NSW GOVERNMENT | Office of Communities

the**centre**for**volunteering**
igniting community spirit

RECOGNITION OF THE RIGHTS OF VOLUNTEERS IN NSW
A REPORT ON THE 2012 STATE-WIDE CONSULTATION

DECEMBER 2012

Contents

Executive summary

Introduction

The Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Victor Dominello MP, launched the first NSW Volunteering Strategy on 14 May 2012. The Strategy contained a commitment to consult widely in NSW on improving recognition of the rights of volunteers. The Centre for Volunteering, supported by the Volunteering Unit in the Office of Communities, led this consultation at the request of the Minister.

The consultation commenced with the publication of a discussion paper on www.haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au and included online consultation and face-to-face engagements in 13 locations between 1 October and 16 November 2012. The face-to-face engagement included student volunteers in Years 9 and 10 in two high schools.

More than 350 people attended face-to-face consultations, 3,118 people viewed the consultation website, 513 people downloaded the discussion paper, 135 people viewed the video message from the Minister, three submissions were received and 41 online surveys were completed.

What emerged from the discussion?

Overwhelmingly, the consultation participants supported the introduction of principles that would enhance the moral rights of volunteers. Participants argued that these principles should include clearer responsibilities for organisations that benefit from the gift of volunteering. Participants were also clear that organisations have an obligation to establish volunteer policies, and that volunteers were responsible for behaving in a manner consistent with these policies and the mission of the organisation with which they volunteer.

Finally, in the context of the NSW Government's commitment to reducing red tape, there was agreement that these principles should be included in a Government led voluntary code. There was limited support for statutory change, with the overwhelming majority of participants not supporting the increased cost and complexity that would necessarily accompany such an approach. However, many participants were strongly in favour of organisations committing to the code as a contractual requirement for receiving NSW Government funding.

Key findings and principles

A demonstrated commitment to best practice in volunteer management

Many participants discussed best practice in volunteer management as the underpinning principle on which to build fair and equitable treatment of volunteers. Participants said that volunteers should be managed in a manner that was collaborative and inclusive. This was the foundation step in building other elements of respect and dignity and without it, it was difficult, if not impossible, to ensure volunteer rights were acknowledged and met.

Participants argued that systems should be in place for managing, communicating with, and deploying volunteers. A number of participants highlighted the greater capacity of many larger organisations to develop and maintain such systems. Other participants pointed to the range of tools and resources that are already available on the internet for supporting volunteer management.

The need for a commitment to ongoing communication on issues impacting volunteers within organisations was a common thread running through this discussion. This was coupled with the clear message that while volunteers were not paid, benefiting from their services was not free and organisations needed to allocate resources to volunteer management in proportion to the size and scope of their programs.

Volunteers are involved in the life of their organisation and included in decisions that affect them

The majority of participants said that volunteers felt valued when they were able to be involved in the life of their organisation. This included discussions about the shape and direction of organisations, discussion on work organisation, participating in decision-making affecting their work, attending forums to develop knowledge and opportunities for networking with other volunteers.

The need to participate in decision-making, particularly where those decisions were likely to impact on the volunteers and the roles they undertake, was a common view among participants. These ideas are consistent with participative democracy and are already widespread in many volunteer organisations.

Clarity on roles, expectations and organisational policies

Participants said that many of the issues or disputes that arise between volunteers and organisations can often be linked to a lack of clarity on the responsibilities and boundaries of specific volunteer roles. Many participants stated that this lack of clarity can often be traced back to the earliest stage of the recruitment process.

It was unsurprising then that volunteers, volunteer managers and organisational representatives throughout the consultations indicated that sound induction and orientation processes were vital to the mutual understanding of the roles, responsibilities and commitment required of both volunteers and organisations.

If the commitment sought from the volunteer is made clear 'the volunteer can make a decision about whether or not they can meet that commitment' or 'whether or not that role is right for them.' This simple approach was seen as a powerful method for volunteers shaping their contribution to the task and provides the opportunity to deploy all their skills and experiences. It also allows organisations the opportunity to assess if the volunteer is the right match for the task.

Many participants said that orientation and induction are fundamental to creating a positive volunteer experience, and that the preparation work involved in managing volunteers should be undertaken before volunteers are brought on board.

Participants argued that developing basic statements of volunteer roles was straightforward and that there were many resources available online and through other community based organisations.

It was frequently asserted that peak bodies and other community organisations should promote the existence of templates and other resources and that government could assist by serving a facilitating role in promoting access to such resources. Finally, volunteers were

seen to have a valuable contribution to make in ensuring that policies were improved over time.

Appropriate and timely access to training and professional development

Appropriate training and development to enable volunteers to successfully undertake their role was a recurring theme during the consultation, as well as the recognition of prior learning, existing skills and abilities.

Again, volunteers participating in the consultation described how different sized organisations responded to this need. Many said training should be responsive to the role being asked of the volunteer and relative to the size of the volunteer program. Similarly, many participants said professional development opportunities should vary according to the nature of the volunteer role and the length of the engagement.

Participants maintained that it was in the best interest of organisations for volunteers to develop and grow in their roles. This means volunteers themselves learn new skills and have new experiences – which support them in developing pathways to further participation and employment – and that this benefits organisations as they gradually draw greater value from the contribution of their volunteers.

An inclusive organisational environment of respect and dignity is promoted

Participants argued that contemporary organisations reflect the diversity of society. Overwhelmingly participants said that organisations needed awareness and sensitivity to the differing skills, abilities, and availability of volunteers. Participants noted that the most successful organisations managed diversity very well.

Participants argued that diverse motivations existed for most volunteers and that the rewards from volunteering varied between individuals. People were entitled to pursue outcomes of their own choosing, and to enjoy the various impacts of volunteering in their lives.

Participants argued strongly that management should take the lead in promoting organisational cultures and policy that would see volunteers treated respectfully and with dignity. This respect needed to extend to professional management of disputes and access to alternative dispute resolution.

The contribution of volunteers is recognised and celebrated

Improving recognition of the contribution of volunteers to society and to their organisations was one of the most frequently expressed views of participants. Acknowledging and celebrating the gift of volunteer time and commitment is essential and needs to be deepened.

Participants also noted that the experience and impact of volunteers is deepened when they are given the opportunity to utilise the range of their skills and abilities, particularly as they gain corporate knowledge through longer term roles. Utilising volunteer skills and experience was seen as a valuable way of recognising volunteers and acknowledging the desire of many to make a greater contribution.

Chapter 1   The consultation on recognition of the rights of volunteers

1.1 The consultation

The Minister for Citizenship and Communities, Victor Dominello MP, launched the first NSW Volunteering Strategy on 14 May 2012. The Strategy contained a commitment to consult widely in NSW on improving recognition of the rights of volunteers. The Centre for Volunteering, supported by the Volunteering Unit in the Office of Communities, led this consultation at the request of the Minister.

The consultation commenced with the publication of a discussion paper on www.haveyoursay.nsw.gov.au and included online consultation and face-to-face engagements in 13 locations between 1 October and 16 November 2012. The face-to-face engagement included student volunteers in Years 9 and 10 in two high schools.

More than 350 people attended face-to-face consultations, 3,118 people viewed the consultation website, 513 people downloaded the discussion paper, 135 people viewed the video message from the Minister, three submissions were received and 41 online surveys were completed.

1.2 Objectives of the consultation

The objective of the consultation was to provide the Minister for Citizenship and Communities with advice on improving the recognition of the rights of volunteers by agreeing on simple, effective and achievable principles to enshrine expectations of fair and respectful treatment.

The need to ensure that volunteers are always treated with fairness, respect and dignity was an issue that was raised repeatedly during the 2011 state-wide consultations that informed the development of the NSW Volunteering Strategy.

In response, as an initiative of the Strategy, the Centre for Volunteering was commissioned to lead a discussion in NSW on improving recognition of the rights of volunteers.

1.3 Governance of the consultation

The consultation approach was developed through engagement with an expert group convened by the Minister for Citizenship and Communities on 24 July 2012. Members of this expert group participated in the state-wide consultation and some contributed submissions.

The expert group included volunteers or representatives from the following organisations:
- Conservation Volunteers Australia
- NSW Rural Fire Service
- NSW Sports Federation
- St John (NSW)
- Society of St Vincent de Paul
- Special Olympics NSW

- Taronga Conservation Society Australia
- The Smith Family
- YWCA NSW.

1.4 Methodology of the consultation and analysis

The methodology of the consultation adopted the approach for building grounded theory pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

The first step is data collection, followed by assembly in Microsoft Excel. Secondly, the key phrases in the data are marked with a series of codes. In this case, the codes were sequentially the questions from the consultation, the web site, and the discussion paper. Thirdly, frequently appearing key words were extracted from the text and used as a further filter. The data amounts to more than 960 segments with a total volume of around 11,000 words.

The constant comparative method is a process in which newly added data is compared with previous data. This is a continuous ongoing procedure, because the constructs are formed, enhanced, confirmed, or even discounted as a result of any new data that emerges during the consultation. A mixed method approach for data gathering was utilised with qualitative face-to-face consultation predominating, but also including an online survey, submissions and input at several stages from the expert group.

Chapter 2   Best practice volunteer management

2.1 What is best practice volunteer management and why adopt it?

Many participants discussed best practice in volunteer management, based on a cooperative and inclusive management style, as an underpinning principle to ensure fair and equitable treatment of volunteers. This discussion incorporated a broad range of issues, with some experienced volunteers and volunteer managers commenting that most issues that were raised during the consultation came down to sound volunteer management practice.

Most participants said that robust systems should be in place for managing, communicating with, and deploying volunteers. Participants highlighted the greater capacity of many larger organisations to develop and maintain such systems. However, many participants pointed to the range of tools and resources that are already 'out there', on the internet, for supporting volunteer management with some suggesting that the accessibility of such resources could be improved upon.

A number of participants felt that simple, well communicated systems were what mattered most. This included such suggestions as a brief position description, a dot-point dispute resolution process or a short statement about the main focus of the organisation or group. The differing angles from which people came at volunteer management all referred to processes and systems being appropriate to the size, capacity and need of each organisation and community group.

The importance of orientation and induction was raised frequently. Generally, this emerged from the commonly-held sentiment that many problems can be avoided by making roles and responsibilities, systems, policies, guidelines and procedures explicit at the outset of the volunteer experience.

In all of the consultation sessions participants said that the opportunity offered by orientation and induction processes was often under-utilised. It was argued that orientation and induction processes offered organisations and volunteer managers the opportunity to clarify the consequences, for the organisation and the individual volunteer, of stepping outside the frameworks provided by organisational policy and procedures. Discussing boundaries in this way was seen as an opportunity to engage volunteers in a discussion around why such requirements and practices were needed, including the protections they offered volunteers.

Many participants argued that issue identification and risk management were critical features in managing modern organisations. Participants argued that volunteers needed to understand these principles and share the responsibility for identifying issues and risks, as the first step in delivering safety for all. Some participants argued strongly for an extension of mandatory insurance for all volunteers across all organisations. There was not widespread support for this view. The majority of those who offered views noted that best practice in managing these issues started with preparation and risk identification, which in some cases resulted in insurance.

Many participants said that it was important to identify and describe just what protections and insurance organisations offered for their volunteers, and that this was a critical early component in volunteer management.

Similarly, participants noted that there are existing requirements that identify where a Working with Children Check or National Police Check is required for a volunteer and that these seemed to strike the right balance in their extent and nature. Participants noted that individual organisation went further in terms of what they required of their organisations, and many participants saw this as a matter for those organisations and their volunteers.

However, some participants argued that every volunteer should undergo a National Police Check. There was a notable absence of widespread support for this notion. Many participants pointed to an absence of demonstrable need, the prohibitive cost, the burden of administrative red tape, and the absence of any guaranteed positive outcome as reasons not to adopt this approach. Many participants said that there was a need to retain and nurture the simple joy of neighbourly helping, without burdensome administrative requirements intruding.

2.2 The importance of communication

A commitment to ongoing communication of issues impacting on volunteers within the organisation, through appropriate mechanisms, was a common thread running through the consultation. This included communicating policies and procedures relevant to volunteer roles, as well as information on available training, networking and professional development opportunities, and on internal and external tools and resources available to volunteers to assist with fulfilling their roles and responsibilities.

Many participants commented that it was sound volunteer management practice to ensure that changes to policies, procedures, roles and responsibilities were also communicated. It was argued that best practice should extend beyond merely communicating changes to including volunteers in the decision-making processes that may lead to change.

2.3 Developing volunteers and organisations

Participants overwhelmingly believed that organisations needed to provide an appropriate level of training and professional development that prepared volunteers to meet the requirements of the volunteer role they undertake. Many said that this preparation needs to begin with design of the volunteer role. Participants thought that professional development, if not training, needs to be ongoing for many volunteer roles, as with many paid roles, particularly in frequently changing environments.

Matching volunteers to roles that suit their skills, experience and needs was also thought to be sound practice, helping to reduce issues down the line and contributing to a positive experience for volunteers and staff alike. Some pointed to matching as a considerable challenge for some organisations. Others pointed to the support provided by the Government funded network of Volunteer Resource Centres, particularly for smaller community organisations and in rural and regional areas. Having a feedback or performance management system in place was also seen as best practice, leading to individual appreciation and supporting development and continuous improvement in the organisation.

Continuous review and improvement was discussed by many participants as a necessary component of best practice in volunteer management. Feedback and performance management was seen as one aspect of review and improvement. Participants also argued that having systems, policies and procedures in place was important, but they need to be reviewed for effectiveness and improved, to ensure ongoing effectiveness. It was argued that both paid staff and volunteers need to be part of continuous review and improvement processes within an organisation if such processes are to be responsive.

Chapter 3   Participation in decision making and the organisation

3.1 Participating, not just doing the job

The majority of participants believed that volunteers needed to be involved in the life of their organisation, through being given opportunities to be involved in discussion about the direction and 'shape of organisations', the organisation of their work, participating in decision-making affecting their work, attending forums to develop knowledge and being given opportunities for networking with other volunteers.

The need to be provided with opportunities to participate in decision-making, particularly where those decisions were likely to impact on the volunteers and the roles they undertake, was a common view among participants. As was noted by a number of participants, this is widespread practice in many volunteer organisations already and these ideas are consistent with participative democracy.

Participants often said that the ability of organisations to involve volunteers will vary depending on each volunteer role, the capacity of the organisation and the interest of the volunteer. Interest and desire for engagement was variable. Participants said that all volunteers appreciated opportunities for a deeper contribution to the organisation. Other participants said that not all volunteers necessarily seek to be engaged in all aspects of organisational life, preferring to meet the requirements of the role they have agreed to undertake and be given occasional opportunities to socialise with other volunteers.

It was generally agreed that a desire to participate coincided with a need among volunteers for their skills and their wealth of experience to be to taken seriously and truly valued. Hence, it was said that where ongoing and systemic participation opportunities were in place, they were positively received.

3.2 Creating positive cultures

Participants felt that offering avenues for volunteer, staff and management interaction and collaboration, cross-fertilisation of ideas, and development of networks throughout the organisation improved satisfaction and morale. All of these contributed to positive organisational cultures. A number of participants commented that providing these opportunities increased the sense of inclusiveness throughout an organisation. This in turn improved volunteer retention, through demonstrating how volunteers and their contribution were valued in all aspects of organisational life.

As with volunteer management, it was argued that orientation and induction processes offered an ideal opportunity to establish and promote organisational values around participation at the beginning of the volunteer experience. Participants said that this might include making clear at the outset that input, feedback and participation was welcomed; and what mechanisms were available for these contributions. Some participants said that orientation was an opportunity to invite volunteers to 'help shape the organisation'.

It was noted that expectations around involvement and participation as a volunteer worker should be distinct from opportunities to participate in decision making. For example, where participation in specific meetings is a requirement of a volunteer role, as opposed to broader opportunities or avenues through which volunteers are invited to contribute, this requirement needed to be made clear at the outset.

3.3 Making the best contribution

Assessing volunteer skills, experience, needs and expectations, and appropriately matching them to a role, was argued to be a mechanism for ensuring that volunteer participation in an organisation was well utilised. If a volunteer plays a role that is the 'right fit' for them, it was noted that they would be better equipped to contribute to the life of the organisation and be satisfied in their role. Such satisfaction was said to support volunteer retention.

Similarly, a number of participants thought that having some form of feedback or performance management system in place was critical for ensuring that volunteers could contribute to organisational learning and responsiveness, particularly regarding volunteer management. Some participants commented that where official channels of feedback are not in place, less constructive channels are likely to emerge.

Chapter 4 Roles, expectations and responsibilities

4.1 Defining a role and establishing expectations

Participants commented that many of the issues that arise between volunteers and organisations emerge from a lack of clarity about roles. It was noted that early on in the recruitment process was the appropriate time to describe and explain the responsibilities and boundaries related to the specific role the volunteer is undertaking. Similarly, it was argued by a number of participants that some organisations do not positively describe what contribution the volunteer is required to make.

Throughout the consultations, volunteers, organisational leaders and volunteer managers said that sound induction and orientation processes were vital to the mutual understanding of the roles, responsibilities and related commitment required of organisations, staff and volunteers.

More broadly, many participants commented that sound orientation and induction processes meant making clear all relevant policies and requirements that defined behaviour and conduct for volunteers in undertaking particular roles within the organisation.

This meant covering such issues as the protections offered and the behaviour required by Work, Health and Safety law and risk management assessment, equal opportunity law, and codes of conduct, as well as the potential consequence for the organisation and the individual volunteer of breaching any such policies or legal requirements. Also, many participants thought that orientation and induction offers the opportunity to articulate dispute resolution processes and to identify the appropriate person within the organisation to go to with concerns.

4.2 Matching skills with roles

Many participants argued that preparation is fundamentally important to creating a positive volunteer experience. Design of volunteer management should necessarily come before volunteers are brought on board.

If the required volunteer commitment is made clear then 'the volunteer can make a decision about whether or not they can meet that commitment' or 'whether or not that role is right for them'. This enables volunteers to make informed decisions about where they invest their time. For organisations, it enables them to have a discussion about the match between the skills, interests and experience of a volunteer and their needs, particularly their needs in a particular volunteer role. It was noted that this process also enables organisations to determine whether or not a volunteer is a good fit for the organisation and its mission and values.

It was argued that writing a basic position description for a volunteer role should be straight forward and that in addition, there are many resources and templates available online and from other community organisations. Some participants said that if there was difficulty in filling a role, there may be cause for the organisation to consider whether or not the role is suited to being a volunteer one or if it is constructed in the appropriate manner.

There was a view that peak bodies and other community organisations should promote the existence of templates and other resources and that government might assist in facilitating or promoting access to such resources. Participants pointed to a range of existing websites that already help facilitate access to resources and information, such as, www.volunteering.com.au, www.volunteeringaustralia.org, www.ourcommunity.com.au and www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au.

There was a frequently expressed view that dispute resolution should be handled internally and at a local level. The role of Community Justice Centres in providing an external alternative dispute resolution process was also promoted, but should only be used after local resolution had been exhausted. Participants said that imposing added layers of red tape in the area of dispute resolution would be an unnecessary burden for most organisations and was inconsistent with practice in Australia and internationally.

It was often noted that the needs and focus of organisations change over time and that many volunteer roles, as with paid roles, need also to develop and change over time. Participants commented that problems can arise when these changing needs and roles are not formally acknowledged through discussion, ongoing review or having continuous improvement processes in place. Providing opportunities for discussion and consultation provided opportunities for questions to be asked, concerns to be aired, for changing needs to be addressed and, importantly, for volunteers to participate in such processes.

Chapter 5 Training and professional development

5.1 Developing volunteers improves outcomes for all

Appropriate training and development to enable volunteers to successfully undertake roles was a recurring theme during the consultation. Recognition of prior learning and mechanisms for identifying and utilising existing skills and abilities among volunteers were also seen as important.

Volunteers participating in the consultation described how organisations of varying sizes respond to this need. Many said assessment of appropriate training might include considering the role of the volunteer and the size of the volunteer program. Likewise, it was acknowledged that professional development opportunities should vary depending on the nature of the volunteer role and the length of engagement.

Participants maintained that it was in the best interest of organisations for volunteers to develop and grow in their roles. This meant that organisations gradually drew greater value from the contribution of volunteers and that volunteers themselves learnt new skills and had new experiences – which supported them in developing pathways to meet their own needs.

Some participants argued that training which offered formal qualifications, or clearly articulated steps towards a qualification, offered at least two primary benefits to the organisation. Firstly, it was responsive to the desire of some volunteers to have their volunteering experience taken seriously by potential employers. Secondly, formalising volunteer training was seen as a tangible demonstration of the value an organisation placed on volunteer contributions. This was also a marker of an organisation's commitment to viewing and developing their volunteers as human capital, in a similar manner to the approach of an organisation to paid staff.

Some participants argued that the cost of training should to be acknowledged by government, while others argued that a level of training that addressed the specific requirements of the volunteer role and the task being asked of the volunteer should be a minimum provision of organisations.

Many noted that the nature of training and professional development provided should differ depending on the nature and duration of the volunteer engagement. For example, it was noted that short term, event and many corporate volunteers would have different expectations around development supported by volunteer organisations, compared to volunteers with longer term commitments.

5.2 What development is needed?

Knowledge sharing opportunities were argued to be best practice in contemporary volunteer management. Many participants said that volunteers needed access to online resources that supported them to fulfil their duties successfully, such as: orientation and induction tools; information about rights and responsibilities, such as Work Health and Safety, codes of conduct and manual handling guidance; external and internal peer-to-peer engagement, face-to-face and online and social media tools; research dissemination and avenues to share case studies in best practice and other learning.

Many participants said drawing volunteers into more issue identification and risk management would require additional training and development.

Networking was also promoted. This included opportunities for participating in decision-making forums and routine meetings within organisations that brought volunteers and paid staff together, to external interagency collaboration and avenues for ongoing engagement with other volunteers and peer networking.

Participants also promoted the value of mentoring. This discussion explored ideas such as pairing new volunteers with staff, and highlighted a strong desire for volunteer skills and experience to be utilised throughout orientation and induction, performance review and personal and development planning processes.

Others argued that experienced volunteers should be involved in supporting and developing new or less experienced volunteers. Drawing on experienced volunteers for mentoring newer volunteers was said to offer a positive opportunity to utilise a valuable resource within organisations, and to demonstrate the value an organisation places on its volunteers and their experience.

5.3 Building capacity for volunteer management

Some consultation participants were keen to include volunteer manager or coordinator training. They argued that resourcing and support would enable volunteers and volunteer programs to be managed to a higher standard than at present. Many said that a well-trained and resourced volunteer manager was a fundamental prerequisite to ensuring the success of volunteer programs and individual volunteers in their roles.

Recognised qualifications and pathways towards qualifications were also important to ensure that the role of volunteer manager, and volunteering more broadly, is taken seriously. A volunteer-involving organisation that prioritised the support and development of its volunteer manager was clearly identified as an organisation of choice for most volunteers.

Many participants noted that training should not be seen as a cure-all, nor was it necessarily what all volunteers sought at all times during their volunteering experience. Participants noted that professional development opportunities were effective when they responded to the experiential and development needs of volunteers and organisations. Participants said that many volunteers sought authentic opportunities for networking, knowledge sharing and mentoring, 'by having effective and appropriately resourced volunteer managers; such opportunities can be more systemically addressed.'

Chapter 6   Respect, dignity and inclusion

6.1 Respecting diversity

There was a strong feeling that management should take the lead for promoting organisational environments of respect and dignity, especially in relation to issues around disputes and dispute resolution.

Many participants argued that it was a responsibility of volunteers to act in a way that demonstrated respect for the mission, objectives and values of the organisation with which they volunteered. For volunteers of organisations that provided customer or client services, this extended to professional behaviour that delivered respect and dignity for clients and customers.

Participants noted that volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and that they reflect the diversity of society. Overwhelmingly participants argued that organisations needed awareness and sensitivity to the differing skills, abilities, and availability of volunteers. Participants noted that the most successful organisations managed diversity very well.

Inclusion and respect were two of the most commonly expressed ideas throughout the consultation process. Participants argued strongly that management should take the lead in promoting organisational cultures and policies that resulted in volunteers being treated respectfully and with dignity. Participants also argued that volunteers and staff had reciprocal obligations to the organisations that engaged them to also behave in inclusive and respectful ways, to organisational representatives, and of course to one another.

Participants commented that the degree to which contemporary organisations reflect the diversity of today's society is an indication of organisational health. They called for the need for awareness throughout organisations for the differing backgrounds, skills, abilities, and availability of volunteers. This extended to a respect for the differing needs and motivations that lead people to seek volunteering experiences. There was acknowledgement that there is a growing group of people who are either compelled to volunteer (e.g. Centrelink participation obligations or Work and Development Orders) or who specifically seek out volunteering opportunities that will assist them to develop their skills and experience to increase their employability. The majority of participants said this new reality should be embraced.

Some volunteers argued that organisations were not equipped to adequately manage the expanding needs and diversity of volunteers, nor should they have to. On the other hand, many volunteers thought that the different motivations that brought people to volunteering should not lead to their exclusion from volunteering and the wider benefits that volunteering delivered. Many participants said that effective organisations that managed diversity well would use that strength to prosper and grow in a different manner compared to those that couldn't accommodate or celebrate diversity.

Many participants felt that community organisations had much to gain from being inclusive of volunteers with diverse backgrounds and needs. There was acknowledgement of the differing capacities of organisations, while participants said organisations need to develop the necessary frameworks for responding to such wide ranging needs if they choose to engage with those volunteers. This discussion often overlapped with the view that organisations should assist volunteers to articulate their experience to potential employers, through mechanisms such as providing written or verbal references, certification of training or training that articulated to qualifications.

6.2 Managing disputes

Respondents noted that respect needed to extend to effective management of disputes. Most participants argued that inclusive and respectful organisational cultures began with the leadership of the organisation. A strong sentiment emerging from the consultation was that prompt and consistent action around dealing with any issues of concern made a tangible contribution to developing healthy and inclusive organisational culture. It was argued by participants that 'word gets around'. That is, organisational reputations (good or bad) often emerged from the handling of these issues, as much as more public elements.

Specifically, many participants spoke to the need for mutual respect to be promoted by management and staff throughout the organisation. This included promoting and supporting respectful professional relationships not only between management and volunteers and staff and volunteers, but also amongst volunteers themselves.

A frequently expressed view was that clear dispute resolution procedures need to be in place, articulated to volunteers and staff on commencement with the organisation, and reinforced through communications from management at review time. Concerns needed to be taken seriously and acted on in accordance with organisational policy.

Participants agreed that organisations had the responsibility to have a dialogue on performance (positive and challenging) with volunteers. No participant suggested that organisations did not have the authority to manage their volunteers. And if performance requirements are not discussed with a volunteer early (as part of induction) then these can be awkward conversations later in the experience of a volunteer. A failure to lay the ground work for such a conversation, just adds complexity to it, and may present further challenges in respectful and dignified treatment of volunteers.

One respondent pointed out how complex these issues can be in practice. A volunteer office-bearer said that they had recently left an organisation as a result of a pattern of bullying by an organisational staff member. Another participant spoke of leaving a volunteering role because she didn't like how the volunteers treated one another.

It was widely argued that organisations also needed to have clearly articulated and communicated termination processes in place for volunteers.

Despite the difficulties, many participants said clear rules and clarity about roles was an essential contributor to respect and dignity in relation to all professional relationships.

6.3 Pathways and volunteering

Many participants spoke of the need to nurture pathways to and from volunteering to enable volunteers to develop and grow. Participants argued that diverse motivations existed for most volunteers and that the rewards from volunteering varied between individuals. People were entitled to pursue outcomes of their own choosing, and to enjoy the various impacts of volunteering in their lives.

The desire of many volunteers to gain experience and skills to further their paid employment opportunities was widely discussed.

Some argued that organisations should not necessarily concern themselves with responding to the needs of this group of volunteers. However, many participants argued that contemporary community organisations concerned with responding to social needs should be responsive to this reality. In some cases volunteers became employees of the organisations for which they

once volunteered. In other cases, volunteers found work with other organisations in the network of organisations within which they volunteer.

Volunteers may also cease volunteering for period of time, but may return to volunteering as their life circumstances change. Participants argued that volunteers who had a positive experience of volunteering in one place are likely to return to the organisation that provided that positive experience. In summary, it was argued that volunteers should be encouraged to develop and learn, both in order to pursue their own needs, and to contribute to changing organisational needs.

Other respondents pointed to research that demonstrates that volunteering is good for volunteers – including living longer, enjoying better health, lower stress, and better well-being. Not surprisingly, research also demonstrates that when people begin volunteering while younger they become physically and psychologically healthier as adults (http://www.stonybrook.edu/bioethics/gtbg.pdf).

Discussion around responding to diverse needs often included the view that when organisations worked together and were well networked they increased their capacity to place volunteers appropriately. This basic principle that volunteers should be appropriately matched in accordance with their skills, abilities, experience and needs, struck a chord throughout the consultation process. Appropriate matching was thought be a fundamental part of best practice in volunteer management and an important mechanism for ensuring a positive experience for volunteers, organisations and paid staff.

Chapter 7   Recognising and celebrating volunteers

7.1 Recognise and acknowledge

Recognition and acknowledgement of the contribution of volunteers to society and to their organisations was a common theme throughout the consultation process. This discussion was broad, focusing on the need for appropriate and regular opportunities for the gift of volunteer time and commitment to be acknowledged. It also focussed on the need for organisations to have plans in place to ensure that the skills, experience and abilities of volunteers were recognised throughout the organisation.

Participants often made a distinction in these discussions between recognising volunteers and volunteers being valued. Many described a range of ways in which the contribution of volunteers could be acknowledged in organisational life. This included organisational level and state-wide awards, lunches and morning teas, and other celebrations to acknowledge the contribution of volunteers. Other suggestions included having an acknowledgement of the value an organisation places on its volunteers in a prominent location on its website, in its offices and on print material.

Some participants spoke about the need for organisations to quantify the volunteer contribution in annual reporting. This might include providing a statement on the number of volunteers, volunteer hours and an estimated dollar value of that contribution to the organisation. A number of participants argued that government had a role in this effort to quantify the contribution of volunteers by improving the collection of volunteering data to ensure the value of volunteering to society and the economy is better understood. Some also argued that different levels of government should take a lead celebrating and recognising volunteering.

7.2 Value

While many noted that steps such as the quantification of volunteer contributions would lead to volunteers feeling more valued, other participants argued that recognition could also include an active appreciation of the skills, experience, abilities and corporate knowledge that volunteers develop on the job. Many participants commented that integrating experienced volunteers, wherever practicable, into the full range of activities that paid staff might be engaged in demonstrated the worth that organisations placed on volunteers.

This included the view that including volunteers in the development and review of policies, procedures and resources should be the norm in organisations that value volunteers. Some commented that it was not often acknowledged that many volunteers these days 'had careers before they became a volunteer' and brought valuable skills with them.

Discussion also incorporated the view that volunteers should be included in representative groups, as paid staff would be, as well as decision-making processes throughout the organisation. Many said that 'a simple thank you' for 'a job well done' was a good start, while others commented that truly integrating volunteers throughout the formal and informal structures of the organisation was a sign of a management that 'walked the walk' when it comes to valuing volunteers.

A number of volunteers argued that greater efforts should be made to acknowledge, reward and share the learning and experience of organisations that are leaders in volunteer management.

Many were keen to see volunteer experience shared through organisations in ways that helped develop the organisation.

It was also noted throughout discussion on this issue that many volunteers report the sense of personal satisfaction they gain through their volunteering experience and the sense of 'giving back'.

Chapter 8   Building commitment to the principles

8.1 Informal commitment

Participants suggested a number of different models for building commitment to the principles identified through the consultation. The most frequently promoted model is a voluntary code. Many participants wanted the NSW Government to exercise leadership in this area, without increasing red tape, and some suggested that the most appropriate model would be a Government led voluntary code. Participants also said that this model could avoid an excessive burden for volunteers and organisations and that this was important because 'there shouldn't be any more red tape'.

One survey respondent articulated the views of many in saying that a 'modular approach to development with six key principles' should be adopted. The respondent argued that six principles covered enough of the issues to be useful and accessible. Above all, respondents wanted an approach that was simple and easy to implement. Many respondents said that the principles would provide a useful focus and could lead to discussion of the constituent elements that contributed to best practice, as discussed earlier in this report.

This approach was also seen as providing useful mechanisms for organisations to acknowledge, promote and celebrate relevant systems and processes that some noted were 'already in place'. Some also noted that a simple set of widely acknowledged and promoted principles could also provide a useful framework, or language, through which examples of best practice could be more easily shared.

There was a multitude of approaches to how such a set of principles might be promoted in the community. These included 'something like the *Heart [Foundation] Tick*, awards, certificates, badges, and other publicity including websites', or through an 'easily recognisable symbol or logo'. Others were more focussed on the annual reporting cycle arguing that 'recognition of the value of the contribution of volunteers to organisations should be a reporting requirement'.

8.2 Supporting volunteers, developing communities

Many respondents spoke about the importance of volunteers to society. Participants argued that it was critically important to settle the issue of recognition of volunteer rights quickly and simply to ensure that the contribution of volunteers is maintained and increased. Every respondent who touched on this issue argued that volunteering should be promoted, celebrated and grown.

Many consultation participants discussed the need to recognise the wider impact of volunteers. Some argued that a media campaign was required 'about the dollar value' of volunteering saying that it was necessary to 'get in people's faces' about the importance and positive impacts of volunteering.

Other respondents spoke about the importance of generational transitions and the need to change the perceived 'face of volunteering'. It was important to many to grow volunteering among school students, arguing that it built engagement with the community and established patterns of care about other people. Others were more sober, suggesting that without transitioning younger volunteers into organisations, it may become increasingly difficult to 'maintain the current levels of service provision'.

8.3 Formal commitment

Many respondents argued for formal commitments to improving recognition of the rights of volunteers. There were almost as many proposals for this formal recognition as there were proponents. These included various legislative changes (federal and state), utilisation of existing accreditation frameworks, inclusion in existing service standards (including for Home and Community Care and Disability Services), creating a volunteer watchdog, and a statutory approach that would see volunteers treated like employees.

A much larger group of respondents rejected these specific ideas, either individually or sometimes in groups, and argued against additional cost, complexity and red tape. Many referenced the implementation of the *Work, Health and Safety Act 2011*, and argued that that change introduced significant compliance costs.

Other respondents said that it was critical that any change in NSW was incorporated in Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations, which are already widely referenced in a range of existing state and federal funding agreements.

A small number of respondents argued for a 'Volunteer rights charter similar to that of the UK'. The government of the United Kingdom is promoting a simple list of volunteer rights that is voluntary. These include what a volunteer might expect in the following areas (https://www.gov.uk/volunteering/your-rights):

- the level of supervision and support
- training
- coverage by the organisation's employer or public liability insurance
- health and safety issues
- any expenses the organisation will cover.

Since 2009 a discussion has occurred in the United Kingdom on how best to address volunteer rights. The latest development is a call from Volunteering England for endorsement of the campaign about rights, recognition and responsibility (http://www.volunteering.org.uk/policy-and-campaigns/volunteer-rights-inquiry-3r-promise).

Finally, the European Youth Forum (http://issuu.com/yomag/docs/volunteering_charter_en) has published a Chart of Volunteer Rights at the commencement of a campaign to have volunteer rights formally recognised.

8.4 What else might add value?

Several respondents called for volunteer rights to be included as part of the mandate of the Australian Charities and Not-for-Profits Commission (ACNC) and in a related proposal, some participants called for organisations to loose their charitable status if they failed to implement the principles protecting volunteer rights.

Appendix One – Consultation locations and dates

Location	Date
Mingara Recreation Club, Tumbi Umbi	04 October 2012
Bathurst City Community Club, Bathurst	05 October 2012
Albury Council Chambers, Albury	12 October 2012
Corrimal District Library & Community Centre, Corrimal	17 October 2012
Merewether High School	22 October 2012
Lambton High School	22 October 2012
Westport Club, Port Macquarie	29 October 2012
Armidale Regional Council, Armidale	31 October 2012
East's Leisure and Golf, East Maitland	02 November 2012
Wyong Shire Council, Wyong	05 November 2012
Blacktown City Council, Blacktown	12 November 2012
Jubilee Room, Parliament House, Sydney	13 November 2012
Campbelltown Catholic Club, Campbelltown	14 November 2012

Appendix Two - Data collection protocol

Consultation questions

- What are the important themes to be included?
- How might volunteers and organisations commit?

On-line survey questions

- What are the important themes/issues that should be considered?
- How could volunteers and organisations commit to such principles?
- Should government funding be conditional on organisations committing to such principles?
- How might organisations celebrate and promote their commitment to such principles?

Discussion paper questions

- What are the important principles that should be included?
- How could organisations commit to such principles?
- How could smaller organisations meet such requirements without increasing red tape?
- Should committing to such principles be a condition of government funding?
- How could volunteers know if organisations had committed to the principles?
- Is alternative dispute resolution appropriate if disputes cannot be solved locally?

Appendix Three – Discussion paper

**Improving recognition of the rights of volunteers
in NSW:
a discussion paper**

**The Centre for Volunteering and the
Office of Communities**

October 2012

Introduction

I launched the first NSW Volunteering Strategy on 14 May 2012. A key theme of the Strategy is removing barriers to people volunteering.

The need to ensure that volunteers are always treated with fairness, respect and dignity was an issue that was raised repeatedly with me in the 2011 state-wide consultations that informed the development of the Strategy.

In some cases, volunteers are treated poorly or unfairly and they leave organisations feeling aggrieved. In other cases, organisations find themselves managing behaviours or values of volunteers that are inconsistent with the organisation's needs and mission.

In response, as an initiative of the NSW Volunteering Strategy, I have commissioned The Centre for Volunteering to lead a discussion in NSW on improving recognition of the rights of volunteers. The objective of the consultation is to provide me with recommendations on improving the recognition of the rights of volunteers by agreeing on simple, effective and achievable principles to enshrine expectations of fair and respectful treatment.

If we leave the discussion until volunteers, managers or directors of organisations feel aggrieved or problems have emerged, it is an emotive and unsettling discussion, rather than one about principles and positives like appreciation and participation. The participation of volunteers and organisations is critical to ensure we get the best possible result for all volunteers in NSW.

An appropriate framework for recognition of rights for volunteers will help everyone to see the goal posts and to refer to them when needed, particularly as an agreed point of reference in difficult times.

I look forward to your participation in this discussion, either through commenting on-line, providing a submission with your views, or attending one of the face-to-face consultations being held around NSW in October and November 2012.

Victor Dominello MP
Minister for Citizenship and Communities
Minister for Aboriginal Affairs

IMPROVING RESPECT, DIGNITY AND APPRECIATION OF VOLUNTEERS
Volunteering occurs in every community in the State, with 2 million volunteers providing more than 240 million hours of volunteering each year in NSW. This precious resource cannot be taken for granted and must be nurtured and developed. This is why improving respect, dignity and appreciation of volunteers is so important.

RECRUITMENT
Many volunteers find their own way to community organisations, some people are recruited through one of the State's Volunteer Resource Centres, and others are recruited directly by organisations that engage volunteers.

What happens when volunteers get to these organisations? Is it important to establish the mutual expectations of volunteers and organisations? It is also important for volunteers to ask questions about the work they might do, and to explore how that fits with their skills, interest and values.

Most organisations match volunteers and their skills to particular roles. They also orient volunteers to the culture, values and mission of the organisation. Making the nature of the volunteering job and the needs of the organisation clear is one way to build respect and appreciation and to ensure dignity for volunteers and their managers in organisations.

Orienting volunteers
A number of volunteer-involving organisations have sound recruitment and induction processes in place, designed to make clear the rights and responsibilities of volunteers.

One such example is The Smith Family, where all volunteers matched to a role are issued with a copy of '*Our commitment to You*'. This document outlines the rights of responsibilities of volunteers, presents the organisational values of The Smith Family, the expected behaviours of volunteers and provides the organisation's Code of Conduct.

Issuing volunteers with '*Our commitment to You*' is the first step in a thorough induction process that is role and site specific and incorporates use of online tools wherever appropriate. These processes are all aimed at clarifying The Smith Family's expectations of volunteers and its commitment to upholding the rights of volunteers.

RETENTION
The decisions to begin volunteering and to continue volunteering for a particular organisation are very different. Some volunteers experience a growing commitment to their organisation, while others, are alienated and do not return. For organisations, retaining volunteers is very important because recruitment is time consuming and expensive.

Retention of volunteers is more likely where:
- there is good governance and management at all levels of the organisation
- work, health and safety obligations are met
- sound volunteer skill development, training and mentoring occurs.

Retention is not an end in itself. Balance is also important. Sometimes volunteer turnover can be a positive thing; for volunteers themselves and for organisations.

> **Retention** is also more likely where there are clear descriptions of what a volunteer role involves; clear messages about what a *job-well-done* looks like; and simple, effective, and timely feedback on performance. Volunteers should be treated fairly, openly and consistently, and they should be given opportunities to express their views and be heard.

Should best practice models of recruitment and retention practices be promoted within the volunteering community? How would this best be accomplished?

MANAGING ISSUES AND RISKS

A National Police Check and a Working with Children Check is required for some volunteers by certain organisations. This can be a policy of the organisation, a funding agreement requirement, and – in limited circumstances – a legal requirement.

Some volunteers find such checks challenging, reporting that they make them feel like a criminal or that they are suspected of wrong doing. Others are more comfortable and take the requirement in their stride. Organisations report that such checks help them manage their obligations to their clients and their organisational risks. Others argue that checks are no replacement for interviewing volunteers and checking referees, just as prospective employees get checked.

How should this issue be managed? How can organisations and volunteers ensure the safety and security of clients, without adding barriers to volunteering?

> **Working with Children Check**
> The NSW Commission for Children and Young People recommends making organisations child safe and child friendly. The Commission runs training in how to make your organisation child safe including the physical environment, recruitment practices, children's rights and the Working With Children Check.
>
> From early 2013, a new Working With Children Check will be introduced in NSW. It will require volunteers who have direct face-to-face contact with children, in a child-related setting, to undergo the new Check. A volunteer who works mainly with adults in an adult setting will not need the Check, even if occasionally a child is present. Some exemptions are proposed including for parents and close family members volunteering in an activity with their own children.
>
> The find out more about the check, go to
> http://kids.nsw.gov.au/kids/working/newcheck/gettinganewcheck.cfm

DISPUTE RESOLUTION

Inevitably there will be disputes or differences of opinion, and the performance of individuals or organisations may fall short of expectations. A volunteer may have concerns with the organisation to which they have committed their time, or an organisation may have concerns with one of their volunteers. Sometimes issues can emerge between volunteers themselves. Such realities are part of life. When these challenges emerge, how can we best deal with them in a way that is transparent, fair and efficient?

Many organisations have very well developed policies and practices for dealing with disputes. These policies will make clear how people with concerns should proceed.

Often the first thing to do is for the those concerned to discuss the matter, just as would happen were a paid employee had a concern.

Problems can emerge between volunteers, with management/staff, between volunteer boards and management/staff, and between volunteers themselves. The objective should be that where disputes emerge they are resolved locally.

In some cases, volunteers or organisations may choose to undertake alternative dispute resolution. Community Justice Centres in NSW provide free alternative dispute resolution services and both volunteers and not-for-profit organisations may use their services. Information about these services is available at www.cjc.nsw.gov.au or on telephone 1800 990 777.

Should best practice models of complaints processes and dispute resolution be promoted within the volunteering community? How would this best be accomplished?

Examples of dispute resolution

A great many volunteer-involving organisations have complaints and dispute resolution processes in place. The Australian Sports Commission provides a 'Member Protection Policy' template for National Sports Organisations and local sporting clubs.

The templates provide a framework for developing local documents and cover a range of matters, from codes of behaviour to reporting, incorporating complaint handling and dispute resolution. The templates are available from www.ausport.gov.au/supporting/nso/member_protection and are supported by an online toolkit and training, accessible via www.playbytherules.net.au.

WHERE TO FROM HERE?

The objective of the consultation process is to inform recommendations on improving the recognition of the rights of volunteers by agreeing on simple, effective and achievable principles to enshrine these expectations.

- What are the important principles that should be included?
- How could organisations commit to such principles?
- How could smaller organisations meet such requirements without increasing red tape?
- Should committing to such principles be a condition of government funding?
- How could volunteers know if organisations had committed to the principles?
- Is alternative dispute resolution appropriate if disputes cannot be solved locally?
- Should alternative dispute resolution only be engaged when local resolution fails?
- What role might publishing best practice resources (templates) play, including for example:
  - ✓ Job descriptions
  - ✓ Performance management criteria and processes
  - ✓ Grievance policies and procedures?

Example principles, expectations and obligations
Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations (The National Standards) provide a framework for best practice in volunteer management. The Standards support the recognition of core obligations and expectations for volunteers and volunteer-engaging organisations.

Drawing on these Standards, the NSW Volunteering website suggests a set of expectations and obligations of volunteers and volunteer-engaging organisations
www.volunteering.nsw.gov.au/organisations/running-an-organisation/rights-and-responsibilities.