

Conflict Resolution and Difficult Conversations

The purpose of this quick guide is to provide leaders of volunteers with information about resolving conflicts and handling difficult conversations.

Conflict management

In many cases, problems between volunteers and your organisation come from a lack of communication and planning. As with any human interaction, the potential for conflict increases when people feel taken for granted or misunderstood. By considering all areas of volunteer engagement including recruitment, training, and ongoing management, you can avoid many potential pitfalls in your relationship with volunteers.

Be prepared

Take a planned approach to conflict management which should be in line with your policies, procedures, and volunteer documentation.

- Recruit volunteers in a fair and non-discriminatory way throughout the recruitment and screening process. You can conduct screening for volunteers, even if certain checks are not required by law (under legislation or contract)
- A Volunteer Agreement is an important part of engaging volunteers, it helps the volunteer understand their rights, role and responsibilities along with those of the organisation
- Tell volunteers about your organisation's procedure for handling complaints. This will help prevent issues becoming problematic. Ensure volunteers' complaints are heard and dealt with in an appropriate manner
- Volunteers can be 'dismissed' but good practice dictates that the process in managing departing volunteers be handled well and with the same respect afforded to employees
- Following a fair process in the recruiting, inducting, and managing volunteer performance will increase a volunteer's confidence and commitment to the organisation

Tips for difficult conversations

- Identify the issue
- Don't make assumptions; poor performance or bad behaviour usually has a reason. It's important to not make decisions until you have all the facts
- Be upfront and direct about the issue; don't leave room for misunderstanding or interpretation
- Stick to the facts and use evidence to support your case
- Focus on the issue not the person
- Consider the volunteer's point of view; often volunteers are very emotionally invested in their work
- Be aware of your own emotions
- Be solutions focused
- Follow up the conversation in writing and formally document it

Other helpful information can be found by referring to the National Volunteer Guide located at [nfplaw.org.au](https://www.nfplaw.org.au)



The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.

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