

## A volunteer training framework

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*Volunteering SA (VSA) has responded to the need to revise and expand the training offered to volunteers. It has developed a volunteer training framework to provide structure and guidance for the sector in making policy and financial decisions about directions and type of training that volunteers require and desire, where the training can lead and what recognition can be given for it. Basic entry-level volunteer training is the focus of the framework. However, other planks in the training framework include training and identifying pathways from basic entry-level volunteer training to accredited training. This approach offers clear linkages and pathways for volunteers and organisations, and it is anticipated this will build a culture of continuous service improvement.*

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### Introduction

Social, economic and political changes that have occurred over recent times have had a significant environmental impact on the volunteer sector and volunteer training in particular. At the local level in SA, this has included legislative changes such as the Volunteers' Protection Act 2001 (SA) and the Children's Protection Act 1993.

As a result of these changes, a number of trends have emerged that have highlighted the need to review and develop volunteer training to ensure it adequately addresses current legislative, organisational and volunteer requirements. These trends include: generational differences, use of technology and growth of environmental concerns.

Volunteering SA (VSA), the peak body for volunteering in South Australia, has responded to the need to revise and expand the training offered to volunteers.

VSA has developed a volunteer training framework to provide structure and guidance for the sector in making policy and financial decisions about directions and type of training that volunteers require and desire, where the training can lead and what recognition (formal or otherwise) can be given for it.

Basic entry-level volunteer training is the focus of the framework. However, other planks in the training framework include training and identifying pathways from basic entry-level volunteer training to accredited training. With this in mind, VSA has reviewed and expanded the partnership it has with TAFESA so that the close working relationship with the public training provider will support the training framework.

VSA also worked with the Office for Volunteers and TAFESA on a project to standardise entry-level volunteer training as another step in strengthening the training framework and ultimately sustaining the sector with highly skilled, competent volunteers.

It is well documented that volunteers, who experience job satisfaction, feel valued and are acknowledged for the work they do, have been placed in a job role commensurate with their skill level and interest and have been given opportunities for further training, are more likely to stay longer in the role. Training benefits the organisation, the clients and the community, and these benefits include increased confidence, quality service provision, reduced risks and openings towards employment and further learning.

A well trained and developed workforce of volunteers is more critical to the successful performances of the volunteer management system than any other single factor. (Standard 5, National Standards for Involving Volunteers 2001)

In this paper, the VSA training framework is discussed in relation to the TAFESA partnership and the standardisation of volunteer training project outcomes. A case study is presented to illustrate an application of this training framework.

### **Partnership**

Volunteering SA and TAFESA have been in partnership since 2000 and both recognise the benefits to be gained through mutual cooperation and alliance in the field of education and training and in the development of the volunteer sector. VSA and TAFESA have a commitment to a shared vision for education and training of volunteers and volunteer managers.

The mutual recognition of the core business of each organisation is a key factor in the working of the partnership. This fact both differentiates and unites the two organisations in mutual cooperation to provide the best possible mix of training opportunities and pathways for future training and employment for volunteers and volunteer managers:

**Volunteering SA** delivers non-accredited training targeted at three training ‘markets’:

- volunteers
- volunteer managers
- volunteer-involving organisations

**TAFESA** delivers accredited training, including:

- Certificates I, II, III in Active Volunteering
- Certificate IV in Community Services (Volunteer Management)
- Diploma and Advanced Diploma of Community Services (Volunteer Management)
- Individual accredited units of competency
- Elements of training within accredited units of competency where the intention is to continue on to the completion of a full qualification
- Recognition of Prior Learning.

Volunteering SA owns the curriculum for the three volunteer management courses and TAFESA is the training provider. The partnership, governed by a memorandum of understanding, began with this arrangement and has over time expanded to take on other functions to mutually support each other's training and education programs.

A licencing agreement exists between TAFESA and Volunteering Australia that enables TAFESA to deliver the three Active Volunteering certificates. This arrangement supports the VSA Training Framework by providing pathways for volunteers to accredited training.

### **Volunteering SA training framework**

Volunteering SA has developed a training framework as a means of structuring the training it delivers to the sector to represent a coherent and sequential plan of development and skill acquisition

for volunteers, volunteer program managers and volunteer-involving organisations. The training framework is designed to take account of individual and organisational training needs, a range of levels of skill development and readiness of people for training. It also has multiple entry and exit points and leads to potential pathways to further training.

It could also be used in conjunction with the Volunteer Training Audit Tool (which is discussed in the next section of this paper, ‘Standardisation of volunteer training’) as a basis for identifying training needs and setting directions for future development of volunteer training options.

Volunteering SA anticipates that the training framework will also inform policy and program development in industries that utilise volunteer support and on whom they are dependent for the delivery of their services; Such industries include community services and health, recreation, sport, environment and conservation, museums and heritage, animal welfare, housing and the justice system.

It is widely recognised that volunteering is a pathway to employment and, where a training option can be added to the volunteering experience, this not only benefits the volunteer but also adds value to the industry (Volunteering SA Inc. 2006). For example, community and welfare organisations claimed 26% of all volunteer hours in 2000 (ABS 2001); and research from NSW, undertaken by the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care (2002), has shown that 80% of volunteer hours for Home and Community Care programs are concentrated in four areas – food services, respite care, transport and social support.

Workforce development that includes volunteers is on the agenda of at least two Industry Skills Boards – Service Skills SA, which covers sport, recreation, tourism, hospitality wholesale, retail and personal services, and Health and Community Services, which covers health,

community services, correctional services and public safety. It is anticipated that this new framework may inform policy and program development for these industries as volunteering is a pathway to employment and, where a training option can be added to the volunteering experience, this adds value for the volunteer as well as to the industry.

The training framework is a three-step approach which acknowledges that, to sustain and develop volunteer involvement in organisations, individual volunteers, volunteer program managers and volunteer-involving organisations have training requirements.

The framework that VSA has developed assists each of these groups to be trained within a national framework for participation, learning and sector development and in the process meet Standard 5 of the National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-for-Profit Organisations. The foundations for this framework are:

- training must be affordable and accessible
- training is about learning and integrating that learning into practice
- training is one of the most important levers for sustainability of the sector and volunteers need to be able to transport their learning from one organisation to another without having to repeat that training; data from the 2000 Census survey (ABS 2001) indicate that 34.8% of people volunteer in more than one organisation
- volunteers are worthy of being trained and supported in their learning
- training needs to have accredited pathways that can be accessed if volunteers want to take up that option
- organisational learning will assist in sector development and service improvements for the end service user
- each generation of volunteers has different training needs and expectations.

## TRAINING FRAMEWORK

Three steps:

**Entry level**  
**Developmental level**  
**Leadership – master classes**

Training can be:

**Optional**  
or  
**Compulsory**  
and  
**Can lead to best practice**

The framework targets three ‘markets’ – volunteers, volunteer program managers and volunteer-involving organisations. The training that is required may be compulsory or optional, and all training should lead to best practice for the organisation and add to the sustainability of volunteer participation in the whole sector.

Entry level training options:

- suite of modules – twelve sets of volunteer training materials have been developed and are freely available; these are listed in the next section of this paper
- three-hour workshops – for the delivery of these modules of training
- on-site and off-site delivery – to meet organisational and volunteer requirements
- linked to VSA-produced resources – these are available for purchase from VSA to support training delivery
- pathway to TAFESA certificates and recognition of prior learning

Developmental level options:

- pathways to further education and training such as the Active Volunteering certificates and other related vocational qualifications

- links to accreditation and the National Standards for Involving Volunteers
- foundations for leadership

Leadership – master classes:

- master classes for experienced volunteer managers
- initiatives and reforms
- taking account of research and current trends and issues facing the sector
- pathways to higher education

The Volunteering SA / TAFESA partnership works collaboratively to advance the training framework and provide opportunities for volunteers and volunteer managers at the developmental and leadership levels in particular.

Volunteering SA is in the process of establishing partnerships with other organisations that can also play a role in contributing to the process and outcomes of the training framework.

As part of the vision for the training framework, the CEO of Volunteering SA submitted a proposal to the Office for Volunteers for funding to undertake a project to standardise basic training for volunteers that is offered by the Volunteer Resource Centres in South Australia.

Twelve training modules were developed and form the basis for the entry level training in the training framework.

### Standardisation of Volunteer Training Project

This project was funded by the South Australian Government through the Office for Volunteers. The outcomes of the ‘Standardisation of volunteer training project’ support the implementation of the Volunteering SA Training Framework.

The standardisation of basic training delivered to volunteers by the Volunteer Resource Centres in South Australia means that common ground is covered, portability of skills from one organisation to another is made easier, recognition of training undertaken is a straightforward process, replicating training in these areas is unnecessary and it removes the need for each organisation to spend time and money duplicating the same training materials.

The outcomes of the project included:

- (a) Twelve modules of training:
- Be an effective volunteer
  - Customer service
  - Engaging Gen Y
  - Introduction to mentoring
  - Volunteering with the frail aged
  - Working in teams
  - Developing grant applications
  - Introduction to effective communication
  - Introduction to marketing
  - Volunteers and paid staff
  - Introduction to governance
  - Introduction to risk management
- (b) For each of these modules, there is:
- a workbook
  - an electronic presentation of the training material
  - presentation notes
  - a certificate
  - a pathways statement with information on links to accredited training

All of this material is available as a free download from the Office for Volunteers website: [www.ofv.sa.gov.au](http://www.ofv.sa.gov.au)

Each training module is designed to be delivered in a three-hour workshop, either at one of the Volunteer Resource Centres or on an organisation's premises. The training topics represent basic training for volunteers in skills areas most required by volunteer-involving organisations and represent the entry level training in the Volunteering SA training framework.

The workbook, certificate (which outlines the basic aspects of the training workshop) and the pathways statement (which outlines the recognition of prior learning process and identifies the national competency(ies) with which the training is most closely aligned) assist volunteers to make decisions about moving to the **developmental level training** and facilitates the progression to accredited training. **Leadership level training**, such as the master classes, can be accessed during and/or following completion of accredited training.

These twelve training modules also assist organisations to meet the requirements of Standard 5 in particular of the National Standards for Volunteer-involving Organisations.

Another outcome of the project was an Audit Tool (available on the Office for Volunteers' website) that is designed to assist volunteer-involving organisations identify training requirements either at entry level, developmental and/or leadership level and prioritise training development plans according to need and availability of resources.

Following is a case study that illustrates how the Volunteering SA Training Framework can provide guidance and create pathways to assist volunteers and indeed organisations make coherent, well-considered choices about training options available to them.

### **Case study: The Hills Volunteering Project**

The following case study outlines the training pathway taken by a volunteer at The Hut Community Centre at Aldgate, South Australia. It illustrates the effectiveness of the Volunteering SA Training Framework in assisting volunteers to select training options that maximise their chances of achieving their goals.

Chris was originally referred to The Hut Community Centre by a Job Network Agency as part of the Work for the Dole Scheme. He began with reception work for two half-days per week and also worked with the project officer on The Hills Volunteering Project doing administration, research, networking with people from the sector and promotional work.

The Hills Volunteering Project at The Hut where Chris worked aims to build the capacity of volunteer-involving organisations (in the Adelaide Hills) to attract and retain volunteers and to provide enhanced pathways to further education, employment and community service outcomes for volunteers. A partnership with the Mt Barker Campus of TAFESA has been formed to facilitate the outcomes of this project.

Within three months, Chris was volunteering three days a week with the Hills Volunteering Project 'and loving it'. He went on to say that he loved the team work, the supportive environment and the opportunities it provided, enabling him to bring with him skills from previous work including interviewing and counselling skills and interpersonal skills to effectively work with a diverse range of clients.

Chris was also a participant in the project and as such had access to the training opportunities offered to volunteers who expressed interest in being involved in the project.

It was as a result of this volunteer experience that Chris then identified that he wanted to be more involved in the volunteer sector

and seek paid employment in this area of work. He therefore pursued study/training options presented to him as a participant of the project and found the Active Volunteering qualifications fitted well with his plans.

Chris enrolled in the Certificate II in Active Volunteering at the Mt Barker Campus of TAFESA. He then set about compiling evidence to support his application for recognition of prior learning (RPL), having realised through his volunteer work that he had skills and knowledge from previous life experiences that he was able to utilise to good effect in his volunteer work.

He also found that the orientation training he received when he began volunteering could be included as part of his evidence for recognition of prior learning for a competency – 'Be an effective volunteer' – in the Certificate II in Active Volunteering. In relation to the Volunteering SA Training Framework, this is entry-level training being recognised and providing a pathway to accredited training – developmental level training.

Chris applied for RPL for all but one competency and was successful. He had a large portfolio of material to support his application. He chose to study the occupational health safety and welfare competency to ensure he had current knowledge about work practices related to his newly chosen field of endeavour. Commenting on this RPL experience, Chris said: 'I loved it because it rounded up my skills and experience from previous work and gave me confidence and direction for my future'.

He explained that this new found sense of confidence boosted his self-esteem and gave him renewed energy and optimism to map out new directions for his future. He commented that, when he looked back on the RPL process and took stock of all he had done, what he had achieved and the skills and knowledge he had accumulated, he remembered thinking at the time: 'I have all these skills and they have

been formally recognised; I should look at what to do next ... it gave me the confidence to take the next step and enrol in the Diploma of Volunteer Management.'

Chris explained that

all this has happened at an important point in my life and having the opportunity through the RPL process to virtually take a review of my life and see I have a lot of skills was an invaluable experience. The process of getting recognition for what I'd achieved in work and life experiences was like a launching pad, it was a pivotal experience, a landmark in my life.

He is currently studying the Diploma of Volunteer Management at TAFESA and says: 'I have now entered the next phase feeling now on a career path and working towards a definite goal'. In relation to the Volunteering SA Training Framework, this is developmental level training that will provide Chris with a pathway to further education and training – leadership level training.

Commenting on his volunteer work, Chris recounted:

... looking back, I see now that my volunteer work had more relevance because I was gaining skills and knowledge that could be used, and now my volunteer work and the training along the way is assisting me to reach those goals - which is all part of the process.

I'm now feeling more confident in myself and in my ability and am continuing to network for career options and I have a couple of options in the pipeline at present. While still unemployed, interestingly I don't feel that way as I'm working towards employment and feel confident about a successful outcome in the not too distant future.

## Conclusion

The Volunteering SA Training Framework adopts an integrated approach with a place for volunteers, volunteer program managers and volunteer-involving organisations – adding value and

contributing to the sustainability of volunteer participation and the infrastructure for volunteering.

This approach offers clear linkages and pathways for volunteers and organisations and it is anticipated this will build a culture of continuous service improvement.

Volunteers have the right to be trained and rewarded for undertaking the training and this approach provides further opportunities for volunteers who want to build on their volunteering experiences and have a pathway to further education.

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## Websites

- Office for Volunteers: [www.ofv.sa.gov.au](http://www.ofv.sa.gov.au)
- TAFESA: [www.tafe.sa.gov.au](http://www.tafe.sa.gov.au)
- Volunteering Australia: [www.volunteeringaustralia.org](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org)
- Volunteering SA Inc.: [www.volunteeringsa.org.au](http://www.volunteeringsa.org.au)

### **About the authors**

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## **'They're funny bloody cattle': encouraging rural men to learn**

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*Our paper examines and analyses the contexts and organisations in rural and regional communities that informally and effectively encourage men to learn. It is based on a combination of local, rural adult education practice and a suite of studies in Australia and elsewhere of learning in community contexts, most recently into community-based men's sheds. It is underpinned by both experience and research evidence that many rural men tend to have an aversion to formal learning. The intention of our paper and its specific, practical conclusions and recommendations is to focus on and share positive and practical ways, demonstrated through practice and validated through research, of encouraging rural men to learn.*

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