

Living Statement of Principles - Consultation Findings

Aim

The aim of the consultation was to examine the implementation of the Statement of Principles for the Recognition of Volunteers in to organisational practice. The Principles have been in place for 3 years and this public engagement sought to identify what is working, what needs to be improved and what might be missing from the Statement of Principles. The consultations form part of a continuous improvement process to ensure relevance to existing and emerging needs.

Method

Engagement workshops facilitated by NSW Volunteering were conducted in 12 locations across NSW (7 regional, 5 metropolitan). Digital engagement via an online survey which matched the question format of the in-person workshops enabled broader participation.

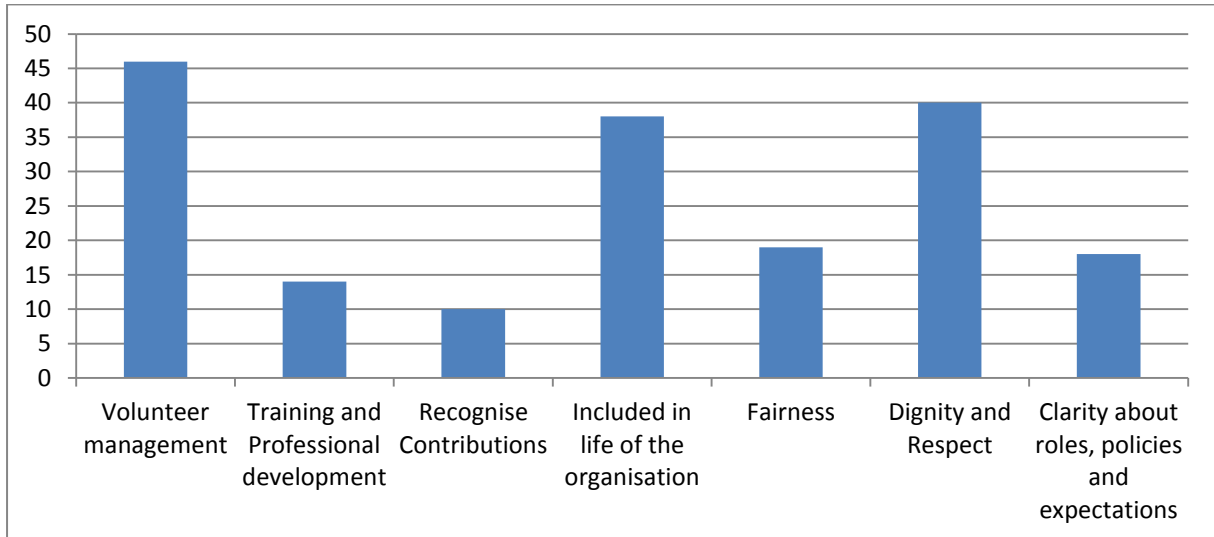
Negocio Resolutions were engaged to participate in every workshop as independent subject experts.

Representatives from the Centre for Volunteering, Negocio Resolutions and NSW Volunteering formed the project steering group. Questions were trialled with Centre for Volunteering volunteers and then refined by the steering group.

Input from the structured conversations taking place in engagement workshops were recorded by NSW Volunteering and Negocio Resolutions. Thematic analysis of the results enables responses to be grouped into like categories. Two rounds of thematic analysis took place with discussion and confirmation by the project steering group to reach agreement on the final selection of themes and sub themes. These were then mapped against the Statement of Principles and the responses to each question are represented in a quantitative form in the charts below.

Results

Q1. What is the ideal workplace where there is respect.



An ideal workplace for volunteers has a high standard of volunteer management. Volunteers enjoy better experiences in organisations that invest in their volunteer program. These organisations take care to deliver good communication with and between staff members and volunteers. What is important to volunteers is that organisations are able to be flexible in the structure of their program.

Leadership is as a characteristic of organisations with respectful volunteer management. Participants reported high expectations of organisational leaders. They need to play an integral role in the implementation of standards established by the Statement of Principles. Organisations that successfully communicate to their staff and volunteers were seen as more likely to be able to uphold the Statement of Principles for the Recognition of Volunteers.

Participants related good volunteer management to tangible examples like the ability of an organisation to reimburse volunteer expenses and provide a safe workplace. These topics were frequently mentioned by participants.

Participants reported that their individual needs' being considered was a defining characteristic of dignity and respect in volunteer workplaces. Volunteers said that organisations which provided meaningful work, and had transparent and accessible processes to resolve disputes with dignity were preferred.

Participants agreed that volunteers want to feel connected through their role in an organisation to a purpose or cause that was important to them personally. Volunteers want to be included in the life of their organisation by being included in decision making.

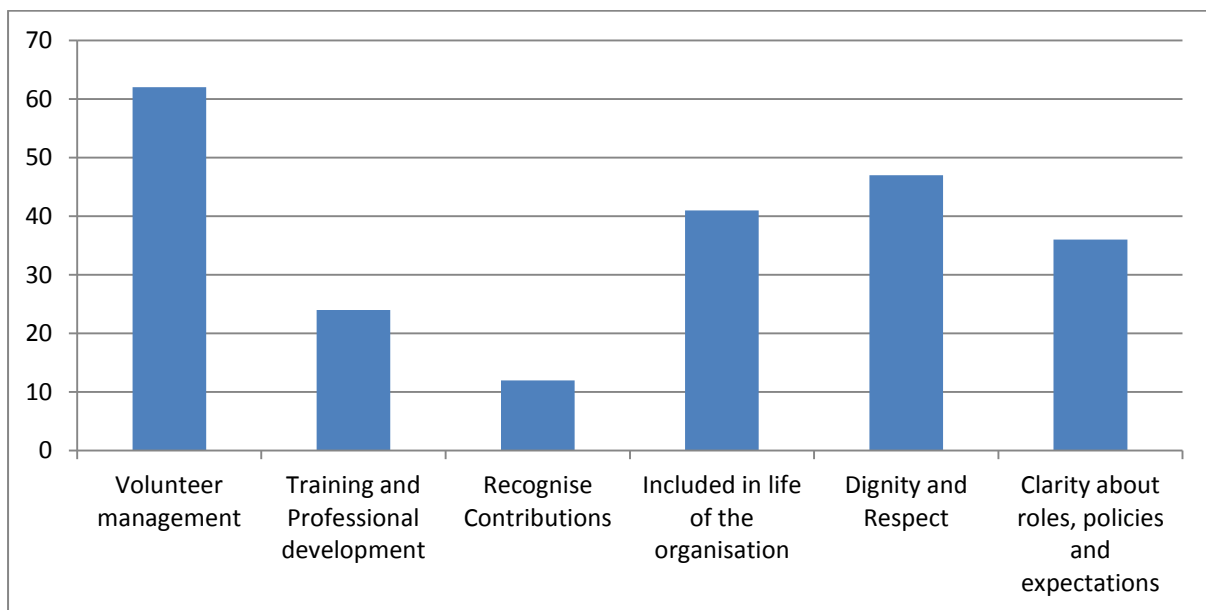
Fairness was characterised by participants as equality between volunteers and paid employees. Volunteers should have the same access to resources and be treated like staff. For example volunteers expected to benefit from the same level of insurance cover as paid staff.

A feature of respectful workplaces was having clearly defined roles that articulated mutual expectations between volunteers and organisations.

Access to training and professional development opportunities was considered important in respectful workplaces. As were opportunities to acknowledge, recognise and celebrate the contributions of volunteers.

Organisations needed to understand their role in creating this work environment as being one of the benefits that motivate volunteers.

Q2 How do volunteers and organisations demonstrate fairness and respect



In successful volunteer workplaces fairness and respect was characterised by the ability to be adaptable. Volunteers have high expectations of organisations meeting their individual needs and coordinating and creating programs to respond to them. Accountability was a factor in demonstrating fairness and respect. This means that organisations report to their volunteers and that volunteers are accountable for their workplace actions.

The ability to listen to volunteers needs rated highly in participant responses relating to fairness and respect. One of the ways organisations can demonstrate respect was through demonstrating understanding of the needs of individual volunteers. Organisations which could adapt their programs to provide different support to volunteers at different life stages, which were flexible and diverse in their communication and could link volunteers to groups in the same cultural group were able to demonstrate fairness and respect.

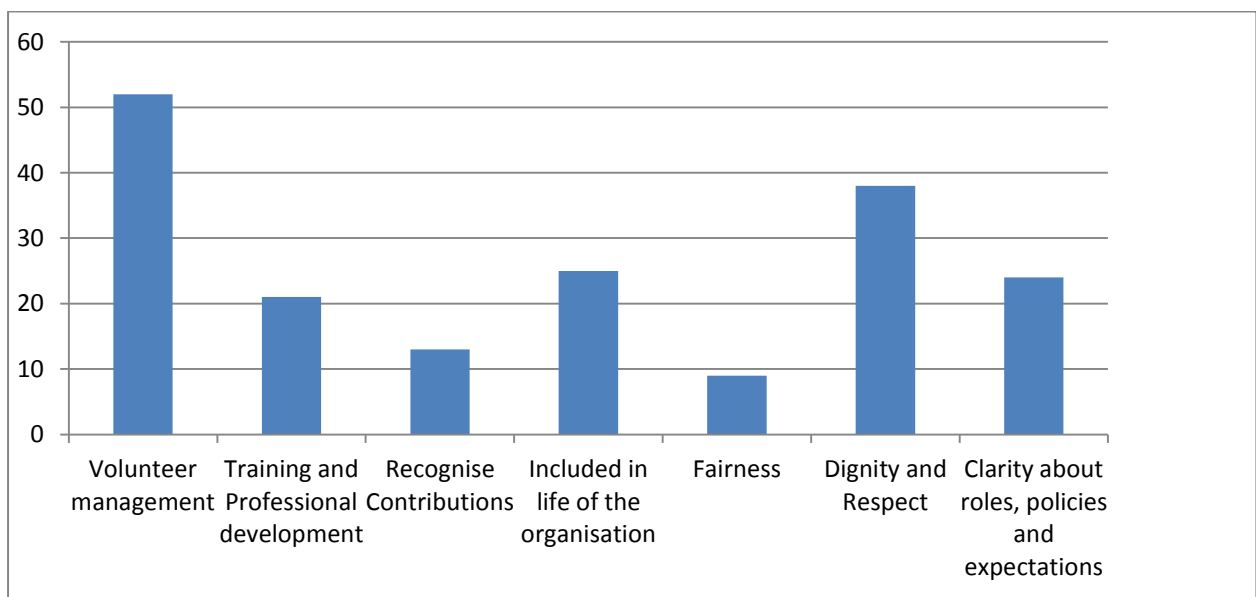
Clear guidelines and role descriptions support organisations and volunteers to demonstrate respect. Participants called for clarity about roles, policies and expectations with concise instructions to be communicated and available to refer to when needed. Organisations should also advise new employees of volunteers’ responsibilities to ensure they understand the role they play within the organisation.

Organisations can establish fairness and respect by being clear about their outcomes and why they need volunteers. One of the needs volunteers identified was the ability to choose their role. Including volunteers in this critical decision to commence work was an identified feature of fairness and respect in organisations. What assisted volunteers to accept a role was having the organisation’s values clearly articulated so that they could make an informed decision.

Participants acknowledged access to appropriate training and professional development as a feature of organisations demonstrating fairness and respect. Recognition of prior learning, language training and up-skilling in relation to the volunteer role were expectations of respectful workplaces. Organisations that enabled transition from volunteering to paid employment met expectations.

Public acknowledgment of work performed well provides recognition to the contribution of volunteers. In fair and respectful workplaces this appreciation is demonstrated through symbols of sharing such as all staff being included in festive events as symbols of sharing. In organisations that demonstrate respect the opportunity to celebrate contributions socially with events, morning teas or awards are valued.

Q3 What needs to happen for volunteers and organisations to recognised each other’s needs



Adaptability was identified as a key consideration for volunteers and organisations to be able to meet each other’s needs. Volunteers expect to have flexibility in roles they undertake.

Organisations that are progressive in their approach to modernising practice are characterised by coordination practices that enable them to manage varied volunteer contributions; having effective and easy to access, multi-format information; and offering resources for volunteers to continue to up-skill.

Consideration of the individual needs of volunteers is a high priority of organisations which seek to recognise volunteer expectations of dignity and respect. Respect for everyone's roles in the organisation was a key factor in meeting mutual expectations of volunteers and staff.

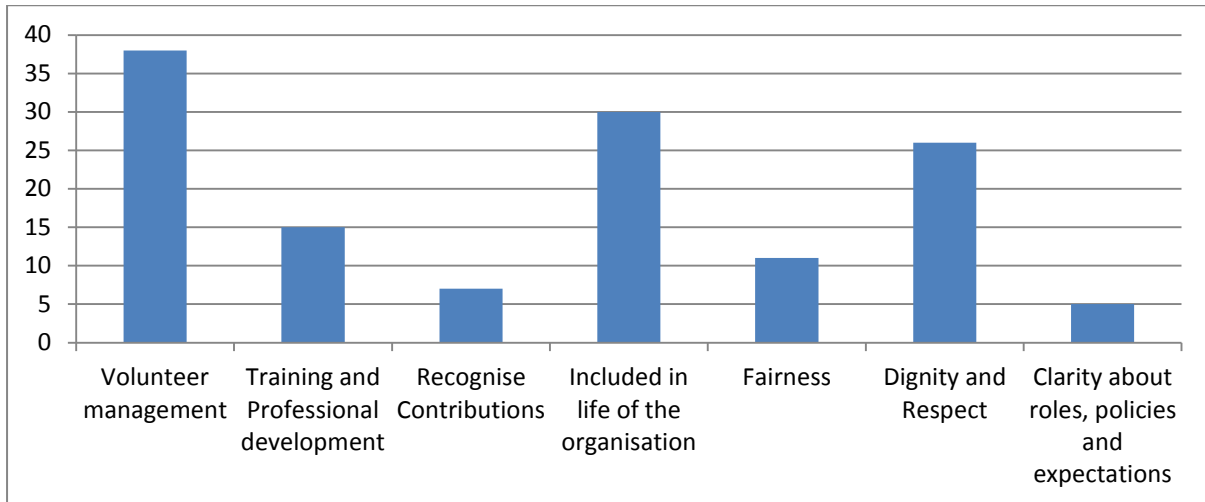
Clarity about roles and clear, mutual expectations established at the outset of the organisation and volunteer relationship assisted in promoting recognition of needs. This relationship is based in a shared connection to the purpose of the organisation. Volunteers want to be included in the work of the organisation and can demonstrate their commitment to it by participating in strategic business planning. Organisations that can adapt to volunteers' needs have a deeper understanding of the benefits to the volunteer of increased connection to socialisation opportunities and stronger social networks.

Awareness of training and professional development for volunteers was a feature of organisations that recognised the need for fairness and respect. Organisations demonstrate the value of its volunteers by enabling pathways to employment. Organisations provide their volunteers experience and prepare for the role and type of work required in the same way as paid staff.

Thanking volunteers is important. Volunteers that receive personal acknowledgement are more motivated to stay. Recognition can also take the form of badges and awards, however the key need to be met is giving recognition for both small and big contributions.

Meeting the need for fairness was expressed by participants as giving equal access to resources as paid staff. Overcoming a lack of understanding from staff of the contribution of volunteers met the need for mutual respect.

Q4 What can you do to bring about mutual respect in volunteer workplaces and to value to work of volunteers.



It takes time and resources to develop volunteer management skills for effective and mutually respectful workplaces. Expectations of program coordination included induction training and a job description that balances the need of the volunteer to have flexibility in their role with the need of the organisation to provide clear work boundaries.

Participants said that measuring program performance helped to understand the impact of volunteers work.

Research efforts could also be made to develop an evidence base on effective volunteer management so the work of volunteers can be accurately valued. Participants called for more modelling of professional behaviour for volunteers and volunteer managers in order to set high standards of practice.

Successful organisations understand that one of the benefits sought by volunteers is simply being involved in the life of the organisation. Staff and volunteers are able to contribute to a shared goal and are motivated to serve a mutual purpose.

Structures for resolving disputes with dignity, including operating with a management committee and offering independent mediation when required, were identified by participants as characteristics of organisation practice that gives consideration to the needs of volunteers and provides dignity and respect.

Skills development is important to volunteers and staff. Providing accredited training for volunteer skills development is an asset to the organisation.

Volunteer workers expect to have agency in organisations so they can bring about change and have an autonomous impact. Volunteers and organisations create trust and transparency where staff and volunteers have equal access to resources (like counselling).

Conclusion

Over 600 responses were included in the results, from online and in-person consultation. The data shows that organisations with high quality volunteer management are most valued as respectful and fair workplaces. It was also clear that volunteers expect to have personal agency and to be included in their organisation's decision making processes. Above all else fairness and respect were associated with equality between volunteers and paid staff. Volunteers expect the same access to resources as paid staff and require good communication from the organisation to facilitate their ongoing involvement.