The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Standard 7: Volunteer Recognition

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Objective:

To understand Standard 7 Criteria and Evidence, the value and impact of volunteer contribution, how to develop volunteer recognition processes, and document the volunteer management system.

Standard 7: Volunteer Recognition

"Recognition is not a scarce resource. You can't use it up or run out of it." – Susan M. Heathfield.

What is Standard 7?

Volunteers are the backbone of volunteer-involving organisations. Their contribution is crucial to achieving your organisation's vision and mission.

But do your volunteers know this? What practices and systems does your organisation have in place to ensure that your volunteers feel recognised, appreciated, and valued?

Standard 7 encourages organisations to acknowledge volunteers and understand how they benefit their mission. Your volunteers' impact is not limited to the tasks they undertake: their impact extends to your organisation's reputation, ability to innovate and stay current, and capacity to create positive change in the community.

Ensuring that your organisation acknowledges the importance of your volunteers' contributions is key. Volunteer recognition validates your volunteers' hard work and effort, and motivates them to stay engaged and committed to your cause. Your organisation can honour your volunteers' work through regular recognition activities, events, and practices. When planning recognition efforts, take each volunteer's cultural values and perspectives into account, and create practices that are appropriate, relevant, and respectful.

By implementing Standard 7's Criteria and Evidence, your organisation can improve the way it celebrates volunteers' achievements and show gratitude for their services.

In short, Standard 7 ensures that your organisation understands, appreciates, and acknowledges the efforts of its volunteers.

Standard 7 Criteria

According to Volunteering Australia, four Criteria help us to better recognise and appreciate volunteer work. These are:

1. Organisation Understands Volunteer Value.
2. Volunteers Recognise Their Value.
3. Regular Volunteer Recognition, and
4. Appropriate & Respectful Recognition.

Why is Standard 7 So Important?

In the end, it's all about relationships. We can make a tangible and lasting difference through our daily interactions, continued connections, and personal impacts. Standard 7 reminds us to take a step back and recognise the passion, strength, and care our volunteers have to offer. This recognition anchors our relationships with leaders, employees, volunteers, and the community.

By meeting this Standard, your organisation will develop and maintain meaningful, long-lasting relationships with its volunteers, who will feel appreciated, valued, and respected, encouraging them to remain active contributors to your organisation. Engaged volunteers are more likely to provide feedback, to help identify areas of improvement, and to appreciate how their work benefits the organisation.

Volunteer recognition and impact assessments should be fundamental components of volunteer-involving organisations' strategy. Volunteers contribute immeasurably to the growth and success of your organisation. In return, you should ensure that your volunteers feel valued. By keeping these principles in mind, you can intentionally foster a culture of engagement, recognition, and contribution that will benefit both your volunteers and organisation.

Criteria 7.1

ORGANISATION UNDERSTANDS VOLUNTEER VALUE

First and foremost, your organisation must recognise the invaluable contribution of its volunteers. Volunteers impact everything your organisation does, from enhancing your services, to improving the community's overall well-being.

Make sure everyone in your organisation, from the top down, is aware of the benefits of involving volunteers in your work. You can improve the quality and range of your services, foster a sense of community connectedness, and transform your organisation, simply by understanding and recognising the power of your volunteers in everything you do.

"The governing body and employees understand how volunteers benefit the organisation, service users, and the community." – Volunteering Australia.

Don't just talk about it, though — actively do something about it! Everyone, from your governing body and senior employees, to your new members and volunteers, should take part when evaluating the impact of your volunteers. This will enable you to keep refining and improving your volunteer program so that everyone in your organisation can continue to grow and thrive whilst contributing to your mission.

Evidence 7.1: Checklist

Ready to get started? Evaluate how well your governing body and employees understand the benefits of volunteers using Criteria provided by Volunteering Australia. Rank your current efforts on a scale from 1 to 5 to identify your next steps forward:

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

"People at all levels of the organisation are informed of, and can articulate, the organisation's reasons and benefits for involving volunteers."

Do you currently have training and meetings to discuss the reasons for, and benefits of, your volunteer program? Do these conversations happen across teams and levels within your organisation? If asked, could each member of your organisation confidently and clearly explain why you work with volunteers?

Company culture is top-down: when leadership understands and recognises a core value, that value makes its way down to all team members. As a volunteer-involving organisation, volunteers affect every team and department.

As leaders, begin by informing and understanding the volunteer program. Then, you can develop and refine training that recognises the impact of your volunteers. Continually reiterate this message in your meetings and conversations, to confirm the importance of your volunteers, both in your organisation and in the community they serve.

Current Ranking: 1   2   3   4   5

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

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"The governing body, employees and volunteers are involved in the evaluation of volunteer involvement."

Is your governing body involved in evaluating volunteer involvement? How are your employees involved in this process? How are your volunteers involved in this process?

Everyone in your organisation, from the top down, should be invested in your volunteer program. An organised feedback system and regular volunteer-focused meetings will ensure that you gain perspectives from all stakeholders. Evaluating volunteer involvement can help you to better recognise, support, and grow it.

Consider several factors when assessing the impact of your volunteers' contribution to your organisation:

- Results of volunteer work: What tasks did the volunteers perform? What tangible outcomes did they produce?

- Organisation value: Did the volunteers' work contribute to achieving the organisation's goals?

- Cultural and inspirational impact: Did the volunteers bring new ideas, suggestions, or approaches that helped the organisation to grow and develop? Did they contribute to the culture and morale of your organisation?

Current Ranking: 1   2   3   4   5

Criteria 7.2

VOLUNTEERS RECOGNISE THEIR VALUE

Volunteers contribute time and skills to your organisation. Moreover, they add immense value to your cause, and to the community as a whole.

• The first step to recognising volunteers is ensuring that your organisation understands the benefits that result from their efforts.

• The second step is to ensure that your volunteers know how their contributions benefit both the organisation and community. This self-acknowledgement will increase their motivation and morale, and help them to see the bigger picture of their efforts.

By clearly communicating your organisation's rationale for involving volunteers, and the resulting benefits, you give your volunteers a greater sense of purpose and significance.

"Volunteers are informed about how their contributions benefit the organisation, service users and the community." – Volunteering Australia.

It's equally important to provide volunteers with feedback on the impact and value of their contribution. This can be done through meaningful conversations, recognition events, regular reviews, or even simple thank-you emails. Showing your volunteers that they are truly making a difference can go a long way to keeping them engaged and committed to your cause.

Remember: Engaged and committed volunteers can make all the difference in driving your organisation towards success.

Evidence 7.2: Checklist

Let's take action! Use the following checklist, with Evidence Criterion provided by Volunteering Australia, to review and improve your current efforts to help your volunteers to recognise their value:

"Volunteers are informed of the organisation's reasons and benefits for involving volunteers"

Are your volunteers aware of the specific reasons for, and benefits of, their efforts? If asked, could they explain how their unique role contributes to the organisation's mission? How do you inform them of this?

Organisations should never assume that volunteers understand the value of their role and efforts. In accordance with all eight National Standards, your organisation should plan and design volunteer roles to directly contribute to its mission. These roles should be clearly defined and communicated, showing how they fit in the organisation's bigger picture. The purpose and impact of each role should be communicated, during orientation and continually thereafter, to keep the volunteer motivated.

Volunteers should never feel as if they are underappreciated outsiders – they should feel recognised, included, and valued for their work.

Current Ranking: 1   2   3   4   5

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

"Volunteers are provided with feedback on the impact and value of their contribution to the organisation and its work."

Are your volunteers given regular feedback on their work? Do you share the impact and value of their specific efforts? Do you keep them updated on milestones and achievements within the organisation?

As humans, we're motivated by seeing the results of our labour. When we can't see these results, it's easy to give up — our work seems useless! Don't let your volunteers feel this way. Make an effort to let them know the impact of their efforts, no matter how small. Create systems to provide regular positive feedback on how their work or the team's work is impacting your organisation, community, and clients.

Current Ranking: 1   2   3   4   5

Criteria 7.3
REGULAR VOLUNTEER RECOGNITION

Your leaders and employees know the value of volunteers. Your volunteers know the impact of their contributions... Now, how can you regularly and formally recognise this?

Standard 7 encourages us to prioritise regularly acknowledging and highlighting the amazing contributions of volunteers. Carefully plan and schedule activities that are specifically designed to recognise the value and impact your volunteers bring to the table, both individually and as a group.

Volunteer recognition is essential for creating a mutually beneficial relationship between volunteers and organisations. Often, volunteer work acts as a stepping stone for volunteers' goals, leading them to future opportunities. Support these goals! When appropriate, provide relevant references and statements of service to volunteers, so they can fully appreciate how much they truly mean to you.

"The organisation regularly acknowledges contributions made by volunteers and the positive impact on the organisation, service users, and the community."

- Volunteering Australia.

Of course, acknowledging your volunteers' outstanding work and dedication isn't just something you leave to chance. Your governing body and management team should actively participate in volunteer recognition. Whether through one-on-one conversations or group events, commit to demonstrating how much you appreciate your volunteers.

Evidence 7.3: Checklist

Let's make it happen! Using the Evidence checklist provided by Volunteering Australia to measure your organisation's current practices for regular volunteer recognition:

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"The organisation plans and schedules activities to acknowledge the contribution, value, and impact of volunteers at individual and group levels."

Do you plan activities to recognise your volunteers? How often do you schedule these activities? Do you take the time to recognise the impact of your volunteers' efforts at these activities? Do you recognise them as both teams and individuals?

Now, you don't need to hold formal galas and parties every month for volunteers. But you do need to plan and schedule simple yet meaningful ways to acknowledge the contributions of your volunteers.

Plan it out. Perhaps you recognise individual volunteers on a monthly basis through a meeting or thank-you letter. You might recognise team efforts quarterly, planning an activity to review and recognise their efforts. Of course, you might host an end-of-year event to recognise volunteers — even those who no longer work with you consistently. Find ways to regularly plan and schedule formal recognition activities for your volunteers, in whichever way works best for your organisation.

Current Ranking: 1   2   3   4   5

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

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"References and statements of service are provided to volunteers as appropriate."

Do you provide references or statements of services for your volunteers if or when they need them? Are they aware that they can ask you for this support?

When appropriate, volunteer managers should offer references and statements of services to volunteers. Let your volunteers know they can ask for these documents and verifications. Support their goals, and they'll support yours!

Current Ranking: 1   2   3   4   5

Evidence 7.3: Checklist

"The governing body and management take an active role in volunteer acknowledgement."

Is your governing body and management team involved in volunteer recognition? If so, to what extent are they involved?

Set the tone from the top. Ensure leadership is involved in volunteer recognition by:

- Inviting them to attend volunteer recognition activities and events.
- Encouraging them to recognise major volunteer milestones.
- Including their names in recognition letters.
- Involving them in volunteer feedback, reviews, and evaluations.
- Acknowledging volunteer work during leadership meetings.

Current Ranking: 1   2   3   4   5

Criteria 7.4

APPROPRIATE & RESPECTFUL RECOGNITION

"**Volunteer acknowledgement is appropriate to the volunteer role, and respectful of cultural values and perspectives.**"
– Volunteering Australia.

Volunteer acknowledgement should be strategic. Recognising your volunteers' efforts is only effective if it is done appropriately and respectfully. This not only demonstrates appreciation for your volunteers' hard work, but also holds space for their needs, goals, and values.

Consult your volunteers on how they want to be recognised. Provide recognition in a variety of formats to meet their needs and remind them of their value. Last – but not least – ensure this recognition respects their cultural and personal perspectives.

Volunteer acknowledgement is a key aspect of our volunteer management strategy. By prioritising consultation, offering diverse acknowledgement formats, and aligning our activities with volunteer perspectives and cultures, we can ensure that our volunteers feel valued, appreciated, and motivated to continue giving their time and energy to our cause.

Let's take action! Ensure your volunteer recognition efforts are appropriate and respectful by examining the Evidence provided by Volunteering Australia:

"Volunteers are consulted on appropriate acknowledgement."

Do you consult volunteers before recognising their efforts? Do you seek to understand what level of recognition they need and are comfortable with?

Always consult with your volunteers before taking action, to ensure your volunteer acknowledgement is appropriate. What's appropriate to you might not be the same for them. Seek to get on the same page. By taking the time to understand their preferences and perspectives, you can be better equipped to offer acknowledgement that truly resonates with them.

Current Ranking: 1   2   3   4   5

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

"Volunteer acknowledgement is provided in a variety of formats appropriate to the volunteer role and volunteer."

Do you provide volunteer recognition in a variety of formats? Are these formats relevant to the volunteer role? Are they respectful and appropriate for the volunteer?

It's crucial to offer a variety of acknowledgement formats tailored to each volunteer's unique needs and roles. For example, the acknowledgement we provide to a regular volunteer may look quite different from that of a one-time event volunteer. Whether this is through verbal recognition, certificates of appreciation, or other forms of acknowledgement, strive to be inclusive and accommodating. Aim to personalise acknowledgement while taking fairness and consistency into account.

Current Ranking: 1   2   3   4   5

"Activities that acknowledge volunteers align with the volunteer's culture and perspectives."

Do you ensure your volunteer recognition activities respect the volunteer's unique culture and perspectives? How do you take this into account?

Invest in taking the time to understand the unique cultural background of your volunteers. Be mindful of their perspectives, beliefs, and cultural nuances. Some cultures may find a certain form of recognition positive, while others might find it offensive.

Seek to understand their perspectives. Don't assume their preferences based on race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, or cultural background. Ask first, then take action. Eliminate stereotypes by creating clear lines of communication between volunteers and their managers.

Acknowledge volunteers from diverse cultures in ways that align with their beliefs and values, ensuring that everyone feels valued and respected.

Current Ranking: 1   2   3   4   5

Assessing Your Volunteer Recognition Standards

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WHAT'S NEXT?

Review the Current Rankings of each Criteria and Evidence Checklist. Evaluate which Criteria you're proficient in, and which areas need improvement. This practice can help you plan your next steps forward.

Use this practice to help evaluate your strengths and weaknesses:

- **What is your strongest Standard 7 Criterion?**

- **Which Criterion does your organisation need 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 7 to Strengthen Volunteer Recognition

What's next?

Once you evaluate your strengths and weaknesses, you can identify where to prioritise your efforts moving forward.

Having a clear, organised volunteer management system can help you in the process of strengthening volunteer recognition. Step 8 of Volunteering Australia's 10 Steps to Implementing the National Standards can refine this process.

Step 8 is to *"Document the volunteer management system."* This is an optional step for organisations looking to implement the National Standards. However, it will be helpful if your organisation doesn't have a documented, clear, or consistent volunteer management system. Even if you do, you may still find Step 8 helpful for reviewing your documentation.

The following Tasks are helpful suggestions to work through and customise, according to your organisation's size, budget, and needs:

Step 8: Document the Volunteer Management System

Task 1: Appoint a Documentation Leader.

Assign an individual or team to prepare the documents for the volunteer management system. Work together to choose the most skilled and equipped member to lead the process.

Task 2: Prepare a General Volunteer Policy.

Prepare a general Volunteer Policy if you don't already have one. The Policy should summarise your organisation's commitment to volunteer involvement. Use the National Standards as a guide.

Tips for Success:

• When complete, work with your team to review and revise the draft.

• Get leadership's approval for the Policy.

Task 3: Determine the Necessary Policy Statements.

What other policy statements do you need? Work with your team to determine the necessary policy statements. Use the core processes and key activities established in Step 7 to guide you.

- Refer to Volunteering Australia's Checklist of Policies That May Be Needed.

- Policies should express your organisation's stance on issues and topics. They can be broad or specific (i.e. volunteer roles, refunding out-of-pocket expenses, etc).

- You don't need a policy on everything — only for what's important. Determine what's necessary to prioritise your efforts.

Task 4: Draft Policy Statements for Each Activity.

What other policy statements do you need? Work with your team to determine the necessary policy statements. Use the core processes and key activities established in Step 7 to guide you.

Tips for Success:

- Follow a consistent style and structure for each statement.

- Work together to review and revise the statements.

- Get approval from appropriate leadership.

How to Implement Standard 7 to Strengthen Volunteer Recognition

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Task 5: Identify Procedures and Work Forms.

Work with your team to identify any procedures and work forms needed to implement the policies.

Tips for Success:

- Policies = What your organisation plans to do and why.

- Procedures and Work Forms = Measures in place to ensure policies are implemented.

- Not sure if you need to create a procedure? Only make necessary procedures by asking your team:

  ▶ If the policy fails on its own, would there be any cost or risk to stakeholders?

  ▶ Would it be easier to solve the problem when or if it occurs, or do you need to secure it with a procedure?

Task 6: Prepare Procedure Drafts.

Prepare a draft for each procedure in a consistent layout. Give your team enough time to write, review, and revise the drafts. Agree on a consistent presentation layout for your policies and procedures documents with your team.

Task 7: Review Draft Procedures.

Once complete, work with your team to review all policy, procedure, and work form documents. Ensure the content is clear, accurate, and easy to understand.

Task 8: Request Feedback.

Ask for feedback! Share your drafted document with all volunteers and relevant stakeholders.

Tips for Success:

- Consider setting a deadline for offering feedback to keep the process moving.

- Consider sending the documents in smaller parts rather than in a large document all at once.

Task 9: Distribute Finalised Procedures!

Is everyone on board? Great! Compile your documents to distribute the documents across the organisation.

Tips for Success:

- Format the document into a "guide" or "manual" format to make it more accessible.

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/

- **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

- Top 10 Quotes about Rewards and Recognition

  https://blog.awardsnetwork.com/top-10-quotes-rewards-recognition

- 18 Employee Recognition Statistics You Need to Know in 2023

  https://www.workhuman.com/blog/employee-recognition-statistics/

- Employee Rewards and Recognition for Multi-cultural Workforce

  https://www.hifives.in/employee-recognition-and-rewards-that-work-best-for-a-multi-cultural-workforce/

- 25 Inspirational Business Process Improvement Quotes

  https://www.teamguru.com/blog/25-inspirational-business-process-improvement-quotes/1632

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.