

When a volunteer leaves or may need to

FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

Many volunteering roles have a natural life cycle and volunteers leave for a variety of reasons. We know in most cases, volunteers leave for positive reasons such as interstate moves and gaining paid employment.

Sometimes there may be an underperformance or personnel issue with a volunteer that may require ending their relationship with your organisation. Having exit processes in place will enable your organisation to provide a respectful end to any volunteer relationship, irrespective of the circumstances.

Alignment with the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

National Standard 5: *Support and Development* discusses changes to volunteer involvement, including the need for fair and transparent procedures for ending the involvement of a volunteer.

Useful resource: [Volunteer Management Guide for Non-profits | Not-for-profit Law \(nfplaw.org.au\)](#)

When a volunteer decides to leave

Volunteers come and go for many reasons and mostly, a volunteer leaving is a time to celebrate the volunteer's contributions to the program and organisation.

Make sure to provide each volunteer with the opportunity to provide feedback that may assist the organisation's programs, going forward.

Having an exit procedure in place ensures that you remove any access to organisational systems and platforms once the volunteer has moved on. This is similar to how you would manage a paid staff member leaving.

Sometimes volunteers may indicate a desire to leave but be open to suggestions for staying. If your organisation is interested in retaining the volunteer, invest in understanding the reasons the volunteer is wishing to leave and see if there is anything you can do to address the reasons given.

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Reasons for ending the volunteer relationship

There may be times when your organisation may need to end a volunteer's engagement.

Some reasons may be:

- There is no need for their services (e.g., when a program ends).
- The volunteer isn't performing the agreed tasks.
- The volunteer is not volunteering within the scope of their role, creating a risk for the organisation.
- The volunteer is breaching policies or procedures.
- The volunteer is bullying or harassing other volunteers or paid staff.
- The volunteer's conduct is unacceptable.
- The volunteer has done something unlawful.

Be as fair and transparent as possible when working towards ending the volunteer relationship. Volunteers have the moral right to fair grievance procedures, however, they do not legally have standing under unfair dismissal laws.

While there is no legal obligation to engage in due process, it is advised you follow a best practice approach.

Your organisation is legally responsible for the conduct of your volunteers, so any serious issue/s need to be managed quickly and in alignment with the law.

Tips and ideas from the sector

- Keep an eye on the morale of your other volunteers and ensure they are supported during this period. Some volunteers have a big influence on workplace culture.
- It's important to have a clear process to work with, including a grievance procedure.
- Utilise support during this period / peer support / Employee Assistance Program (EAP).
- Ensure clear, transparent and empathetic communication – reflect on how you communicate and how it might be received. It is important that the volunteer knows their role is ending, rather than just fading out / having an abrupt end.
- Elderly volunteers can sometimes become a work health and safety concern. Work shadowing can not only assist this but can help with succession planning.
- Look at ways you can thank the volunteer. Write them a letter, hold a celebration, provide them with a plaque of appreciation.
- It is important to ask how the volunteer how they would like to be celebrated (just like when we recognise volunteers). Sometimes they may not want a public celebration.

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