



# The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

## Module One

Introduction to the National Standards for Volunteering



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## Introduction to the National Standards for Volunteering

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In this Module you will learn:

- what the National Standards for Volunteering are
- why they are important
- why your organisation should implement them
- how to implement them.

This Module is the foundation for the following nine Modules, which explain in detail each of the National Standards for Volunteering.

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# Benefits of Volunteer Involvement

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Volunteer involvement is a critical part of Australian society. It provides a number of contributions and benefits to our society as a whole, by building strong, inclusive, and resilient communities. Volunteering provides a foundation for social change: it empowers our responses to community need and challenges, and it draws together and supports the strengths and assets within communities.

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A volunteer providing time, skills, and expertise can help organisations meet their aims and goals, and enable the pursuit of programs and activities that benefit the community.

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## Volunteering engenders important benefits

For an individual, volunteering is an opportunity to be involved in activities reflecting their interests and using their skills, that promotes a sense of belonging and general wellbeing. Volunteering can also be means by which a person develops skills and potential pathways to employment. Or, their focus may be on contributing their existing skills for the common good.

Volunteer involvement is thereby a two-way relationship: it allows organisations to achieve their goals by involving volunteers in their activities; and it helps volunteers to make meaningful use of their time and skills, contributing to social and community outcomes.



# The National Standards

## AIMS AND PRINCIPLES

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The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement provide a sound framework for supporting volunteering in Australia.

The Standards have been developed in consultation with the volunteering sector to ensure relevance and suitability. Their purpose is to support the involvement of volunteers, and to act as a resource and guide to best practice for organisations in which volunteers are involved.

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Reflecting the diversity of this growing sector, the Standards are easy to follow and adaptable to different types of organisations and forms of volunteering.

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For volunteers, the Standards help to improve the volunteering experience, and ensure that it is a positive one.



For organisations, the Standards provide guidance on good practice and benchmarks to assist with attracting, managing, and retaining volunteers, and for managing risk and safety.

Using the Standards, organisations can consider the role and impact that effective volunteer involvement can have on achieving their strategic goals and aims.

### The National Standards have been designed to help organisations:



Incorporate the values and maximise the benefits of volunteer involvement.



Develop effective volunteer involvement strategies and practices.



Involve volunteers in meaningful and useful activities that contribute to the outcomes of the organisation's work.



Ensure the rights of volunteers are protected and that they are supported to carry out their varying roles and responsibilities.

### The Standards incorporate the following principles:



Volunteer involvement should be a considered, planned part of an organisation's strategic development, aligning with the organisation's strategic aims, and incorporated into its evaluation framework.



Effective volunteer involvement requires organisational leadership, and a culture and structure that supports and values the role of volunteers.



Volunteers have rights, which include the right to work in a safe and supportive environment with the appropriate infrastructure and effective management practices.



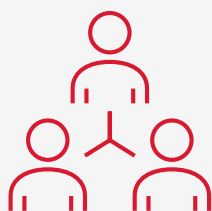
Volunteers have responsibilities, which include acting responsibly, being accountable to the organisation for their actions, and respecting the organisation's values and practices.

# Using the National Standards

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The National Standards allow organisations to make use of simple, practical criteria to guide their systems and activities across a broad range of volunteering situations.

Eight standards address the key areas of volunteer involvement:



## 1. Leadership and management

The governing body and senior employees lead and promote a positive culture towards volunteering, and implement effective management systems to support volunteer involvement, including risk management processes.



## 2. Commitment to volunteer involvement

Commitment that supports the organisation's strategic direction to volunteer involvement is set out through its vision, planning, and resourcing.



## 3. Volunteer roles

Volunteers are engaged in meaningful roles which contribute to the organisation's purpose, goals, and objectives, which are defined, documented, communicated and reviewed by volunteers and employees.



## 4. Recruitment and selection

Volunteer recruitment and selection strategies are planned, consistent, and meet the needs of both the organisation and volunteers, with selection based on interest, knowledge, skills or attributes, and that are consistent with anti-discrimination legislation.

## Eight standards address the key areas of volunteer involvement:

Each Standard contains an outline of its intent and scope, and sets out the criteria against which organisations can assess their level of achievement.

This includes details of the types of practices and evidence that an organisation might need to meet the Standards. Explanations, examples and tools are provided in a set of video modules that, complete with detailed reading guides, form part of the implementation resources. A Workbook and full Guide to applying the Standards are also available.



### 5. Support and development

Volunteers understand their roles and gain the knowledge, skills and feedback they need to safely and effectively carry out their duties. This includes having appropriate and consistent orientation, training, supervision and support.



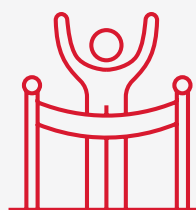
### 6. Workplace safety and wellbeing

The health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers is protected in the workplace through effective relationships, processes, and complaints and grievance procedures.



### 7. Volunteer recognition

The contribution, value and impact of volunteers is understood, appreciated, and acknowledged to enable them to remain engaged.



### 8. Quality management and continuous improvement

Effective volunteer involvement results from a system of good practice, review, and continuous improvement, that builds positive change into the way organisations work day-to-day.

# Using the National Standards

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## Organisations can use the National Standards in a number of ways:

- As a general guide to help them adopt good practices.
- As a tool for an audit of data and processes, that provides a picture of how well their organisation is performing against best practice for volunteer involvement.
- As a guideline or checklist to help identify opportunities to make ongoing improvements.
- As a framework of reference to assist in planning and establishing a new volunteer service.
- As a baseline from which progress in making improvements can be monitored and measured.
- As a way of gaining formal recognition for good practice by meeting the National Standards.

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An organisation that is able to demonstrate compliance with the Standards is well placed strategically to recruit and retain more volunteers. It is also positioned for success in attracting funding or sponsorship for new initiatives.

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Some Standards or criteria may only apply to certain kinds of volunteering situations. Specific requirements for a formal recognition of meeting the standards will depend on a range of factors, such as an organisation's size, resources, complexity, or the types of volunteer involvement it facilitates.



# Which types of organisations can apply the Standards?



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The Standards are designed to be flexible enough to apply to different sizes of organisations with varying levels of resources, in both rural and urban settings, led either by employees or volunteers.

Smaller organisations (for example, groups of volunteers coming together to organise their own activities, or those organisations with no paid employees) may find the Standards useful for guiding some of their work, or for working towards a more formal organisational structure.

But it is not intended that the Standards are met by volunteer groups. They are also not intended to apply to the activities of volunteers themselves.

The Standards are primarily for the use of organisations that include volunteers in their personnel.

## Using the National Standards in your organisation

The **National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, 2015** represent what the national, state and territory volunteering peak bodies regard as best practice in the management of volunteer involvement.

This Module is designed as an introduction to a systematic and user-friendly method for implementing the Standards in your organisation.

It is the first in a set of ten Modules, bookending the eight Standards, comprised of reading guides and videos, that are suitable for any organisation that wants to implement the Standards, or for anyone whose job involves volunteers.



**The Modules can be used in conjunction with the Workbook, which contains comprehensive step-by-step instructions to walk you through the implementation process, and is available from your state or territory volunteering peak body.**

When followed together with the National Standards, these resources will help you determine where you need to make improvements in your system for managing volunteer involvement. Importantly, they will also enable you to identify your strengths – what you are currently doing well.

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By focusing your change management efforts around these steps and plans, you will learn how to better protect the rights of volunteers, add value to their work, and be well on the way to achieving best practice for your organisation.

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# General Principles

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## PARTNERSHIP



This principle requires effective partnerships to be developed between the key people involved in your organisation. Depending on the size and complexity of your organisation, this may include board or management committee members, senior management, managers of volunteers, volunteers, customers of volunteers, and any paid employees. External people or agencies may also be potential partners who can provide valuable guidance or assistance. This means that:

- Communication between the key stakeholders needs to be open and effective.
- There needs to be a general acceptance of the need for change and agreement on the direction of that change.
- Volunteers, customers, employees, and managers are all involved in jointly developing strategies to implement the Standards.

# General Principles

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## EMPOWERMENT



This principle empowers managers or coordinators of volunteers, as well as volunteers themselves. This means that:

- Management's role is to provide leadership and an environment that facilitates innovation and improvement.
- Effective top-down and bottom-up communication are essential requirements where each person within an organisation has their say.
- There is a strong sense of ownership of the Standards, and a commitment to using them to guide the direction of change.

# General Principles

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## GROUP EFFORT



Ideally, the work of assessing current practice against the Standards, identifying areas for improvement, and developing an organisation's policies and procedures for volunteer involvement should not be left to just one person. A self-managing and self-directing team will provide the necessary group effort to manage the project of adopting the Standards. This means that:

- The primary responsibility for implementing the Standards lies with the team.
- The team is assigned sufficient authority to identify and carry out the required tasks.
- The team is adequately resourced to develop and implement strategies that reflect its specific needs and goals.



# Steps to implementing the National Standards

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Volunteer involving organisations come in all different shapes and sizes – from local community groups with only a handful of volunteers, to transnational organisations employing thousands of volunteers worldwide. This diversity necessitates adopting a flexible approach to implementing the Standards.

The Modules, Guide, and Workbook are not meant to be strict and rigid. Rather, they are designed to be adapted to suit the special needs and circumstances of each organisation.

For all steps and tasks for implementation, see the Workbook available from your state or territory volunteering peak body.

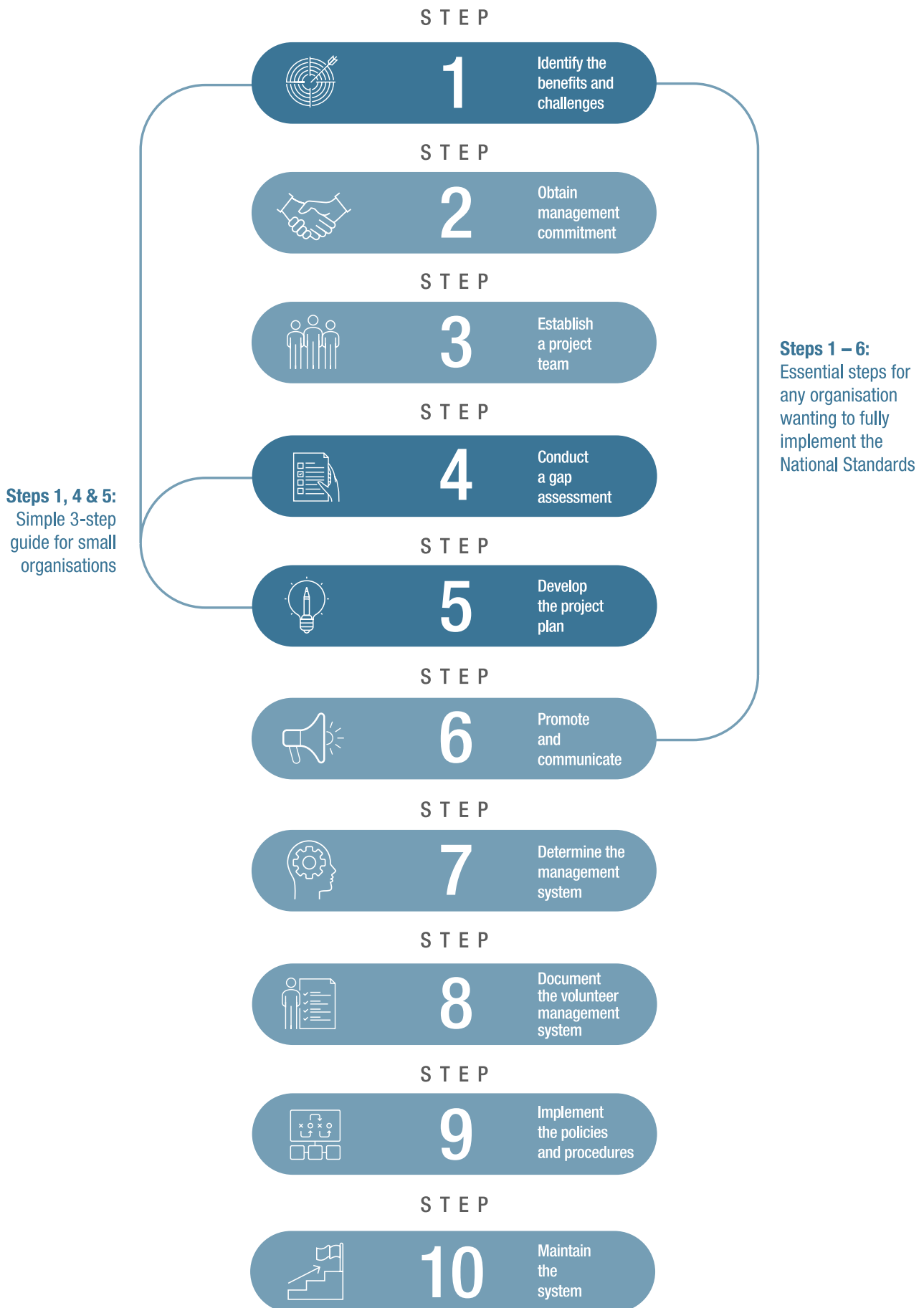
Steps 1 – 6 are essential steps for any organisation wanting to fully implement the National Standards.

Steps 7 – 10 are also important, but whether you include these will depend on your organisation's size and its resources.

Small organisations wanting to use the National Standards as a simple guide to best practice may find it easier to work with one Standard at a time, and to only use Step 1, Step 4 and Step 5.



We recommend following the ten steps outlined below.



# Steps to implementing the National Standards

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## Step 1



### Identify the benefits and challenges

As the lead person in the implementation of the National Standards (particularly if you are a manager or coordinator of volunteers), you will play a key role in getting the project started. Before anything else, you will need to identify and weigh up the likely benefits and challenges of implementing the National Standards in your organisation.

## Step 2



### Obtain management commitment

The lead people in your organisation (such as the management team or senior manager) need to be convinced that implementing the National Standards is worth the effort. Their active support for your endeavour is vital not only at the outset, but throughout the entire implementation process.

## Step 3



### Establish a project team

Ideally, implementation of quality standards should not be left to one person. An empowered and committed team will share the work involved and provide a range of perspectives. If you are leading the implementation of the Standards, one of your challenges will be to engage other people from your organisation, and to assist them to form an effective well-organised team.

## Step 4



### Conduct a gap assessment

This step involves identifying the gap between how volunteer involvement is currently managed in your organisation and how it should be managed, as articulated by the National Standards. This step will identify the areas where improvement needs to be made.

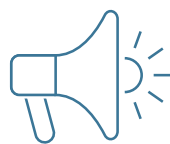
## Step 5



### Develop the project plan

A good plan is crucial to managing the project effectively. To bring the project to a successful conclusion, you will need to consider four planning dimensions: work tasks, time, cost, and responsibility.

## Step 6



### Promote and Communicate

One of the main roles of the project team is to generate an awareness of the project throughout your organisation, and keep people informed of the progress made. It is crucial that this role be done well if the project is to gain the support necessary for the team to achieve its goals.

## Step 7



### Determine the management system

This Step involves the project team in defining the 'ideal' management system to support the policies, processes, and procedures called for in the National Standards. If the gap assessment has concluded that there are no significant gaps between the current practice of the organisation and the National Standards, then Steps 7 and 8 will be more of a review of the existing volunteer management system.

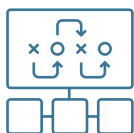
## Step 8



### Document the volunteer management system

This Step is primarily for organisations that do not already have coherent and consistent documentation of their volunteer management system, or who wish to review their documentation in detail. Before starting to review or write new policies, procedures and work forms, allow sufficient time to plan and make choices about what, how and for whom you need to document. This will help the project team focus its thinking on the long term, and make the task of documenting less time consuming.

## Step 9



### Implement the policies and procedures

To successfully implement the management system for volunteer involvement, you will need to get the cooperation from all concerned. Volunteers, their supervisors, and any other personnel involved will all need to understand the reasons for implementing any new system or revisions to an old system, and be convinced of its benefits.

## Step 10



### Maintain the System

Meeting the National Standards is an ongoing process. It doesn't end when you have completed the gap assessment and implemented changes to your system for managing volunteer involvement. Regular checks should be carried out along with continuous incremental improvements.

# What to expect

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The National Standards are not a ruling. Nor are they legislation set in stone; they are a practical set of guidelines that have been developed by consensus out of forged experience and gained knowledge of hardworking individuals for integration and application into your organisation or team.

They have the goal in mind of improving the quality and standards of operation for all volunteer organisations in Australia.

The benefits go both ways.

## Preliminary tips

Although the task of improving the way an organisation operates is worthwhile, there's no escaping the fact that it is also challenging. However, with thoughtful and planned application of the National Standards, using the Modules, Guide and Workbook, there is no reason why your change endeavours will not be rewarding and satisfying.

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Your support for volunteers will give them more opportunities to contribute. Meanwhile, your organisation will be empowered to address the need in our communities... making Australia a better place.

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Here are some useful tips.

- Articulate the need for change and its importance – constantly emphasise the range of benefits you expect from implementing the Standards.
- Recognise that change can be stressful, and that it can sometimes cause conflict – deal with this any time it arises.
- Start by choosing the areas where you can get some quick results – then, use this momentum to tackle the more difficult and complex issues.
- Celebrate your wins. Nothing succeeds like success!
- Avoid 'quick fix' solutions to problems – or even worse, a 'flavour of the month' approach, where you are constantly switching focus. Instead, try to follow the steps through to completion.
- Acknowledge that the process will take time, and allow for this. Rome was not built in a day, and neither are best practice organisations.



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# Ready to learn more?

**Want to continue your learning journey? Click on the resources below to take the next step towards becoming a best practice volunteering organisation.**

**Implementing the National Standards Guide and Workbook**  
Available from your state or territory volunteering peak body

**Module 1 – Introduction to the National Standards for Volunteering**  
Video {Link to video} | Reading Guide {Link to Reading Guide}

**Module 2 – Standard One: Leadership and Management**  
Video {Link to video} | Reading Guide {Link to Reading Guide}

**Module 3 – Standard Two: Commitment to Volunteer Involvement**  
Video {Link to video} | Reading Guide {Link to Reading Guide}

**Module 4 – Standard Three: Volunteer Roles**  
Video {Link to video} | Reading Guide {Link to Reading Guide}

**Module 5 – Standard Four: Recruitment and Selection**  
Video {Link to video} | Reading Guide {Link to Reading Guide}

**Module 6 – Standard Five: Support and Development**  
Video {Link to video} | Reading Guide {Link to Reading Guide}

**Module 7 – Standard Six: Workplace Safety and Wellbeing**  
Video {Link to video} | Reading Guide {Link to Reading Guide}

**Module 8 – Standard Seven: Volunteer Recognition**  
Video {Link to video} | Reading Guide {Link to Reading Guide}

**Module 9 – Standard Eight: Quality Management and Continuous Improvement**  
Video {Link to video} | Reading Guide {Link to Reading Guide}

**Module 10 – Implementing the Standards: Drawing it All Together**  
Video {Link to video} | Reading Guide {Link to Reading Guide}





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*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.*