurance**

Covers volunteers for personal injury incurred while volunteering. Coverage ranges from death to disability, disablement, a capital sum or a limited amount of weekly benefits. There is often an age limit so that children or retirees are subject to reduced cover or excluded. Check every clause!

### **Seek independent advice about insurance**

It is essential that you seek independent and professional advice about volunteer insurance. Persevere with getting clear information and read the fine print. It may not be easy to get clear written documentation from your organisation, insurance broker or provider. There are some things to check when reading the fine print of insurance policies that cover volunteers:

## TIP

Volunteers need to be clearly informed about the insurance before they commence working with an organisation. Tell the volunteers what is and isn't covered, especially in terms of medical expenses, and any other options that are available such as the organisation covering the gap and other costs separately.

## Responsibilities of organisations

- For volunteers doing on-ground work, clarify the land tenure and who needs to take responsibility for providing the insurance (private land, council land, state agency land, crown land, national park etc).
- If your organisation is not the land manager get confirmation in writing about who will provide the insurance before volunteers commence work.

## Policy wording and insurance coverage

- Is the terminology “volunteer”, “voluntary worker” or “people working on behalf of the organisation” actually written in the insurance policy?
- What is the age range for people covered? People under and over certain ages may be subject to reduced cover or excluded altogether (age range is commonly 15-90).
- Are children that are accompanied by a parent covered or not covered? What is your organisation’s policy about children coming to work days with a parent/guardian?
- There are usually “exclusions” for personal accident insurance. What types of injuries and what amount of medical expenses does the policy cover?
- The “gap” in medical expenses is not normally covered by an insurance policy. Is the “gap” is covered by your organisation?
- Is loss of income included for volunteers who are unable to work after any injury?
- One volunteer can cause injury to other volunteers. Is member to member liability included?
- Does the policy say anything about pre-existing medical conditions? Does your volunteer registration form collect information about pre-existing conditions?
- Are certain activities excluded from the policy such as using power tools or working on particular terrains? Are your volunteers currently undertaking these activities?
- Are the volunteers covered during their journey to and from their work day?
- Are volunteers permitted to use their own cars when their work involves transporting others or carrying out any other volunteer work for the organisation?
- Will loss of no claim bonus and cost of ‘excess’ on personal car insurance be paid in the event of damage to the volunteer’s car?
- Will allowance be made for loss or damage to the volunteer’s personal property?
- Check whether the activities specified in the insurance policy match activities in your program’s Volunteer Job Description (read more in “Volunteer recruitment process” page 44).

## TIP

Insurers usually require written documentation and records. This is where the good record keeping comes in handy. It is essential to know who has attended each volunteer work day in case there is an injury or accident that could lead to an insurance claim or dispute.

**For Further Information:** Volunteering NSW

[www.ourcommunity.com.au/insurance/view\\_help\\_sheet.do?articleid=263](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/insurance/view_help_sheet.do?articleid=263)

## Adequate resources

There are many resources required to manage an environmental volunteer program. A good volunteer program is one with enough resources to be able to support the number of volunteers involved.

### TIP

Do you have enough staff to cope with a growth in volunteer numbers? Think about the maximum number of volunteers that can be adequately supported with your current level of resources. Be realistic about how far your resources can be stretched. It is better to have a smaller number of well supported and functioning volunteer groups than take on too many poorly-resourced volunteers.

### **Paid staff**

The paid workers (employees and contractors) who co-ordinate and supervise environmental volunteers are valuable resources that contribute to the success of the program.

The number of paid workers and their responsibilities vary from one organisation to another. Some organisations employ paid staff with the sole responsibility of co-ordinating the volunteer program, while other paid workers supervise and train the volunteers. In other organisations, co-ordinating the program and supervising the volunteers may be the responsibility of one person, either as their whole job or just one aspect of it.

### **Budget**

There are various expenses to factor in. These include:

- Salaries for program co-ordinators, supervisors and trainers
- Delivering training for volunteers (guest speakers, facilitator fees, venue hire and catering)
- Registration fees for external training offered to volunteers
- Administrative equipment (computer, phone, fax, printer – if required)
- Tools, vehicles and equipment
- Personal protective equipment for staff and volunteers (gloves, shirts, hats, first aid kits)
- Materials (plants, mulch, herbicide, logs, stakes and sleeves, weed matting, fencing)
- Signs
- Rubbish removal
- Printing of brochures, flyers, newsletters and banners
- Website support
- Promotion activities that require paid graphic design, letter box dropping and newspaper advertisements
- Volunteer recognition events (end of year party, social functions, awards, gifts)
- Out of pocket expenses for volunteers and paid staff: petrol allowance, photos printed
- Professional training and out of pocket expenses for volunteer program co-ordinators and supervisors

## Grants

Many grants are available to not-for-profit organisations for environmental restoration, natural and cultural heritage projects. The most widely recognised grants for on-ground environmental restoration, education or research are offered by the New South Wales Government's Environmental Trust <http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/grants/envtrust.htm> There are other government program grants, such as the Australian Government's Community Action Grants. Other grants, funded through different sponsors, may come through Landcare Australia Ltd. Often this funding can be used to employ contractors who do additional work on a site that volunteers are looking after. This can give volunteers a real boost in enthusiasm for their work.

Grants specifically for community and volunteer groups are also available. Tell the volunteers well in advance about the grants available to community groups. Assisting with applications and acting as a sponsor for volunteer groups can give them a better chance of accessing this other source of funding.

Think about what funding is available outside your organisation. Remember to stay realistic about what can be achieved in the required time frame of funding bodies, especially if you will be managing additional funded projects on top of your normal workload.

## Corporate sponsorship

Large companies and local small businesses are sometimes interested in sponsoring environmental programs by providing cash contributions towards buying items such as tools, uniforms, equipment, materials and printing. Other businesses may be able to provide in-kind contributions such as free printing or discounted goods and services. Providing incentives and rewards for volunteers may be another way for local businesses to assist, such as discounted prices at the local hardware store for the Bushcare volunteers.

Think carefully about accepting sponsorship from a company that could be in conflict with your organisation or program's goals or not acceptable to your volunteers. Are the company's products aligned with the principles of environmental protection? Is there a conflict? An example might be if the company is involved in a development application or dispute with your council.

**"Sponsorship is not a donation.**

**It offers monetary support in return for an agreed benefit".**

Landcare Sponsorship: A Guide for Groups in NSW, 1999.

## TIP

Ask volunteers for their ideas on what needs funding. Keep a wish list and short summary of projects you would like to do and who could be involved (if there were more funding). Sometimes grant opportunities come around quickly and this will make it easier to put together an application.

## TIP

Be clear about what the sponsoring organisation requires in return for funding, and whether you have the capacity to deliver this.

## Managing the on-ground work

The main on-ground activities of most NSW environmental volunteers are bush regeneration, planting local native species, native flora and fauna monitoring, water quality monitoring and growing native plants at community nurseries.

Careful planning with the volunteers is essential to ensure that the many values within the natural landscape are protected and that volunteers understand the nature of work and the principles and practices of ecological restoration, habitat protection and bush regeneration.

### Do a site assessment

Volunteers often work at sensitive sites. Organisations need to develop a clear work strategy and supervise the volunteer work being done. A site assessment includes:

- Clarifying the land tenure and zoning, and whether volunteers are permitted to work there
- Documenting the flora and fauna species, for example doing pre- and post- surveys of plants, or indicator species such as birds, mammals or reptiles
- Researching the history of the site (previous land use, soil contamination, any local knowledge and anecdotes)
- Taking 'before photos' from fixed points at the site
- Creating a base map identifying the main features and work zones
- Looking at what else is happening at and around the site. This will inform the work strategy and who else you need to work with.

Examples include:

- Presence of threatened species, populations or Endangered Ecological Communities (a licence may be needed to work in these areas  
[www.environment.nsw.gov.au/wildlifelicences/sciedconlicences.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/wildlifelicences/sciedconlicences.htm))
- Hazard Reduction Zones and Asset Protection Zones
- Fire trails
- Waterways
- Shared access (walking track, cycleway)
- Cultural heritage (Aboriginal and European)
- Nearby sites where other staff or contractors are working

### TIP

Keep the communication going back and forth about what work the volunteers are doing and who else in your organisation needs to be aware about this work – parks managers, stormwater engineers, road work teams, mowers, gardeners, contractors etc

### SNAPSHOT

#### Bushcare with Care

This practical field guide has been developed for bushland managers, bush regenerators and Bushcare volunteers who have a responsibility to protect Aboriginal cultural values in the landscape. The guide has been developed by the Greater Sydney Local Land Services and contains useful information and images about the types of Aboriginal cultural places, objects and values that can be found in Sydney's urban bushland. The guide also includes information about legislation, protocols for consulting with people from the Aboriginal community and step by step procedures to follow when people are working near Aboriginal places or objects in bushland.

- Threats to the site (stormwater, feral animals, pathogens, rubbish dumping, encroachment etc)
- Underground utility access points (gas, electricity, telephone etc)
- Neighbours with access or views

### **Develop an agreed site plan of management or work plan**

- Develop a plan with the volunteers for what can be achieved in 12 months, in 3 years etc
- Be clear about the priorities
- Be realistic about timeframes (it may take time to see results of work efforts)
- Link the site plan back to local/regional catchment plans to show the volunteers how their work fits into a bigger picture

### **Prepare site reports**

Written site reports are an important way to collect information about the work being done at a site over time. Site reports can be completed at the end of each work day by the volunteers and/or supervisor. Many organisations use this system, which is especially useful when volunteers are working without a supervisor. The reports include information about who attended, the tasks undertaken, number of plants planted, use of chemicals and special tools, health and safety issues, training needs and any questions to be addressed by the supervisor or program co-ordinator.

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

Example of the Reporting Template used for the GreenWay project in Sydney's inner west

[www.greenway.org.au/files/GreenWay%20Revegetation%20Plan%202011.pdf](http://www.greenway.org.au/files/GreenWay%20Revegetation%20Plan%202011.pdf) (page 70)

### **Monitor the on-ground work**

- Have regular site inspections with the volunteers to evaluate progress of work and whether it matches the site work plan
- Take photos and videos from the same fixed points at the site to show changes over time
- Keep records of who attends each work day

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

*Australian Association of Bush Regenerators (AABR)*

An organisation that aims to foster and encourage sound ecological practices of bushland management by qualified people and volunteers. It also promotes the study and practice of bush regeneration. [www.aabr.org.au](http://www.aabr.org.au)

*Community Biodiversity Survey Manual* National Parks Association NSW, 2001 [www.environment.nsw.gov.au/surveys/CommunityBiodiversitySurveyManual.htm](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/surveys/CommunityBiodiversitySurveyManual.htm)

*Birds in Backyards- Best Practice guidelines for Enhancing Bird Habitat*

[www.csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/BestPracticeGuidelinesforEnhancingUrbanBirdHabitat.pdf](http://www.csu.edu/cerc/researchreports/documents/BestPracticeGuidelinesforEnhancingUrbanBirdHabitat.pdf)

## **TIP**

On a regular basis revisit the site plan with the volunteers. Remember to include new volunteers who join in along the way.

## **TIP**

Site report information documents a history of the site over time, and helps future land managers long after the current supervisors and volunteers have moved on.

## **TIP**

Biosecurity means protecting the economy, environment and community from the negative impacts of pests, diseases and weeds. Implementing good practices with volunteers from the start will help to ensure problems are not moved from site to site.

## Promoting success

A key to the lasting success and continued expansion of an environmental volunteer program is the ability to promote achievements and successes to the people and bodies that make decisions about funding and support. This means promotion both within your organisation and beyond, which includes:

- Showcasing successful projects and results using photos and short films on websites
- Reporting regularly to councillors about volunteer achievements, hours worked etc
- Putting regular articles and columns in community newsletters and local newspapers
- Nominating the whole program, individual groups and volunteers for awards such as:
  - NSW Landcare Awards
  - Banksia Environmental Foundation
  - Young Environmentalist of the Year
  - Local Government Excellence in the Environment
  - Local Australia Day awards
  - Keep Australia Beautiful Sustainable Cities Awards
- Writing press releases with a local context that also link with high profile days such as National Volunteer Week, International Volunteer Day, World Environment Day or National Tree Day. Be ready with photographs or be willing to host journalists for a photo shoot on your site
- Inviting senior managers, councillors and Members of Parliament to attend recognition events, project launches and Christmas parties
- Making presentations at conferences and peer forums

### TIP

A picture tells a thousand words. Good quality photos showing sites before and after, and volunteers at work and enjoying themselves, are powerful promoters of your program.

Ensure that your volunteer program is well known to other sections within the organisation: the sustainability educators, community services, parks, engineering, road works etc. Updates are easily shared on noticeboards and in lunch rooms and can work well as informal communication tools.



Showcase your volunteer group to promote your program

*Jan Thomas*

## SNAPSHOT

### Internal promotion of environmental volunteer program

Some council bushland managers have given priority to promoting the successes of the Bushcare program and attracting ongoing funding and support. Reports to senior managers and councillors showing before and after photos of sites are used to demonstrate progress of work and the valuable contributions made by council's many Bushcare volunteers. Short films are also developed to document the good work at some sites and how this fits in with the overall bigger picture of ecological restoration. Short films are inexpensive to produce and are very effective tool for documenting projects and promoting success.

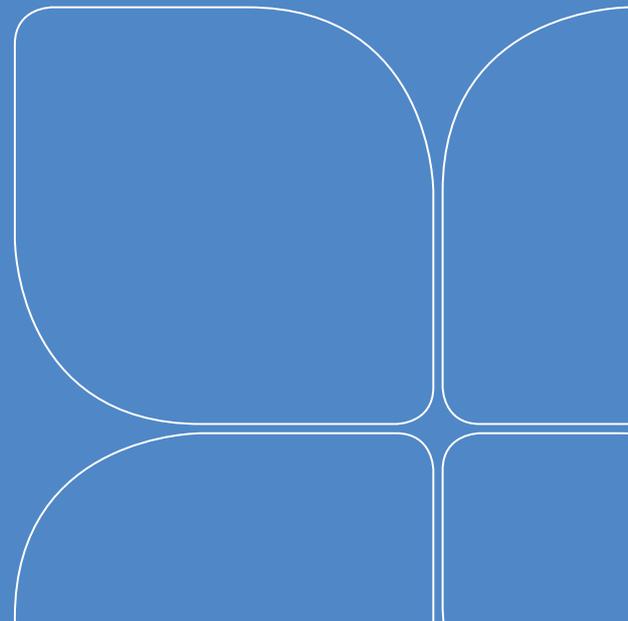
[www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au/Environment---Sustainability/BushCare/](http://www.willoughby.nsw.gov.au/Environment---Sustainability/BushCare/)



Restoring shorebird habitat at  
Long Reef  
*Peter Miller*

## **Part 2**

# **Managing people**



# Finding and retaining volunteers

There are many aspects to consider when attempting to find and retain volunteers. As well as understanding individual motivation for volunteering, there are a whole range of ways in which your program can be managed so as to continue to meet volunteer needs and expectations.

## TIP

Keep a record of individual interests, skills and relevant experience so that volunteers can be matched to the most suitable tasks.

## Understanding why people get involved

Volunteers come from all walks of life and with a broad range of skills. Different people will have different needs, interests and motivations for getting involved. According to volunteer literature, most people respond to three levels of motivation. The basic level is self-serving drive, then relational (to do with relationships) and the highest level is belief. One's beliefs generally provide the strongest level of commitment and passion. "Why People Volunteer" [www.volunteerpower.com](http://www.volunteerpower.com)

Bushcare and the other regular volunteer groups who meet across Sydney seem to have a combination of an attachment to and concern for their local natural environment as well as being motivated by cultural and social factors, such as wanting to work with like-minded friends and neighbours.

What motivates your volunteers? Why did they want to get involved? Find out by asking them. Their motivations for getting involved might be quite different to yours!

**"Why did you choose to volunteer with us?"**

**"How would you like to be involved?"**

**"What do you hope to get out of volunteering with us?"**

Volunteer motivations may not always be made clear and motivations can change over time. For example, a person may initially want to remove weeds to improve their property's views and market value, but as they become more involved in the program their motivation may become more about wanting to protect the bushland for its biodiversity and habitat values.

Some people may want to support the environmental cause but might not want to work outdoors. Have a range of jobs available including light duties, office jobs, artistic, promotion, website, advocacy and administrative.

Examples of environmental volunteer motivations may include wanting to:

- Make a difference to the environment
- Learn more about local native plants and animals

- Be able to “give something back” to a natural area / wildlife
- Participate in local community activities
- Share one’s skills with others
- Connect with the neighbours
- Reduce bush fire hazard near property
- Enhance property values
- Make the bushland reserve look better
- Meet like-minded people and make new friends
- Interact with other people and feel included
- Receive training and gain new skills
- Undertake a new challenge or career change
- Gain work experience and meet potential employers

Volunteers give their time by choice. Asking why people chose to volunteer with your organisation will help ensure that some of their needs will be met through their participation in the program.

Examples of usually essential volunteer needs include:

- To be given clear instructions and support
- To do tasks that are meaningful and have a clear purpose
- To see the results of their efforts
- To feel proud of the organisation/volunteer program to which they donate time
- To be given recognition for their efforts and achievement

## SNAPSHOT

### Growers for Greenspace

This project was held across several local government areas in the Parramatta River catchment during 2010 - 2011. Community members were recruited, trained and given equipment to propagate and grow native plants in their own backyards, courtyards and balconies for revegetation projects in the catchment. The project sought to attract a greater variety of volunteers, specifically those interested in gardening, who may consider themselves to be time-poor, or physically unable to participate in volunteering activities such as bush regeneration. The project raised community awareness of ecological issues of the Parramatta River catchment and its many native vegetation communities. At the same time, an additional number of local provenance plants were grown to add to the limited supply of plants currently able to be produced by councils and community nurseries.

[www.parramattariver.org.au](http://www.parramattariver.org.au)



Growers for Greenspace volunteers

PRCG

### **Avoiding volunteer burn out**

People who get involved with environmental volunteering are often full of energy and enthusiasm about wanting to make a difference. Remember that volunteers can burn out if they take on too much or do not get enough support from their organisation.

Beware of the trap *“the more you do, the more you get asked to do”*.

Some factors leading to volunteer burn out include:

- Lack of direction and priority setting
- Results of volunteer efforts not being seen on the ground
- Large workload and unrealistic expectations
- Poor feedback about their performance
- Poor co-ordination and communication
- Poor resourcing of the volunteer program

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

See Simon Sinek’s video “Start with Why”.

[www.ted.com/talks/](http://www.ted.com/talks/)

[simon\\_sinek\\_how\\_great\\_leaders\\_inspire\\_action.html](http://simon_sinek_how_great_leaders_inspire_action.html)



*“It’s not just hard work, it’s fun and friendship too”*

*Margaret Reidy*

## Keeping volunteers motivated

Remember that volunteers usually join for their own reasons, not for yours or your organisation's reasons.

However there are many things that volunteer program co-ordinators and supervisors can also do towards keeping volunteers involved and interested over time.

### Your management style

- Keep in mind the volunteer motivations and needs when running the program
- Be mindful of making changes that can impact on people's primary motivating factors (for example, if the volunteers enjoy the social aspect of stopping for a cuppa during a work session, don't change this ritual)
- Be enthusiastic and encourage new ideas (being motivated is contagious)
- Be friendly but firm about what volunteers are permitted and not permitted to do
- Avoid too much bureaucracy and using "management speak"
- Be reliable and organised - don't waste their time
- Fulfil your duty of care by providing safety information and protective equipment
- Practice good customer service and follow through on volunteer requests (even if you cannot do something that a volunteer has requested, let them know)
- Maintain good communication with volunteers, such as regular newsletters and email reminders, as well as making opportunities for face-to-face casual contacts

## SNAPSHOT

Sutherland Shire Council has one of the largest Bushcare programs in Sydney. Their regular "Bushcare Bulletin" newsletter keeps volunteers up to date and is posted out to volunteers as well as being available on their website.

[www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/Environment/Environmental\\_Programs/Bushcare/Bushcare\\_Bulletin](http://www.sutherlandshire.nsw.gov.au/Environment/Environmental_Programs/Bushcare/Bushcare_Bulletin)

## TIP

If a volunteer group is covering a large reserve surrounded by houses, rotate the work days and tasks so that everyone's 'patch' is worked in.

The volunteering tasks that volunteers are asked to do are a critical factor in keeping them engaged and motivated.

### Tasks for volunteers

- Encourage people in a volunteer group to rotate tasks and responsibilities
- Whenever possible, match tasks to people's skills and interests (for example if someone enjoys taking photos, ask them to take the before and after photos to document the group's work)
- Work with the volunteers to develop their own site work plans and encourage a sense of ownership of their work

## SNAPSHOT

### 101 Secrets for a Successful Environmental Volunteer Group

This great little booklet summarises some of the tips and "secret ingredients" shared by environmental volunteers who attended the 2009 Sydney Community Forum. Environmental volunteer groups are made up of a wonderful mix of personalities, skills and interests. Encouraging volunteers to keep coming back month after month is a challenge faced by many organisations and volunteers groups. The booklet contains actual quotes about the simple things that will encourage volunteers to stay motivated and keeping the group going. Examples include: Make it social; take turns and bring some good food to share; make each other feel valued; set a clear goal; respect the time that people give; plan for succession and "remember that not everyone is on email - talking is still allowed!"

[www.bushcare.org.au](http://www.bushcare.org.au) Search under 'Resources'

## TIP

Ensure that the on-ground work can be maintained in the long term. No volunteer wants to see their efforts wasted by taking on too much or the neglect of land managers.

While environmental volunteers usually have a strong sense of place and attachment to their local patch, exchanging ideas and connecting with other volunteers regionally can be stimulating and motivating.

## Regional networking opportunities

- Regional community events are networking and motivating events for volunteers. Volunteers who work in small programs particularly find value in such events.
- Email networks such as Sydney's Nature Carers (SNaC) keep volunteers connected. SNaC is for volunteers and professionals who share ideas and knowledge online. A regular e-news bulletin is published on SNaC with information about regional news, events, grants, training etc. To join, send your details to [SNaC-subscribe@yahoo.com](mailto:SNaC-subscribe@yahoo.com)



2012 Sydney Community Forum

SMCMA

Some regional events are also very useful for promoting your volunteering program more broadly. For example Bushcare's Major Day Out, is now on its way to becoming an annual event held at several sites across Australia! [www.bushcaresmajordayout.org](http://www.bushcaresmajordayout.org)

**"Just as Clean Up Australia Day has made us a litter conscious nation, Bushcare's Major Day Out aims to establish a day where we celebrate our concern and love for bushland and the process of Bushcare as an accepted and desirable part of our culture."**

Don Wilson, Bushcare's Major Day Out website

## TIP

A new website is in development that will promote environmental volunteering programs and events across the Sydney region and beyond. Be sure to provide details of your events if you would like them promoted on a regional scale.  
[www.bushcare.org.au](http://www.bushcare.org.au)

### **Regular training and opportunities to learn more**

- Offer a variety of training and opportunities to build skills (read more under “Training Volunteers” page 59)
- Organise field trips, bus tours, boat tours and site visits that encourage volunteers to see environmental volunteer work in other areas
- Hold events for volunteers to meet others, share feedback, experiences, concerns and questions

## **SNAPSHOT**

### **Building Bridges to Boorowa: Urban Bushcare meets rural Landcare**

Each year, a group of North Sydney Bushcare volunteers go on a road trip to Boorowa Shire, approximately 3½ hours south-west of Sydney. The North Sydney volunteers visit local farms in the area, meeting local landholders and helping out with revegetation sites. The trip provides a valuable opportunity for the urban focussed volunteers to learn about and experience the land degradation problems faced in this rural part of Australia. In turn the landholders hear about the land management issues faced in urban areas.

[www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au](http://www.northsydney.nsw.gov.au)

### **Surveys and appraisals**

- Ring volunteers if you haven’t seen them in a while and ask them “Are you still enjoying volunteering with us?”
- Do volunteer appraisals and give feedback on volunteer performance and development of skills.

### **Recognition of volunteer efforts**

- Use a personal touch and express appreciation verbally
- Write feature stories about volunteer groups or individuals in the newsletter. Be sure to ask first, not everyone wants their photo or story made public.
- Give rewards when appropriate (such as a discount at the local hardware store, a National Parks entry pass and discounts to attend training events)
- Organise end of year Christmas parties (remember many volunteers like the social aspect and it is also an opportunity to celebrate efforts from the past year)
- Give awards or certificates of appreciation at the end of year party
- Recognise volunteer efforts with awards. (Read more under “Promoting your program pp. 36-43)
- Include your volunteers in larger appreciation events organised by your council/agency (e.g. council volunteers dinner)



Willoughby City Council's Christmas party for volunteers

*Willoughby City Council*

## SNAPSHOT

### Annual awards for Bushcare volunteers

Many councils now hold good-humoured annual awards ceremonies for their volunteers, which are announced at the end of year Bushcare Christmas party. The awards are to celebrate the achievements of groups and the outstanding contributions of individual volunteers throughout the year. A range of fun categories are awarded such as: Best Morning Tea, Quiet Achiever, Bushcare Legend and the Golden Trowel Award. Local businesses sometimes get involved by donating prizes and receiving a special mention in the next Bushcare newsletter.

## Finding more people to get involved

### TIP

Knowing a bit about the demographics of your local area is a good place to start. What does your local community look like? What is the average age (and life stage) of the majority of people who might be likely to join your program? Are there large numbers of transient residents who may volunteer for short periods of time only?

Do you actively seek volunteers to establish new volunteer groups or sites, or wait for people to come to you? Often the interest of one or two residents can be enough to establish a new group of volunteers. These first few people can help spread the word by talking to their neighbours and community networks.

We know that volunteers come from all walks of life, with a broad range of skills and interests. One of the biggest challenges today is getting people to become involved despite the many other demands for people's spare time.

Another challenge is knowing how and where to find people interested in joining your volunteer program. Another factor to consider is when to do a recruitment drive. Spring and autumn are best. Winter is cold, and people are thinking about Christmas and holidays in the middle of summer, so there is no point trying to recruit at those times.

Think about where the people you want to reach are, what other community activities they might already be participating in, what languages they speak and how they might find out about local information. Rather than a broad sweeping recruitment campaign, you may need to tailor specific events and information to reach different target groups.

Some of the many target groups include:

#### **Retirees**

If a large percentage of the local population are retired, holding volunteer activities on weekdays is likely to work well.

## SNAPSHOT

### Golden Oldies Seed Sowing Implantation Program (GOSSIP)

This local, community based environmental project started several years ago, utilising the energy and enthusiasm of green thumbed retirees (our "Golden Oldies") to produce a continuous supply of plants for bushland rehabilitation projects. The pilot project started in a retirement village, in partnership with the environment group Save Our Waterways Now, Brisbane City Council, service clubs and bush walkers. Some service club members were particularly good at finding resources to use (such as an old shade house) to keep the costs low. Native plant species were propagated and grown in the retirement village. The project provided meaningful and rewarding work for some of the "frustrated gardeners" living at the retirement village, as well as a valuable opportunity for social interaction. The GOSSIP project could be used as a model for similar projects across Australia.

[www.saveourwaterwaysnow.com.au](http://www.saveourwaterwaysnow.com.au)

#### **Young Families**

If there is a high population of young families they might not be able to commit to ongoing volunteering if they are also involved with sporting and family activities on weekends. Find other ways to encourage participation from young families such as guided bushwalks, wildlife education programs in school holidays and backyard wildlife monitoring programs.

## People from culturally and linguistically diverse communities

In Sydney, many local government areas have high populations of recent migrants and people who speak languages other than English. This represents a high proportion of the community who could potentially become involved in on-ground environmental volunteering projects.

There are many things to consider when inviting participation from people of diverse communities such as: languages spoken, level of English proficiency, cultural norms and practices as well as perceptions about volunteering and the environment.

Some people might prefer to volunteer together as part of their existing social networks and groups. Offer opportunities for people to get involved as part of these pre-existing community groups, church groups, cultural groups, leisure groups and ESL classes (English as a Second Language).

## SNAPSHOT

### Bushcare brochures translated into different languages

In 2010 Bankstown City Council translated their Bushcare brochure into the top three community languages of Chinese, Arabic and Vietnamese, aiming to make Bushcare volunteering more accessible to the wider community.

[www.bankstown.nsw.gov.au](http://www.bankstown.nsw.gov.au)

## OTHER RESOURCES

For a lot more tips and examples about working with people from diverse communities:

*Building sustainable communities. Ideas for inclusive projects.*

A manual available from the Ethnic Communities Sustainable Living Project [www.eccnsw.org.au](http://www.eccnsw.org.au)

*Involving people from CALD backgrounds 2007*

[www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)

(See Volunteer Resources for Volunteer Managers)

*Step into Voluntary Work*

Australian Multicultural Foundation

[www.amf.net.au/projects/step-into-voluntary-work/](http://www.amf.net.au/projects/step-into-voluntary-work/)

## SNAPSHOT

### Walking Together, Working with Nature DVD

In 2007, students from al-Ghazzali Centre for Islamic Sciences and Human Development, along with some friends and family members, started restoring an area along the Cooks River foreshore in Sydney's inner-west. This project is a great example of an environmental volunteer project that has evolved out of the activities and friendships of an already established community group. The City of Canterbury Council supported the volunteers by providing tools, materials and training. The former Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority funded the production of a short film to document the development of this community project as a resource for other local councils and community organisations. The appeal of the DVD lies in its themes of peer sharing and education, with the volunteers telling their story from the heart and encouraging others to also get involved in their own local areas.

## SNAPSHOT

### Women's only tree planting day

The Merri Creek Catchment in Victoria is home to more than 100 language groups. The Merri Creek Management Committee delivers a range of activities to engage people from these diverse communities including guided walks (promoting sense of place and connection to the landscape), stormwater litter education and teaching materials for English as a Second Language classes. In the past, a group of Muslims approached the MCMC and requested to be involved in a women's only tree planting day. The activity was in school holidays so that women could bring their children and food for a BBQ afterwards. Female staff from MCMC assisted with the planting and BBQ.

[www.mcmc.org.au](http://www.mcmc.org.au)

### **People with disabilities**

People with disabilities have a diverse range of skills and can also make a contribution to the community through volunteer participation.

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

*The STAR Volunteer programme aims to link people with disabilities with a volunteer for social support and offers opportunities for all, regardless of ability to volunteer in the community.*

<http://www.starinc.com.au/>

## SNAPSHOT

### Youth volunteering

An increase in volunteering by young people was identified in a study by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria (YACVic) in 2011. However young people want to volunteer in 'youth specific' areas and where it could help their future employment opportunities. They also target areas that offer adventure and life skills growth opportunities.

[www.probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2011/11/what%E2%80%99s-it-me-understanding-young-volunteers](http://www.probonoaustralia.com.au/news/2011/11/what%E2%80%99s-it-me-understanding-young-volunteers)

## SNAPSHOT

### Under 35s Bushcare group

Lane Cove Council has a Bushcare group for people aged 35 and under. The group started as a result of a sustainability education project that ran pub trivia activities. The group of young people started forming friendships, and would bring their other friends along. One of the last activities of the education project was a bushwalk and the council Bushcare Co-ordinator suggested Bushcare as a way of staying involved after the project finished. They formed their own Bushcare group, working on a Sunday afternoon. Every few months, they head off the pub after their Bushcare work day.

### Young Adults

Young adults might be more interested in volunteering with other young people and with more of a social aspect. Their motivations for volunteering might be different but can still be accommodated.

“Adventure conservation is fun, challenging and takes place in wild places. It delivers important conservation outcomes that could not be done by conventional paid staff because it is too expensive or logistically impossible. Volunteers can find activities that suit a broad range of ages, fitness levels, conservation skills and wilderness experience. But they all have one thing in common, they can be done by people who care about wild places and want to protect them for future generations”.

Geoff Luscombe, NPWS

## SNAPSHOT

### Adventurous conservation activities

The Willow Warriors refer to themselves as an “Adventure Conservation Group”. The volunteer activities combine the excitement of white-water rafting, flat water kayaking and having fun in the outdoors with Landcare conservation activities. Willow species are mapped along rivers and in wetlands in south east NSW to track where seeding willows have spread and these seeding willows are poisoned to prevent them spreading into World Heritage Areas.

[www.willowwarriors.org.au](http://www.willowwarriors.org.au)

### Link volunteer activities with other outdoor activities

Linking in with the themes of having fun and volunteering together with one’s friends, some tasks can be done in conjunction with existing outdoor adventure activities. Of course there would be extra considerations regarding safe work practices and insurance coverage and possibly additional expenses.

## SNAPSHOT

### Duke of Edinburgh student Bushcare group

Willoughby City Council is trialling a Bushcare group specifically for under 20 year olds, including students doing the Duke of Edinburgh Award program. The involvement for most of the young people will be transient, although it is hoped that some will stay on in Bushcare for the longer term.



Willoughby City Council 'Under 20s Bushcare' volunteers

*Willoughby City Council*

### Students

Secondary and tertiary students often seek volunteering opportunities as a way of gaining working experience, trying out a possible career choice, doing something in their 'gap year' or completing an award program. They are not usually involved in volunteering for long periods of time but some councils have successfully adapted their programs to allow for these temporary contributors.

### OTHER RESOURCES

Youth Volunteering

[www.youthvolunteering.com.au](http://www.youthvolunteering.com.au)

NSW Department of Education and Training has a program to encourage student volunteering & service learning

[www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/volunteering/index.htm](http://www.curriculumsupport.education.nsw.gov.au/volunteering/index.htm)

## People returning to work after a long absence

Environmental volunteering and the opportunity to learn new skills may appeal to people in the community who have been out of the paid workforce for a period of time. They may have been away from work for any number of reasons:

- Illness or recovering from an injury (work rehabilitation programs)
- Studying
- Travelling
- Raising children
- Caring for someone aged or disabled

## Corporates

Environmental program co-ordinators are sometimes given the opportunity to organise corporate work days. These are one-off work days where corporate employees get involved in environmental projects and on-ground work. The employees are usually still paid to be there on the day by the company so it is the company rather than the individuals that are “volunteering”.

However people that might not normally be targeted have the opportunity to get a taste of doing on-ground work in natural areas. This may encourage some people to get involved in ongoing environmental volunteering.

Corporate work days are a specific type of activity to add on to regular environmental volunteering programs. Since people are offering their services and labour for a day, issues regarding managing the on-ground work, duty of care, work safety and insurance still need to be considered and planned for.

## SNAPSHOT

### NSW National Parks Corporate Volunteering Program

NSW National Parks offers a range of interactive corporate volunteering experiences in Sydney Harbour and Lane Cove National Parks. The programs emphasise conservation and social responsibility and give businesses the opportunity to invest in protection and conservation of Australian and cultural heritage. Activities facilitated include on-ground restoration activities and educational experiences.

[www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/Volunteers/CorporateVolunteering.pdf](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/Volunteers/CorporateVolunteering.pdf)

## OTHER RESOURCES

Landcare Australia Limited

[www.landcareonline.com.au](http://www.landcareonline.com.au)

Conservation Volunteers Australia

[www.conservationvolunteers.com.au](http://www.conservationvolunteers.com.au)

Australian Centre for Corporate Volunteering  
(linked to the Volunteering Australia website)

[www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)

## Promoting your program

### TIP

Remember the power of word of mouth and how important it is to maintain a positive first impression of your volunteer program.

There are many different ways to promote the aims of the volunteer program and the benefits of getting involved. The methods to use will depend on what works best for your organisation and how much time and money is available for promotion. Activities to promote your program are also closely linked to the range of things that you can do to keep your volunteers motivated and enjoying their volunteering.

Some of the many ways to get information out to potential volunteers include:

### Linking in with widely publicised theme days or events

Widely promoted local festivals and popular theme days are good opportunities to utilise the “Think Global, Act Local” message and bring people’s attention to the local environmental volunteering program.

Some examples of popular theme days include:

- Clean Up Australia Day (March)
- National Volunteer Week (May)
- World Environment Day (June)
- National Tree Day (July)
- Threatened Species Day (September)
- Landcare Week (September)
- Bushcare’s Major Day Out (September)
- National Water Week (October)
- International Volunteer Day (December)

The Australian Government has a calendar of all national environmental days available at: [www.environment.gov.au/about/media/events/index.html](http://www.environment.gov.au/about/media/events/index.html)

## SNAPSHOT

### Bushcare’s Major Day Out

The concept of Bushcare’s Major Day Out began in 2009, initiated by a persuasive Willoughby City Council volunteer. The original aim of the day was to get Bushcare volunteers from across the council area to join forces for a large scale bush regeneration project on the one morning. It was an opportunity for long-term Bushcare volunteers to get together on a different site, and also for residents who have never tried Bushcare before to give it a try to see if they would enjoy it. The event expanded to being Sydney-wide in 2010 and in 2011 groups in Victoria, Queensland and South Australia also held events. Bushcare’s Major Day Out is gaining momentum as a national day of community action that gives people the opportunity to participate in bushland restoration activities held throughout Australia.

[www.bushcaresmajordayout.org](http://www.bushcaresmajordayout.org)

## SNAPSHOT

### Bushcare Month recruitment drive

A few councils in Sydney now celebrate their own “Bushcare Month” as a way of generating local publicity for the program and attracting new volunteers. Usually held in spring or autumn, some Bushcare groups open up their site for local residents to come and meet the volunteers, find out more and decide if it is something they could like to get involved in. [www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au)

## SNAPSHOT

### Special theme days focussing on weed removal

Localised theme days are a good way of generating local interest and publicity. Successful weed removal days have been held on the northern beaches (Asparagus Out! field days) and the inner west (Turkey Rhubarb Day). The theme days draw attention to the weeds as a specific and highly visible local issue. Interested residents can participate by concentrating on one task and one skill (this can be less overwhelming for some people who are getting involved for the first time).

[www.pittwater.nsw.gov.au](http://www.pittwater.nsw.gov.au)

[www.greenway.org.au](http://www.greenway.org.au)

### Guided walks, field days, demonstrations

These are great ways to promote your program and gauge community interest by giving people a taste of what is involved. Guided walks can be held during a theme week (such as Seniors Week or Biodiversity Month) or a local festival. These events and festivals often already have their own local media coverage to leverage. Another idea is to invite the Mayor or a local personality to help lead the walk, which can also attract interest.

Often the people who participate in these activities are already interested in the natural environment and might be interested in more information about how they can get actively involved in environmental volunteering.

Remember that where an event is held to attract new volunteers, 30 interested people may turn up. 6-8 of them may be interested in forming a volunteer group to work on the ground. 2 more people may be interested in writing advocacy letters or working on a website. A neighbour might not be able to commit time to attending work days but may agree to occasionally make the morning tea cake or keep an eye on the site during the week.

### Short films

YouTube provides an easy to use interface for posting short films on the internet. Short films are inexpensive to produce. Using films that feature volunteers and their stories is a valuable way of promoting volunteering and inspiring others to get involved. Some volunteers may also like to produce their own films which could save you time and money.

### TIP

Soon after an event, follow up with any interested people while they are still keen and available.

## SNAPSHOT

### Volunteer stories documented with You Tube videos

Short films about the award winning community projects from the 2011 Sydney Regional Awards were produced and put on youtube.com. The volunteers involved with the projects were involved in the making of the short films and were given the opportunity to tell their stories. The films are a powerful and effective way of documenting these inspiring community projects. To see the short films, search "Sydney Metropolitan 2011 Regional Awards" on YouTube.

[www.youtube.com](http://www.youtube.com)

## SNAPSHOT

### Ku-ring-gai Council Envirotube

Ku-ring-gai Council has produced and posted short educational films on YouTube about various biodiversity projects and native wildlife in the local area. To see the short films, search “Ku-ring-gai Envirotube” on YouTube.

### Displays and stalls

Displays and information stalls are good for festivals, community events and shopping centres. There are various ways to do displays, depending on where they are located, how much space is available and how much time people will have to look at the display.

Some councils have trailers that are towed to volunteer days, special events or parked in residential streets on a rotating basis. When in use, the trailer can be opened up and used to display information brochures, photos, live specimens of weeds and native plants, and examples of equipment used. When stationary, the trailer is closed, parked in the street and publicises a phone number to call for more information about the volunteer program.

### TIP

Use “before and after” photos of sites in displays to show progress and achievements. Good photos of volunteers can help to promote the social and fun aspects of volunteering.



Hurstville City Council's Bushcare trailer

*Heather Stolle*

One of the most effective aspects of a display or stall is to have actual volunteers there and talking to people passing by. Volunteers can share their own experiences and inspire others in their community.

## SNAPSHOT

### Annual Bushcare Stall at the Sydney Royal Easter Show

Between 2005 and 2013, local councils and Bushcare volunteers across Sydney got involved in putting together an educational stall at the Sydney Royal Easter Show. The stall was a joint initiative between Willoughby City Council, whose bushland staff build the stall and native garden, other local councils who supplied native plants from community nurseries, brochures and other materials, and the local Catchment Management Authority which co-ordinated the administrative and financial side of things. The aim of the stall was to attract the wider public to the messages of Bushcare. The volunteers spruiked Bushcare and the benefits of backyard biodiversity to thousands of people who visit the stall each year over a two week period. Wildlife displays and other entertainers were engaged to entice people to visit the stall. Free entry to the Easter Show was a great incentive for the volunteers to come along and spread the Bushcare messages, as well as being able to meet other volunteers from different parts of Greater Sydney.



2012 Sydney Royal Easter Show Bushcare stall

SMCMA

### Websites

Most environmental volunteer programs now have their own website or webpage within their council's website. These sites can also link people to other relevant activities, opportunities and information beyond their local area.

### Social Media

Some local councils in Sydney are embracing social media such as Facebook and Twitter as a way to reach people and promote volunteering events. Use of social media is one way to communicate, but it can't be forced upon people. Use of some social media can require a lot of resourcing and moderators.

## SNAPSHOT

### Bushcare promoted through Facebook

Local councils such as Woollahra, Sutherland and North Sydney have a Facebook page to raise awareness about Bushcare, promote events and recruit new volunteers.

### Photo competitions and stories

Storytelling and narratives from volunteers themselves are a powerful way of promoting a program and inspiring others.

## SNAPSHOT

### Hornsby Shire Council photo and story competition

At the end of each year, a competition is held for Bushcare volunteers calling for photos of local fauna, invertebrates, flowers and plants, fungi and landscapes. There is also a category called "My Bushcare" for photos of the people in Bushcare. Each entry submitted has to include a story behind the photo taken. Stories can be in the form of a short anecdote, poem or ditty. Some of the stories are then published in newsletters and used for promotion of the Bushcare program. Many of the winning entries in previous years have produced touching stories and quotes that reflect the essence of what Bushcare is about.

[www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au](http://www.hornsby.nsw.gov.au)



Coal Loader community nursery group

North Sydney Council

## Logos

Logos make the program recognisable and can be put on banners, flyers, publications, volunteer information kits, promotional material, clothing items and vehicles. Many councils in Sydney have unique logos for their Bushcare programs. Landcare (image of two hands around Australia) is another example of a logo that is widely recognised. Get volunteers involved in the design process where possible – let them make it their own since they are the ones who will most strongly identify with it.



## Clothing

Many organisations provide clothing items for volunteers to wear when they are working. Items such as hats and long sleeve shirts provide protection from the sun, as well as making the volunteers stand out to other people passing by the area.



Pyrmont Ultimo Landcare group

Mary Mortimer

## Banners

Banners placed in high profile locations such as libraries, shopping centres, community events and council foyers help promote the volunteer program.

## Promotional giveaways

These also help to get the program's logo, name and image out there. Examples include: stickers, magnets, hats, bookmarks and water bottles.

## TIP

When designing publicity flyers and advertisements, put the name and phone number of a volunteer or community representative as well as that of your organisation. Some people may be more inclined to call a community representative directly to find out more information rather than to approach the organisation initially and risk being “roped in”

### Regular mail outs

Most councils already have regular large mail outs for rates notices and community reports. Check with your own council, there might be an opportunity to occasionally insert a flyer about your volunteer program.

### On-hold telephone advertisements

If you work in an organisation that has community messages playing when people are placed “on hold”, insert a message with a spiel about joining the volunteer program.

### Existing local groups and networks

Make presentations at meetings or write a short article for the newsletters of local environmental groups, community groups, church groups and resident associations.

### Signs

Signs are used to encourage people in natural areas to stay on tracks and out of sensitive areas. Signs also raise awareness of the work being done and who is involved.

*“Rehabilitation area - please stay on the track.*

*This site is being cared for by community volunteers.”*

Low, portable signs can also be used when groups are at work.

### Letterbox drops

Useful when people are living in a concentrated area that is near to a volunteer site or environmental project.

### Media articles

Newspaper and radio features could include a story about the volunteer program, a particular project, a hard working volunteer or a grant or award that has been received. A local ‘champion’ or well-known personality could also be asked to be involved in the story that promotes your volunteer program and messages.

Remember to include a call to action at the end of the article for anyone interested in knowing more or getting involved “To join the program, phone (name and number).”

**For more tips see:** Enabling Ecoaction - A Handbook for Anyone Working with the Public on Conservation. Book by Les Robinson and Andreas Glanznig, 2003.

## Example press release to recognise volunteer efforts

### Examples of headings for your media article:

**“Volunteers - our greatest resource”,  
“Our outstanding volunteers”  
“Recognising the efforts of our environmental volunteers”  
“Volunteers - ordinary people, extraordinary contribution”  
“Volunteering - thinking globally and acting locally”**

### Examples of text/ statements:

Volunteers have been recognised by (Name of Council/ Organisation) for their contribution to (projects, events, committees).

(Name of MP, Senator, Councillor, local organisation representative) today applauded the efforts of dedicated volunteers who have offered their time and commitment towards (name of environmental program or projects).

As part of the International Day of Volunteers on 5<sup>th</sup> December, (Name of MP, Senator, Councillor, local organisation representative) publicly thanked the (several/ dozens/ hundreds) of volunteers in (the area) who have helped conserve and restore our (natural bushland/ waterways/ beach dunes etc).

While the work of these people may go unpaid, it does not go unrecognised. These people can see that there is a problem and rather than just talk about it, they join together to get actively involved in doing something about it.

To acknowledge the outstanding contribution of our volunteers, (name of organisation) is having a (awards program, event? BBQ etc..). To formally recognise these great contributions, you are encouraged to consider nominating these individuals whose unpaid, tireless efforts go largely unsung, but who have a lasting and profound impact on the environment around us. The (awards program, event? BBQ etc..) is a yearly event to recognise the marvellous contribution that

our volunteers make to the local community. Award recipients are nominated by (...)

The (Award certificates/ gifts) are a small way of saying thank you to the volunteers for the invaluable contribution they make in offering their time and experience. Their efforts go a long way in making our area a better place to live.

Throughout Australia many thousands of volunteers devote their time and effort to valuable environmental work. Empowering and working with local communities is a key to addressing environmental problems.

Environmental volunteers work tirelessly on projects involving the restoration, protection, and conservation of our precious natural resources. They undertake a wide range of tasks, from tree planting to water quality monitoring, participating in litter pick ups and restoring delicate wetland areas (list their achievements/ number hours worked/ number of trees planted etc..). These outstanding achievements would not have been possible without the efforts of our tireless volunteers. This is an opportunity to recognise the people in our local community who are making a tangible and lasting contribution to the environment that will be a legacy for future generations. All residents are invited to become involved in one of the many worthwhile projects underway in our area.

For information on how to get involved, phone (Name and phone number).

## TIP

If you work in a large organisation and are recruiting for the first time, find out how other sections recruit volunteers. For example, in a local council talk to the community services or library staff to see if there are procedures and relevant documentation already being used.

## TIP

Recruitment of volunteers should always comply with Equal Employment Opportunity and the principles of cultural diversity.

## TIP

Recruiting new volunteers and getting them properly set up to start working is a time consuming process. However you decide to recruit, make sure enough time and resources have been allocated to process the paperwork, do the volunteer interviews and inductions, organise training, distribute tools and prepare the volunteer to start work.

## Volunteer recruitment process

To build a strong volunteer workforce, the right people need to be matched with the right jobs. Volunteers can make an enormous contribution and achieve a lot of personal satisfaction when the match is right.

Good practice volunteer management recommends that policies, procedures, budgets and resources are in place before starting the volunteer recruitment process. This is realistic in well established organisations that already have the available expertise and staff resources. In other cases, some organisations are already working with volunteers, which then brings about awareness for the need to develop a more structured program and an ongoing commitment to resource the program.

### Selection criteria for volunteers

Before recruiting volunteers, be clear about what tasks the volunteers will be undertaking and the kind of people you are looking for.

Examples of selection criteria (essential or desirable) include:

- Interest in environmental issues
- Willingness to learn and work co-operatively with others
- Computer skills
- Own transport to travel to the job
- A good level of health and fitness (especially for outdoor work)
- First Aid Certificate

### Deciding when to recruit

There is no right time to recruit. Winter and the middle of summer are not the best times if recruiting people to do on-ground work. Depending on what works for your organisation, recruitment can happen in different ways:

- On an ongoing basis, as interested people make contact with you or the organisation
- During targeted recruitment 'drives' at particular times during the year such as spring when people are keen to get outdoors
- By having people contact you through a local volunteer referral service

There are several volunteer referral services available through the internet. People searching for volunteering opportunities can be matched with not for profit organisations registered with the services. (See Appendix: More useful resources)

## Volunteer Registration Forms

As well as capturing basic contact information, registration forms are a good way to find out more useful information about the new volunteer right from the start, such as:

- The volunteer's interests, skills and any relevant experience
- Days of the week the volunteer is available for training and volunteer work
- Medical information that is relevant to performing the volunteering role (pre-existing medical conditions, allergies, history of workers compensation, disabilities, medication being taken etc)

At the time the registration form is being completed, you could also ask the new volunteer to complete any other relevant paperwork such as the Working with Children check.

## Volunteer job descriptions

There are many tasks that volunteers can do. A challenge is to ensure that the tasks provide a meaningful role for a volunteer. A collection of odd jobs is less likely to arouse the enthusiasm of a new or prospective volunteer than a role that has clear purpose and contribution.

Having a volunteer job description document is a good tool for:

- Listing the tasks that can be done by volunteers
- Indicating the time commitment involved
- Outlining the rights and responsibilities of the volunteers and the organisation
- Managing the expectations of volunteers

## TIP

Volunteering Australia recommends that a maximum of 16 hours per week is appropriate for volunteering.

On average, most environmental volunteers in Sydney work for three hours once a fortnight or once a month.

## Example Volunteer Job Description



### **Volunteer Position: Bushcare Volunteer**

#### **The purpose of a Bushcare Volunteer's work**

To complement (and not replace) the bushland rehabilitation work done by Council staff and contractors. Council manages xx hectares of bushland reserved as community land in the local government area.

#### **Types of Bushcare Volunteer roles**

A new Bushcare volunteer can:

- Join an existing Bushcare group
- Help start a new Bushcare group
- Work individually (under special circumstances and with Council's prior approval)
- Gain office work experience that is relevant to a high school or tertiary course

#### **The range of tasks performed by Bushcare volunteers**

- Bush regeneration - weeding, hazard reduction by hand, minor bank stabilisation
- Revegetation - planting and mulching
- Attend specialised training workshops (this is optional)
- Flora and fauna monitoring and documentation
- Site assessment, planning and monitoring
- Photography and artwork of bushland, flora and fauna
- Work on education and Bushcare publicity projects in the Council office or at home

#### **Essential requirements**

- Attend a 3 hour introductory training workshop before/within xx months of joining the Bushcare program

#### **Estimated Hours of Work**

- Approximately 3-6 hours per month for a Bushcare group member
- As many hours as desired for individual, work experience and office volunteers (although this cannot exceed 16 hours a week unless it is part of a university course)

#### **Supervision and co-ordination of volunteers**

Council staff provide instructions and guidance to individual volunteers and at group work days. The supervisor is responsible for providing:

- Tools and equipment for volunteers
- Training and technical advice in bush regeneration and safe work practices
- Work site safety inductions

**Desirable Qualifications, Skills and Attributes**

- An interest in the preservation of bushland. No experience in bush regeneration is necessary
- A desire to learn about natural area restoration
- Willingness to work as part of a team

**The benefits to Bushcare Volunteers**

- On-site training and skills gained in bush regeneration, native plants and weed identification
- Training workshops provided about specialist topics
- Opportunities to meet like-minded people and neighbours
- Links established with Council staff and other volunteers
- A quarterly newsletter
- Work experience gained in the field of bushland management
- Enjoyment and relaxation gained by working in a natural area

**Out of pocket expenses**

On prior agreement with the Bushcare Co-ordinator, volunteers can be reimbursed for the following out of pocket expenses:

- Printing of photographs of Bushcare sites
- Tea, coffee and sugar supplies for Bushcare work days
- Phone calls to contact other volunteers regarding work days

NOTE: A receipt, log book of calls or phone bill need to be presented.

**Insurance cover**

Volunteers who are aged between 15 and 90 years and are undertaking activities approved by Council staff are covered under Council’s personal accident insurance policy. Volunteers who are registered with Council’s Bushcare Program are covered, other family members and friends are not.

**Enquiries**

The Volunteer Program Co-ordinator will be happy to discuss any issues that arise in your time as a volunteer. Phone:

**STATEMENT OF UNDERSTANDING**

I, *(insert name)* understand the statement of duties outlined above.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_



## **Volunteer agreements**

A volunteer agreement informs a volunteer about what is expected of them and what they can expect from the organisation. Volunteer agreements are not legally binding but help establish a commitment by volunteers and the organisation to the volunteering relationship.

There are positive and negative aspects about volunteer agreements. For example a potential volunteer might be terrific but unwilling to sign an agreement. Some people may already be committed to the cause and their volunteering role and having to sign an agreement could put them off. On the other hand, volunteer agreements can be a tool to clarify expectations up front and demonstrate that the organisation places a high importance on the volunteering role.

A volunteer agreement is usually discussed and signed after registration and induction into the program.

Examples of volunteer commitments:

- Accept the responsibilities and limits set out in the Volunteer Job Description
- Be aware of my rights as a volunteer, as outlined in the information given to me
- Work in a manner that is safe for myself, other volunteers, supervisors and members of the public
- Participate in orientation and training programs as required
- Complete any technical and safety training that is required
- Accept guidance and direction from the supervisor
- Work as part of a team
- Not to work unsupervised (unless authorised to do so)
- Sign the attendance record at each volunteering session
- Report any accident or injury to the program co-ordinator within 48 hours
- Advise the supervisor or group leader if I cannot attend a work or training session
- Not disclose any confidential or sensitive information to other volunteers
- Support a non-discriminatory and harassment-free work environment

Examples of commitments from the organisation to the volunteer:

- Cover volunteers for insurance while undertaking their volunteering role
- Provide appropriate orientation and training
- Provide technical advice, guidance and assistance to volunteers
- Provide necessary safety equipment for volunteer tasks
- Assist with grant applications and appropriate expenditure of grant funds
- Provide guidance and advice in supervising programs and projects
- Establish a clear work plan which outlines volunteer activities and tasks
- Provide information on organisational changes or new policy decisions relevant to volunteers

“Unlike paid staff, volunteers are not covered by award conditions or workplace agreements. Volunteers, however, do have rights some of which are enshrined in legislation and some of which are the moral obligations of an organisation involving volunteers.”

Volunteering Australia  
[www.govolunteer.com.au/volunteer/content/checklist.htm](http://www.govolunteer.com.au/volunteer/content/checklist.htm)

- Recognise volunteer efforts and achievements
- Provide feedback on volunteering efforts and achievements
- Provide opportunities for volunteers to raise questions, concerns and/or complaints

### Other Resources

See sample volunteer agreement in the Office of Environment and Heritage Volunteer Policy and Procedures document.

[www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/Volunteers/09797DECCWVolPolProc.pdf](http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/Volunteers/09797DECCWVolPolProc.pdf)

### Information kits for new volunteers

When a new volunteer starts with the program, provide them with a simple information kit with the most essential information. The information kit could include for example:

- work dates and locations
- contact details
- health and safety information
- a copy of the most recent newsletter
- first aid information
- a list of suitable clothing to wear and what to bring to work days.

### Induction interviews

Interviews provide a good opportunity to match applicants to the volunteer positions. The interview also enables you to screen people who want to join the program by finding out more information and ensuring that all of the necessary paperwork is completed. Interviews can cover for example:

- People’s motivations and availability
- Level of skill and training requirements
- Relevant medical conditions which may affect their ability to do the volunteer work
- Discussion about the volunteer agreements
- Distribution of safety gloves, goggles, hats, equipment etc
- Orientation to the program, staff members, other volunteers involved and the organisation’s structure
- Questions about the program

Volunteer induction interviews should only be about 30 minutes long and can be conducted at your workplace, at the volunteer’s home or at the site where they will be working (whichever is most convenient for all involved).

#### TIP

Develop a checklist for the induction interview to make sure everything gets covered.

## TIP

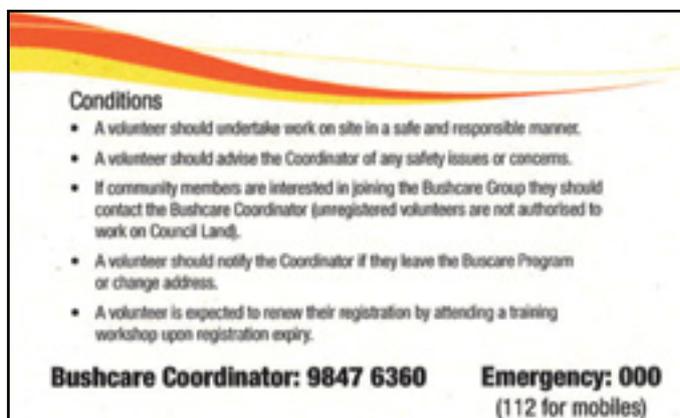
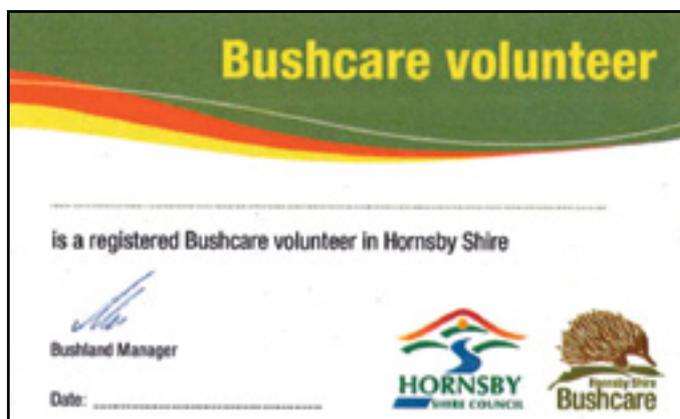
Remember that first impressions count. What will new volunteers think when they first come into contact with you and your organisation at the induction interview?

Interviews can be one on one, or you might need to induct several volunteers together at a general orientation meeting. If you interview several people together, remember to maintain privacy and discuss their individual personal information and medical issues at another time in private.

## SNAPSHOT

### Permit system for volunteers working in bushland

Some councils issue permits to certify that the volunteer has completed the registration, induction and introductory training requirements of the volunteer program. The permit authorises the volunteer to commence work. A permit is often in the form of a laminated card that can be carried by the volunteer when they are working. This is handy for volunteers who work at highly visible sites that might attract enquiries from curious people passing by. Permits are often for a specific period of time. In order to get a renewed permit some refresher training may need to be completed. The permit system also helps the organisation keep track of where their volunteers are working and what training they have completed.



Hornsby Bushcare volunteer permit

Hornsby Shire Council

Example of a Volunteer Induction checklist



**Record of Interview**

Remind the person being interviewed:

*"This information will be kept confidential"*

Name of person interviewed:      A. Citizen

Date of interview:

How did you find out about volunteering opportunities with us?  
(please circle)

Newspaper Article/ Advertisement/ Internet/ Radio/ Television/  
Friends/ Family/ Other (provide details) \_\_\_\_\_

Motivators - Why did you choose to volunteer with us/ our program?

\_\_\_\_\_

What do you hope to get out of volunteering with us?

\_\_\_\_\_

Are you able to attend training courses and workshops for volunteers?

(please circle)    On weekends?    Yes/ No      Weekdays?    Yes/ No

**Information kit:**

*Checklist of information discussed or distributed (whichever is applicable)*

- Volunteer Registration Form  
(to be completed before or at the interview)
- Volunteer Job Description
- Volunteer Rights and Responsibilities
- Health and Safety information
- Safety and protective equipment
- Volunteer Insurance information
- Accident and injury procedures
- Use and loan of tools
- Work dates and site locations
- Newsletter and information about up and coming educational events and training
- Medical history and any health issues outlined in Registration Form

Name of site/team/supervisor or task that the new volunteer will be matched to: \_\_\_\_\_

Added comments:

*"Thank you and welcome to the program."*

**Office use:**

Name of staff member who performed the interview \_\_\_\_\_

- The volunteer's personal details have been added to database.

## Evaluating volunteer satisfaction and performance

The level of participation and satisfaction of the volunteers is one way to measure your program's success. Feedback from volunteers that they are having an enjoyable experience and feel they are making a worthwhile contribution is a good sign of the program's success. Evaluating volunteer participation and satisfaction can be done in different ways, with outcomes aggregated for reporting at program level:

Quantitative (statistical measurement)

- How many volunteers are involved overall?
- How many sites or projects?
- How many hours did the volunteers work over the last year?
- Who is participating regularly? How does this compare with how many volunteers are registered in the database?
- Who has not attended for a while?
- How many volunteers have completed the basic training?
- How many volunteers participated in the annual survey?

Qualitative ('measuring' people's attitudes and experiences)

- Informal feedback from volunteers about their volunteering experience and the level of support they get from the organisation
- Regular surveys of volunteers to get their feedback and suggestions
- Evaluation forms distributed at the end of training events
- Feedback from the supervisors working with volunteers about their impressions about the level of satisfaction and needs of volunteers.

Examples of volunteer survey questions:

- Please rate the following areas (poor / fair / good) and provide any additional comments:
- The organisation's response to your initial enquiry about volunteering
- The information provided about what is expected of you as a volunteer
- The information provided about what a volunteer can expect from the organisation
- Your introduction/ induction to the volunteer group/task
- The information received to date about work health and safety
- The training received to date
- Provision of feedback about your performance
- Opportunities to give feedback about your needs as a volunteer
- Opportunities to give feedback about your supervisor's performance
- Opportunities to provide suggestions to enhance the volunteer program

I am enjoying my experience as volunteer	agree/disagree
I am making a worthwhile contribution	agree/disagree
My motivations for volunteering are being satisfied	agree/disagree
My contribution is recognised by the supervisor/organisation	agree/disagree

### TIP

Always introduce a volunteer survey with something inclusive and encouraging like:  
*"Your comments are important and will help us to manage our volunteer program better."*

## SNAPSHOT

### Volunteer satisfaction surveys

Many councils conduct annual or biannual surveys of their environmental volunteers. The surveys are usually to gauge the level of volunteer satisfaction and needs for future support. Surveys can be done online, for example with “Survey Monkey” and the information is useful for making improvements to the program. With online surveys, the opportunity to provide detailed information is sometimes limited. Surveys are useful but are not a replacement for face to face contact, appraisals and discussion forums where volunteers can receive feedback and get a sense of their achievements.

[www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com)

### Volunteer performance appraisals

Performance appraisals are a good way to:

- Evaluate the effectiveness of a volunteer’s work
- Evaluate the effectiveness of your organisation in supporting the volunteer’s work
- Provide feedback and suggestions for how the volunteer can build their skills
- Recognise the good work of volunteers
- Evaluate whether some of the volunteer’s motivations are being met

A volunteer or the supervisor may complete a volunteer appraisal separately, or it can be completed and discussed together.

Examples of questions for a volunteer appraisal include:

#### Volunteer attendance and tasks

- Regular attendance at volunteer activities has been: poor / fair / good
- Volunteer duties are undertaken with attention to health and safety: disagree / agree
- The volunteer is satisfied with the work tasks allocated: agree/ disagree

#### Volunteer Support

- The volunteer is satisfied with the level of training from the supervisor/organisation
- The volunteer is satisfied with the other support from the supervisor/ organisation (newsletters, regular communication, condition of tools and safety equipment etc)

#### Volunteer Training

- The volunteer has completed the basic training
- The volunteer has been given practical demonstrations in work techniques

The volunteer can demonstrate knowledge and skills in safe work practices/ work techniques/ identification of flora and fauna (whichever is applicable)

#### Discussion

- Further training and support needed by the volunteer
- Any other comments, questions or feedback

### TIP

Always keep a note of suggestions made by volunteers and their supervisors. Some things may not be able to be implemented or changed right now, but make good ideas for later on.

## TIP

The feedback and information collected from volunteer appraisals is also valuable for evaluating the success of your volunteer program overall.

### Succession planning

For many volunteers who have been involved for a long time, they need to know that there are others who can take over and continue the good work being done.

Often there are a smaller number of highly skilled and experienced volunteers in the program. Set up a buddy system with other volunteers as a way to mentor future leaders and pass on their invaluable local knowledge.

**“The aim is to ensure that the relationship between volunteer supervisors and volunteers is harmonious and productive. This ensures that both the organisation and volunteer get the most from this valuable and necessary relationship.”**

Kylie Warry, Trainer  
Teamology, 2012



Working together

Liz Millen

## Handling difficult situations with volunteers

Unfortunately, not everyone interested in volunteering is a great match for the program. Usually volunteers who are not happy will move on. At other times, a volunteer program co-ordinator or supervisor has to handle a grievance or face the awkward situation of confronting a volunteer who has not followed procedures or the volunteer agreements.

### Volunteer grievances

Grievances can arise and all staff and volunteers should be aware of the procedures to follow for resolving them. Find out what procedures your organisation already has in place regarding paid staff grievances and develop your procedures along the same lines.

Examples of procedures include:

- Establishing a “first line of communication” for volunteers through their immediate supervisor. If this doesn’t work, take the grievance to the person at the next level up etc
- Using the volunteer appraisal process to talk through issues of interest and concern. This can help prevent issues from bubbling away unresolved.
- Receiving and responding to serious complaints in writing.

### Dismissing volunteers

Situations can arise where the relationship between a volunteer and organisation deteriorates and it is best to ask the volunteer to leave the program. Examples of such situations include a volunteer continually refusing to work safely (putting themselves and other volunteers at risk) or be unwilling to follow the site plan for the on-ground work.

The benefit of having the volunteer agreements, induction interviews, surveys, performance appraisals and site work plans is that the majority of volunteers will have an understanding of what is permitted and expected by the organisation.

Find out what procedures your organisation already has in place regarding giving people warnings and develop your procedures along the same lines.

Examples of procedures include:

- Having a written code of conduct
- A system of verbal and written warnings
- Being specific about what actions merit a caution, warning or dismissal.

### TIP

Provide regular opportunities for volunteers to ask questions and voice their concerns. This can include discussions at the morning tea break, during a training workshop, a meeting with the program co-ordinator or via a regular volunteer survey. These can help to identify and deal with problems before they inflame.

## TIP

Remember that the supervisor's role is not as an extra pair of hands. The supervisor is there to maintain the volunteer group's focus and well-being, allocate tasks, provide on-the-job instruction and reinforce practices for work health and safety.

# Supervising volunteers

Supervisors have an important and influential role in supporting and training volunteers by teaching practical skills and regularly reinforcing the broader concepts and the context for the environmental work being done.

There is considerable diversity in the way volunteers doing on-ground work are supervised:

- Some well-resourced councils allocate a supervisor for every volunteer work day.
- Some volunteer groups have a site strategy to follow and work with a supervisor once every few months.
- Some councils engage contractors to supervise and train volunteers.
- In some cases, selected and trained volunteers act as group leaders and supervisors.

## The important role of supervisors

Supervisors are right there at the coalface, having direct contact with the volunteers and building a working relationship with them over time. Supervisors have different and preferred ways for doing things and will bring their own personality to the job. Some of the main responsibilities of a supervisor are listed here, however working with groups of volunteers requires many other skills and attributes as well. (Read more in Part 3: Professional Development.)

A supervisor is there to:

- Train and build skills of the volunteers
- Assess training needs and skill gaps of volunteers
- Assist volunteers with site assessments and development of site work plans
- Ensure the work undertaken follows what is in the site work plan and other formalised procedures
- Ensure safe work practices when on site
- Handle chemicals
- Provide tools, PPE, materials and equipment for work days
- Complete all necessary documentation before and after working with volunteers
- Report loss of or damage to equipment, and organise repairs
- Supervise and moderate data collection (wildlife monitoring, water quality etc)
- Mediate disagreements between volunteers

The supervisor works with diverse groups of people who volunteer in their spare time and there are little things that count which can have a positive influence on the quality of supervision and the volunteering experience:

- Be well prepared
- Introduce yourself when new volunteers arrive
- Do an “Acknowledgement of Country” (if appropriate)
- Do a safety induction at each work day
- Plan for latecomers
- Allow time for the volunteers to ask questions
- Follow up with any enquiries received at the last working day
- Physically demonstrate the skills or concepts being explained
- When talking to a group of people on site, be mindful of uncomfortable situations such as the sun shining in people’s faces, standing on a slope or near an ants nest!

## Levels of supervision

Deciding how much is enough supervision and when it is OK for volunteers to work unsupervised depends on the tasks and type of work volunteers are doing. It will also depend on an organisation’s own policy and willingness to manage the risks.

Ideally, environmental volunteers should almost always work with a supervisor, who is there to supervise and teach skills. This is not always possible when the number of volunteers exceeds the resources available for employment of supervisors. Be realistic about how many volunteers can be supported and properly supervised with your current level of resources in the program. If a supervisor cannot be present at every volunteer work day, develop a roster so that each volunteer group is supervised on a regular and equitable basis.

The appropriate ratio of the supervisor to volunteers should take into account:

- The type of tasks being undertaken (and the level of risk)
- The level of skill and experience of the volunteers
- The age range of volunteers (if children are permitted on site, there may be a policy stipulation that children under a certain age must be supervised by a parent or guardian).

### TIP

The supervisor-volunteer relationship is one that builds and grows over time. As much as possible, allocate the same supervisors to the same volunteer groups. If there is a good rapport and consistency, it is likely that many volunteers will keep coming back because they like working with their supervisor.

### TIP

If a volunteer group works unsupervised, delegate responsibilities to some of the volunteers to ensure that tools are properly distributed and packed up, and that any log books or site reports are completed and handed in.

### Volunteers working alone

Some volunteers may want to work on their own at a site. This often happens when people want to remove weeds and work in the bushland behind their property. Some organisations have a policy of not supporting individual Bushcare volunteers at all. The reasons for not permitting volunteers to work alone may include:

- Safety risks and insurance implications
- Risks of causing damage to sensitive natural areas, threatened species etc
- Lack of resources to support and monitor the work of individual volunteers (it is seen as more cost effective to supervise and support groups of volunteers)

Other organisations permit individual volunteers to work unsupervised if they have completed a minimum level of training and work according to an agreed work plan.

Volunteers who work alone need:

- A work plan, specific tasks and clear boundaries
- A minimum training requirement (this may include an amount of work experience with a supervisor, trainer or other experienced volunteers before working alone)
- The necessary health and safety information
- The necessary tools and equipment
- Volunteer insurance
- Procedures like all other volunteers (such as signing a log book at every work day)
- Regular contact with the program co-ordinator or a supervisor
- A buddy (another volunteer in the area that they can talk to regularly)

You may like to consider scheduled or random audits or inspections to ensure the volunteer/s are working safely.



Volunteers working alone need clear boundaries

*Claire Bettington*

# Training volunteers

Training is an important way for an organisation to support its volunteers by recognising the value of their contribution, building their knowledge and teaching the skills required to do the work. The training needs of organisations and volunteers are diverse (as are the tasks undertaken by volunteers), so there is no recommended minimum standard or best practice model for training environmental volunteers.

Recent surveys in Sydney have indicated that whether training is accredited (or not) doesn't seem important to most volunteers. Some volunteers seek formal training opportunities more for their personal interest or career progression.

## Effective training strategies

### **Strategies that can be useful when training volunteers include:**

- Offering a range of training opportunities to suit different preferences
- Classroom style indoors
- Half day skills demonstrations in the field
- On the job training on a work day
- Courses focusing on specialised skills and topics
- Tours to look at other sites
- An informal discussion one evening to refresh skills with a supervisor or trainer

### **Offering flexibility in the times that training opportunities are held**

- Weekends and weekdays
- Evenings during the week
- Longer courses spread out over a couple of weekend days within a 3 month period

### **Offering refresher training**

Rather than a pre-set agenda or structured course, create opportunities for experienced volunteers to come along with specific questions about broader site management issues.

### **Offering training that matches volunteer motivations**

Volunteering is an activity that happens in a person's spare time. Training opportunities need to be fun, social and allow volunteers to see a connection between what they are learning and how it will make a difference with their site or project.

## TIP

Most volunteers want training that is practical and relevant for the site where they work. For example, a short course about native plant or weed identification might be more appealing if it relates directly to the plants found at or near their site.

### **Offering training that is practical and locally relevant**

Strike a balance between theory and practice. Most volunteers want to learn new skills and information that is directly relevant to the tasks that they do. The main purpose for training volunteers is to build their confidence when doing the work.

### **Different needs of volunteers**

Volunteer surveys and performance appraisals will help to assess the different training needs of your volunteers. For some volunteers, doing extra training courses helps them to stay motivated. Doing a training course may be overwhelming for other people, or they may not be able to commit the extra time to attend a course. Many volunteers just want to come along to work on the day and learn “on the job”.

### **Different requirements of organisations**

Each organisation that manages environmental volunteers has its own policy for what is an acceptable minimum level of training and whether this training is compulsory or not.

Some organisations set time frames for new volunteers to complete their basic training (for example, completion of the introductory course within six months of joining the program). Others have made an induction training session essential before volunteers can start work.

Other organisations require volunteers to undertake refresher training on a regular basis (for example, completion of an intermediate or advanced course every two years).

The type of training provided for the volunteers will depend on:

- The organisation’s policy for the minimum training requirement before a volunteer can start work
- The resources available to deliver or pay for internal or external training courses
- The skills and knowledge gaps of the volunteers
- Training courses available from external providers

## SNAPSHOT

### **Cost sharing of training across neighbouring councils**

Many councils in Sydney are sharing the costs of training courses for volunteers. The most common examples are the accredited Bushcare units offered by Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE. Councils unable to fill a whole course with their own volunteers, will offer places to other council volunteers and the costs per head are shared across a few councils.

## Different types of formal training

There are no rules about standardised or recommended practice for training volunteers. Nor is there a one-stop-shop or “best” training course out there.

The most common examples of formal training include:

### **In-house courses and workshops**

Short courses and workshops that are developed and delivered in-house by the volunteer program co-ordinator or supervisors. They usually involve a combination of sessions held indoors (classroom style) and in the field. The duration of courses and information covered varies across organisations, from 3 hours to two full days spread over two weekends. Topics usually cover an overview of Bushcare (or other environmental work), health and safety, basic work techniques and specialised skills such as plant identification, wildlife monitoring and/or seed propagation.

### **Training consultants**

Some organisations engage independent training consultants to deliver tailored workshops and short courses for volunteers. The length of courses and information covered varies (usually between 3 hours and 2 days) as each consultant has their own individual training style. Examples of the courses that training consultants in the Sydney region can deliver include Introductory and Advanced Bushcare, native plant and weed identification and more specialised courses such as identification of native grasses, eucalypts, wetland care etc.

### **Accredited training delivered by Registered Training Organisations**

Units of Competency from the Conservation and Land Management (Natural Area Restoration and Management) training package can be delivered by any Registered Training Organisation (RTO), tailoring courses to the specific requirements of clients who receive a Statement of Attainment or other accredited outcome. For example, Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE offers accredited short courses for environmental volunteers, delivered in classroom style with a practical component. Local councils and other volunteer managers pay for groups of volunteers to attend the courses that range from one to three days in duration.

## TIP

New training opportunities are not always what people need. Volunteers usually work once or twice a month for a few hours at a time. Often, refresher training is most needed to brush up on skills or put into practice the technical information learned at a past training course.

## SNAPSHOT

### TAFE Bushcare units

Northern Sydney Institute of TAFE has developed a series of course units specifically for Bushcare volunteers. The Bushcare units are administered through the commercial arm of TAFE NSI and delivered by qualified TAFE teachers. Each unit is a component of some subjects that make up a Certificate II or III in Conservation and Land Management. They include: Bushcare Essentials, Bushcare Advanced, Native Plant Identification, Native Plant Propagation, Fauna Friendly Bushcare and Revegetation. These are commercial courses and enrolment fees apply. Bookings are made directly through TAFE NSI.

[www.nsi.tafensw.edu.au](http://www.nsi.tafensw.edu.au)

There are also other modes of training delivery for accredited courses leading to Statements of Attainment or a full Certificate. In agreement with the volunteer program co-ordinator, volunteers can enrol into a TAFE certificate and learn the course content remotely while working on site. An independent assessor from TAFE or another Registered Training Organisation is used to assess the progress and skills attained by the volunteers. Statements of Attainment do not make up a whole Certificate or other recognised course. They are individual statements to say that a person is competent in one component of a subject (a number of subjects make up a whole course).

Accredited training outcomes are a good option for volunteers seeking training and formal recognition of their skills. Using this system, the organisation also has more control and confidence about what skills are being taught to their volunteers on site. There are, however, costs and time involved for the organisation in administering this system and paying for the assessors.

## SNAPSHOT

### Towra Team gaining qualifications in Conservation and Land Management

The Towra Team is a group of young La Perouse Aboriginal community members. With the initiative and leadership of an Aboriginal National Parks and Wildlife Service officer and community leader, the Towra Team have been working as trainees in Kamay Botany Bay National Park. The Team is involved in ecological restoration work, weeding and planting native vegetation. The team members are working as part of a traineeship towards certificate qualifications in conservation and land management. With the assistance of a good supervisor who knows the course content, the trainees are learning much of the course while working in the field. Skills are assessed by an independent assessor who is employed by TAFE. An article about the Towra Team can be viewed at [www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s3349812.htm](http://www.abc.net.au/gardening/stories/s3349812.htm)

### On-line training modules

Email and internet are well used by volunteers. There is scope in the future to develop on-line training courses or modules for people to work through in their own time.



The Towra Team

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## Informal training and other ways to build skills and knowledge

There are so many other ways to build the capacity of volunteers, which don't involve attending a structured course or sitting in a classroom.

### On-site training

Good on-site training with a qualified supervisor is essential (and probably the most important way of "training" volunteers). For many volunteers this is the only training they receive. Training at the site enables volunteers to "learn by doing". Skills and concepts can be taught using practical demonstrations and showing real life examples to reinforce broader concepts such as the overall goals for managing the site and protecting habitat for native plants and animals. This ongoing reinforcement of concepts and practical information encourages volunteers to build confidence over time and acquire the decision making skills that cannot be learnt in a one-day training course.

### Short courses with a specialist or local topic

A short one day or half day workshop can work well when it is about a specific topic or a local issue that is relevant to the work of the volunteers. This timeframe also works better for people who have limited spare time.

### TIP

Even without going through an accredited process, there are benefits in having a semi-structured site training program for volunteers. To keep track of what is taught to which volunteers, supervisors could use a simple checklist. The checklist could then be used to make observations of the volunteers over time to monitor skills and future training needs. This in-house system is especially useful if different supervisors are working with the same group of volunteers.

## SNAPSHOT

### Plants of the Kurnell Peninsula workshop

Sutherland Shire Council ran this popular workshop as part of the Kurnell 2020 project. The project aims to create bushland corridors on public and private land across the Kurnell Peninsula linking Botany Bay National Park and the Ramsar wetlands at Towra Point. The workshop was open to anyone interested and focussed on raising awareness about some common and unusual native plants of the Endangered Ecological Communities found on the peninsula. The morning session covered the theory and the afternoon session involved a tour to look at different sites. Participants were taught how to identify the plants from this specific geographical area. The workshop is a good model for focussing on a particular geographic or project area and could work in other parts of Sydney.

### Site tours and exchange visits

Many volunteers enjoy other opportunities to learn, socialise, share experiences and exchange information with other like-minded people. Examples include river boat tours and bus tours to see other volunteer sites or habitats. Some organisations have organised exchange visits, taking volunteers to visit different Bushcare programs. A coastal group spending time working with a group whose site is on the Cumberland Plain can be a valuable learning experience for volunteers.

## SNAPSHOT

### Volunteer Exchange Program

Blacktown City Council has established a Bushcare volunteer exchange partnership program with Wollondilly Shire Council. The volunteers tour the other council's Bushcare sites and participate in Bushcare activities alongside the local volunteers. The partnership project provides the opportunity for all involved to experience different vegetation communities, learn new plant species, network with other volunteers, share experiences and exchange ideas.



Blacktown City Council volunteers visit a Wollondilly Shire Council Bushcare site *Brendan Andre*

## SNAPSHOT

### Bus tours to look at other Bushcare sites

Some councils organise bus tours that give volunteers a chance to look at the work being done at other Bushcare sites. The tours may have a specific theme such as a tour within a catchment (which may involve neighbouring councils also) or visiting sites that are protecting remnant Endangered Ecological Communities. At each of the site visits, the volunteers get to talk about their work. The bus tour also gives the Bushcare supervisors and volunteers a chance to exchange information and ideas over a cuppa and cake.

## Walks and talks

Many educational activities are held by other organisations and community groups, which are also valuable opportunities for volunteers to gain relevant information. Examples include guided walks through bushland, wetlands and river foreshores. Talks, seminars and visual presentations about special interest topics are also great opportunities for volunteers to gain knowledge and learn more about what interests them. These talks and presentations can also be held in the evenings during the week, making them more accessible to a wider audience.

## Useful training topics for environmental volunteers

Much of the training for environmental volunteers focuses on teaching the technical information and skills. This is very important, however, volunteers also need to have a level of understanding for why the work is being done on the ground. Weed removal is often a motivator for joining a volunteer group and among one of the first skills learnt. We now know that mass weed removal (done too quickly) can do more harm than good by destroying habitat for native wildlife and destabilising creek banks.

Environmental restoration work and monitoring are complex processes. It is really important for the volunteers to have some awareness of the bigger picture and how their actions are linked with other ecological processes at the site, the protection of habitat and the site's cultural values. Training and instruction of volunteers needs to cover a holistic combination of the basic awareness and skills required to do the practical work as well as a broader understanding that will build confidence to manage a site, make decisions and set priorities.

Some of the most relevant training topics include:

- *"Why are we doing Bushcare?"*
- Protecting biodiversity
- Fauna habitat
- Identification of native plants and weeds
- Weed and native "look-alikes"
- Other ecological processes happening at the site (aquatic habitat, fire etc)
- Cultural values of the site (Aboriginal and European)
- Safe work practices
- Bush regeneration techniques
- Chemical use
- First Aid
- Regional context

## TIP

Not all volunteers have the time or inclination to attend extra courses. Offer a variety of ways for people to gain the skills and information needed. More variety and flexibility with training can also increase the chance of engaging a larger number of volunteers from different age groups, life stages and cultural backgrounds.

## SNAPSHOT

### Bushcare Boosters Training modules

In 2010, the Sydney Metropolitan Catchment Management Authority conducted a survey of volunteers and program co-ordinators about their needs and training opportunities. One of the main findings was that many volunteers needed a better understanding of where their work fitted into the bigger picture of ecological restoration. A new training package was developed to address this need and give Bushcare volunteers a “boost” in their knowledge and overall understanding. The Bushcare Boosters package comprises three training modules - Working Safely and Weed Control Techniques, Bushcare and the Big Picture and The Birds and the Bees of Bushcare. Each module includes trainer’s notes, a workshop outline and a participant’s workbook and can be freely used in any format by anyone who works with Bushcare volunteers (council staff, supervisors, training consultants etc).

[www.bushcare.org.au](http://www.bushcare.org.au) websites



Bushcare Boosters training with Randwick City Council bushcare volunteers

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# Ensuring health and safety

Part of recognising the contribution and value of volunteers includes protecting their health and safety. Organisations that work with volunteers have a duty of care to provide a healthy and safe working environment for their volunteers. The health and safety of volunteers is accorded the same priority as that of paid employees.

Work health and safety laws are a complex area of legislation. Each organisation is responsible for ensuring that they are familiar with current requirements and their responsibilities.

## SNAPSHOT

### Work Health and Safety Laws

The Work Health and Safety Act 2011 covers volunteers, volunteer managers and organisations working in New South Wales, Queensland, the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory. Volunteers and volunteer program managers need to be familiar with their obligations and responsibilities.

Good practice means:

- Not exposing volunteers to high risk activities
- Doing the same risk assessments with volunteers that are done with paid employees
- Providing the necessary equipment, tools and personal protective clothing
- Reducing foreseeable risks at the places where volunteers work
- Providing the necessary instructions and training to mitigate risks
- Delegating at least one paid employee that has the appropriate knowledge and skills to be responsible for the management of volunteers and their health and safety
- Providing insurance cover for volunteers in case of a volunteer work-related injury

## TIP

An organisation that doesn't properly consider health and safety, risks harm to the volunteers and also risks damage to its reputation and legal action.

## TIP

Tick bites have been implicated in a number of very serious health problems including Mammalian Meat Allergy and Lyme Disease. Tick bite avoidance using appropriate clothing or insect repellent is key to managing this risk.

## TIP

Walk around the site with the volunteers and do the site risk assessment together at the beginning of each working day, rather than just telling the volunteers what the hazards are.

### Minimising hazards and risks

For volunteers doing on-ground work in natural areas, many things can be done by volunteer program co-ordinators to minimise the risks:

- Complete a risk assessment for each of the different tasks done by volunteers
- Prepare Safe Work Method Statements for each permitted task
- Immediately put into place any measures that are identified to manage the risks
- Decide which activities cannot be done by volunteers (e.g. use of power tools, limited use of chemicals, handling of asbestos or syringes)
- Maintain tools and safety equipment in good working condition
- Implement procedures for the correct use, handling, storage and recording of chemicals
- Train volunteers in -
  - safe use and handling of tools, equipment and chemicals
  - notification procedures for hazardous materials such as asbestos and syringes,
  - best practice bush regeneration techniques
  - best practice heavy lifting technique
  - protection when working outdoors etc
- Provide personal protective equipment -
  - thick gloves
  - hats
  - sun cream
  - mosquito repellent
  - safety glasses
- Tell the volunteers what personal protective equipment (PPE) they need to bring and wear to work days, if these are not to be provided. Clothing should provide maximum protection
  - long pants
  - long sleeves
  - strong and enclosed boots or shoes
  - strong work gloves
  - wide brimmed hat
  - safety glasses
- Enforce the use of PPE when working
- Have a First Aid Kit, including appropriate treatment for the removal of ticks (e.g. Wart Off Freeze Spray) sharps container and mobile phone at each volunteer work day
- Keep the phone number and location of the nearest doctor, medical centre and hospital with the First Aid Kit. Make sure all volunteers are aware of the location of these.
- Ensure that all supervisors or volunteer group leaders have a current First Aid Certificate
- Be prepared to cancel an activity if conditions are unsuitable e.g. high winds, smoke from bushfires, heavy rain or slippery conditions etc

- If any volunteers have particular pre-existing conditions (e.g. acute allergies) make sure they bring the necessary medication and provide instructions in case of a medical emergency

### **Site inductions**

At the start of each work day, also do a health and safety induction or reminder with volunteers. This is especially important if there are new volunteers on the day. While site inductions are essential they do not have to be boring. Consider delivering information in different formats e.g. role plays or quizzes.

A health and safety induction includes reminders about (whichever is relevant):

- Warm up stretches
- Correct lifting of large or heavy objects
- Wearing PPE appropriate to the tasks performed and site conditions
- Dehydration and sunburn
- Bites, stings and allergies
- Safe collection and disposal of sharp objects or syringes
- Low hanging branches
- Hazardous materials found on site
- Safe use of tools
- Safe use of chemicals
- Slippery or steep terrain
- Working in or near water
- Trip hazards
- Other site, season and weather specific issues and risks
- Tick bites and treatment including post work and self-checks.

### **OTHER RESOURCES**

Workcover NSW

[www.workcover.nsw.gov.au](http://www.workcover.nsw.gov.au)

*A handbook for community service organisations. Volunteer health and safety.*

Worksafe Victoria

[www.worksafe.vic.gov.au](http://www.worksafe.vic.gov.au)

Free SWMS template available from safety risk dot net

<http://www.safetyrisk.net/free-safe-work-method-statement/>

The Australian Association of Bush Regenerators produced a special "Tick Issue" of their newsletter in March 2012.

[www.aabr.org.au/images/stories/resources/newsletters/AABR\\_News\\_112.pdf](http://www.aabr.org.au/images/stories/resources/newsletters/AABR_News_112.pdf)

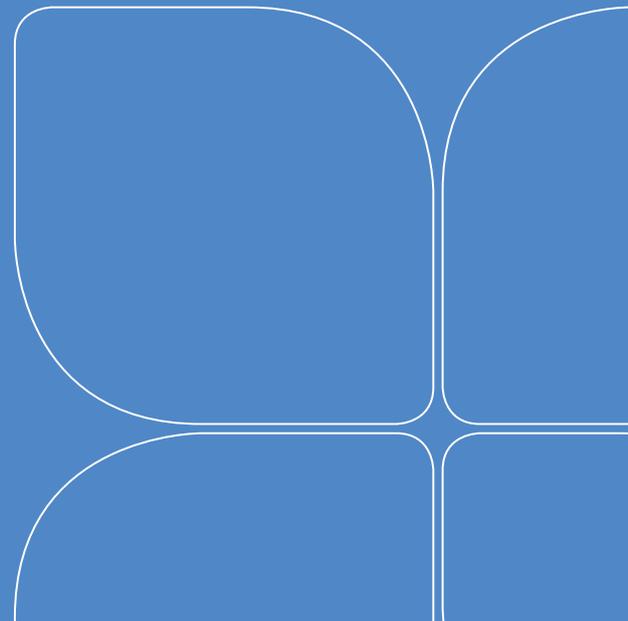
Example of a workplace hazards assessment for volunteers working outdoors



<b>Day:</b> <i>(circle)</i>	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun	<b>Date:</b>	
<b>Bushcare Group:</b>						<b>Site:</b>			
<b>Site Supervisor:</b>									
<b>People on site:</b> <i>(Use back if needed)</i>									
Site Hazard Assessment					Tasks <i>(refer to Safe Work Method Statements)</i>				
Hazard	Tick if present and identified in site briefing – leave blank if not relevant				Task	Tick if relevant	Additional site constraints		
Entry and Exit	Entry point identified				Hand Weeding				
	Exit points identified				Spraying (high vol)				
	Emergency meeting point				Spraying (backpack)				
Animal hazards	Snakes, Spiders, Ticks, Other				Brush Cutting				
Environment	Bushfire				Mulching				
	Flood/high flows				Hose Watering				
	Heat				Waste Disposal				
	Solar radiation				Cut and Paint				
	Uneven surfaces				Scrape and Paint				
	Rain				Chainsaw				
	Wind				Jute Matting				
	Deep water				Construction				
	Isolation				Pruning				
	Other workers and tools				Planting				
	Height/steep drops				Hand Watering				
Human Hazards	Needles				Tank Watering				
	Glass				Erosion Control				
	Overhead wires				Others:				
	Chemicals								
	Asbestos				<b>Additional Risk Management Measures Taken</b>				
	Other								
Waste									
Other site hazards									
<b>Personal Protective Equipment Required</b>									
· Gloves		· Long sleeved shirt		· Sturdy footwear with good sole grip		Other:			
· Long Trousers		· Sun Hats / Sun screen							
Has everyone been instructed on what to do and how to do it?					Yes / No		If no, what action was taken		
<b>Nearest Hospital Address:</b>					<b>Emergency pick up point:</b>				
					<b>Emergency Phone Contact Person:</b>				
Has agency been informed of presence on site?		Yes / No			Time:		Text / phone call / pre-arranged		

## **Part 3**

# **Professional development**



# Recognition of requirements of volunteer managers and supervisors

Managing environmental volunteers is a profession that requires high level skills and knowledge. In Sydney, many councils make a major investment in supporting environmental volunteer programs and employing the professional staff to support them.

## Skills of volunteer program co-ordinators

Many people who work in this field have completed science or environmental management degrees at university and/or conservation and land management certificates at TAFE.

However as well as an understanding of natural area management, there are a whole lot of other skills also required to effectively manage an environmental volunteering program

**“One of the common areas overlooked in terms of skills development is communication skills for managers and leaders. Working with volunteers is essentially team work and the communication and influencing skills required to do this well are a critical aspect to managing these relationships successfully.”**

Kylie Warry, Lead Trainer, Teamology. 2012.

A list of the work tasks and skills required by volunteer co-ordinators include:

- Office administration
- Managing a budget
- Recruiting new volunteers
- Promotion and publicity
- Working with people
- Organising and delivering training
- Writing procedures, reports grant applications and award competition entries
- Producing newsletters
- Supervising the supervisors
- Managing risks and a safe work place for volunteers
- Performance appraisals and surveys of volunteers
- Performance appraisals of the supervisors
- Handling grievances and difficult situations
- Dealing with uncooperative volunteers
- Maintaining a database of volunteer contact details and activities
- Writing press releases
- Writing content for websites

- Updating websites
- Taking photos and creating short films
- Organising volunteer recognition events
- Organising photo competitions and awards programs

## Skills and knowledge of supervisors

In some organisations, the volunteer program co-ordinator and the volunteer supervisor are the same person. In other organisations, the program co-ordinator manages the person or team of dedicated supervisors whose role it is to work directly with the volunteers. The supervisors have an important and influential task (perhaps the most important role) in training volunteers over time and contributing to the quality of their volunteering experience.

Ideally, the supervisors need to be able to:

- Teach skills, demonstrate techniques, teach plant identification etc
- Reinforce broader concepts of “the bigger picture” of Bushcare (or other work done)
- Know, in general, when to give technical information and when to “keep it simple” (and avoid overwhelming volunteers with too much information)
- Give appropriate attention to new volunteers
- Teach and reinforce safe work practices
- Assess the skill levels of volunteers, and fill in the training gaps
- Work well with people
- Handle difficult people or situations
- Build working relationships with members of the community
- Represent the values of the organisation they work for

These are all high level skills that can make the world of difference to the volunteer’s experience of volunteering, their understanding of a “bigger picture” as well as the outcomes on the ground. This is a big ask for one person!

## Training opportunities

Both volunteer program co-ordinators and the supervisors need regular opportunities for training and professional development. This includes:

- Accredited competency-based training and distance education courses through Registered Training Organisations
- Courses and workshops offered by peak volunteering organisations and individual training consultants
- Regular opportunities to share knowledge and ideas with peers and professionals from other organisations

## TIP

Remember to celebrate the work you do on International Volunteer Managers Day! Held each year in November [www.volunteermanagersday.org/](http://www.volunteermanagersday.org/)

## TIP

Some councils employ contractors to supervise their volunteers. The duty of care obligations and the expectations from the volunteers is the same. Remember to extend any training and upskilling opportunities to the contractor supervisors also.

Useful training topics for co-ordinators and supervisors staff include:

- Train the Trainer
- Supervising environmental volunteers
- Legal obligations of organisations that manage volunteers
- Group dynamics and team work
- Motivation and leadership
- Recruitment and selection of volunteers
- Orientation and induction of volunteers
- Recognition of volunteers
- Rights and responsibilities of volunteers
- Facilitation skills
- Negotiation and conflict management
- Dealing with grievances
- Handling performance discussions
- Public relations
- Workplace health and safety
- Risk management
- First Aid
- Project management
- Change management

## OTHER RESOURCES

Teamology is a training organisation that works with volunteer managers and supervisors to further develop their skills.

[www.teamology.com.au](http://www.teamology.com.au)



Volunteer recruitment and motivation workshop

SMCMA

# Communication and networking opportunities

The Volunteer Co-ordinators Network (Natural Areas) started in 1993, becoming an Australia-wide network of people employed to co-ordinate community volunteer involvement in natural resource management and on-ground work. There are a number of support functions provided by the network.

## **Volcoord email network**

Volcoord is an email group and bulletin board for the members of the Volunteer Co-ordinators Network. This list server is moderated by AABR. Emails are sent around regularly to share information, ideas and questions as well as notification of events and advertised jobs. Issues often discussed include volunteer policies and procedures, technical bush regeneration issues and legislative changes. To join the Volcoord email group, send an email with your contact details to [volcoord-subscribe@yahogroups.com.au](mailto:volcoord-subscribe@yahogroups.com.au). In the future, this electronic network may be upgraded to a different platform with more functions to share information.

## **Volunteer Co-ordinators Network - Sydney Region**

Volunteer managers and supervisors from Sydney, the Blue Mountains and the Central and South Coast areas meet four times a year at different locations throughout the region. Greater Sydney Local Land Services manages the administration for these get-togethers.

Each organisation has its own particular requirements and models for managing volunteers. The network is there to share ideas, information and questions about best practice and what works well. Major activities such as regional training opportunities and the annual 'Urban Landcare: Volunteer Everywhere' stall at the Retirement and Lifestyle Expo are also jointly co-ordinated through the network. Meeting dates and locations are publicised through Volcoord.

## **Bushcare website**

This new website has a specific section for the professional people and organisations that manage environmental volunteer programs. New and relevant information will be posted as it becomes available.

[www.bushcare.org.au](http://www.bushcare.org.au)

### **TIP**

If you are doing things differently to the examples presented here, please share your ideas and experiences with the Volunteer Co-ordinators Network!

# Appendix:

## More useful resources

### Section A: Working with volunteers and professional development

#### **NSW Volunteering Strategy**

[www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au/about-us/volunteering-strategy](http://www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au/about-us/volunteering-strategy)

The NSW Government launched a Volunteering Strategy in May 2012 with details of additional resources to be developed to assist volunteers and volunteer organisations.

#### **National Standards for involving volunteers in Not For Profit organisations**

<http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy-and-best-practise/national-standards-and-supporting-material/>

Includes a Model Code of Practice for Organisations Involving Volunteers

#### **Volunteering Australia**

[www.volunteeringaustralia.org.au](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org.au)

The peak body for volunteering in Australia. Over 100 on-line publications tailored to meet the training and information needs of volunteer managers. These include training resources, best practice tips, information sheets about volunteer management, research and past media releases. The site contains various information sheets about aspects of working with volunteers.

Examples of the information sheets include:

- Tips for involving volunteers
- Definition and Principles of Volunteering
- Recognising Volunteers
- National Volunteer Week
- International Volunteer Day
- Reimbursements for volunteers

#### **The Centre for Volunteering (Volunteering NSW)**

[www.volunteering.com.au](http://www.volunteering.com.au)

#### **The School of Volunteer Management**

[www.svm.edu.au](http://www.svm.edu.au)

A Registered Training Organisation that provides training in volunteer management skills and leadership to employees and organisations in the not-for-profit sector. The School is the corporate arm of Volunteering NSW.

#### **The National Volunteer Skills Centre**

<http://www.nvsc.org.au>

The Centre supports volunteer involving organisations throughout Australia by promoting a nationally consistent approach for volunteer training and providing learning materials for volunteers and managers of volunteers.

#### **NSW Government Volunteering Portal**

[www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au](http://www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au)

Includes a guide of community grants

#### **Our Community**

[www.ourcommunity.com.au/insurance/view\\_help\\_sheet.do?articleid=260](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au/insurance/view_help_sheet.do?articleid=260)

Information about screening volunteers

### **Running The Risk?**

[www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)

This is a practical tool to assist volunteer involving organisations in identifying their risks and implementing effective strategies for managing them.

### **Volunteer Power**

[www.volunteerpower.com](http://www.volunteerpower.com)

### **Volunteering measurement toolkit**

[www.unv.org/en/news-resources/resources/on-volunteerism/doc/measuring-volunteering-toolkit.html](http://www.unv.org/en/news-resources/resources/on-volunteerism/doc/measuring-volunteering-toolkit.html)

A toolkit prepared for the International Year of the Volunteer on measuring the impact of voluntary action. It can be applied on a national, regional or local level by funding bodies, policy-makers or community organisations.

### **Australian Journal on Volunteering**

[www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org) Search under *Publications*

A publication of Volunteering Australia that aims to encourage informed discussion, debate and research on contemporary issues of importance to volunteering.

### **Pro Bono Australia**

[www.probonoaustralia.com.au/](http://www.probonoaustralia.com.au/)

An information hub for not-for-profit volunteering

## **Section B: Working with the community**

### **Enabling Ecoaction: A Handbook for Anyone Working with the Public on Conservation**

Les Robinson & Andreas Glanznig

2003, Humane Society International, WWF Australia and World Conservation Union

### **Fostering Sustainable Behaviour: An Introduction to community based social marketing**

Doug McKenzie-Mohr and William Smith

1999, New Society Publishing

### **Towards Whole of Community Engagement: A Practical Toolkit**

Heather Aslin & Val Brown

2004, Murray Darling Basin Commission

This toolkit is for staff and volunteers from all sectors involved in natural resource management.

[http://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/archived/mdbc-S-E-reports/1831\\_towards\\_whole\\_of\\_community\\_engagement\\_toolkit.pdf](http://www.mdba.gov.au/sites/default/files/archived/mdbc-S-E-reports/1831_towards_whole_of_community_engagement_toolkit.pdf)

### **What we need is... a community education project**

A step by step guide to planning a community project

<http://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/communities/Community-Education-Project.pdf>

### **Department of Environment and Conservation (Western Australia) Urban Nature Program**

<http://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/management/off-reserve-conservation/67-urban-nature>

Provides technical advice and on-ground support for land managers working to protect, manage and restore bushlands and wetlands

### **Habitat Brisbane Program**

Helps community groups restore natural habitats in parks, remnant bushland, wetlands and along waterways

[www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/environment-waste/natural-environment/bushland-parklands-wetlands/habitat-brisbane/index.htm](http://www.brisbane.qld.gov.au/environment-waste/natural-environment/bushland-parklands-wetlands/habitat-brisbane/index.htm)