



The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Module Seven

Standard 6: Workplace Safety and Well-being

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Objective:

To define Standard 6 Criteria and Evidence, the legal and moral importance of workplace safety and well-being, how to protect your volunteers, and create a management system that supports these policies.





Standard 6: Workplace Safety and Well-being

“It takes leadership to improve safety”
– Jackie Stewart.

What is Standard 6?

Safety first!

As a manager of a volunteer-involving organisation, it's important that you prioritise the health, safety, and well-being of your volunteers. While it's easy to overlook the safety of volunteers, it's crucial to uphold safety regulations and procedures, just as you would for paid staff.

Standard 6 provides comprehensive guidance to measure, develop, and implement health and safety policies, procedures, and processes. The first step to ensuring safety is integrating volunteers into workplace safety practices. Volunteers should receive safety training and resources that are relevant to the tasks they will be performing.

Effective practices and policies should be put in place to ensure volunteers' health and safety whilst carrying out their duties. These practices include:

- The physical environment,
- Equipment used,
- Processes and procedures,
- Communication, and the
- Culture of the organisation.

This means having a system in place that identifies, mitigates, and responds to potential risks.

Volunteers should also be able to communicate with staff if they have any questions, concerns, or emergencies. Their grievances should be taken seriously, and resolutions should be fair to all involved parties.

In short? Standard 6 protects volunteers' physical and mental health, well-being, and safety through effective procedures.

Standard 6 Criteria

Volunteering Australia prescribes three Criteria to set clear expectations for volunteers' workplace safety and well-being. These are:

1. Effective Working Relationships
2. Health and Safety Processes
3. Complaints and Grievances

Why is Standard 6 So Important?

You have the moral obligation and legal duty to care for your volunteers, which means you are responsible for their safety and well-being while they are involved in your organisation. This responsibility includes:

- Providing a safe working environment,
- Safe equipment and tools, and
- Training them to safely perform the tasks assigned to them.

By meeting these standards, your organisation will demonstrate its commitment to the health and safety of its volunteers. This will help to manage potential risks whilst fostering a culture of support and responsiveness, and this, in turn, will lead to increased volunteer engagement and retention, as well as to improved productivity and overall satisfaction.

With these principles in mind, you should develop a comprehensive safety plan that ensures your volunteers' health, safety, and well-being. You will thereby create a safer and more inclusive environment for the volunteers who generously give their time and energy to your organisation.

Research shows us that volunteers are 66% more likely to donate to an organisation they volunteer for. If you advocate for their success, they'll advocate for yours.



Criteria 6.1

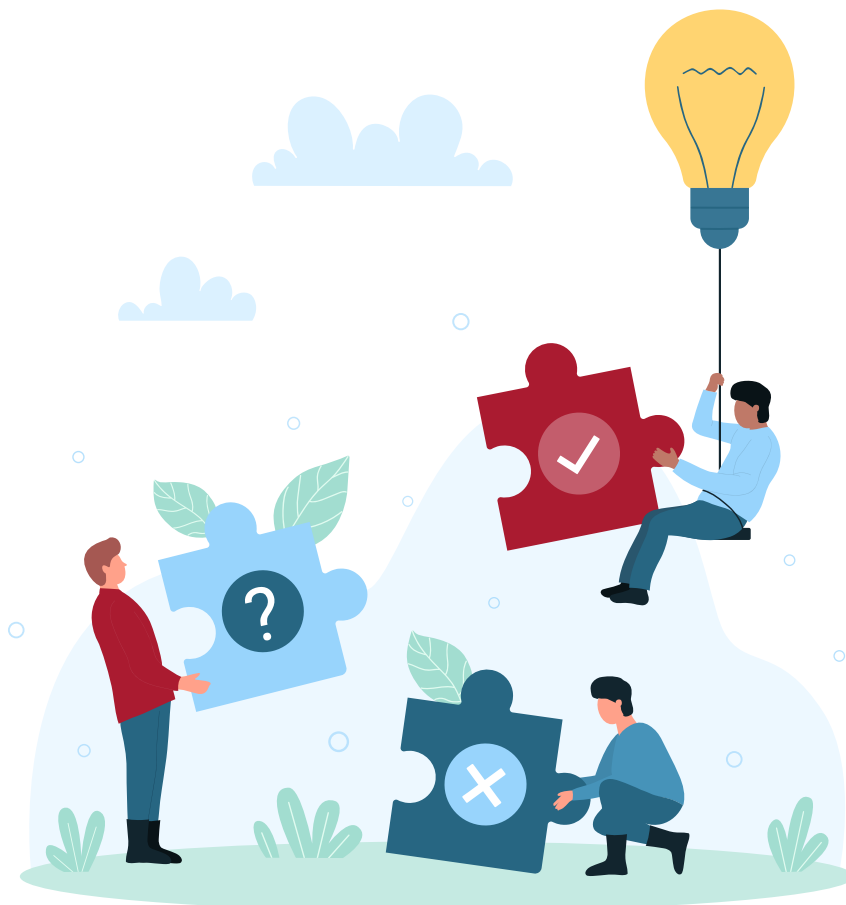
EFFECTIVE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS

Communication is the key to avoiding and solving conflict. Effective working relationships between employees and volunteers are essential to the success of volunteer-involved organisations. A well-functioning organisation will have structured processes in place to facilitate communication between staff and volunteers.

One of the most critical ways to generate effective communication is to establish regular touchpoints between staff and volunteers. When volunteers feel valued and heard, they become more engaged, and are more likely to become long-term supporters of your organisation. Structured processes will also help volunteers feel confident in their roles and understand who they should turn to for support and guidance.

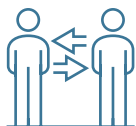
“Effective working relationships with employees, and between volunteers, are facilitated by the organisation” – Volunteering Australia.

Providing opportunities for volunteers to meet collectively will help to create a sense of community among them. This will, in turn, foster a supportive environment for everyone. It's therefore important to encourage collaboration and knowledge sharing, which will enable volunteers to learn from each other's experiences.



Evidence 6.1: Checklist

Let's begin! Evaluate how your organisation facilitates working relationships between employees and volunteers by using the Criteria provided by Volunteering Australia. Rank your current efforts on a scale from 1 to 5 to identify key points of action:



“Structured processes are in place for relevant staff to communicate and/or meet with volunteers.”

Do your volunteers have opportunities to meet or communicate with staff members? If so, are there established procedures in place to facilitate these interactions? Do these interactions support volunteers' and employees' success, health, and safety?

Effective communication and relationship-building between staff and volunteers creates vibrant and successful organisations. Bridging relationships between staff and volunteers can improve organisational outcomes by increasing engagement, loyalty, and productivity.

If you want to ensure that your volunteers feel valued and motivated, then you should commit to establishing structured communication channels and support systems that meet their needs. You'll thereby build a culture of respect, trust, and teamwork that will benefit everyone.

Regular in-person and/or virtual meetings will not only ensure that everyone is on the same page, but also enable boundaries and expectations to be clearly communicated.

Volunteers should always have a clear point of contact to reach out to, should they have questions or concerns.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

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



“Where requested, volunteers are provided with opportunities and resources to meet collectively regarding their work with the organisation.”

Do volunteers have opportunities to meet (with each other and with your staff) to discuss their work? Are there resources available to them? If they need help, can they easily receive access to these opportunities and resources?

When volunteers are confident in their roles, they are better able to follow your guidelines and ensure their own safety and well-being. When volunteers are equipped with the resources and information they need to succeed, they can more effectively contribute to the organisation's mission.

Be proactive! Provide these resources to your volunteers before they reach out. Consider sending volunteers regular newsletters, updating your online materials, hosting meetings, and creating toolkits and checklists for guidelines on how to succeed in their roles safely and effectively.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

Criteria 6.2

HEALTH & SAFETY PROCESSES

In 2020-2021, Safe Work Australia reported the following top five serious incident claims:

1. Body stressing.
2. Falls, trips, and slips of a person.
3. Being hit by moving objects.
4. Mental stress.
5. Hitting objects with a part of the body.

In total, there were 130,195 serious claims filed in Australia that year. Each of these health and safety incidents affected the workers' physical and mental health. Paid workers are often familiar with, and trained to identify and avoid, safety risks in their work environments. Volunteers may be less aware of, and/or not trained to identify, such risks. Volunteers generously provide their time and skills to support your cause, and they do so voluntarily: you must ensure that your organisation does not put them in harm's way without proper protection.

To ensure the safety of your volunteers, processes should be in place to identify potential hazards and minimise or eliminate risks. This includes:

“Processes are in place to protect the health and safety of volunteers in their capacity as volunteers.”
– Volunteering Australia.

- Reviewing the environment in which they work, whether it's an office, construction site, or healthcare facility, and
- Identifying any danger areas or equipment that may need to be secured or marked for caution.

It is important to provide your volunteers with proper training to mitigate risks and minimise potential injuries.

Prioritising the health and safety of your volunteers, providing them with proper training and resources, and managing their workload, will create a safe and rewarding environment for them.





Evidence 6.2: Checklist

Let's take action! Use the following checklist of Evidence Criterion provided by Volunteering Australia to assess the strength of your current health and safety policies, and learn how you might improve them:



“Health and safety management policies and procedures include volunteers.”

Does your organisation have structured, documented health and safety management policies? Do these policies include your volunteers? If so, are the unique volunteer roles and their associated risks taken into account, or are the procedures generalised?

Volunteers should be given the same level of care and support as employees and contractors, including being provided with information about potential hazards, risk assessments, and any necessary equipment or protective gear. Even though volunteers might not work as often as paid employees, they may be victims of unique risks, based on their roles, responsibilities, and backgrounds.

Ensure that you conduct proper risk management for volunteers, and include processes for identifying, mitigating, and resolving risks in your policies.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

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



“Volunteers are insured for personal injury and liability.”

Are your volunteers insured for personal injury and liability? If so, are they aware of their coverage?

Volunteering Australia insists that insurance coverage is a fundamental right of all volunteers. However, recent surveys reveal that almost 1 in 4 volunteer-involving organisations don't provide insurance to their volunteers.

Insurance protects both your volunteers and your organisation from potential legal or financial repercussions should an accident occur. It is important to ensure that volunteers' insurance covers both personal injury and liability.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

Evidence 6.2: Checklist



“Volunteers have access to the same post-incident debriefing and support provided to employees.”

Are your volunteers provided support and debriefing after incidents? If so, is this process the same for paid workers?

Volunteers may experience trauma or stress from an incident, just as an employee would. It's important to equally acknowledge and support their experiences. Standardise your post-incident procedures for volunteers and employees.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

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



“Expectations and limits of volunteer roles, including time commitments and any designated hours, are agreed with volunteers, and individual workloads of volunteers are monitored and managed.”

Do your volunteers have realistic expectations of their roles, responsibilities, and performance? Are there limits in place to avoid unnecessary stress, harm, or risk? Are these expectations and limits continually monitored and managed?

Volunteers can experience burnout, just like employees! Many workplace incidents are the result of overworked and overwhelmed workers. Communicating realistic expectations and limits to your volunteers can reduce pressure and prevent them from attempting tasks they're underqualified or underprepared to complete.

Volunteers should be informed of the required time commitment and designated hours that they are expected to work. Individual workloads of volunteers should also be monitored and managed, to ensure that they are not overwhelmed or overworked.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

Criteria 6.3

COMPLAINTS & GRIEVANCE

When working with volunteers, it's easy to focus on the positive. After all, you don't want to scare them away by talking about risks, complaints, and grievance procedures... Right?

Wrong!

You need to ensure that your volunteers are happy and committed to your organisation's cause. One way to achieve this is by providing a collegial environment that offers transparency and fairness through clear access to complaints and grievance procedures.

It's vital that your volunteers are aware of the procedures for raising any concerns or complaints. By doing so, you're giving them assurance that their voices will be heard, and that any issues they have will be addressed.

"Volunteers have access to complaints and grievance procedures."

- Volunteering Australia.

Volunteers are not resources to be used: rather, they are individuals who have their own needs and concerns. By establishing clear and fair procedures for complaints and grievances, you will empower a more committed, productive, and satisfied volunteer team!





Evidence 6.3: Checklist

Ready to get started? Great! Reflect on your current complaints and grievance procedures as you review and rank your efforts, based on the Criteria Evidence provided by Volunteering Australia:



“Volunteers are given information about how to make a complaint or raise a concern, both within the organisation and to relevant external bodies.”

Do you have structured procedures for volunteers to make a complaint or share a concern within your organisation? If so, are volunteers aware of these procedures? Are they encouraged to speak up when there's an issue?

Volunteer concerns shouldn't be swept under the carpet. Clear communication is the key to identifying, mitigating, and resolving risks. Ensure that your organisation's volunteers know how, when, and where to file a complaint. By being transparent about these processes, you can proactively manage organisational risk whilst creating a culture of open communication and trust.

It is especially important that volunteers and employees report notable incidents. Under Work Health and Safety (WHS) laws, these include:

- *Death.*
- *Serious illness or injury:* Incidents requiring medical treatment within 48 hours of risk exposure and/or that prevent the volunteer from working for at least 10 days.
- *Dangerous incidents:* These are “near miss” accidents where serious injury, illness, or death almost occurred (for example, the spillage of harmful substances, electric shock, criminal threats, falling of nearby objects, etc).
- *Mental health:* Discrimination, bullying, and harassment should be treated with similar levels of prevention.

Clear and well-defined procedures outline the steps to take when a volunteer raises a concern or makes a complaint. Managers should ensure that all volunteers receive training on these procedures.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

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

Evidence 6.3: Checklist



“Grievances from volunteers are managed consistently, transparently, equitably and in line with principles of natural justice.”

How does your organisation manage volunteer complaints and grievances? Are your processes standardised, or do they vary from case to case? Do they prioritise the well-being and safety concerns of volunteers? Are resolutions fair and transparent?

Your grievance-handling processes should be consistent to avoid unfairness, discrimination, and inequality. This means ensuring that a proper investigation is conducted to establish the facts of the situation. All parties involved should be notified of the outcome of the investigation, and any action taken should be communicated transparently.

Resolutions should be:

- Agreed upon,
- Satisfactory to all parties, and
- In line with WHS regulations.

Consider getting agreement/s in writing. Provide volunteers with information on the relevant external bodies where they can report concerns, so that they can seek support from independent sources. This ensures an unbiased approach to addressing grievances.

It's worth noting that when your volunteers are compliant with your health and safety policies, they cannot be punished under the WHS Act.

Current Ranking: 1 2 3 4 5

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Assessing Your Workplace Safety and Well-being Standards:

WHAT'S NEXT?


Take a moment to review your organisation's Current Rankings of each Criterion and the Evidence Checklist. This practice will identify strengths and weaknesses, so that you can prioritise project efforts accordingly. Areas that have low scores should be taken seriously, in order to protect the health, safety, and well-being of your volunteers.

Use this practice to evaluate your organisational strengths and weaknesses:

- What is your strongest Standard 6 Criterion?
- Which Criterion does your organisation need to improve the most?
- What actions are the easiest to implement?
- What actions are the most challenging to implement?







How to Implement Standard 6 to Increase Workplace Safety and Well-being

What's next?

It takes leadership to improve safety. Step 7 of Volunteering Australia's 10 Steps to Implementing the National Standards builds on this idea, strengthening management support and organisation.

Step 7 is to "Determine the management system." Steps 1 – 6 are essential for implementing the National Standards, especially for large organisations. If you're working with a smaller team and/or budget, you may find that Steps 1, 4, and 5 are the most relevant. Depending on your organisation's size and resources, you may find Steps 7 – 10 helpful for implementation.

Step 7 involves the project team in defining the processes, policies, and procedures that support the organisation's goals regarding the implementation of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement.

Should your gap assessment find several discrepancies between your current practices and compliance with the National Standards, Steps 7 and 8 will enable you to review and finalise adjustments to your current system. However, if significant gaps are identified, your project team will need to develop a plan to address these gaps, and to implement the necessary changes to align the volunteer management system with the National Standards.

Once the ideal management system is established, your organisation must ensure that it is effectively communicating this system to your volunteers. These communications should include:

- Details about the roles and responsibilities of volunteers,
- The organisation's expectations of volunteers, and
- The support and training available to volunteers.

By doing this, volunteer-involving organisations ensure that they provide the best possible support to their volunteers, whilst also achieving their strategic and management goals.



Step 7: Determine the Management System

Task 1: Create an Organisation Chart.

Identify the relationships between the different departments, roles, and functions of your organisation and its volunteers.

Create an organisation chart to visualise these connections. Assign appropriate points of contact for effective employee-volunteer communication, reporting, and management.

Task 2: Review Written Job Descriptions.

Review your written job descriptions for each volunteer role. Ensure these include the points of contact, clearly defining which member the volunteers will report to. This process should be consistent and relevant across roles.

Task 3: Identify Core Processes.

Meet with your project team to discuss the “core processes” of the volunteer management system:

- Brainstorm with your team to visualise your ideal management system.
- Use the National Standards to help guide you.
- Break this system into core processes.
- Map out how these processes connect and support the overall system.

Task 4: Identify Key Tasks.

Break down your core processes into key tasks.

For example, one of your core processes might be to “provide ongoing training to volunteers.” What needs to happen to accomplish this? Create bullet points, a flow chart, or another method to map out each process’s tasks.

From here, you can create task checklists and assign responsibilities effectively.

Resources

- **National Standards for Volunteer Involvement - Document**
<https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/National-Standards-Document-FINAL-3004.pdf>
- **Implementing the National Standards - Guide And Workbook**
<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/implementing-the-national-standards/>
- **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.vic.gov.au/business-information/protect-your-business/risk-management/prepare-a-risk-management-plan>
- **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>
- **Volunteer Hub - Quotes That Have The Power To Inspire Volunteers**
<https://www.volunteerhub.com/blog/quotes-inspire-volunteers/>
- **Sample Volunteer Job Description**
<https://www.iwu.edu/action/officeassistantvolunteer.pdf>
- **Fair Work Legislation**
<https://www.fairwork.gov.au/about-us/legislation>
- **Volunteer Rights & Volunteer Checklist**
https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/files_mf/1376971192VAVolunteerRightsandchecklist.pdf
- **When is a Volunteer not a Volunteer?**
<https://mcdonaldmurholme.com.au/when-is-a-volunteer-not-a-volunteer/>
- **Australia: Volunteer workplace rights and obligations**
<https://www.mondaq.com/australia/employee-rights-labour-relations/1291688/volunteer-workplace-rights-and-obligations>
- **Volunteer Workplace Rights And Obligations**
<https://www.volunteerhub.com/blog/40-volunteer-statistics/>

Resources

- **Inspirational Quotes for Recruiters**

<https://hireforhope.com/inspirational-quotes-for-recruiters/>

- **National Standards for Volunteer Involvement gap analysis**

<https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/nationalstandardsvolunteering>

- **19 Volunteering Statistics Your Nonprofit Team Should Study**

<https://blog.goldenvolunteer.com/volunteering-statistics/>

- **Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission**

<https://www.humanrights.vic.gov.au/for-individuals/volunteering/>

- **Volunteer Matching: Finding the Right Role for Every Volunteer**

<https://tobijohnson.com/volunteer-matching-finding-right-role/>

- **Background Screening For Volunteers**

<https://www.volunteeringwa.org.au/assets/factsheets/background-screening-for-volunteers-may-2021.pdf>

- **21 Inspirational Employee Engagement Quotes from Business Leaders**

<https://blog.kainexus.com/employee-engagement/inspirational-quotes>

- **Employee Training Statistics: Cost of Progress in 2023**

<https://teamstage.io/training-statistics/>

- **Majority of workers who quit a job in 2021**

<https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2022/03/09/majority-of-workers-who-quit-a-job-in-2021-cite-low-pay-no-opportunities-for-advancement-feeling-disrespected/>

- **Best Workplace Safety Quotes From Inspirational Figures**

<https://blog.vantagecircle.com/workplace-safety-quotes/>

- **WHS duties for volunteer organisations**

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/safety-topic/managing-health-and-safety/volunteers/whs-duties>

- **The Essential Guide to Work Health and Safety for Volunteers**

https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/system/files/documents/1703/volunteers_guide.pdf

- **Work health and safety for volunteer organisations**

https://www.dmirs.wa.gov.au/sites/default/files/atoms/files/211103_gl_whsvolunteer.pdf

- **Key work health and safety statistics Australia 2022**

<https://www.safeworkaustralia.gov.au/doc/key-work-health-and-safety-statistics-australia-2022>



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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.