



The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Module Four

Standard 3: Volunteer Roles



Standard 3: Volunteer Roles

Objective:

To outline Standard 3 Criteria and Evidence, focussing on the impact of strategically defining volunteer roles, how to achieve this, and how to conduct a gap assessment for effective growth.



Standard 3: Volunteer Roles

“Volunteerism is the voice of the people put into action. These actions shape and mould the present into a future of which we can all be proud.” –Helen Dyer

What is Standard 3?

Standards 1 and 2 taught us the power of clarity: the *clearer* your organisation’s commitment to your volunteer program, the *greater* its impact. In these Standards, we clarified where your organisation stands regarding volunteers’ objectives, goals, and purpose.

Building on this clarity, Standard 3 outlines the steps your *volunteers* should take to help your organisation reach its goals. The Criteria and Evidence for Standard 3 help us to define volunteer roles in such a way that they can benefit *all* members of the organisation. By creating fulfilling, focused roles and responsibilities for your volunteers, you can support your organisation’s objectives *and* your volunteers’ reasons for giving back.

The strength of the relationships between the organisation and its volunteer base is the heart of your organisation. By setting clear expectations through well-crafted volunteer roles, you can foster lasting collaborations that can bring about real change for your organisation and its cause.

In short? It defines volunteer roles to create a more meaningful outcome for the organisation and volunteers alike.

Standard 3 Criteria

Volunteering Australia recommends four Criteria for Standard 3. Each of these helps your organisation to measure the strength of your current volunteer roles, and determine how you can improve them:

1. Contributing to the Organisation’s Goals
2. Ensuring Appropriateness
3. Defining, Documenting, and Distributing
4. Reviewing Feedback

Why is Standard 3 So Important?

The success of your organisation is rooted in the deep connections it builds with its dedicated volunteer community. Leaders within these organisations have a profound responsibility to create well-defined volunteer roles that prioritise transparency and empower each volunteer to become an integral part of the mission.

It’s important to recognise that the power of your work is rooted in the collaborative efforts and diverse talents of your volunteer base. These roles should be thoughtfully designed to leverage individuals’ skills and passions, making every volunteer feel valued and essential to the team’s overall success.

You should also clearly and openly communicate with your volunteers to foster and maintain these important relationships. By continuously revisiting and refining volunteer roles, your organisation can remain adaptive and responsive to the evolving needs of your community. This can serve to strengthen the connection between leaders, volunteers, and the people you serve, creating unity as you jointly tackle the challenges ahead.



Criteria 3.1

CONTRIBUTING TO THE ORGANISATION'S GOALS

Volunteer roles should be “designed” to contribute to your organisational goals – the process should be planned, not accidental.

Before you can achieve this, you must clearly understand your organisation’s mission, which is fundamental to connecting your volunteers’ roles to your cause.

Crafting well-defined volunteer roles ensures that volunteers’ contributions are not only tailored to suit their unique skills and passions, but are also aligned with your organisation’s overall purpose.

In the end? You’re left with much more empowering, efficient results.

“Volunteer roles are designed to contribute to the organisation’s purpose, goals and objectives.”

– Volunteering Australia.



Evidence 3.1: Checklist

Let's get started! We'll begin by determining how well your organisation currently meets each Criterion by examining the Evidence provided by Volunteering Australia.

Use the Current Ranking Scale to identify any areas that need improvement:



“Descriptions of volunteer roles indicate how the role contributes to the organisation’s purpose, goals and objectives.”

What volunteer roles does your organisation offer currently? Are there clearly documented descriptions of these roles? If so, how well do they align with your organisation’s overarching mission?

Each volunteer role should be relevant to your organisation’s goals, and each volunteer role description should directly mention *how* and *why* it’s relevant.

Let’s look at an example – here’s what a basic description of what an administrative role might look like *without* indicating how it contributes to the cause:

- *“The Volunteer Office Assistant is responsible for answering phones, emails, and messages for the department. They should assist the department with any day-to-day errands and tasks.”*

Now, let’s say here’s what it might look like when it *does* clarify the contribution:

- *“The Volunteer Office Assistant is responsible for answering phones, emails, and messages to help the department serve its clients. They should assist the department with day-to-day errands and tasks and report to [Staff Member/Title]. This position helps our organisation identify those in need of help, provide more immediate support to our clients, and allocate resources to meet their needs quickly and efficiently.”*

See the difference? Each volunteer role should clarify the greater purpose of the daily tasks.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

(1 = Absent/Needs Improvement > 5 = Fully Implemented/Compliant)

Criteria 3.2

ENSURING APPROPRIATENESS

But what if you can't easily define the "why" behind each task?

This is where Criterion 3.2 comes into play.

How appropriate, relevant, and supported are your volunteer roles? Is each task necessary for the community? Is each one appropriate for the needs of all parties involved?

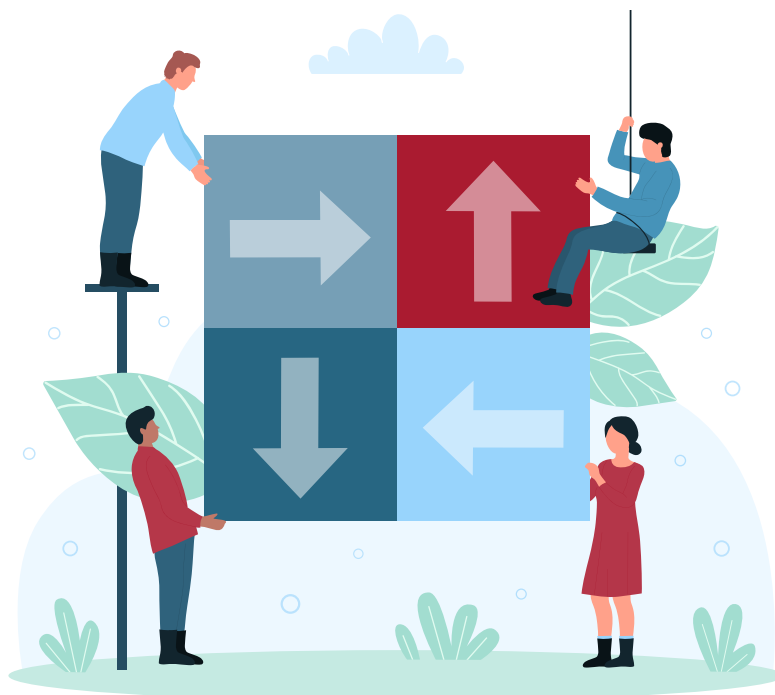
For example, sending a volunteer on "coffee runs" values neither the volunteer's time, nor the organisation's goals. However, assigning a volunteer to manage important, complex tasks without the training, knowledge, and resources won't help, either...

Volunteer roles should be fair, balanced, and diverse. Your volunteer roles should be created to be accessible to a diverse range of interests and abilities, whilst ensuring that they match the human and financial resources you have available to support them.

"Volunteer roles are appropriate for the community, service user, and stakeholder groups with which the organisation works."

— Volunteering Australia.

A clear understanding of the importance of cultivating a dynamic volunteer community is fundamental to implementing this Standard, as it both requires and empowers volunteer managers and leaders to be proactive in building strong, long-lasting relationships with their volunteers. This way, both the organisation *and* the volunteer wins.



Evidence 3.2: Checklist

Let's make it happen! Examine each item of evidence as defined by Volunteering Australia to ensure the appropriateness, relevance, and diversity of each one of your volunteer roles.



“Volunteer roles reflect current developments in volunteering, volunteer availability and ways of involving volunteers.”

You should continually adapt, refine, and improve your volunteer roles to evolve with your organisational, volunteer, and community needs.

Have there been any recent shifts, needs, or standards changing in your industry? Has volunteer availability changed? Are there any new ways you can involve volunteers? Keep your volunteer roles both up-to-date and relevant to both your organisation's needs and your volunteers' abilities.

During COVID-19, there was a major shift to *remote* volunteer work. Irrespective of whether your volunteering is delivered online or in-person, it's now time to consider new ways to make volunteer work universally appropriate and accessible.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

(1 = Absent/Needs Improvement > 5 = Fully Implemented/Compliant)



“Volunteer roles and activities are designed to attract people with relevant attributes, and diverse experiences and interests.”

By skilfully aligning volunteer talents and passions with appropriate, relevant tasks, your organisation can create a fulfilling and meaningful experience for both volunteers and the organisation.

To access the benefits of volunteering, you must make your volunteer roles desirable. The goal should be to attract volunteers with a variety of skills, interests, and knowledge who are passionate about your organisational cause.

There are two crucial ways to accomplish this: *relevance* and *diversity*.

Are your volunteer roles relevant to those who are interested in your cause? Clarifying the contribution you seek in your volunteer role description can not only help to strengthen this connection, but to find volunteers with the appropriate attributes.

Diversity empowers creativity, innovation, and new perspectives. Are your volunteer roles similar or diverse? You can attract diverse talent by creating a variety of roles that are accessible to those across age, gender, education, income, and levels of ability.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

Criteria 3.3

DEFINING, DOCUMENTING, AND DISTRIBUTING

The results of implementing Standard 3 are dependent on how well you *communicate*.

Did you get it in writing? Are your volunteers aware of the objectives, contributions, and value of their roles? As Evidence 3.3 states, we must define, document, and communicate our efforts.

Communication improves accountability and reduces liability.

Distinctive, well-structured roles ensure that each volunteer's unique skill sets, passions, and experiences can be put to the best possible use. When all members are aware of these roles, we can inspire more fulfilled and engaged volunteers while accelerating the organisation's mission.

“Volunteer roles are defined, documented and communicated.”

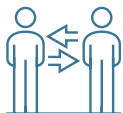
- Volunteering Australia.





Evidence 3.3: Checklist

Let's take action! By exploring each item of Evidence prescribed by Volunteering Australia to assess how well your organisation defines, documents, and communicates its volunteer roles, you can expect the following outcomes:



“The relationship between volunteer and employee roles is defined.”

Your organisation's goals and your volunteer's goals shouldn't be separate. When volunteer roles support your organisation's objectives, their roles may interact and overlap with employee roles.

What is this relationship like? Are volunteers treated as equals to employees? Do employees manage volunteers? Who do the volunteers report to? Are the employees and volunteers both aware of this relationship?

Clearly outline the relationship between volunteer and employee roles in your organisation in role descriptions, training, and any other relevant documents.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

(1 = Absent/Needs Improvement > 5 = Fully Implemented/Compliant)



“Volunteer roles meet the requirements of the Fair Work Act, or subsequent legislation addressing volunteer work.”

The *Fair Work Act 2009* and the *Fair Work Regulations 2009* are the primary legislation employers must follow. It's essential to ensure that you're compliant with these laws. Some organisations have been found guilty of treating volunteers as employees. However, volunteers cannot submit an unfair dismissal claim: they're volunteering due to altruism, not in search of a pay check.

Be sure your volunteer contracts clarify this, and avoid issuing payment to volunteers to avoid breaching this distinction.

Other legislation may apply, depending on your region and industry. For example, if your organisation has both employees and volunteers, the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011* likely applies. Under this Act, volunteers are also considered workers, which means that volunteers have the same protections and duties as employees.

Volunteering Australia recommends that volunteers have the right to a(n):

- Healthy and safe working environment.
- Application and interview processes compliant with equal opportunity and anti-discrimination laws.
- Insurance coverage.
- Relevant and truthful information about your organisation.
- Reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.
- A copy of your volunteer policies.
- Not to fill or otherwise undertake the work of a position previously or currently held by a paid worker.
- Job description and agreed-upon hours.
- Grievance procedures.
- Appropriate orientation and training.
- Confidentiality and privacy under the Privacy Act 1988.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

Evidence 3.3: Checklist



“Volunteer roles have written descriptions that include duties, responsibilities, and accountabilities.”

As we have established, volunteers have the right to a thorough and accurate job description.

Each role should have a written description detailing the volunteer’s duties, responsibilities, and accountabilities. Volunteers should have access to this before and after accepting their role. Be transparent and establish clear expectations to set your volunteers up for success – you should never give them any surprises!

If a volunteer is ever required to perform duties outside of their role description, it should be discussed and agreed upon, as the circumstance arises. If this happens regularly, you should consider updating future job descriptions to include the new tasks and responsibilities.

Accurate descriptions of volunteer roles can attract those with the appropriate passions, skills, and knowledge needed for your volunteers and organisation to succeed.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5



“Current volunteer role descriptions are distributed and readily available to all relevant employees and volunteers of the organisation.”

We’ve defined and documented the volunteer roles... but have we communicated them?

Volunteer role descriptions should be provided to all current operational volunteers and appropriate employees. Knowing what is and isn’t expected of them will not only protect and prepare your volunteers, but it can also prevent employees from asking volunteers to complete tasks that are outside of their remit.

Do you have your volunteers’ role descriptions defined and documented? Have you described and distributed them to your volunteers and employees? Are volunteers and employees aware of any changes or updates to role descriptions? If anyone needed their role description, could you provide it quickly?

Answering these questions will determine how readily available volunteer role descriptions are within your organisation, right now.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

Criteria 3.4

REVIEWING FEEDBACK

Regularly seek feedback across your organisation – it is filled with free insight, data, and solutions! Beyond this, it lets your members know they're valued.

When volunteers can perceive that an organisation genuinely recognises their worth and significance, a deep-rooted motivation and loyalty is cultivated. This can propel their continued participation and involvement. This connection creates a ripple effect: when volunteers feel valued, they are more likely to continue volunteering with your organisation, and to spread positive word-of-mouth, which will attract new recruits. This increased support results in further growth and development for your organisation and its mission.

“Volunteer roles are reviewed with input from volunteers and employees.” – Volunteering Australia.

Combining feedback from the volunteer roles, you can consolidate and amplify the collective strength and capacity of your organisation. This bolstered support system paves the way for your organisation to broaden its reach, expand its endeavours, and surmount challenges.

Your *organisation* will change. Your *volunteers'* needs will change. Your *clients'* needs, challenges, and resources will change. Seeking feedback and adapting to new challenges as an ongoing, consciously iterative process can help to overcome the constraints of limited resources; fuel growth; and maximise your impact.



Evidence 3.4: Checklist

It's time to take action! Review the following Evidence for Criterion 3.4 provided by Volunteering Australia. Examine what your organisation is doing well, and recognise where it can improve:



“Feedback from current and exiting volunteers is sought and used to review the relevance and appropriateness of volunteer roles and activities.”

Do you have a current system for obtaining feedback from both existing and exiting volunteers? If so, how often is this feedback gathered? How is it applied within your volunteer management program? Is there any information you wish you had obtained about your volunteers, but didn't?

Volunteering Australia conducted a recent survey that revealed 2 in 3 volunteers give back to serve the community, even more do so to contribute to a specific cause they believe in and are passionate about.

If you understood the ideas, goals, and challenges motivating your volunteers, you could create a program that better supports their needs and more ably attracts the best volunteers.

Current volunteers can often provide valuable insight, not least about what you're doing well. Exiting volunteers may help you to better understand: how to better retain them; identify why they left; and how they could have been better supported.

Gathering this feedback is only the first step. How do you review and apply it? What systems do you have in place to apply the feedback you receive? Consider scheduling routine processes and meetings to collect and review feedback.

By fostering an environment where volunteers feel appreciated, challenged, and inspired, organisations can cultivate a flourishing community of support, propelling the organisation toward achieving its goals.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

(1 = Absent/Needs Improvement > 5 = Fully Implemented/Compliant)



“The governing body, management and staff contribute to the development and review of volunteer roles.”

While volunteer feedback is crucial, seek the perspectives of all relevant members across leadership and staff.

What employees and managers are affected by volunteer roles? What feedback would be helpful to receive from these members of your organisation?

The governing body, management, and employees should be involved in reviewing and refining volunteer roles to become even more mutually beneficial.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

Assessing Your Volunteer Roles Standards

WHAT'S NEXT?

Take a moment to review your Current Rankings for each Criteria and Evidence Checklist. Note which areas you're strongest in and which areas could be improved. This process will prove helpful as you implement Step 4.

Use this practice to help evaluate your strengths and weaknesses:

- **What is your strongest Standard 3 Criterion?**
- **Which Criterion in your organisation needs the most improvement?**
- **What actions are easiest to implement?**
- **What actions are the most challenging to implement?**

By providing volunteers with clarity around their roles, you can equip them with the confidence they need to succeed in them.







How to Implement Standard 3 to Define Volunteer Roles

How can you get started?

Of the 10 Steps to Implementing the National Standards, Volunteering Australia considers that Step 4 is to “*Conduct a gap assessment.*” This step is crucial for both small and large volunteer-involving organisations alike.

Conducting a gap assessment is quite simple: in fact, it’s all about efficiency, about spotting the difference/s between how your organisation manages its volunteer program vs how it should be managed under the National Standards for Volunteering.

In short? We’re going to identify your organisation’s weaknesses and what you can do to improve them. This will help prioritise your efforts and clarify your next steps in the implementation process: conducting a gap assessment.

Step 4: Conduct a Gap Assessment

» Task 1: Rate Your Current Efforts.

Work with your National Standards implementation team to rate how well your organisation meets each Criterion in the 8 Standards.

You can use the Current Ranking scale found in each Standard Worksheet to guide you. Alternatively, Volunteering Australia provides a National Standards Gap Analysis, which enables you to rank each Criterion as “*Met,*” “*Partially Met,*” or “*Not Met.*” The digital version of this analysis can be found at [this link](#) from the Centre for Volunteering.

Next to each rating, include the following:

- The reason why you gave the Criteria that rating.
- Any Evidence that your organisation currently meets each Criterion.
- The area/s requiring the most improvement.



Members should agree upon the Criteria rating. If not, your organisation's National Standards Leader should make the final decision.

» Task 2: Narrow it Down.

The National Standards are meant to be a general guide, not a precise instruction manual. Certain criteria may be less relevant to your organisation's needs, goals, and structure. You will need to work with your team to eliminate these Criteria to ensure that you have proper Evidence to support the decision.

» Task 3: Create an Action Plan.

You've mapped out the gap... Now, it's time to close it.

Starting with the areas in need of the most improvement, determine what actions your team needs to take in each Criterion to meet the National Standards. Use the National Standards Gap Analysis to list the needed evidence, gaps, and actions. Further instructions to develop this plan are detailed in Step 5: *"Develop the project plan."*

Resources

- **National Standards for Volunteer Involvement - Document**
<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/National-Standards-Document-FINAL-3004.pdf>
- **National Standards for Volunteer Involvement - Supporting Material**
<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material/>
- **Advancing Your Personal Leadership, One Step At A Time**
<https://www.workforgood.org/article/advancing-your-personal-leadership-one-step-at-a-time>
- **Assess and Manage Risk**
<https://business.gov.au/risk-management/risk-assessment-and-planning/assess-and-manage-risk>
- **Peter F. Drucker Quote**
<https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/452830-unless-commitment-is-made-there-are-only-promises-and-hopes>
- **Volunteering in Australia 2022 - The Organisation Perspective**
<https://volunteeringstrategy.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Volunteering-in-Australia-2022-The-Organisation-Perspective.pdf>
- **Commitment to Volunteer Involvement**
<https://volunteeringhub.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2021/02/Commitment%20to%20Volunteer%20Involvement.pdf>



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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.