

National Volunteering Guide Part 1

Introduction

Feb 2024



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Introduction

What this guide covers



Introduction

This part covers:

- ▶ what does this guide do for volunteer involving organisations?
- ▶ what is the National Strategy for Volunteering?
- ▶ what are the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement?
- ▶ the key legal issues covered in this guide



Disclaimer

This guide provides general information about involving volunteers. This information is a guide only and is not legal advice. If you or your organisation has a specific legal issue, you should seek legal advice before deciding what to do.

Please refer to [the full disclaimer](#) that applies to this guide.

Volunteers are a vital resource to most community organisations.

Most volunteers provide their services because they want to contribute to their community in a useful and meaningful way.

The relationship between an organisation or group and the volunteer should be managed in a way that is mutually respectful, safe and healthy.

Adopting 'best practice' principles around the involvement of volunteers will help volunteer involving organisations attract, manage, retain and recognise volunteers, and improve the volunteer experience.

About this guide



What does this guide do?

One way your organisation can ensure its relationship with its volunteers is meaningful, and managed in a respectful, safe and healthy way is by understanding the legal issues around the involvement of volunteers.

This guide aims to strengthen your understanding of these legal issues.



What this guide covers



Note – this guide mostly deals with formal volunteering

This guide is intended for volunteer involving organisations engaging ‘formal volunteers’.

Formal volunteers are people who give their time willingly for the common good and without financial gain to an organisation (including institutions and agencies) in a structured way.

This is distinguished from ‘**informal volunteering**’ which is also time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain, but which takes place outside the context of a formal organisation or group and excludes one’s own family members.

Sometimes community organisations attract ‘spontaneous volunteers.’

Spontaneous volunteers are people without a formal association with a volunteer involving organisation who seek out or are invited to help with various volunteering opportunities, often in connection with a community response to disasters. These informal volunteers create certain challenges for organisations. For more information on spontaneous volunteers, see part 4 of this guide (volunteer safety).

This guide is designed for use by volunteer involving organisations across Australia and provides an overview of the key legal obligations of volunteer involving organisations.

The guide is divided into six parts.

You can download the full guide from our [volunteers webpage](#).

Part 1.	• Introduction
Part 2.	• Volunteer, employee or independent contractor – The legal differences between types of workers and the main legal obligations an organisation owes to volunteers, employees and independent contractors
Part 3.	• The volunteer relationship – Recruiting, inducting, managing performance, managing grievances and ending the relationship
Part 4.	• Volunteer safety – Responsibility regarding negligence, work health and safety, managing risk, insurance and child safe standards
Part 5.	• Unlawful workplace behaviour – Protecting volunteers and other people your volunteers interact with from behaviour such as sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying and victimisation
Part 6.	• Other relevant legal issues – Intellectual property, privacy and record-keeping



This guide includes practical tools (for example, checklists and tips) and links to other reliable sources of information which you may find helpful.



For useful information published by Volunteering Australia, explore the [Volunteering Resource Hub](#), which includes a guide to volunteer management.



Volunteering Australia and the National Strategy for Volunteering



Who is Volunteering Australia?

Volunteering Australia is the national peak body for volunteering, working to advance volunteering in the Australian community.



Note

This guide is informed by Volunteering Australia's National Strategy for Volunteering 2023-2033 (National Strategy for Volunteering).

The National Strategy for Volunteering was funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, led by Volunteering Australia, and co-designed in collaboration with the entire volunteering ecosystem.

What are the focus areas and strategic objectives of the National Strategy for Volunteering?

Focus area 1 – Individual potential and the volunteer experience

Aim – Volunteering is safe, inclusive, accessible, meaningful and not exploitative. The strategic objectives to achieve this aim:

- focus on the volunteer experience
- make volunteering inclusive and accessible
- ensure volunteering is not exploitative

Focus area 2 – Community and social impact

Aim – The diversity and impact of volunteering is articulated and celebrated. The strategic objectives to achieve this aim:

- diversify the understanding of volunteering
- reshape the public perception of volunteering
- recognise the inherent value of volunteering
- enable a community-led approach

Focus area 3 – Conditions for volunteering to thrive

Aim – The right conditions are in place for volunteering to be effective and sustainable. The strategic objectives to achieve this aim:

- make volunteering a cross-portfolio issue in government
- build strong leadership and shared accountability
- commit to strategic investment
- recognise the importance of volunteer management



The National Strategy for Volunteering

Volunteering activities take place across all domains of public life in Australia. Volunteers are involved in a myriad of services and activities including the arts, aged care, mental health, disability support, animal welfare, food and emergency relief, environment, sports, education, international development, and more.

In many cases, the contributions of volunteers are crucial to the survival of the sectors they volunteer in.

(page 56 of the strategy)



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

This guide also refers to the [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement \(Standards\)](#) developed by Volunteering Australia.

The Standards are a best practice framework to guide volunteer involvement that:

- help improve the volunteer experience and ensure that the wellbeing of volunteers is supported and their contributions are valued, and
- provide best practice guidance and benchmarks to help organisations attract, manage and retain volunteers and support effective risk and safety practices

Where relevant, throughout this guide we refer to the Standards, recognising that 'best practice' sits alongside and in addition to the legal issues that volunteer involving organisations need to consider.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) include two Standards that are particularly relevant to the overall management of a volunteer program:

Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture – The governing body and organisation leaders promote volunteering and implement effective management systems to support volunteer participation.

Standard 2: Volunteer participation is championed and modelled – Commitment to volunteer participation is set out through vision, planning and resourcing, and supports the organisation's or group's strategic direction

State and territory peak bodies

In addition to Volunteering Australia, each state and territory has peak bodies which facilitate volunteer opportunities and support volunteer involving organisations:

- [VolunteeringACT](#)
- [The Centre for Volunteering \(NSW\)](#)
- [Volunteering Queensland](#)
- [Volunteering SA & NT](#)
- [Volunteering Tasmania](#)
- [Volunteering Victoria](#)
- [Volunteering WA](#)



National Volunteering Guide Part 2

Volunteer, employee or independent contractor?

Feb 2024



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Part 2

Volunteer, employee or independent contractor?

Volunteer, employee or independent contractor?



This part covers:

- ▶ the importance of correctly classifying different working relationships
- ▶ the basic legal differences between volunteers, employees and independent contractors, and
- ▶ some of the main legal obligations an organisation owes to its volunteers, employees and independent contractors

This part of the guide helps community organisations understand how the law treats different kinds of working relationships in your organisation – volunteers, employees and independent contractors.



Why is it important to distinguish between different kinds of working relationships?

If your organisation incorrectly classifies a worker:

- you may fail to give the worker their legal entitlements or meet your obligations under law
- the worker may be confused about their own obligations and legal entitlements
- legal claims could be made against your organisation, and your organisation may be liable to pay penalties



The National Strategy for Volunteering

On the strategic objective to ensure volunteering is not exploitative:

Volunteers across Australia deliver essential services, which further complicates the distinction between paid and unpaid work.

Determination of how volunteer contributions are equivalent to, distinct from, or complement paid work is critical for better understanding the size, scale, and contribution of volunteer workforces. It will remain important to differentiate paid and unpaid work in different settings, so a more nuanced understanding of the intersection between paid and unpaid work is paramount.

(page 47 of the strategy)



Distinguishing between different kinds of workers

Whether a person is a volunteer, employee or independent contractor – requires consideration of different elements because each category of worker has different attributes.

The law recognises different categories of relationships where one party (a worker) performs work for another party in exchange for payment or reward.

These include the relationships of:

- employer and employee, and
- principal and independent contractor

The law also recognises a separate category of worker known as a 'volunteer'. This type of worker performs work for another without an expectation of, or legal requirement of, payment or reward.



Note

It's important for your community organisation to know which category of 'worker' is doing work in your organisation because, depending on whether the worker is a volunteer, employee or an independent contractor, different legal entitlements and obligations apply.

In particular:

- your organisation can be legally responsible for both the safety of its volunteers and the consequences of their actions (so you need to know who they are and what they are doing)
- a volunteer should understand the basis on which they are engaged (so they are aware of their legal entitlements and insurance and safety risks)
- whether someone is covered by your organisation's insurance may depend on their status (category of worker), and
- some laws apply differently to volunteers and some laws don't apply at all



As a result, different legal entitlements apply to different categories of workers in your organisation. This is shown in the table below:

Indicators	Volunteer	Employee	Independent contractor
Is the worker paid?	x (note: honorarium discussed below)	✓	✓
National Employment Standards apply?	x	✓	x
Superannuation paid?	x	✓	x (some exceptions)
Workers' Compensation applies?	x	✓	x (some exceptions)
Occupational/Workplace Health and Safety laws applies?	✓ (some exceptions)	✓	✓
Paid sick and annual leave accrues?	x	✓	x
Paid long service leave?	x	✓	x
Unfair dismissal laws apply?	x	✓	x (but some contractual termination rights may apply)
Redundancy rights apply?	x	✓	x (but some contractual termination rights involving payment may apply)



Case examples

In the case of Mr and Mrs Morris (see summary below), the court found that Mr and Mrs Morris were employees as caretakers of a property. The organisation had alleged they were volunteers. The Court found that, based on the care-taker award rate, the couple had been underpaid, and awarded them superannuation and annual leave to the value of approximately \$80,000.

In the case of Ms Guilbert (see summary below), the court found Ms Guilbert was a volunteer rather than an employee when she was injured after being thrown by a horse. This means that she was unable to make a claim for workers compensation, which is only available to employees.



The difference between members of a community organisation and volunteers

The line between members and volunteers can be tricky to distinguish when you sit on a committee. In particular circumstances, an organisation's members may also be considered to be 'volunteers'.

A 'member' of a not-for-profit organisation has certain rights and obligations set out in the organisation's rules or constitution (for example, the right to vote at an AGM, attend meetings and access information) and in legislation.

As soon as an organisation asks a member to do something outside their role as a member, the person may be considered a volunteer (as well as a member). This has legal implications:

- certain laws apply to volunteers (that may not apply to members), and
- insurance may apply to volunteers and members in a different way

Consider your organisation's liability for negligence – volunteer board members can sometimes be personally liable.

Where the organisation is unincorporated, no specific duty of care arises merely because people share common membership of the unincorporated association. However, committee members may still be personally liable for injuries to a member or a volunteer.



Case example – unincorporated association

Mr Hrybnyuk was a member of a Russian Club, an unincorporated association. The president of the club, Mazur, asked Hrybnyuk to help demolish a shed on the association's premises. While doing so, Hrybnyuk suffered extensive injuries when he fell through the roof of the shed that he was helping to demolish.

The judge held that the president (a volunteer) owed Hrybnyuk a duty of care. In particular, the judge stated the principle that 'a person who seeks the services of a volunteer may be liable in negligence'.

However, Hrybnyuk was unsuccessful in his negligence action because the judge found there was no evidence that Mazur's failure to require:

- a building inspection before permitting Hrybnyuk to demolish the shed, or
- a person with building experience to be on-site to supervise the demolition,

caused Hrybnyuk's injuries.

That is, an inspection may not have uncovered the fault that caused him to fall, and a suitably qualified supervisor would not necessarily have directed Hrybnyuk not to climb onto the roof.

Hrybnyuk v Mazur [2004] NSWCA 374



Tip – insurance policies

Check your insurance policies to see whether they cover injuries to volunteers as well as members, and whether they also cover injuries or harm that volunteers might cause to others. If your policy doesn't explicitly cover volunteers and members, ask for this to be included in your policy (in writing).



Example – insurance

Mr Ball is a member of his local cricket club. He regularly exercises his right to vote and attend meetings and enjoys the club's facilities on a weekly basis. The cricket club also engages staff to help with the upkeep of the grounds. The club has insurance covering employees, and people playing sport at the club. A call goes out to members to help in a working bee on the weekend and Mr Ball is eager to participate. He's asked to clean out the gutters.

Unfortunately, he slips while climbing the ladder and injures his back. The cricket club's public liability insurance policy doesn't cover injuries to volunteers. As he's not an employee, Mr Ball doesn't have access to workers compensation insurance. The cricket club doesn't have insurance that covers volunteers, and therefore Mr Ball has no access to insurance to cover the costs associated with his injuries sustained while volunteering.

Volunteers

In Australia, there is no accepted legal definition of a volunteer.

Volunteering Australia and the Fair Work Ombudsman provide useful definitions for a volunteer, and case law (judge-made law) provides useful guidance on the 'attributes' of a volunteer.

Who is a volunteer?



Volunteering Australia

Volunteering Australia describes volunteering as:

'Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.'

Volunteering Australia has [published resources with more information about this definition](#).



The Fair Work Ombudsman

The [Fair Work Ombudsman](#) has identified the following characteristics of a genuine volunteering arrangement:

- a volunteer is someone who does work for the main purpose of benefiting someone else
- the organisation and individual did not intend to create a legally binding employment relationship
- a volunteer is under no obligation to attend the workplace or perform work, and
- a volunteer does not expect to be paid for their work

It's important to:

- understand the attributes (characteristics) of a volunteer
- consider these attributes in relation to your existing or potential future volunteer relationships, and
- be clear about how the volunteer relationship is distinguished from the employment or independent contractor relationship



Volunteer attributes

Generally, a worker will be found to be a volunteer when the following attributes exist (other factors may also be relevant):

Type of work	Payment and benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> works or provides services on an 'ex-gratia' basis, which means that they do so voluntarily, without a legally enforceable obligation to do so and with no expectation of payment for work performed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> generally, has no legally enforceable right to receive payments such as a wage, honoraria, allowances or expenses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> any agreement between the volunteer and the organisation (whether verbal or written) doesn't include any evidence that the parties intended to enter into a legally binding contract in relation to the work being carried out (see part 3 of this guide for more information about what should and shouldn't be included in a volunteer agreement) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> may be reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the volunteer arrangement can end at any time, either by the volunteer or the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> may receive payments like an 'honoraria', or allowances, or non-cash benefits such as free use of facilities or free or reduced-price entry into an event (but this is different from a 'legally enforceable right' to receive these things)



Caution

Where a volunteer receives some benefit for the services they provide, be careful that you are clear and careful in how you distinguish between volunteers and employees.

Payments or benefits to volunteers may attract taxation obligations, and if regularly received or of considerable value, may add weight to an argument that the 'volunteer' is an employee or contractor.

This may also pose problems in determining an organisation's tax liabilities (for example, for fringe benefits tax or the obligation to remit PAYG tax payments to the Australian Tax Office).



Tip

The best way to be clear about the relationship between your community organisation and a volunteer is to write it down. Generally, if a person is described as a volunteer in a document governing the arrangement, it would usually be considered that there is no intention to create a contractual or legal relationship (provided that the relationship is, in reality, voluntary).

See part 3 of this guide for more information about what should and shouldn't be included in a volunteer agreement.



Spontaneous volunteers

Sometimes community organisations attract 'spontaneous volunteers' – for example, spontaneous offers of assistance and volunteering following an emergency, crisis or issue resulting in significant media coverage.

As noted above, spontaneous volunteers differ from formal volunteers and may create certain challenges for organisations. For more information see part 4 of this guide (volunteer safety).

One of the strategic objectives of the National Strategy for Volunteering is to diversify the understanding of volunteering.



The National Strategy for Volunteering

On the objective to diversify the understanding of volunteering:

Like First Nations people, volunteers in multicultural communities do not necessarily resonate with the term volunteering and more commonly use words such as 'giving', 'helping', and 'sharing' to describe their voluntary activities. Some cultures do not even have an equivalent word for volunteering and volunteer work undertaken by Australians born overseas often takes place within ethnic, cultural, or religious communities.

(page 50 of the strategy)

An expanded understanding of volunteering will reflect Australia's diversity and ensure all forms of volunteering are recognised, supported, and celebrated.

(page 49 of the strategy)



Assessing whether a worker is a volunteer

When a worker's relationship with an organisation is being assessed, the Fair Work Ombudsman or court or tribunal will look at the four key factors (discussed below) to establish whether an agreement was intended to be legally binding. If these factors are in place, the relationship is less likely to be considered a volunteering relationship.

Generally, there are four key requirements that evidence a legally binding relationship:

Four key requirements for a legally binding relationship

1. Intention to create legal relations

2. Consideration

3. Mutuality of obligation

4. Certainty and completeness

1. Is there an intention to create legal relations regarding the obligation to carry out the work?

- Do the facts and circumstances point to an intention of both parties to have a legal relationship and that the arrangement could be enforced?
- Under the arrangement, can the organisation and individual be compelled to do something (as opposed to where either party can walk away at any time without challenge)?
- If the parties intend to create legal relations regarding the obligation to carry out the work, the relationship is not likely to be a volunteer relationship.

2. Is there consideration?

- Does each party agree to provide a benefit or reward to the other party? For the worker, this will usually be their labour and for the employer (or principal), this will usually be monetary but may also be a commitment to offer training, experience or other non-monetary benefits. **[Note** – see below for more information on internships and unpaid work experience].
- Although the payment of consideration is generally an indicator of an employment or independent contracting relationship, this is not always the case, particularly where there is no correlation between the payment and the hours worked or completion of a specific task or job.

3. Is there mutuality of obligation?

- Is the person's commitment to perform work provided in exchange for whatever benefits or experience the employer (or principal) is offering?
- Mutuality of obligation is more likely to indicate an employment or independent contracting relationship where the benefit (usually payment) is linked or correlates to hours worked or completion of a set task or tasks.

4. Is there certainty and completeness?

- Is there an agreement on all the essential terms to make the contract workable and are those terms certain and clear in meaning?
- Whether certainty and completeness of terms is indicative of an employment or contracting relationship, or that of a volunteer, depends on the actual terms.
- Where the terms are clearly stated, for example, it's clearly stated that:
 - the relationship is a volunteer one
 - there is no intention to create legal relations between the parties in relation to the volunteering role, and
 - any payments aren't linked to the hours of work or completion of set tasks,
 - the arrangement is more likely to be a volunteer relationship.
- Of course, the agreement shouldn't include any terms which indicate an employment relationship.



Note

In addition to these factors, a court or tribunal may also consider the actual nature of the arrangement as well as how the parties have chosen to describe it.



What is a legally binding relationship?

Legal relations exist when the parties have a legally binding agreement between them.

Generally, this means they intend that the promises made by each party will be binding, so if one party breaches the terms of the agreement, the other party has a right to seek damages against the breaching party or, in some circumstances, force the breaching party to perform certain obligations under the agreement.

In a volunteer relationship, there must be no intention to create a legally binding agreement regarding the work to be carried out. This means that, for example, if the organisation doesn't provide the volunteer with work, the volunteer has no recourse against the organisation. Similarly, if the volunteer fails to report for duty as agreed, the organisation has no recourse against the volunteer.



More information – protecting intellectual property and confidential information

There may be situations where a volunteer involving organisation wants to create legally binding obligations on the volunteer. For example, this is done to protect the organisation's confidential information or intellectual property (as explained in part 6 of this guide). Provided such legally binding obligations go no further than this (create obligations around other tasks or the work), having a legally binding agreement in relation to such matters will not affect the nature of the volunteer relationship.

See part 3 of this guide for more information on how to impose legally binding obligations on a volunteer to protect the organisation's confidential information and intellectual property.

The nature of the relationship

In addition to how the parties have chosen to describe the relationship in a legal agreement, a court or tribunal may also consider the actual nature of the relationship and the work being done.

An arrangement is more likely to be considered an employment relationship rather than a volunteer relationship if it:

- involves productive work rather than just learning, training or skill development
- is for a lengthy period
- involves work that is integral to the functioning of the business or organisation, and
- primarily benefits the organisation



Caution

Take care when negotiating with a worker. A legally binding agreement doesn't have to be in writing. It can be formed verbally through conversations, through communication such as a string of email correspondence or even inferred from the conduct of the people involved.

Work that is:

- primarily observational, or
- incidental to a learning experience rather than being for the primary benefit of the operation of the business or organisation,

is more likely to be considered voluntary in nature.

Unpaid work experience and internships

In certain circumstances, it can be lawful to not pay a person for their labour (for example, when volunteering for a not-for-profit organisation or experience working in an organisation as part of a formal program to get employment). However, in cases where the person is actually an employee, they are entitled to pay and conditions under the [Fair Work Act 2009 \(Cth\)](#).

The Fair Work Ombudsman will consider certain factors to decide whether a person's position is an unpaid trial, a student placement, a work experience or internship.



More information – guidelines on paid and unpaid work

See the Fair Work Ombudsman's website for more information about:

- the [different types of legitimate unpaid work](#), and
- [understanding different types of legitimate unpaid work and unpaid work where the person involved should be paid](#)



Case example – work experience

Barbour worked as an unpaid assistant in a small law firm after graduating. The firm allowed him to observe practitioners and learn about the practice of law three days a week. He wasn't paid, but was promised a base salary of \$250 per week with 25% commission for referred matters later – once he had become 'competent'.

The Commission was **not** satisfied that:

- an agreement had been reached as to the terms of an employment contract (the role was an unpaid opportunity for him to demonstrate competence as a lawyer)
- consideration had passed between the parties (the work was not paid for and there was no evidence that the work was for the commercial gain of the firm)
- there was an intention to create a legally binding arrangement (it didn't matter that the parties may have contemplated a future legal employment relationship)

[Barbour v Memtaz Derbas T/A Derbas Lawyers \[2021\] FWC 1718](#)



Case example – internship

A university student performed more than 180 hours of work for AIMG during an internship, before being offered paid employment.

The Court found that the internship did not have any affiliation or connection with the worker's university degree, and involved productive work for the benefit of AIMG. Accordingly, it was held that an employment relationship existed and AIMG was ordered to back-pay wages and penalties relating to underpayment of wages.

The Court stated that it would not tolerate attempts to disguise employment relationships as unpaid internships to avoid payment of entitlements.

Fair Work Ombudsman v AIMG BQ Pty Ltd & Anor [2016] FCCA 1024



Case example – no intention to create legal relations

Anglican Community Services (**ACS**) rented a property to various groups for camps and retreats. Brandenburg (the camp manager) asked Mr and Mrs Morris to act as caretakers of the property. They acted as caretakers for three years; at the end of this period they claimed unpaid wages. ACS argued that Mr and Mrs Morris were volunteers and therefore not entitled to wages.

Brandenburg had sent Mr and Mrs Morris a letter outlining the nature of their role, which described Mr and Mrs Morris as being 'appointed' to the positions of caretakers of the property. The initial appointment was for six months, which would then be reviewed and could be extended. Their duties were clearly set out and relatively onerous (including cleaning, light maintenance work, inspecting the condition of the building and facilitating building inspections for prospective groups).

The judge found that Mr and Mrs Morris were employees and not volunteers, as the parties intended to create legal relations. This was demonstrated by several factors:

- they were under the instruction of Brandenburg who would inform them when groups were coming to stay and when the premises would need to be cleaned and inspected
- the nature of the agreement created mutual expectations between the parties (rent and amenities in exchange for labour), which could be legally enforced, and
- the regularity of their appointment was indicative of employment, as was the inclusion of the initial provisional period which would be unusual in a volunteering context, because a true volunteer (or the organisation) is able to end the arrangement at any time

As a result, Mr and Mrs Morris were awarded compensation for unpaid wages.

Morris and Morris v Anglican Community Services [2000] SAIRC 6.



Case example – workers compensation

Guilbert was a volunteer at a horse-riding ranch in NSW for five years. She was asked to perform tasks such as saddling and preparing the horses for trail rides, feeding the horses, cleaning out bird cages, cleaning toilets, washing equipment and helping in the café. Guilbert was also allowed to participate in riding lessons and go on trail rides.

Guilbert was thrown from a horse while helping on a trail ride and injured her spine. The ranch's insurance company denied that Guilbert was a worker, and therefore denied her access to workers compensation.

Guilbert argued that there was an intention to create legal relations. She said that the horse rides she was allowed at the end of some of her shifts were 'consideration' or a 'reward' for performing duties which otherwise would have been performed by paid staff. She also provided evidence that indicated control – she was required to wear a uniform, work set hours, and was asked for reasons if she was late.

However, the Commissioner found there was no intention to create legal relations. The fact that she wouldn't have performed the tasks, if not for the 'horse rides or lessons in exchange' didn't matter. What matters is the objective intention conveyed by what was said or done – not the uncommunicated subjective motives or intentions of the parties. The tasks comprised part of the usual activities of a volunteer. They didn't represent some additional activity that was outside the activities performed by a volunteer, which could be regarded as consideration to form a binding contract of employment. The direction, organisation and supervision of volunteers was for reasons of safety and to ensure a full complement of volunteers.

Glenworth Valley Horse Riding Pty Ltd [2020] NSWCCPD 10 (4 March 2020)



This decision doesn't mean that volunteers are always excluded from coverage under workers' compensation schemes or that organisations using volunteer services are not liable for costs associated with injuries to volunteers. For more information, see part 4 of this guide (volunteer safety).



Case example – workers compensation

Wieland held roles with Basketball SA, including referee coordinator, referee coach, and court supervisor. Wieland received \$500 per season for each role, as well as payments for her referee coach and court supervisor roles. Basketball SA made these payments in cash, and Wieland didn't declare them as income for tax purposes.

In 2017, Wieland fell over and injured herself as she entered a stadium to participate in a meeting and act as a referee coach. Wieland made a claim for compensation under the South Australian legislation for injured workers. To be entitled to compensation, Wieland needed to prove that she and Basketball SA mutually intended to create a legally enforceable contractual relationship between them.

Although Basketball SA had classified Wieland as a 'volunteer', the South Australian Employment Tribunal wasn't satisfied that she was a volunteer. The Tribunal noted that, even though Basketball SA was a not-for-profit organisation that would be expected to engage volunteers, it also had employees. The Tribunal said that for the roles of referee coach and court supervisor, there was a direct correlation between the hours worked and the amount Basketball SA paid Wieland, so the parties mutually intended to create a contractual relationship. Wieland was therefore entitled to compensation for her injuries.

Wieland v Return to Work SA [2018] SAET 190



Can volunteers be paid for their work?

Some payments to volunteers are acceptable.

It's common, and appropriate, for volunteers to be reimbursed for authorised expenses they incur while performing their role. Sometimes organisations provide a monetary reward or other recognition to show gratitude for a volunteer's contribution.

Some organisations provide benefits to volunteers that they may call an honorarium, allowance or one-off payment. However, if these payments are comparable to wages or a salary in disguise, then this may point to an employment relationship, and such payments should not be made to volunteers.

Examples of where a payment or pattern of payments may be deemed to be a wage or payment for services include:

- if a payment is calculated with reference to time with the organisation or hours worked
- if an allowance far exceeds the expenses actually incurred or is paid on a regular basis, or
- a lump sum payment is in exchange for services provided



Case example – honorarium

Bergman was a member of the Broken Hill Musicians Club and a regular bingo patron, who had acted as a bingo caller for the club for approximately five years until she claimed she was unfairly dismissed. To bring a claim for unfair dismissal, Bergman needed to prove she was an employee.

Bergman argued that she was paid \$50 regularly for calling five bingo sessions per week. She provided her tax file number to the club, was provided with a letter for Centrelink where the club referred to her as an employee, and argued that the club exercised control over the manner of her work performance, place and hours of work and that she required permission to take leave.

The club argued that there was no intention to create a legal relationship. She was not offered the role – rather Bergman was selected as the bingo caller by club patrons (who were all members). She was allowed to play the gambling machines during her 'breaks' unlike employees of the club. Her attendance and times of the bingo sessions were not monitored by the club. On occasion, when Bergman was absent, other people performed the bingo calling. Bergman didn't need to notify the club of her absence.

The club also argued that the \$50 per week was an honorarium not intended to affect the relationship.

The Fair Work Commission found that Bergman was not an employee, as there was no mutual intention between the parties to enter a legally enforceable arrangement or contract. The \$50 was a gift unrelated to her hours of work, which did not satisfy the element of 'consideration' or exchange that exists in an employment relationship where a person is hired to work in return for wages.

Bergman v Broken Hill Musicians Club Ltd T/A Broken Hill Musicians Club [2011] FWA 1143



Case example – honorarium, terms of the agreement

Grinholz was a coach for a soccer team for Football Federation Victoria (FFV). He was engaged under a 'voluntary services agreement' which stated he would receive an honorarium of \$6,000 to be paid in two equal instalments – one at the beginning of the season and the other at the end. In exchange, Grinholz was required to attend training sessions each week, and attend matches throughout the season and the youth championships. He was also required to liaise with full time coaches and FFV administrators.

FFV terminated Grinholz's engagement halfway through the season. He then made an unfair dismissal application to the Fair Work Commission. FFV objected on the basis that Grinholz was a volunteer and not an employee (and therefore not entitled to bring a claim for unfair dismissal).

In deciding the case, the Commission looked at the various indicators of a volunteer and employment relationship. In this case, indicators of an employment relationship were that:

- FFV was able to exercise a substantial degree of control over Grinholz's work
- Grinholz was required to wear a uniform
- Grinholz was required to act consistently with FFV's policies and to promote FFV in his coaching activities

However, there were also indicators of a volunteer relationship:

- the honorarium was not paid based on hours worked, but closely related to the expenses Grinholz would likely incur in carrying out his role
- provisions of the volunteer services agreement expressly stated that Grinholz was a volunteer and not an employee nor independent contractor, and that he was not entitled to any fees for services

The Commission determined that Grinholz was a volunteer and not entitled to make an unfair dismissal claim against FFV.

In making its decision, the Commission stated that, although certain terms of the agreement indicated the existence of an employment relationship, those terms were not inconsistent with requirements that would normally be expected to be placed on volunteers, particularly in the not-for profit sector. In other words, the factors that would normally suggest an employment relationship could be attributed to other legitimate purposes, such as the need to uphold standards and protect the interests of the organisation (in this case, young people).

Grinholz v Football Federation Victoria Inc [2016] FWC 7976

What does it mean for your organisation if a person is a 'volunteer'?

Many laws which protect employees' rights and entitlements apply differently to volunteers or not at all.

More information about the basic legal entitlements and obligations that apply to volunteers is set out below under the heading 'Legal obligations owed by community organisations'.



Employees

The legal distinction between a worker who is an employee, an independent contractor, or a volunteer is not always easy to make.

While much employment law is now set out in legislation, the issue of whether a worker is an employee, independent contractor or volunteer is based on principles that have been established through case law over time (judge-made law).

When is a worker an employee?

For some time, the courts and other relevant tribunals considered whether a worker is an employee by making a **multi-factorial assessment** of the entire relationship between the worker and the organisation (including by considering the conduct of the parties).

In 2022, two High Court decisions (summarised below) changed the court's approach by focussing on the terms of the contract between the parties (instead of their conduct).

In certain circumstances, consideration of the parties' conduct would still be relevant and considered. These circumstances include:

- where the contract (or agreement) is not in writing, or is partly written and partly oral
- where the terms of the written contract are being challenged as invalid (as a sham) or varied (changed), or
- where a party to the contract may be asserting rectification, estoppel or any other legal, equitable or statutory rights or remedies

Parliament has now stepped in to address the High Court's changed approach. Under the [*Fair Work Legislation Amendment \(Closing Loopholes No. 2\) Bill 2023*](#), passed by Parliament on 12 February 2024, a new definition of employee under the [*Fair Work Act 2009 \(Cth\)*](#) will apply.

Under the new definition, whether a relationship is one of employer and employee, will be determined by assessing the totality and true nature of the relationship between the parties. This assessment will include consideration of the terms of any contract and how the contract is performed in practice.



Note

The new definition of employee under the [*Fair Work Act 2009 \(Cth\)*](#) will apply six months from the day following royal assent to the [*Fair Work Legislation Amendment \(Closing Loopholes No. 2\) Bill 2023*](#).

In essence this legislative overrides the 'contract-centric' approach of the High Court in the two cases from 2022 and is a return to the previous multi-factorial test from case law.



Summary

Depending on the circumstances, whether a person is an employee, an independent contractor, or a volunteer will be determined by examining:

- the terms of the contract between the parties
- the relationship between the parties, or
- both the contract and the relationship between the parties



Case example – contractor label

McCourt signed an 'administrative services agreement' with Construct, a labour hire organisation. Under the agreement, Construct would offer McCourt an opportunity to provide labour to third-party building companies, who would oversee McCourt's day-to-day work and directly pay Construct, who in turn paid McCourt.

In finding that McCourt was an employee (and not an independent contractor), the High Court held:

- where it has not been argued that a contract is a sham, is ineffective, has been varied or otherwise displaced by the parties' conduct (for example, conduct giving rise to an estoppel or waiver), the rights and obligations under the contract are primary, and
- it is not required to look beyond the terms of the contract and review the parties' subsequent conduct to determine if an employment relationship exists

Parties should still be wary of relying on labels given to a relationship in a contract as determinative of its character. In this case, while McCourt's contract described him as a contractor, the nature of the rights and obligations between the parties under the contract rendered him an employee of Construct.

Construction, Forestry, Maritime, Mining and Energy Union v Personnel Contracting Pty Ltd [2022] HCA



Case example – contract terms

From 1977 to late 1985, Jamsek and Whitby were employed by a company as truck drivers. In 1986, the workers agreed to 'become contractors', by forming partnerships with their respective spouses and re-engaging under fresh contracts between the company and these partnerships, while also purchasing their own trucks.

After the working relationship was terminated in 2017, the nature of the relationship between the workers and the company was in dispute.

In the absence of a reason to doubt the contract's validity (such as being a sham or otherwise ineffective at law), the High Court of Australia focussed on the wording of the written contract to determine the relationship between the parties and find that the workers were independent contractors from 1986.

ZG Operations Australia Pty Ltd v Jamsek [2022] HCA

Evidence of the attributes listed below in a working relationship suggest the worker is an employee. These attributes may be evident from the contract between the parties, the relationship between the parties, or both.

It's important to:

- understand the attributes (characteristics) of an employee
- consider these attributes in relation to your existing or potential future employment relationships, and
- be clear about how the employment relationship is distinguished from the volunteer relationship



Employee attributes

Type of work	Payments and benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> performs ongoing work under the control, direction and supervision of the employer, on an ongoing basis 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is paid for time worked
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> must perform the duties of their position 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is paid regularly (for example, weekly, fortnightly or monthly) and has income tax withheld from their salary by their employer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> provides their personal services and can't delegate their work to 'outsiders' (can't arrange for their work to be done by someone else who is not another employee) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is entitled to have superannuation contributions paid into a nominated superannuation fund by their employer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> work hours set by the employer, an enterprise agreement or modern award 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is entitled to paid and unpaid leave (for example, sick leave, personal or carers' leave, annual or recreation leave, or long service leave)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is recognised as a part of the employer's business or holds themselves out to the public as being part of that business (for example, wearing a uniform, using a business card) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> is covered by professional indemnity, public liability and workers compensation insurance premiums paid by the employer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> doesn't take commercial risks and can't make a 'profit' or 'loss' from the work performed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> generally, has all 'tools of the trade' provided by the employer to carry out the work (for example, desk, computer, stationary) unless otherwise agreed



Note

Other factors may also be relevant and of importance in particular cases. While it's often straight-forward to determine whether a worker is an employee, where there is doubt, the organisation should get legal advice.



Example – employee

Barry is a retired clerk and is often called on by Jo, the office manager, at a local charity to do administrative duties, including project work. Jo gives Barry details of the work to be done and negotiates with Barry as to the days and times he works. The charity provides Barry with the equipment he needs to get the work done and pays him by the hour. When working, Barry is required to wear a uniform displaying the charity's logo and must report to Jo regularly about the status of the work. The charity deducts tax from Barry's wages and remits it to the ATO.

Even though Barry works irregular hours for the charity, Barry is employed by the charity, most likely on a casual basis.



What does it mean for your organisation if a worker is an ‘employee’?

The law requires that employers provide certain benefits to their employees. Examples of these benefits include paid leave and superannuation, but there are many others.

The law also requires that employers treat their employees in a certain way. For example, an employer must provide an employee with a notice period (or payment instead of notice) before terminating their contract of employment. Note, however, casual employees do not require a notice period or payment before termination of their contract of employment.



Note

Independent contractors and volunteers are not owed all the same entitlements as employees.

This is why it's important for your community organisation to be clear about the terms on which a person becomes involved in your community organisation.

More information about the basic legal entitlements and obligations that apply to employees is set out below under the heading ‘Legal obligations owed by community organisations’.



Tip

Have a written agreement documenting the nature of the relationship between your community organisation and any person doing work for it. This way both parties will be clear about the nature of the relationship.

However – merely labelling a worker an employee, independent contractor or volunteer doesn't mean they are in fact an employee, independent contractor or volunteer. The nature of the rights and obligations between the parties as set out in a contract (if there is one) will largely determine whether the worker is an employee or independent contractor.

Can legislation make someone (including a volunteer) an ‘employee’ for particular purposes?

Yes. Some legislation may provide that a worker that is not an ‘employee’ at law may still be entitled to particular protections as if they were an employee.

For example, the laws governing workplace health and safety, workers' compensation and superannuation:

- contain 'deeming' provisions which group employees, independent contractors and volunteers together as 'workers' in certain circumstances, or
- provide a definition of an employee that is broader than the standard legal tests established by the courts

In such instances, ‘employee’ has a broader meaning than the tests in the ‘employee attributes’ table above. The effect of this is that an organisation may owe duties to certain independent contractors and volunteers and be liable to provide them with certain entitlements, as if the independent contractor or volunteer was actually an employee.



Independent contractors

There are many circumstances in which a community organisation may wish to engage an independent contractor or consultant to provide services to the organisation.



Example

An organisation may wish to engage an independent contractor when it has a short-term project which requires a person with specialist skills to complete a task – such as an independent evaluation of the organisation's services or programs.

The organisation hiring a contractor is sometimes referred to as the 'principal'.

It's important to:

- understand the attributes (characteristics) of an independent contractor relationship
- consider these attributes in relation to your existing or potential future independent contractor relationships, and
- be clear about how this relationship is distinguished from the volunteer relationship

When is a worker an 'independent contractor'?

Unlike employees who are seen to be subject to the control and direction of their employer, independent contractors are recognised as running their own business and providing services under commercial, rather than employment, contracts.

Evidence of the attributes listed below in a working relationship suggest the worker is an independent contractor. These attributes may be evident from the contract between the parties, the relationship between the parties, or both.

Independent contractor attributes

Type of work	Payment and benefits
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has control over how to carry out their work and has the expertise to do so (bears responsibility and liability for poor work) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is paid for results achieved (for example, submits an invoice for work completed or is paid at the end of, or at stages of, a project)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • also provides services to the general public and other businesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • pays their own superannuation, income tax and GST and holds own insurance policies
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is contracted to work for a set period of time or do a set task and can decide what hours of work are required to complete that work 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • may have their own registered business and has an Australian Business Number (ABN)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is free to accept or refuse work beyond the requirements of any current contract with the organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provides all or most of the necessary materials and equipment to complete the work (for example, uses their own tools, but there may be exceptions to this)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is usually free to delegate work to others (for example, to engage a subcontractor) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is in a position to make a profit or loss from work (bears the risk of this)



Example – independent contractor

Steve is a handyman and is often called on by Abdul, the operations manager at a local charity, to do minor repairs. Abdul provides Steve with details of the work to be done and the time by which he needs it done. Abdul is not concerned about how Steve does the work only that it is done on time and on budget. Steve considers the request for the work to be done. He personally doesn't have time to do the work, but his colleague Geoff does. Steve agrees with Abdul as to the work to be done, the timeframe in which it is to be done in and the cost of the work to be carried out.

Steve arranges for Geoff to attend the charity's offices with his tools and equipment and complete the work. Steve invoices the charity for the work carried out by Geoff, and Abdul is responsible for payment to Steve and remitting tax on the invoiced amount.

Steve is an independent contractor.

What does it mean for your organisation if a worker is an 'independent contractor'?

Many of the laws which protect employees' rights and provide for their entitlements don't apply to independent contractors or will apply differently.

More information about the basic legal entitlements and obligations that apply to independent contractors is set out below under the heading 'Legal obligations owed by community organisations'.



Checklist – analysing your existing volunteer relationships

In analysing your existing volunteer relationships, it may be useful to complete the following check list.



Note

This is not an exhaustive checklist and there may be other relevant factors to consider.

Factors indicating...	A volunteer relationship	An employer / employee relationship	An independent contractor relationship
Was there an intention to create a legally binding agreement?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Is the person motivated by selfless reasons consistent with a volunteering role?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Is there an expectation or provision of remuneration or benefit in relation to the work performed?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Is the type of remuneration based on hourly rates or wages (and are overtime and penalties paid)?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No
Does the person have absolute discretion and autonomy about how they perform their tasks or work (can they determine their start and finish times)?	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Is the person free to provide similar services to others within the same industry?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes
Can the arrangement end at any time?	<input type="checkbox"/> Yes	<input type="checkbox"/> No	<input type="checkbox"/> No



Legal obligations owed by community organisations



Why is it important for your community organisation to know which category of worker is doing work in your organisation?

It's important for your community organisation to know which category of worker is doing work in your organisation because, depending on whether the worker is a volunteer, employee or an independent contractor, different legal entitlements and obligations apply.

The main obligations owed by an organisation to its volunteers, employees and independent contractors are quite detailed and are only summarised very briefly below.

Minimum legal protections

Volunteers

The *Independent Contractors Act 2006 (Cth)* and most of the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)* don't apply to volunteers.

A volunteer doesn't have any legally enforceable right to hours of work or payment.

Some organisations may have policies about paying out-of-pocket expenses and other payments for volunteers, but generally there is no legally enforceable obligation for the organisation to do so.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

The Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement include Standards relevant to the matters discussed in this part of the guide.

Standard 2: Volunteer participation is championed and modelled – Commitment to volunteer participation is set out through vision, planning and resourcing, and supports the organisation's strategic direction.

2.5 Resources (including time, funds, equipment and technology) are allocated for volunteer involvement.

Evidence of this includes having policies and procedures for reimbursement for volunteer out-of-pocket expenses.

Standard 7: Volunteers are recognised – Volunteer contribution, value and impact is understood, appreciated and acknowledged.

This standard sets out non-monetary ways that your organisation can recognise the valuable contribution of volunteers. This could help make sure you are not inadvertently providing a benefit that is comparable to wages.

7.3 The organisation regularly engages with volunteers about the impact of their contribution.

Evidence of this includes:

- The organisation plans and schedules activities to acknowledge and celebrate the value, contribution and impact of volunteers at the individual and group level.
- References and statements of service are provided to volunteers.
- The governing body and leaders champion and lead volunteer acknowledgement.



Employees

Under the [Fair Work Act 2009 \(Cth\)](#), all employees are entitled to minimum standards of employment.

These minimum standards are known as the National Employment Standards (**NES**). All employers must comply with the NES.

The NES provides a safety net for all Australian employees and relates to:

- maximum weekly work hours
- requests for flexible working arrangements
- offers and requests to convert from casual to permanent employment
- parental leave and related entitlements
- annual leave
- personal/carer's leave, compassionate leave and unpaid family and domestic violence leave
- community service leave
- long service leave
- public holidays
- notice of termination and redundancy pay, and
- the provision of a Fair Work Information Statement and Casual Employment Information Statement

Independent contractors

Independent contractors:

- have no statutory entitlement to minimum wages or other benefits such as paid leave (the NES don't apply to them), and
- are free to negotiate the terms of their contracts with the organisations that hire them

However, independent contractors are entitled to some 'general protections' set out in the [Fair Work Act 2009 \(Cth\)](#), including protection from unlawful discrimination.

Independent contractors and organisations may also have rights under the [Independent Contractors Act 2006 \(Cth\)](#). Under that Act, if the provisions apply either party can apply to a court for an order to have the contract (or a part of it) revoked or varied on the grounds that it is 'harsh' or 'unfair'. This could happen if the independent contractor believes that they are being paid at a rate that is, or is likely to be, less than an employee would get for performing similar work.

If your organisation is concerned about whether a contract is unfair, you may need to seek legal advice.

Application of industrial instruments (awards, enterprise agreements and determinations)

Volunteers

Volunteers are not covered by the terms of industrial instruments.

Employees

Employees and employers in certain industries and occupations may be bound by an industrial instrument such as a modern award, enterprise agreement or determination of Fair Work Australia.

These instruments contain additional minimum entitlements that supplement the NES (for example, penalty and overtime rates, loadings and allowances).

Independent contractors

Independent contractors are not covered by the terms of modern awards, enterprise agreements or determinations of Fair Work Australia.



An independent contractor's entitlements are set out in the contract between the contractor and the organisation (although those rights may be impacted by the [Independent Contractors Act 2006 \(Cth\)](#), certain provisions of the [Fair Work Act 2009 \(Cth\)](#) and various other deeming legislation. See below for further information in relation to superannuation, taxation and workplace health and safety.

Long service leave

Volunteers

Volunteers have no legal entitlement to long service leave.

Employees

Employees are generally entitled to long service leave after a long period of working for an employer. For most employees, their long service leave entitlements come from the laws in the state or territory where they are working. These laws set out how long an employee must work to get long service leave and details of how long service leave is calculated.

Independent contractors

Independent contractors have no legal entitlement to long service leave.



Long service leave entitlements generally vary between the states and territories. To find out more about long service leave entitlements, contact the long service leave agency in your state or territory. For a list of these agencies, see the [Fair Work Ombudsman website](#).

Superannuation

Volunteers

Volunteers have no legal entitlement to superannuation.

Employees

Under the [Superannuation Guarantee \(Administration\) Act 1992 \(Cth\)](#), your organisation is required to make minimum prescribed superannuation contributions for all eligible employees (whether full time, part time or casual):

- over 18 years, or
- under 18 years who work more than 30 hours a week



Note

Before 1 July 2022, a \$450 superannuation guarantee applied (so employers were only required to make super guarantee contributions to an eligible employee's super fund if the employee was paid \$450 or more in a calendar month).

The [Australian Tax Office has published a note](#) on making a payment after 30 June 2022 for work done before 1 July 2022.

Independent contractors

Under superannuation law, the definition of an employee is expanded to include a person who is engaged wholly or principally for their labour, who is paid under a contract for the hours they work (rather than to achieve a result) and who is not permitted to delegate their work.

The effect of this is that in certain circumstances your organisation may be required to make superannuation payments on behalf of workers you consider to be independent contractors.



The ATO has developed a [Superannuation Guarantee eligibility decision tool](#) to help you understand whether you need to make superannuation contributions for individual workers (including any contractors who are treated as employees). However, these situations can be difficult, and you should seek legal advice in cases of doubt.

Safety

Volunteers, employees and independent contractors

Not-for-profit organisations are required by law to make sure they provide a safe working environment for their volunteers, employees and independent contractors.

This legal obligation stems from two primary sources of law:

- the common law (judge made law) of negligence and the negligence provisions in state and territory legislation, and
- work health and safety (or occupational health and safety) laws in each state and territory

Generally, under both sets of laws, if your organisation fails to take steps to protect the safety of volunteers, employees or independent contractors there may be legal repercussions.



You can find more information about your organisation's obligations to volunteers under negligence law and work health and safety laws in part 4 of this guide.

For more information about the work health and occupational health and safety laws in Australia generally see [our WHS webpage](#) and for more information about negligence laws in Australia generally see [our negligence webpage](#).

Insurance

Volunteers

Generally, volunteers are not covered by workers' compensation insurance. Therefore, it's a good idea for your organisation to take out personal accident insurance to cover your volunteers for out-of-pocket medical expenses if they are injured while working for your organisation.

Make sure any existing public liability, product liability and professional indemnity insurances are sufficient to cover the activities (acts or omissions) and age range of your volunteers. If they don't, it may also be necessary for your organisation to take out product liability and professional indemnity insurance in respect of its volunteers.

Employees

Employers are generally required by state and territory health and safety laws to take out workers' compensation insurance to cover the employees and the organisation.

Depending on its activities and functions, your organisation may also need to take out product liability, public liability and professional indemnity insurance to cover its own liability and that of its employees to other people.

Independent contractors

Unlike employees, independent contractors are typically required to organise their own insurance cover, such as accident compensation, public liability and professional indemnity. However, in some cases, an organisation engaging a contractor may have an obligation to effect workers' compensation insurance in respect of the contractor. The contractor themselves may also have insurance and compensation obligations in respect of their workers.



When you engage a contractor, you should determine if your organisation is required to effect workers' compensation in respect of the contractor and, if so, ensure your policy covers them.

If your organisation is not required to cover the contractor, check whether they have the necessary insurance because your organisation's policies may not cover them (make sure you understand what your policies do and don't cover). These situations can be difficult – seek legal advice in cases of doubt.



For more information about insurance for your community organisation, see part 4 of this guide and [our guide to risk and insurance](#).

For more information about the workers' compensation scheme in your state or territory, contact the relevant regulator:

- Australian Capital Territory – [Worksafe ACT](#)
- New South Wales – [SafeWork NSW](#)
- Northern Territory – [NT WorkSafe](#)
- Queensland – [WorkSafe Queensland](#)
- South Australia – [SafeWork SA](#)
- Tasmania – [WorkSafe Tasmania](#)
- Victoria – [WorkSafe Victoria](#)
- Western Australia – [WorkSafe WA](#)

Taxation

Volunteers

In certain circumstances, an organisation may provide volunteers payments or other benefits while working for the organisation. This may include cash payments, non-cash benefits, or both. These payments are given various descriptions, including honoraria, reimbursements, and allowances. Honorary or ex-gratia payments by the organisation to a volunteer are generally not legally enforceable.

How an amount is described does not determine its treatment for tax purposes. Whether a payment is assessable income in the hands of a volunteer depends on the nature of the payment and the recipient's circumstances.

Generally, volunteers do not have to pay tax on payments or benefits they may receive in their capacity as a volunteer for a not-for-profit organisation. Community organisations are similarly not liable to withhold income tax or fringe benefits tax for payments or benefits they provide to volunteers. There are, however, exceptions to these general rules and the ATO has further information on this issue.

Employees

If your community organisation is an employer, it is required to withhold income tax from wage payments to employees (PAYG withholding) each pay period. The organisation must then provide this tax to the ATO. The [ATO website has a tax withheld calculator](#) that you can use to work out how much tax you need to withhold from payments you make to your employees and other workers each pay period (week, fortnight, or month).

Other taxes, such as fringe benefits tax, may also apply to employees. In addition, depending on the size of your organisation and the total remuneration paid by its payroll, it may also be liable to pay payroll tax to the State Revenue Office.



Caution

Some not-for-profit community organisations are eligible for an exemption from paying income tax. This means the organisation doesn't have to pay tax on any income that comes into the community organisation (for example, on money received as part of a grant).

However, this exemption only applies to the community organisation income tax liability. It doesn't mean that employees of the community organisation are exempt from paying income tax. All employers are required to comply with the ATO's income tax withholding obligations in relation to payments of income to employees.

Independent contractors

Typically, independent contractors are paid after they provide a tax invoice to your organisation. The independent contractor is responsible for any income tax liability that may flow from that payment. Generally, the community organisation usually doesn't have to withhold income tax in respect of payments made to independent contractors. However, if a contractor fails to provide you with an ABN, you may have an obligation to withhold PAYG tax.

There is also scope under taxation laws for independent contractors to enter into voluntary agreements authorising their hirers to withhold taxation from payments. Before entering into such a voluntary agreement with an independent contractor, your organisation should contact the ATO or seek legal advice to make sure the necessary requirements for an arrangement of this type are met.

If your organisation is registered or required to be registered for GST purposes, your organisation may have GST obligations in relation to services provided by an independent contractor.

It's important to note that certain tax laws (such as payroll tax laws) apply an expanded definition of employee or deem an independent contractor to be an employee in some cases. The effect of this is that in certain circumstances your organisation may be liable to pay tax in relation to workers that would otherwise be considered independent contractors.

Termination

Volunteers

There is no notice period or other requirements to terminate a volunteer relationship – the voluntary nature of the relationship means that either party can end it at any time.

Volunteers can't make unfair or unlawful dismissal claims. However, if a person disputes they were a 'volunteer' and can establish that they had the attributes of an employee (see the table above for the attributes of an employee), and a court accepts that they were an employee, they may be entitled to lodge an action for unfair dismissal.

Employees

In relation to termination of their employment, most full-time and part-time employees are entitled to a notice period (or pay in lieu of such a notice period) in accordance with the NES. If the employee is covered by a modern award or enterprise agreement or has a written contract of employment, that award, agreement, or contract may specify a greater period of notice. Casual employees are not entitled to notice of termination.

If your organisation dismisses an employee for a reason that contravenes the provisions of the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)* or for a reason that is discriminatory, or the termination is 'harsh, unjust or unreasonable', the employee may be able to make a claim for 'unfair dismissal' or 'unlawful termination' against your organisation.

Always seek legal advice before terminating an employee's employment.



For more information about termination of the volunteer relationship, see part 3 of this guide and our [fact sheet on legal obligations when terminating an employee](#).

Independent contractors

If your organisation has a contract with an independent contractor, that contract will ordinarily end when the independent contractor has completed the work and received payment from your organisation. However, if your organisation wants to terminate the agreement before completion of the work, it can only do so in accordance with the terms of the contract or if otherwise allowed by the law (for example, it may be possible to terminate the contract if it can't be completed for reasons outside the control of either party).

Check the terms of your contract to see whether your organisation:

- can terminate by giving notice, and
- is required to pay the contractor for costs they incurred up to the date of termination

These situations can be difficult, and you should seek legal advice, particularly if the contract does not have any express provision dealing with termination.

Depending on its terms, your organisation may also be able to terminate a contract if the contractor is in serious breach of the contract. Again, it's important to look carefully at the terms of the contract because sometimes they require you to give the independent contractor a 'notice to remedy a breach' and an opportunity to fix it before terminating the agreement.

Unlike employees, independent contractors can't make unfair or unlawful dismissal claims. However, if your organisation attempts to terminate its contract with an independent contractor, other than in accordance with the terms of that contract, the independent contractor may take legal action against your organisation for breach of contract or breach of applicable general protections provisions of the [Fair Work Act 2009 \(Cth\)](#).



Caution

If a person who your organisation regards as an 'independent contractor' can establish in court that they are properly classified as an employee (see the table above for attributes of an employee), they will be able to make any claims available to an employee, including an unfair dismissal claim.



The risks of not describing a worker's status accurately

Often the parties to a contract for the performance of work will try to describe the legal nature of the relationship between them.

For example, a contract may state:

- 'this agreement does not create a relationship of employment' or
- 'the parties agree that their relationship is one of principal and independent contractor'

While it is a good idea to write down the terms of the relationship in a contract so both parties are clear about the arrangement, the label you give your worker is not necessarily decisive.

The nature of the rights and obligations between the parties as set out in the contract will largely determine whether the worker is an employee, independent contractor, or volunteer.

So, if a person who is called an 'independent contractor' or 'volunteer' actually has all or many of the attributes of an employee (see above for employee attributes), a court may decide that the person is an 'employee' and entitled to the legal benefits of being an employee.



Caution

Even if it is made clear in writing that the person is a 'volunteer', if the true nature of the relationship is that of an employer and employee, your organisation can't rely on the label of 'volunteer' or the existence of a volunteer agreement as proof of this arrangement.



Remember

If your organisation is not sure about how to correctly classify the worker, or whether you have correctly labelled the worker – seek legal advice.

Summary – the differences between a volunteer, employee and independent contractor

The law recognises many different categories of ‘workers’ such as volunteers, employees and independent contractors

- The law treats each category of worker differently; it's important that you do as well
- The consequences for failing to understand these differences include exposing your organisation to claims for employee entitlements, unfair dismissal claims and penalties for failing to remit taxes or pay superannuation

Different legal obligations are owed to volunteers, employees and independent contractors

- Your organisation needs to be across the different legal entitlements and obligations surrounding payment, safety, industrial instruments (such as awards), insurance, superannuation, taxation and termination



Each category of worker has unique attributes

- Generally, volunteers are not paid for the work that they perform, they perform without a legally enforceable obligation to do so and the volunteer relationship can end at any time
- Generally, employees are paid for time worked, must perform the duties of their position, perform ongoing work under the supervision and control of an employer and are entitled to paid and unpaid leave
- Generally, independent contractors have control over how they carry out their work, are paid for results that they achieve, are contracted for a set period of time or a set task and are free to accept work from the general public and other businesses

Consider using a volunteer agreement

- This is the best way to be clear about the relationship between your organisation and the volunteer. For a sample volunteer agreement, see part 3 of this guide
- When your organisation engages a worker, it should clarify from the outset the nature of the relationship and the expectations and obligations of the parties

Distinguish between members and volunteers

- Be aware that your organisation's members may also be considered ‘volunteers’ in particular circumstances
- This has certain legal implications for your organisation - certain laws apply to volunteers that may not apply to members, and insurance may apply to volunteers and members in a different way



National Volunteering Guide

Part 3

Recruiting, inducting, managing and ending the volunteer relationship

Feb 2024



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Part 3

**Recruiting, inducting, managing and
ending the volunteer relationship**

Recruiting, inducting, managing performance and ending the volunteer relationship



This part covers:

- ▶ the recruitment process
- ▶ inducting your volunteers
- ▶ managing the performance of your volunteers, and
- ▶ ending the volunteer relationship

Recruitment of volunteers

Volunteers are essential to the success of community organisations.

The profession of volunteer management

The [National Strategy for Volunteering](#) emphasises the skills that underpin volunteer management.



The National Strategy for Volunteering

On the strategic objective to recognise the importance of volunteer management:

Volunteering does not 'just happen'. Instead, it requires deliberate and ongoing strategic investment underpinned by adequate resourcing. Leading and managing volunteers is more than just administration; it requires time, talent, and skill.

Those responsible for leading, managing, and coordinating volunteers, whether paid or unpaid, are the gatekeepers to positive volunteering experiences and impactful volunteering outcomes. Elevating the profession of Volunteer Management and investing in infrastructure to reduce the burdensome administration associated with volunteer involvement is critical to any serious effort to futureproof volunteering'.

(page 62 of the strategy)



The volunteer experience



The National Strategy for Volunteering

On the strategic objective to focus on the volunteer experience:

Focusing on the volunteer experience is likely to reduce barriers to volunteering. For example, recruitment messages that appeal to one's primary motivations for volunteering are proven to be more effective and persuasive.

Volunteers need a degree of choice and freedom in how they carry out their role, they need opportunities to develop meaningful relationships in their volunteering, and they need the ability to demonstrate and improve their skills. An increased desire for flexibility from volunteers may increase the prevalence of online volunteering in the future, which is attractive for both its convenience and accessibility. Creating more flexible opportunities is also identified as the most important factor that could motivate more people over the age of 70 to volunteer

(page 43 of the strategy)

Your organisation should recruit its volunteers in a fair and non-discriminatory way.

Volunteer involving organisations should:

- use a volunteer role description when recruiting volunteers that focuses on the specific requirements of the role, and
- conduct some level of screening of volunteers, carefully balanced with the requirements of the role, even where there is no legislative or contractual requirement that checks be performed.

Volunteer role description

Importance of a volunteer role description

We recommend that you use a volunteer role description for all volunteer positions in your organisation.

The volunteer role description:

- should focus on the specific requirements of the role – being the skills or qualifications needed for the role (and not the attributes of a person), and
- can help your organisation understand what it needs and shape your advertisement

A volunteer role description will also help your organisation make decisions about what skills are required to perform the role and what checks might be necessary for the role. (Conducting unnecessary checks could lead to an allegation of discrimination).

A volunteer role description will also help:

- manage a volunteer's expectations about the role as it will set out the volunteer's roles and responsibilities
- your organisation manage the volunteer's performance and deal with any grievances as the description will be a record of what the volunteer has agreed to contribute to the organisation
- if necessary, consider whether a volunteer was acting outside the scope of their role – in particular, where injury, loss or harm has resulted from the actions or inaction of the volunteer (generally, your organisation will not be held liable if the volunteer has acted outside the scope of the work organised by the organisation or contrary to any instructions given by the organisation to the volunteer)



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement have two standards that relate to recruitment of volunteers. These are:

- **Standard 3: Volunteer roles are meaningful and tailored** – Volunteers are engaged in meaningful roles which contribute to the organisation's or group's purpose and meet volunteer interests and preferred style of participation.

This standard outlines important considerations for the way volunteer roles are designed and ways to meet both the needs of contemporary volunteering and the objectives of the organisation.

- **Standard 4: Recruitment is equitable and diversity is valued** – Volunteer recruitment and selection strategies meet the needs of the organisation and volunteers; they facilitate and value diversity and ensure equity and accessibility.

This standard describes the recruitment policies, including appropriate screening, that ensure organisations are effective in attracting suitable volunteers while also building diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility principles into recruitment activities.

Sample volunteer role description

A volunteer involving organisation should prepare a volunteer role description for each volunteer in the organisation. A sample volunteer role description is provided below.



Caution

The sample volunteer role description has been developed as an example only and should be changed to meet the needs and circumstances of your organisation.



Note

A key aspect of a genuine volunteer relationship is that either the volunteer or organisation can walk away from the arrangement at any time (see 'ending the volunteer relationship' below). You should, therefore, be careful how you frame the relationship.

Similar to the sample volunteer agreement (below), a volunteer role description should be clear and consistent in the use of language. Avoid using 'employment' type language.

For example:

- ✓ use terms such as 'volunteer', 'we would be pleased if you would', 'help to', 'provide assistance'
- ✗ avoid terms such as 'job', 'work', 'you must', 'required', 'responsible for'



Tips

- Discuss the volunteer role description as part of the induction process (discussed below).
- Give a copy of the volunteer role description to the volunteer and keep a copy with your other records on your volunteer.
- A volunteer role description should be reviewed from time to time (for example, as part of any volunteer performance review process) and, if necessary, amended.

For more information on volunteer record keeping, see part 6 of this guide.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

As outlined above, [Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) have two standards that relate to recruitment of volunteers, including:

Standard 3: Volunteer roles are meaningful and tailored – Volunteers are involved in meaningful roles that contribute to the organisation's or group's purpose and meets volunteer interests and preferred style of participation.

- 3.1 Volunteer roles are designed and negotiated with volunteers, considering the needs and interests of volunteers.
- 3.2 Volunteer roles contribute to the organisation's purpose, goals and objectives.
- 3.3 Volunteer roles are defined documented and communicated.
- 3.4 Volunteer roles are reviewed regularly including through feedback and engagement with volunteers about their experience

Sample volunteer role description

Volunteer Client Enquiry Officer

Purpose

The Volunteer Client Enquiry Officer helps provide an effective and efficient response to client enquiries.

Supervision

[Name of supervisor] will supervise volunteers, and provide ongoing support, with focused supervision to be provided by the social workers co-ordinating the task being undertaken by the volunteer.

Volunteer duties and responsibilities

As a Volunteer Client Enquiry Officer at **[Name of organisation]**, you will help by performing the following duties:

- answer phone calls from members of public
- record client personal information in database
- liaise with relevant staff and social workers about client inquiries
- provide clients with general information only, in accordance with social workers instructions



- sit in on client interviews social workers and assist with note-taking
- drafting client correspondence under social workers supervision
- filing and other administrative duties related to client files and
- other duties as directed social workers volunteer coordinator or [Name of organisation] staff

Skills, qualifications or experience required (or desirable) for role

We are looking for a volunteer with the following skills, qualifications or experience to fill this volunteer role:

- social workers, social work graduates, or 3-5th year social work students
- an understanding of the issues experienced by people who are marginalised and disadvantaged
- ability to deal with challenging client behaviours
- a demonstrated interest in social issues in Australia or internationally
- an understanding of issues of client confidentiality and the sensitive nature of clients' personal and health information
- experience in an office or client service environment – particularly a charitable organisation, and
- attention to detail and the ability to follow directions carefully

Background checks for role

[Name of organisation] is very serious about its duty to provide clients with a professional service and to providing all people working at [Name of organisation] with a safe and healthy working environment. We are a child safe organisation. We are committed to recruiting dedicated, professional volunteers who have the skills and experience appropriate for this role.

For this reason, should you be interested in this role, we will need to collect the following information before you begin the role **[insert details such as resume, a qualification check, a Working with Children Check, police check]***.

You will only have to provide this information following the initial meeting with the volunteer manager, and, if required, we will help to arrange for checks or help you apply for them.

If you have any questions about these background checks, please don't hesitate to contact **[insert contact information]**. Please note that we treat all information as sensitive and handle it in accordance with privacy laws. You can access a copy of our privacy policy **[here]** (or we can provide you with a copy).

Also note that we will require you to sign the attached volunteer agreement**

** These checks are discussed below at 'volunteer screening'*

*** Volunteer agreements are discussed below at 'volunteer agreement' where a sample volunteer agreement is provided*

Volunteer screening as part of the recruitment process

It's important that volunteer involving organisations screen potential volunteers in a systematic way.

Certain background screening checks are required by law (under legislation or contract) and others are optional.

When deciding what checks your organisation requires to minimise risks associated with your volunteers, consider whether the volunteer's role and responsibilities will include contact with vulnerable clients or children, access to sensitive information, handling money, or operating certain machinery (including vehicles). This consideration should already be completed as part of the preparation of a role description (discussed above) as the first step of the recruitment process and the subsequent advertising for volunteers.

The [National Strategy for Volunteering](#) contemplates how volunteer screening can hold up the recruitment process and possibly discriminate against potential volunteers. These factors may influence your consideration of whether to conduct screening checks in a particular case. However, see our note below on the importance of conducting some level of screening for volunteers (even when checks are not required by law).



Note

Even when not required, volunteer involving organisations should conduct some level of screening for volunteers. This is because all organisations have a responsibility to make sure they maintain a safe environment for all workers (paid and unpaid) and clients.

Due to this overarching duty of care (which is discussed in more detail in part 4 of this guide), organisations should always try to be well informed about the people they choose to be part of their organisations.



The National Strategy for Volunteering

On the objective to make volunteering inclusive and accessible:

Processes such as background checks are not easy or inclusive for those without the requisite identification documents or access to private transport. People with disability identify stigma, unconscious bias, and lack of understanding as the greatest barrier to inclusion. This includes the prevalence of ableism, where people with disability are seen as less capable, less able to contribute, and not valued as much as those without disability.

(page 44 of the strategy)

On the objective to commit to strategic investment:

Other parts of the volunteering infrastructure in Australia such as screening systems are often designed without volunteers in mind, which can cause bottlenecks for volunteer involvement. In Victoria the NDIS Worker Screening Check process has involved manual approval of volunteer fee waivers, causing significant delays as a larger number of volunteers required screening than anticipated. Volunteering should be safe for both volunteers and the people they volunteer with. Ensuring that screening processes, worker checks, and other safeguards that include volunteers are well-resourced and efficient is crucial to effective volunteer engagement.

(page 61 of the strategy)

Working with Children Checks

The laws regarding working with children requirements vary between the states and territories.

While there are plans to develop a nationally consistent approach to working with children checks and child safe organisations across jurisdictions, currently your organisation will need to comply with the law in your state (or more jurisdictions depending on where your organisation operates).



Terminology

In this part of the guide, the screening checks for people working with children are referred to as **Working with Children Checks**, although terminology differs across states and territories.

While the working with children screening requirements and obligations differ across the states and territories, they all generally set out:

- **when Working with Children Checks are legally required**
 - They are generally required for all people who will be carrying out child-related work.



- The definition of ‘child related work’ is different across the states and territories.
- **any exemptions to the legal requirement for a check**
 - In some states and territories, exemptions are allowed where the volunteer is under 18 years of age or where the volunteer is a parent of a child and the volunteering involves an activity undertaken by that volunteer’s child.
- **the legal obligations of an organisation working with children**
 - This generally includes an obligation to make sure its workers who work with children have submitted to a working with children check in relevant jurisdictions before they begin any child related work.
- **how to apply for a Working with Children Check and other relevant matters**
 - Volunteers must apply directly through the relevant state or territory authority to obtain a Working with Children Check.

Your organisation must understand its legal obligations when it comes to Working with Children Checks.



For more information, see our [webpage on background checks](#), which includes a screening guide for each state and territory.

Police Checks

Police Checks (sometimes referred to as ‘criminal record or history checks’) are different to Working with Children Checks. For example, not all criminal offences will be relevant for a working with children check, only those the legislation has set out on the basis that those offences pose a risk to children.

A Police Check allows an organisation to be aware of all (releasable) previous convictions (child-related or not). This may be appropriate if you are looking for a volunteer who may be transporting clients and you want to be certain they don’t have any relevant driving-related offences.

Police Checks are generally not mandatory. However, some legislation requires criminal record checks as part of people’s qualifications (for example, security guard). And sometimes a not-for-profit organisation may be under a contractual agreement to get police checks for certain positions (for example, under an agreement with the Department of Human Services for the delivery of services to children).

Make sure you comply with any obligations in any funding agreements your organisation has.

Differences between Police Checks and Working with Children Checks include:

- what is checked
- what is revealed by the checks
- the outcome
- length of validity of the checks (a Police Check is a ‘point in time’ single check), and
- whether the check is transferable across jurisdictions



Tip

Where there is no legal obligation to conduct a Police Check (or a Working with Children Check), your organisation may want to consider if there is still a need for a check. Consent will be required from the volunteer and you must make sure your organisation complies with privacy legislation applicable in your state or territory

This is another reason why having a volunteer role description is important – your organisation can consider the roles and responsibilities set out in the role description and decide what convictions for prior offences, if any, would preclude a person from being suitable for that role. You can then decide if your organisation is going to get a Police Check (or a Working with Children Check) for the position and you can make this clear in the volunteer role description.

If you decide the position requires a Police Check, your organisation should also consider the process it will follow if the Police Check comes back showing an offence, including discussing the check with the volunteer.

This process should:

- allow the volunteer to confidentially explain the result of the check, and
- ensure the privacy of the person and that the record of the Police Check is stored appropriately (refer to part 6 of this guide).

There are legal protections preventing discrimination on the basis of a criminal record. You must not refuse an applicant simply because they have a prior conviction for an offence that has no relevance to the available position.



Case example

In the case of *Mr GC v State of New South Wales (Rail Corporation New South Wales) [2012] Ausry 48*, the Australian Human Rights Commission found an organisation had discriminated on the basis of a criminal record.

However, your organisation has obligations to create a safe and effective environment, and you can refuse a potential volunteer on the basis of a criminal record when you believe that a prior offence prevents the applicant from performing the 'inherent requirements' of the volunteer position (refer to the discussion below 'recruitment and discrimination law'). If this situation arises your organisation may need to seek legal advice.

Police Checks (in each state and territory) are explained in more detail in [our screening guides](#).

The National Disability Insurance Scheme Worker Screening Check Program

The National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) Worker Screening Check is a national clearance system for workers providing NDIS services and supports.

Under the national scheme:

- a NDIS worker screen database of registered workers is being established
- organisations will be able to access the database to check the clearance status of workers
- NDIS providers will be responsible for identifying roles in their organisation that require a screening check and will be required to make sure all workers in these roles receive an appropriate check, and
- workers who receive a national screening check will be eligible to work in any Australian state or territory



While the system is national, workers who provide NDIS disability support apply for a check through their local state or territory authority. The national program began on 1 February 2021 (except in the Northern Territory, where the scheme began on 1 July 2021).

NDIS Worker Screening Checks (in each state and territory) are explained in more in [our screening guides](#).

Other checks

In addition to screening required by law, it may be in the best interests of a volunteer involving organisation to make sure it conducts other background checks.

By asking for referee details and performing licence and qualification checks (and possibly asking for details of any potential conflicts of interest) an organisation can assure itself that it's making the right choice when recruiting a volunteer.

Background checks are addressed in more detail in [our screening guides](#).

People on visas

Work restrictions may apply to the holders of temporary visas, such as tourist and student visas. These may affect whether the visa holder can engage in unpaid work (that is volunteer for your organisation).

Restrictions are indicated by particular visa conditions.



For a full list of visa conditions, see the [Department of Home Affairs 'Immigration and Citizenship' website](#).

When dealing with people who are not permanent residents, it's important to check they don't breach visa conditions due to their involvement with your organisation.

Under the [Migration Act 1958 \(Cth\) \(Migration Act\)](#), penalties apply to organisations that engage an 'illegal worker' (a non-citizen who is working without a valid visa or working or volunteering in breach of a visa condition), unless it can show that reasonable steps were taken at reasonable times to make sure the person was in fact legal.

Under the law, it doesn't matter if the organisation didn't know the person's work rights. Organisations may be penalised for simply having such a person on their premises. Therefore, it's important that organisations verify a person's immigration status and work rights before and during the volunteer work period.

A person is a legal worker if they are:

- an Australian citizen
- an Australian permanent resident
- a New Zealand citizen, or
- a foreign national with a visa with permission to work in Australia (and who is not in breach of their visa conditions, for example, the visa has expired)

To confirm the above, an organisation must sight an Australian or New Zealand passport or conduct a VEVO check. Also see [the Department of Home Affairs webpage on working in Australia](#).

If you believe or know that a potential volunteer is in Australia on a visa, then you should check that they have permission to work. These checks are important to avoid inadvertent breaches of visa conditions.



Tips

Carefully check any conditions attached to an applicant volunteer's visa.

We recommend that organisations:

- run a [VEVO check \(online\)](#) of a person's work rights before taking them on as a volunteer if they are not an Australian citizen or permanent resident with unrestricted work rights, and
- seek independent immigration legal advice where required. More information is provided below

Remember this is also important from the volunteer's perspective – they don't want to put their visa at risk either.

The easiest and quickest way for an organisation to take reasonable steps to make sure it's engaging legal workers, is to use the Department's VEVO system. Using this system, your organisation can either:

- register as a VEVO organisation and, with the individual's consent, conduct the search yourself, or
- ask the person to send their current visa details directly from the VEVO Enquiry Form

The VEVO search will reveal the visa status and work entitlements for the visa holder. It will also state whether the person doesn't have permission to work or has work restrictions. If the visa has no work restrictions then the person is free to work and volunteer while they hold a valid visa. However, VEVO checks are only current at the time conducted.

Therefore, it's important to conduct regular checks, track relevant dates (for example, work and expiry dates), and keep records on file confirming the organisation has verified the person's immigration status and work rights.



Caution

It's important that your organisation checks the VEVO results were recently generated and continues to conduct VEVO checks while the person volunteers with your organisation. This is because visa status and work rights may change. It's not enough to view the results of a VEVO search conducted by a third party (unless, completed by a Migration Agent) or a printed copy held by the person as these could be out of date.



Tip

Add VEVO checks to your volunteer recruitment process and include a copy of the VEVO Results in the volunteer's file.



The Department of Home Affairs' website includes information on [engaging legal workers](#), and the [Visa Entitlement Verification Online system](#).

The [Fair Work Ombudsman website](#) features information on unpaid work.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

As outlined above, [Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) have two standards that relate to recruitment of volunteers, including:

Standard 4: Recruitment is equitable and diversity is valued – Volunteer recruitment and selection strategies meet the needs of the organisation and volunteers; they facilitate and value diversity and ensure equity and accessibility.

- 4.1 Organisations and groups engage volunteers using planned and innovative approaches to attract people with relevant interests, knowledge and skills.
- 4.2 Potential volunteers are provided with information about the organisation, how volunteers contribute to its purpose and vision, available opportunities and the selection process.
- 4.3 Volunteers are selected based on their interests, knowledge, skills and suitability for the role, and consistent with anti-discrimination law.
- 4.4 Diversity, inclusivity and accessibility principles are built into recruitment activities, reflecting and promoting awareness of, and respect for, diversity and inclusion and the inherent value this brings to the organisation.
- 4.5 Screening processes maintain the safety and security of service recipients, employees, volunteers, and the organisation, in line with legal requirements and regulations.

Recruitment and discrimination law

Anti-discrimination law protects workers, including volunteers, in a number of ways.



For detailed information about what constitutes unlawful discrimination and whether volunteers are protected from unlawful discrimination in the workplace, see part 5 of this guide (workplace behaviour).

Regardless of whether an organisation or its volunteers are covered by anti-discrimination laws, best practice dictates that organisations extend any protections available to employees to its volunteers, including in the area of recruitment.

An overview of discrimination law in the context of recruitment of volunteers is set out below.



What is discrimination?

Discrimination is treating, or proposing to treat, someone unfavourably because of a personal attribute which is protected by law.

Generally, there are two types of discrimination – direct and indirect.

Anti-discrimination laws prohibit both kinds of discrimination when they occur because of a 'protected attribute' of the person (for example, age, sexuality, gender identity, disability, race). The particular



protected attributes that are covered vary under the different state and federal laws (this is explained further in part 5 of this guide).

When recruiting volunteers, using a volunteer role description (as discussed above) which focuses on the roles and responsibilities of the position should help your organisation ask questions that focus on the requirements of the role rather than the personal attributes of the potential volunteer.

For example, your organisation should be asking 'Would you need any support to assist in performing this role? This job requires lifting. Is there anything that will prevent you from performing these duties?' Your organisation should **not** be asking 'Do you have a disability? You look a bit old – are you going to be able to lift boxes of donated goods?'



Tip – when recruiting volunteers

An organisation conducting a recruitment process for volunteers, should ask all potential volunteers the same questions and record their responses in writing. This will not only be helpful to compare all potential volunteers but also if an allegation of discrimination is made.



Case example – failure to focus on inherent requirements

In the case of *Mr CG v State of New South Wales (Rail Corporation New South Wales)* [2012] AusHRC 48 the Australian Human Rights Commission investigated a complaint by Mr CG that he was discriminated against on the basis of his criminal record when applying for a job as a market analyst with the Rail Corporation of New South Wales (**RailCorp**).

Mr CG had been convicted of driving after consuming a prohibited amount of alcohol in 2001 and 2008. Around June 2009, Mr CG applied for the job with RailCorp. Although Mr CG met all the selection criteria and was the selection panel's preferred candidate for the Market Analyst role, he was advised that he was not offered employment because of his criminal record.

RailCorp argued that Mr CG could not, considering his criminal record, meet the inherent requirements of the Market Analyst role. The Commission rejected this argument on the basis that Mr CG's criminal offences had no connection with his employment noting that, among other things, Mr CG was not required to drive as part of his employment with RailCorp nor was he required to engage in any safety critical activities related to the provision of rail transport services.

The Commission found that RailCorp had unlawfully discriminated against Mr CG on the basis of his criminal record.



Case example – focusing on personal attributes

In the case of *Smith v Commonwealth of Australia* (2000) EOC 93-077, Smith had applied for a position as a part-time director on the Red Meat Producer Corporation's board. She was shortlisted as one of the 12 best candidates, but her application was ultimately unsuccessful.

Smith lodged a complaint with the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission alleging she had been discriminated against on the grounds of her sex, marital status and pregnancy by the Red Meat Producer Corporation selection committee.

During the interview process, while the selection committee members had asked Smith technical questions about the meat and livestock industry, they also asked if she was married and had children. When Smith confirmed she was married with children, the panel noted the role involved travel and suggested this may conflict with her family commitments. Smith said this would not be a problem.

Smith claimed the personal questions made her uncomfortable, affected her confidence and made it hard for her to stay focussed on industry issues.

The Red Meat Producer Corporation claimed that Smith's application was unsuccessful because there were already five people on the board from NSW, Smith was less experienced than other applicants, and her reference checks had not turned out well.

The Commissioner found that the asking of the interview questions about Smith's family life was a breach of the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* (Cth) as the questions were not related to Smith's ability to perform as a director. The questions clearly placed her under greater stress and made her uncomfortable, and therefore constituted discrimination against Smith on the grounds of her sex and marital status. Smith was awarded \$2,500 in damages.

Anti-discrimination procedures in recruitment

Steps your organisation can take to prevent discrimination include:

having an anti-discrimination policy with a section on discrimination in recruitment that covers all workers (volunteers as well as paid workers).	<input type="checkbox"/>
preparing a role description that focuses on the skills required for the volunteer role rather than the personal attributes that may be desirable (for example, 'are you able to commit to volunteering regularly between 8am and 4pm on Tuesdays?').	<input type="checkbox"/>
considering the language you use in the volunteer recruitment process (as outlined above, avoid focusing on personal attributes such as 'do you have kids; we really need someone reliable').	<input type="checkbox"/>
using the same language in the role description across advertisements and in the interview process (see the sample volunteer role description above).	<input type="checkbox"/>
conducting regular training for all volunteers and workers about the policy so that people recognise discriminatory practices and are aware of processes for addressing them	<input type="checkbox"/>

Organisations that have an anti-discrimination policy and procedures (as a matter of best practice, if not otherwise required by law) help protect all their workers from discriminatory behaviour.

These policies and procedures will also help the organisation if a discrimination complaint is made.

Anti-discrimination policy

We recommend that volunteer involving organisations have a policy against discrimination across the whole organisation.

**A good anti-discrimination policy should include:**

a policy statement outlining the organisation's commitment to preventing and addressing discrimination in the workplace	<input type="checkbox"/>
who is covered by the policy (volunteers as well as paid workers)	<input type="checkbox"/>
the relevant laws that apply	<input type="checkbox"/>
what constitutes discrimination (including direct and indirect discrimination and examples of both)	<input type="checkbox"/>
the attributes that are protected	<input type="checkbox"/>
when discrimination is lawful (see below for more information)	<input type="checkbox"/>
what workers should do if they experience or witness unlawful discrimination	<input type="checkbox"/>
how to make a complaint	<input type="checkbox"/>
how discrimination complaints will be handled	<input type="checkbox"/>
the consequences of breaching the policy	<input type="checkbox"/>
where to go for further information (for example, the Australian Human Rights Commission website and the relevant state or territory anti-discrimination body).	<input type="checkbox"/>

Your organisation should also make sure all its workers (paid and unpaid) have a good understanding of the anti-discrimination policy, which may require organisations to have regular training sessions.

When might discrimination be lawful in recruitment?

Lawful discrimination

Generally, discrimination will be lawful when it doesn't contravene any relevant anti-discrimination legislation.

Not all discrimination is against the law.

Discrimination is not against the law if:

- the discrimination is not on the basis of a protected attribute, or
- it is excused or exempted by law

The discriminatory conduct that is excused or exempted differs between the states and territories (see below).



Caution

The lists of types of lawful discrimination set out below are not exhaustive. There may be other situations in which discrimination is lawful. For more information, see the [Australian Human Rights Commission website](#).

Volunteer involving organisations should be careful relying on exceptions or exemptions and may need to seek legal advice.



Australian Capital Territory

Generally, discriminatory conduct will not be against the [Discrimination Act 1991 \(ACT\)](#) if:

- a person discriminates against someone else in relation to a position as an employee or contract worker if the duties of the position involve doing domestic duties on the premises where the person lives
- a person discriminates against someone else in relation to a position as an employee or contract worker if the duties of the position involve the care of a child where the child lives
- it's for the provision of accommodation if:
 - the person who provides or proposes to provide the accommodation, or a near relative or carer of the person, lives and intends to continue to live on the premises, and
 - the accommodation provided in the premises is for not more than six people and any near relative or carer of the person
- it's for the provision of accommodation by a religious body for members of a relevant class of people
- it's for the provision of accommodation by a charitable or voluntary body for members of a relevant class of people
- a person discriminates on the ground of accommodation status in relation to the provision of accommodation if the discrimination is reasonable, having regard to any relevant factors
- an employment agency discriminates in the selection of people as suitable for a job vacancy if, had the proposed employer discriminated against the person in the same way, the discrimination would not have been unlawful
- the purpose of the act is:
 - to make sure members of a relevant class of people have equal opportunities with other people, or
 - to give members of a relevant class of people access to facilities, services or opportunities to meet the special needs they have as members of the relevant class
- a voluntary body discriminates against a person in relation to:
 - the admission of people as members of the body, or
 - the provision of benefits, facilities or services to people, whether the people are members of the body or otherwise
- a person (the first person) discriminates against someone else in relation to:
 - employment as a member of the staff of an educational institution, or
 - a position as a contract worker that involves doing work in an educational institution,if the institution is conducted in accordance with the doctrines, tenets, beliefs or teachings of a particular religion or creed, and the first person so discriminates in good faith to avoid injury to the religious susceptibilities of adherents of that religion or creed, or
- it's necessary to comply with an order of a court or tribunal, or is authorised by legislation

For more information, see part 5 of this guide and the [ACT Human Rights Commission website](#).



Note and caution – Australian Capital Territory

As well as the exceptions that are expressly provided in the *Discrimination Act 1991 (ACT)*, an organisation can make an application to the ACT Human Rights Commission to be granted a temporary exemption for conduct that would otherwise contravene certain discrimination provisions.

The Commission will only grant an exemption for conduct that promotes acceptance and compliance with the Act, and the exemption will be subject to any conditions the Commission sees fit. If you are considering applying to the Commission for an exemption for your organisation, seek independent legal advice as the above information is just a guide.

For more information on how to apply for an exemption, see the [ACT Human Rights Commission webpage on granting exemptions](#).

Queensland

Generally, discriminatory conduct will not be against the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (QLD)* if:

- a special measure would need to be taken to promote substantive equality for a disadvantaged group
- it's a genuine occupational requirement for the position (for example, employing only women applicants for positions involving body searches of women)
- it's lawful to discriminate to protect public health or the health and safety of people at a place of work
- the employer can demonstrate that it would impose unjustifiable hardship on the organisation to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the impairment
- a religious body discriminates (except on the basis of age, race or impairment), in the area of employment, against a person who openly acts in a way contrary to the employer's religious beliefs
- the role or service is targeted towards people who are married if you would like the role to be done by a married couple
- the role involves working with children and the discrimination is on the basis of gender identity or lawful sexual activity (where the discrimination is reasonably necessary to protect the child) or against people with a conviction for a child sex offence or those disqualified from working with children under any Act in Australia
- a person is acting in compliance with pre-existing industrial awards and agreements, other pre-existing legislation and court orders, or
- discrimination is on the basis of gender and the role is a live-in job where sleeping accommodation is provided for one sex only and supplying separate accommodation would impose unjustifiable hardship on an employer

For more information, see part 5 of this guide and the [Queensland Human Rights Commission website](#).



Note and caution – Queensland

If an organisation can show that their proposed actions are likely to contravene the [*Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 \(Qld\)*](#) and the actions are not covered by the specific or general exemptions in the Act, they may apply to the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission (**QIRC**) for a work-related exemption, or to the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal (**QCAT**) for all other exemptions.

QCAT may grant a temporary exemption from the operation of a specified provision to allow conduct that might otherwise be discriminatory. This might include, for example, restricting accommodation to single people, or recruiting for women or men only.

If you are considering applying to either QIRC or QCAT for an exemption for your organisation, seek independent legal advice as the above information is just a guide.

For more information on how to apply for an exemption, see the [Queensland Human Rights Commission webpage on granting exemptions](#).

Northern Territory

Generally, discriminatory conduct will not be against the [*Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 \(NT\)*](#) if:

- an educational authority, in accordance with the doctrine of a particular religion, excludes applicants on the grounds of religious belief or activity, or sexuality and is in good faith to avoid offending the religious sensitivities of people of the particular religion
- it's based on a genuine occupational qualification or requirement in relation to a particular position
- the person's inability to adequately perform the inherent requirements of the work even where the special need of the other person has been or were to be accommodated
- offering work where the work is to be performed in the person's home
- it's on the grounds of irrelevant criminal record if the work principally involves the care, instruction or supervision of vulnerable persons and the discrimination is reasonably necessary to protect the physical, psychological or emotional well-being of those vulnerable persons, or
- it's necessary to comply with an order of a court or tribunal, or it is authorised by legislation

For more information, see part 5 of this guide and the [Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission website](#).



Note and caution – Northern Territory

As well as the exceptions that are already expressly provided for by the [*Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 \(NT\)*](#), an organisation can make an application to the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner for a temporary exemption for conduct that would otherwise contravene certain discrimination provisions.

The Commissioner may grant an exemption on the basis that the proposed discriminatory conduct seeks to redress past discrimination, and the exemption will be subject to any conditions the Commissioner sees fit. If you are considering applying to the Commissioner for an exemption for your organisation, seek independent legal advice as the above information is just a guide.



New South Wales

Generally, discriminatory conduct will not be against the [Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 \(NSW\)](#) if:

- it's necessary to protect the public health where discrimination is against a person on the grounds of disability if the disability concerned is an infectious disease
- an applicant or employee is unable to carry out the 'inherent requirements' (essential duties) of the role (and taking steps to accommodate the person would impose 'unjustifiable hardship' on the employer)
- the role or service is targeted towards people of one sex only, towards a particular age group or towards a particular race or ethnic group, where being that particular sex, within that particular age group or of the race or ethnic group is a 'genuine occupational qualification' essential for doing the role
- the role or service is targeted towards people who are married if you would like the role to be done by a married couple
- a religious body or organisation discriminates in:
 - ordaining or appointing priests, ministers of religion or members of a religious order (or training or educating those people seeking appointment), or
 - selecting or appointing people to perform functions relating to, or participating in, any religious observance or practice, or
- your organisation has obtained an exemption from the President of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Board to allow discrimination on any ground and in any area covered by NSW anti-discrimination laws

For more information, see part 5 of this guide and [Anti-Discrimination New South Wales' website](#).



Note and caution – New South Wales

There are two ways to apply for an exemption under the [Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 \(NSW\)](#):

- apply to the President of the Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW for an exemption to allow discrimination on any ground and in any area covered by the Act. These exemptions generally relate to employment and recruitment.
- apply to the Minister (currently the Attorney General) for a certificate that a special needs program or activity can operate in a discriminatory manner. The Minister can't grant a certificate for race or age discrimination. These exemptions apply to special needs programs, activities or facilities which promote access for certain groups of people affected by unlawful discrimination.

If you are considering applying for an exemption for your organisation, seek independent legal advice as the above information is just a guide.

For information on how to apply for exemptions and specific timeframes, see [Anti-Discrimination New South Wales' webpage on granting exemptions](#).

South Australia

Generally, discriminatory conduct will not be against the [Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(SA\)](#) if:

- it's a special measure being taken to achieve equal opportunity for people of a particular disability, race, age, sex, marital status, or for pregnant women, people with caring responsibilities and people of a chosen gender
- it's a genuine occupational requirement for the position (for example, employing only women applicants for positions involving body searches of women)
- it's discrimination based on sexual orientation, gender identity or intersex status in relation to employment or engagement for the purposes of an educational institution if:



- the educational institution is administered in accordance with the precepts of a particular religion and the discrimination is founded on the precepts of that religion
- the educational authority administering the institution has a written policy stating its position in relation to the matter
- a copy of the policy is given to a person who is to be interviewed for or offered employment with the authority or a teacher who is to be offered engagement as a contractor by the authority, and
- a copy of the policy is provided on request, free of charge to employees, contractors and prospective employees and contractors of the authority; to students, prospective students and parents and guardians of students and prospective students of the institution; and to other members of the public
- it's discrimination on the ground of gender identity for the purpose of enforcing standards of appearance and dress reasonably required for employment
- if the person has an attribute which means that they would not be able:
 - to perform their work adequately without endangering themselves or others, or
 - to respond adequately to situations of emergency that should reasonably be anticipated in connection with the employment
- the employer can demonstrate that it would impose unjustifiable hardship on the organisation to make reasonable adjustments to accommodate the impairment, or
- it's necessary to comply with an order of a court or tribunal

For more information, see part 5 of this guide and South Australia's [Equal Opportunity Commission's website](#).



Note and caution – South Australia

As well as the exceptions expressly provided for in the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)*, an organisation can make an application to the South Australian Employment Tribunal for a temporary exemption from certain discrimination provisions (including outside of employment situations).

An exemption may be granted if, for example, your program or service aims to promote equality of opportunity between people, prevent certain kinds of discrimination or helps people to participate in the economic and social life of the community. If you are considering applying for an exemption, seek independent legal advice as the above information is just a guide.

For more information on how to apply for an exemption, see South Australia's [Equal Opportunity Commission's website](#).



Tasmania

Generally, discriminatory conduct will not be against the [Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 \(Tas\)](#) if:

- a program, plan or arrangement is designed to promote equal opportunity for a group of people who are disadvantaged or have a special need because of a prescribed attribute
- it's required by the doctrines of the religion of an institution
- if in employment, it's for the purpose of the residential care of persons under the age of 18 years
- if in employment, it's based on a genuine occupational qualification or requirement in relation to a particular position
- in accommodation, if it's a shared accommodation for less than five adult persons
- if in employment, the person has an attribute which means that they would not be able:
 - to carry out the inherent requirements of the employment, or
 - in order to carry out those inherent requirements would require services or facilities not reasonably required by another person, the provision of which would impose unjustifiable hardship, and
- it's reasonably necessary to comply with an order of a commission, court or tribunal, or is authorised by laws of Tasmania or the Commonwealth

For more information, see part 5 of this guide and [Equal Opportunity Tasmania's website](#).



Note and caution – Tasmania

As well as the exceptions already provided for in the [Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 \(Tas\)](#), an organisation can make an application to the Anti-Discrimination Commissioner for a temporary exemption for conduct that would otherwise contravene certain discrimination provisions of the Act.

The Commissioner will only grant an exemption for conduct that furthers the purposes of the Act, and the exemption can be subject to any conditions the Commissioner sees fit. If you are considering applying to the Commissioner for an exemption for your organisation, seek independent legal advice as the above information is just a guide.

For more information on how to apply for an exemption, see [Equal Opportunity Tasmania's webpage on granting exemptions](#).

Victoria

Generally, discriminatory conduct will not be against the [Equal Opportunity Act 2010 \(Vic\)](#) if:

- it's necessary to comply with an order of a court or tribunal, or is authorised by an Act
- a religious body or organisation discriminates in:
 - ordaining or appointing priests, ministers of religion or members of a religious order (or training or educating those people seeking appointment)
 - selecting or appointing people to perform functions relating to, or participating in, any religious observance or practice
- conforming to the doctrines, beliefs or principles of the religion or where it is reasonably necessary to avoid injury to the religious sensitivities of people who follow the religion (where discrimination is on the basis of a person's religious belief or activity, sex, sexual orientation, lawful sexual activity, marital status, parental status or gender identity)
- it's necessary to protect the health and safety of any person, including the person being discriminated against (where discrimination is on the basis of disability, pregnancy or physical features)



- it's necessary to protect property of any person (including the person discriminated against) or any public property (where discrimination is on the basis of disability or physical feature), or
- your organisation is providing special services, benefits or facilities to meet the special needs of people with a particular personal characteristic

For more information, see part 5 of this guide and the [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's website](#).



Note and caution – Victoria

If your organisation's planned action doesn't fall within one of the statutory exceptions in the [Equal Opportunity Act 2010 \(Vic\)](#), the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal (**VCAT**) may grant temporary exemptions, allowing discrimination to be legal in some circumstances if it believes that this would further the Act's goal of promoting equal opportunity.

Exemptions apply for the period set by VCAT, which can't be longer than five years. VCAT may also attach conditions when granting an exemption, such as a requirement to provide periodic reports on how often the exemption is applied. You may also wish to apply for an exemption in cases where you are unsure whether an exception or special measure applies.

If you are considering applying to VCAT for an exemption for your organisation, seek independent legal advice as the above information is just a guide.

For more information on how to apply for an exemption, see the [Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission's webpage on granting exemptions](#).

Western Australia

Generally, discriminatory conduct will not be against the [Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(WA\)](#) if:

- it's an act a purpose of which is to afford a person with a particular family responsibility or of a particular family status access to facilities, services or opportunities to meet their special needs in relation to employment, education, training or welfare, or any ancillary benefits
- an employer who provides accommodation to its employees, provides accommodation of different standards to different employees where:
 - the standard of the accommodation provided to each employee is determined having regard to the number of persons in the household of the employee, and
 - it's not reasonable to expect the employer to provide accommodation of the same standard for all employees
- an employer restricts the employment of a person if:
 - that person is a relative of an employee of the employer, or
 - that person is a relative of an employee of another employer,
 and the first-mentioned employer can demonstrate, after making reasonable enquiries, that there is a significant likelihood of collusion between that person and that person's relative which would result in damage to the business of the first-mentioned employer
- it's based on a genuine occupational qualification or requirement in relation to a particular position
- carried out by an employer, principal or person:
 - where the employer or principal is a private educational authority, or
 - in the case of employment or work in a hospital or other place where a medical or other health related service is provided, where the employer or principal is a religious body,

if the duties of the employment or work are for the purposes of, or in connection with, or otherwise involve or relate to, the participation of the employee in any religious observance or practice



- carried out by an employer on the ground of the holding or not holding of any political conviction or the engaging in or refusal or failure to engage in any lawful political activities with respect to the offering of employment or work
- carried out by an employer on the ground of the impairment of that person if it is reasonable for the employer to conclude that the person with the impairment, because of that impairment:
 - would be unable to carry out work reasonably required to be performed in the course of the employment or engagement concerned, or
 - would, in order to carry out that work, require services or facilities that are not required by persons who do not have an impairment and the provision of which would impose an unjustifiable hardship on the employer
- carried out by an employer on the ground of the other person's age when an engagement is offered or access to goods, services or facilities are provided if it is to ensure compliance with health and safety considerations, or
- it's necessary to comply with an order of a court or tribunal.

For further information, see part 5 of this guide and Western Australia's [Equal Opportunity Commission's website](#).



Note and caution – Western Australia

As well as the exceptions that are already expressly provided for by the [Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(WA\)](#), an organisation can make an application to the State Administrative Tribunal for a temporary exemption from certain discrimination provisions.

The Tribunal may grant a temporary exemption for a period not exceeding five years and subject to any conditions it sees fit. If you are considering applying to the Tribunal for an exemption for your organisation, seek independent legal advice as the above information is just a guide.

For more information on how to apply for an exemption, see the [State Administrative Tribunal's website](#).



Inducting your volunteers

Providing volunteers with a proper induction process is a good way to show your organisation's commitment to its volunteers – it's the first impression the new volunteer will get of your organisation.



What is induction?

Induction is the process of welcoming new volunteers to the organisation and familiarising them with their role, the role of other workers (paid and unpaid) and the workplace more broadly.

All volunteers should complete the induction process before starting any volunteer duties.

After completing induction, volunteers should:

- know where to access your organisation's policies and procedures, and
- have copies of those that are particularly relevant to them and their role (for example, health and safety, privacy and volunteer grievance policies)

Checklist – volunteer induction

We recommend you complete an induction checklist for each new volunteer – a sample checklist is below.



Note – the sample induction checklist

The sample induction checklist may be used generally with volunteers, it is not exhaustive and you should change it to meet the needs of your organisation.

The sample induction checklist doesn't constitute legal advice.

It may be appropriate to have a separate checklist for different volunteer positions.

For example – all your committee members (also called board members or directors) may be volunteers. We recommend that new committee members have an induction to the role of the committee – it's important they understand the role of a committee generally, their specific role on the committee and how that role differs to the roles of other people in the organisation.

Review the checklist to make sure it's consistent with the volunteer role description (for example, if a volunteer is going to be using your organisation's vehicles you may want to make sure that an overview of any relevant vehicle policies and procedures are included as part of the induction process).

Once the induction checklist is completed, give a copy to the volunteer. You should also keep a copy with other records in relation to your volunteer. Part 6 of this guide provides further information on volunteer record keeping.



For more information on the process of inducting new board members see our fact sheets '[Introduction to the board member role for new board members](#)' and '[Board Inductions – bringing on a new board member](#)'.



Sample volunteer induction checklist

Checklist of Items	Completed	Follow up? Who will follow up?
Welcomed and introduced to other workers (paid and unpaid)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Provided background about organisation and overview of organisational structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Work station prepared and relevant safety considerations undertaken	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Walk through of the workplace and discussed work premises, facilities and Work Health and Safety (emergency procedures, first aid, safety considerations in the role, reporting health and safety concerns, critical incident policies)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Discussed volunteer role description, expectations and reporting structure	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Discussed volunteer agreement including important issues like the nature of the relationship, how it can end, reimbursements (and signed)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Discussed consent and release form (and signed)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Key contact person allocated (to go to with any concerns, feedback or queries about role and duties)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Policies provided and read by the volunteer (with confirmation in writing):	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Privacy policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Workplace behaviour policies (including policies about communications and social media that set out expectations about media, print and email)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Health and Safety policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• Volunteer grievance policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	
• [Add other key policies and procedures, for example, conflict of interest, working with vulnerable clients, return of property]	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conducted training in relation to the role, including any machinery and equipment use	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Conducted or scheduled training in relation to workplace behaviour policies and risk management	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Discussed insurance coverage as a volunteer (what cover is available under the organisation's insurance)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
Signature of volunteer:	Date:	
Signature of volunteer manager:	Date:	



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed – Volunteers understand their roles and gain the knowledge, skills and feedback needed to participate safely and effectively

5.1 Volunteers are provided with relevant induction and training.

Evidence of this would include:

- induction requirements for volunteer roles are documented and implemented
- volunteer induction includes information about the organisation, their volunteer role and how it contributes to the organisation's purpose, goals and objectives
- volunteers are made aware of their rights and responsibilities
- where appropriate, volunteers understand and agree to a code of conduct or rights and responsibilities statement

Volunteer agreement

A volunteer agreement is an important part of engaging volunteers, helping to make sure the volunteer understands their rights, role and responsibilities along with those of the organisation.

It's also important in helping your organisation manage its obligations in relation to health and safety.

As set out in part 4 of this guide, the workplace health and safety (**WHS**) legislation enacted throughout Australia creates obligations for most organisations to ensure the health and safety of their volunteers. In addition to any obligations under the WHS laws your organisation also has a general duty of care towards your volunteers.

There are other reasons in which a volunteer agreement may become important, including clarity on the ownership of intellectual property (discussed below and also in part 6 of this guide).



More information – sample volunteer agreement

You can download a sample volunteer agreement from [our volunteer webpage](#). A sample agreement with drafting tips is also available.

The sample volunteer agreement may not be appropriate for every volunteer involving organisation. You should change the sample agreement to meet the needs of your organisation using the tips published with the agreement.

The sample volunteer agreement doesn't constitute legal advice. Your organisation may need to consider seeking legal advice on its volunteer agreement

Once the volunteer agreement has been discussed with your volunteer and signed (see below), you should give a copy to the volunteer.

You should also then keep a copy with your other records in relation to your volunteer. For further information on volunteer record keeping, refer to part 6 of this guide (organisational issues applicable to volunteers).



Tips – volunteer agreement drafting

- be clear that you have engaged the person as a volunteer
- include a statement that the parties don't intend to enter into a legally enforceable contract in relation to the carrying out of the work (refer to 'non-legal nature of the volunteer relationship' below)
- consider if you need to be extra clear on certain rights and obligations between the organisation and the volunteer – such as intellectual property and confidentiality (refer to 'non-legal nature of the volunteer relationship' below)
- be clear and consistent in the use of 'non-employment' type language
- use terms such as 'help to' and 'we would be pleased if you would'
- avoid terms such as 'pay, payment, salary, contract, work, appointment' or 'you must'
- be clear that the volunteer will not be receiving payment for work but may receive reimbursement for reasonable expenses and that any other non-monetary benefits provided to the volunteer are done so on a gratuitous basis only and are not payment in lieu of salary
- outline what the volunteer can expect from the organisation (for example, an induction, supervision and applicable insurance coverage)
- outline what the organisation expects from its volunteers (for example, compliance with policies and procedures including WHS, privacy, confidentiality and workplace behaviour), and
- ask the volunteer to notify you if they are unable to attend to any allocated tasks

Volunteer agreement and the non-legal nature of the volunteer relationship



What is a legally binding relationship?

A legally binding relationship is a relationship where the parties have agreed they have legal obligations to each other.

Generally, this means that they intend that the promises made by each party will be binding, and if one party breaches the terms of the agreement, the other one has a right to seek damages against the breaching party or, in some circumstances, force the other party to perform certain obligations under the agreement

The nature of volunteering requires that there is no legally binding relationship between the parties regarding the volunteer work to be carried out.

For example, if the organisation doesn't provide the volunteer with work, the volunteer has no recourse against the organisation. Similarly, if the volunteer fails to report for duty as agreed, the organisation has no legal recourse against the volunteer. This is also explained in part 2 of this guide (which deals with the differences between a volunteer and other workers, like employee relationships).



What about intellectual property and confidential information?

There may be situations where a volunteer involving organisation wants to be very clear on certain rights and obligations between the organisation and the volunteer.

For example, if the volunteer is producing or creating material in their role, the organisation may want to be clear with the volunteer about who owns the intellectual property in the material. If the volunteer is exposed to confidential information, the organisation may wish to be clear with the volunteer about their confidentiality obligations.

See part 6 of this guide for more information on intellectual property and confidential information.

Our [sample volunteer agreement](#) makes it clear to the volunteer that they have obligations in relation to intellectual property and confidentiality. However, because the sample volunteer agreement has been drafted as a **non-legally binding agreement**, the organisation may not have legal recourse against the volunteer if something goes wrong (for example, if the volunteer discloses confidential information or decides to keep the intellectual property they created for the organisation and use it for their own personal gain).



It's a risk assessment

Some volunteer involving organisations may conduct a risk assessment and decide that a non-legally binding volunteer agreement is appropriate and provides adequate protection.

Other organisations may be particularly concerned with protecting confidentiality and intellectual property and seek to impose legally binding obligations on the volunteer in relation to these matters. If in doubt, seek legal advice.

Organisations can impose legally binding obligations on the volunteer in relation to these matters by:

- asking their volunteers to enter into separate legally binding agreements regarding intellectual property and confidentiality, or
- amending the sample volunteer agreement below to make it legally-binding

In both cases, the agreements would need to be executed (signed) in a legally binding manner, such as a 'deed' (see below for more information on 'deeds').

Provided the legally binding obligations go no further than this (they are not imposing legal obligations on the volunteer around other tasks or the work), having a legally binding agreement in relation to intellectual property or confidentiality should not, by itself, affect the nature of the volunteer relationship.



Caution

Seek legal advice before asking volunteers to enter a legally binding arrangement in relation to intellectual property or confidentiality.



Note on volunteer agreement being ‘executed’ (signed) as a deed

If an organisation wishes to create legally binding obligations in relation to intellectual property or confidentiality, you will need to amend the [sample volunteer agreement](#) we have published so that it’s executed (signed) as a deed. Seek legal assistance if you wish to alter the sample volunteer agreement and make it a deed.



What is a deed?

A deed is a special type of binding promise or commitment to do something. It’s not the same as a contract. A deed doesn’t require ‘consideration’.

Consideration is one of the four requirements for a contract to be valid and enforceable, and generally refers to the exchange of something of value, such as the exchange of labour for payment. This makes deeds useful documents when a promise is being made without anything in return for that promise (such as payment). We explain this in more detail below.



Caution – unincorporated associations

If your organisation is an unincorporated association (which means that it has not formalised its structure through a process of registration with government), it can’t enter contracts (including deeds) in its own name. Seek legal advice if your organisation wants to make the volunteer agreement legally binding.

Deed of agreement – intellectual property and confidential information

The non-legal nature of the volunteer relationship

As explained above, the nature of a volunteer relationship requires that there is no legally binding relationship between a volunteer and a not-for-profit organisation regarding the volunteer work to be performed. For example, if the organisation doesn’t give the volunteer work, the volunteer has no recourse against the organisation. Similarly, if the volunteer doesn’t report for duty as agreed, the organisation has no recourse against the volunteer.

Intellectual property and confidential information

There may be situations where an organisation wants to be very clear on certain rights and obligations between the organisation and the volunteer. For example, if the volunteer is producing or creating material in their role, the organisation may want to make it clear who owns the intellectual property in the material. If the volunteer is exposed to or dealing with confidential information, the organisation may also wish to be clear with the volunteer about their confidentiality obligations.



When is it appropriate to have a legally binding agreement?

Some volunteer involving organisations may conduct a risk assessment and decide that a non-legally binding volunteer agreement is appropriate and adequate. Other organisations may be particularly concerned with protecting confidentiality and intellectual property and seek to impose legally binding obligations on the volunteer in relation to these particular matters.



Organisations can impose legally binding obligations on the volunteer in relation to these matters by asking their volunteers to enter into a separate legally binding agreement, such as a 'deed', regarding intellectual property and confidentiality.

Provided the legally binding obligations go no further than this (that is, they aren't imposing legal obligations on the volunteer around other tasks or the work), having a legally binding agreement in relation to intellectual property or confidentiality should not, by itself, affect the nature of the volunteer relationship.



More information – sample confidentiality and intellectual property deed

You can download a sample confidentiality and intellectual property deed from [our volunteer webpage](#).

Note – the deed published on our volunteer webpage is a generic, sample deed of agreement. It's not legal advice and may not suit your organisation. Your organisation will need to draft a deed of agreement to suit your circumstances and may want to seek legal advice on this.



Caution

A deed is a legally binding document. Seek legal advice before asking volunteers to enter a legally binding arrangement in relation to intellectual property or confidentiality.



What does 'execution' mean?

Execution means signing an agreement, and doing this with any required formalities – for example, in some cases, a witness to the signing may be required.

Note – a witness is no longer required for Australian registered companies, which are now allowed to execute documents (including deeds) through an agent or authorised representative without a witness. The witness requirement for execution of a deed may still apply to some entities that are not incorporated under the Corporations Act (for example, some incorporated associations). **You will need to check the signing requirements for your organisation.**

For the signing of a deed (a sample deed is published [on our volunteer webpage](#)), the person signing the deed on behalf of your organisation must be authorised to do this – make sure you check authority before signing the agreement.

If the signing must be witnessed, it should be witnessed by a third person (not the volunteer or the person authorised to sign on behalf of the organisation).

If the volunteer is working remotely, and a witness is not required, they can print and sign the deed and provide the original signed deed to the organisation by post, or a scanned copy by email.

If the volunteer is working remotely, and a witness is required, they can print and sign the deed (provided they have a witness with them, who can witness their signature) and provide the original signed and witnessed deed to the organisation by post, or a scanned copy by email.



What are 'moral rights'?

Moral rights are the right to be credited for your work, not to have your work falsely attributed to another artist and not to have your work treated in a derogatory way. You continue to have these rights even if you transfer your intellectual property rights to someone else.

The moral rights consent requested in the sample Deed means that the volunteer will not enforce these rights against the organisation.

You can find out more information about moral rights in part 6 of this guide and from the [Australian Copyright Council](#).



Managing the performance of volunteers

Managing the performance of volunteers can be problematic if not done correctly. A well-structured performance management system provides benefits both to the volunteer involving organisation and the volunteer.

The benefits of performance management include:

- establishing the volunteer performance objectives and how these objectives align with both the organisation's values, purposes and activities and the volunteer's roles and responsibilities as set out in the volunteer role description
- improved guidance and assistance in developing the potential of the volunteer and their capabilities
- identifying the volunteer's training needs, and
- improved communication and relationships between a volunteer and their manager, including an agreed process for feedback from the volunteer



Example

Sarah, a long-standing volunteer with the organisation, was angry about a misunderstanding and upset a member of staff. Another time, she was short-tempered with a different volunteer in front of peers, shocking them as well.

Her supervisor reviews the organisation's volunteer performance management policy and asks Sarah to attend a volunteer performance management meeting. The supervisor clearly outlines the two incidents which occurred. Sarah admits that the incidents occurred and is quite upset about her conduct. Sarah apologises to the shift supervisor and says that she is very overwhelmed in her personal life. Sarah acknowledges that she can no longer commit to the organisation as a volunteer. Sarah and the shift supervisor agree to end the volunteer relationship. The shift supervisor took clear notes of the meeting with Sarah. Both Sarah and the shift supervisor signed the notes from the meeting. The organisation provided a letter to Sarah thanking her for her time at the organisation and confirming the volunteer relationship had ended.

Organisational performance management plan

A volunteer involving organisation should have a plan in place for how it will manage the performance of all its workers. Although managing the performance of employees involves risks that don't apply to volunteers (for example, unfair dismissal), best practice dictates that the management of volunteers shouldn't differ significantly from the management of employees. This provides consistency of treatment and gives workers some certainty about the process they may expect when issues come up.

A useful way to think about performance management is to think in terms of both conduct and performance. 'Performance' generally refers to the quality of work. For example, only partly recording a client's contact details in the organisation's systems or failing to collect necessary information from a client.

This differs from 'conduct' which generally refers to the deliberate breaking of workplace rules, such as misuse of the organisation's equipment (for example, using a vehicle without permission or in breach of the organisation's policies), disclosure of confidential information or inappropriate workplace behaviour (for example, bullying or sexual harassment).



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement are relevant to the discussion on performance management.

Standard 7: Volunteers are recognised – Volunteer contribution, value and impact is understood, appreciated and acknowledged.

7.2 Volunteer effort is measured and acknowledged in the organisation's reporting and used to demonstrate impact.

Evidence of this would include:

- volunteers are informed of the organisation's reasons and benefits for involving volunteers
- volunteers are provided with feedback on the impact and value of their contribution to the organisation and its work
- the governing body, employees and volunteers are involved in the evaluation of volunteer participation

Standard 8: Volunteer policies and practices are continuously improved – Effective volunteer involvement results from a system of good practice, regular review and continuous improvement.

8.1 Policies and procedures are designed and implemented to effectively guide all aspects of volunteer involvement.

8.2 Volunteer involvement is regularly reviewed in line with the organisation's evaluation and quality management frameworks.

8.3 The organisation's performance with volunteer involvement is monitored and reported to the governing body, employees, volunteers and other stakeholders.

8.4 Opportunities are available for volunteers to provide feedback on their experience and relevant areas of the organisation's work.

A performance management plan should include:

A review of the volunteer's performance after a set period – although volunteers don't generally have a formal probationary period, it's a good idea for the organisation to set a timeframe following which it will consider whether the volunteer arrangement is working out as expected. If the arrangement is not working out, it's better for the organisation (and potentially its clients), if it addresses this and, if necessary, ends the arrangement.

Periodic appraisal of performance – where possible, this should be a formal and documented process which:

- set out aspects of the volunteer's work that is both satisfactory and unsatisfactory and how unsatisfactory aspects of work performance might be improved
- identifies any training required or desirable, and
- allows for goal setting for the upcoming appraisal period

Generally, appraisals are carried out at least annually but (depending on the nature of the work) may be more often. Don't confuse periodic performance appraisal with performance management procedures. Performance management procedures address specific performance or conduct issues when they arise.



Performance management procedures – when specific issues that relate to performance or conduct (or both) arise, they should be addressed immediately (see ‘performance management procedures and process’ below). Failure to do so may result in damage to the organisation’s reputation or property, damage or distress to clients, discontent among other volunteers and the creation of vicarious liability for the organisation (see part 4 of this guide on safety).

Ending the relationship – when volunteers don’t respond appropriately to performance management procedures it may be necessary for the organisation to end the volunteer relationship (see ‘ending the relationship’ below).

Performance management procedures and process

Your organisation should develop procedures on how it will manage specific issues relating to performance or conduct (or both) that arise. As outlined above, this should be separate to any process in place for performance appraisal.

If an issue relating to performance or conduct arises, notify the volunteer of the issue and arrange a meeting.

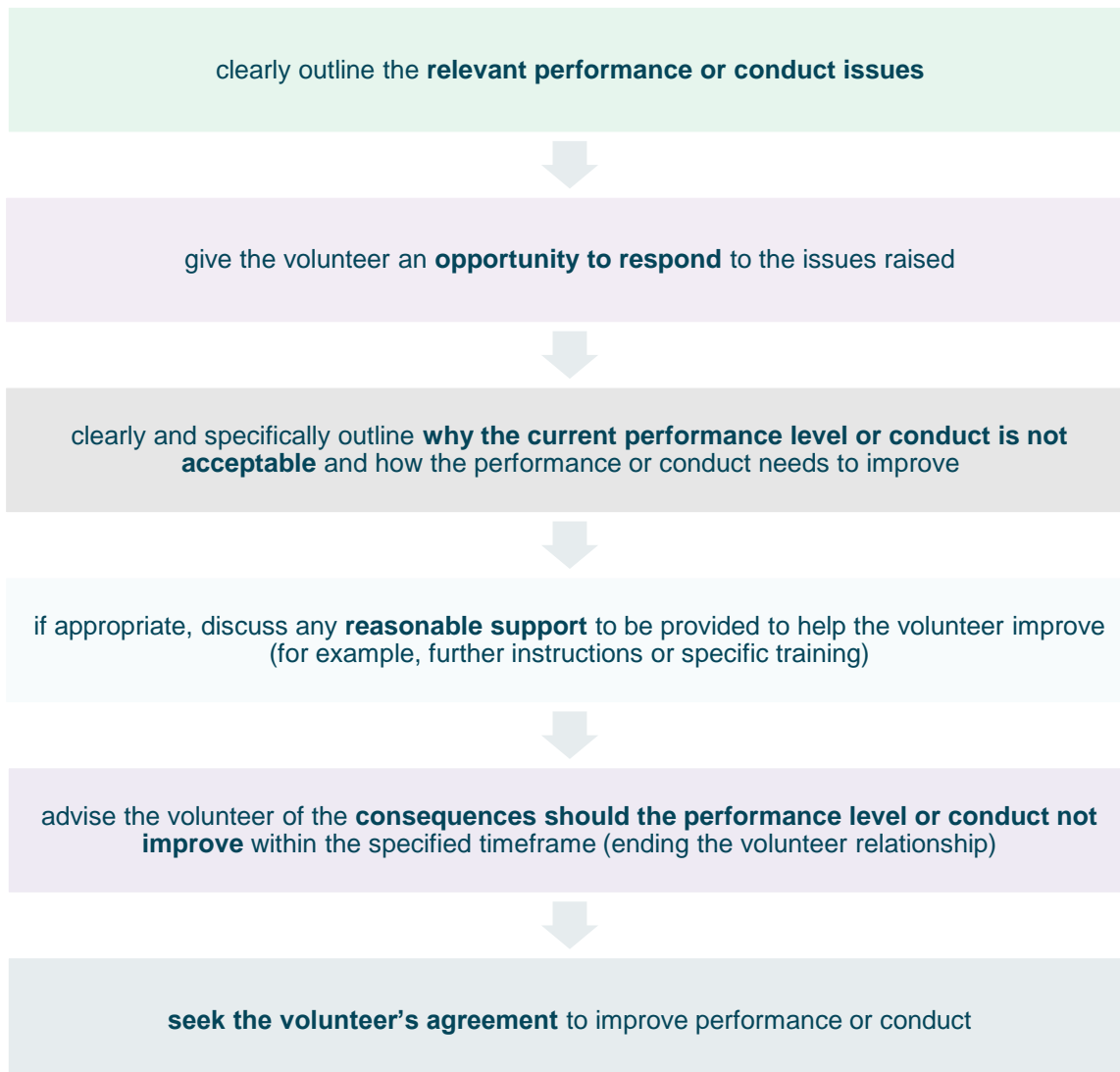
It’s good practice to ask the volunteer if they would like to have a support person present at the meeting. Make sure you keep a record that the offer was made (particularly if the offer is declined).

Keep written notes of both the performance or conduct issues and of the meeting itself. It may also be useful to have another person from the organisation in the meeting.

Following the meeting, consider the volunteer’s responses to the issues raised and the need for continued monitoring of the volunteer’s performance and conduct objectively. In some cases, it may be preferable or appropriate to simply end the volunteering relationship. (See ‘ending the relationship’ below).



Follow this process at the meeting:





National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed – Volunteers understand their roles and gain the knowledge, skills and feedback needed to participate safely and effectively.

- 5.1 Volunteers are provided with relevant induction and training.
- 5.2 Volunteers' knowledge and skills are reviewed to identify support and development needs.
- 5.3 Volunteers are engaged with throughout their time and provided with supervision and support that enables them to participate fully.
- 5.4 People with responsibility for volunteers have sufficient time and resources to engage with and provide proper support.
- 5.5 Changes to the role of a volunteer are fair and consistent and achieved through engaging with the volunteer.

See this standard for examples of evidence of meeting this criteria.



Managing volunteer grievances



Note

Volunteers have the right to express grievances with the volunteer program or your organisation. Your organisation should make sure the volunteer's grievances are heard and dealt with in an appropriate manner.

Grievances occur in most volunteer involving organisations. They can be raised on topics including workload and work distribution, work conditions, and management-volunteer relations.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Standard 6: Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected – The health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers is protected and volunteers understand their rights and responsibilities.

This standard commits the organisation to protecting volunteer safety and wellbeing and recognises its duty of care to volunteers. Adopting this standard assists the organisation to meet its obligations for the health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers, manage risk and provide a supportive and responsive workplace for volunteers.

- 6.1 Effective working relationships with employees, and between volunteers, are facilitated.
- 6.2 Organisations and groups meet their legal and ethical obligations to protect volunteers from harm.
- 6.3 Processes are in place to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers in their capacity as volunteers, including relevant insurances, such as personal injury and liability.
- 6.4 Volunteers understand and have access to complaints procedures.
- 6.5 Complaints, concerns and safety incidents are analysed to identify causes and inform continuous improvement.

See this standard for examples of evidence of meeting this criteria.

To make sure volunteers' grievances are heard and dealt with in an appropriate manner, a volunteer involving organisation should:

- develop and implement a policy for managing volunteer grievances (see 'volunteer grievance policy' below)
- provide the policy to your volunteer (attaching the policy to the volunteer agreement is a good way to make sure the volunteer has a copy, and the policy can also be discussed as part of the induction process)
- make sure all volunteer managers and those involved in supervising volunteers are aware of the policy and understand their roles and responsibilities in relation to the policy
- have a process for making sure grievances are addressed in a fair and appropriate manner, which includes reviewing the outcome of the grievance to make sure appropriate decisions were made



Example

Bill, a volunteer, makes a complaint that the workplace is unsafe.

Bill's complaint is that the stairs that lead into the donation shop are very steep and hard to see. He claims that patrons of the donation shop have had near accidents on many occasions.

The workplace supervisor receives the complaint and is immediately concerned for the safety of the volunteers, staff and customers. The workplace supervisor reviews the volunteer grievances policy and refers the complaint to the organisation's workplace health and safety officer. The workplace health safety officer organises a contractor to install a hand rail and to paint the stairs a brighter colour so that they are more easily identifiable.

Bill is informed in writing of the outcome of his complaint. Bill is satisfied with the response of the organisation and doesn't take any further action.

Volunteer grievance policy

A volunteer grievance policy is a written document that sets out the process for making a complaint, how the complaint will be resolved and who is responsible for resolving it. The policy should be short and concise so it's easy to understand and follow.

A volunteer grievance policy should include:

Purpose. A brief description (for example, the purpose of the policy is to provide a framework for the handling of grievances in a fair and timely manner).

Scope. A statement on who the policy applies to. For example, student placements or internships may have slightly different processes which involve the student's school or university.

Purpose. A brief description (for example, the purpose of the policy is to provide a framework for the handling of grievances in a fair and timely manner).

Definitions. What is meant by a 'work related grievance' (for example, any problem, or concern or complaint in relation to the volunteer's work environment, including changes to the volunteer's role, their safety, or the behaviour of others in the workplace).

Roles and responsibilities. The role of managers (and supervisors) to manage a grievance complaint as well as the expectations of the volunteer who made the complaint.

How to raise a grievance. The process the volunteer is to take (for example, raise the complaint with the volunteer's immediate supervisor in the first instance).

Procedures. This should include mechanisms to ensure the fair resolution of the complaint (for example, opportunities to be heard and use of supports).

Outcomes of the grievance resolution process. The volunteer should receive written advice of the outcome of their grievance.

Further action. Options to pursue the grievance through other appropriate internal or external processes.

Documentation. All documentation relating to the grievance should be placed on the volunteer's file (also refer to part 6 of this guide which deals with the keeping of volunteer records, including the requirements of confidentiality and privacy).



Caution – when volunteers are also members

Some organisations will have volunteers who are also legal members of the organisation. If your organisation has any volunteers who are also members, it's important to make sure any member's grievances are dealt with under the correct process.

Depending on the subject matter of the grievance, this may be the volunteer grievance procedure or the grievance procedure in your organisation's rules or constitution. If your organisation is an incorporated association, you should check the grievance procedure requirements in your relevant incorporated association legislation.

For more information, see [our webpage on disputes with members](#).



Ending the volunteer relationship

Your organisation may choose to end a volunteer relationship for many reasons.



Note

It's important to manage the process of ending a volunteer relationship well. This will help your organisation avoid any potential legal consequences or reputational damage.

Ending a genuine volunteer relationship is different to ending an employment relationship by termination of an employee (which involves certain legal rights, obligations and processes). It's important that both your organisation and the volunteer understand these differences.

Your organisation should have processes for the ending of a volunteer relationship which include keeping volunteer records once the relationship has come to an end.

It's important your organisation is clear on the nature of the relationships with its workers (both paid and unpaid) as the rights and obligations differ. This is discussed in part 2 of this guide, which sets out how the 'unfair dismissal' or 'unlawful termination' provisions in the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)* (**Fair Work Act**) don't apply to volunteers.

Under the Fair Work Act, employees have certain rights, for example, in relation to redundancy or the ability to bring a claim for 'unfair dismissal' or 'unlawful termination'. Because the provisions of the Fair Work Act regarding unfair dismissal don't apply to volunteers, a genuine volunteer can't bring a claim against your organisation for unfair dismissal.

Unlike an employee, your organisation has no legal rights against a volunteer who doesn't turn up, walks out or doesn't return to your organisation.

This is part of the nature of a true volunteer relationship. It's important that organisations that use volunteers and volunteers themselves understand that the protections that apply in an employer-employee relationship are not the same as in an organisation-volunteer relationship.



For more information on dismissing an employee (if it's appropriate, how to terminate lawfully and fairly) refer to [our webpage on employee termination and resignation](#).



Tips

A good time to make it clear that the volunteer relationship is not an employment relationship is when you discuss your organisation's volunteer agreement with your volunteer.

It will be helpful to explain that this means:

- the protections that apply in an employer-employee relationship are not the same as in an organisation-volunteer relationship, and
- the volunteer or organisation may end the relationship at any time

When talking about ending the relationship you should avoid the terms 'dismiss', 'letting go' or 'fire' as these are more suitable for an employment relationship. 'End' or 'walk away' are better terms to use.



Managing the process of ending the volunteer relationship

Reasons for ending the volunteer relationship

There may be a number of reasons why a volunteer involving organisation chooses to end a relationship with one of its volunteers. These include:

- there's no longer a need for the volunteer's services
- the volunteer's performance
- the volunteer's conduct is not satisfactory (or has not improved following a review process) or there has been serious misconduct, or
- the volunteer's presence may be detrimental to the health and safety of others in the organisation

As outlined in part 4 of this guide (on safety), a volunteer involving organisation has a duty of care to provide a safe work environment and could be held legally responsible for the actions of its volunteers.

If keeping a volunteer in the organisation is a risk to the health and safety of others (including members of the public), ending the relationship may be necessary to make sure you are acting in accordance with the standard of care required by law.



Caution

There is a tension between anti-discrimination laws and health and safety laws, so make sure you have considered anti-discrimination laws as well.

Discrimination law is discussed in part 5 of this guide. If in doubt, seek legal advice.



Example

Your organisation has soup vans that travel around the Adelaide Hills area feeding homeless people.

You have a loyal volunteer that has been serving soup in the vans for the last 20 years. The volunteer is now in their eighties and recently there have been incidents where their increasing fragility and instability have resulted in soup spills, as well as a minor burn to their hand and to another volunteer.

You are concerned that continuing in the role poses a serious risk to their safety, other volunteers and the public that are being served. You discuss these concerns with the volunteer and explain that you have duty of care to take steps to minimise risks to health and safety.

There are other suitable roles (for example, calling suppliers and administration work) that you offer the volunteer. The volunteer doesn't accept this as they have their heart set on staying with the soup vans. You suggest that instead of serving, they hand out blankets, cutlery and napkins. They agree this is a sensible compromise and you are now comfortable that you are not placing them or anyone else at risk. However, you should ensure they understands that they are no longer authorised to serve soup under any circumstances.



The process of ending the volunteer relationship

When ending a volunteer relationship, think about your approach:

Be aware of other relationships. As outlined above, and in part 2 of this guide, if the person has been engaged by your organisation as a paid worker, your organisation will have different legal obligations including processes to be followed (and the person will have certain legal rights). Also be aware if the person is a member of your organisation as they will continue to have member rights (you should check your organisation's rules or constitution).

Be careful about ending a volunteer arrangement if there has been a recent complaint made by the volunteer. This could be construed as 'victimisation' against the complainant, even if your organisation decided to end the relationship for completely unrelated reasons. For more information about victimisation, refer to part 5 of this guide.

Make sure the process is as fair and transparent as possible. You don't need to give reasons why the relationship is ending, however, it is good practice to do so. Think about your organisation's reputation - the former volunteer may tell other volunteers in your organisation who could think you were being unfair and they may stop volunteering. They could also tell family and friends.

Confirm the arrangement has come to an end in writing and keep a record of the documentation provided to the volunteer.

Maintain your organisation's obligations of confidentiality and privacy of the volunteer.

Make sure all property of the organisation is returned by the volunteer (for example, documents and uniforms).

Consider if security changes are needed including to any buildings (access codes), IT systems and other electronic accounts (for example, Facebook login details and email passwords).



See [our fact sheets](#) on members' rights for members of a company limited by guarantee and of incorporated associations (for each jurisdiction) for information on suspending or terminating member rights.

Confirming the end of the arrangement in writing, not only provides finality for the volunteer and organisation, but may be relied on by your organisation to avoid any liability (legal responsibility) that might arise because of the volunteer's future actions. This may be relevant if you need to show they were not a volunteer at the time of their actions and not a representative of your organisation.



Example

The Ocean Voice is an organisation that runs a program providing media and public speaking training for people who are interested in environmental activism. The organisation matches the volunteers with media and speaking opportunities to help raise awareness and change attitudes about environmental issues.

At a recent speaking event, a volunteer called Kylie became violent and harassed a camera person. There were some informal discussions between Kylie and the volunteer manager about ending her involvement in the program while she obtains some care in relation to issues in her personal life. However, Kylie continues to be approached directly by journalists and other organisations for media and public speaking opportunities. Kylie takes up these opportunities and continues to represent that she is a volunteer at Ocean Voice. At one event, she again has a violent episode and physically abuses an interviewer resulting in their hospitalisation. As a result, Ocean Voice's reputation is tarnished and the relationships it has built with the media suffers.

In this example, while the interviewer doesn't make a claim against the organisation, this is a potential outcome where a volunteer causes harm to someone while volunteering. As the ending of the volunteer relationship had not been formalised or documented, it would be difficult to show Kylie was no longer a volunteer, and that Ocean Voice was not therefore liable for her actions.

Volunteer records at the end of the volunteer relationship

While organisations have limited legal obligations to keep specific records relating to volunteers, we recommend that a volunteer involving organisation keep records of its volunteers for at least seven years.

Part 6 of this guide sets out reasons for keeping records in more detail. These include the reason that legal action can generally be brought up to six years after an event to which the legal action relates (for example, a former volunteer alleges your organisation's negligence was the cause of the injury to the person while they were volunteering for your organisation). Some claims have even longer limitation periods. If your organisation is also bound by work health and safety laws, in most jurisdictions these laws generally require certain records be kept for five years.

Keeping volunteer records for seven years is also consistent with any obligations your volunteer involving organisation has under the Fair Work Act in relation to employee records. This obligation does not specifically extend to volunteer records, however, best practice dictates that the management of volunteers should not differ significantly from the management of employees, (including record keeping).



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) sets out that evidence to meet **Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture** – the governing body and organisational leadership promote volunteering and implement effective systems to support volunteer participation, includes:

- 1.4 Volunteer records are maintained, and volunteers and employees understand their obligations on information sharing, record keeping and privacy.

Summary – recruiting, inducting, managing and ending the volunteer relationship



Recruiting volunteers

- Recruit your volunteers in a fair and non-discriminatory way.
- Use a volunteer role description for all volunteer positions in your organisation.
- In some instances, checks will be required by law. If your organisation and its workers are involved in child related work then generally a Working with Children Check will be required. Even when not required, your organisation ought to undertake some level of screening for volunteers.
- Organisations that have an anti-discrimination policy and procedures help protect their workers from discriminatory behaviour and help prevent damage that may arise from a complaint of discrimination.

Inducting volunteers

- Volunteers should complete an induction process before starting any volunteer work. Use a Volunteer Induction Checklist.
- A Volunteer Agreement is also an important part of engaging volunteers.
- A genuine volunteer relationship requires there is no legally binding relationship between the organisation and the volunteer in relation to the work to be carried out. In some circumstances an organisation can impose legally binding obligations on a volunteer in relation to intellectual property and confidential information.

Managing volunteer performance

- If not done correctly, performance management can be problematic.
- A well-structured performance management system provides a number of benefits both to the organisation and the volunteer.
- A management system should include a management plan and processes to be followed.

Managing volunteer performance

- Volunteers have the right to express grievances with the volunteer program or your organisation.
- Your organisation should make sure volunteers' grievances are heard and dealt with in an appropriate manner.
- Have a volunteer grievance policy in place that outlines the process of making a complaint, how it will be resolved and who is responsible for resolving it.

Ending the volunteer relationship

- Sometimes ending the relationship is necessary to make sure your organisation is acting in accordance with the standard of care to its workers that is required by law.
- There may be other reasons to end the relationship.
- Many volunteers don't understand how the relationship can end – it's important this is understood from the beginning of the relationship. Discuss this as part of the induction process.



National Volunteering Guide Part 4

Volunteer safety

Feb 2024



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Part 4

Volunteer safety

Volunteer safety

This part covers:

- ▶ negligence laws and volunteers
- ▶ health and safety of volunteers in the workplace
- ▶ child safety
- ▶ managing safety risks, and
- ▶ volunteer insurance



This part of the guide covers a range of issues faced by community organisations regarding safety and volunteers.

Many community organisations rely on the support of their volunteers to effectively pursue their stated purpose.

Understanding your community organisation's legal obligations in relation to safety is crucial to protect this valuable resource.



The National Strategy for Volunteering

On the strategic objective to ensure volunteering is not exploitative:

Like paid work, volunteering activities can be hazardous. However, safeguards for volunteers are often less robust than those offered to paid workers. Volunteers may face pressure to undertake duties they do not want to undertake, are not qualified for, or that should be paid.

Exploitation may come in various forms, such as deploying volunteers in roles that should be paid, pressuring people to volunteer when they do not want to, asking volunteers to do more when they do not have capacity, and asking volunteers to undertake duties they feel unsafe or uncomfortable carrying out.

Volunteers give their most precious resource: their time. In return they should be able to expect that the environments they volunteer in are safe and they are protected from physical and psychological harm.

(page 46 of the strategy)



This part of the guide considers the two primary sources of 'safety' law that your organisation will need to be aware of when engaging and working with volunteers:

- negligence law, and
- work health and safety (or occupational health and safety) laws



Caution

Your community organisation's obligations come from various sources. It's important to make sure you understand which laws apply to your organisation. This can sometimes be a complex legal issue and you may need legal advice for your specific issue.



Checklists in the annexure

Checklists to help organisations understand when they may or may not be liable for a volunteer's actions are included in the annexures to this part of the guide.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement have two standards that relate to the safety of volunteers. These are:

- **Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed** – Volunteers understand their roles and gain the knowledge, skills and feedback needed to participate safely and effectively.
- **Standard 6: Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected** – The health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers is protected and volunteers understand their rights and responsibilities.

Understanding your legal obligations and implementing practices to ensure the safety of volunteers will help your organisation demonstrate it is meeting these standards and complying with the relevant legislation.

Negligence

Not-for-profit community organisations have safety obligations under

- the common law (judge-made law) of negligence, and
- the negligence provisions in state and territory legislation



Note

These obligations extend to both the safety of the volunteer and the safety of the people that your volunteer interacts with.

If your organisation is found to be negligent (that is, it failed to meet its obligations) the court will order that a remedy be provided to the person who has suffered damage as a result of the organisation's actions (or



failure to act). In some circumstances, your organisation may also be held liable, that is 'legally responsible' for the negligent actions (or any failures to act) of its volunteers.

Volunteer involving organisations should understand their duty of care, and the standard of care they need to meet so they can protect their volunteers, their organisation and the people that their organisation interacts with.

The two sides to safety

When considering your obligations under negligence laws, your community organisation needs to consider the two sides to safety:

- its duty of care, and the standard of care it needs to meet to prevent volunteers from suffering damage, and
- its duty of care, and the standard of care it needs to meet to prevent the people your volunteers interact with (such as clients, other 'workers', or the public) from suffering damage (discussed in further detail below)

Negligence laws

Your organisation has safety obligations under the common law (judge-made law) of negligence and under the negligence provisions in state and territory legislation.

If your organisation:

- owes a duty of care (to the volunteer, or the person that the volunteer is interacting with), and
- breaches this duty, and
- the breach is the cause of damage to a person to which the duty is owed,

it may be found liable (legally responsible) for the damage caused.

Your organisation should ask the following questions:



Duty of care

Generally, a person or organisation will only be held liable for the damage caused to another person if they were under a duty to prevent such injury or loss from occurring – that is, if they had a 'duty of care'.

In short, your community organisation unequivocally owes a duty of care to any person it employs.

Although dependent on the circumstances of the case, you should also assume that your organisation owes a duty of care to its volunteers, to the people it assists (including people who rely on any material it might publish) and to people who enter its premises.



For more information on **an organisation's duty of care regarding children**, see [our screening checks guide](#) for your state or territory.

Standard of care

If your organisation owes a 'duty of care' to a person or category of person, such as a volunteer, your organisation needs to treat those people with an appropriate standard of care.

Essentially, in all the states and territories, the standard of care expected is the standard of 'the reasonable person' in the same position and with the same knowledge as the person being judged.

So, in any negligence proceedings, your organisation will be judged by reference to a reasonably competent and prudent organisation, in the same position, and with the same knowledge as your organisation.

The legislation in both South Australia and the Australian Capital Territory includes a definition of 'standard of care', which is used as a starting point to determine if particular conduct is negligent. The other states and territories rely on the common law rule (described above), which is essentially the same.

Breach of duty

If your organisation doesn't meet the applicable standard of care, it will be considered to have 'breached its duty'.

In every state and territory (other than the Northern Territory whose legislation doesn't address breach of duty), the starting point for determining whether there has been a breach of duty is the legislation.

These statutory provisions are basically an expression of the pre-existing common law principles. So, the same general principles apply in the Northern Territory.

The relevant provisions in the various states and territories are virtually identical, and set out general principles which can be summed up as follows for the purposes of your community organisation –

Your organisation will be considered negligent for failing to take precautions against a risk if:

1.

the risk was one your organisation should have known about

2.

the risk was 'not insignificant', and

3.

a 'reasonable' organisation in the same position as yours would have taken precautions against the risk

In deciding whether a reasonable organisation would have taken precautions against the risk, a court will consider (among other things):

The social utility of the organisation's conduct that created the risk

For example, did the incident happen during meal preparation in your organisation's soup kitchen?

If so, the court will consider the benefit of your work to your community when determining whether there was a breach of duty.

The court doesn't want to discourage people from participating in important work of this kind.

The burden for the organisation of taking precautions to avoid the risk

Was there an easy and inexpensive way to prevent the incident from happening, such as putting up a cautionary sign to prevent a slip on a wet floor?



If so, it's more likely that you breached your duty of care. If the only way for your organisation to avoid the risk was to install expensive equipment, which your organisation could not afford, you are less likely to have breached your duty by failing to do so.

The gravity of the risk

Was the risk that your organisation failed to mitigate one that could result in serious harm?

If so, your duty would involve going to greater lengths to avoid that harm eventuating than it would were the potential consequences of your conduct less serious.

The seriousness of the harm

If the risk of harm is 'not insignificant' then your organisation should have done something to prevent it (including making the decision not to follow through with the activity).

Generally, if someone is injured, the risk is likely to be found as significant.



In summary

Whether your organisation will be found to have breached its duty will involve a detailed assessment of what was reasonable conduct in all the circumstances of the case.

The standard of care expected of your organisation is that of a reasonably competent and prudent organisation, in the same position, and with the same knowledge as your organisation.

So, if your organisation acts in accordance with an established practice in the community sector, you will be less likely to be found to have breached your duty of care regarding volunteers or the public interacting with volunteers.

Damage and causation

Your organisation can't be found negligent unless someone has suffered some type of damage recognised by the law as giving rise to a cause of action – if no legally recognised damage is suffered, there will be no negligence, even if your organisation has not conducted itself appropriately.

The most common categories of damage in negligence are personal injury, property damage and financial loss.

In addition to 'damage recognised by the law', your organisation can't be found negligent unless its failure to take reasonable care has actually caused the damage complained of (referred to as 'causation'.) The person who has suffered damage carries the burden of establishing that the negligence caused their damage.

To establish causation it must be shown that the negligence was 'a necessary condition of the occurrence of the harm'. The question to ask here is whether the damage would have occurred 'but for' your organisation's conduct.



Example

Matthew, a volunteer at a community-based organisation cleaned the floors of its premises and, contrary to policy, forgot to put up the sign to caution people that the floors were slippery. Unaware of the slippery floors, Simon, a regular client of the organisation, tripped and broke his back. If Simon can establish that, had the sign been up, he would not have walked across the floor (and therefore would not have slipped), causation will be established.

If, however, there is evidence that Simon routinely ignored such cautionary signs, and he would likely have walked across the slippery floor regardless, he will find it difficult to establish that, 'but for' the organisation's negligence, Simon would not have been injured.

Your organisation will generally be legally responsible for the actions of volunteers, but not in all cases. This is discussed in greater detail below.

Consequences of liability

If your organisation is found negligent or vicariously liable for the actions of a volunteer (see below), the court will order that a remedy be provided to the person who has suffered damage because of the relevant conduct. This remedy is almost always in the form of monetary compensation, with the aim being to put the person who has suffered damage (personal injury, property damage or financial loss) in the position they were in before the act (or failure to act) occurred.

If a person has suffered non-monetary loss (in particular, personal injury) it's impossible to put the injured person back into her original position, but best attempts will be made by the court to provide 'full and adequate' compensation, which caters for an injured person's past and future needs. Compensation will be assessed by the court on a 'once and for all' basis, and your organisation will be ordered to pay a lump sum that cannot be revised at a future date.

Proportionate liability

In some cases, damage can be caused by the negligent conduct of multiple people or organisations.

All the states and territories have 'proportionate liability' provisions in legislation, which, in claims for financial loss or property damage, may limit the liability of any one wrongdoer to the proportion which reflects their responsibility for damage suffered.



Example

If your organisation is one of three organisations that negligently caused damage to property, provided certain conditions are met, you will only need to contribute to the sum of damages awarded by the court – a percentage which is considered to reflect your share of the responsibility.

The proportionate liability provisions do not apply to claims for personal injury. Where a person has been injured by the negligent conduct of multiple people, each wrongdoer is 'jointly and severally liable' for the whole loss. This means that an injured person can recover the whole award of damages from any one person or organisation found to have caused or contributed to their injury. This shields injured persons from the risk of being short-changed if some of those responsible for their injury are unable to pay the damages.

This is a complex area of the law and your organisation will require legal assistance if this situation arises.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, **Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed** – Volunteers understand their roles and gain the knowledge, skills and feedback needed to participate safely and effectively.

- 5.1 Volunteers are provided with relevant induction and training.
- 5.2 Volunteers' knowledge and skills are reviewed to identify support and development needs.
- 5.3 Volunteers are engaged with throughout their time and provided with supervision and training that enables them to participate fully.
- 5.4 People with responsibility for volunteers have sufficient time and resources to engage with and provide proper support to volunteers.
- 5.5 Changes to the role of a volunteer are fair and consistent and achieved through engaging with the volunteer.

See this standard for examples of evidence of meeting this criteria.

Providing volunteers with support and development so that they understand their safety obligations and are adequately supervised is one way to help organisations meet their safety obligations under negligence law.

Your organisation's legal responsibility for actions of its volunteers

As discussed above, your organisation will need to consider the two sides to safety – the duty to the volunteer, and the duty to the people that your volunteer interacts with.



What is vicarious liability?

Vicarious liability is the responsibility an organisation has for the actions of their employees or volunteers in the course of their work



Note

In some circumstances, your organisation may be held liable, that is 'legally responsible' for the negligent actions (or any failures to act) of its volunteers.

This is because each state and territory has legislation that sets out a special protection for volunteers from personal civil liability for anything done or not done in good faith when performing community work for a community organisation.

Civil liability refers to liability arising out of a civil proceeding, which is a legal action between two citizens. For example, compensation for personal injury, property damage or financial loss as a result of negligence.

A volunteer will only be protected if they satisfy all the tests under the relevant state or territory legislation (see below).

Generally – if a volunteer (who is protected by the relevant legislation) has caused personal injury, property damage or financial loss to a person as a result of the volunteer's own action or failure to act, the volunteer



will not be personally liable to pay any compensation to that person. Instead, if harm is caused by a volunteer, the community organisation may be liable rather than the volunteer individually.



Caution

The position in NSW and Queensland may differ.

In NSW a volunteer will not be liable for their acts or omissions, done in good faith, while doing community work organised by a community organisation or as an office holder of a community organisation unless they fall into an exception in the legislation, and where a volunteer is not liable, the organisation will ordinarily not be vicariously liable for the volunteer's acts or omissions.

In Queensland, legislation protects volunteers from liability but, unlike NSW, the protection is not extended to the organisation. Queensland courts may be willing to extend protection to the organisation from liability from its volunteers' acts and omissions, but the position is uncertain.

Our summaries of the negligence laws in NSW and Queensland below provide more information.

Despite this protection, there are still circumstances where an organisation could be liable, including where it has been negligent.



Example – volunteer patient transport driver

Natalie is a volunteer patient transport driver for a not-for-profit organisation which transports clients to and from medical appointments and on outings to do their shopping.

Natalie has recently separated from her husband and generally suffers from anxiety and is not coping well with the separation. She has confided in her supervisor about her increased intake of alcohol since the separation. Natalie's supervisor has noticed that Natalie sometimes appears to be drowsy when she reports for volunteering duties. Instead of requiring Natalie to undergo breath testing in accordance with the organisation's drug and alcohol policy, Natalie's supervisor dismisses her concerns as Natalie is a long-standing volunteer with a good record and is just 'going through a rough patch'.

After again reporting for volunteer duties in a drowsy state, Natalie has a car accident while transporting an elderly client. Natalie drove through a red traffic light and crashed into a mother walking her two primary school-aged children to school. The mother and one of the children were killed. The other child survived but has severe injuries which will take many months to heal and will require ongoing rehabilitation. The client in Natalie's car also suffered cuts and abrasions as well as severe shock. Natalie was breath tested at the scene and found to have a blood alcohol level more than the legal driving limit. News of the accident was widely reported on the television, in newspapers and on the internet.

In this case, in addition to breaking criminal laws, Natalie has been negligent by breaching her duty of care to her passenger and other road users. Although the state in which Natalie and the organisation operates has legislation protecting volunteers (and the organisation) from civil liability, the fact that she was under the influence of alcohol at the time of the accident means that that protection is no longer available to her or the organisation.

Therefore, as Natalie was doing volunteer work for the organisation, the organisation will be vicariously liable for Natalie's negligence. The organisation has also breached its duty of care to the client and other road users by failing to take reasonable steps to prevent a reasonably foreseeable incident from occurring. As a result, the organisation is exposed to claims from the client, the family of the deceased mother and child, the injured child and, potentially, onlookers who suffered psychological damage from seeing the accident and its aftermath. In addition, the organisation itself has suffered reputational damage because of negative publicity generated by the incident. This has impacted its funding and ability to attract workers, volunteers and clients.

The state and territory laws on negligence are summarised below.



Caution – unincorporated community organisations

Unincorporated community organisations should seek legal advice about the application of state and territory laws to them.



Australian Capital Territory

The *Civil Law (Wrongs) Act 2002 (ACT)* (**ACT Wrongs Act**) sets out special protection which provides that volunteers are generally not personally liable (legally responsible) for civil liability which arises as a result of anything they have done (or not done) honestly and without recklessness, while carrying out community work for a community organisation.

If a volunteer is protected under the ACT Wrongs Act (that is, all the tests have been met), the volunteer will not be personally liable to pay any compensation for personal injury, property damage or financial loss caused by their own actions or failures to act. Instead, if harm is caused by a volunteer, the community organisation (the legal entity) may be liable rather than the volunteer individually.

More information: To work out whether a volunteer might gain the benefit of protection under the ACT Wrongs Act, or whether an exception to the protection applies, see the '**Checklist: Are our volunteers protected against personal liability under the ACT Wrongs Act?**' in the annexure to this part of the guide.

New South Wales

The *Civil Liability Act 2002 (NSW)* (**NSW Civil Liability Act**) sets out special protection for volunteers which provides that volunteers are generally not personally liable (legally responsible) for any act they have done (or not done) in good faith while doing community work that is organised by a community organisation or as an office holder of a community organisation.

In most other Australian states and territories, civil liability incurred by a protected volunteer is automatically transferred to the community organisation (so that the organisation itself would have to pay any compensation). In NSW, there is no such automatic transfer. The NSW Civil Liability Act operates to the effect that if a volunteer is protected under the Act, then the community organisation is also protected and does not take on the volunteer's liability.

However, a community organisation in NSW may nevertheless be liable for damage caused by a volunteer who was acting in good faith if the community organisation was in breach of a 'non-delegable duty of care' – which is a common law duty owed by the community organisation itself, rather than the volunteer, to the person who suffered the damage. This may include providing adequate training, equipment or supervision to volunteers. So, for example, if a volunteer causes an injury to another person because the organisation failed to give the volunteer appropriate safety training, the organisation may be liable to pay compensation to the injured person.

This is a complicated area of law and your organisation should seek legal advice about any potential liability in these circumstances.

More information: To work out whether a volunteer might gain the benefit of protection under the NSW Civil Liability Act, or whether an exception to the protection applies, see the '**Checklist: Are our volunteers protected against personal liability under the NSW Civil Liability Act?**' in the annexure to this part of the guide.

Northern Territory

The *Personal Injuries (Liabilities and Damages) Act 2003 (NT)* (**NT Personal Injuries Act**) sets out special protection which provides that volunteers are generally not personally liable (legally responsible) for personal injury caused by any act they have done (or not done) in good faith and without recklessness, while doing community work for a community organisation.

If a volunteer is protected under the NT Personal Injuries Act (that is, all the tests have been met), the volunteer will not be personally liable to pay any compensation for personal injury caused by their own actions or failures to act. Instead, if harm is caused by a volunteer, the community organisation (the legal entity) will be liable rather than the volunteer individually.

In this context, civil liability refers to liability arising out of a civil proceeding for personal injury.

More information: To work out whether a volunteer might gain the benefit of protection under the NT Personal Injuries Act, or whether an exception to the protection applies, see the '**Checklist: Are our volunteers protected against personal liability under the NT Personal Injuries Act?**' in the annexure to this part of the guide.



Queensland

The *Civil Liability Act 2003 (QLD)* (**QLD Civil Liability Act**) sets out special protection which provides that volunteers are generally not personally liable (legally responsible) for civil liability which arises as a result of any act they have done (or not done) in good faith and without recklessness, while doing community work that has been organised by a community organisation.

In most other Australian states and territories, civil liability incurred by a protected volunteer is automatically transferred to the community organisation (so that the organisation itself would have to pay any compensation). In Queensland however, there is no such automatic transfer. The QLD Civil Liability Act is, in fact, silent on whether the organisation itself takes on the volunteer's liability and there is no clear case law on this, so the legal position is not yet settled. It's possible that liability might transfer from the volunteer to the organisation under the legal principle of 'vicarious liability', where one party becomes liable for the actions of another (the usual example is that an employer is vicariously liable for its employees), but it's not clear whether this principle applies in the volunteering context.

However, regardless of this lack of clarity, the community organisation could be liable for damage caused by a volunteer who was acting in good faith if the organisation was in breach of a 'non-delegable duty of care' – which is a common law duty owed by the organisation itself, rather than the volunteer, to the person who suffered the damage. The organisation's duty of care may include providing adequate training, equipment or supervision to volunteers. So, for example, if someone is injured by a volunteer because the organisation failed to give the volunteer appropriate safety training, the organisation could be liable to pay compensation to the injured person.

This is a complicated area of law and your organisation should seek legal advice about its own potential liability in such circumstances.

More information: To work out whether a volunteer might gain the benefit of protection under the QLD Civil Liability Act, or whether an exception to the protection applies, see the '**Checklist:** Are our volunteers protected against personal liability under the QLD Civil Liability Act?' in the annexure to this part of the guide.

South Australia

The *Volunteers Protection Act 2001 (SA)* (**SA Volunteers Act**) sets out special protection which provides that volunteers are generally not personally liable (legally responsible) for civil liability which arises as a result of any act they have done (or not done) in good faith and without recklessness, while doing community work for a community organisation.

If a volunteer is protected under the SA Volunteers Act (that is, all the tests have been met), the volunteer will not be personally liable to pay any compensation for personal injury, property damage or financial loss caused by their own actions or failures to act. Instead, if harm is caused by a volunteer, the community organisation (the legal entity) will be liable rather than the volunteer individually.

More information: To work out whether a volunteer might gain the benefit of protection under the SA Volunteers Act, or whether an exception to the protection applies, see the '**Checklist:** Are our volunteers protected against personal liability under the SA Volunteers Act?' in the annexure to this part of the guide.



Tasmania

The *Civil Liability Act 2002 (Tas)* (**Tas Civil Liability Act**) sets out special protection which provides that volunteers are generally not personally liable (legally responsible) for civil liability which arises as a result of any act they have done (or not done) in good faith, while doing community work.

If a volunteer is protected under the Tas Civil Liability Act (that is, all the tests have been met), the volunteer will not be personally liable to pay any compensation for personal injury, property damage or financial loss caused by their own actions or failures to act. Instead, if harm is caused by a volunteer, the community organisation (the legal entity) will be liable rather than the volunteer individually.

More information: To work out whether a volunteer might gain the benefit of protection under the Tas Civil Liability Act, or whether an exception to the protection applies, see the **Checklist:** Are our volunteers protected against personal liability under the Tas Civil Liability Act?' in the annexure to this part of the guide.

Victoria

The *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)* (**Vic Wrongs Act**) sets out special protection which provides that volunteers are generally not personally liable (legally responsible) for civil liability which arises as a result of any act they have done (or not done) in good faith while doing community work that is organised by a community organisation.

If a volunteer is protected under the Vic Wrongs Act (that is, all the tests have been met), the volunteer will not be personally liable to pay any compensation for personal injury, property damage or financial loss caused by their own actions or failures to act. Instead, if harm is caused by a volunteer, the community organisation (the legal entity) will be liable rather than the volunteer individually.

More information: To work out whether a volunteer might gain the benefit of protection under the Vic Wrongs Act (or whether an exception to the protection applies), see the '**Checklist:** Are our volunteers protected against personal liability under the Vic Wrongs Act?' in the annexure to this part of the guide.

Western Australia

The *Volunteers and Food and Other Donors (Protection from Liability) Act 2002 (WA)* (**WA Protection Act**) sets out special protection which provides that volunteers are generally not personally liable (legally responsible) for civil liability which arises as a result of any act they have done in good faith while doing community work for a community organisation.

If a volunteer is protected under the WA Protection Act (that is, all the tests have been met) the volunteer will not be personally liable to pay any compensation for personal injury, property damage or financial loss caused by their own actions or failures to act. Instead, the liability of a protected volunteer will be transferred to the organisation the volunteer was performing the community work for, and the injured party would be able to sue the community organisation (rather than the volunteer) for any injury, damage or loss caused by the volunteer.

More information: To work out whether a volunteer might gain the benefit of protection under the WA Protection Act, or whether an exception to the protection applies see the '**Checklist:** Are our volunteers protected against personal liability under the WA Protection Act?' in the annexure to this part of the guide.



Note – operating in multiple states or territories

If your organisation has volunteers operating in another state or territory, generally they will be subject to the laws in that state. It doesn't matter that the volunteer is resident in the one state or territory or that the community organisation is registered in a particular state or territory. Determining which law a volunteer will be subject to can be complicated and may require legal advice.



Can your organisation get volunteers to agree to reimburse you for compensation payable because of their actions?

Australian Capital Territory

The ACT Wrongs Act doesn't explicitly prohibit these kinds of agreements (known as indemnity agreements), under which a volunteer agrees to reimburse the organisation for any compensation which may be payable due to their actions. However, protection provided by legislation can't generally be 'waived', so any such agreement is very unlikely to be valid.

New South Wales

The NSW Civil Liability Act doesn't explicitly prohibit these kinds of agreements (known as indemnity agreements), under which a volunteer agrees to reimburse the organisation for any compensation which may be payable due to their actions. But it does contain general provisions which allow parties to enter a contract which makes 'express provision for their rights, obligations and liabilities'. However, if your organisation asks a volunteer to sign an indemnity agreement, note that it may not protect your organisation from liability in all circumstances, especially where there has been gross negligence or breaches of specific laws.

Northern Territory

The NT Personal Injuries Act specifically states that these kinds of agreements (known as indemnity agreements) have no effect. Your organisation can't try to 'contract out of' the volunteer protection provisions to avoid being legally responsible for volunteers' actions.

Queensland

The QLD Civil Liability Act is silent on the effect of these types of agreements (known as indemnity agreements), but contains a general provision which allows parties to enter a contract which makes 'express provision for their rights, obligations and liabilities'. However, if your organisation asks a volunteer to sign an indemnity agreement, note that it may not protect your organisation from liability in all circumstances, especially where there has been gross negligence or breaches of specific laws.

South Australia

The SA Volunteers Act is silent on the effect of these types of agreements (known as indemnity agreements), under which a volunteer agrees to reimburse the organisation for any compensation which may be payable due to their actions. However, protection provided by legislation can't generally be 'waived', so any such agreement is very unlikely to be valid.

Tasmania

The Tas Civil Liability Act specifically states that these kinds of agreements (known as indemnity agreements) have no effect. Your organisation can't try to 'contract out of' the volunteer protection provisions to avoid being legally responsible for volunteers' actions.

Victoria

The Vic Wrongs Act specifically prohibits these kinds of agreements (known as indemnity agreements). Your organisation can't try to 'contract out of' the volunteer protection provisions to avoid being legally responsible for volunteers' actions.



Western Australia

The WA Protection Act specifically states that these kinds of agreements (known as indemnity agreements) have no effect. Your organisation can't try to 'contract out of' the volunteer protection provisions to avoid being legally responsible for volunteers' actions.

What if your organisation (or a volunteer) makes an apology or expresses regret?

Australian Capital Territory

Under the ACT Wrongs Act, a volunteer or community organisation may make an apology to another person about an incident without fearing it will be construed as an admission of liability in a claim or proceeding arising out of the incident.

The ACT Wrongs Act specifies that an apology is an oral or written expression of sympathy or regret, or of a general sense of benevolence or compassion in relation to an incident, whether or not the expression admits or implies fault or liability in relation to the incident. The ACT Wrongs Act expressly states that an apology:

- is not (and must not be taken to be) an express or implied admission of fault or liability by the person in relation to the incident
- is not relevant to deciding fault or liability in relation to the incident, and
- is not admissible in any civil proceeding as evidence of the fault or liability of the person in relation to the incident

New South Wales

The NSW Civil Liability Act specifies that an apology is an expression of sympathy or regret, or of a general sense of benevolence or compassion, in connection with any matter, whether or not the apology admits or implies an admission of fault in connection with the matter.

In a civil proceeding to which the Civil Liability Act applies, an apology:

- does not constitute an express or implied admission of fault or liability by the person in connection with that matter, and
- is not relevant to the determination of fault or liability in connection with that matter

In addition, evidence of an apology is not admissible in any civil proceedings as evidence of the fault or liability of the person in that matter.

Northern Territory

The NT Personal Injuries Act specifies that an expression of regret can be an oral or written statement by a person that expresses regret for an incident that is alleged to have caused personal injury and does not contain an acknowledgement of fault by that person.

An expression of regret about a personal injury that is made at any time before the start of a proceeding relating to that injury is not admissible as evidence in the proceeding, meaning that it can't be used as evidence of an admission of liability or to prove that the person was at fault.



Queensland

The QLD Civil Liability Act specifies that an apology is an expression of sympathy or regret, or of a general sense of benevolence or compassion, in connection with any matter, whether or not it admits or implies an admission of fault in relation to the matter.

The QLD Civil Liability Act expressly states that an apology:

- does not constitute an express or implied admission of fault or liability by the person in connection with the matter
- is not relevant to the determination of fault or liability in connection with that matter, and
- is not admissible in any civil proceedings as evidence of the fault or liability of the person in connection with that matter

Note that there are some exceptions to this, such as in cases of defamation, unlawful sexual misconduct and unlawful intentional acts causing a person injury.

South Australia

The SA Volunteers Act is silent on the effect of an apology, but under the [Civil Liability Act 1936 \(SA\)](#) (**SA Civil Liability Act**), a person may make an apology to another person about an incident without fearing it will be construed as an admission of liability in a claim or proceeding arising out of the incident.

The SA Civil Liability Act specifies that an apology is an expression of sympathy or regret, or a general sense of benevolence or compassion, whether or not the apology admits or implies an admission of fault in connection with the matter.

The SA Civil Liability Act expressly states that an apology:

- does not constitute an express or implied admission of fault or liability by the person in connection with the matter
- is not relevant to the determination of fault or liability in connection with that matter, and
- is not admissible in any civil proceedings as evidence of the fault or liability of the person in connection with that matter

Note that an apology may influence liability in respect of defamation.

Tasmania

The Tas Civil Liability Act specifies that an apology is an expression of sympathy or regret, or of a general sense of benevolence or compassion by a person that does not contain an admission of fault.

In a civil proceeding of any kind to which the Tas Civil Liability Act applies, an apology:

- does not constitute an express or implied admission of fault or liability by the person in connection with the matter, and
- is not relevant to the determination of fault or liability in connection with that matter

Evidence of an apology made by or on behalf of a person is not admissible in any civil proceeding as evidence of the fault or liability of the person.



Victoria

The Vic Wrongs Act specifies that an apology is an expression of sorrow, regret or sympathy that does not contain a clear acknowledgement of fault.

In a civil proceeding where death or injury is an issue or relevant to an issue of fact or law, an apology does not constitute:

- an admission of liability for the death or injury, or
- an admission of unprofessional conduct, carelessness, incompetence or unsatisfactory professional performance, however expressed, for the purposes of any Act regulating the practice or conduct of a profession or occupation

An apology is not an admission of liability whether or not it:

- was made in writing or orally, or
- is made before or after the civil proceeding was in contemplation or started

Note that the above only applies in cases of personal injury or death, or where death or injury is relevant to the issues in the case, and not to civil liability generally (other types of damage or loss) or in other proceedings.

Western Australia

The WA Protection Act is silent on the effect of an apology but the *Civil Liability Act 2002 (WA)* specifies that an apology is an expression of sorrow, regret or sympathy by a person that does not contain an acknowledgment of fault by that person.

In a civil proceeding of any kind to which the *Civil Liability Act 2002 (WA)* applies, an apology:

- does not constitute an express or implied admission of fault or liability by the person in connection with that incident
- is not relevant to the determination of fault or liability in connection with that incident, and
- is not admissible in any civil proceeding as evidence of the fault or liability of the person in connection with that incident



Checklists in the annexure

To work out whether:

- a volunteer might be protected under state or territory legislation, or
- an exception to the protection applies,

see the checklists in the annexure to this part of the guide.



Health and safety in the workplace

Not-for-profit community organisations are required by law to make sure they provide a safe workplace for their employees and volunteers.



Examples of health and safety of volunteers in the workplace

A volunteer drives a client to an appointment – it's important to make sure the vehicle is road-worthy, has appropriate insurance and the volunteer has been trained in proper lifting and handling techniques if the client requires assistance in and out of the vehicle. The volunteer may also need training in relation to dealing with medical emergencies that may arise while transporting the client.

A volunteer collects roadside donations – the safety risks for volunteer collectors include injuries caused by vehicles, tripping or slipping, sunburn, heat exhaustion, fatigue and verbal abuse which may potentially result in psychological harm. The organisation should provide a comprehensive briefing about the potential safety risks and strategies for their avoidance.

Different laws exist in each state and territory.

New South Wales, South Australia, Queensland, the Northern Territory, Tasmania and most recently Western Australia have 'harmonised' their work health and safety laws by enacting similar legislation, based on an agreed 'model' Work Health and Safety Act (**Model Laws**).

This means that in most states and territories and at the Commonwealth level, work health and safety laws impose similar obligations. The harmonised work health and safety laws (**Harmonised WHS Laws**, or **WHS Law**) are considered below.

Victoria has not adopted the Model Laws and has retained its own legislation – the *Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)* and *Occupational Health and Safety Regulations 2017 (Vic)* (**Victorian OHS Law**, or **OHS Law**). The Victorian OHS Law is considered below.

If either the Harmonised WHS Laws or Victorian OHS Laws apply to your organisation, compliance with the relevant laws is important.

If your not-for-profit community organisation doesn't comply with these laws it risks incurring substantial fines. Directors and officers risk further fines and imprisonment if they don't exercise due diligence in relation to work health and safety of volunteers.

Due diligence includes taking reasonable steps to:

- acquire and keep up-to-date knowledge of work health and safety matters
- gain an understanding of the nature of the operations of the organisation and generally of the hazards and risks associated with those operations
- ensure that the organisation has available for use, and uses, appropriate resources and processes to eliminate or minimise risks to health and safety from work carried out
- ensure that the organisation has appropriate processes for receiving and considering information regarding incidents, hazards and risks and responding in a timely way to that information
- ensure that organisation has, and implements, processes for complying with any duty or obligation under the Model Laws

Alongside legislation, there are also common law duties to provide employees with a safe workplace. Under the common law, all employers have a legal duty to take reasonable care to avoid exposing employees to reasonably foreseeable risks of injury. These obligations are not exhaustively covered in this part of the guide and independent advice should be sought in relation to a question about these common law duties.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, **Standard 6: Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected** – The health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers is protected and volunteers understand their rights and responsibilities.

- 6.1 Effective working relationships with employees, and between volunteers, are facilitated.
- 6.2 Organisations and groups meet their legal and ethical obligations to protect volunteers from harm.
- 6.3 Processes are in place to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers in their capacity as volunteers, including relevant insurances, such as personal injury and liability.

See this standard for examples of evidence of meeting this criteria.

Harmonised WHS Laws

The harmonised WHS Laws apply in Queensland, New South Wales, Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Northern Territory, Tasmania and now Western Australia.

To determine whether and how the Harmonised WHS Laws apply to your volunteers, organisations in these states and territories need to:

1.	• work out whether the Harmonised WHS Laws apply to the organisation
2.	• consider who holds a duty under the Harmonised WHS Laws
3.	• consider the two sides to safety of volunteers under the Harmonised WHS Laws
4.	• understand the key WHS Law duties, and
5.	• understand who may be liable, that is legally responsible, if there is a breach of the WHS Law duties



Caution

Despite harmonisation of WHS laws in most Australian states and territories, some differences between the application of the WHS Laws in each jurisdiction remain, so it's important to check the laws in each state or territory that your organisation operates in (see table below).

For a summary of the key differences between each state and territory see our guide [‘Community organisations and work health and safety laws’](#).

The table below lists the state and territory legislation that make up the Harmonised WHS Laws, together with the relevant regulators. The Commonwealth legislation, which generally applies to Commonwealth government employers and authorities, is also included in the table. In addition to the Acts



and Regulations listed below, codes of practice published by the relevant regulators may also have legal force.

Jurisdiction	Legislation	Regulations	Regulator
Commonwealth	<u>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (Cth)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety Regulations 2011 (Cth)</u>	<u>Comcare</u>
Tasmania	<u>Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (Tas)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety Regulations 2022 (Tas)</u>	<u>WorkSafe Tasmania</u>
Northern Territory	<u>Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011 (NT)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Regulation 2011 (NT)</u>	<u>NT WorkSafe</u>
South Australia	<u>Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety Regulations 2012 (SA)</u>	<u>SafeWork SA</u>
Australian Capital Territory	<u>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (ACT)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 (ACT)</u>	<u>WorkSafe ACT</u>
Queensland	<u>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (QLD)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety Regulation 2011 (QLD)</u>	<u>WorkSafe QLD</u>
New South Wales	<u>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety Regulation 2017 (NSW)</u>	<u>SafeWork NSW</u>
Western Australia	<u>Work Health and Safety Act 2020 (WA)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety (General) Regulations 2022 (WA)</u>	<u>WorkSafe WA</u>



In this part of the guide we only consider the Harmonised WHS Laws as they relate to volunteers. For more information on how the Harmonised WHS Laws apply to your organisation more broadly (for example to employees), see our guide ['Community organisations and work health and safety laws'](#)

Do the Harmonised WHS Laws apply to your not-for-profit organisation?

To work out whether the Harmonised WHS Laws apply to your organisation, you will need to consider whether your organisation is a 'Person conducting a business or undertaking' and not a 'volunteer association'.

If the Harmonised WHS Laws apply to your organisation, it will have duties under WHS Law. These duties are discussed in greater detail below.



Is your organisation a 'person conducting a business or undertaking'?

The WHS Laws apply to a 'person conducting a business or undertaking' (**PCBU**). Organisations should consider whether they fall within the definition of a PCBU to determine whether they will need to comply with the WHS Laws.

The WHS Laws do not define what a 'business or undertaking' is. A 'business or undertaking' will typically involve some sort of organised operation or enterprise that is ongoing in nature.

An organisation will be considered to be conducting a business or undertaking whether or not that business or undertaking is:

- conducted for profit or gain
- conducted by an individual or a group of people, or
- structured as a partnership, incorporated association (such as a company limited by guarantee, or state based incorporated association) or unincorporated association

The definition of a 'business or undertaking' is very broad and may capture many not-for-profit organisations.



Note

Both unincorporated and incorporated organisations can be a person conducting a business or undertaking (**PCBU**). See below for more information about the difference in liability (legal responsibility) between these two types of organisational structures.

For more information on what it means to be 'unincorporated' see our webpage ['What does incorporation mean and should you incorporate?'](#)



What is a volunteer association?

A volunteer association is a group of volunteers working together for a community purpose where none of the volunteers, (whether alone or jointly with any other volunteers) employs any person to carry out work for the volunteer association.

Is your organisation a 'volunteer association'?

The Harmonised WHS Laws apply to all community organisations that have employees. However, they don't apply to an organisation which **only** engages volunteers (a 'volunteer association').

A 'volunteer association' is taken not to be conducting a business or undertaking and therefore is not subject to the requirements of the WHS Laws.

This means that only not-for-profit community groups which consist solely of volunteers (and not employees or contractors) are exempt from WHS Laws. If your organisation employs anybody (whether casually, part-time or as a contractor), it's not a volunteer association and must comply with WHS Laws.

Note that payments made to volunteers for direct out-of-pocket expenses (such as travel and meals) when carrying out volunteer work will not be regarded as wages or salary. However, if other payments for carrying out volunteer work are made they may constitute a wage or salary and mean that the person is being 'employed' by the organisation.



Note

Even though a 'volunteer association' is taken not to be a person conducting a business or undertaking under the harmonised WHS laws, volunteers working for volunteer associations still have duties and obligations as 'workers' under the legislation (see below for more information).



For more information about reimbursing volunteers, see part 2 of this guide.

What if your organisation doesn't fit into the definition of PCBU or is a volunteer association?

If your community organisation doesn't fit into the definition of PCBU or is a volunteer association, this doesn't mean you can ignore health and safety altogether. Your organisation may not have to comply with WHS Laws but will still need to take reasonable care to make sure that volunteers and members of the public who come in to contact with the organisation and its activities are safe.

Remember that under the common law of negligence (established by the courts), not-for-profit organisations owe a duty of care to their volunteers to take reasonable steps to avoid foreseeable harm, injury or loss. This is discussed above under 'Negligence' above. If you are unsure about how these obligations might apply to your organisation, you should seek independent legal advice.

Who holds a duty under the Harmonised WHS Laws?

The duty owed by each person is different, and the Harmonised Laws are quite prescriptive in what the duty requires.

The table below sets out an overview of the different duties.

Duty holder	Duty
Person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU)	The PCBU has a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers (including volunteers) and other people who might be affected by the work (known as the primary duty of care) while the workers are at work in the business or undertaking. This includes eliminating, or minimising as far as reasonably practicable, any risks to health and safety.
Officer	Officers have a duty to exercise due diligence to ensure that the PCBU complies with its WHS duties. The Harmonised Law outlines particular actions an officer should take to fulfil the duty to exercise due diligence. See 'Liability of directors and officers' below for more information.
Workers (including volunteers)	Workers (including volunteers) have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety, and for the health and safety of anyone who might be affected by their actions or omissions. Workers also have a duty to comply, so far as they reasonably can, with any reasonable instruction given by the PCBU to allow it to comply with the Harmonised Law and to cooperate with any reasonable policy or procedure of the PCBU which relates to work health and safety and that has been notified to workers.
Other people	Other people (whether or not the person has another duty, for example as an officer) have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety, take reasonable care that their acts or omissions do not adversely affect the health or



safety of other people and, so far as they reasonably can, comply with any reasonable instruction given by the PCBU to allow the person to comply with the Harmonised Law.

Volunteers and the two sides to safety under Harmonised WHS Laws

As discussed above, under the Harmonised WHS Laws, volunteers are classified as ‘workers’ and accordingly are entitled to certain protections and have certain obligations.

This means that when engaging volunteers, your community organisation will need to consider the two sides to safety in the workplace:

- your obligation to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of volunteers carrying out work as part of the organisation, and
- the volunteer’s obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety, take reasonable care that their acts or omissions do not adversely affect the health and safety of other persons and to comply and co-operate with reasonable instruction, policy and procedure relating to health and safety



Note – working from home

A volunteer’s obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety can extend to a volunteer working from their own home.



Who is a volunteer? Who is a worker?

A volunteer is a person who is acting on a voluntary basis (irrespective of whether the person receives out-of-pocket expenses). Under the Harmonised WHS Laws, a volunteer is classified as a ‘worker’.

‘Worker’ has a broad definition and includes a person carrying out work in any capacity for a person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU), including work as an employee, a contractor or subcontractor, an employee of a contractor or subcontractor, an employee of a labour hire company, an outworker, an apprentice or trainee, a student gaining work experience, or a volunteer.



Tip

To help volunteers comply with their obligation to take reasonable care for their own health and safety, it’s a good idea to include information about this obligation in any volunteer training, induction and policies.

Some practical steps volunteers can take to make sure they are meeting their duty include:

- understanding and complying with WHS policies and procedures
- engaging with the organisation on WHS issues, and
- taking proactive steps to perform work safely and make sure other workers are performing their work safely



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, **Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed** – Volunteers understand their roles and gain the knowledge, skills and feedback needed to participate safely and effectively.

- 5.1 Volunteers are provided with relevant induction and training.
- 5.2 Volunteers' knowledge and skills are reviewed to identify support and development needs.
- 5.3 Volunteers are engaged with throughout their time and provided with supervision and training that enables them to participate fully.
- 5.4 People with responsibility for volunteers have sufficient time and resources to engage with and provide proper support to volunteers.
- 5.5 Changes to the role of a volunteer are fair and consistent and achieved through engaging with the volunteer.

See this standard for examples of evidence of meeting this criteria.

Providing volunteers with support and development so they understand their safety obligations and are adequately supervised is one way to help organisations meet their safety obligations under work health and safety law.



Example – organisation's obligations to others under WHS laws

Natalie is a volunteer patient transport driver for a not-for-profit organisation which transports clients to and from medical appointments and on outings to do their shopping.

Natalie has recently separated from her husband. She generally suffers from anxiety and is not coping well with the separation. She has confided in her supervisor about her increased intake of alcohol since the separation. Natalie's supervisor has noticed that Natalie sometimes appears to be drowsy when she reports for volunteering duties.

Natalie's supervisor recognises that, under WHS Laws, the organisation has a duty to its clients and the general public to ensure that their health and safety is not impacted by Natalie's volunteer activities and so consults the organisation's drug and alcohol policy.

In accordance with the policy, Natalie's supervisor informs Natalie that because she appears to be drowsy when reporting for her duties, she has a reasonable suspicion that Natalie may sometimes be intoxicated. Natalie confesses that she often 'has a few too many' the night before working. Following further discussion, Natalie's supervisor informs Natalie that, to ensure her health and safety, as well as that of others, Natalie will be required to undertake a breath test before starting each shift for at least the next three months.



If the Harmonised WHS Laws apply to our organisation, what are the specific duties?

The Harmonised WHS Laws impose duties on organisations, which are intended to protect the health and safety of workers.

Three of these legal duties that relate to volunteers are:

1.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the primary duty of care to ensure the health and safety of workers (which includes volunteers)
2.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the duty to 'consult' with workers about safety (which includes volunteers)
3.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> the duty to notify the relevant regulator immediately of notifiable incidents and duty to preserve incident sites



These are not the only relevant duties for organisations covered by the Harmonised WHS Laws.

See our guide '[Community organisations and work health and safety laws](#)' for more information about the legal duties organisations are obligated to fulfil under WHS Laws.

Where a duty is imposed on an organisation to ensure health and safety this will require the organisation to eliminate (or minimise) risks to health and safety, so far as reasonably practicable.



What does 'reasonably practicable' mean?

Reasonably practicable means that something is reasonably able to be done, taking into account and weighing up all relevant matters including:

- the likelihood of the hazard or the risk occurring
- the degree of harm that might result from the hazard or the risk
- what the person concerned knows, or ought reasonably to know, about the hazard or risk, and ways of eliminating or minimising the risk
- the availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or minimise the risk, and
- after assessing the extent of the risk and the available ways of eliminating or minimising the risk, the cost associated with available ways of eliminating or minimising the risk, including whether the cost is grossly disproportionate to the risk



For more information about how to determine if something is 'reasonably practicable' see our guide '[Community organisations and work health and safety laws](#)'.



Tip

The cost of eliminating or minimising risks may be a relevant factor for many community organisations with limited resources. However, if there is an incident in the workplace, it's not a defence to a breach of WHS Laws to claim, 'We're a not-for-profit group and we couldn't afford to reduce that risk'.

To reduce your chance of being found guilty for a breach of WHS Laws, your organisation needs to be able to show (documented proof is best) that it has identified and considered risks and has taken practical steps within its resources to eliminate or reduce those risks. Often these don't need to be expensive measures. For example, if your volunteers are lifting items, you don't have to buy an expensive hydraulic lifting machine – instead, you could train volunteers in safe lifting practices and post reminder notices around the premises to comply with these duties.

Three legal duties that relate to volunteers

1. Primary duty of care to ensure the health and safety of workers

Your organisation must ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety (physical and psychological) of workers – which includes volunteers.

In addition to volunteers, organisations must also ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that the health and safety of other persons is not put at risk from work carried out as part of the conduct of the organisation (which may include work carried out by volunteers). Other persons may include other workers, clients, customers, tradespeople, and suppliers who visit the workplace.

A 'workplace' is broadly defined under WHS Laws. When your organisation considers the other persons at the workplace to whom it may owe a duty, be sure to think of all places that will be considered to be 'workplaces' for your organisation under WHS Laws, and not just your office or site.

Some activities may not be considered 'work' under WHS Law, if you are unsure if your activity is covered by WHS Law, you should seek legal advice.

In determining what your organisation is required to do to keep volunteers safe, your organisation should consider:

- the type of work being carried out
- the environment in which the work is being undertaken
- any risks associated with the work and the likelihood of an injury or illness
- what can be done to eliminate or minimise those risks
- the resources that will be required to eliminate or minimise those risks



Example – sausage sizzle fundraiser

A charity, staffed by employees and volunteers, arranges a sausage sizzle to raise money. The event takes place at a local park, where an employee and volunteer are responsible for the set-up of a barbeque. There is a gas leak which results in a minor explosion. The employee, volunteer and a passer-by are injured. As the charity is an employer, it will owe a duty to all three injured parties. Whether or not the charity breached the duty will depend on whether it did all that was reasonably practicable to ensure people weren't exposed to this risk.



Example – cricket club renovation

A council allowed 21 volunteer members of a cricket club to remove cement render and sheeting from the walls of its premises. Members of the club were exposed to asbestos in the process. Before doing this work, the council failed to make enquiries about the presence of asbestos in the walls of their buildings. The court found that the council failed to ensure that people (volunteer members of a community organisation) were not exposed to risk as a result of an undertaking.



Example – volunteer driver

A volunteer drives clients to and from medical appointments in their own car. There is a risk the volunteer (and the clients) could be involved in a car accident while driving. There is no way for the organisation to completely eliminate the risk. However, the organisation can minimise the risk by:

- checking the volunteer has a current drivers licence
- making sure the car is insured, well maintained and less than 10 years old, and
- providing training to volunteer drivers on safe driving



Tip

Your organisation may want to provide volunteers with training on working safely, protective equipment, first aid training, first aid facilities, and training on incident response procedures (for example, fire drills).

The primary duty of care and psychological health and safety

As a result of changes to the model WHS Laws in 2022, the primary duty of PCBUs to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers now expressly includes psychological health and safety.

A PCBU must eliminate psychosocial risks in the workplace, or if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise these risks so far as is reasonably practicable.

Examples of psychosocial hazards include job demands, low job control, poor support, bullying, and harassment (including sexual harassment).

Measures to control such hazards include job (work) design, improving job control, implementing safe work systems and procedures, and engaging in regular consultation with workers about the risks of psychosocial hazards.

To help implement this extended duty, [Safe Work Australia has published a Model Code of Practice for managing psychosocial hazards at work](#).

For the Model Code of Practice to apply in a particular state or territory, it must first be approved as a Code of Practice in that jurisdiction. Not all jurisdictions will implement the Model Code of Practice in the same way.

The extended duty of care:

- now applies in [New South Wales](#) (since 1 October 2022), [Western Australia](#) and [Tasmania](#) (since 4 January 2023), [Queensland](#) (since 1 April 2023), and the [Northern Territory](#) (since 1 July 2023), and
- has not yet been implemented in South Australia or the ACT



Victoria (the only state or territory that is not part of the Harmonised WHS scheme) is developing regulations and a code to address the management of psychosocial risks.



The National Strategy for Volunteering

On the strategic objective to ensure volunteering is not exploitative:

Psychosocial hazards include factors of work that increase the risk of work-related stress and can lead to psychological or physical harm. Volunteers can often experience overload or burnout in their role. During COVID-19, many volunteers felt that undue responsibility was placed upon them, their workload became unmanageable, and that it became difficult to balance voluntary work with other commitments. Given that there may be a threshold for “too much” volunteering, which reverses wellbeing benefits and creates adverse outcomes for volunteering, it is imperative that the safety risks associated with volunteering are identified and properly managed.

(page 46 of the strategy)

2. Duty to consult with volunteers about safety

Your community organisation has a duty to consult with workers (which includes volunteers), as far as reasonably practicable, about matters relating to work health or safety that affect them. Workers must be made aware about potential hazards associated with their work and how the organisation endeavours to protect them from such harm.

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to consulting with workers as this will depend on the size of the organisation, the type of work carried out and the length of the worker's engagement. Consultation with workers could be carried out by:

- providing alerts or newsletters by mail or email which provide information on health and safety or updates in procedures
- having a point of contact for volunteers (for example, an email address) to voice concerns or provide suggestions regarding health and safety, and
- holding health and safety meetings

Whatever approach is adopted, your community organisation should talk regularly with workers about doing their work safely. The views of the workers should be taken into account and workers should be advised of the outcome of consultations in a timely matter. Workers should also be made aware of who to talk to about a specific incident of concern relating to work health and safety.



Tip

Include notices around your workplace about incident procedures and who to contact when an incident occurs. Your organisation should hold regular training for volunteers on these issues as well.

3. Duty to notify the regulator immediately of notifiable incidents and to preserve incident sites

While all workplace incidents should be recorded by all community organisations no matter how large or small, there are particular legal obligations on community organisations for the reporting of some types of incidents.

Under the Harmonised WHS Laws, some incidents that occur in the workplace require a special type of response by an organisation. This special response includes:

- immediate notification to the regulator in your state or territory for 'notifiable incidents' (such as death, serious injury or illness or a dangerous incident), and



- so far as is reasonably practicable, preservation of incident sites where notifiable incidents have occurred (to allow inspection of the site, and a full investigation to occur if required)

These duties extend to incidents that occur to volunteers (and any other person, including contractors or clients) while at the workplace. Remember, a 'workplace' is broadly defined under WHS Laws. Be sure to think of all places that will be considered to be 'workplaces' for your organisation under WHS Laws, and not just your office or site.

Only incidents which arise out of the conduct of the business or undertaking are notifiable. For example, the following would not be a notifiable incident:

- a volunteer suffers a heart attack while at work which is unrelated to work or the workplace
- a volunteer driving to work is injured in a car accident (where driving is not part of their work), or
- a volunteer with a known history of epilepsy has a seizure at work



There are significant penalties for employers who fail to follow the correct procedures after a notifiable incident.

See our guide '[Community organisations and work health and safety laws](#)' for more information on:

- what constitutes a 'notifiable incident' under the Harmonised WHS Laws
- when your organisation must notify the relevant state or territory regulator and the notification procedure you must follow
- when and how your organisation may be required to preserve an 'incident site'
- your record keeping obligations, and
- the steps you should take after an incident occurs to prevent a similar incident from occurring in the future

The best and most appropriate response will largely depend on the nature of the incident.

Your organisation may also wish to review its approach to risk management and insurance options – see the section below on insurance and our [guide to risk management and insurance](#).

Who may be legally responsible under WHS laws?

Your organisation, its directors and officers (who will often be volunteers in community organisations) could be personally liable (legally responsible) for failure to comply with WHS Laws. The state regulators can prosecute companies, organisations and individuals in relation to WHS offences.

Liability of the community organisation itself

- **incorporated community organisations**

If your community organisation is incorporated (such as an incorporated association or a company limited by guarantee), the organisation itself is considered to be a separate person for the purposes of the WHS Laws and can be found guilty of breaches of WHS legislation.

This means that an incorporated organisation as a whole can be held responsible for breaches of WHS Law by its officers, employees, volunteers or agents, where those officers, employees, volunteers or agents are performing tasks within the scope of their authority.

Not-for-profit community organisations can be prosecuted as severely as commercial enterprises. The regulator may also prosecute the organisation's directors and officers personally (see below for more information on directors and officers of a community organisation).

- **unincorporated community organisations**

If you meet the definition of PCBU and you are not a volunteer association, it doesn't matter that you are an unincorporated community organisation - the WHS Laws will still apply to your organisation.



If your community organisation is unincorporated however, it is not recognised by law and cannot itself be prosecuted for breaches of the WHS Laws.

However, as with an incorporated organisation, the 'officers' of an unincorporated organisation can be held personally liable for a breach of the 'officer' duties and could potentially incur penalties where there has been a serious failure to take adequate care to prevent or report workplace injuries.

Liability of directors and officers



Who is an officer?

Under the WHS Laws, officers of an organisation may include:

- a director or secretary of the organisation
- a person who makes decisions, or participates in making decisions, that affect the whole or a substantial part of the operations of an organisation (for example, a board member or CEO)
- a person who has the capacity to significantly affect the organisation's financial standing, and
- various people who may be involved in an organisation in positions of responsibility such as a receiver, administrator, liquidator or trustee of an organisation

- **volunteer director or officer**

A volunteer director or officer is expected to comply with the duties in WHS Law but can't be prosecuted for failing to comply with those duties. This immunity from prosecution under WHS Law has been designed to ensure that people are not discouraged from taking up voluntary positions in community organisations. However, paid directors have no such immunity and can be personally liable.

A volunteer director or officer also has general work health and safety obligations as a worker under the WHS Law and can be prosecuted for a breach of these duties (see discussion below).

- **paid director or officer**

An officer of an organisation (whether incorporated or unincorporated) may be found personally liable for breach of the WHS Law if:

- they receive payment for their position as an officer in the organisation (that is, they are not a volunteer officer), and
- they fail to exercise due diligence (discussed below) to ensure that the organisation complies with its duties or obligations under the WHS Law



Note

'Officers' of any person conducting a business or undertaking (PCBU) who are 'volunteers' can't be prosecuted for a breach of the 'officer duties'. They can, however, be prosecuted as 'workers' or 'other persons' should they breach the obligations owed by those types of duty holders.

**Tip**

A director or officer will still be classed as a volunteer where they receive repayment from the organisation only for out-of-pocket expenses incurred because of their position.

Liability of volunteers as workers

Workers (which includes volunteers) have a duty to take reasonable care for their own health and safety and for the health and safety of others to make sure they are not adversely affected by their actions or omissions while at work.

Workers must also comply with the reasonable instructions given by the organisation in relation to compliance with the WHS Act and must cooperate with any reasonable WHS policies and procedures of the organisation.

Workers in an organisation may also be personally liable if they do not comply with the duties that apply to 'workers' under the WHS Law. Regulators can prosecute workers for an offence in respect of breaching their duties.

**Note**

Fines and prosecutions of workers are extremely rare, and there is currently no record of a volunteer being fined or prosecuted under the Harmonised Laws.

Victorian OHS Laws

This following information provides people involved in not-for-profit community organisations in Victoria with a basic understanding of Victorian OHS Laws and how they relate to volunteers.

To determine whether and how the Victorian OHS Laws apply to your volunteers, your organisation will need to:

1.	• work out whether the Victorian OHS Laws apply to the organisation
2.	• consider who holds a duty under the Victorian OHS Laws
3.	• consider the two sides to safety of volunteers under the Victorian OHS Laws
4.	• understand the key duties under the Victorian OHS Laws that relate to volunteers, and
5.	• understand who may be liable, that is legally responsible, if there is a breach of these duties



In this part of the guide we only consider the Victorian OHS Laws as they relate to volunteers. For more information on how Victorian OHS Laws apply to your organisation more broadly (for example to employees), see our ['Victorian guide to occupational health and safety laws'](#).



Do the Victorian OHS Laws apply to your organisation?

The Victorian OHS laws will apply to all community organisations that have employees and may also apply to community organisations that are completely volunteer-based where they manage or control a 'workplace'.

To work out whether the Victorian OHS laws apply to your organisation, you will need to consider whether your organisation is an 'employer', or is an organisation that manages or controls a 'workplace'.

If the Victorian OHS Laws apply to your organisation, it will be required to meet obligations discussed below.

Is your organisation an 'employer'?

The Victorian OHS Laws apply to all 'employers' in Victoria, whether they are not-for-profit or for-profit. Your community organisation will be considered an 'employer' if it:

- employs one or more people under a contract of employment (has at least one 'employee'), or
- employs one or more people under a contract of training (has at least one 'trainee' or 'apprentice')

Therefore, your organisation will not be an employer if it operates exclusively based on assistance provided by volunteers who do not have a contract of employment or training.

To determine whether a community organisation is an 'employer':

- it's not relevant that a community organisation relies heavily on volunteers - if an organisation employs even one person (for example, a part-time bookkeeper), it may be considered an 'employer' under the Victorian OHS Laws and should comply with all the 'employer duties', and
- it's not relevant if your organisation is an unincorporated entity – the OHS Laws also apply to unincorporated bodies who are 'employers', and a breach of the OHS Laws could mean a committee member is personally liable.

Does your organisation manage or control a workplace?

If your community organisation is not an 'employer', your organisation may still be required to comply with Victorian OHS Laws if it has 'management or control of a workplace'. Under Victorian OHS Laws, a 'workplace' is broadly defined as a place, whether or not in a building or structure, where 'employees or self-employed persons work'.

Therefore, if your community organisation manages or controls a place where employees or self-employed persons work, then the place will be considered a 'workplace', and your organisation may owe a duty of care to ensure that the workplace (and the means of entering and leaving the workplace) is safe and without risks to health.

It is important to note that even if your community organisation has no employees, is completely volunteer-based and does not engage contractors or consultants, it may still be taken to 'manage or control a workplace'. This is because the Victorian OHS Laws do not require that your community organisation be involved in the engagement of those people. All that is required is that your community has a degree of control over the place at which the work is carried out.

This will mean that if the place at which the community organisation carries out its work has contractors or other self-employed persons who attend the workplace from time-to-time, then this place may be a 'workplace' for the purposes of the Victorian OHS Laws and your organisation may owe a duty of care in relation to that workplace.



Example

A community centre or community hub may have a range of organisations that operate within the same building. Some of the community organisations operating out of the centre may be entirely volunteer-based, whereas others have employees. If this is the case, a volunteer-based organisation with management and control of the centre will still be required to comply with the 'workplace' duties in the OHS Law.



Note – unincorporated bodies

If your organisation meets the requirements under Victorian OHS Laws (that is, it has control of a workplace as described above) the Victorian OHS Law may apply to your organisation, and a breach of the Victorian OHS Laws could mean a committee member is personally liable.

More information about the difference in liability (legal responsibility) between incorporated associations and unincorporated associations can be found below. For more information on what it means to be 'unincorporated' see our webpage ['What incorporation mean and should you incorporate?'](#)

What if your organisation doesn't employ people and doesn't manage or control a workplace?

If your community organisation is not an employer and the people involved in your organisation have no contact with a 'workplace' that is managed or controlled by your organisation, the Victorian OHS Laws are unlikely to apply.

If your community organisation is not an employer and doesn't operate in a workplace, this does not mean you can ignore health and safety altogether. Your organisation may not have to comply with Victorian OHS Laws but will still need to take reasonable care to ensure that volunteers and members of the public who come in to contact with the organisation and its activities are safe.

Remember that under the common law of negligence (established by the courts), not-for-profit organisations owe a duty of care to their volunteers to take reasonable steps to avoid foreseeable harm, injury or loss. This is discussed above under 'Negligence'. If you are unsure about how these obligations might apply to your organisation, you should seek independent legal advice.



Example

An entirely volunteer-run group meets in each other's homes regularly to discuss their organisation's progress and plan for the future. Because there are no employees in the organisation and no employees are present in the various homes, Victorian OHS laws will not apply.



Who holds a duty under Victorian OHS Laws?

The duty owed by each person is different, and the Victorian OHS Laws are quite prescriptive in what the duty requires.

The table below sets out the different duties.

Duty holder	Duty
Employer	Employers owe a duty to employees, and other persons (including volunteers) who may be affected by the work or activities of the organisation, to ensure so far as is reasonably practicable that employees and other persons are not exposed to risks to their health and safety arising from the organisation's activities.
Persons who manage or control workplaces	Persons who control or manage a workplace must ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that the workplace and the means of entering and leaving it are safe and without risks. A breach of this duty is an offence, however, volunteers cannot be fined or prosecuted for a breach of this duty.
Any person at a workplace	Any person at a workplace, including volunteers, must not recklessly endanger another person in the workplace. A breach of this duty is an offence under the Victorian OHS Laws.

Volunteers and the two sides to safety under Victorian OHS Laws

As discussed above, under Victorian OHS Laws, any person at a workplace can be entitled to certain protections and have certain obligations.

This means that when engaging volunteers in your organisation, your community organisation will need to consider the two sides to safety in the workplace:

- your obligation to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, that volunteers are not exposed to risks to their health and safety arising from the organisation's activities, and
- the volunteer's obligation to ensure it does not recklessly endanger another person in the workplace



Who is a volunteer?

Under Victorian OHS Laws, a volunteer is a person who is acting on a voluntary basis (not being paid for their work). A person will continue to be considered a volunteer despite receiving payment of out-of-pocket expenses from the organisation.



Tips

To help volunteers comply with their obligation to take reasonable care of their own health and safety, it's a good idea to include information about this obligation in any volunteer training, induction and policies.

Some practical steps volunteers can take to ensure they are meeting their duty include:

- understanding and complying with Victorian OHS policies and procedures
- engaging with the organisation on Victorian OHS issues, and
- taking proactive steps to perform work safely and make sure other workers are performing their work safely



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement, **Standard 5: Volunteers are supported and developed** – Volunteers understand their roles and gain the knowledge, skills and feedback needed to participate safely and effectively

- 5.1 Volunteers are provided with relevant induction and training.
- 5.2 Volunteers' knowledge and skills are reviewed to identify support and development needs.
- 5.3 Volunteers are engaged with throughout their time and provided with supervision and training that enables them to participate fully.
- 5.4 People with responsibility for volunteers have sufficient time and resources to engage with and provide proper support to volunteers.
- 5.5 Changes to the role of a volunteer are fair and consistent and achieved through engaging with the volunteer.

See this standard for examples of evidence of meeting this criteria.

Providing volunteers with support and development so that they understand their safety obligations, and are adequately supervised is one way to help organisations meet their safety obligations under work health and law.

If the Victorian OHS Laws do apply to our organisation, what are the specific duties?

Most of the employer's obligations in the Victorian OHS Law relate to 'employees'. Volunteers are not included in the definition of 'employees'. However, there are some obligations to people other than the employer's employees – such as volunteers.

Four key legal duties that relate to volunteers are:

1.	•the duty not to expose other persons to risk
2.	•the duty to to keep the workplace safe and without risks to health
3.	•the duty not to recklessly endanger persons at workplaces
4.	•the duty to notify regulator immediately of notifiable incidents and duty to preserve incident sites



These are not the only relevant duties for organisations covered by the Victorian OHS Laws. For more information, see our ['Victorian guide to occupational health and safety laws'](#).



What does 'reasonably practicable' mean?

Many of the duties in the Victorian OHS laws require that employers do what is 'reasonably practicable' in the circumstances to make sure they meet their obligations to provide a safe and healthy working environment.

This standard of care requires the employer to, so far as is practicable, provide and maintain a safe working environment in which the employees are not exposed to hazards.

The following matters must be taken into account to determine if something is (or was at a particular time) 'reasonably practicable':

- the likelihood of the hazard or risk concerned eventuating
- the degree of harm that would result if the hazard or risk eventuated
- what the person concerned knows, or ought reasonably to know, about the hazard or risk and any ways of eliminating or reducing the hazard or risk
- the availability and suitability of ways to eliminate or reduce the hazard or risk
- the cost of eliminating or reducing the hazard or risk

To meet the requisite standard of care and control over OHS risks, it's recommended that duty-holders conduct the following four-stage process to:

1. identify any hazards within the workplace
2. assess the risks that may result as a consequence of the hazards
3. decide on appropriate control measures to prevent and minimise the level of the risks, and
4. implement, monitor and review those control measures



For more information about how to determine if something is 'reasonably practicable' see our guide ['Community organisations and work health and safety laws'](#).



Tip

The cost of eliminating or minimising risks may be a relevant factor for many community organisations with limited resources. However, if there is an incident in the workplace, it's not a defence to a breach of Victorian OHS Law to claim, 'We're a not-for-profit group and we couldn't afford to reduce that risk'.

To reduce your chance of being found guilty for a breach of Victorian OHS Laws, your organisation needs to be able to show (documented proof is best) that it has identified and considered risks and has taken practical steps within its resources to eliminate or reduce those risks. Often these don't need to be expensive measures. For example, if your volunteers are lifting items, you don't have to buy an expensive hydraulic lifting machine – instead, you could train volunteers in safe lifting practices and post reminder notices around the premises to comply with these OHS duties.



1. Duty not to expose other persons to risk

Community organisations who are employers must, so far as reasonably practicable, ensure that people are not exposed to risks to their health and safety arising from the conduct of the undertaking of the employer. This will include:

- any activity which is done in the course of carrying on the organisation's activities (for example, holding a fun day at a community kindergarten)
- when performing work or providing services at one or more places (regardless of whether these are carried on within a defined physical boundary), and
- any activity which is ancillary to the organisation's operations (for example, contractors cleaning a premise after hours)

Employers owe this duty to everyone, and therefore the duty extends to volunteers, independent contractors or consultants (and the employees of contractors or consultants), clients and any other members of the public that might be affected by the organisation's activities.



Example – sausage sizzle fundraiser

A charity, staffed by employees and volunteers, arranges a sausage sizzle to raise money. The event takes place at a local park, where an employee and volunteer are responsible for the set-up of a barbecue. There is a gas leak which results in a minor explosion. The employee, volunteer and a passer-by are injured. As the charity is an employer, it will owe a duty to all three injured parties. Whether or not the charity breached the duty will depend on whether it did all that was reasonably practicable to ensure people weren't exposed to this risk.



Example – cricket club renovation

A council allowed 21 volunteer members of a cricket club to remove cement render and sheeting from the walls of its premises. Members of the club were exposed to asbestos in the process. Before doing this work, the council failed to make enquiries about the presence of asbestos in the walls of their buildings. The court found that the council failed to ensure that people (volunteer members of a community organisation) were not exposed to risk as a result of an undertaking.



Note – psychological health and safety

Under the OHS Laws, 'health' includes psychological health.

Victoria is developing regulations and a code to address the management of psychosocial risks.



2. Duty to keep the workplace safe and without risks to health

All community organisations that control or manage a workplace to any extent must comply with this duty. This duty requires community organisations to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, that the workplace, and the means of entering and leaving it, are safe and without risks to health.

This duty is on the controller or manager of the workplace, which means that it will often be the responsibility of an entity even when it is not the owner of the premises. This means a number of parties who jointly occupy premises might owe duties at the same time under this section.

This duty is not limited to the protection of people employed in the workplace, it also extends to any person who is likely to enter the premises at some stage. This could include volunteers, clients, customers, service providers, contractors and others who enter the workplace.



Example

A community organisation is leasing office space. The organisation is aware that the front doormat has been damaged and protrudes from the ground, but fails to remove the tripping hazard. A volunteer arrives to help answer the phones and trips on the mat, causing injury. The community organisation may be liable as it was in control of the workplace and the means of entering it at the time, even though it doesn't own the premises.

3. Duty not to recklessly endanger persons at workplaces

All community organisations and people at the workplace have a duty not to recklessly engage in conduct that may place another person who is at a workplace in danger of serious injury.

A person will be reckless where they do an act (or omit or fail to do something), knowing that serious injury is foreseeable and a probable consequence of their act or omission. Serious injury includes both physical and mental injuries that are significant and severe (for example injuries which impair the enjoyment of life or ability to work in the future).

This duty is owed to everyone who comes into contact with the workplace, including employees, independent contractors (and their employees), volunteers, clients and any other members of the public who would be affected by the community organisation's conduct.



Note

The duty not to recklessly endanger persons at workplaces is an example of an obligation that volunteers must also comply with. It's a good idea to include this duty in any volunteer training, induction and policies.



Example – volunteer driver

An employee of a community organisation directed a volunteer to drive a truck of donated furniture to one of the organisation's stores. The truck that the volunteer was instructed to drive had defective brakes and the employee knew this. While driving to the store, the volunteer attempted to apply the brakes which failed. The volunteer swerved to the left side of the road to avoid traffic and collided with the support column of a road sign. The volunteer died as a result of the injuries sustained in the collision. The employee who directed the worker to drive the truck may be found guilty of an offence under OHS Law in these circumstances.



4. Duty to notify the regulator immediately of notifiable incidents and duty to preserve incident sites

While all workplace incidents should be recorded by all community organisations no matter how large or small, under Victorian OHS Laws, organisations must notify WorkSafe Victoria when particular types of injuries or incidents occur.

Organisations must report an incident that results in:

- the death of a person
- a person requiring medical treatment within 48 hours of exposure to a substance
- a person requiring immediate treatment as an in-patient in a hospital
- a person requiring immediate medical treatment for amputation, a serious head injury, a serious eye injury, the separation of skin from underlying tissue (such as de-gloving or scalping), electric shock, a spinal injury, the loss of a bodily function, or serious lacerations

Organisations must also report incidents involving:

- the collapse, overturning, failure or malfunction of, or damage to, any plant that is required to be licensed or registered
- the collapse or partial collapse of all or part of a building or structure
- an implosion, explosion or fire
- the escape, spillage or leakage of any substance including dangerous goods
- the fall or release from a height of any plant, substance or object
- in relation to a mine, the overturning or collapse of any plant, the inrush of water, mud or gas, or the interruption of the main system of ventilation

The Victorian OHS laws require that these incident sites be preserved to allow a full investigation (if required). If a notifiable incident does happen in your organisation, the site should not be disturbed until a WorkSafe inspector arrives at the workplace, unless you have been directed otherwise by WorkSafe.

All community organisations that are employers who have the management and control of a workplace must comply with this duty. Even where there is a manager or supervisor on duty, the ultimate responsibility to report incidents will rest with the employer (the community organisation). Your community organisation should have a clear policy that covers processes for incident notification, either as part of its OHS policy or a separate incident reporting policy.

This duty is owed to all employees, volunteers and members of the general public who are seriously injured or affected by a workplace incident.

A 'workplace' will include any place where volunteers work. This is not limited to a physical building or structure and could include sporting fields, vehicles and any other places that volunteers of your community organisation undertake their duties. When serious incidents occur in these places your organisation may be required to notify WorkSafe Victoria.



Case example

An organisation operated residential home care sites for the elderly and people with a disability. A resident of the organisation was performing routine exercises on a tilt table under the supervision of his carer. During the exercises another resident called out to the carer for assistance and the carer left the patient on the tilt table in a squatting position. As he left, the carer told the resident he would be back in 5 minutes and gave him the controls. While alone, the resident pressed a button to change the angle of the tilt table. The button he pressed in fact changed the angle of the table so that a significant amount of pressure was placed on his legs. Unable to support his own weight, he fell to the floor and broke both his legs. He required a significant hospital stay after the incident.

The organisation failed to notify WorkSafe immediately after becoming aware of the incident in writing within 48 hours of the incident. The organisation submitted an enforceable undertaking to the regulator. An undertaking to the regulator is generally accepted as an alternative to civil or administrative action where there has been a breach of the law, and it is enforceable in a court. The regulator accepted the organisation's undertaking.

Victorian WorkCover Authority v Australian Home Care Services Pty Ltd (Unreported, Moorabbin Magistrates' Court, Clifford M, 11 May 2017)



See our '[Victorian guide to occupational health and safety laws](#)' for more information on:

- what constitutes a notifiable incident under Victorian OHS Laws
- when your organisation may have to report incidents that expose a person (including volunteers) who are in the vicinity to an immediate health or safety risk or dangerous occurrence
- when your organisation must notify WorkSafe Victoria and the notification procedure you must follow
- when and how your organisation may be required to preserve an 'incident site'
- your record keeping obligations, and
- the steps you should take after an incident to prevent a similar incident in the future



Note

The best and most appropriate response will largely depend on the nature of the incident. Notifiable incidents are just one type of workplace incident that organisations may need to respond to.

Refer to our guide '[Community organisations and work health and safety laws](#)' for tips on how to respond to a workplace incident more broadly.

Your organisation may also wish to review its approach to risk management and insurance options – see the section below on insurance and our [guide to risk management and insurance](#).



Who may be legally responsible under Victorian OHS Laws?

There is a possibility that both your organisation and its individual officers (who will often be volunteers in community organisations) could be personally liable (legally responsible) for failure to comply with Victorian OHS laws. WorkSafe Victoria can prosecute the organisation, its officers, or in some circumstances, both.

Liability of the community organisation itself

- **incorporated community organisations**

If your community organisation is incorporated (such as an incorporated association or a company limited by guarantee), the organisation itself is considered to be a separate person for the purposes of the OHS Laws and can be found guilty of breaches of OHS legislation.

This means that an incorporated organisation as a whole can be held responsible for breaches of the Act by its officers, employees, or agents, where those officers, employees or agents are performing tasks within the scope of their authority.

Not-for-profit community organisations can be prosecuted as severely as commercial enterprises. The regulator may also prosecute the organisation's directors and officers personally (see below for more information on directors and officers of a community organisation).

- **unincorporated community organisations**

If your community organisation is unincorporated, it can't itself be prosecuted for breaches of the Victorian OHS Laws.

However, as with an incorporated organisation, the 'officers' of an unincorporated organisation can be held personally liable for a breach and could potentially incur penalties where there has been a serious failure to take adequate care to prevent or report workplace injuries

Liability of directors and officers

- **directors and officers**

Under Victorian OHS Law, 'officers' of a community organisation (whether incorporated or unincorporated) will include any of the following:

- a director or secretary
- a person who makes decisions that affect the whole or a substantial part of the operations of a community organisation
- a person who has the capacity to significantly affect the community organisation's financial standing, and
- various people who may be involved in a community organisation as a receiver, administrator, liquidator or trustee of a community organisation

- **volunteer directors and officers**

A volunteer director or officer is expected to comply with the duties in Victorian OHS law but will generally not be held liable for breaches of the Victorian OHS laws for anything done by them in a volunteer capacity, even where they fail to take reasonable care. This immunity from prosecution under the OHS Act has been designed to make sure people aren't discouraged from taking up voluntary positions in community organisations.

Despite this protection under Victorian OHS laws, a volunteer director or officer must act in good faith in that capacity at all times and must not recklessly engage in conduct that may place another person (who is at a workplace) in danger of serious injury in order to avoid potential prosecution. Further, as noted earlier in this guide, a volunteer officer may, in their personal capacity, still owe duties under Victorian OHS Laws as a worker or where they are managing or controlling the workplace at the time of an incident.

- **paid directors and officers**

A director or an officer of a community organisation (whether incorporated or unincorporated), may be found personally liable for a breach of the Victorian OHS laws if:

- they receive payment for their position as an officer in the organisation (that is, they are not a volunteer officer), and



- the organisation they direct contravenes the OHS Act and this has occurred because the director failed to take reasonable care



Tip

An officer will still be classed as a volunteer, even where they receive repayment from the organisation only for out-of-pocket expenses incurred because of their position.

Working remotely



Should your organisation let its volunteers work from home?

It depends. Allowing volunteers to work from home may not be sensible in all situations. If your volunteers require high levels of supervision (for example, engaging with difficult or challenging clients), your organisation may need to consider whether it's appropriate to ask your volunteers to work remotely. Remember, you have a duty of care to ensure the safety (physical and psychological) of your volunteers and clients, and this can be difficult to monitor if your volunteers are working remotely.

If it's safe to have your volunteers volunteer remotely, make sure they have the necessary equipment, training, and a safe environment in which to work.

Consider what measures your organisation can put in place to support volunteers. This could include, for example, conducting meetings through video-conferencing and sending work to be reviewed by email.

Safety of children

When you work with children, you have a legal responsibility to ensure their physical, mental and emotional safety.

In addition to the duty of care your community organisation owes to volunteers and to members of the public, you should consider the special responsibilities you may have in relation to children that your organisation comes into contact with when providing services, or when they are volunteers for your organisation.

Child Safe Standards

The [National Principles for Child Safe Organisations \(National Principles\)](#), endorsed by the Federal Government in 2019, aim to provide a nationally consistent approach to creating organisational cultures that foster child safety and wellbeing.

Although Australian organisations are not legally required to adopt them, the National Principles are considered best practice for fostering child safety and wellbeing culture and practice.

If your organisation interacts with children or youth volunteers, we recommend you use the National Principles as a guide to create a child safe environment. You can then be satisfied that your organisation is taking reasonable steps to protect children from risks to their health and safety. Complying with the National Principles may also assist with taking 'reasonable precautions' to prevent an individual associated with your organisation from perpetrating child abuse (discussed further below).



National Principles for Child Safe Organisations

Principle 1: Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

Principle 2: Children and young people are informed about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

Principle 3: Families and communities are informed and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

Principle 4: Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.

Principle 5: People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

Principle 6: Processes to respond to complaints and concerns are child focused.

Principle 7: Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.

Principle 8: Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.

Principle 9: Implementation of the national child safe principles is regularly reviewed and improved.

Principle 10: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people.

In **Victoria**, organisations that engage youth volunteers (or provide services to children) must comply with the [Child Safe Standards](#) as set out in the [Child Wellbeing and Safety Act 2005 \(Vic\)](#).

The [Victorian Commission for Children and Young People](#) is the oversight body for the Standards. You can find more information about the Standards, including information about who the Standards apply to on the [Commission's website](#).



Victorian Child Safe Standards

Standard 1: Organisations establish a culturally safe environment in which the diverse and unique identities and experiences of Aboriginal children and young people are respected and valued.

Standard 2: Child safety and wellbeing is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

Standard 3: Children and young people are empowered about their rights, participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

Standard 4: Families and communities are informed, and involved in promoting child safety and wellbeing.

Standard 5: Equity is upheld and diverse needs respected in policy and practice.

Standard 6: People working with children and young people are suitable and supported to reflect child safety and wellbeing values in practice.

Standard 7: Processes for complaints and concerns are child focused.

Standard 8: Staff and volunteers are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children and young people safe through ongoing education and training.

Standard 9: Physical and online environments promote safety and wellbeing while minimising the opportunity for children and young people to be harmed.

Standard 10: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is regularly reviewed and improved.

Standard 11: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is safe for children and young people

In **New South Wales**, agencies delivering services to children and young people must comply with [Child Safe Standards](#) adopted by the New South Wales government.

[The Office of the Children's Guardian](#) has responsibility to implement the Standards.



New South Wales Child Safe Standards

Standard 1: Child safety is embedded in organisational leadership, governance and culture.

Standard 2: Children participate in decisions affecting them and are taken seriously.

Standard 3: Families and communities are informed and involved.

Standard 4: Equity is upheld and diverse needs are taken into account.

Standard 5: People working with children are suitable and supported.

Standard 6: Processes to respond to complaints of child sexual abuse are child focused.

Standard 7: Staff are equipped with the knowledge, skills and awareness to keep children safe through continual education and training.

Standard 8: Physical and online environments minimise the opportunity for abuse to occur.

Standard 9: Implementation of the Child Safe Standards is continuously reviewed and improved.

Standard 10: Policies and procedures document how the organisation is child safe.



In **South Australia**, certain organisations must provide child safe environments and comply with the requirements under the [*Children and Young People \(Safety\) Act 2017 \(SA\)*](#) and the [*Child Safety \(Prohibited Persons\) Act 2016 \(SA\)*](#).

These organisations must:

- have a child safe environments policy in place
- meet working with children check obligations, and
- lodge a child safe environments compliance statement, which should all cover youth volunteers



Access the National Principles, along with helpful supporting resources, on the [Child Safe Organisations website](#).

The National Office for Child Safety has also published a [Complaint Handling Guide](#).

For more information about the Victorian Child Safe Standards, see the [Commission for Children and Young People's website](#).

For more information about the NSW Child Safe Standards, see the [NSW Office of the Children's Guardian's Child Safe Scheme webpage](#).

For more information about the child safe requirements in South Australia, visit the [Department of Human Services website](#).

Safety laws, child safety and your duty of care

As discussed above, when considering safety, there are two primary sources of law that your organisation will need to be aware of:

- negligence laws, and
- work health and safety (or occupational health and safety) laws

Negligence laws

A community organisation may owe children a duty of care under the common law (judge-made law) of negligence or under the negligence legislation.

Under negligence law, fulfilling your legal responsibility to children requires you to meet the standard expected of a reasonably competent and prudent organisation, in the same position and with the same knowledge.

In certain circumstances, your organisation may also be held legally responsible (liable) for the actions of its volunteers, where harm has been caused to someone else, such as a child.

It's important to note that the standard of care expected in relation to children may be generally higher than that owed to others.

If you are dealing with children, you should consider any special measures you may need to take to meet these obligations under specific state and territory negligence laws aimed at protecting children from child abuse (see below).

Work health and safety laws

In addition to its duty of care to ensure child safety, your organisation may also owe obligations under work health and safety laws – Harmonised Laws or Victorian OHS Laws. These laws are discussed above.

Under work health and safety laws, fulfilling your legal responsibility to children may mean ensuring, as far as reasonably practicable, that the health and safety of children (either volunteers, or children who interact with volunteers) involved with your organisations is protected.

**Note**

It's crucial that your organisation has conducted a careful risk assessment of the activities involving and interactions it has with children, to determine whether it needs to implement any further safeguards and processes to help ensure their safety. One important safeguard to put in place is comprehensive induction and training of workers and volunteers.

Induction and training

During induction and training make sure volunteers involved in your organisation understand all the policies you have in relation to child safety, and why they exist.

To ensure this:

- | | |
|---|--------------------------|
| highlight policies that are particularly relevant to children, such as social media, privacy, IT, and appropriate workplace behaviour policies | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| explain the importance of a safe workplace and provide training on how to avoid harmful situations, where possible, and point out any special safety requirements in relation to children | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| set out the reporting lines and process for addressing complaints and concerns about child safety | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| outline any reporting requirements for child safety that apply to your workers (see discussion below) and the process for reporting within your organisation, and | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| foster a culture of open communication by encouraging the people within your organisation to express any concerns regarding child safety | <input type="checkbox"/> |

**Tip**

If your service engages or works with children, it's important that everyone that works in your organisation (including volunteers) is aware of their reporting obligations and any potential consequences for failing to meet them. Reporting obligations should form a part of your organisation's standard induction, training and ongoing professional development processes, and you should have written policies and procedures in place.



Case study

The national Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse (**Royal Commission**) found that to keep children safe, an organisation must create and maintain a protective environment that minimises rather than accentuates the risk of abuse. The Royal Commission critically analysed the system errors, failures and oversights of a particular organisation to demonstrate certain ‘unacceptable’ actions of a child safe organisation, including but not limited to:

- a failure to adhere to appropriate background checking procedures
- a failure to implement child protection policies
- the absence of an effective confidential reporting system and, and
- a failure to provide staff with effective training in child protection matters



Note – Negligence laws and child abuse

In New South Wales, Victoria, Queensland, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Tasmania, under legislation, an organisation has a duty of care to take reasonable precautions to prevent the physical or sexual abuse of children by individuals associated with the organisation (this includes volunteers, board members, employees and independent contractors).

Under these laws, the organisation is taken to have breached the duty unless it took all reasonable precautions to prevent the abuse from happening (the ‘onus of proof’ is reversed). Reasonable precautions could include implementing the policies, procedures and safe-guards discussed in this section.

Western Australia and the ACT are progressing towards legislating this duty.



For more information about your organisation’s obligations under negligence law and work health and safety law, refer to the earlier sections of this guide.

For more information about legal issues relating to youth volunteers, see our fact sheet on [‘youth volunteers’](#)

Screening checks

There are many circumstances where organisations will need to screen their volunteers because they are working with children.

Screening checks (including Working with Children Checks, National Disability Insurance Scheme Worker Screening Checks, police checks, reference and other background checks) are an important consideration, especially for organisations involving youth volunteers. As children are considered more vulnerable than others working in your organisation, a higher duty of care in respect of their safety may be owed.

Some background screening checks are required by law (either under legislation or contract), while others are optional. Even when a screening check is not required, it’s best practice for organisations to conduct some level of screening to make sure they maintain a safe environment for all workers (paid and unpaid) and clients.

Your organisation will need to think carefully about who will need screening checks. Part 3 of this guide goes through the requirements in further detail.



Insurance and child safety

Even if your community organisation puts measures in place to avoid or minimise risk in relation to the safety and well-being of children, your community organisation may still want to take out insurance to cover possible harms to children. For example, your community organisation may take out a volunteer personal accident insurance policy that covers volunteers under the age of 18 (if the organisation has child volunteers) or public liability insurance that covers injury to children.



Caution

Not all insurers, or insurance policies will cover volunteers under the age of 18. If you are concerned, make sure that you speak to your insurer.

It's essential that your community organisation is aware of what is covered by the insurance policy and any exclusions that apply.

For your organisation to satisfy itself of the coverage it holds, we suggest that you review your current policies. If in doubt, ask your insurer the following questions:

- does the policy have any age limits that may affect a claim?
- are actions of children themselves covered?
- are injuries sustained by children covered?
- are there any particular reporting, recordkeeping or other requirements in respect of claims involving children?



For more information about risk and insurance see below, as well as our [guide on risk management and insurance](#).



Tip

Ask your insurer to confirm the above in writing so that the position is clear to everyone. And if there is any dispute about the policy's coverage, you can refer to this correspondence.

Litigation involving children

Typically, an action can be brought against a person or entity within six years of the cause of action occurring (for example, a breach of contract or an act of negligence). Therefore, you should keep any legal documents that may be relevant if legal action was to be taken (but is not actual or threatened) for six years.

However, the situation is different where a claim involves a child and your organisation should keep records for a lot longer than six years.

Each state and territory has passed laws which remove the limitation period for bringing a claim for personal injury resulting from child sexual abuse (in some states and territories this extends to other forms of child abuse). This means a person can bring a claim at any point in their lifetime, regardless of how long ago the act causing the harm took place.

Also, generally a person under 18 years of age can bring a claim for personal injury (not relating to child sexual abuse) within:



- 12 years from the date of the act causing injury, or
- six years of the 'discoverable date' - the first day it is known or should have been known that injury has occurred, and it was caused by the fault of the defendant to the claim (whichever is latest)

If the injured child was not in the care of a competent parent or guardian, the limitation period can be extended further. The limitation period may vary from state to state so it is important to seek legal advice on the limitation periods that apply in your state or territory.



Case study – keeping records

A number of case studies provided by the Royal Commission demonstrate the long-term consequences of an institution's failure to adequately keep documents and records.

The destruction of critical documents or lack of consistent record-keeping meant that, in many circumstances, schools and other institutions weren't able to confirm whether and to what extent investigations in response to allegations of abuse had been conducted, and if so, the outcomes. Further, institutions weren't able to connect pieces of information concerning an offender's behaviour and could not respond adequately to subsequent concerns, years on. Similarly, many young victims weren't able to get answers about the circumstances of the abuse they suffered.



Managing risk

Your organisation could potentially be liable for the actions of its volunteers and for any injuries that its volunteers experience as a result of their volunteering under both negligence laws and work health and safety laws. While claims against community organisations are relatively uncommon, your organisation should aim to operate in a way that reduces the risk of damage (including personal injury, financial loss or property damage).

Thinking about risks, insurance and related legal issues doesn't have to be a scary or negative process. There are some risks associated with the activities conducted by all community organisations – including ensuring the safety of volunteers and the safety of the people your volunteers interact with.

If your community organisation understands these risks, there are many things that the people involved in your community organisation can do to eliminate risks or minimise the chance of them occurring – this is sometimes referred to as a 'risk management strategy'.

Where the potential risks can't be avoided, your community organisation can look at the insurance options that may be available to protect against those risks. Essentially, insurance is a way of managing risks your organisation can't avoid or minimise, by paying another party (the insurer) to bear the costs if certain risks eventuate. However, as discussed below, some states have specifically legislated against organisations insuring against certain types of risks.

Risk management strategy

As a part of your risk management strategy, we suggest that your organisation:

- creates a safe physical environment and has appropriate safety policies and training in place
- follows a staff and volunteer induction process
- understands obligations you may be under to conduct background checks on the people involved in your organisation, such as Working with Children Checks
- ensures safe procedures when providing goods or services to the public
- implements staff and volunteer safety guidelines, which include incident reporting procedures
- creates safety instruction manuals (where appropriate)
- consults with your volunteers about these safety guidelines and the importance of them sticking to their authorised duties (you can include this in their volunteer agreement and discuss these issues in their induction)
- provides your volunteers with copies of written policies and instruction manuals
- conducts regular training, including refresher training, on safety issues
- conducts regular risk assessments to identify potential risks to health and safety and takes steps to eliminate these risks. Ideally, these risk assessments will be for each different activity undertaken by volunteers and each site where volunteers work. If the work or site changes, any new risks associated with the change should be considered
- clearly defines the role and tasks of your volunteers in a written document (volunteer position description) and specifies any prohibited actions (for example, giving clients medical advice)
- reviews your insurance policies to make sure they adequately cover injuries to and actions of your volunteers, and
- from time to time, checks that the above processes are being implemented. Are your volunteers following these processes? Are these processes being enforced?



Tip

Your organisation may want to think about including 'risk management' as a standard agenda item at meetings (meetings of the governing body of your organisation as well meetings of the staff or volunteers). This doesn't have to be a long discussion. It may just be a chance for your organisation to discuss ongoing risks and whether the measures your organisation has put in place to manage them are working. It may also be a chance to think about whether new risks have come up which need to be dealt with. For larger organisations, you may want to have a risk management sub-committee of your board or committee of management.



Safe Work Australia (the national WHS policy body) has published resources relating to work health and safety of volunteers, including an [Essential Guide to Work Health and Safety for Volunteers](#).

Some of the state and territory based regulators have published resources relating to workplace safety and minimising risk.

The checklist above includes some of the risk management strategies your organisation could implement. Reading this along with our [insurance and risk management guide](#).

For a sample volunteer position description, see part 3 of this guide.

For a checklist covering what to do when an incident or accident happens in your organisation, see our [incident and accidents checklist](#).



Note – spontaneous volunteers

Spontaneous offers of assistance and volunteering may arise following an emergency, crisis or issue resulting in significant media coverage. The community response may include donations of goods or money, or offers of physical assistance through volunteering. People may also offer to volunteer on a one-off basis at an event or for a short period of time when the needs of the organisation are high.

Spontaneous volunteers may create challenges for organisations, especially where organisations are already managing significant workloads due to an emergency or other incident – for example:

- managing the scale of volunteers at any given time and their respective roles
- performing appropriate screening and other background checks in a short time frame
- ensuring volunteers have the skills, training or experience to perform the role, and
- difficulty in administering adequate training, safety procedures, guidance and supervision to manage workplace risks



The National Strategy for Volunteering

On the strategic objective to reshape the public perception of volunteering:

There is no 'one size fits all' approach to defining what makes something a volunteering role or activity. Some activities are regular and ongoing whereas others may be one-off, short-term, or project based. All forms of volunteering are important and valuable.

(page 51 of the strategy)

On the strategic objective to enable a community-led approach:

When it comes to spontaneous or emerging needs, communities tend to self-mobilise and self-fund to fill critical gaps. The effectiveness and efficiency of spontaneous helping demonstrates the power of a community led approach. ... The importance of community-led solutions is particularly salient in the context of disaster response and recovery.

(pages 54 and 55 of the strategy)



Tips – spontaneous volunteers

We recommend that your organisation reviews its insurance policies to ensure that coverage extends to its spontaneous volunteers. See below for more information about insurance considerations.

We also recommend that your organisation develops a specific policy on whether it will use spontaneous volunteers. If it's open to using spontaneous volunteers, the policy should cover:

- the circumstances where using spontaneous volunteers would be appropriate
- the minimum induction required for spontaneous volunteers, and
- any special risk management protocols to be followed (for example, ensuring that spontaneous volunteers wear identifying information that distinguishes them from fully inducted regular volunteers, and requiring the spontaneous volunteer to sign a declaration about their fitness to volunteer, and a waiver of liability)

Insurance

Insurance is a way of managing risks your organisation can't avoid or minimise, by paying another party (the insurer) to bear the costs if certain risks eventuate.

Volunteers will often fall between the gaps in an organisation's insurance policy when they suffer injuries in their role unless the organisation holds specific insurance for this purpose – such as volunteer personal accident insurance (this is discussed in greater detail below).

Common types of insurance for community organisations include:

- volunteer personal accident insurance (protects volunteers)
- directors' and officers' liability insurance (protects volunteer committee members or directors)
- public liability insurance (protects members of the public)
- professional indemnity insurance (protects experts or advisors)
- building and contents, occupiers, and fraud insurance (protects property and assets)
- motor vehicle insurance (protects vehicles)

Your organisation should make sure it has adequate insurance coverage to protect it from liability.



You can't be certain of avoiding liabilities, but you can be certain of having appropriate insurance cover. If your organisation is not sure about the type or extent of cover required, you should contact an insurance broker.

An insurance policy is a contract – a legally binding document between you and the insurance company. This means that your organisation will have to do certain things – for example, provide full and accurate information, notify of incidents – to make sure the contract is and remains valid. Make sure you understand the terms and conditions of the policy so that you know what these obligations are.

If you think your organisation may be exposed to legal action, notify your insurer and seek legal advice as soon as possible about its potential liability (if the action is covered by your insurer, they may do this on your behalf).

In Western Australia and New South Wales, the WHS Laws state that an insurance policy is of no effect to the extent that it would indemnify a person for the person's liability to pay a fine for an offence against the Act. This means that if your organisation is fined under the WA or NSW WHS Act, your insurer is not allowed to pay or reimburse the organisation for the fine. It is an offence against the relevant WHS Act to enter into an insurance policy that purports to indemnify a person for a fine against the WHS Act.

A similar prohibition applies in Victoria, Western Australia, and the ACT under each respective WHS or OHS Law.



Caution

Insurance should not be the cornerstone of your organisation's risk management strategy.

Ultimately, you should implement other measures with the goal of never having to make a claim and only rely on insurance as a last resort.

Insurance can cover any costs arising from a claim, but it can't restore any damage caused to your organisation's reputation or culture.



Tip

When your organisation signs an agreement with another party, check whether there is any requirement to take out particular insurance. This is reasonably common, particularly in agreements to provide services.

Insurance is often a complex issue for community organisations, and it's recommended that you contact an insurance broker who has experience in arranging insurance for organisations like yours to make sure the insurance you take out is suited to your particular needs.



For more information on insurance and risk management, including volunteer personal accident insurance, see our [risk management and insurance guide](#).

Volunteer personal accident insurance

Volunteers often fall between the gaps as they aren't covered by an organisation's insurance policies when they suffer injuries in their role unless the organisation holds specific insurance for this purpose – such as volunteer personal accident insurance.

It's important to remember that:

- workers' compensation insurance doesn't cover volunteers (except in rare circumstances), and



- public liability insurance will usually cover injuries a volunteer causes to others but may not cover injuries caused to volunteers

Volunteer personal accident insurance will cover members and volunteers of a community organisation for expenses incurred in the event of accidental injury, disability or death which occurs while the volunteer is doing work for the community organisation. The insurance is usually (but not always) extended to include cover for loss of income if the volunteer is unable to work as a result of an injury sustained when volunteering for the community organisation.

Unlike workers compensation, it's not compulsory for a community organisation to take out personal accident insurance for volunteers. However, because volunteers are a central part of many not-for-profit community organisations, it's useful to make sure that both the organisation and the volunteers are protected in the event of an accident.



Example – undercooked chicken

A volunteer serving food at a local fundraiser undercooks the chicken. As a result, a significant number of people contract food poisoning and end up in hospital, including the volunteer. The organisation's public liability insurance will cover members of the public who attended the fundraiser, but not the volunteer.



Tips

- Check your organisation's existing insurance policies to find out whether your volunteers are covered. If in doubt, pick up the phone to your insurer.
- Consider taking out a volunteer personal accident insurance policy to make sure your volunteers are covered for any injuries they sustain while volunteering.
- Check age limits under your policies and, if necessary, negotiate with your insurer to extend coverage to all your volunteers.
- Understand what is and isn't covered – for example, insurers will only cover non-Medicare medical expenses and will not (and cannot under legislation) cover out of pocket hospital expenses that have Medicare component. Your insurer may not be allowed to cover any fines under the relevant WHS or OHS Act.
- Let all volunteers know what they are and aren't covered for, and the process for making a claim. If there are any extra costs payable, make sure you are clear about whether the organisation or person will have to pay.

Workers Compensation

Workers compensation is a form of insurance payment to employees if they are injured at work or become sick due to their work.

In all states and territories, volunteers will not be considered 'workers' for the purposes of workers compensation unless they are a part of special prescribed class in that jurisdiction. Where volunteers can be covered by workers compensation, it is often voluntary for the organisation to take out workers compensation on behalf of their volunteers (unlike employees where it is compulsory).

It's also important to note that while workers compensation legislation may not apply to volunteers for the purposes of receiving workers compensation, it does create obligations for officers of an organisation including volunteer officers. In most workers compensation legislation, the provisions do not exclude directors, officers or committee members because they are unpaid.

These obligations may include:

- ensuring workers are insured when required



- not charging a worker for compensation or damages for an injury, and
- assisting with a worker's rehabilitation and return to work

Where volunteer emergency service workers are covered by workers compensation that compensation is liable to be paid by the relevant state or territory regardless of whether they are a part of a community organisation.

In the case of religious ministers, the responsibility for workers compensation falls upon the religious body.

An overview of the workers compensation volunteer provisions in each state and territory follows.



Caution

If you have a question about whether workers compensation insurance would apply to one of your volunteers you should talk to your workers compensation insurer. This is a guide only.

Australian Capital Territory

Workers compensation in the ACT is covered under the [Workers Compensation Act 1951 \(ACT\)](#). For the purposes of the ACT legislation certain volunteers can be considered 'workers'.

If your volunteers are covered by any of the below categories, it's compulsory for a community organisation to take out workers compensation on their behalf:

- a trainee – being a person engaged under an arrangement by which training and on-the-job experience is provided, but not arranged or facilitated by an educational institution, and the trainee must not be an adult with a disability for whom the arrangement is arranged by a disability employment service provider
- a religious worker – being a person declared by the Minister
- a commercial voluntary worker – being a person who works voluntarily for a business, trade or enterprise that operates for the financial benefit of the person carrying on the enterprise, or if the person is a corporation, for the financial benefit of the corporation's members (this excludes not-for-profits), or
- a public interest voluntary worker – being a person engaged in work that is declared by the Minister to be carried out by an entity that is in the interests of public interest



Example – commercial voluntary workers

The Homeless Trust is an organisation incorporated under statute whose only object is to help the homeless in Canberra. The trust runs an opportunity shop in Tuggeranong, which earns a small profit. The shop is staffed by unpaid volunteers. The shop's profits are used to help the homeless. The shop is an 'enterprise, trade or business', but it's not carried on for the financial benefit of the trust's members. The volunteer staff of the shop are therefore not commercial volunteers.



Example – public interest voluntary workers

In some circumstances, the Minister may consider that it's necessary or desirable in the public interest that the work of volunteers (who are not 'commercial volunteers') be declared to be public interest voluntary workers.

For example, the annual Big Splash charity event is potentially very dangerous for the volunteer marshals because they must be present in their own boats on Lake Burley Griffin while the participants perform difficult stunts in motorboats and jet skis at high speed nearby. In previous years, volunteer marshals have been seriously injured at the event, and the Minister considers that the club did not take out adequate insurance cover for the work of the marshals. Taking these matters into account, the Minister may consider that it is necessary or desirable in the public interest that the work of the volunteer marshals be declared to be public interest voluntary work.

New South Wales

Workers compensation in NSW is covered under the [Workplace Injury Management and Workers Compensation Act 1998 \(NSW\)](#), the [Workers Compensation Act 1987 \(NSW\)](#) and the [Workers Compensation \(Bush Fire, Emergency and Rescue Services\) Act 1987 \(NSW\)](#).

In New South Wales volunteers are only covered by workers compensation if they are emergency services workers, volunteer firefighters, or volunteer ambulance officers.

Northern Territory

Workers compensation in the Northern Territory is covered under the [Return to Work Act 1986 \(NT\)](#).

Emergency services volunteers (who receive nothing more than reasonable travelling, accommodation or other out of pocket expenses) can receive workers compensation.

Queensland

Workers compensation in Queensland is covered under the [Workers' Compensation and Rehabilitation Act 2003 \(QLD\)](#).

Volunteers are not 'workers', but volunteers may be entitled to workers' compensation if they are:

- a voluntary emergency services or ambulance worker
- a volunteer involved in a religious, charitable or benevolent organisation, or
- a volunteer involved in a not-for-profit organisation, and
- the organisation they are engaged by has an insurance policy that covers such people

However, there are special rules for what specifically volunteers can be insured for and what entitlements they are allowed. If your organisation is unsure you should seek legal advice.

South Australia

Workers compensation in South Australia is covered under the [Return to Work Act 2014 \(SA\)](#) and the [Return to Work Regulations 2015 \(SA\)](#).

Volunteers are only covered by workers compensation if they are a volunteer state emergency services member, marine rescue worker, or firefighter.



Tasmania

Workers compensation in Tasmania is covered under the *Workers Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 1988 (Tas)*.

Police volunteers, volunteer fire-fighters, police staff and prescribed volunteers can receive workers compensation.

Victoria

Workers compensation in Victoria is covered under the *Workplace Injury Rehabilitation and Compensation Act 2013 (Vic)*, *Emergency Management Act 1986 (Vic)*, *Emergency Management Act 2013 (Vic)*, *Police Assistance Compensation Act 1968 (Vic)* and the *Victoria State Emergency Service Act 2005 (Vic)*. Volunteers are only covered if they are engaged by particular government agencies or for particular government related work, such as:

- voluntary emergency and state emergency services workers
- jurors
- volunteer workers in government schools
- volunteers assisting police officers, and
- volunteer firefighters

Western Australia

Workers compensation is covered under the *Workers' Compensation and Injury Management Act 1981 (WA)*.

Volunteers are not covered by workers compensation in Western Australia.



Summary: Volunteer safety



Negligence law

- Community organisations have safety obligations under the common law (judge made law) of negligence and under the negligence provisions in state and territory legislation.
- These obligations extend to both the safety of the volunteer and the safety of the people that your volunteer is interacting with.
- If your organisation is found negligent (that is, it failed to meet its obligations) you may be liable to pay compensation (or other form of remedy).
- A volunteer involving organisation should understand its duty of care, and the standard of care it needs to meet so that it can protect its volunteers, the organisation and the people that the organisation interacts with.

Determining whether your volunteers are protected from liability

- Each state and territory has legislation that sets out special protection for volunteers from personal civil liability for anything done or not done in good faith when performing community work for a community organisation.
- A volunteer will only be protected if they satisfy all the tests under the relevant state or territory legislation (see the annexure to this part of this guide for checklists that will help organisations determine this).
- In all states but New South Wales and Queensland, if the volunteer is protected, the volunteer will not be personally liable to pay any compensation. Instead, if harm is caused by a volunteer, the community organisation may be liable rather than the volunteer individually. In New South Wales the organisation is protected, and in Queensland the law is unclear.

Work health and safety laws

- Many community organisations (if they have at least one employee) will be obliged to comply with the work health and safety laws in their state or territory.
- Community organisations have an obligation to ensure, so far as reasonably practicable, the health and safety of people involved in their organisation – this extends to volunteers.

Child safety

- A community organisation should consider the special responsibilities they may have in relation to children that their organisation comes into contact with – for example, when providing services to children, or when a child volunteers for the organisation.

Risk management

- Your organisation could potentially be liable for the actions of its volunteers and for any damage that its volunteers experience as a result of volunteering.
- There are many things that the people involved in your community organisation can do to eliminate risks or minimise the chance of them occurring – such as implementing a ‘risk management strategy’.
- Where the potential risks can't be avoided, your community organisation can look at the insurance options that may be available to protect against those risks.



Annexure - personal liability protection

**Protection for volunteers against
personal liability under state and
territory legislation**



Victoria – checklist

Are your volunteers protected against personal liability under the Wrongs Act?

This checklist provides a simple guide to help a Victorian community organisation:

- work out if its volunteers are protected under the *Wrongs Act 1958 (Vic)* (**Wrongs Act**), and
- understand when it could be held liable (legally responsible) for the actions of its volunteers



Read this checklist together with the information in this part of the guide about safety, negligence, risk management and your volunteers, including the circumstances in which your organisation could be legally responsible for the actions of your volunteers.



How to use this checklist

To be protected under the Wrongs Act, a volunteer must meet threshold requirements.

These requirements, and questions to help your organisation assess whether a volunteer may be covered, are set out below.

Start by answering the questions in Sections A, B and C. You will then be directed to:

- Section D ‘Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?’, or
- Section E ‘Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?’

Seek legal advice before acting on the information in this annexure.

Section A – Do your volunteers meet the requirements for protection?

Question 1 Has the community work been done by a ‘volunteer’?

The Wrongs Act defines a ‘volunteer’ as a person who provides a service in relation to community work on a voluntary basis. The Act says that a person is still considered a volunteer even if they receive:

- remuneration that they would have received whether they provided that service or not (for example, a person who is in paid employment with another organisation, but is released from that employment to undertake voluntary work)
- reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses incurred in the provision of that service, or
- remuneration for the work not greater than the amount prescribed by the regulations of the Wrongs Act

A volunteer who is paid by their regular employer while they do volunteer work for a community organisation (for example, through a corporate volunteer program) is still considered to be a volunteer for the purposes of the Wrongs Act and a community organisation could be held legally responsible for that volunteer’s actions in civil proceedings.

A number of people are specifically excluded from the definition of a ‘volunteer’ (for example, members of the Country Fire Authority and some Emergency Services personnel) because they are already given immunity from liability under other Victorian laws.



Example

Fred is employed by B Pty Ltd as a gardener. B Pty Ltd encourages its staff to volunteer their services to Community House Inc (a Victorian incorporated association), which is adjacent to their business premises. B Pty Ltd allows their staff to volunteer for one day a month at Community House Inc on full pay. Fred, as part of the scheme, tends the Community House's garden one day each month while being paid by his employer. Fred is still regarded as a volunteer for the purposes of the Wrongs Act while performing services for Community House Inc. Although he is paid by his employer while he is volunteering at Community House Inc, he would have received this remuneration whether or not he was volunteering.

Question 1: check list

To be entitled to protection the work must be performed by someone who satisfies the legal definition of 'volunteer'. Was the community work done on a voluntary basis?

- Yes – go to Question 2
- No – go to Section E

Question 2
Is your organisation a 'community organisation'?

For the volunteer to be entitled to the protection, your organisation must meet the definition of 'community organisation' in the Wrongs Act.

Your organisation will meet the definition if it organises the doing of community work by volunteers (see question 3) and it fits into one of the categories listed in the checklist for Question 2 below.



Caution

The volunteer protection provisions of the Wrongs Act are unlikely to apply to unincorporated community groups. This means there is a strong chance that volunteers who are involved in an unincorporated community group will be liable for their own actions.



For more information on the difference between unincorporated and incorporated community groups see our fact sheet ['What is incorporation and does our group need to incorporate?'](#)

**Question 2: check list**

Does your organisation fit into one of the following categories?

- an incorporated association under the *Associations Incorporation Reform Act 2012* (Vic)
- a municipal council or other incorporated local government body
- any other body corporate (such as a company limited by guarantee)
- any public entity or public service body within the meaning of the *Public Administration Act 2004* (Vic) or other person or body acting on behalf of the State

If ANY apply go to Question 3

If NONE apply go to Section E

Question 3

Is the volunteer providing a service in relation to 'community work'?

The protection under the Wrongs Act applies to a volunteer when they are doing 'community work' – the focus is on the purpose of the volunteer's activity, not the overall purpose of the organisation. Whether a volunteer is performing 'community work' will depend on what work the volunteer is actually doing, rather than the objects of the organisation they are doing the work for.

Community work is broadly defined as work for any of the purposes in the checklist below. The volunteer protection only applies in relation to a service provided by the volunteer, not the provision of goods (for example, donation to an op shop or clothing for school children).

The Wrongs Act regulations can declare that certain work is not community work even if it fits into the categories above.

**Caution**

Some of the fields of community work set out below have a technical legal meaning (for example, charitable purposes). You may need to seek legal advice about whether the work falls into one of these categories. For further information on what types of activities may be considered to be charitable, refer to our webpage on [registering as a charity](#).

Question 3: check list

Community work is any work that is done, or to be done for:

- religious, educational, charitable or benevolent purposes
- promoting or encouraging literature, science or the arts
- sport, recreation, tourism or amusement
- conserving or protecting the environment
- establishing, carrying on or improving a community, social or cultural centre
- a political purpose, or
- promoting the common interests of the community generally or a particular section of the community

If ANY apply go to Question 4

If NONE apply go to Section E

**Question 4**

Has the community work been 'organised' by a community organisation?

A volunteer is protected if the community work is 'organised' by the community organisation. The definition of 'organise' includes 'to direct and supervise', but this is non-exhaustive and may extend to situations where there are no specific directions or supervision given, for example, where volunteers are given a general discretion to organise a fundraising event. However, the protection does not extend to spontaneous acts of volunteers or activities the organisation has not authorised (see Section C below).

For example, if your organisation trains a person to use a machine and directs that person to use it, they will be performing work organised by your organisation. A person who starts working without approval or direction from your organisation would not be performing work organised by your organisation.

Question 4: check list

The community work performed must be 'organised' by the community organisation. Was the work performed by the volunteer organised, directed or supervised by the community organisation?

- Yes – go to Question 5**
- No – go to Section E**

Section B – Has civil liability been incurred?

Question 5

Was the liability incurred a civil liability?

The protection is only afforded for civil liabilities. A volunteer will not be protected from liability for criminal actions (offences by a person against the state) while volunteering. This includes traffic infringements as well as more serious crimes.

For example, if a volunteer physically assaults someone while they are volunteering, this may result in criminal charges and possible criminal compensation. The Wrongs Act won't protect the volunteer from criminal liability in this situation.

Question 5: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer for an act or omission that constitutes a civil liability (for example, negligence causing physical injury) and not an act or omission that would (on the balance of probabilities) constitute a criminal offence (for example, stealing or assault)?

- Yes – go to Question 6**
- No – go to Section E**

Question 6

Is the civil liability included in the protection provisions?

A volunteer will not be protected under the Wrongs Act in certain civil proceedings:

- if the volunteer is sued for defamation, or
- if the volunteer has a car accident while volunteering where a claim is brought under the *Transport Accident Act 1986 (Vic)*

In this case, any liability for compensation for personal injury to third parties under the *Transport Accident Act 1986 (Vic)* is excluded (as this is covered by the compulsory third party insurance that is included in the registration costs of a vehicle).

**Question 6: check list**

Certain types of civil liability are excluded from the protection provisions. Was the liability incurred by the volunteer one of the following types?

- Liability for defamation
- A claim under the Transport Accident Act 1986

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go Section C

Section C – When does the protection not apply to volunteers?

A volunteer is not automatically protected by meeting the threshold requirements of the legislation outlined in Section A and B. There are specific situations where the protection will not apply. These situations are listed below.

Question 7

Is the volunteer performing community work as a part of a court order or fine repayment scheme?

A person doing community work under an order imposed by a court is not a volunteer under the Wrongs Act definition.

Although work under a fine repayment scheme is not specifically excluded by the Act, it's unlikely that such work would be considered 'voluntary' as the participant will receive a benefit in the form of their debt being cancelled or reduced.

Question 7: check list

Is the volunteer performing the community work doing so under a court order or fine repayment scheme?

- Yes – go to Section E**
- No – go to Question 8**

**Caution**

Organisations working with individuals under court orders or fine repayment schemes will need to carefully manage their own risks. Speak to the relevant government department and advise the individuals to consider whether there is insurance covering their participation.

Question 8

Were the volunteer's actions (or failure to act) done in 'good faith'?

The volunteer's actions (or failure to act) must have been done in 'good faith'.

To act in good faith has been defined as acting honestly and without fraud. Where a volunteer endeavours to act in the best interests of the community organisation and is not involved in any dishonest or fraudulent behaviour, the volunteer is taken to be acting in good faith. The volunteer protection only applies in relation to a service provided by the volunteer, not the provision of goods (for example, donation to an op-shop or clothing for school children).



Example – ‘in good faith’

A volunteer attends a community sports day to help with minor first aid. A child falls and fractures their arm, and as a result of the volunteer’s care, their injury is worsened. The volunteer will be acting in good faith if they were trying to help the injured person and believed that was the correct first aid action. However, they will not be acting in good faith if they gave this assistance to impress their friend when they knew they had no knowledge of what first aid action to take.

Question 8: check list

At the time of the act or omission was the volunteer acting in good faith?

- Yes they were acting in good faith - go to Question 9**
- No they were not acting in good faith- go to Section E**

Question 9 Does an exception apply?

Certain acts of the volunteer will exclude their ability to claim protection. Even if a person is a volunteer and they have been doing community work organised by a community organisation, there are further exceptions set out under the Wrongs Act.

In general, a volunteer will not be protected where:

- the volunteer knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that at the relevant times they were:
 - acting outside the scope of the community work organised by the community organisation
 - acting contrary to any instructions given by the community organisation in relation to the providing of the service, or
- the volunteer’s ability to provide the service in a proper manner was, at the relevant times, significantly impaired by alcohol or drugs

There are specific legal definitions and interpretations of many of the terms used in these exceptions (for example, ‘ought reasonably to have known’, ‘drugs’, ‘alcohol’ and ‘significantly impaired’). If potentially relevant, your organisation may need to seek legal advice about these issues.



Example

A person volunteers at a community sports day and is instructed to assist with refreshments only. The volunteer starts to help with marshalling participants without instruction to do so. An injury occurs as a result of the volunteer’s marshalling activities. As the volunteer was acting contrary to instructions, it’s likely that an exception under the Wrongs Act applies and that the volunteer will not be protected from liability.

**Question 9: check list**

Did any of the following apply to the volunteer at the time of the act or omission?

- volunteer's ability to provide the service was significantly impaired as a result of voluntarily consuming alcohol or a drug (whether or not consumed for therapeutic purpose)
- acting outside the scope of activities authorised by the community organisation
- acting contrary to instructions given by the community organisation

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go to Section D

Section D – Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?

If you have answered all the questions in sections A, B and C, and the answer does not result in 'go to section E', the protection under the Wrongs Act is likely to apply to volunteers engaged by your organisation. If you are in doubt, seek legal advice. The volunteer will need their own, independent legal advice if legal action is started against them.

If your volunteers are protected, they don't incur personal civil liability as a result of performing community work organised by or as an office holder of your community organisation. This means the volunteer, who caused personal injury, property damage or financial loss to a person as a result of the volunteer's own action or failure to act, will not be personally liable to pay any compensation to that person.

Instead, the liability of a protected volunteer will be transferred to the organisation the volunteer was performing the community work for, and the injured party would be able to sue the community organisation (rather than the volunteer) for any injury or loss caused by the volunteer.

Section E – Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?

If your volunteers are not protected by the provisions of the Wrongs Act, your volunteers remain personally liable for their actions. They may be either sued individually or joined to an action against your community organisation, for their acts and omissions while performing community work.

**Note – volunteers are critical to the work of community organisations**

Volunteers are a critical element to the work that many not-for-profit community organisations do. The circumstances when a volunteer is found to be personally liable are extremely rare, and in most instances, volunteers are found to be doing the right thing.

The potential for liability should not be a reason not to engage volunteers, and it's most important that organisations are aware of the risks and put measures in place to prevent incidents from occurring.



New South Wales – checklist

Are your volunteers protected against personal liability under the Civil Liability Act?

This checklist provides a simple guide to help a New South Wales community organisation:

- work out if its volunteers are protected under the provisions of the Civil Liability Act 2002 (NSW) (NSW Civil Liability Act), and
- understand when it could be held liable (legally responsible) for the actions of its volunteers



Read this checklist together with the information in this part of the guide about safety, negligence, risk management and your volunteers, including the circumstances in which your organisation could be legally responsible for the actions of your volunteers.



How to use this checklist

To be protected under the NSW Civil Liability Act, a volunteer must meet threshold requirements.

These requirements, and questions to help your organisation assess whether a volunteer may be covered, are set out below.

Start by answering the questions in Sections A, B and C. You will then be directed to:

- Section D ‘Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?’, or
- Section E ‘Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?’

Seek legal advice before acting on the information in this annexure.

Section A – Do your volunteers meet the requirements for protection?

Question 1

Has the community work been done by a ‘volunteer’?

The NSW Civil Liability Act defines a ‘volunteer’ as a person who does ‘community work’ (discussed below) on a voluntary basis.

The Act says that a person is considered to work on a voluntary basis if they receive no remuneration for the work other than:

- reimbursement for reasonable out-of-pocket expenses, or
- remuneration within limits prescribed by the regulations of the NSW Civil Liability Act.

Question 1: check list

To be entitled to protection the work must be performed by someone who satisfies the legal definition of ‘volunteer’. Was the community work done on a voluntary basis?

- Yes – go to Question 2**
- No – go to Section E**

**Question 2****Is your organisation a 'community organisation'?**

For the volunteer to be entitled to the protection, your organisation must meet the definition of 'community organisation' in the NSW Civil Liability Act.

Your organisation will meet the definition if it organises the doing of community work by volunteers (see question 3), it's capable of being sued for damages in civil proceedings and it fits into one of the categories listed in the checklist for Question 2 below.

**Caution**

The volunteer protection provisions of the NSW Civil Liability Act are unlikely to apply to unincorporated community groups. This means there is a strong chance that volunteers who are involved in an unincorporated community group will be liable for their own actions.



For more information on the difference between unincorporated and incorporated community groups see our fact sheet ['What is incorporation and does our group need to incorporate?'](#)

Question 2: check list

Does your organisation fit into one of the following categories?

- a body corporate (for example, a company limited by guarantee or an incorporated association)
- a church or other religious organisation
- an authority of the State

If ANY apply go to Question 3

If NONE apply go to Section E

Question 3**Is the work being done by the volunteer 'community work'?**

The protection under the NSW Civil Liability Act applies to a volunteer when they are doing 'community work' – the focus is on the purpose of the volunteer's activity, not the overall purpose of the organisation. Whether a volunteer is performing 'community work' will depend on what work the volunteer is actually doing, rather than the objects of the organisation they are doing the work for.

Community work is broadly defined as work that is not for private financial gain that is done for any of the purposes in the below checklist.

The Regulations to the NSW Civil Liability Act can also specify that certain types of work do or do not constitute community work.

**Caution**

Some of the fields of community work set out below have a technical legal meaning (for example, charitable purposes). You may need to seek legal advice about whether the work falls into one of these categories. For further information on what types of activities may be considered to be charitable, refer to our webpage on [registering as a charity](#).

**Question 3: check list**

Community work is not performed for private financial gain and is done for one or more of the following purposes:

- charitable
- benevolent
- philanthropic
- sporting
- educational
- cultural

If ANY apply go to Question 4

If NONE apply go to Section E

Question 4

Is the volunteer an office holder or has the community work been 'organised' by a community organisation?

A volunteer is protected if they carry out the community work as an office holder of the community organisation (for example a director or secretary), or if the community work is 'organised' by a community organisation. The definition of 'organised' includes 'directed or supervised', but this is non-exhaustive and may extend to situations where there are no specific directions or supervision given, for example, where volunteers are given general discretion to organise a fundraising event.

However, the protection does not extend to spontaneous acts of volunteers or activities the organisation has not authorised (see Section C below).

For example, if your organisation trains a person to use a machine and directs that person to use it, they will be performing work organised by your organisation. A person who starts working without approval or direction from your organisation would not be performing work organised by your organisation.

Question 4: check list

Was the work performed by the volunteer:

- organised, directed or supervised by the community organisation?
- carried out by someone acting as an office holder of the community organisation?

If ANY apply go to Question 5

If NONE apply go to Section E

Section B – Has civil liability been incurred?

Question 5

Was the liability incurred a civil liability?

The protection is only afforded for civil liabilities. A volunteer will not be protected from liability for criminal actions (offences by a person against the state) while volunteering. This includes traffic infringements as well as more serious crimes.

For example, if a volunteer physically assaults someone while they are volunteering, this may result in criminal charges and possible criminal compensation. The NSW Civil Liability Act won't protect the volunteer from criminal liability in this situation.

**Question 5: check list**

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer for an act or omission that constitutes a civil liability (for example, negligence causing physical injury) and not an act or omission that would (on the balance of probabilities) constitute a criminal offence (for example, stealing or assault)?

- Yes – go to Question 6
- No – go to Section E

Question 6

Is the civil liability included in the protection provisions?

Certain types of civil liability are excluded from the protection provisions. A volunteer will not be protected by the NSW Civil Liability Act in certain civil proceedings:

- if the volunteer is sued for defamation
- liability that would otherwise be covered by third-party insurance under the *Motor Accidents Compensation Act 1999 (NSW)*, such as if the volunteer has a car accident while volunteering, or
- any other personal liability that is required to be insured against by a law of the state

Question 6: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer one of the following types?

- Liability for defamation
- Liability that is required to be insured against by law (for example, insurance required as part of a professional qualification and accreditation, such as doctors, accountants, nurses, or lawyers)
- Liability for personal injury due to a motor vehicle accident where that liability should have been covered by third-party insurance

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go Section C

Section C – When does the protection not apply to volunteers?

A volunteer is not automatically protected by meeting the threshold requirements of the legislation outlined in Section A and B. There are specific situations where the protection will not apply. These situations are listed below.

Question 7

Is the volunteer performing community work as a part of a court order or fine repayment scheme?

A person doing community work under an order of a court is not a volunteer under the NSW Civil Liability Act definition. Although work under a fine repayment scheme is not specifically excluded by the Act, it's unlikely that such work would be considered 'voluntary' as the participant will receive a benefit in the form of their debt being cancelled or reduced.

Question 7: check list

Is the volunteer performing the community work doing so under a court order or fine repayment scheme?

- Yes – go to Section E
- No – go to Question 8



Caution

Organisations working with individuals under court orders or fine repayment schemes will need to carefully manage their own risks. Speak to the relevant government department and advise the individuals to consider whether there is insurance covering their participation.

Question 8

Were the volunteer's actions (or failure to act) done in 'good faith'?

The volunteer's actions (or failure to act) must have been done in 'good faith'. To act in good faith has been defined as acting honestly and without fraud. Where a volunteer endeavours to act in the best interests of the community organisation and is not involved in any dishonest or fraudulent behaviour, the volunteer is taken to be acting in good faith.



Example – 'in good faith'

A volunteer attends a community sports day to help with minor first aid. A child falls and fractures their arm, and as a result of the volunteer's care, their injury is worsened. The volunteer will be acting in good faith if they were trying to help the injured person and believed that was the correct first aid action. However, they will not be acting in good faith if they gave this assistance to impress their friend when they knew they had no knowledge of what first aid action to take.

Question 8: check list

At the time of the act or omission was the volunteer acting in good faith?

- Yes they were acting in good faith - go to Question 9**
- No they were not acting in good faith- go to Section E**

Question 9

Does an exception apply?

Certain acts of the volunteer will exclude their ability to claim protection. Even if a person is a volunteer and they have been doing community work organised by a community organisation, there are further exceptions set out under the NSW Civil Liability Act. In general, a volunteer will not be protected if:

- the volunteer knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that they were acting:
 - outside the scope of the activities authorised by the community organisation, or
 - contrary to any instructions given by the community organisation, or
- the volunteer's ability to exercise reasonable care and skill when doing the work was significantly impaired by alcohol or drugs voluntarily consumed (whether consumed for medication or not), and the volunteer failed to exercise reasonable care and skill when doing the work

There are specific legal definitions and interpretations of many of the terms used in these exceptions (for example, 'ought reasonably to have known', 'drugs', 'alcohol' and 'significantly impaired'). If potentially relevant, your organisation may need to seek legal advice about these issues.



Example

A person volunteers at a community sports day and is instructed to assist with refreshments only. The volunteer starts to help with marshalling participants without instruction to do so. An injury occurs as a result of the volunteer's marshalling activities. As the volunteer was acting contrary to instructions, it's likely that an exception under the NSW Civil Liability Act applies and that the volunteer will not be protected from liability.

Question 9: check list

Did any of the following apply to the volunteer at the time of the act or omission?

- volunteer's ability to exercise reasonable care and skill was significantly impaired as a result of voluntarily consuming alcohol or a drug (whether or not consumed for medication) and they failed to exercise reasonable care and skill
- acting outside the scope of activities authorised by the community organisation
- acting contrary to instructions given by the community organisation

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go to Section D

Section D – Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?

If you have answered all the questions in sections A, B and C, and the answer does not result in 'go to section E', the protection under the NSW Civil Liability Act is likely to apply to volunteers engaged by your organisation. If you are in doubt, seek legal advice. The volunteer will need their own, independent legal advice if legal action is started against them.

If your volunteers are protected, this means they don't incur personal civil liability as a result of performing community work organised by or as an office holder of your community organisation.

In most other Australian states and territories, civil liability incurred by a protected volunteer is automatically transferred to the community organisation (so that the organisation itself would have to pay any compensation). In NSW, there is no such automatic transfer. The NSW Civil Liability Act operates to the effect that if a volunteer is protected under the Act, then the community organisation is also protected and does not take on the volunteer's liability.

Even if the volunteer is protected, a community organisation in NSW may nevertheless be liable for damage caused by a volunteer who was acting in good faith if the community organisation was in breach of a 'non-delegable duty of care' – which is a common law duty owed by the community organisation itself, rather than the volunteer, to the person who suffered the damage. This may include providing adequate training, equipment or supervision to volunteers. So, for example, if a volunteer causes an injury to another person because the organisation failed to give the volunteer appropriate safety training, the organisation may be liable to pay compensation to the injured person.

This is a complicated area of law and your organisation should seek legal advice about any potential liability in these circumstances.

Section E – Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?

If your volunteers are not protected by the provisions of the NSW Civil Liability Act, your volunteers remain personally liable for their actions. They may be either sued individually or joined to an action against your community organisation, for their acts and omissions while performing community work.



Note – volunteers are critical to the work of community organisations

Volunteers are a critical element to the work that many not-for-profit community organisations do. The circumstances when a volunteer is found to be personally liable are extremely rare, and in most instances, volunteers are found to be doing the right thing.

The potential for liability should not be a reason not to engage volunteers, and it's most important that organisations are aware of the risks and put measures in place to prevent incidents from occurring.



Queensland – checklist

Are your volunteers protected against personal liability under the Civil Liability Act?

This checklist provides a simple guide to help a Queensland community organisation:

- work out if its volunteers are protected under the provisions of the *Civil Liability Act 2003 (QLD)* (**QLD Civil Liability Act**), and
- understand when it could be held liable (legally responsible) for the actions of its volunteers



Read this checklist together with the information in this part of the guide about safety, negligence, risk management and your volunteers, including the circumstances in which your organisation could be legally responsible for the actions of your volunteers.



How to use this checklist

To be protected under the QLD Civil Liability Act, a volunteer must meet threshold requirements.

These requirements, and questions to help your organisation assess whether a volunteer may be covered, are set out below.

Start by answering the questions in Sections A, B and C. You will then be directed to:

- Section D 'Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?', or
- Section E 'Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?'

Seek legal advice before acting on the information in this annexure.

Section A – Do your volunteers meet the requirements for protection?

Question 1

Has the community work been done by a 'volunteer'?

The QLD Civil Liability Act defines a 'volunteer' as a person who does 'community work' (discussed below) on a voluntary basis or donates food in certain circumstances.

A person is considered to work on a 'voluntary basis' if they receive no remuneration for the work other than reimbursement for reasonable expenses.



Example

Fred is employed as a gardener. Fred volunteers his services to Community House Inc (a Queensland incorporated association) for one day a month. Fred drives to Community House and occasionally buys plants for its garden. Community House pays Fred for petrol and the cost of the plants. Fred is regarded as a volunteer for the purposes of the QLD Civil Liability Act while performing services for Community House Inc because the only remuneration he receives is reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.

**Question 1: check list**

To be entitled to protection the work must be performed by someone who satisfies the legal definition of 'volunteer'. Was the community work done on a voluntary basis?

- Yes – go to Question 2**
- No – go to Section E**

Question 2

Is your organisation a 'community organisation'?

For the volunteer to be entitled to the protection, your organisation must meet the definition of 'community organisation' in the QLD Civil Liability Act.

Your organisation will meet the definition if it organises the doing of community work by volunteers (see question 3) and it fits into one of the categories listed in the checklist for Question 2 below.

**Caution**

The volunteer protection provisions of the QLD Civil Liability Act **may** apply to unincorporated community groups. We recommend seeking legal advice.



For more information on the difference between unincorporated and incorporated community groups see our fact sheet ['What is incorporation and does our group need to incorporate?'](#)

Question 2: check list

Does your organisation fit into one of the following categories?

- a corporation (for example, a company limited by guarantee or an incorporated association)
- a trustee acting the capacity of trustee
- a registered political party
- a public or other authority under section 34 of the QLD Civil Liability Act
- a parents and citizens association
- a church or other religious group

If ANY apply go to Question 3

If NONE apply go to Section E

**Question 3****Is the work being done by the volunteer 'community work'?**

The protection under the QLD Civil Liability Act applies to a volunteer when they are doing 'community work' – the focus is on the purpose of the volunteer's activity, not the overall purpose of the organisation. Whether a volunteer is performing 'community work' will depend on what work the volunteer is actually doing, rather than the objects of the organisation they are doing the work for.

Community work is broadly defined as work that is not for private financial gain that is done for any of the purposes in the below checklist (and includes making donations of food for one or more of the specified purposes).

The QLD Civil Liability Act regulations can declare that certain work is not community work even if it fits in to the categories above.

**Caution**

Some of the fields of community work set out below have a technical legal meaning (for example, charitable purposes). You may need to seek legal advice about whether the work falls into one of these categories. For further information on what types of activities may be considered to be charitable, refer to our webpage on [registering as a charity](#).

Question 3: check list

Community work is not performed for private financial gain and is done for one or more of the following purposes:

- charitable
- benevolent
- philanthropic
- recreational
- political
- sporting
- educational
- cultural

If ANY apply go to Question 4

If NONE apply go to Section E

Question 4**Is the volunteer an office holder or has the community work been 'organised' by a community organisation?**

A volunteer is protected if they carry out the community work as an office holder of the community organisation (for example a director or secretary), or if the community work is 'organised' by the community organisation. The definition of 'organised' includes 'directed or supervised', but this is non-exhaustive and may extend to situations where there are no specific directions or supervision given, for example, where volunteers are given general discretion to organise a fundraising event.

However, the protection does not extend to spontaneous acts of volunteers or activities the organisation has not authorised.

For example, if your organisation trains a person to use a machine and directs that person to use it, they will be performing work organised by your organisation. A person who starts working without approval or direction from your organisation would not be performing work organised by your organisation.

**Question 4: check list**

Was the work performed by the volunteer:

- organised, directed or supervised by the community organisation?
- carried out by someone acting as an office holder of the community organisation?

If ANY apply go to Question 5

If NONE apply go to Section E

Section B – Has civil liability been incurred?

Question 5

Was the liability incurred a civil liability?

The protection is only afforded for civil liabilities. A volunteer will not be protected from liability for criminal actions (offences by a person against the state) while volunteering. This includes traffic infringements as well as more serious crimes.

For example, if a volunteer physically assaults someone while they are volunteering, this may result in criminal charges and possible criminal compensation. The QLD Civil Liability Act won't protect the volunteer from criminal liability in this situation.

Question 5: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer for an act or omission that constitutes a civil liability (for example, negligence causing physical injury) and not an act or omission that would (on the balance of probabilities) constitute a criminal offence (for example, stealing or assault)?

- Yes – go to Question 6**
- No – go to Section E**

Question 6

Is the civil liability included in the protection provisions?

Certain types of civil liability are excluded from the protection provisions. A volunteer will not be protected by the QLD Civil Liability Act in certain civil proceedings:

- liability that would otherwise be covered by compulsory third-party insurance under the [Motor Accident Insurance Act 1994 \(QLD\)](#), such as if the volunteer has a car accident while volunteering, or
- any other personal liability that is required to be insured against by a law of the state

Question 6: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer one of the following types?

- Liability that is required to be insured against by law (for example, insurance required as part of a professional qualification and accreditation, such as doctors, accountants, nurses, or lawyers)
- Liability for personal injury due to a motor vehicle accident where that liability should have been covered by compulsory third-party insurance

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go Section C

Section C – When does the protection not apply to volunteers?

A volunteer is not automatically protected by meeting the threshold requirements of the legislation outlined in Section A and B. There are specific situations where the protection will not apply. These situations are listed below.

**Question 7**

Is the volunteer performing community work as a part of a court order or fine repayment scheme?

A person doing work under an order of a court is not a volunteer under the QLD Civil Liability Act definition. Although work under a fine repayment scheme is not specifically excluded by the Act, it's unlikely that such work would be considered 'voluntary' as the participant will receive a benefit in the form of their debt being cancelled or reduced.

Question 7: check list

Is the volunteer performing the community work doing so under a court order or fine repayment scheme?

- Yes – go to Section E**
- No – go to Question 8**

**Caution**

Organisations working with individuals under court orders or fine repayment schemes will need to carefully manage their own risks. Speak to the relevant government department and advise the individuals to consider whether there is insurance covering their participation.

Question 8

Were the volunteer's actions (or failure to act) done in 'good faith'?

The volunteer's actions (or failure to act) must have been done in 'good faith'. To act in good faith has been defined as acting honestly and without fraud. Where a volunteer endeavours to act in the best interests of the community organisation and is not involved in any dishonest or fraudulent behaviour, the volunteer is taken to be acting in good faith.

**Example – 'in good faith'**

A volunteer attends a community sports day to help with minor first aid. A child falls and fractures their arm, and as a result of the volunteer's care, their injury is worsened. The volunteer will be acting in good faith if they were trying to help the injured person and believed that was the correct first aid action. However, they will not be acting in good faith if they gave this assistance to impress their friend when they knew they had no knowledge of what first aid action to take.

Question 8: check list

At the time of the act or omission was the volunteer acting in good faith?

- Yes they were acting in good faith - go to Question 9**
- No they were not acting in good faith- go to Section E**

**Question 9****Does an exception apply?**

In general, a volunteer will not be protected if:

- the volunteer knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that they were acting:
 - outside the scope of the activities authorised by the community organisation, or
 - contrary to any instructions given by the community organisation, or
- the volunteer was intoxicated (under the influence of alcohol or drugs) and failed to exercise due care and skill when doing the work

There are specific legal definitions and interpretations of many of the terms used in these exceptions (for example, 'ought reasonably to have known', 'drugs', 'alcohol' and 'intoxicated'). If potentially relevant, your organisation may need to seek legal advice about these issues.

**Example**

A person volunteers at a community sports day and is instructed to assist with refreshments only. The volunteer starts to help with marshalling participants without instruction to do so. An injury occurs as a result of the volunteer's marshalling activities. As the volunteer was acting contrary to instructions, it's likely that an exception under the Civil Liability Act applies and that the volunteer will not be protected from liability.

Question 9: check list

Did any of the following apply to the volunteer at the time of the act or omission?

- volunteer was intoxicated while doing the work and failed to exercise due care and skill
- acting outside the scope of activities authorised by the community organisation
- acting contrary to instructions given by the community organisation

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go to Section D

Section D – Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?

If you have answered all the questions in sections A, B and C, and the answer does not result in 'go to section E', the protection under the QLD Civil Liability Act is likely to apply to volunteers engaged by your organisation. If you are in doubt, seek legal advice. The volunteer will need their own, independent legal advice if legal action is started against them.

If your volunteers are protected, they do not incur personal civil liability as a result of performing community work organised by or as an office holder of your community organisation. This includes when a person suffers harm resulting from the consumption of food donated by the volunteer, in particular circumstances. This means the volunteer, who caused personal injury, property damage or financial loss to a person as a result of the volunteer's own action or failure to act, will not be personally liable to pay any compensation to that person.

The QLD Civil Liability Act doesn't state whether the organisation itself becomes liable on a volunteer's behalf. However, under the common law, if an organisation does not fulfil its own duty of care and this leads to a volunteer causing injury or damage, it could become liable.



Section E – Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?

If your volunteers are not protected by the provisions of the QLD Civil Liability Act, your volunteers remain personally liable for their actions. They may be either sued individually or joined to an action against your community organisation, for their acts and omissions while performing community work.



Note – volunteers are critical to the work of community organisations

Volunteers are a critical element to the work that many not-for-profit community organisations do. The circumstances when a volunteer is found to be personally liable are extremely rare, and in most instances, volunteers are found to be doing the right thing.

The potential for liability should not be a reason not to engage volunteers, and it's most important that organisations are aware of the risks and put measures in place to prevent incidents from occurring.



Western Australia – checklist

Are your volunteers protected against personal liability under the Protection Act?

This checklist provides a simple guide to help a Western Australian community organisation:

- work out if its volunteers are protected under the provisions of the *Volunteers and Food and Other Donors (Protection from Liability) Act 2002 (WA)* (**WA Protection Act**), and
- understand when it could be held liable (legally responsible) for the actions of its volunteers



Read this checklist together with the information in this part of the guide about safety, negligence, risk management and your volunteers, including the circumstances in which your organisation could be legally responsible for the actions of your volunteers.



How to use this checklist

To be protected under the WA Protection Act, a volunteer must meet threshold requirements.

These requirements, and questions to help your organisation assess whether a volunteer may be covered, are set out below.

Start by answering the questions in Sections A, B and C. You will then be directed to:

- Section D ‘Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?’, or
- Section E ‘Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?’

Seek legal advice before acting on the information in this annexure.

Section A – Do your volunteers meet the requirements for protection?

Question 1

Has the community work been done by a ‘volunteer’?

A person is considered to be doing community work on a voluntary basis if they receive no remuneration for doing the work other than:

- remuneration that person would receive whether or not they did the community work
- reimbursement of reasonable expenses incurred in performing the community work, or
- remuneration that is not greater than the amount prescribed by the regulations (if any)



Example

Fred is employed as a gardener. Fred volunteers his services to Community House Inc (a Western Australian incorporated association) for one day a month. Fred drives to Community House and occasionally buys plants for its garden. Community House pays Fred for petrol and the cost of the plants. Fred is regarded as a volunteer for the purposes of the WA Protection Act while performing services for Community House Inc because the only remuneration he receives is reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.

Question 1: check list

To be entitled to protection the work must be performed by someone who satisfies the legal definition of 'volunteer'. Was the community work done on a voluntary basis?

- Yes – go to Question 2
- No – go to Section E

Question 2

Is your organisation a 'community organisation'?

For the volunteer to be entitled to the protection, your organisation must meet the definition of 'community organisation' in the WA Protection Act.

Your organisation will meet the definition if it organises the doing of community work by volunteers (see question 3) and it fits into one of the categories listed in the checklist for Question 2 below



Caution

The volunteer protection provisions of the WA Protection Act are unlikely to apply to unincorporated community groups. This means there is a strong chance that volunteers who are involved in an unincorporated community group will be liable for their own actions.



For more information on the difference between unincorporated and incorporated community groups see our fact sheet '[What is incorporation and does our group need to incorporate?](#)'

**Question 2: check list**

Does your organisation fit into one of the following categories?

- a state agency or instrumentality
- a department of the public service
- an incorporated association (under the *Associations Incorporation Act 2015 (WA)*)
- a local government
- another body corporate (such as a company limited by guarantee)

If ANY apply go to Question 3

If NONE apply go to Section E

Question 3

Is the work being done by the volunteer 'community work'?

The protection under the WA Protection Act applies to a volunteer when they are doing 'community work' – the focus is on the purpose of the volunteer's activity, not the overall purpose of the organisation. Whether a volunteer is performing 'community work' will depend on what work the volunteer is actually doing, rather than the objects of the organisation they are doing the work for.

Community work is broadly defined as work for any of the purposes in the below checklist.

The *Volunteers (Protection from Liability) Regulations 2005 (WA)* can declare that certain work is or is not community work even if it fits in to the categories above.

**Caution**

Some of the fields of community work set out below have a technical legal meaning (for example, charitable purposes). You may need to seek legal advice about whether the work falls into one of these categories. For further information on what types of activities may be considered to be charitable, see our webpage on [registering as a charity](#).

Question 3: check list

Community work is done for one or more of the following purposes:

- religious, educational, charitable or benevolent
- promoting or encouraging literature, science or the arts
- sport, recreation or amusement
- care, treatment or other assistance for people with a physical or mental disability or condition
- conserving or protecting the environment
- promoting or preserving historical or cultural heritage
- establishing, carrying on or improving a community, social or cultural centre
- promoting the interests of a local community
- political purposes
- for a purpose prescribed by the *Volunteers (Protection from Liability) Regulations 2005 (WA)*

If ANY apply go to Question 4

If NONE apply go to Section E

**Question 4****Was the volunteer carrying out community work for the community organisation?**

A volunteer is protected while they carry out community work for the community organisation. The wording is quite broad and could, in theory, encompass tasks that the volunteer was not asked to do but decided to do of their own accord. However, the volunteer will not be protected if they acted without authority or contrary to instructions (see Section C below).

For example, if your organisation trains a person to use a machine and directs that person to use it, they will be performing work organised by your organisation. A person who starts working without approval or direction from your organisation would not be performing work organised by your organisation.

Question 4: check list

Was the work performed by the volunteer in the course of carrying out community work for the community organisation?

- Yes - go to Question 5
- No - go to Section E

Section B – Has civil liability been incurred?

Question 5**Was the liability incurred a civil liability?**

The protection is only afforded for civil liabilities. A volunteer will not be protected from liability for criminal actions (offences by a person against the state) while volunteering. This includes traffic infringements as well as more serious crimes. For example, if a volunteer physically assaults someone while they are volunteering, this may result in criminal charges and possible criminal compensation.

Question 5: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer for an act or omission that constitutes a civil liability (for example, negligence causing physical injury) and not an act or omission that would (on the balance of probabilities) constitute a criminal offence (for example, stealing or assault)?

- Yes – go to Question 6
- No – go to Section E

Question 6**Is the civil liability included in the protection provisions?**

Certain types of civil liability are excluded from the protection provisions. A volunteer will not be protected in certain civil proceedings if:

- the volunteer is sued for defamation, or
- the volunteer has a car accident while volunteering. In this case, any liability for compensation for personal injury to third parties under the *Motor Vehicle (Third Party Insurance) Act 1943 (WA)* is excluded (as this is covered by the compulsory third party insurance that is included in the registration costs of a vehicle)

Question 6: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer one of the following types?

- Liability for defamation
- Liability for personal injury due to a motor vehicle accident where that liability should have been covered by third-party insurance

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go Section C



Section C – When does the protection not apply to volunteers?

A volunteer is not automatically protected by meeting the threshold requirements of the legislation outlined in Section A and B. There are specific situations where the protection will not apply. These situations are listed below.

Question 7

Is the volunteer performing community work as a part of a court order or fine repayment scheme?

A person who carries out community work under the order of a court is not regarded as working on a voluntary basis, and is therefore not considered a volunteer.

Work under a fine repayment scheme is not specifically excluded by the WA Protection Act, however, it is unlikely that such work would be considered 'voluntary' as the participant will receive a benefit in the form of their debt being cancelled or reduced.

Question 7: check list

Is the volunteer performing the community work doing so under a court order or fine repayment scheme?

- Yes – go to Section E**
- No – go to Question 8**



Caution

Organisations working with individuals under court orders or fine repayment schemes will need to carefully manage their own risks. Speak to the relevant government department and advise the individuals to consider whether there is insurance covering their participation.

Question 8

Were the volunteer's actions (or failure to act) done in 'good faith'?

The volunteer's actions (or failure to act) must have been done in 'good faith'.

To act in good faith has been defined as acting honestly and without fraud. Where a volunteer endeavours to act in the best interests of the community organisation and is not involved in any dishonest or fraudulent behaviour, the volunteer is taken to be acting in good faith.



Example – 'in good faith'

A volunteer attends a community sports day to help with minor first aid. A child falls and fractures their arm, and as a result of the volunteer's care, their injury is worsened. The volunteer will be acting in good faith if they were trying to help the injured person and believed that was the correct first aid action. However, they will not be acting in good faith if they gave this assistance to impress their friend when they knew they had no knowledge of what first aid action to take.

**Question 8: check list**

At the time of the act or omission was the volunteer acting in good faith?

- Yes they were acting in good faith - go to Question 9**
- No they were not acting in good faith- go to Section E**

Question 9**Does an exception apply?**

Certain acts of the volunteer will exclude their ability to claim protection. Even if a person is a volunteer and they have been doing community work organised by a community organisation, there are exceptions set out under the WA Protection Act.

In general, a volunteer will not be protected where:

- the volunteer knew, or ought to have reasonably known, that at the relevant times they were acting:
 - outside the scope of the community work organised by the community organisation, or
 - contrary to any instructions given by the community organisation, or
- the volunteer's ability to do the community work in a proper manner was, at the relevant times, significantly impaired by alcohol or drugs

There are specific legal definitions and interpretations of many of the terms used in these exceptions (for example, 'ought reasonably to have known', 'drugs', 'alcohol' and 'significantly impaired').

If potentially relevant, your organisation may need to seek legal advice about these issues..

**Example**

A person volunteers at a community sports day and is instructed to assist with refreshments only. The volunteer starts to help with marshalling participants without instruction to do so. An injury occurs as a result of the volunteer's marshalling activities. As the volunteer was acting contrary to instructions, it's likely that an exception applies and that the volunteer will not be protected from liability.

Question 9: check list

Did any of the following apply to the volunteer at the time of the act or omission?

- volunteer's ability to exercise reasonable care and skill was significantly impaired as a result of voluntarily consuming alcohol or a drug
- acting outside the scope of activities authorised by the community organisation
- acting contrary to instructions given by the community organisation

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go to Section D



Section D - Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?

If you have answered all the questions in sections A, B and C, and the answer does not result in 'go to section E', the protection under the WA Protection Act is likely to apply to volunteers engaged by your organisation. If you are in doubt, seek legal advice. The volunteer will need their own, independent legal advice if legal action is started against them.

If your volunteers are protected (that is, all the tests set out above have been met), they don't incur personal civil liability as a result of performing community work organised by your community organisation. This means a volunteer, who caused personal injury, property damage or financial loss to a person as a result of the volunteer's own action or failure to act, will not be personally liable to pay any compensation to that person.

Instead, the liability of a protected volunteer will be transferred to the organisation the volunteer was performing the community work for, and the injured party would be able to sue the community organisation (rather than the volunteer) for any injury, damage or loss caused by the volunteer.

Section E – Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?

If your volunteers are not protected by the provisions of the WA Protection Act, your volunteers remain personally liable for their actions. They may be either sued individually or joined to an action against your community organisation, for their acts and omissions while performing community work.



Note – volunteers are critical to the work of community organisations

Volunteers are a critical element to the work that many not-for-profit community organisations do. The circumstances when a volunteer is found to be personally liable are extremely rare, and in most instances, volunteers are found to be doing the right thing.

The potential for liability should not be a reason not to engage volunteers, and it's most important that organisations are aware of the risks and put measures in place to prevent incidents from occurring.



South Australia – checklist

Are your volunteers protected against personal liability under the Volunteers Act?

This checklist provides a simple guide to help a South Australian community organisation:

- work out if its volunteers are protected under the provisions of the [Volunteers Protection Act 2001 \(SA\) \(SA Volunteers Act\)](#), and
- understand when it could be held liable (legally responsible) for the actions of its volunteers



Read this checklist together with the information in this part of the guide about safety, negligence, risk management and your volunteers, including the circumstances in which your organisation could be legally responsible for the actions of your volunteers.



How to use this checklist

To be protected under the SA Volunteers Act, a volunteer must meet threshold requirements.

These requirements, and questions to help your organisation assess whether a volunteer may be covered, are set out below.

Start by answering the questions in Sections A, B and C. You will then be directed to:

- Section D ‘Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?’, or
- Section E ‘Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?’

Seek legal advice before acting on the information in this annexure.

Section A – Do your volunteers meet the requirements for protection?

Question 1

Has the community work been done by a ‘volunteer’?

The SA Volunteers Act defines a ‘volunteer’ as a person who carries out community work on a voluntary basis. A person is considered to work on a ‘voluntary basis’ if they receive no remuneration for the work, or are remunerated within limits fixed by regulation. The [Volunteers Protection Regulations 2019 \(SA\) \(Volunteers Regulations\)](#) set these limits as:

- reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses, or
- a monetary gift made to the person in recognition of the person’s work as a volunteer. Such a monetary gift can’t be subject to PAYG withholding or instalment tax, paid as a consequence of the person’s employment, legally required to be paid, or an amount relied upon by the person as a source of income.



Example

Fred is employed as a gardener. Fred volunteers his services to Community House Inc (a South Australian incorporated association) for one day a month. After a year of volunteering, Community House gave Fred a \$100 voucher as thank you gift for his assistance. Fred is still regarded as a volunteer for the purposes of the SA Volunteers Act while performing services for Community House Inc.

Question 1: check list

To be entitled to protection the work must be performed by someone who satisfies the legal definition of 'volunteer'. Was the community work done on a voluntary basis?

- Yes – go to Question 2
- No – go to Section E

Question 2
Is your organisation a 'community organisation'?

For the volunteer to be entitled to the protection, your organisation must meet the definition of 'community organisation' in the SA Volunteers Act.

Your organisation will meet the definition if it directs or co-ordinates the doing of community work by volunteers (see question 3) and it fits into one of the categories listed in the checklist for Question 2 below.



Caution

The volunteer protection provisions of the SA Volunteers Act are unlikely to apply to unincorporated community groups. This means there is a strong chance that volunteers who are involved in an unincorporated community group will be liable for their own actions.



For more information on the difference between unincorporated and incorporated community groups see our fact sheet '[What is incorporation and does our group need to incorporate?](#)'

Question 2: check list

Does your organisation fit into one of the following categories?

- a body corporate (such as a company limited by guarantee or incorporated association)
- the Crown (a government body)

If ANY apply go to Question 3

If NONE apply go to Section E



Question 3
Is the work being done by the volunteer 'community work'?

The protection under the SA Volunteers Act applies to a volunteer when they are doing 'community work' – the focus is on the purpose of the volunteer's activity, not the overall purpose of the organisation. Whether a volunteer is performing 'community work' will depend on what work the volunteer is actually doing, rather than the objects of the organisation they are doing the work for.

Community work is broadly defined as work for any of the purposes in the below checklist. The Volunteers Regulations can also specify that certain types of work is not community work.



Caution

Some of the fields of community work set out below have a technical legal meaning (for example, charitable purposes). You may need to seek legal advice about whether the work falls into one of these categories. For further information on what types of activities may be considered to be charitable, see our webpage on [registering as a charity](#).

Question 3: check list

Community work is done for one or more of the following purposes:

- religious, educational, charitable or benevolent
- promoting or encouraging literature, science or the arts
- looking after, or providing medical treatment or attention for, people who need care because of a physical or mental disability or condition
- sport, recreation, or amusement
- conserving resources or protecting the natural environment from harm
- preserving historical or cultural heritage
- political
- protecting or promoting the common interests of the community generally or a particular section of the community

If ANY apply go to Question 4

If NONE apply go to Section E

**Question 4**

Was the volunteer carrying out community work for the community organisation?

A volunteer is protected while they carry out community work for the community organisation. The wording is quite broad and could, in theory, encompass tasks that the volunteer was not asked to do but decided to do of their own accord. However, the volunteer will not be protected if they acted without authority or contrary to instructions (see Section C below).

For example, if your organisation trains a person to use a machine and directs that person to use it, they will be performing work organised by your organisation. A person who starts working without approval or direction from your organisation would not be performing work organised by your organisation.

Question 4: check list

Was the work performed by the volunteer in the course of carrying out community work for the community organisation?

- Yes - go to Question 5**
- No - go to Section E**

Section B – Has civil liability been incurred?

Question 5

Was the liability incurred a civil liability?

The protection is only afforded for civil liabilities. A volunteer will not be protected from liability for criminal actions (offences by a person against the state) while volunteering. This includes traffic infringements as well as more serious crimes.

For example, if a volunteer physically assaults someone while they are volunteering, this may result in criminal charges and possible criminal compensation. The SA Volunteers Act won't protect the volunteer from criminal liability in this situation.

Question 5: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer for an act or omission that constitutes a civil liability (for example, negligence causing physical injury) and not an act or omission that would (on the balance of probabilities) constitute a criminal offence (for example, stealing or assault)?

- Yes – go to Question 6**
- No – go to Section E**

Question 6

Is the civil liability included in the protection provisions?

Certain types of civil liability are excluded from the protection provisions. A volunteer will not be protected in certain civil proceedings if:

- the act or omission falls within a scheme of compulsory third-party motor vehicle insurance (where the volunteer was involved in a motor accident and the injured person follows the normal procedure for making a claim), or
- the act or omission is defamation

Question 6: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer one of the following types?

- Liability for defamation
- Liability for personal injury due to a motor vehicle accident where that liability should have been covered by third-party insurance

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go Section C



Section C – When does the protection not apply to volunteers?

A volunteer is not automatically protected by meeting the threshold requirements of the legislation outlined in Section A and B. There are specific situations where the protection will not apply. These situations are listed below.

Question 7

Is the volunteer performing community work as a part of a court order or fine repayment scheme?

A person who carries out community work under the order of a court or as a condition of a bond is not regarded as working on a voluntary basis, and is therefore not considered a volunteer.

Although work under a fine repayment scheme is not specifically excluded by the Act, it's unlikely that such work would be considered 'voluntary' as the participant will receive a benefit in the form of their debt being cancelled or reduced.

Question 7: check list

Is the volunteer performing the community work doing so under a court order or fine repayment scheme?

- Yes – go to Section E**
- No – go to Question 8**



Caution

Organisations working with individuals under court orders or fine repayment schemes will need to carefully manage their own risks. Speak to the relevant government department and advise the individuals to consider whether there is insurance covering their participation.

Question 8

Were the volunteer's actions (or failure to act) done in 'good faith' and 'without recklessness'?

The volunteer's actions (or failure to act) must have been done in 'good faith' and 'without recklessness'. Generally, to act in good faith is to act honestly and without fraud. Where a volunteer endeavours to act in the best interests of the community organisation and is not involved in any dishonest or fraudulent behaviour, it's likely the volunteer is acting in good faith.

The term 'recklessness' has an imprecise definition in the law but generally means that a person knew or should have known that their action was likely to cause harm. Your organisation may need to seek legal advice about this if relevant.



Example – ‘in good faith’

A volunteer attends a community sports day to help with minor first aid. A child falls and fractures their arm, and as a result of the volunteer’s care, their injury is worsened. The volunteer will be acting in good faith if they were trying to help the injured person and believed that was the correct first aid action. However, they will not be acting in good faith if they gave this assistance to impress their friend when they knew they had no knowledge of what first aid action to take.

Example – ‘without recklessness’

A person volunteers their time by running sports sessions for children. An accident occurs due to faulty sports equipment. The volunteer will have acted recklessly if they were aware that there was a problem with their equipment. The volunteer will not be reckless if their equipment had been checked recently and they had no knowledge of the problem.

Question 8: check list

At the time of the act or omission was the volunteer acting in good faith and without recklessness?

- Yes they were acting in good faith and without recklessness – go to Question 9**
- No they were not acting in good faith, or they were acting recklessly – go to Section E**

Question 9

Does an exception apply?

Certain acts of the volunteer will exclude their ability to claim protection. Even if a person is a volunteer and they have been doing community work organised by a community organisation, there are exceptions set out under the Act.

In general, a volunteer will not be protected where:

- the volunteer knew, or ought to have reasonably known, that at the relevant times they were acting:
 - outside the scope of the activities authorised by the community organisation
 - contrary to any instructions given by the community organisation, or
- the volunteer’s ability to do the community work properly was significantly impaired by a recreational drug

There are specific legal definitions and interpretations of many of the terms used in these exceptions (for example, ‘ought reasonably to have known’, ‘drugs’ and ‘significantly impaired’). If potentially relevant, your organisation may need to seek legal advice about these issues..



Example

A person volunteers at a community sports day and is instructed to assist with refreshments only. The volunteer starts to help with marshalling participants without instruction to do so. An injury occurs as a result of the volunteer’s marshalling activities. As the volunteer was acting contrary to instructions, it’s likely that an exception applies and that the volunteer will not be protected from liability.

**Question 9: check list**

Did any of the following apply to the volunteer at the time of the act or omission?

- volunteer's ability to exercise reasonable care and skill was significantly impaired by a recreational drug
- acting outside the scope of activities authorised by the community organisation
- acting contrary to instructions given by the community organisation

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go to Section D

Section D – Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?

If you have answered all the questions in sections A, B and C, and the answer does not result in 'go to section E', the protection under the SA Volunteers Act is likely to apply to volunteers engaged by your organisation. If you are in doubt, seek legal advice. The volunteer will need their own, independent legal advice if legal action is started against them.

If your volunteers are protected (that is, all the tests set out above have been met), they don't incur personal civil liability as a result of performing community work organised by your community organisation.

This means a volunteer, who caused personal injury, property damage or financial loss to a person as a result of the volunteer's own action or failure to act, will not be personally liable to pay any compensation to that person.

Instead, the liability of a protected volunteer will attach to the organisation the volunteer was performing the community work for, and the injured party would be able to sue the community organisation (rather than the volunteer) for any injury, damage or loss caused by the volunteer.

Section E – Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?

If your volunteers are not protected by the provisions of the SA Volunteers Act, your volunteers remain personally liable for their actions. They may be either sued individually or joined to an action against your community organisation, for their acts and omissions while performing community work.

**Note – volunteers are critical to the work of community organisations**

Volunteers are a critical element to the work that many not-for-profit community organisations do. The circumstances when a volunteer is found to be personally liable are extremely rare, and in most instances, volunteers are found to be doing the right thing.

The potential for liability should not be a reason not to engage volunteers, and it's most important that organisations are aware of the risks and put measures in place to prevent incidents from occurring.



Australian Capital Territory – checklist

Are your volunteers protected against personal liability under the Wrongs Act?

This checklist provides a simple guide to assist an ACT community organisation to:

- work out if its volunteers are protected under the provisions of the Civil Law (Wrongs) Act 2002 (ACT) (ACT Wrongs Act), and
- understand when it could be held liable (legally responsible) for the actions of its volunteers



Read this checklist together with the information in this part of the guide about safety, negligence, risk management and your volunteers, including the circumstances in which your organisation could be legally responsible for the actions of your volunteers.



How to use this checklist

To be protected under the ACT Wrongs Act, a volunteer must meet threshold requirements.

These requirements, and questions to help your organisation assess whether a volunteer may be covered, are set out below.

Start by answering the questions in Sections A, B and C. You will then be directed to:

- Section D 'Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?', or
- Section E 'Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?'

Seek legal advice before acting on the information in this annexure.

Section A – Do your volunteers meet the requirements for protection?

Question 1

Has the community work been done by a 'volunteer'?

The ACT Wrongs Act defines a 'volunteer' as a person who carries out community work on a voluntary basis.

A person is considered to work on a 'voluntary basis' if they:

- receive no remuneration for the work, or
- are remunerated for the work but within limits fixed by regulation. The volunteer may receive reimbursement of their reasonable expenses and the work will still be considered as being on a voluntary basis



Example

Fred is employed as a gardener. Fred volunteers his services to Community House Inc (an incorporated association) for one day a month. Fred drives to Community House and occasionally buys plants for its garden. Community House pays Fred for petrol and the cost of the plants. Fred is regarded as a volunteer for the purposes of the ACT Wrongs Act while performing services for Community House Inc because the only remuneration he receives is reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.

Question 1: check list

To be entitled to protection the work must be performed by someone who satisfies the legal definition of 'volunteer'. Was the community work done on a voluntary basis?

- Yes – go to Question 2
- No – go to Section E

Question 2

Is your organisation a 'community organisation'?

For the volunteer to be entitled to the protection, your organisation must meet the definition of 'community organisation' in the ACT Wrongs Act.

Your organisation will meet the definition if it is a corporation that directs or coordinates the carrying out of community work by volunteers (see question 3).

The definition in the ACT Wrongs Act allows for-profit entities as well as not-for-profit entities to fall into the definition of 'community organisations'. The meaning of 'community work' is discussed in question 3 below, but note that 'community work' does not have to be the organisation's sole activity.



Caution

The volunteer protection provisions of the ACT Wrongs Act **may** apply to unincorporated community groups. We recommend seeking legal advice.



For more information on the difference between unincorporated and incorporated community groups see our fact sheet ['What is incorporation and does our group need to incorporate?'](#)

Question 2: check list

Does your organisation fit into the following category?

- a corporation that directs or coordinates the carrying out of community work by volunteers

If ANY apply go to Question 3

If NONE apply go to Section E

**Question 3**

Is the work being done by the volunteer 'community work'?

The protection under the ACT Wrongs Act applies to a volunteer when they are doing 'community work' – the focus is on the purpose of the volunteer's activity, not the overall purpose of the organisation. Whether a volunteer is performing 'community work' will depend on what work the volunteer is actually doing, rather than the objects of the organisation they are doing the work for.

Community work is broadly defined as work for any of the purposes in the below checklist.

Certain types of work may be declared by regulation to constitute, or not to constitute, 'community work'.

The ACT Wrongs Act also specifically excludes from the definition of community work any work that involves acts or threats of violence or creates a serious risk to the health or safety of the public or a section of the public.

**Caution**

Some of the fields of community work set out below have a technical legal meaning (for example, charitable purposes). You may need to seek legal advice about whether the work falls into one of these categories. For further information on what types of activities may be considered to be charitable, see our webpage on [registering as a charity](#).

Question 3: check list

Community work is done for one or more of the following purposes:

- religious, educational, charitable or benevolent
- promoting or encouraging literature, science or the arts
- looking after, or giving attention to, people who need care because of a physical or mental disability or condition
- sport, recreation, or amusement
- conserving resources or protecting the natural environment from harm
- preserving historical or cultural heritage
- political
- protecting or promoting the common interests of the community generally or a particular section of the community

If ANY apply go to Question 4

If NONE apply go to Section E

Question 4

Was the volunteer carrying out community work for the community organisation?

A volunteer is protected if their action (or failure to act) took place while they were carrying out community work for the community organisation. The definition of 'community organisation' as an organisation that directs or coordinates community work by volunteers indicates a degree of direction, coordination and organisation on the part of the community organisation, but the wording 'carried out for' is broad and could, in theory, encompass tasks that the volunteer was not asked to do but decided to do of their own accord.

However, the volunteer will not be protected if they acted without authority or contrary to instructions (see Section C below).

**Question 4: check list**

Was the work performed by the volunteer carried out for the community organisation?

- Yes - go to Question 5
- No - go to Section E

Section B – Has civil liability been incurred?

Question 5

Was the liability incurred a civil liability?

The protection is only afforded for civil liabilities. A volunteer will not be protected from liability for criminal actions (offences by a person against the state) while volunteering. This includes traffic infringements as well as more serious crimes.

For example, if a volunteer physically assaults someone while they are volunteering, this may result in criminal charges and possible criminal compensation. The ACT Wrongs Act won't protect the volunteer from criminal liability in this situation.

Question 5: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer for an act or omission that constitutes a civil liability (for example, negligence causing physical injury) and not an act or omission that would (on the balance of probabilities) constitute a criminal offence (for example, stealing or assault)?

- Yes – go to Question 6
- No – go to Section E

Question 6

Is the civil liability included in the protection provisions?

Certain types of civil liability are excluded from the protection provisions. A volunteer will not be protected in certain civil proceedings if:

- if the volunteer is sued for defamation, or
- if the volunteer has a car accident while volunteering. In this case, any liability for compensation for personal injury to third parties which falls within the ambit of a compulsory third-party motor vehicle insurance scheme is excluded (as this is covered by the compulsory third party insurance that is included in the registration costs of a vehicle)

Question 6: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer one of the following types?

- Liability for defamation
- Liability for personal injury due to a motor vehicle accident where that liability should have been covered by third-party insurance

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go Section C



Section C – When does the protection not apply to volunteers?

A volunteer is not automatically protected by meeting the threshold requirements of the legislation outlined in Section A and B. There are specific situations where the protection will not apply. These situations are listed below.

Question 7

Is the volunteer performing community work as a part of a court order or fine repayment scheme?

Although the ACT Wrongs Act does not specifically exclude a person who carries out community work under a court order, it is unlikely that such a person would be considered to be working on a 'voluntary basis' as there are penalties for failure to comply with a court order.

The *Crimes (Sentence Administration) Act 2005 (ACT)* (see sections 315 to 317) includes provisions that may protect a community organisation against civil liability for conduct engaged in by the offender in doing the community service work. Your organisation should seek further legal advice if you are in this situation. It is also unlikely work under an infringement notice work and development scheme would be considered as being undertaken 'voluntarily' as the participant will receive a benefit in the form of their fine debt being repaid or waived.

Question 7: check list

Is the volunteer performing the community work doing so under a court order or fine repayment scheme?

- Yes – go to Section E
- No – go to Question 8



Caution

Organisations working with individuals under court orders or fine repayment schemes will need to carefully manage their own risks. Speak to the relevant government department and advise the individuals to consider whether there is insurance covering their participation.

Question 8

Were the volunteer's actions (or failure to act) done 'honestly and without recklessness'?

The volunteer's actions (or omissions) must have been done 'honestly and without recklessness'.

A person is reckless about causing harm if there is a substantial risk that harm will occur and they ignore the risk. If relevant, your organisation may need to seek legal advice about these issues.



Example – ‘honestly’

A volunteer attends a community sports day to help with minor first aid. A child falls and fractures their arm, and as a result of the volunteer’s care, their injury is worsened. The volunteer will be acting honestly if they were trying to help the injured person and believed that was the correct first aid action. However, they will not be acting honestly if they gave this assistance to impress their friend when they knew they had no knowledge of what first aid action to take.

Example – ‘without recklessness’

A person volunteers their time by running sports sessions for children. An accident occurs due to faulty sports equipment. The volunteer will have acted recklessly if they were aware that there was a problem with their equipment. The volunteer will not be reckless if their equipment had been checked recently and they had no knowledge of the problem.

Question 8: check list

At the time of the act or omission was the volunteer acting honestly and without recklessness?

- Yes they were acting honestly and without recklessness - go to Question 9**
- No they were not acting honestly, or they were acting recklessly- go to Section E**

Question 9 Does an exception apply?

Even if a volunteer acted honestly and without recklessness while carrying out community work for a community organisation, they may not be protected under the ACT Wrongs Act if an exception applies. In general, your organisation will not be liable (and a volunteer may be personally liable) if:

- the volunteer’s capacity to carry out the work properly was, at the relevant time, significantly impaired by a recreational drug
- the volunteer knew, or ought to have known, that they were acting:
 - outside the scope of the activities authorised by the community organisation, or
 - contrary to instructions given by the community organisation

There are specific legal definitions and interpretations of many of the terms used in these exceptions (for example, ‘ought reasonably to have known’, ‘drugs’ and ‘significantly impaired’). If potentially relevant, your organisation may need to seek legal advice about these issues.



Example

A person volunteers at a community sports day and is instructed to assist with refreshments only. The volunteer starts to help with marshalling participants without instruction to do so. An injury occurs as a result of the volunteer’s marshalling activities. As the volunteer was acting contrary to instructions, it’s likely that an exception applies and that the volunteer will not be protected from liability.

**Question 9: check list**

Did any of the following apply to the volunteer at the time of the act or omission?

- volunteer's capacity to carry out the work properly was significantly impaired by a recreational drug
- acting outside the scope of activities authorised by the community organisation
- acting contrary to instructions given by the community organisation

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go to Section D

Section D – Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?

If you have answered all the questions in sections A, B and C, and the answer does not result in 'go to section E', the protection under the ACT Wrongs Act is likely to apply to volunteers engaged by your organisation. If you are in doubt, seek legal advice. The volunteer will need their own, independent legal advice if legal action is started against them.

If your volunteers are protected (that is, all the tests set out above have been met), they don't incur personal civil liability as a result of performing community work organised by your community organisation.

This means a volunteer, who caused personal injury, property damage or financial loss to a person as a result of the volunteer's own action or failure to act, will not be personally liable to pay any compensation to that person.

Instead, the liability of a protected volunteer will be transferred to the organisation the volunteer was performing the community work for, and the injured party would be able to sue the community organisation (rather than the volunteer) for any injury, damage or loss caused by the volunteer.

Section E – Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?

If your volunteers are not protected by the provisions of the ACT Wrongs Act, your volunteers remain personally liable for their actions. They may be either sued individually or joined to an action against your community organisation, for their acts and omissions while performing community work.

**Note – volunteers are critical to the work of community organisations**

Volunteers are a critical element to the work that many not-for-profit community organisations do. The circumstances when a volunteer is found to be personally liable are extremely rare, and in most instances, volunteers are found to be doing the right thing.

The potential for liability should not be a reason not to engage volunteers, and it's most important that organisations are aware of the risks and put measures in place to prevent incidents from occurring.



Tasmania – checklist

Are your volunteers protected against personal liability under the Civil Liability Act?

This checklist provides a simple guide to help a Tasmanian community organisation to:

- work out if its volunteers are protected under the provisions of the [Civil Liability Act 2002 \(Tas\)](#) (**Tas Civil Liability Act**), and
- understand when it could be held liable (legally responsible) for the actions of its volunteers



Read this checklist together with the information in this part of the guide about safety, negligence, risk management and your volunteers, including the circumstances in which your organisation could be legally responsible for the actions of your volunteers.



How to use this checklist

To be protected under the Tas Civil Liability Act, a volunteer must meet threshold requirements.

These requirements, and questions to help your organisation assess whether a volunteer may be covered, are set out below.

Start by answering the questions in Sections A, B and C. You will then be directed to:

- Section D ‘Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?’, or
- Section E ‘Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?’

Section A – Do your volunteers meet the requirements for protection?

Question 1

Has the community work been done by a ‘volunteer’?

The Tas Civil Liability Act defines a ‘volunteer’ as a person who does community work on a voluntary basis.

The Tas Civil Liability Act says that a person is considered to work on a voluntary basis if they receive:

- no remuneration for the work other than:
 - remuneration that would have been received whether or not they did that work (for example, a person who is in paid employment with another organisation, but is released from that employment to undertake voluntary work) or
 - reimbursement for reasonable out-of-pocket expenses, or
- remuneration for the work that is not greater than the amount prescribed by regulations of the Tas Civil Liability Act.



Example

Fred is employed by B Pty Ltd as a gardener. B Pty Ltd encourages its staff to volunteer their services to Community House Inc (a Tasmanian incorporated association), which is adjacent to their business premises. B Pty Ltd allows their staff to volunteer for one day a month at Community House Inc on full pay. Fred, as part of the scheme, tends the Community House's garden one day each month while being paid by his employer. Fred is still regarded as a volunteer for the purposes of the Civil Liability Act while performing services for Community House Inc. Although he is paid as an employee, this is not linked to his volunteering at Community House Inc. He would be paid whether he volunteered or not.

Question 1: check list

To be entitled to protection the work must be performed by someone who satisfies the legal definition of 'volunteer'. Was the community work done on a voluntary basis?

- Yes – go to Question 2
- No – go to Section E

Question 2
Is your organisation a 'community organisation'?

For the volunteer to be entitled to the protection, your organisation must meet the definition of 'community organisation' in the Tas Civil Liability Act.

Your organisation will meet the definition if it organises the doing of community work by volunteers (see question 3) and you fit into one of the categories listed in the checklist for Question 2 below.



Caution

The volunteer protection provisions of the Tas Civil Liability Act are unlikely to apply to unincorporated community groups. This means there is a strong chance that volunteers who are involved in an unincorporated community group will be liable for their own actions.



For more information on the difference between unincorporated and incorporated community groups see our fact sheet ['What is incorporation and does our group need to incorporate?'](#)

**Question 2: check list**

Does your organisation fit into one of the following categories?

- a State Service Agency or statutory authority
- an incorporated association under the *Associations Incorporation Act 1964* (Tas)
- a council
- a body corporate (such as a company limited by guarantee)

If ANY apply go to Question 3

If NONE apply go to Section E

Question 3

Is the work being done by the volunteer 'community work'?

The protection under the Tas Civil Liability Act applies to a volunteer when they are doing 'community work' – the focus is on the purpose of the volunteer's activity, not the overall purpose of the organisation. Whether a volunteer is performing 'community work' will depend on what work the volunteer is actually doing, rather than the objects of the organisation they are doing the work for.

Community work is broadly defined as work organised by a community organisation for any of the purposes listed in the below checklist.

Regulations to the Tas Civil Liability Act can also specify that certain types of work do or don't constitute community work.

**Caution**

Some of the fields of community work set out below have a technical legal meaning (for example, charitable purposes). You may need to seek legal advice about whether the work falls into one of these categories. For further information on what types of activities may be considered to be charitable, see to our webpage on [registering as a charity](#).

Question 3: check list

Community work is done for one or more of the following purposes:

- religious, educational, charitable or benevolent
- promoting or encouraging literature, science or the arts
- sport, recreation or amusement
- caring for, treating or otherwise assisting people who need assistance because of a physical or mental disability or condition
- conserving or protecting the environment
- promoting or preserving historical or cultural heritage
- establishing, carrying on or improving a community, social or cultural centre
- promoting the interests of a local community
- political

If ANY apply go to Question 4

If NONE apply go to Section E

**Question 4**

Has the community work been 'organised' by a community organisation?

A volunteer is protected if they carried out community work that is 'organised' by the community organisation. The definition of 'organised' in the Tas Civil Liability Act includes work that is 'directed' or 'supervised' by a community organisation, but this is non-exhaustive and may extend to situations where there are no specific directions or supervision given, for example, where volunteers are given a general discretion to organise a fundraising event.

However, the protection does not extend to spontaneous acts of volunteers or activities the organisation has not authorised (see Section C below).

For example, if your organisation trains a person to use a machine and directs that person to use it, they will be performing work organised by your organisation. A person who starts working without approval or direction from your organisation would not be performing work organised by your organisation.

Question 4: check list

Was the work performed by the volunteer organised, directed or supervised by the community organisation?

- Yes - go to Question 5
- No - go to Section E

Section B – Has civil liability been incurred?

Question 5

Was the liability incurred a civil offence?

The protection is only afforded for civil liabilities. A volunteer will not be protected from liability for criminal actions (offences by a person against the state) while volunteering. This includes traffic infringements as well as more serious crimes. For example, if a volunteer physically assaults someone while they are volunteering, this may result in criminal charges and possible criminal compensation. The Civil Liability Act won't protect the volunteer from criminal liability in this situation.

Question 5: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer for an act or omission that constitutes a civil liability (for example, negligence causing physical injury) and not an act or omission that would (on the balance of probabilities) constitute a criminal offence (for example, stealing or assault)?

- Yes – go to Question 6
- No – go to Section E

Question 6

Is the civil liability included in the protection provisions?

Certain types of civil liability are excluded from the protection provisions. A volunteer will not be protected in certain civil proceedings if:

- if the volunteer is sued for defamation, or
- if the volunteer has a car accident while volunteering which results in the death or personal injury of another person. In this case, any liability for compensation for personal injury (including death) to third parties under the *Motor Accidents (Liabilities and Compensation) Act 1973 (Tas)* is excluded (as this is covered by the compulsory third party insurance that is included in the registration costs of a vehicle)

**Question 6: check list**

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer one of the following types?

- Liability for defamation
- Liability for personal injury (including death) due to a motor vehicle accident where that liability should have been covered by third-party insurance

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go Section C

Section C – When does the protection not apply to volunteers?

A volunteer is not automatically protected by meeting the threshold requirements of the legislation outlined in Section A and B. There are specific situations where the protection will not apply. These situations are listed below.

Question 7

Is the volunteer performing community work as a part of a court order or fine repayment scheme?

A person doing work under an order imposed by a court is not a volunteer under the Tas Civil Liability Act definition.

Although work under a fine repayment scheme is not specifically excluded by the Act, it is unlikely that such work would be considered 'voluntary' as the participant will receive benefit in the form of their debt being cancelled or reduced.

Question 7: check list

Is the volunteer performing the community work doing so under a court order or fine repayment scheme?

- Yes – go to Section E**
- No – go to Question 8**

**Caution**

Organisations working with individuals under court orders or fine repayment schemes will need to carefully manage their own risks. Speak to the relevant government department and advise the individuals to consider whether there is insurance covering their participation.

Question 8

Were the volunteer's actions (or failure to act) done in 'good faith'?

The volunteer's actions (or omissions) must have been done in 'good faith'. To act in good faith has been defined as acting honestly and without fraud. Where a volunteer endeavours to act in the best interests of the community organisation and is not involved in any dishonest or fraudulent behaviour, the volunteer is taken to be acting in good faith.



Example – ‘in good faith’

A volunteer attends a community sports day to help with minor first aid. A child falls and fractures their arm, and as a result of the volunteer’s care, their injury is worsened. The volunteer will be acting in good faith if they were trying to help the injured person and believed that was the correct first aid action. However, they will not be acting in good faith if they gave this assistance to impress their friend when they knew they had no knowledge of what first aid action to take.

Question 8: check list

At the time of the act or omission was the volunteer acting in good faith?

- Yes they were acting in good faith – go to Question 9
- No they were not acting in good faith – go to Section E

Question 9

Does an exception apply?

Even if a person is a volunteer and they have been doing community work organised by a community organisation, there are exceptions set out under the Tas Civil Liability Act. In general, a volunteer will not be protected where:

- the volunteer knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that at the relevant times they were acting:
 - outside the scope of the community work organised by the community organisation, or
 - contrary to any instructions given by the community organisation, or
- the volunteer’s ability to do the community work in a proper manner was, at the relevant times, significantly impaired by alcohol or drugs.

There are specific legal definitions and interpretations of many of the terms used in these exceptions (for example, ‘ought reasonably to have known’, ‘drugs’, ‘alcohol’ and ‘significantly impaired’). If potentially relevant, your organisation may need to seek legal advice about these issues.



Example

A person volunteers at a community sports day and is instructed to assist with refreshments only. The volunteer starts to help with marshalling participants without instruction to do so. An injury occurs as a result of the volunteer’s marshalling activities. As the volunteer was acting contrary to instructions, it’s likely that an exception applies and that the volunteer will not be protected from liability.

**Question 9: check list**

Did any of the following apply to the volunteer at the time of the act or omission?

- volunteer's ability to exercise reasonable care and skill was significantly impaired as a result of voluntarily consuming alcohol or a drug
- acting outside the scope of community work organised by the community organisation
- acting contrary to instructions given by the community organisation

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go to Section D

Section D – Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?

If you have answered all the questions in sections A, B and C, and the answer does not result in 'go to section E', the protection under the Tas Civil Liability Act is likely to apply to volunteers engaged by your organisation. If you are in doubt, seek legal advice. The volunteer will need their own, independent legal advice if legal action is started against them.

If your volunteers are protected (that is, all the tests set out above have been met), they don't incur personal civil liability as a result of performing community work organised by your community organisation.

This means a volunteer, who caused personal injury, property damage or financial loss to a person as a result of the volunteer's own action or failure to act, will not be personally liable to pay any compensation to that person.

Instead, the liability of a protected volunteer will be transferred to the organisation the volunteer was performing the community work for, and the injured party would be able to sue the community organisation (rather than the volunteer) for any injury, damage or loss caused by the volunteer.

Section E – Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?

If your volunteers are not protected by the provisions of the Tas Civil Liability Act, your volunteers remain personally liable for their actions. They may be either sued individually or joined to an action against your community organisation, for their acts and omissions while performing community work.

**Note – volunteers are critical to the work of community organisations**

Volunteers are a critical element to the work that many not-for-profit community organisations do. The circumstances when a volunteer is found to be personally liable are extremely rare, and in most instances, volunteers are found to be doing the right thing.

The potential for liability should not be a reason not to engage volunteers, and it's most important that organisations are aware of the risks and put measures in place to prevent incidents from occurring.



Northern Territory – checklist

Are your volunteers protected against personal liability under the Personal Injuries Act?

This checklist provides a simple guide to help a Northern Territory community organisation:

- work out if its volunteers are protected under the provisions of the *Personal Injuries (Liabilities and Damages) Act 2003 (NT) (NT Personal Injuries Act)*, and
- understand when it could be held liable (legally responsible) for the actions of its volunteers



Read this checklist together with the information in this part of the guide about safety, negligence, risk management and your volunteers, including the circumstances in which your organisation could be legally responsible for the actions of your volunteers.



How to use this checklist

To be protected under the NT Personal Injuries Act, a volunteer must meet threshold requirements.

These requirements, and questions to help your organisation assess whether a volunteer may be covered, are set out below.

Start by answering the questions in Sections A, B and C. You will then be directed to:

- Section D ‘Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?’, or
- Section E ‘Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?’

Section A – Do your volunteers meet the requirements for protection?

Question 1

Has the community work been done by a ‘volunteer’?

The NT Personal Injuries Act defines a ‘volunteer’ as a person doing community work for a community organisation (these terms are discussed below) who receives no remuneration for the work other than:

- remuneration that would have been received whether or not they did that work (for example, a person who is in paid employment with another organisation, but is released from that employment to undertake voluntary work)
- reimbursement for reasonable out-of-pocket expenses, or
- remuneration for the work not greater than the amount prescribed by the regulations of the NT Personal Injuries Act



Example

Fred is employed by B Pty Ltd as a gardener. B Pty Ltd encourages its staff to volunteer their services to Community House Inc (a Territory registered body corporate), which is adjacent to their business premises. B Pty Ltd allows their staff to volunteer for one day a month at Community House Inc on full pay. Fred, as part of the scheme, tends the Community House's garden one day each month while being paid by his employer. Fred is still regarded as a volunteer for the purposes of the NT Personal Injuries Act while performing services for Community House Inc. Although he is paid as an employee, this is not linked to his volunteering at Community House Inc. He would be paid whether he

Question 1: check list

To be entitled to protection the work must be performed by someone who satisfies the legal definition of 'volunteer'. Was the community work done on a voluntary basis?

- Yes – go to Question 2**
- No – go to Section E**

Question 2
Is your organisation a 'community organisation'?

For the volunteer to be entitled to the protection, your organisation must meet the definition of 'community organisation' in the NT Personal Injuries Act.

Your organisation will meet the definition if it organises, directs or supervises 'community work' (see Question 3) done by volunteers and fits into one of the categories listed in the checklist for Question 2 below.



Caution

The volunteer protection provisions of the NT Personal Injuries Act are unlikely to apply to an unincorporated community group unless it's a religious body. This means there is a strong chance volunteers who are involved in an unincorporated community group will be liable for their own actions.



For more information on the difference between unincorporated and incorporated community groups see our fact sheet '[What is incorporation and does our group need to incorporate?](#)'

**Question 2: check list**

Does your organisation fit into one of the following categories?

- a religious body
- a body corporate (for example, a company limited by guarantee or an incorporated association)
- an Agency or department of the Territory

If ANY apply go to Question 3

If NONE apply go to Section E

Question 3

Is the work being done by the volunteer 'community work'?

The protection under the NT Personal Injuries Act applies to a volunteer when they are doing 'community work' – the focus is on the purpose of the volunteer's activity, not the overall purpose of the organisation. Whether a volunteer is performing 'community work' will depend on what work the volunteer is actually doing, rather than the objects of the organisation they are doing the work for.

Community work is broadly defined as work organised by a community organisation for any of the purposes listed in the below checklist.

The regulations to the NT Personal Injuries Act can also specify that certain types of work constitute community work.

**Caution**

Some of the fields of community work set out below have a technical legal meaning (for example, charitable purposes). You may need to seek legal advice about whether the work falls into one of these categories. For further information on what types of activities may be considered to be charitable, see our webpage on [registering as a charity](#).

Question 3: check list

Community work is done for one or more of the following purposes:

- religious, educational, charitable or benevolent
- promoting or encouraging literature, science or the arts
- sport, recreation or amusement
- conserving or protecting the environment
- establishing, carrying on or improving a community, social or cultural centre
- promoting the interests of a local community
- political

If ANY apply go to Question 4

If NONE apply go to Section E

**Question 4****Was the volunteer doing community work for the community organisation?**

A volunteer is protected if their action (or failure to act) took place while they were doing community work for the community organisation. This wording is quite broad and could, in theory, encompass tasks that the volunteer was not asked to do but decided to do of their own accord.

However, the volunteer will not be protected if they acted without authority or contrary to instructions (see Section C below).

For example, if your organisation trains a person to use a machine and directs that person to use it, they will be performing work organised by your organisation. A person who starts working without approval or direction from your organisation would not be performing work organised by your organisation.

Question 4: check list

The work done must have been community work for a community organisation. Was the work performed by the volunteer for the community organisation?

- Yes - go to Question 5
- No - go to Section E

Section B – Has civil liability been incurred?

Question 5**Was the liability incurred a civil liability?**

The protection is only afforded for civil liabilities. A volunteer will not be protected from liability for criminal actions (offences by a person against the state) while volunteering. This includes traffic infringements as well as more serious crimes.

For example, if a volunteer physically assaults someone while they are volunteering, this may result in criminal charges and possible criminal compensation. The NT Personal Injuries Act won't protect the volunteer from criminal liability in this situation.

Question 5: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer for an act or omission that constitutes a civil liability (for example, negligence causing physical injury) and not an act or omission that would (on the balance of probabilities) constitute a criminal offence (for example, stealing or assault)?

- Yes – go to Question 6
- No – go to Section E

Question 6**Is the civil liability included in the protection provisions?**

Certain types of civil liability are excluded from the protection provisions. A volunteer will not be protected under the NT Personal Injuries Act in certain civil proceedings for personal injury if the volunteer has a car accident while volunteering. In this case, any liability for compensation for personal injury to third parties under the *Motor Accidents (Compensation) Act 1979 (NT)* is excluded (as this is covered by the compulsory third party insurance that is included in the registration costs of a vehicle).

Question 6: check list

Was the liability incurred by the volunteer of the following type?

- Liability for personal injury due to a motor vehicle accident where that liability should have been covered by third-party insurance

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go Section C



Section C – When does the protection not apply to volunteers?

A volunteer is not automatically protected by meeting the threshold requirements of the legislation outlined in Section A and B. There are specific situations where the protection will not apply. These situations are listed below.

Question 7

Is the volunteer performing community work as a part of a court order or fine repayment scheme?

A person doing work under a community work order made under the *Sentencing Act 1995 (NT)*, *Youth Justice Act 2005 (NT)* or *Fines and Penalties (Recovery) Act 2001 (NT)* is not a volunteer under the NT Personal Injuries Act.

Question 7: check list

Is the volunteer performing the community work doing so under a court order or fine repayment scheme?

- Yes – go to Section E
- No – go to Question 8



Caution

Organisations working with individuals under court orders or fine repayment schemes will need to carefully manage their own risks. Speak to the relevant government department and advise the individuals to consider whether there is insurance covering their participation.

Question 8

Were the volunteer's actions (or failure to act) done in 'good faith' and 'without recklessness'?

Certain acts of the volunteer will exclude their ability to claim protection. The volunteer's actions (or failure to act) must have been done in 'good faith' and 'without recklessness'. Generally, to act in good faith is to act honestly and without fraud. Where a volunteer endeavours to act in the best interests of the community organisation and is not involved in any dishonest or fraudulent behaviour, the volunteer is taken to be acting in good faith.

The term 'recklessness' has an imprecise definition in the law but generally means that a person knew or should have known that their action was likely to cause harm. Your organisation may need to seek legal advice about this if relevant.



Example – ‘in good faith’

A volunteer attends a community sports day to help with minor first aid. A child falls and fractures their arm, and as a result of the volunteer’s care, their injury is worsened. The volunteer will be acting in good faith if they were trying to help the injured person and believed that was the correct first aid action. However, they will not be acting in good faith if they gave this assistance to impress their friend when they knew they had no knowledge of what first aid action to take.

Example – ‘without recklessness’

A person volunteers their time by running sports sessions for children. An accident occurs due to faulty sports equipment. The volunteer will have acted recklessly if they were aware that there was a problem with their equipment. The volunteer will not be reckless if their equipment had been checked recently and they had no knowledge of the problem

Question 8: check list

At the time of the act or omission was the volunteer acting in good faith and without recklessness?

- Yes they were acting in good faith and without recklessness – go to Question 9**
- No they were not acting in good faith, or they were acting recklessly – go to Section E**

Question 9 Does an exception apply?

Certain acts of the volunteer will exclude their ability to claim protection. Even if a person is a volunteer and they have been doing community work organised, directed or supervised by a community organisation, there are exceptions set out under the NT Personal Injuries Act. In general, a volunteer will not be protected where:

- the volunteer knew, or ought reasonably to have known, that they were acting outside the scope of their authority, or contrary to the instructions of the community organisation, or
- the volunteer did the act (or failed to act) while intoxicated

There are specific legal definitions and interpretations of many of the terms used in these exceptions (for example, ‘ought reasonably to have known’ and ‘intoxicated’). If potentially relevant, your organisation may need to seek legal advice about these issues.



Example

A person volunteers at a community sports day and is instructed to assist with refreshments only. The volunteer starts to help with marshalling participants without instruction to do so. An injury occurs as a result of the volunteer’s marshalling activities. As the volunteer was acting contrary to instructions, it’s likely that an exception applies and that the volunteer will not be protected from liability.

**Question 9: check list**

Did any of the following apply to the volunteer at the time of the act or omission?

- volunteer did the act while intoxicated
- acting outside the scope of authority
- acting contrary to instructions given by the community organisation

If ANY apply go to Section E

If NONE apply go to Section D

Section D – Your volunteers are likely protected; what does this mean?

If you have answered all the questions in sections A, B and C, and the answer does not result in 'go to section E', the protection under the NT Personal Injuries Act is likely to apply to volunteers engaged by your organisation. If you are in doubt, seek legal advice. The volunteer will need their own, independent legal advice if legal action is started against them.

If your volunteers are protected (that is, all the tests set out above have been met), they don't incur personal civil liability as a result of performing community work organised by your community organisation.

This means a volunteer, who caused personal injury, property damage or financial loss to a person as a result of the volunteer's own action or failure to act, will not be personally liable to pay any compensation to that person.

Instead, the liability of a protected volunteer will be transferred to the organisation the volunteer was performing the community work for, and the injured party would be able to sue the community organisation (rather than the volunteer) for any injury, damage or loss caused by the volunteer.

Section E – Your volunteers may not be protected; what does this mean?

If your volunteers are not protected by the provisions of the NT Personal Injuries Act, your volunteers remain personally liable for their actions. They may be either sued individually or joined to an action against your community organisation, for their acts and omissions while performing community work.

**Note – volunteers are critical to the work of community organisations**

Volunteers are a critical element to the work that many not-for-profit community organisations do. The circumstances when a volunteer is found to be personally liable are extremely rare, and in most instances, volunteers are found to be doing the right thing.

The potential for liability should not be a reason not to engage volunteers, and it's most important that organisations are aware of the risks and put measures in place to prevent incidents from occurring.



National Volunteering Guide Part 5

Workplace behaviour

Feb 2024



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Part 5

Workplace behaviour

Volunteers and unlawful workplace behaviour



This part covers:

- ▶ how sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying and victimisation laws apply to volunteers
- ▶ making a complaint under discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying and victimisation laws

This part of the guide considers how sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying and victimisation laws apply to volunteers in the workplace.



Note – negligence and work health and safety laws

Your organisation has legal responsibility for the actions of its volunteers under negligence and work health and safety laws.

An organisation's responsibilities under these laws are relevant to managing unlawful workplace behaviours. For example, where an organisation fails to meet its duty to ensure the health and safety of a client, such as being aware of a volunteer sexually harassing a client but not doing anything to stop the sexual harassment, there will be an impact on the organisation (including reputational and financial damage) and the client (for example, physical and or psychological harm).

For more information about an organisation's responsibilities under negligence and work health and safety laws, see part 4 of this guide.



Do sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying and victimisation laws apply to volunteers in the workplace?

The tables below set out Commonwealth, state and territory legislation relevant to sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying and victimisation and summarises the extent to which these laws apply to volunteers.

Commonwealth			
Sexual harassment	Discrimination	Bullying	Victimisation
<p><u>Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)</u></p> <p><u>Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)</u></p>	<p><u>Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)</u></p> <p><u>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)</u></p> <p><u>Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)</u></p> <p><u>Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)</u></p>	<p><u>Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)</u></p>	<p><u>Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)</u></p> <p><u>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)</u></p> <p><u>Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)</u></p> <p><u>Sex Discrimination Act 1984(Cth)</u></p> <p><u>Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)</u></p>
<p>This applies to volunteers unless the organisation has no employees. See 'sexual harassment' below</p>	<p>These may apply to volunteers in certain circumstances – see 'discrimination' below</p>	<p>This applies to volunteers unless the organisation has no employees or is not a constitutionally covered organisation – see 'bullying' below</p>	<p>These may apply to volunteers in certain circumstances – see 'victimisation' below</p>
Australian Capital Territory			
Sexual harassment	Discrimination	Bullying	Victimisation
<p><u>Discrimination Act 1991 (ACT)</u></p>	<p><u>Discrimination Act 1991 (ACT)</u></p>	<p><u>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (ACT)</u></p>	<p><u>Discrimination Act 1991 (ACT)</u></p>
<p>✓ This applies to volunteers</p>	<p>✓ This applies to volunteers</p>	<p>This applies to volunteers if the organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> meets the definition of a 'person conducting a business or undertaking', and doesn't meet the definition of a 'volunteer association' <p>See 'bullying' below</p>	<p>✓ This applies to volunteers</p>



New South Wales			
Sexual harassment	Discrimination	Bullying	Victimisation
<u>Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)</u>	<u>Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)</u>	<u>Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)</u>
<p>✓ This applies to volunteers</p>	<p>This may apply to volunteers in certain circumstances – see the discrimination section of this part of the guide</p>	<p>This applies to volunteers if the organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> meets the definition of a ‘person conducting a business or undertaking’, and doesn’t meet the definition of a ‘volunteer association’ <p>See the bullying section of this part of the guide</p>	<p>These may apply to volunteers in certain circumstances – see the victimisation section of this part of the guide</p>

Northern Territory			
Sexual harassment	Discrimination	Bullying	Victimisation
<u>Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 (NT)</u>	<u>Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 (NT)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act 2011 (NT)</u>	<u>Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 (NT)</u>
<p>New laws came into force on 3 July 2023 that apply to volunteers.</p>	<p>New laws came into force on 3 July 2023 that apply to volunteers.</p>	<p>This applies to volunteers if the organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> meets the definition of a ‘person conducting a business or undertaking’, and doesn’t meet the definition of a ‘volunteer association’ <p>See ‘bullying’ below</p>	<p>New laws came into force on 3 July 2023 that apply to volunteers.</p>



Queensland			
Sexual harassment	Discrimination	Bullying	Victimisation
<u><i>Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (QLD)</i></u>	<u><i>Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (QLD)</i></u>	<u><i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (QLD)</i></u>	<u><i>Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (QLD)</i></u>
✓ This applies to volunteers	✓ This applies to volunteers	This applies to volunteers if the organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meets the definition of a 'person conducting a business or undertaking', and • doesn't meet the definition of a 'volunteer association' See 'bullying' below	✓ This applies to volunteers

South Australia			
Sexual harassment	Discrimination	Bullying	Victimisation
<u><i>Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)</i></u>	<u><i>Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)</i></u>	<u><i>Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (SA)</i></u>	<u><i>Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)</i></u>
✓ This applies to volunteers	✓ This applies to volunteers	This applies to volunteers if the organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meets the definition of a 'person conducting a business or undertaking', and • doesn't meet the definition of a 'volunteer association' See 'bullying' below	✓ This applies to volunteers



Tasmania			
Sexual harassment	Discrimination	Bullying	Victimisation
<u>Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (Tas)</u>	<u>Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (Tas)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (Tas)</u>	<u>Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (Tas)</u>
✓ This applies to volunteers	✓ This applies to volunteers	This applies to volunteers if the organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meets the definition of a 'person conducting a business or undertaking', and • doesn't meet the definition of a 'volunteer association' See 'bullying' below	✓ This applies to volunteers

Western Australia			
Sexual harassment	Discrimination	Bullying	Victimisation
<u>Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)</u>	<u>Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)</u>	<u>Work Health and Safety Act 2020 (WA)</u>	<u>Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)</u>
This doesn't apply to volunteers	This doesn't apply to volunteers	This applies to volunteers if the organisation: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • meets the definition of a 'person conducting a business or undertaking', and • doesn't meet the definition of a 'volunteer association' See 'bullying' below	This may apply to volunteers in certain circumstances - see the victimisation section of this part of the guide



Victoria			
Sexual harassment	Discrimination	Bullying	Victimisation
<u><i>Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)</i></u>	<u><i>Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)</i></u>	<u><i>Occupational Health and Safety Act 2004 (Vic)</i></u>	<u><i>Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)</i></u>
<p>✓ This applies to volunteers</p>	<p>This may apply to volunteers - see 'discrimination' below</p>	<p>This applies to volunteers if the organisation:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • is an 'employer' (that is, they have employees), or • manages or controls a 'workplace' <p>See 'bullying' below</p>	<p>This may apply to volunteers - see the victimisation section of this part of the guide</p>



Sexual harassment

Sexual harassment laws exist at both the state and federal level. Where the federal and a state or territory law relating to sexual harassment overlap, you must comply with both.



What is sexual harassment?

The definition of sexual harassment differs slightly between the federal laws and the laws in each state and territory.

Generally, sexual harassment occurs when the following two factors are met:

- a person makes unwelcome sexual advances, requests sexual favours, makes unsolicited acts of physical intimacy, or physical contact of a sexual nature or remarks with sexual connotations about another person, and
- the behaviour is intended, or could reasonably be expected, to offend, humiliate or intimidate the other person



Examples of conduct – sexual harassment

Examples of conduct which is likely to constitute sexual harassment include:

- unwelcome physical touching
- staring or leering in a sexual manner
- suggestive comments or jokes
- unwanted requests to go out on dates
- requests for sexual favours
- emailing pornography or rude jokes
- sending sexually explicit emails, texts or posts on social networking sites
- intrusive questions about a person's private life or body
- displaying posters, magazines or screen savers of a sexual nature



Example – sexual harassment

Peter volunteers with an environmental organisation. He leads a team of up to 10 other volunteers and they do door knocking, phone call campaigns and street petitions.

Peter is very friendly with his team and tries to create a very close team atmosphere. He uses words like 'babe' and 'doll' when talking to female members of the team. He also often winks and makes other sexually suggestive facial expressions at a few members of the team – male and female. Some team members are very uncomfortable with Peter's behaviour. One female team member has even said to Peter that she really doesn't like the pet names he uses and his other behaviour isn't appropriate. Peter laughed this off.

Peter's behaviour is likely to constitute sexual harassment. Peter's behaviour has sexual connotations and, particularly for the team member who expressed her discomfort, is unwelcome and could reasonably be expected to offend, humiliate or intimidate others.



Note – the #metoo movement

Sexual harassment in the workplace has been at the forefront of public discussion over the past few years, thanks to the worldwide #metoo and #TimesUp movements. Along with media reports of high profile people being alleged to have assaulted their colleagues in for-profit workplaces (and subsequent criminal charges and findings of guilt) there have also been allegations in not-for-profit workplaces.

State and federal courts decisions have awarded damages to victims of sexual harassment in excess of \$100,000 (previously, awards for damages were generally in the range of \$12,000 to \$20,000). More recent decisions have followed the land mark case of *Richardson v Oracle Pty Ltd* [2014] FCAFC 82, in which the Full Federal Court increased a damages award from \$18,000 to \$130,000 and recognised that 'community attitudes regarding the impact of sexual harassment [have] changed, in particular that the adverse consequences ... can extend to loss of employment and career; severe psychological illness; and relationship breakdown'.

In the 2020 case of *Hughes trading as Beesley and Hughes Lawyers v Hill* [2020] FCAFC 126, a senior lawyer had made inappropriate sexual advances to a paralegal working at the firm and then prevented her from making an internal complaint. At trial, the paralegal was awarded \$170,000 in damages against the law firm.



What is harassment on the ground of sex?

'Sex' in this context is best defined as the gender identity, however expressed, of the person being discriminated against.

Harassment on the ground of sex takes place when a person engages in unwelcome conduct of a seriously demeaning nature, because of another person's sex or characteristic of their sex, in circumstances in which a reasonable person would have anticipated the possibility that the person harassed would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.



Examples of conduct – harassment on the ground of sex

Examples of conduct from the [Workplace Gender Equality Agency \(WGEA\)](#) which are likely to constitute sex-based harassment include:

- commenting offensively about a person because of their gender
- ignoring or isolating a person because of their gender
- making repeated sexual invitations to a person who has declined before
- making sexual gestures
- displaying sexist material in the workplace
- asking inappropriate sexual questions
- sexual touching, kissing or staring
- sexual assault



Sexual harassment laws and your organisation's obligations

Under these laws (where they apply):

- sexual harassment of volunteers, while they are doing their volunteer work, is unlawful
- volunteers must not sexually harass others in the workplace (including staff, volunteers, clients, and members of the public)
- volunteers in your volunteer involving organisation have the same legal rights and protections against sexual harassment as employees
- your organisation could be liable (legally responsible) for any harm, injury or loss as a result of the actions of your volunteers (this 'vicarious liability' can generally be avoided if your organisation takes all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment, and
- your organisation may have a positive duty to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate sexual harassment from the workplace.



Tip – best practice

Regardless whether the sexual harassment laws apply to your organisation and its volunteers (or if they only apply in limited circumstances, or only to your employees), it's best practice, as much as reasonably practicable, to comply with the laws.

Not only is this favourable to your volunteers (and workers, clients and members of the public in contact with your organisation), it will also help prevent any reputational or other damage to your organisation that may arise from a complaint of sexual harassment.

Along with duties that your organisation may owe under harassment laws, your organisation may also have duties under:

- work health and safety laws to provide a both a workplace free from physical and psychological harm, and
- the law of negligence, which includes a duty to take reasonable care to avoid exposing your workers, including volunteers, to reasonably foreseeable risks of injury which could include harm caused by sexual harassment

Federal sexual harassment laws

At the federal level, the [Sex Discrimination Act 1984 \(Cth\)](#) (**Sex Discrimination Act**) and the [Fair Work Act 2009 \(Cth\)](#) (**Fair Work Act**) protect volunteers in certain circumstances.

From 11 September 2021, the 'worker' definition, which includes volunteers, was adopted from the [Work Health and Safety Act 2011\(Cth\)](#) (**Work Health and Safety Act**) into the Sex Discrimination Act. As a result, it is now unlawful for a worker or persons conducting a business or undertaking (**PCBU**), to harass another worker, or a person who is seeking to become a worker, in that business or undertaking, on the ground of sex. This law protects both volunteers and those seeking to become volunteers.

On 13 December 2022, amendments to both the Sex Discrimination Act and the Fair Work Act impose a positive duty on employers to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate, as far as possible, sexual harassment and certain discriminatory conduct.

This positive duty to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate sexual harassment from the workplace means taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing inappropriate workplace behaviour.

From 6 March 2023, under amendments to the [Fair Work Act](#):

- sexual harassment of persons seeking to become volunteers in a particular business or undertaking, is unlawful, and



- volunteers must not sexually harass another person where the other person is seeking to become a volunteer in a particular business or undertaking



Note – the positive duty to eliminate sexual harassment

Amendments to the Sex Discrimination Act have introduced a positive duty on employers and persons conducting a PCBU to take reasonable and proportionate measures to prevent and eliminate sexual harassment in places of work.

These amendments extend the protections to all paid and unpaid workers, including volunteers and interns engaged by an employer or PCBU. This duty is not imposed on volunteer associations (a volunteer association is entirely volunteer run and doesn't engage employees or contractors to carry out work on its behalf).

This means that most organisations are obliged to take proactive steps to prevent sexual harassment, as opposed to being simply reactive to individual complaints.

This duty is ongoing and requires employers to continually review their practices to ensure they are taking meaningful action to prevent harassment from occurring, including against volunteers.



Tips – taking positive steps to prevent sexual harassment in the workplace

- Develop and implement a policy on appropriate workplace behaviour, which makes it clear that sexual harassment is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. This policy should cover how the organisation will comply with laws about sexual harassment (where they apply).
- Make all workers (including volunteers) aware of:
 - the kind of behaviour that is unacceptable
 - the terms of the policy
 - what to do if they are subjected to harassment, and
 - what to do if the process for making a complaint does not resolve the matter
- Conduct training on appropriate workplace behaviour for incoming workers and refreshers for ongoing workers.
- Implement an appropriate screening process for volunteers to make sure you are not engaging a volunteer with a history of repeated sexual harassment (part 3 of this guide).
- Nominate a person to review and evaluate your organisation's compliance with the positive duty.
- Nominate a person, with sufficient authority to act on behalf of the organisation, who people can make complaints on inappropriate behaviour to.
- Implement a fair and transparent process for resolving complaints.

The Sex Discrimination Act has also been amended to provide volunteers (and others) protection from hostile workplace environments.



Note – hostile workplace environments

Under the Sex Discrimination Act, it is unlawful for a person to subject another person to a workplace environment that is hostile on the ground of sex (in this context, 'sex' refers to the gender identity, however described, to the other person).

A workplace environment will be hostile if it is offensive, intimidating or humiliating to a person because of two or more matters that relate to their sex or a characteristic of their sex, regardless of whether the sex or characteristic is the dominant or substantial reason.

A person will subject another person to a workplace environment that is hostile on the ground of sex if, while at work, the first person engages in conduct that a reasonable person (having regard to all the circumstances) would have anticipated might result in the workplace environment being offensive, intimidating or humiliating.

This conduct may include:

- commenting offensively about a person because of their gender
- ignoring or isolating a person because of their gender
- making repeated sexual invitations to a person who has previously declined such invitations
- making sexual gestures
- displaying sexist material in the workplace
- asking inappropriate sexual questions
- sexual touching, kissing or staring
- sexual assault

Volunteering within a specified area of public life.

In particular circumstances, the Sex Discrimination Act may also apply to volunteers where volunteering falls within a specified area of public life.

These areas of public life include:

- providing goods, services and facilities (see example, below), and
- carrying out a function under a federal law or for the purposes of a federal government program (see example, below) or by a member of a management committee of a club (in this context 'club' means an association of at least 30 people that funds the provision of facilities for the club and sells or supplies alcohol)

Even if the Sex Discrimination Act doesn't apply, or only applies in specified areas of public life, your organisation may still owe duties under other laws to protect your volunteers from sexual harassment (for example, under state and territory discrimination laws, work health and safety laws or negligence law).



Example – government programs (sexual harassment)

Greg and Ananya volunteer with an organisation that receives funding from the federal government as part of a federal program to support elderly people and assist them to stay living in their homes. Greg and Ananya go to clients' homes and assist with everyday tasks, and sometimes provide respite care for clients' carers. Greg is often flirtatious with female clients, frequently making comments about their physical appearance. He says he is paying them compliments and making them feel good about themselves. However, Ananya has observed that many clients feel uncomfortable when Greg behaves this way. Greg's behaviour has been prohibited under the Sex Discrimination Act because his role is for the purpose of delivering a federal government program. His behaviour constitutes an unwelcome sexual advance.



Example – goods, services or facilities (sexual harassment)

Sexual Health Awareness (SHA) is a charity that works to promote and increase sexual health knowledge and education for young people. SHA volunteers to go out to sexual health clinics and provide information pamphlets and free condoms to any patients who want them. Nathan is a regular volunteer for SHA. He tries to make jokes to patients who pick up pamphlets or condoms, but his jokes are generally of a sexual nature. Patients frequently feel very uncomfortable by Nathan's jokes, which they feel are in bad taste given the circumstances. Nathan's behaviour while providing these goods and services is very likely prohibited under sexual harassment laws. Nathan's jokes are remarks with sexual connotations and could be reasonably expected to offend, humiliate or intimidate others.

Legal consequences under the Fair Work Act

From 6 March 2023, the Fair Work Act allows a person (including volunteers) who claims they have been sexually harassed in the workplace, to apply to the Fair Work Commission for an order to stop the harassment.

If the person making an application to the Commission for a stop sexual harassment order remains engaged in the workplace, they may make an application up to 24 months after the relevant conduct is alleged to have taken place.

If the Commission is satisfied that:

- the aggrieved person has been sexually harassed, and
- there is a risk that they will continue to be harassed,

the Commission may make an order it considers appropriate to prevent further harassment.

The purpose of an order is for the worker to be able to continue their work free from the harassment. The order may require monitoring of behaviour, compliance and review of existing policies, further support and anything else the Commission considers appropriate in the circumstances.

The Commission may not make an order requiring payment of a monetary amount.

Without issuing a stop harassment order, the Commission may deal with a dispute through mediation, conciliation, making a recommendation or expressing an opinion.

If attempts to resolve the dispute are unsuccessful, the Commission may issue a certificate allowing (within 60 days of the certificate being issued):

- the parties to agree to deal with the dispute by arbitration in the Commission, or
- the aggrieved person to apply to have the dispute heard by the Federal Court or the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia

Under these changes to the Fair Work Act, multiple aggrieved persons can make an application so the Commission can deal with the aggrieved persons jointly. This can be both practical and efficient in cases involving a common perpetrator.

State and territory sexual harassment laws

Sexual harassment at the state and territory level is covered by the same laws that cover discrimination (see the table above). They apply explicitly to volunteers in the **Australian Capital Territory, New South Wales, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania, Victoria** and now the **Northern Territory**.

While the sexual harassment provisions in these laws are all slightly different, they generally provide (as outlined above) that sexual harassment is likely to occur in situations where:

- a person engages in unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature, and
- a reasonable person would have anticipated the possibility the other person would be offended, humiliated or intimidated by the behaviour

These laws are explained further below.



In **Western Australia**, it's unlikely the sexual harassment law applies to volunteers. However, your organisation may still owe duties under other laws to protect your volunteers from sexual harassment. For example, work health and safety laws or the common law.

Australian Capital Territory

Volunteers are covered by the [Discrimination Act 1991 \(ACT\)](#) (**ACT Discrimination Act**) under the definition of employment. The definition of employment includes an unpaid worker being a person who performs work for an employer for no remuneration.

Under the ACT Discrimination Act it is unlawful for:

- an employer to subject an employee (or volunteer), or a person seeking employment, to sexual harassment, or
- an employee (or volunteer) to subject a fellow employee (or volunteer), or a person seeking employment with the same employer, to sexual harassment

A person subjects someone else to sexual harassment if the person makes an unwelcome sexual advance, or an unwelcome request for sexual favours, to the other person or engages in other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in circumstances in which the other person reasonably feels offended, humiliated or intimidated.

The term 'conduct of a sexual nature' includes making a statement of a sexual nature to, or in the presence of, a person, whether the statement is made orally or in writing.

New South Wales

In relation to sexual harassment, the [Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 \(NSW\)](#) (**NSW Anti-Discrimination Act**) provides that the term 'workplace participant' includes a volunteer or unpaid trainee. It's unlawful under the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act for a volunteer to be sexually harassed by another person at the place that is a workplace of both those persons.

A person sexually harasses another person if:

- the person makes an unwelcome sexual advance, or an unwelcome request for sexual favours, to the other person, or
- the person engages in other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in relation to the other person,

in circumstances in which a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated that the other person would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.

Northern Territory

Under changes to the [Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 \(NT\)](#) (**NT Anti-Discrimination Act**), in force since 3 July 2023, the term 'work' now includes work performed by volunteers.

Section 4 of the NT Anti-Discrimination Act Work now defines work to include work carried out in any capacity and at any place, including as:

- an employee
- a contractor or subcontractor
- an employee of a contractor or subcontractor
- an employee of a labour hire company
- an outworker
- an apprentice or trainee
- a student or other person gaining work experience, whether formal or informal
- a volunteer or on another unpaid basis
- a statutory appointee
- part of a vocational training program or other occupational training or retraining program, or
- a person of a prescribed class



As volunteers are now covered by the NT Discrimination Act, organisations could be held vicariously liable (responsible) for sexual harassment by a worker carrying out functions in connection with their work. One way in which an organisation can help defend itself against liability is by proving it took reasonable steps to prevent the sexual harassment from occurring, for example, the provision of training, production of policies and evidence of their implementation. An organisation should take steps to prevent this behaviour and not wait for a complaint before addressing inappropriate workplace behaviour.

Queensland

Volunteers are protected under the [Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 \(QLD\)](#) (**QLD Anti-Discrimination Act**) from discrimination pursuant to the meaning of the term 'work'.

'Work' includes work:

- under a work experience arrangement
- vocational placement
- on a voluntary or unpaid basis
- by a person with an impairment in a sheltered workshop and under a guidance program
- vocational training program or other occupational training or retraining program.

Sexual harassment is prohibited under the QLD Anti-Discrimination Act and occurs where a person:

- subjects another person to an unsolicited act of physical intimacy
- makes an unsolicited demand or request (whether directly or by implication) for sexual favours from the other person
- makes a remark with sexual connotations relating to the other person, or
- engages in any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in relation to the other person,

with the intention of offending, humiliating or intimidating the other person or in circumstances where a reasonable person would have anticipated the possibility that the other person would be offended, humiliated or intimidated by the conduct.

Under the QLD Anti-Discrimination Act, organisations can be held vicariously liable (responsible) for sexual harassment by a worker carrying out functions in connection with their work. One way in which an organisation can help defend itself against liability is by proving it took reasonable steps to prevent the sexual harassment from occurring, for example, the provision of training, production of policies and evidence of their implementation. An organisation should take steps to prevent this behaviour and not wait for a complaint before addressing inappropriate workplace behaviour.

South Australia

Volunteers are protected by the [Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(SA\)](#) (**SA Equal Opportunity Act**) pursuant to the definitions of employee and employment, which include unpaid workers and unpaid work.

The SA Equal Opportunity Act makes it unlawful for a person to subject a volunteer who they work with to sexual harassment while at a place that is a workplace of both people or in circumstances where the person was, or ought reasonably to have been, aware that the other person was a fellow worker or seeking to become a fellow worker.

Under the SA Equal Opportunity Act, organisations can be held vicariously liable (responsible) for sexual harassment by an employee (including a volunteer) carrying out functions in connection with their work. One way in which an organisation can help defend itself against liability is by proving that it had appropriate policies in place at the time of the unlawful act, and that they took reasonable steps to enforce the policies. An organisation should take steps to prevent this behaviour and not wait for a complaint before addressing inappropriate workplace behaviour.

A person sexually harasses another if:

- the person makes an unwelcome sexual advance, or an unwelcome request for sexual favours, to the person harassed, or
- engages in other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in relation to the person harassed,



in circumstances in which a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated that the person harassed would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.

Tasmania

Volunteers are protected by the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (Tas)* (**Tas Anti-Discrimination Act**) pursuant to the definition of the term 'employment'. The definition of employment includes employment or occupation in any capacity, with or without remuneration.

The Tas Anti-Discrimination Act provides that a person must not sexually harass another person. Sexual harassment will take place if a person, in circumstances where a reasonable person having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated that the other person would be offended, humiliated, intimidated, insulted or ridiculed:

- subjects another person to an unsolicited act of physical contact of a sexual nature
- makes an unwelcome sexual advance or an unwelcome request for sexual favours to another person
- makes an unwelcome remark or statement with sexual connotations to another person or about another person in that person's presence
- makes any unwelcome gesture, action or comment of a sexual nature, or
- engages in conduct of a sexual nature in relation to another person that is offensive to that person

Victoria

The definition of 'employee' under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)* (**Vic Equal Opportunity Act**) includes, in relation to the prohibition of sexual harassment, unpaid workers and volunteers.

Under the Vic Equal Opportunity Act, it is unlawful for:

- an employer to sexually harass an employee, volunteer, or person seeking to become an employee or volunteer, or
- an employee or volunteer to sexually harass a fellow employee or volunteer, or a person seeking to become an employee or volunteer

Further, under the Vic Equal Opportunity Act, organisations have a positive duty to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate sexual harassment from the workplace. This means taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing inappropriate workplace behaviour.

The term 'sexual harassment' means:

- making an unwelcome sexual advance, or an unwelcome request for sexual favours, to another person, or
- engaging in any other unwelcome conduct of a sexual nature in relation to another person,

in circumstances where a reasonable person, having regard to all the circumstances, would have anticipated that the other person would be offended, humiliated or intimidated.

The term 'conduct of a sexual nature' can include:

- subjecting a person to any act of physical intimacy
- making, orally or in writing, any remark or statement with sexual connotations to a person or about a person in his or her presence, or
- making any gesture, action or comment of a sexual nature in a person's presence.

Western Australia

The definition of 'employment' in the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)* (**WA Equal Opportunity Act**) includes part time and temporary employment, work under a contract of service and work as a State employee.

Provisions relating to sexual harassment rely on 'employment' (and only apply in relation to specified areas of public life being education, employment and accommodation). Accordingly, volunteers are



unlikely to be covered by most provisions of the WA Equal Opportunity Act, including the sexual harassment provisions.



For more information, see:

- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, [volunteers and sexual harassment webpage](#)
- Australian Human Rights Commission, [Effectively preventing and responding to sexual harassment – a code of practice](#)
- Queensland Human Rights Commission, [resource on sexual harassment, including a sample Policy- discrimination and sexual harassment.](#)



Discrimination

Anti-discrimination laws exist at both the state and federal level. They may apply to your organisation's volunteers. At the federal level, anti-discrimination laws are found in a number of pieces of legislation that set out protected attributes such as age, race, disability and sex and protected areas of public life. All the states and territories have their own legislation (usually called anti-discrimination or equal opportunity legislation).

We refer to all these laws collectively as **anti-discrimination laws**. They are explained further below.

Along with duties that your organisation may owe under anti-discrimination laws, your organisation may have duties under work health and safety laws and under the law of negligence, which contains a duty to take reasonable care to avoid exposing your workers, including volunteers, to reasonably foreseeable risks of injury which could include harm caused by discrimination.



What is discrimination?

Under anti-discrimination laws, discrimination occurs when:

- a person is treated unfavourably because of a 'personal attribute' protected by law
- the treatment happens in an 'area of public life' protected by the law
- the treatment causes the person to be disadvantaged, and
- an exception does not apply

Discrimination can be:

- **direct** – when someone directly treats, or proposes to treat, another person less favourably than others because the person has one or more protected attributes
- **indirect** – when a person or business imposes, or proposes to impose, a condition or requirement that has, or is likely to have, the effect of disadvantaging another person because they have one or more protected attributes. The condition or requirement must not be reasonable in the circumstances.

Examples of discrimination

Discrimination of volunteers could occur in the recruitment process (see part 3 of this guide), or in other situations including not being given opportunities that other volunteers are given. Some further examples are below.



Note

While it is not clear in the law whether volunteers are protected from discrimination in the recruitment process, as a matter of best practice (and to protect your organisation from other risks such as reputational harm), your organisation should make sure it doesn't have discriminatory practices in the volunteer recruitment process.



Example – direct discrimination

Michael would like to volunteer at his local op shop and goes into the shop to see the manager to apply for a role. Mary, the manager, tells Michael that although he's clearly qualified to carry out the role, because the rest of the volunteers and staff at the shop are women, she doesn't think he will fit in and so will not be offered a volunteer position. Mary has discriminated against Michael based on his gender.



Example – indirect discrimination

Sarah is a hairdresser and is transgender. She only recently started publicly identifying as female. Sarah has volunteered for many years with an organisation called Trims for Change, which gives free haircuts to homeless people. Trims for Change has a policy that requires its volunteers to wear a uniform. The policy also provides that only one uniform per year will be provided to volunteers. The uniforms are gender specific – male volunteers wear a shirt and pants and female volunteers wear a dress. Sarah asked to be provided with the female uniform when she decided to publicly identify as female. Trims for Change refused, telling Sarah the policy only allowed one uniform per year for each volunteer.

The policy is likely to indirectly discriminate against Sarah and other transgender persons based on gender identity.



Example – reasonable indirect discrimination

Mandeep is Sikh and an avid cyclist. He wants to volunteer with an organisation that runs cycling programs for children to promote health and exercise. The organisation Mandeep applies to volunteer with has a policy that all volunteers must wear a helmet when cycling. Mandeep wears a turban as part of his religion.

The policy likely indirectly discriminates against persons who wear religious headdresses based on religion, but the policy may also be reasonable because it is a reasonable safety requirement to require volunteers to wear helmets while cycling.

Protected personal attributes

The particular personal attributes across the various anti-discrimination laws differ. They may include all or some of the following: age, sex, race, skin colour, descent, national or ethnic origin, religious belief or activity (or lack of), disability, physical features, sexual orientation, sexual or gender identity, intersex status, marital or relationship status, carer and parental status, pregnancy or potential pregnancy, breastfeeding, family responsibilities, employment and industrial activity, political belief or activity, association with someone who has (or is assumed to have) one of these attributes, and irrelevant criminal record.

Protected areas of public life

The 'areas of public life' protected under the anti-discrimination laws all differ. Many of the laws include as areas of public life employment, education, accommodation, some clubs, goods and services and facilities. Some also include sport, local government, administration of government laws and programs or land.

As discussed below (in relation to the specific laws) these areas of public life may mean the federal laws might apply to your organisation in certain circumstances (when they might otherwise might not have done so – similarly, the New South Wales and Victorian laws).



Exceptions – when it is lawful to discriminate

Generally, discrimination will be lawful when it doesn't contravene any relevant anti-discrimination legislation. Discrimination is not against the law if the discrimination is not based on a protected attribute, is excused or exempted by law, or takes place in an area of life not covered by the legislation.

Discriminatory conduct that is excused or exempted differs between the states and territories, as set out in part 3 of this guide.

Discrimination law and your organisation's obligations

Under these laws (where they apply):

- discrimination of volunteers, while doing volunteer work, is unlawful
- volunteers must not discriminate against others in the workplace (including staff, volunteers, clients, and members of the public)
- volunteers in your volunteer involving organisation have the same legal rights and protections against discrimination as employees
- your organisation could be liable (legally responsible) for any harm, injury or loss as a result of the actions of your volunteers (this 'vicarious liability' can generally be avoided if your organisation takes all reasonable steps to prevent sexual harassment), and
- your organisation may have a positive duty to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate discrimination from the workplace. This means taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing inappropriate workplace behaviour.

As we have stated for sexual harassment, regardless of whether the not anti-discrimination laws apply to your organisation and its volunteers (or only in limited circumstances, or only to your employees) it's best practice to comply with the laws (as much as reasonably practicable). Not only is it favourable to your volunteers (and workers, clients and members of the public in contact with your organisation), it will help prevent any reputational or other damage to your organisation that may arise from a complaint of discrimination.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement include **Standard 4: Recruitment is equitable and diversity is valued** – Volunteer recruitment and selection strategies meet the needs of the organisation and volunteers; they facilitate and value diversity and ensure equity and accessibility.

- 4.1 Organisations and groups involve volunteers using equitable and innovative approaches to attract people with relevant interests, knowledge and skills.
- 4.3 Volunteers are selected based on their interests, knowledge, skills and suitability for the role, and consistent with anti-discrimination law.
- 4.4 Diversity, inclusivity, and accessibility principles are built into recruitment activities, reflecting and promoting awareness of, and respect for, diversity and inclusion and the inherent value this brings to the organisation.

See this standard for examples of evidence of meeting this criteria.



Tips – minimising discrimination in the workplace

- Prepare, and implement, an anti-discrimination policy with a section on discrimination in recruitment that covers your volunteers (in addition to other workers). For further information on what should be contained in a policy, see part 3 of this guide.
- When recruiting volunteers, prepare a position description that focuses on the skills required for the volunteer role rather than the personal attributes that may be desirable. Use the same language in the position description across advertisements and in the interview process (for further information, see part 3 of this guide).
- Nominate a person who your volunteers are to make complaints on discriminatory behaviour to and have a fair and transparent process for resolving complaints.
- Make all volunteers (and workers) aware of relevant policies, and what to do if the process for making a complaint doesn't resolve the complaint.
- Conduct regular training for all volunteers and workers in relation to the policy so they recognise discriminatory practices and the processes for addressing them.

As a matter of best practice, if not otherwise required by law, organisations should consider having an anti-discrimination policy and procedure in place. Not only will this help an organisation to meet its legal obligations, it will also protect its workers from discriminatory behaviour and protect the reputation of the organisation if a complaint of discrimination is made.

Federal anti-discrimination laws

At the federal level, discrimination laws are set out in the following legislation (and accompanying regulations). These discrimination laws make it unlawful to discriminate against a person in certain areas of public life.

- *Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)*. This Act makes discrimination on the basis of a person's race, colour, descent, or national or ethnic origin unlawful where it occurs in specified areas of public life.
- *Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)*. This Act prohibits discrimination against people with disabilities in specified areas of public life.
- *Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)*. This Act ensures people are not treated less favourably on the ground of age in specified areas of public life.
- *Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)*. This Act prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, intersex status, marital or relationship status, and pregnancy and family responsibilities in specified areas of public life.

These **Federal Discrimination Laws** apply to all Australian employers and workers and mainly cover discrimination by employers against employees and contractors. **Most of these laws do not apply to volunteers.**

However, in other specified areas of public life the Federal Discrimination Laws may apply to volunteers. All the Federal Discrimination Laws specify that they apply in the context of the provision of facilities, goods or services. Some of them also cover clubs (in this context means an association of at least thirty people that funds the provision of facilities for the club and sells or supplies alcohol) or sporting activities. Discrimination in these contexts prohibits organisations from discriminating against anyone, including volunteers.

There may also be some protections afforded to volunteers by the *Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986 (Cth)*, which incorporates a number of international conventions and prohibits certain discriminatory behaviour.

Even if these federal discrimination laws don't apply or apply only in limited circumstances (such as specified areas of public life) your organisation may still owe duties under other laws to protect your volunteers from discrimination (for example, state and territory discrimination laws).

**Table – protected personal attributes under Federal Discrimination Laws**

Protected Attribute	<i>Racial Discrimination Act 1975 (Cth)</i>	<i>Disability Discrimination Act 1992 (Cth)</i>	<i>Age Discrimination Act 2004 (Cth)</i>	<i>Sex Discrimination Act 1984 (Cth)</i>
Colour	✓			
Descent	✓			
National or ethnic origin	✓			
Race	✓			
Disability		✓		
Age			✓	
Breastfeeding				✓
Family responsibilities				✓
Sex				✓
Gender identity				✓
Intersex status				✓
Marital or relationship status				✓
Pregnancy or potential pregnancy				✓
Sexual orientation				✓

**Discrimination – goods and services**

Hai Van has multiple sclerosis and is in a wheelchair. She is a client of an organisation that provides crisis accommodation. The organisation runs a kitchen that provides meals to which all clients are entitled. The kitchen is on the second floor of the building that the organisation occupies, and there is no way for Hai Van to get to the second floor in her wheelchair. Under Federal Discrimination Laws, the organisation may be exposing itself to a complaint.



Discrimination – access to premises

Consider the above example if Hai Van was a volunteer of the organisation rather than a client. Under Federal Discrimination Laws, Hai Van is not protected from unlawful discrimination in the area of her work because Federal Discrimination Laws don't apply to discrimination against volunteers working in the workplace. However, Federal Discrimination Laws do prohibit discrimination against a person based on a disability in relation to their access to premises, or parts of premises, unless providing that access would cause the organisation an unjustifiable hardship (for example, it may be too costly or impractical for the organisation to install an elevator or stair lift).

In this case, under Federal Discrimination Laws, the organisation may be exposing itself to a complaint.

State anti-discrimination laws

Whether volunteers are covered by state and territory anti-discrimination laws, and what protected attributes are covered, differs. Volunteers are generally protected by these laws in the **Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania and now in the Northern Territory**.

In specified areas of public life, the laws may also apply to volunteers in **New South Wales and Victoria**.

It's unlikely the law applies to volunteers in **Western Australia**. However, even if these laws do not apply or apply only in limited circumstances (such as specified areas of public life) your organisation may still owe duties under other laws to protect your volunteers from discrimination.



Note – other laws to protect human rights and volunteers

In each state and territory, volunteers may be able to rely on other laws that protect them from discrimination. For example:

- In Victoria – the *Racial and Religious Tolerance Act 2001 (Vic)* prohibits vilification on the basis of race or religion (and has a broad application so is likely to apply to volunteers) and the *Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities Act 2006 (Vic)* (volunteers for government local authorities and other public authorities may be able to rely on this law)
- In Western Australia and Victoria – the *Spent Convictions Act 1988 (WA)* and *Spent Convictions Act 2021 (Vic)* prohibit discrimination on the basis of having a spent conviction (this may be applicable to recruitment of volunteers, see part 3 of this guide)
- In Queensland – the *Human Rights Act 2019 (QLD)* states that every person has a right to equal and effective protection against discrimination (if your organisation provides services on behalf of the Queensland government, you may also need to comply with this Act when making decisions about volunteers – check your funding agreement and ask your contract manager)
- In the Australian Capital Territory - the *Human Rights Act 2004 (ACT)* sets out that every person has the right to equal and effective protection against discrimination on any ground (volunteers for public authorities may be able to rely on this law)



Table – protected personal attributes in state and territory discrimination law

Each state and territory's legislation varies. The table below is an overview of these laws.

Protected Attribute	NSW	Vic	QLD	WA	SA	Tas	ACT	NT
Accommodation status							✓	
Age	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Breastfeeding	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Disability	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Employment status		✓					✓	
Gender identity	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Gender history				✓			✓	
Genetic information							✓	
Immigration status							✓	
Industrial (trade union) activity		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓
Intersex status					✓	✓	✓	
Irrelevant criminal record						✓	✓	✓
Irrelevant medical record						✓		✓
Occupation							✓	
Nationality	✓	✓			✓			
Lawful sexual activity		✓	✓			✓		
Parental, family or carer responsibilities	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Physical features		✓					✓	
Political views		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Pregnancy	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Race	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Relationship status	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Religion		✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓
Religious dress or appearance					✓			
Sex	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Sexuality	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Spent conviction	✓	✓		✓	✓		✓	✓



Association with a person who has, or is believed to have, any listed attribute	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
Association with a person who has, or is believed to have, protected attributes of sexual orientation, age or impairment (disability)				✓			

Australian Capital Territory

Pursuant to the *Discrimination Act 1991 (ACT)* (**ACT Discrimination Act**), the term:

- 'employment' includes work as an unpaid worker
- 'unpaid worker' means a person who performs work for an employer for no remuneration
- 'employer in relation to an unpaid worker, means the person for whom the unpaid worker performs work

Accordingly, volunteer workers are covered by the provisions of the ACT Discrimination Act. The ACT Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds listed in the table above.

New South Wales

The definition of 'employment' under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)* (**NSW Anti-Discrimination Act**) doesn't include volunteers, and volunteers are unlikely to be covered by most provisions of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act.

However, in particular circumstances, the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act may apply to volunteers where volunteering falls within another area covered by the NSW Discrimination Act (for example, the provision of goods and services). If it applies, the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds listed in the table above.

The New South Wales authority responsible for administering the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act (the Anti-Discrimination Board) has published [helpful information](#) on volunteers and discrimination (which also explains the areas of 'public life' which may apply to volunteers).

Northern Territory

Under changes to the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 (NT)* (**NT Anti-Discrimination Act**), in force since 3 July 2023, the term 'work' now includes work performed by volunteers.

Section 4 of the NT Anti-Discrimination Act Work now defines work to include work carried out in any capacity and at any place, including as:

- an employee
- a contractor or subcontractor
- an employee of a contractor or subcontractor
- an employee of a labour hire company
- an outworker
- an apprentice or trainee
- a student or other person gaining work experience, whether formal or informal
- a volunteer or on another unpaid basis
- a statutory appointee
- part of a vocational training program or other occupational training or retraining program, or
- a person of a prescribed class

Volunteers are now covered by the NT Anti-Discrimination Act, so organisations could be held vicariously liable (responsible) for the occurrence of discrimination in the workplace.



Queensland

Pursuant to the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (QLD)* (**QLD Anti-Discrimination Act**), volunteers are protected from discrimination as the meaning of the term 'work' includes:

- work under a work experience arrangement within the meaning of the *Education (Work Experience) Act 1996 (QLD)*
- work under a vocational placement
- work on a voluntary or unpaid basis
- work by a person with an impairment in a sheltered workshop, whether on a paid basis (including a token remuneration or allowance) or an unpaid basis
- work under a guidance program, an apprenticeship training program or other occupational training or retraining program.

The QLD Anti-Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds listed in the table above.

Under the QLD Anti-Discrimination Act, organisations can be held vicariously liable (responsible) for discrimination in the workplace. One way in which an organisation can defend itself against liability is by proving that it took reasonable steps to prevent the discrimination from occurring. This includes taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing the inappropriate workplace behaviour.

South Australia

Volunteers are covered by the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)* (**SA Equal Opportunity Act**) as:

- 'employee' includes an unpaid worker
- 'employer' means an organisation for which the unpaid worker performs services
- 'employment' includes unpaid work
- 'unpaid worker' means a person who performs work for an employer for no remuneration.

The SA Equal Opportunity Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds listed in the table above.

Under the SA Equal Opportunity Act, organisations can be held vicariously liable (responsible) for discrimination by an employee or a volunteer. One way in which an organisation can defend itself against liability is by proving that it had appropriate policies in place at the time of the unlawful act, and that they took reasonable steps to enforce the policy. This includes taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing the inappropriate workplace behaviour.

Tasmania

Under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (Tas)* (**Tas Anti-Discrimination Act**), volunteers are covered as the definition of 'employment' includes employment or occupation in any capacity, with or without remuneration. The Tas Anti-Discrimination Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds listed in the table above.

Victoria

Under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)*, (**Vic Equal Opportunity Act**), the definition of 'employee' only includes unpaid workers and volunteers in relation to the prohibition of sexual harassment.

Accordingly, volunteers are unlikely to be covered by most provisions of the Vic Equal Opportunity Act. However, in particular circumstances, the Vic Equal Opportunity Act may apply to volunteers where volunteering falls within another area covered by the Vic Equal Opportunity Act (for example, the provision of goods and services). In the event where it applies, the Vic Equal Opportunity Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds in the table above. Further, in the event it applies, your organisation may have a positive duty to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate discrimination from the workplace. This includes taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing the inappropriate workplace behaviour.



The Victorian authority responsible for administering the Vic Equal Opportunity Act (the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission) has published [helpful information](#) on volunteers and discrimination (which also explains the areas of 'public life' which may apply to volunteers).

Western Australia

Unlike in other jurisdictions, the definition of 'employment' in the [Equal Opportunity Act 1984 \(WA\)](#) (**WA Equal Opportunity Act**) doesn't include volunteers, unpaid workers or vocational placement by an educational or training authority. Accordingly, volunteers are unlikely to be covered by most provisions of the WA Discrimination Act. If it were to apply, the WA Equal Opportunity Act prohibits discrimination on the grounds listed in the table above.



For more information, see:

- Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission, [discrimination webpage](#)
- Australian Human Rights Commission, [Willing to Work: Good Practice Examples for Employers \(covering age and disability\)](#)
- Queensland Human Rights Commission, [resources on discrimination](#), including a [sample Policy- discrimination and sexual harassment](#).



Bullying

Bullying laws exist at a federal level. The *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)* (**Fair Work Act**) has provisions that relate to bullying behaviour, which can apply to volunteers.

Separately to these provisions, workplace bullying of volunteers can also breach state and territory work health and safety (**WHS Laws**). Organisations covered by these laws owe various duties to their volunteers including providing and maintaining a working environment that is safe and without risks to health. Bullying in the workplace is a risk to 'psychological health.' The obligation to provide and maintain a working environment that is safe and without risks to health is explained in more detail in part 4 of this guide.

There is also a duty under negligence law to take reasonable care to avoid exposing your workers, including volunteers who might be exposed to reasonably foreseeable risks of injury, which could include harm caused by bullying. This is explained in more detail in part 4 of this guide.



What is bullying?

Under the Fair Work Act, workplace bullying occurs when:

- a person, or a group of people, repeatedly behaves unreasonably towards a worker or a group of workers at work, and
- the behaviour creates a risk to health and safety

A 'worker' is defined broadly and extends to volunteers, except those that volunteer in a completely volunteer-based organisation with no employees ('volunteer association').

Being at 'work' is not limited to the confines of a physical workplace. It can occur offsite, at work related functions and through social media channels.

The bullying provisions under the Fair Work Act apply to behaviour in your organisation if your organisation:

- 'conducts a business or undertaking' (the business or undertaking does not need to be for profit) within the meaning of work health and safety legislation (see the table at the start of this part of this guide summarising what bullying laws apply in all the states and territories and part 4 of this guide), and
- is a 'constitutional corporation' (see the note below) or is incorporated in the Australian Capital Territory or the Northern Territory,

The bullying provisions of the Fair Work Act don't apply to unincorporated associations.



Note – constitutional corporation

A **constitutional corporation** is a body which is incorporated under a federal or state Act (for example, a company limited by guarantee or incorporated association), and which conducts trading or financial activities. The key question for most not-for-profits will usually be whether they are ‘trading’.

‘Trading’ in this context means the provision of good or services for payment as well as the provision of services carried on for the purpose of earning revenue. This may only be a small part of the organisation’s activities and it doesn’t matter that the income from trading activities is used for charitable purposes.

Activities classified by the courts as ‘trading’ activities include:

- providing services in return for a fee or charge
- selling goods from a shop or stall
- international student fees
- patient charges
- fundraising activities
- charging car parking fees
- ticket sales and charging admission to events or services
- advertising and broadcasting, and
- sale of publications

The receipt of government grants and subsidies to not-for-profit organisations are generally not regarded by the courts as trading.

The bullying provisions of the Fair Work Act will apply to many incorporated not-for-profit volunteer involving organisations, unless they don’t have any employees or pay anyone to carry out work on behalf of the organisation.

Unreasonable behaviour that creates a risk to health and safety

Unreasonable behaviour includes, but is not limited to, behaviour that is humiliating, victimising, intimidating or threatening. The question is whether an objective, reasonable person in the circumstances would think that the behaviour is reasonable or not.

The bullying behaviour must also create a risk to health and safety. Often, bullying behaviour will create a risk of mental or psychological harm, for both the person being bullied and other workers who may witness the bullying behaviour. Bullying can make a person feel sad, isolated, and can lead to a mental health condition such as anxiety and depression.



Note – psychological health and safety

As a result of changes to the model WHS Laws in 2022, the primary duty of PCBUs to ensure, as far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of workers now includes psychological health and safety. The duty is no longer limited to physical health and safety.

A PCBU must eliminate psychosocial risks in the workplace, or if that is not reasonably practicable, minimise these risks so far as is reasonably practicable.

Victoria (the only state or territory that is not part of the Harmonised WHS scheme) is developing regulations and a code to address the management of psychosocial risks.

See part 4 of this guide for more information on the primary duty of care and psychological health and safety.



The bullying behaviour may also create a risk of physical harm, such as where the bully behaves in physically intimidating or violent ways, where workers are pressured not to conduct their work in a safe way, or where workers engage in activities like 'hazing' or initiation ceremonies.



Example – bullying

Background

Hiruni has been a volunteer board member of a charity that works with culturally and linguistically diverse youth to help them succeed academically for several years. Recently, the board has elected a new Chair, Megan.

Since Megan was elected Chair, the 'culture' of the board has changed. Hiruni has witnessed Megan talking down to board members, particularly Matthew, who is also a volunteer. Whenever Matthew speaks in board meetings Megan rolls her eyes and sometimes interrupts him in an abrasive manner. Hiruni checks in with Matthew about Megan's behaviour. He says that it upsets him and he is intimidated by Megan. He made a complaint to the Secretary of the Board, Angela, and nothing ever came of it. Matthew says he thinks Megan started to dislike him after he raised a couple of safety concerns with her.

Hiruni speaks to Angela and asks her about the complaint Matthew made against Megan. Angela says that she went to Megan and tried to discuss it with her but Megan accused Angela of trying to sabotage the organisation by supporting Matthew's 'unreasonable expectations'.

Is this bullying?

Megan's behaviour likely constitutes bullying under the Fair Work Act because it's unreasonable and has occurred repeatedly, including:

- treating Matthew dismissively, and speaking over him rudely in board meetings, which makes him upset and intimidated,
- Megan's creation of a 'culture of silence'; workers feel that they cannot raise concerns, and
- Megan's behaviour has created a risk to health and safety because: workers are at risk of mental harm, particularly Matthew, because he feels upset and intimidated in the workplace



Case example – bullying and liability under common law of negligence

A small not-for-profit bookshop had one employee. It then employed another (Swan). The evidence showed that over a period, the first employee bullied Swan including regularly belittling her in front of customers, being constantly hyper critical of her work, even throwing books at her.

Swan complained to the board (as she had no-one else to complain to). The board promised to do something about it, discussed it at a board meeting but didn't take action to resolve the situation. The bullying continued and Swan again complained to the board who again promised to do something but they didn't. In the end Swan made an application to the Court alleging the negligence of her employer caused her injury (psychiatric) by exposing her to an unsafe workplace - she was subject to bullying conduct – and sought damages for pain and suffering and pecuniary loss.

The Court was highly critical of the employer's response to Swan's complaints. It found the employer was negligent because it didn't investigate the complaint, assess the risk to Swan, monitor the behaviour of its employees, have workplace behaviour policies setting out expectations on appropriate behaviour, have training on appropriate behaviour including on how to make complaints or a procedures on responding to complaints.

When determining that the organisation was liable, the judge found that the board's lack of action was 'explained but not excused' by the voluntary nature of the board members' work. The organisation was ordered to pay almost \$600,000 in damages.

Swan v Monash Law Book Co-operative [2013] VSC 326

When will behaviour not be bullying?

Behaviour will not be bullying when it's reasonable management action that is done in a reasonable way. Management action may include things like performance reviews, conducting a workplace investigation, or modifying a worker's duties because of a medical condition.

A spontaneous conversation or comment is unlikely to constitute management action.

Reasonable management action

The management action must be reasonable in the circumstances. Consider the following example.



Example – reasonable management action

Background

Glenda volunteers in the canteen of a not-for-profit community school. Glenda knows that other volunteers complain about her behind her back because she is a bit slower in completing her duties in the canteen. Glenda rolled her ankle recently and she has been medically advised to keep weight off it for at least two weeks. One of the volunteers reports to the facilities manager that Glenda is limping and seems to be in pain. The facilities manager tells Glenda that she has to go home and won't be able to come back to the canteen until she can provide a doctor's certificate that says she is fit to return to work. Glenda feels that this is unfair.

Is this bullying?

The facilities manager choosing to send Glenda home is 'management action'. The school has a duty to make sure all its workers, including volunteers, are conducting their work safely. Glenda is obviously injured, so it's reasonable in the circumstances to take management action to ensure her and other workers' safety.



Management action taken in a reasonable way

Management action must also be taken in a reasonable way. To ensure the manner of management action is reasonable, it may be necessary to consider the worker's particular circumstances. Review Glenda's situation in the above example and the following further information.



Example – management action taken in a reasonable manner

When told that Glenda was injured, the facilities manager considered how best to approach the situation, being mindful that Glenda has some difficulty with the other volunteers. The facilities manager consulted the school's work health and safety policy for guidance on the appropriate course of action, and made sure that when she told Glenda she would need to go home it was done in a discreet way to avoid making Glenda feel uncomfortable by attracting attention to the situation. This is reasonable management action taken in a reasonable manner.



Example – management action taken in an unreasonable manner

After consulting the school's work health and safety policy, the facilities manager spots Terri-Anne, another canteen volunteer, walking past. The facilities manager calls out to Terri-Anne and tells her that Glenda's injury is 'a real health and safety issue' and that they must get her out of there before she does some damage to herself or someone else.

The facilities manager tells Terri-Anne that she's busy and so asks Terri-Anne to go tell Glenda to go home till she's better. Terri-Anne promptly returns to the canteen and announces to Glenda in front of the other volunteers and children that the facilities manager told her to tell her to go home as she's a health and safety risk. Glenda felt embarrassed and humiliated by receiving this message from Terri-Anne and in such an abrupt and public manner. Although the decision to send Glenda home was reasonable management action, it was taken in an unreasonable manner.



Case example – Mr Stancu

Stancu was engaged as a volunteer with Australian Volunteers International (AVI).

Stancu alleged that his AVI country manager, Ms Faktaufon ‘bullied him’ in the course of his volunteer role as sanitation engineer at The Ministry of Public Works and Utilities in Kiribati (the Central Pacific). Stancu was there as part of the Australian Volunteers for International Development Program.

Stancu made an application for a stop bullying order against Faktaufon in the Fair Work Commission. Stancu argued that the manner in which Faktaufon had counselled and warned Stancu about his behaviour was unreasonable, and that the behaviour created a risk to his health and safety. AVI argued that (among other things) Faktaufon’s actions constituted reasonable management action.

Faktaufon met with Stancu, provided written correspondence and issued a warning in relation to complaints about inappropriate behaviour at a state dinner function, excessive drinking, being inappropriately dressed in public (wearing no shirt, and wearing only swimwear in the streets), behaving inappropriately in the office, hitting a pedestrian with his car and using abusive and racist language toward the pedestrian.

The Commission found that these warnings did not present a health or safety risk to Stancu, and that they constituted reasonable management action carried out in a reasonable manner. The complaints raised had come from many different sources and in most cases it was reasonable that Faktaufon should act on them. Faktaufon also gave Stancu an opportunity to respond to the complaints.

The Commission also found that Stancu was not working as a volunteer for a constitutional corporation within the Commonwealth. Even though Stancu was engaged through the Australian Volunteers for International Development programme, which was being managed by AVI, his work was being done for the Ministry, which was not a constitutionally covered business and was operating outside the Commonwealth.

Stancu [2015] FWC 1999 (26 March 2015)

Bullying and your organisation’s obligations

Your organisation is likely to owe duties to protect volunteers from being bullied and prevent them from bullying others while engaging in volunteer work (under the federal law, state and territory work health and safety legislation, or negligence law).

As we have stated for all other workplace behaviours, regardless of whether the bullying laws apply to your organisation (or only your employees and not volunteers) it’s best practice to comply with the law (as much as is reasonably practicable). Not only is it favourable to your volunteers (and workers, clients and members of the public in contact with your organisation) it will help prevent any reputational or other damage to your organisation that may arise from a complaint of bullying.



Tips – eliminating bullying behaviour

- Have a policy on appropriate workplace behaviour. This policy should cover how your organisation will comply with laws about bullying (where they apply).
- Nominate a person who your volunteers are to make complaints on inappropriate behaviour to and have a fair and transparent process for resolving complaints.
- Make all volunteers (and all workers) aware of the kind of behaviour that is unacceptable, the policy, and what to do if the process for making a complaint does not resolve the complaint.
- Conduct ongoing training in relation to appropriate workplace behaviour.



Legal consequences under the Fair Work Act

The Fair Work Act allows a worker (including a volunteer) who has been bullied at work to apply to the Fair Work Commission for an order to stop bullying. If the volunteer is no longer volunteering for the organisation they can't apply to the Commission.

If the Commission is satisfied the worker has been bullied at work by a person or a group of people and there is a risk that the worker will continue to be bullied at work by the person or group, the Commission may make any order it considers appropriate.

It can make orders affecting the organisation generally or particular people within the organisation. The purpose of an order is for the worker to be able to continue their work without being bullied. The orders may require monitoring of behaviour, compliance and review of existing policies, further support and anything else the Commission considers appropriate except an order for payment of money.

Your organisation must comply with an order – if it doesn't, the person who has been bullied can then apply for an order for a financial penalty against your organisation.



Case example – Mr Bibawi

Stepping Stone is a community organisation that provides services to people with mental illness. They provide a clubhouse for clients. The clubhouse provides access to voluntary educational, social, recreational and work activities, and provides mental health services. One of the programs offered by Stepping Stone was called 'Work-ordered day'. Under this program clients could volunteer to give administrative support to the clubhouse. Participation in this program was intended to improve the health and wellbeing of participants, and assist them to return to employment. The clubhouse would not be able to run without the assistance of these volunteers.

Bibawi was a client of Stepping Stone and he participated in the 'Work-ordered day' program. His duties included data entry, writing parts of a newsletter, reaching out to clients and other general administrative tasks. By participating in this program, Bibawi qualified for the Centrelink Mobility Allowance.

While taking part in the program Bibawi experienced bullying and applied to the Fair Work Commission for a Stop-Bullying Order against Stepping Stone. To be eligible to apply for a Stop-Bullying Order, the applicant needs to be a 'worker' under the Fair Work Act.

At first the Commission said that Bibawi wasn't a worker, and so was not eligible to apply for a Stop-Bullying Order. Bibawi appealed this decision, arguing that he carried out work for Stepping Stone. The Full Bench of the Commission agreed with Bibawi, and found that he was a worker. They said that it was clear that Bibawi carried out work that was of benefit to the running of the clubhouse. They also said that it didn't matter that Bibawi was a client of Stepping Stone, that he received Centrelink benefits, or that he carried out the work to improve his well-being.

The Full Bench noted that 'there may be a wide range of motivations and objectives attaching to the performance of such work' and that the only consideration for the Commission should be that work was performed, and not the reasons behind it.

[Bibawi v Stepping Stone Clubhouse Inc t/a Stepping Stone & Others \[2019\] FWCFB 1314](#)



Note – actions of volunteer

Your organisation is also in many cases responsible for the actions or omissions of volunteers. If your volunteer is acting in a way that may be classified as 'bullying' in the workplace, make sure you take proactive steps to prevent and respond to the behaviour.



National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement includes **Standard 6: Volunteer safety and wellbeing is protected** – The health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers is protected and volunteers understand their rights and responsibilities

- 6.1 Effective working relationships with employees, and between volunteers, are facilitated.
- 6.2 Organisations and groups meet their legal and ethical obligations to protect volunteers from harm.
- 6.3 Processes are in place to protect the health, safety and wellbeing of volunteers in their capacity as volunteers, including relevant insurances, such as personal injury and liability.
- 6.4 Volunteers understand and have access to complaints procedures.
- 6.5 Complaints, concerns and safety incidents are analysed to identify causes and inform continuous improvement.

See this standard for examples of evidence of meeting this criteria.



For more information, see:

- Fair Work Commission; [Anti-Bullying Guide](#), [Anti-Bullying Benchbook](#)
- Safe Work Australia; [Guide for preventing and responding to workplace bullying](#)
- Australian Human Rights Commission; [What is bullying](#), [Workplace bullying](#)

Also refer to the relevant Work Safe body in your state or territory – these bodies have published information on workplace bullying.



Victimisation

Laws relating to sexual harassment, bullying and discrimination also prevent victimisation of a person who has made a complaint about such behaviour or exercised other rights under the relevant laws.

Along with duties that your organisation may owe under victimisation laws, your organisation may have duties under:

- work place health and safety laws, and
- the law of negligence, which contains a duty to take reasonable care to avoid exposing your workers, including volunteers, to reasonably foreseeable risks of injury which could include harm caused by victimisation



What is victimisation?

The definition of victimisation varies slightly from each territory and state and federally, but for the main part it occurs where a person is subjected to, or threatened with, some form of detriment (which means a loss, damage, or injury to the person making the complaint) because:

- they, or someone associated with them makes or proposes to make a complaint under discrimination law (discrimination, harassment or victimisation)
- they asserted rights, or another person's rights, under discrimination law
- they assisted with an investigation of a complaint of a matter covered by discrimination law, or
- they refused to do something because it would be discrimination, sexual harassment or victimisation

The types of detriment that might result in victimisation can include bullying and intimidation by other workers, being moved to another volunteer position with lower responsibility, not being given any meaningful volunteer work, or ending the volunteer relationship.

Under recent amendments to the [Age Discrimination Act 2004](#), the [Disability Discrimination Act 1992](#) and the [Racial Discrimination Act 1975](#), acts of victimisation committed before the start of the amending Act (the [Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment \(Respect at Work\) Act 2022](#)) are unlawful.

It is also unlawful under the Fair Work Act for a person to coerce another person into exercising (or not exercising) a 'workplace right' (such as the right to make a bullying or discrimination complaint). While coercion is different from victimisation (coercion occurs before an action is taken, while victimisation generally arises after the victim takes some action), volunteer organisations should nevertheless be aware of this risk and make sure this does not occur.



Example – victimisation

Chris is a volunteer at a not-for-profit animal shelter. While volunteering, Chris observed his colleague Anushka being subjected to comments of a sexual nature by their supervisor, Trudi. Chris saw that Anushka was upset by the comments and encouraged her to make a complaint about Trudi's conduct. However, Anushka was reluctant to do so because she feared that Trudi may retaliate against her. Despite this, Chris reported the incident to Trudi's supervisor. Trudi and her supervisor were friends and, following Chris's complaint, both he and Anushka were told that their services as volunteers were no longer required.

Both Chris and Anushka have been victimised.



Your organisation's obligations

Under the same laws that prohibit discrimination, harassment and bullying (where they apply) your organisation should be aware that:

- victimisation of volunteers, while doing volunteer work, is unlawful
- volunteers must not victimise others in the workplace (including staff, volunteers, clients, and members of the public)
- volunteers in your volunteer involving organisation have the same legal rights and protections against victimisation as employees
- your organisation could be liable (legally responsible) for any harm, injury or loss as a result of the actions of your volunteers (this 'vicarious liability' can generally be avoided if your organisation takes all reasonable steps to prevent victimisation), and
- your organisation may have a positive duty to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate victimisation from the workplace. This means taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing inappropriate workplace behaviour.

As we have stated for sexual harassment and discrimination, whether the victimisation laws apply to your organisation (or only your employees and not volunteers) it is best practice to comply with the law (as far as reasonably practicable). Not only is it favourable to your volunteers (and workers, clients and members of the public in contact with your organisation) it will help prevent any reputational or other damage to your organisation that may arise from a complaint of victimisation.

Positive duty to eliminate acts of victimisation

The *Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Respect at Work) Act 2022* imposes a positive duty on employers Australia-wide to 'take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate' victimisation as far as possible.

In practice, this means that employer organisations are obligated to take proactive steps to prevent acts of victimisation which relate to complaints, proceedings, assertions or allegations about discrimination, sexual harassment and hostile workplace environments. This duty is ongoing and requires employers to continually review their practices to ensure they are taking steps to prevent victimisation.



Tip – victimisation and ending the volunteer relationship

Before you end the volunteer relationship with a volunteer, always make sure there are no outstanding complaints made by the volunteer, to avoid victimisation at this point. If there are outstanding complaints, resolve these appropriately before proceeding with ending the volunteer relationship.

Your organisation should also make sure its policy on appropriate workplace behaviour (as outlined above in relation to sexual harassment and discrimination) makes it clear that victimisation is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. This policy should cover how the organisation will comply with laws about victimisation (where they apply). The policy should also set out the process for resolving complaints and what to do if the process for making a complaint does not resolve the complaint. All volunteers should be trained on these policies and procedures and the policy must be implemented.

Victimisation laws

The laws dealing with victimisation are complex. Your volunteer involving organisation may need to seek legal advice to determine how they may apply.

The provisions of the Fair Work Act that prohibit victimisation generally don't apply to volunteers. Further, as noted above, many of the federal anti-discrimination laws do not cover volunteers. This means there is often no protection from victimisation for volunteers. There may be limited circumstances where the federal anti-discrimination laws protect volunteers under another area of public life (for example, the provision of goods and services).



In the states and territories, the same laws that prohibit discrimination and harassment (as discussed above) also broadly (but don't always) prohibit victimisation. Whether or not victimisation of a volunteer is prohibited by the law depends on whether the victimisation occurs in connection with a breach (or an allegation of a breach) of the relevant anti-discrimination legislation. That is, victimisation is only prohibited where the original discrimination or sexual harassment alleged was unlawful.

As a summary, volunteers are generally protected by these laws in the **Australian Capital Territory Queensland, South Australia, Tasmania** and now in the **Northern Territory**. This includes protection against victimisation in relation to their volunteer work. However, in **New South Wales and Victoria**, volunteers are generally protected from victimisation that relates to a sexual harassment matter but generally not from victimisation that relates to discrimination. In **Western Australia**, volunteers are generally not protected against victimisation in relation to discrimination or sexual harassment that has occurred or is alleged to have occurred in the course of their volunteer work.

Nevertheless, in all jurisdictions volunteers are protected against victimisation which occurs in relation to unlawful discriminatory conduct taking place in certain areas of public life (such as the provision of goods and services or, for example, in relation to people with disabilities, access to premises).



Victimisation – goods and services

Hai Van has multiple sclerosis and is in a wheelchair. She is a client of an organisation that provides crisis accommodation. The organisation runs a kitchen that provides meals to which all clients are entitled. The kitchen is on the second floor of the building that the organisation occupies, and there is no way for Hai Van to get to the second floor in her wheelchair, even though it would not cause the organisation an unjustifiable hardship to install a stair lift.

Under State Discrimination Laws, the organisation has breached the relevant legislation. Hai Van discusses this with the organisation and alleges that she intends to bring a claim against the organisation. In response, the organisation informs Hai Van that she is barred from utilising the organisation's crisis accommodation.

In this case, the organisation has victimised Hai Van and is exposed to a claim.



Victimisation – access to premises

Consider the above example if Hai Van was a volunteer of the organisation rather than a client and, instead of being barred from accessing the organisation's services, she is told that her services as a volunteer are no longer required.

Under ACT, QLD, Tas, SA and NT Discrimination Laws, Hai Van is protected from discrimination in relation to her work as a volunteer. She informs the organisation that she has been discriminated against and has a right to make a claim. By informing Hai Van that it is terminating the volunteering relationship, the organisation has, in addition to unlawfully discriminating against Hai Van, victimised her and is exposed to a claim.

Under Vic, NSW and WA Discrimination Laws, Hai Van is not protected from unlawful discrimination in the area of her work and so she is not protected by the laws against victimisation. However, Discrimination Laws in these jurisdictions do prohibit discrimination against a person on the basis of a disability in relation to their access to premises, or parts of premises (unless, for example, providing access would cause an unjustifiable hardship on the organisation). So she may still be able to make a victimisation claim against the organisation on that basis (that she was discriminated against in relation to the provision of access to premises).

Regardless of whether a volunteer is protected from victimisation while providing volunteer services in other areas of public life, as indicated in the example below, volunteers may nevertheless expose organisations to victimisation claims as a result of the volunteer's actions.



Example – victimisation by a volunteer

A community house runs educational courses. A volunteer tutor fails a student because she didn't complete her attendance requirement. The student complains that she is being discriminated against due to her race. The community house tells the student that this is a ridiculous complaint and that any application to re-enrol next year will not be accepted. While the student's discrimination complaint appears weak, she may be able to bring a claim for victimisation based on the actions of the community house after receiving the complaint. In this instance the community house may be liable for the unlawful (victimisation) action of its volunteer.

State and territory victimisation laws

Australian Capital Territory

As noted above, volunteers are covered by the provisions of the [Discrimination Act 1991 \(ACT\)](#) (**ACT Discrimination Act**). The ACT Discrimination Act makes it unlawful for a person to subject, or threaten to subject, another person to any detriment because:

- the other person, or someone associated with the other person, has taken (or proposes to take) discrimination action, or
- the first person believes the other person, or someone associated with the other person has taken (or proposes to take) discrimination action

The term 'discrimination action' includes actions such as making a discrimination complaint, reasonably asserting a right, giving evidence in court or giving evidence as part of an investigation.

New South Wales

As noted above, other than in relation to sexual harassment, the definition of 'employment' under the [Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 \(NSW\)](#) (**NSW Anti-Discrimination Act**) doesn't include volunteers, and volunteers are unlikely to be covered by most provisions of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act (other than sexual harassment).

However, in particular circumstances, the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act may apply to volunteers in an area of public life covered by the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act (for example, the provision of goods and services). If it applies, the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act makes it unlawful for a person to subject another person to any detriment in any circumstances on the grounds that the victimised person has (or intends to):

- brought proceedings against the discriminator or any other person under the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act
- given evidence or information in connection with proceedings brought under the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act
- alleged that the discriminator has committed an act which would amount to a contravention of the NSW Anti-Discrimination Act, or
- otherwise done anything under or by reference to the NSW Discrimination Act in relation to the discriminator or any other person

The above does not apply to false allegations not made in good faith.



Northern Territory

Under changes to the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 (NT)* (**NT Anti-Discrimination Act**), in force since 3 July 2023, the term 'work' now includes work performed by volunteers.

Section 4 of the NT Anti-Discrimination Act Work now defines work to include work carried out in any capacity and at any place, including as:

- an employee
- a contractor or subcontractor
- an employee of a contractor or subcontractor
- an employee of a labour hire company
- an outworker
- an apprentice or trainee
- a student or other person gaining work experience, whether formal or informal
- a volunteer or on another unpaid basis
- a statutory appointee
- part of a vocational training program or other occupational training or retraining program, or
- a person of a prescribed class

Accordingly, volunteers are now covered by the NT Anti-Discrimination Act. This makes it unlawful for a person to subject another person (or associate of the person) to victimisation because the person has (or intends to):

- make a complaint under the NT Anti-Discrimination Act
- given evidence or information in connection with proceedings brought under the NT Anti-Discrimination Act
- alleged that a person has committed an act which would amount to a contravention of the NT Anti-Discrimination Act, or
- done anything in relation to a person under or by reference to the NT Anti-Discrimination Act

The above does not apply to false allegations not made in good faith.

As volunteers are now covered by the NT Anti-Discrimination Act, organisations could be held vicariously liable (responsible) for victimisation in the workplace. One way in which an organisation can defend itself against liability is by proving that it took reasonable steps to prevent the victimisation from occurring, for example the provision of training and the production of policies. This includes taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing the inappropriate workplace behaviour.

Queensland

As noted above, volunteers are protected under the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (QLD)* (**QLD Anti-Discrimination Act**) from discrimination and sexual harassment. Under the QLD Anti-Discrimination Act, victimisation occurs where a person does an act, or threatens to do an act, to the detriment of another person:

- because the second person (or a person associated with that person):
 - refused to do an act that would amount to a contravention of the QLD Anti-Discrimination Act
 - in good faith, alleged, or intends to allege that a person committed a contravention of the QLD Anti-Discrimination Act, or
 - is, has been, or intends to be, involved in a proceeding under the QLD Anti-Discrimination Act against any person, or
- because the first person believes that the second person (or a person associated with that person) is doing, has done, or intends to do one of the things mentioned above.

The term 'involvement in a proceeding' includes making a complaint under the QLD Anti-Discrimination Act, being involved in a prosecution for an offence under the QLD Anti-Discrimination Act, and supplying information, producing documents or appearing as a witness as part of the prosecution process.



Under the QLD Anti-Discrimination Act, organisations can be held vicariously liable (responsible) for victimisation in the workplace. One way in which an organisation can defend itself against liability is by proving that it took reasonable steps to prevent the victimisation from occurring. This includes taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing the inappropriate workplace behaviour.

South Australia

As noted above, volunteers are covered by the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)* (**SA Equal Opportunity Act**) which prohibits acts of victimisation, including treating the victim unfavourably on the ground that the victim has (or intends to, or is suspected of having):

- brought proceedings under the SA Equal Opportunity Act
- given evidence or information in proceedings under the SA Equal Opportunity Act
- made allegations that the victim or some other person has been the subject of an act that contravenes the SA Equal Opportunity Act
- reasonably asserted the victim's right, or the right of some other person, to lodge a complaint or take other proceedings under the SA Equal Opportunity Act, or
- otherwise done anything under or by reference to the SA Equal Opportunity Act

The above does not apply to false allegations not made in good faith.

Under the SA Equal Opportunity Act, organisations can be held vicariously liable (responsible) for the occurrence of victimisation by an employee (including a volunteer) the workplace. One way in which an organisation can defend itself against liability is by proving that it had appropriate policies in place at the time of the unlawful act, and that they took reasonable steps to enforce the policy. This includes taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing the inappropriate workplace behaviour.

Tasmania

As noted above, the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (Tas)* (**Tas Anti-Discrimination Act**) covers volunteers. The Tas Anti-Discrimination Act prohibits a person from subjecting, or threatening to subject another person (or an associate of that person) to any detriment because they:

- have made, or intend to make, a complaint under the Tas Anti-Discrimination Act
- gave, or intend to give, evidence or information in connection with any proceedings under the Tas Anti-Discrimination Act
- allege, or intend to allege, that any person has committed an act which would amount to a contravention of Tas Anti-Discrimination Act
- refused, or intend to refuse, to do anything that would amount to a contravention of the Tas Anti-Discrimination Act, or
- have otherwise done anything under or by reference to the Tas Anti-Discrimination Act

Victoria

As noted above, the definition of 'employee' under the *Equal Opportunity Act 2010 (Vic)* (**Vic Equal Opportunity Act**) includes unpaid workers and volunteers, but this is only in relation to the prohibition of sexual harassment.

However, in particular circumstances in addition to sexual harassment, the Vic Equal Opportunity Act may apply to volunteers in specified 'areas' covered by the Vic Equal Opportunity Act (for example, the provision of goods and services). The Vic Equal Opportunity Act prohibits victimisation, which occurs where a person subjects, or threatens to subject, another person to any detriment because that other person (or a person associated with that person) has:

- brought a dispute to the Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission
- made a complaint under the Vic Equal Opportunity Act



- brought any proceeding or dispute under the Vic Equal Opportunity Act against any person
- given evidence or information, or produced a document, in connection with a proceeding or investigation conducted under the Vic Equal Opportunity Act
- attended a compulsory conference or mediation in any proceedings under the Vic Equal Opportunity Act
- alleged that a person that has done an act or has refused to do anything that is unlawful under certain provisions of the Vic Equal Opportunity Act (or believes that they would do so), or
- has otherwise done anything in accordance with the Vic Equal Opportunity Act in relation to any person

The above does not apply to false allegations not made in good faith.

If the Vic Equal Opportunity Act applies to your volunteers (for example, sexual harassment or in the specified 'areas' covered by the Vic Equal Opportunity Act) your organisation may have a positive duty to take reasonable and proportionate measures to eliminate victimisation from the workplace. This includes taking steps to prevent this behaviour and not waiting for a complaint before addressing the inappropriate workplace behaviour.

Western Australia

As noted above, the definition of 'employment' in the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)*, (**WA Equal Opportunity Act**) doesn't include volunteers, unpaid workers or vocational placement by an educational or training authority and for the most part it does not apply to volunteers.

The WA Equal Opportunity Act provides that it is unlawful for a person (victimiser) to subject or threaten to subject another person (the person victimised) to any detriment because the person victimised has (or intends):

- made, or proposes to make a complaint under the WA Equal Opportunity Act
- brought, or proposes to bring proceedings against the victimiser or any other person under the WA Equal Opportunity Act
- given information, or a document, to a person performing any function under the WA Equal Opportunity Act
- appeared as a witness before the Tribunal in a proceeding under the WA Equal Opportunity Act
- has asserted any rights of the person victimised or rights of any other person under the WA Equal Opportunity Act, or
- has made an allegation that a person that has done an act that is unlawful under certain provisions of the WA Equal Opportunity Act

The above does not apply to false allegations not made in good faith.

As the WA Equal Opportunity Act doesn't protect volunteers in the workplace, they are not protected from victimisation in the workplace in relation to their volunteering.



Making a complaint – discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying and victimisation

Where possible and appropriate, complaints about discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying and victimisation should be dealt with internally and in accordance with the organisation's complaint handling policy.

Where it is not possible or appropriate to resolve complaints internally, complaints may be made to the relevant state or federal body. There are different bodies in each state and at the federal level to which a complaint regarding discrimination, sexual harassment, bullying or victimisation may be made. For information on how to make a complaint, and what a complaint should contain, you should contact the relevant body listed in the table below. Equally, if you have been notified that a complaint has been made against you or your organisation, you should also contact the body in the table below.

Discrimination, sexual harassment, and victimisation

<p>Fair Work Commission (FWC)</p>	<p>Under the Fair Work Act a person (including volunteers) who claims they have been sexually harassed in the workplace, may apply to the Fair Work Commission for an order to stop the harassment.</p> <p>If the person making an application to the Commission for a stop sexual harassment order remains engaged in the workplace, they may make an application up to 24 months after the relevant conduct is alleged to have taken place.</p> <p>If the Commission is satisfied that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the aggrieved person has been sexually harassed, and • there is a risk that they will continue to be harassed, <p>the Commission may make an order it considers appropriate to prevent further harassment.</p> <p>The purpose of an order is for the worker to be able to continue their work free from the harassment. The order may require monitoring of behaviour, compliance and review of existing policies, further support and anything else the Commission considers appropriate in the circumstances.</p> <p>The Commission may not make an order requiring payment of a monetary amount.</p> <p>Without issuing a stop harassment order, the Commission may deal with a dispute through mediation, conciliation, making a recommendation or expressing an opinion.</p> <p>If attempts to resolve the dispute are unsuccessful, the Commission may issue a certificate allowing (within 60 days of the certificate being issued):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the parties to agree to deal with the dispute by arbitration in the Commission, or • the aggrieved person to apply to have the dispute heard by the Federal Court or the Federal Circuit and Family Court of Australia <p>Multiple aggrieved persons can make an application so the Commission can deal with the aggrieved persons jointly. This can be both practical and efficient in cases involving a common perpetrator.</p>
<p>Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)</p>	<p>The AHRC investigates and resolves complaints of discrimination, harassment or bullying on the basis of, but not limited to sex, disability, race or age.</p> <p>The complaint made must be with regards to unlawful discrimination. To resolve complaints, the AHRC use the method of conciliation, a free and informal process which can occur through a telephone conference, exchange of letters, or a face to face conference between the complainant and respondent.</p>



	<p>If the complaint can't be resolved through conciliation, the complainant may apply to have their complaint be heard in the Federal Court or Federal Circuit Court of Australia, but must do so within 60 days (of the end of conciliation) and in some instances, with permission from the Court. Whether or not a volunteer can make a complaint to the AHRC will depend on whether the volunteer is covered by certain aspects of the federal discrimination laws. This is complex and may require legal advice.</p> <p>The <i>Anti-Discrimination and Human Rights Legislation Amendment (Respect at Work) Act 2022</i> has amended the <i>Australian Human Rights Commission Act 1986</i> to extend the period for making complaints about age, disability and race discrimination to 24 months. The President of the AHRC may terminate claims made beyond this timeframe.</p>
<p>Australian Capital Territory</p> <p>ACT Human Rights Commission (ACT-HRC)</p>	<p>The ACT-HRC's role is to resolve complaints and promote rights. It may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • decide to take no further action on a complaint • attempt to resolve it through conciliation, or • decide that resolution by conciliation is unlikely to be successful <p>If the ACT-HRC decides that conciliation should be attempted to resolve the complaint, this allows an opportunity for both parties to discuss and try to find a way to resolve the complaint.</p> <p>Outcomes from conciliation may include: a written or verbal apology, the introduction of policies and guidelines, financial compensation (agreed to by the other party) or gestures to show the respondent's good will towards the complainant.</p> <p>If the complaint is unable to be resolved through conciliation or the ACT-HRC decides that conciliation will be unlikely to resolve the complaint, the complaint may be referred to the ACT Civil and Administrative Tribunal.</p>
<p>New South Wales</p> <p>Anti-Discrimination Board of NSW (ADB)</p>	<p>The ADB investigates complaints of discrimination that are covered in the <i>Anti-Discrimination Act 1977 (NSW)</i>.</p> <p>It doesn't have the power to make an order or award compensation, but actively seeks to resolve complaints through conciliation which is designed to be an informal and cost-effective method of resolving disputes. The ADB may also choose to refuse investigating a complaint if the incident occurred more than 12 months before the complaint was lodged. If a person or organisation wishes to lodge a complaint about events which happened more than 12 months ago, an explanation for the delay in lodging the complaint will need to be provided to the ADB.</p>
<p>Northern Territory</p> <p>Northern Territory Anti-Discrimination Commission (NTADC)</p>	<p>A complaint to the NTADC must be made within 12 months of the incident occurring. However, the NTADC may consider complaints over 12 months if there is good reason. Once the NTADC receives a complaint covered by the <i>Anti-Discrimination Act 1992 (NT)</i> the respondent is notified by the NTADC and the matter is set down for a compulsory conciliation. If the matter is not resolved the complainant may decide to continue the evaluation process which involves the complaint being referred to the Northern Territory Civil and Administrative Tribunal if the NTADC decides there is merit for the referral.</p>
<p>Queensland</p> <p>Queensland Human Rights Commission (QHCR)</p>	<p>The QHRC uses conciliation in resolving complaints that may arise and QHRC provide this service free of charge.</p> <p>Complaints to the QHRC must be made in writing, and set out how the incident involved a breach of the <i>Anti-Discrimination Act 1991 (QLD)</i> and the <i>Human Rights Act 2019 (QLD)</i>.</p>



<p>Previously the Anti-Discrimination Commission Queensland (ADCQ)</p>	<p>Complaints to the QHRC must be made within a year of the incident. However, the QHRC may choose to accept a complaint about an incident which occurred over a year ago depending on the length of and reason for the delay.</p> <p>If the complaint is unable to be resolved through conciliation, the complainant may approach the Queensland Industrial Relations Commission for work-related complaints or the Queensland Civil and Administrative Tribunal for all other complaints.</p>
<p>South Australia</p> <p>Equal Opportunity Commission (EOCSA)</p>	<p>EOCSA provide free and confidential services in resolving complaints through the use of conciliation.</p> <p>A 12 month time limit is imposed and the EOCSA generally won't consider complaints about incidents over 12 months ago unless there is good reason, and it would be fair for the complaint to be taken up despite being late.</p> <p>If the parties are unable to agree to resolve the complaint, the EOCSA may choose to refer the complaint to the South Australian Employment Tribunal (SAET).</p> <p>The SAET hears and determines matters regarding:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • equal opportunity complaints • exemptions to the <i>Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (SA)</i>, or • a review of refusal to extend time <p>Equal opportunity complaints must be made in the first instance to the EOCSA before approaching the SAET.</p>
<p>Tasmania</p> <p>Equal Opportunity Tasmania (EOT)</p>	<p>A complaint must be within the scope of the <i>Anti-Discrimination Act 1998 (Tas)</i> and made within 12 months of the incident. If the EOT decides the complaint is to be handled, an investigation process will occur.</p> <p>At the end of the investigation, the EOT may decide to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • dismiss the complaint • resolve the complaint through conciliation, or • refer the complaint to the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal <p>If the EOT chooses to dismiss the complaint, the EOT will inform the complainant and respondent of the decision and reasons for it. The complainant has the right to ask the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal for a review of the decision by the EOT.</p> <p>If conciliation occurs, but the complaint is unresolved, the EOT must send the complaint to the Anti-Discrimination Tribunal for inquiry.</p>
<p>Victoria</p> <p>Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (VEOHRC)</p>	<p>VEOHRC seeks to resolve complaints through the process of conciliation, the aim of which is to reach an agreement between the complainant and the respondent.</p> <p>VEOHRC is unable to make orders or award compensation but common outcomes of conciliation can include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • an apology • financial compensation (agreed to by the other party) • a job reinstatement, or an agreement to change or stop behaviour <p>If the issue can't be resolved through conciliation, a complainant may apply to the Victorian Civil and Administrative Tribunal. The complainant can make this application regardless of whether a complaint has been made to VEOHRC.</p>



Western Australia

Equal Opportunity Commission (EOCWA)

Complaints to the EOCWA must be on a matter under the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984 (WA)* and the incident must have occurred within 12 months of the complaint being lodged.

Generally, the EOCWA will refuse complaints about incidents over 12 months ago but may consider them if there is good reason or good cause for the delay.

Common outcomes from conciliation can include:

- an apology
- staff training programs, or
- compensation for a specific loss

If the complaint is unable to be conciliated, the EOCWA may choose to dismiss the complaint or refer the matter to the State Administrative Tribunal for hearing and determination.

Bullying

Not all organisations are required to comply with the work health and safety legislation. To work out whether your organisation is subject to these laws, see part 4 of this guide.

Federal

Fair Work Commission (FWC)

The role of the FWC is to prevent bullying from occurring in the future. The FWC becomes involved when a person makes an application to the Commission for an order to stop bullying. The FWC can't order that financial penalties be imposed, or make orders for compensation.

If a person is eligible to make a stop bullying application (they are a 'worker' and they are in a constitutionally covered business), they must make an application using Form F72 – Application for an order to stop workplace bullying, accompanied by the appropriate fee. Importantly, this application must be made while the worker is still involved with the organisation.

Actions that the Commission might consider could include:

- requiring the individual or group of individuals to stop the specified behaviour
- regular monitoring of behaviours by an employer or principal
- compliance with an employer or principal's bullying policy
- the provision of information and additional support and training to workers
- review of the employer's or principal's bullying policy

Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC)

As mentioned above, a person may also be able to make a complaint to the AHRC for bullying in the workplace, where the bullying is linked to, or based on, a protected characteristic, such as the person's age, sex, race or disability or if it based on person's criminal record, trade union activity, political opinion, religion or social origin. Whether or not volunteers are able to make a complaint to the AHRC is complicated and legal advice may need to be sought.

Australian Capital Territory

Access Canberra

Access Canberra's role is to monitor and enforce compliance with the *Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (ACT)*.

One of Access Canberra's roles in relation to bullying at work is to ensure that the employer is meeting their obligation to provide a work environment that is safe and that risks to health (including risks to psychological health) are prevented or managed. In the case of bullying, this can include dealing effectively with issues that do arise despite attempts at prevention.

If an application is made to Access Canberra, an Access Canberra inspector might:



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • issue an improvement notice requiring specific actions to be taken by the employer where there is a breach of the <i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i> (this action may include directions to develop and implement policies and procedures, directions to train staff in relation to acceptable workplace behaviours or directions to train supervisors in relation to their role in dealing with bullying at work) • provide advice to the employer about how to comply with health and safety laws • decide that the workplace has taken reasonable steps to prevent bullying at work • decide that the employer has taken reasonable steps to respond to and manage allegations of bullying at work, and • recommend that the employer engage the services of a suitably qualified person to assist with managing health and safety issues
<p>New South Wales</p> <p>SafeWork NSW</p>	<p>SafeWork NSW's role is to ensure that organisations subject to the <i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (NSW)</i> provide and maintain a work environment that is without risks to health and safety.</p> <p>SafeWork NSW can investigate workplace bullying. If you are a worker you can notify SafeWork NSW by filling in the 'Workplace bullying form'.</p> <p>If a SafeWork inspector visits the workplace, they may:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • provide information and advice on the requirements of WHS or workers compensation law • explain the range of SafeWork products and services available to your business • provide practical advice on how to eliminate or reduce the risk of injury and illness • investigate or verify compliance with legislative obligations • issue notices or other instructions to secure compliance with legislation
<p>Northern Territory</p> <p>NT WorkSafe</p>	<p>The role of NT WorkSafe is to assess whether the workplace concerned, has appropriate systems in place to manage the risk of exposure to workplace bullying.</p> <p>NT WorkSafe responds to workplace bullying complaints only in certain situations that fall within the scope of the <i>Work Health and Safety (National Uniform Legislation) Act (NT)</i>:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint must (on the face of it) fall within the definition of workplace harassment • the complaint must be in writing. The complainant will be given or sent an information package which must be completed • the complaint should have been raised at the workplace and an attempt made to resolve the complaint internally <p>For further information or to request a bullying and harassment complaint form contact NT WorkSafe on 1800 019 115 or ntworksafe@nt.gov.au.</p>
<p>Queensland</p> <p>Workplace Health and Safety Queensland (WHSQ)</p>	<p>WHSQ can only respond to complaints in certain situations that fall within the scope of the <i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011 (QLD)</i>, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • the complaint must (on face value) fall within the definition of workplace bullying • the complaint must be in writing unless there are exceptional circumstances • the complainant must contact the Work Health and Safety Infoline on 1300 362 128 for an information package, which includes the address to send



	<p>the complaint and a checklist which must be completed, signed and attached to the written complaint</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> attempts should be made to resolve the situation in the workplace before contacting WHSQ <p>If all the above has been satisfied, a WHSQ inspector will contact the workplace, advise them of the complaint and may request evidence from the workplace that the risk of injury or illness from workplace bullying is being effectively managed. When people at the workplace fail to meet their duties under the <i>Work Health and Safety Act 2011</i>, inspectors may use a range of compliance and enforcement options including, but not limited to, advice, verbal directions, improvement and infringement notices.</p>
<p>South Australia</p> <p>SafeWork SA</p>	<p>SafeWork SA's role is to ensure that PCBUs and workers meet their obligations under work health and safety laws, including, psychological health risks from bullying.</p> <p>Workers can contact SafeWork SA to make a complaint on 1300 365 255.</p> <p>If a complaint is made to SafeWork SA, they will:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> confirm if the complaint has merit under the legal definitions determine if the PCBU has taken appropriate measures or actions make sure the hazards are suitably controlled issue statutory notices for breaches of work health and safety laws, if required
<p>Tasmania</p> <p>WorkSafe Tasmania</p>	<p>WorkSafe Tasmania can investigate if it receives a complaint of bullying in the workplace. A worker can make a complaint using the online form to lodge a complaint or phone the Helpline on 1300 366 322.</p> <p>WorkSafe Tasmania will only investigate when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> the bullying is still occurring, and the victim has exhausted all options in their workplace to stop the bullying <p>It is the role of a WorkSafe Tasmania inspector to investigate and determine if those involved have met their obligations under the <u><i>Work Health and Safety Act 2012 (Tas)</i></u> for example, if the organisation has a policy and procedure in place for preventing and responding to bullying.</p>
<p>Victoria</p> <p>WorkSafe Victoria</p>	<p>WorkSafe's Advisory Service can provide information on bullying and how to prevent it, advice on how to raise the issue of bullying in your workplace or refer the matter to an inspector (where appropriate).</p>
<p>Western Australia</p> <p>WorkSafe Western Australia</p>	<p>A person (after taking preliminary steps) can make a complaint about bullying via an <u>Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) enquiry</u> with WorkSafe. Action taken by WorkSafe is targeted at preventing and managing bullying in the workplace. Depending on the outcome of the investigation and the circumstances the Inspector can take one or more of the following actions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> no action provide information issue improvement notice

Summary – volunteers and unlawful workplace behaviour



Laws prohibit sexual harassment

- The laws exist at both state and federal level.
- The federal laws prohibit sexual harassment and harassment on the ground of sex.
- Generally, sexual harassment laws apply to volunteers (including those seeking volunteer work) in all states except Western Australia.
- A positive duty now applies to some organisations to ensure they are taking ongoing steps to protect volunteers from sexual harassment.
- We recommend you take proactive steps to ensure this obligation is discharged.
- It is now unlawful for a person to subject another to a workplace environment which is hostile on the ground of sex.

Laws prohibit discrimination

- The laws exist at both state and federal level.
- Generally, the state-based discrimination laws will apply to volunteers in the Australian Capital Territory, Queensland, South Australia and Tasmania. They may apply in Victoria and New South Wales where volunteering falls within another area covered by the discrimination legislation, but are unlikely to apply in Western Australia.
- We recommend you comply with these laws (as much as reasonably possible) even if strictly speaking you are not legally required to comply

Laws prohibit bullying

- Bullying behaviour is prohibited under federal law (for example, volunteers are protected in the same way as are employees under the Fair Work Act) and in each state and territory.
- We recommend you comply with these laws (as much as reasonably possible) even if strictly speaking you are not legally required to comply.

Laws prohibit victimisation

- These are the same laws that prohibit discrimination so your organisation will need to be aware of whether victimisation laws apply to volunteers in their state.
- A positive duty now applies to some organisations to ensure they are taking ongoing steps to protect volunteers from victimisation.
- We recommend you comply with these laws (as much as reasonably possible) even if strictly speaking you are not legally required to comply.

Sexual harassment, discrimination, bullying, victimisation may also be a work health and safety issue

- The relevant federal, state or territory work health and safety legislation may apply to your organisation.
- Generally, if your organisation is required to take out workers' compensation insurance policy it will not cover your volunteers. You may need to consider separate insurance.



Negligence

- Where legislation doesn't protect a volunteer at work, a common law (negligence) duty of care may still be owed to the volunteer to ensure they do not suffer harm as a result of inappropriate workplace behaviour.

Legal obligations to protect volunteers from unlawful workplace behaviour

- Your organisation must understand its legal obligations to protect its volunteers from unlawful workplace behaviour.
- It should have a workplace behaviour policy and procedures to help all workers to be protected from unlawful behaviour. It should include details of the person to whom complaints on behaviour can be made, the process for resolving complaints and what to do if the process for making a complaint does not resolve it. Ongoing training on appropriate workplace behaviour should be conducted.

Legal obligations to protect the people your volunteers are interacting with

- Your organisation must understand it also has legal obligations to ensure the people your volunteers are interacting with are not subjected to unlawful workplace behaviour by the volunteer.
- Your organisation could be legally responsible (under discrimination laws, work health and safety legislation, and negligence law).

Volunteers may be sued

- Laws in each state and territory generally protect volunteers from liability, for things in done in good faith (or honestly and without recklessness in the ACT), however, there are some exceptions.



National Volunteering Guide

Part 6

**Other legal issues relevant to volunteers
– intellectual property, privacy and record
keeping**

Feb 2024



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Part 6

**Other legal issues relevant to
volunteers – intellectual property,
privacy and record keeping**

Other legal issues relevant to volunteers



This part covers:

- ▶ intellectual property rights
- ▶ privacy law, and
- ▶ record keeping

This part of the guide covers some additional legal issues relevant to volunteer involving organisations.

For example:

Who **owns photographs** taken by a volunteer for use on our social media sites?

What are our **privacy obligations** towards our volunteers?

Are obligations regarding **use of confidential information** the same for volunteers as they are for employees?

What records need to be kept in relation to volunteers? What about **records involving personal information** (for example, a copy of the volunteer's Working with Children Check)? For how long should we keep these records?





Intellectual property

Intellectual property (or IP) is a legal term used to describe kinds of intangible property which protect outputs of the 'mind'. As part of its activities, your organisation will develop, hold and use intellectual property.

Intellectual property may include:

- your organisation's name, logo and branding (including for services or programs you provide)
- publications and training materials
- photos and other artistic materials (including those used on social media)



Why does intellectual property matter?

It's important to understand how intellectual property is created, who owns it and how ownership can be changed so that:

- your organisation's intellectual property rights are protected, and
- your organisation doesn't infringe another person's intellectual property

Infringement of intellectual property rights, even unintentionally, may lead to undesirable consequences (such as, legal action against your organisation).

There are 'types' of IP, including:

- copyright – protects certain types of works including literary, artistic and musical works
- trade marks – used to signify an association between certain goods or services and a particular trader
- trade secrets and other confidential information
- designs – protect the appearance or 'visual features' of a product
- patents – protect inventions
- plant breeder rights – protect new plant varieties

These forms of intellectual property are all different in what they protect, how they are protected, how they are enforced and exploited, and the duration of the protection provided.

The owner of intellectual property will have certain rights to 'exclude' others from using their asset. For example, the owner of the copyright in a literary work (such as a newsletter or report), has the right to prevent others from publishing that work.

While ownership of intellectual property typically originates with its author or creator, most forms of intellectual property can be assigned to another party. For example, employers will typically own intellectual property created by their employees as a matter of law, while other individuals such as contractors or volunteers can agree to assign intellectual property arising from their work to their organisation.



How is intellectual property protected in Australia?

In Australia, intellectual property rights are protected under Commonwealth legislation (laws passed by the Federal Parliament), as well as by the common law (laws developed by Australian courts).

In some instances, intellectual property protection is automatic and doesn't require any formal registration (for example, copyright), while in other cases, you must formally apply for registration to protect the intellectual property (for example, patents).



Copyright

Copyright is the expression of an original idea in a material form. The expression of the idea is known as a 'work'. Depending on the type of work, different copyright protections may apply. Key categories of works include:

- literary – works reduced to writing (articles, letters, flyers)
- dramatic – works intended to be performed dramatically (dance, choreography)
- artistic – works which have an artistic quality or craftsmanship (painting, prints, photographs, sculptures)
- musical – works involving an auditory element, such as a melody (songs, jingles, musical scores)

In addition, copyright also protects sound recordings, films, broadcasts and published editions of works.

Protecting copyright

In Australia, copyright is protected under the *Copyright Act 1968 (Cth)* (**Copyright Act**). Works created in Australia are protected by copyright automatically on creation. The copyright in a work does not need to be 'registered'.

Copyright protection only lasts for a certain amount of time, depending on the type of copyright.

For example:

Work	Duration of protection
Literary, artistic or musical works	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70 years after the death of the author, if the work was made public before death • 70 years from the date the work was made public, if the work was made public after the death of the author
Sound recordings, films	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 70 years from the year the material was created or first made public
Broadcasts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50 years after the broadcast was made
Published editions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 25 years after first publication

Once the copyright protection period ends, the work is no longer protected and can be used by anyone provided it is not also the subject of another intellectual property right (for example, a trade mark registration).

The owner of the copyright has the exclusive right to do certain things with the material. Depending on the kind of work involved, this will typically include the exclusive right to:

- copy or reproduce the copyright material in any format (for example, scan, print or photocopy)
- publish the material (for example, in hardcopy or electronic form)
- perform the material in public (for example, present it at a conference or training session)
- make an adaptation of the material (for example, translate it into a different language, or update it over the years), and
- communicate the material to the public (for example, publish or broadcast on the internet)

Copyright ownership

Under the Copyright Act, unless another agreement is made, copyright in a work will be owned by the author of the work. However, the Copyright Act also provides that employers will own copyright in certain works produced by employees in the course of their employment. This exception is unlikely to apply to volunteers or contractors.

The agreements organisations have with its employees, contractors and volunteers should include terms setting out what works the organisation will own. The agreement will also need to ensure that these works



are transferred to the organisation. Generally, the transfer (or assignment) will occur on **creation** of the work.

If an organisation doesn't have an agreement in place with a volunteer or any other third party, the ownership of a work can be transferred later by agreement between the parties. This is done through a document called a 'Deed of Assignment', which transfers ownership from one party to another.

If an organisation doesn't intend to own the works created by its employees or volunteers, it should ensure it has written agreements in place allowing the organisation to use the works.



Example

Justin volunteers at a local environmental protection organisation. He is a keen photographer and takes photographs of trees and other local plants in the area for the organisation to use on its website and social media sites (for example, Facebook and Instagram).

Unless Justin and the organisation have agreed otherwise in writing, Justin owns the copyright in the photographs, and has the exclusive right to control how they are used.

However, the organisation can obtain permission from Justin to use the photographs for the purpose of publishing the photographs on the organisation's website and social media sites.



Tip

For more information about deeds of assignment, see **part 3** of this guide which includes a sample Deed of Assignment that covers confidential information and intellectual property.

Authorised use of copyright (licence)

To use a copyright work owned by another person, permission is required. This permission is referred to as a copyright 'licence'.

Ideally, licence agreements are in writing, providing an explicit understanding of what permissions are being granted, and any associated terms.

Some works may be licensed for use by the public broadly, such as 'Creative Commons' or 'open source' materials. In these cases, it's important to review the terms associated with use of those works, as they may contain limitations. For example, a condition may limit commercial use of a work, which could still prevent use of works by not-for-profit organisations (as the use is not private or domestic).

In some instances your organisation may need to license the use of copyright it owns as part of its arrangements with contractors.



Example – non-exclusive licence

An organisation may engage with an academic to provide pro-bono assistance and prepare a report. It may be agreed that the organisation will own the copyright in the report but the academic will be given permission to use the work on certain terms – such as only publishing the report for academic or research purposes.

This is called a 'non-exclusive licence'.

When licensing copyright and other intellectual property, it's always important to set out the terms of use clearly, including how it can be used, any restrictions and any applicable fees.



Example

Sam drafts an original training manual for a community organisation in 2018, while completing a volunteer placement. Sam assigns the copyright in the works to the organisation as part of his volunteer agreement and later dies in 2021. The work will be protected by copyright, owned by the organisation, until the end of 2092.

Infringement of copyright

A person will infringe another person's copyright if they exercise one of the copyright owner's exclusive rights (such as publication) without the owner's permission.

A person may also be liable for copyright infringement if they are found to have authorised another person to infringe the copyright. 'Authorising' can mean asking someone to infringe copyright or allowing someone working under your supervision to infringe copyright.

Examples of uses of works that may infringe copyright include:

- photocopying, emailing, broadcasting or printing material
- playing music for staff, volunteers or other persons at your organisation without a licence
- recording a video that incorporates music that is subject to copyright protection, and
- communicating material to the public by making it available on a website

There are a limited number of exceptions to copyright infringement, including research and study, parody and satire. However, there is no general exception for not-for-profit community organisations.

If your organisation wants to use the copyrighted work of another person or organisation, you should ensure that you have permission from the copyright owner. This may require you to approach the owner and explain how you will use the works, where you will use the works and for how long your organisation intends to use the works. You may be required to pay a fee, called a 'royalty'. The licence should be documented in writing.

Trade marks, patents and designs

The other main forms of intellectual property are set out below. In all instances, the best way for a volunteer involving organisation to protect these forms of intellectual property is to register them with [IP Australia](#).

Trade marks

A trade mark is a sign used in relation to particular goods or services in order to differentiate them from the similar goods or services of other traders. Common examples include logos and brand names, but trade marks are not limited to words and images, and can be an exclusive right over a phrase, sound, smell, colour, shape or even an aspect of packaging.

In Australia, the *Trade Marks Act 1995 (Cth)* sets out the criteria for registration, rights of the trade mark owner and other matters such as the length of protection (once registered, 10 years from date the application is filed, renewable indefinitely).

Trade marks are registered in relation to the specific goods or services in respect of which they are to be used. It's possible for marks which are substantially identical to coexist, provided they are registered and used in different industries.

Registration confers certain rights (which are legally enforceable) on the holder of a registered trade mark, including:

- the exclusive right to use and authorise the use of the trade mark in relation to the goods or services for which the trade mark is registered
- the right to seek relief if the trade mark is infringed (for example, an injunction or an order to the infringing person to cease using the trade mark)
- the right to assign or license the trade mark, and



- protection of the trade mark rights being infringed by third parties through the imposition of penalties including criminal penalties (for example, penalties for falsifying a registered trade mark or falsely applying a trade mark)



What about unregistered trade marks?

A trade mark does not necessarily need to be registered before it is used by an organisation, and the common law may provide a degree of protection for unregistered marks.

If a trade mark is not registered, the owner has limited rights if it is misused or infringed and legal action is usually limited to a claim of misleading or deceptive conduct under Australian Consumer Law or 'passing off' under the common law.

However, it's often difficult to enforce an unregistered trade mark, particularly where another trader has a registered trade mark. It's therefore recommended that any trade marks are registered to provide the best protection for the organisation.

A trade mark should be registered in the name of the organisation itself, being the legal entity having ownership of the trade mark, even if a volunteer has assisted in the creation of the trade mark. The legal position is different if the organisation is an unincorporated association (see below).



Note – use of the symbols ® and ™

Once a trade mark is registered, the owner is granted the right to use the ® symbol to denote their rights. This symbol must only be used once a trade mark is registered as it is an offence to falsely represent that a trade mark is registered.

The '™' symbol may be used in relation to any trade mark, whether registered or not.

Patents and designs

A patent is a registered intellectual property right which protects an invention or innovation. In Australia, the relevant law is the *Patents Act 1990 (Cth)*. Once registered with IP Australia, protection lasts up to eight years for an innovation patent, 20 years for a standard patent and 25 years for patent of a pharmaceutical substance.

A design registration can protect the shape, configuration, pattern and ornamentation of a product, which gives a product a unique appearance. In Australia the relevant law is the *Designs Act 2003 (Cth)*. Once registered with IP Australia, protection lasts five years from the filing date of the application to register (the registration can be renewed for an additional period of five years). Designs are only able to be renewed once so a design can only be registered for a maximum of 10 years.

In both cases, a patent or design should be registered in the name of the organisation itself, being the legal entity having ownership of the patent or design, even if a volunteer has assisted in the creation of the patent or design. The legal position is different if the organisation is an unincorporated association (see below).



Note – unincorporated associations

While registration of a trade mark, patent or design will usually be in the name of the organisation, this can't be the case where the organisation is an unincorporated association.

This is because an unincorporated association is not a separate legal entity – it can't own intellectual property in its own name.

In this situation, it's common for registration to be in the name of a member of the governing body of the unincorporated association. In this instance, it's important to document in writing that the member of the governing body doesn't hold the registration for their own benefit but for the benefit of the unincorporated association.



For more information on trade marks, patents and designs, see our [webpage on Intellectual Property](#) or refer to [IP Australia](#).

What are moral rights?

Moral rights are the rights of an individual who creates a work to:

- be given credit as the author of the work
- not have someone else credited as the author of their work, and
- not have something done to their work (such as change the work) that would negatively impact the authors reputation

Moral rights continue to be held by the author even if they have transferred ownership of the copyright to someone else. This may limit the copyright owner's ability to deal with a work in certain ways.

In Australia, you can't assign, sell or waive your moral rights. Instead, the author can give their 'consent' to actions which would otherwise infringe their moral rights.

Depending on how your organisation chooses to deal with copyright, you may need to seek a moral rights consent from volunteers. Some organisations prefer to ensure that the author's moral rights are preserved and will attribute the author at all times. However, if an organisation wishes to be able to use a work without crediting its author, or to be able to unilaterally alter that work, it will need to obtain a moral rights consent. This can be included in a volunteer agreement signed at the beginning of the volunteering arrangement (see **part 3** of this guide) or it can occur in writing later.



Example

Kayla volunteers at a local dog rescue home. She writes an article on canine enrichment for adopted dogs for publication on the dog rescue home's website.

Unless Kayla has consented otherwise, she can insist that she be recognised as the author of the article and that the article not be changed in a manner that may negatively affect Kayla's reputation.



Confidential information

Confidential information is any information which your organisation does not want to be public knowledge.

Confidential information is not strictly 'property' – it is a right to have information kept confidential.

To maintain confidentiality, your organisation will need to ensure that any person who receives information is required to keep that information confidential.

Confidential information is often disclosed to employees or volunteers so they can perform their role (for example, an organisation's client and contact lists or funding information). To ensure that employees, contractors and volunteers are required to maintain confidentiality, all agreements with employees, contractors and volunteers should contain appropriate provisions limiting use and disclosure of confidential information.

The best way to make sure people understand they are receiving confidential information is to mark the information as confidential and to make sure the recipient understands it must be treated in confidence. Confidential information should be stored securely with restricted access.

If a person who receives confidential information breaches their duty of confidence, the law may provide a remedy. Often this remedy will be damages (monetary) or an injunction (a court order to stop a person who has threatened to make confidential information public).

Protection of confidential information lasts as long as the information stays confidential. Once confidential information has been disclosed (made public) it will no longer be confidential and can't become confidential again.



Tip

It may be appropriate to include a disclaimer, such as the following example, on sensitive material to help demonstrate that there is no intention to disclose the material publicly, and to remind recipients of the information about its confidential nature:

Important notice:

The information in this document is confidential information of XYZ Community Organisation.

The information in this document is provided only for the purposes of [insert authorised purpose] and must not be disclosed, reproduced, published, performed, communicated to the public or adapted by any person for any other purpose, except with the prior written consent of XYZ Community Organisation.

Using confidentiality agreements

A confidentiality agreement (or non-disclosure agreement) is an agreement between two parties (for example, a volunteer and your organisation) which sets out the terms and obligations that apply to confidential information which is received or shared between the parties.

A confidentiality agreement provides a clear way for your organisation to protect your rights in respect of confidential information. If you expect that volunteers will have access to confidential information, it's a good idea to ask them to sign a confidentiality agreement before they start volunteering.

Terms of confidentiality may be a separate agreement or part of a broader agreement (for example, the volunteer agreement). If an agreement is not put in place before confidential information is disclosed to a volunteer, you should immediately ask the volunteer to enter into an agreement which requires that the volunteer not disclose or use any confidential information received before and after the date of the agreement.

If the volunteer doesn't agree to sign the agreement, your organisation will need to consider if it's appropriate to continue to disclose confidential information to that person.



Example

HealthyHeads is a suicide-prevention charity. It has developed a unique therapy treatment.

Kylie is volunteer who takes initial phone calls from potential clients. As part of her role, Kylie receives some training in how the therapy works. To make sure Kylie can't disclose the workings of its unique therapy, HealthyHeads makes sure her volunteer agreement includes a provision which obliges her not to disclose or use confidential information (including details of the therapy) to anyone outside HealthyHeads.



Tip

A confidentiality agreement should:

- define the information that is considered confidential
- confirm that the confidential information must be kept confidential, and
- clearly define the limited purposes for which the confidential information may be used

Be aware that – even if all steps are taken to protect the confidentiality of information – there are some circumstances in which disclosure can be required by law. For example, courts can impose an obligation that information (including confidential information) be produced to the court through a request (a subpoena) if disclosure of the information is considered to be in the interests of justice.



Tip

For more information about deeds of agreement, see **part 3** of this guide which includes a sample Deed of Agreement that covers confidential information and intellectual property.

Accusations of infringement of another person or organisation's intellectual property

If a volunteer accuses your organisation of infringing their intellectual property:

- try to negotiate with the volunteer to identify what intellectual property they think has been infringed and how
- if feasible, stop using the intellectual property immediately, or come to an agreement with the volunteer to assign the intellectual property to your organisation
- seek legal advice to determine whether the volunteer's claim has merit (that is, whether it's substantial enough that it could be pursued in the courts) and how to resolve the dispute

If you are accused of infringing another person or organisation's intellectual property:

- if you consider the accusation has merit, stop carrying out the allegedly infringing activity as soon as possible, and
- seek legal advice



Who owns the intellectual property?

Understanding the different forms of intellectual property is critical to making sure any intellectual property produced by volunteers is protected.

As outlined above, your organisation can only consider how to best protect the organisation once it understands who owns the intellectual property.

The law in relation to each form of intellectual property and ownership is summarised below.

Volunteer or other unpaid worker – when the creator or author of the material is a volunteer or an unpaid worker (such as a person doing work experience or a vocational placement or internship):

Copyright

If an unpaid worker creates copyright material for your organisation, they will own copyright in the material unless there is a written agreement otherwise.

It's important to have an agreement with unpaid workers, including volunteers, about copyright ownership before they create material for your organisation to make sure copyright is owned by the organisation when it's created.

However, if this doesn't occur, the unpaid worker can agree in writing to assign copyright ownership to the organisation after its creation.



Trade marks, patents and designs

Trade marks, patents and designs are owned by the individual or entity listed as the owner on the Australian Trade Marks, Patents and Designs registers (unless registered fraudulently).

For this reason, an unpaid worker will not possess any rights in relation to a trade mark, patent or design registered with IP Australia in the name of your organisation.

However, if an unpaid worker develops a trade mark (for example, by drawing a logo) the unpaid worker's work may separately be protected by copyright.

Confidential information

The obligation to keep some information confidential may arise in an unpaid worker relationship through a confidentiality agreement (or confidentiality provisions in an agreement). Confidentiality can also arise where information is disclosed to the unpaid worker expressly in confidence, although it's more difficult to enforce.

Moral rights

Unpaid workers will have moral rights in respect of any literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work which they produce. These rights remain with the author of the work at all times, and so consent must be sought for any actions which might otherwise infringe moral rights.



Employee – when the creator or author of the material is an employee:

Copyright

It's an implied term of employment that an employer owns copyright in material created by their employees 'in the course of their employment'.

To remove uncertainties, your organisation should make it clear that it is hiring someone as an employee, and always include terms relating to copyright material in your employment agreements.

Trade marks, patents and designs

It's an implied term of employment that an employer owns a trade mark, patent or design created by their employees 'in the course of their employment'.

To remove uncertainties, your organisation should make it clear that it is hiring someone as an employee, and include protections for intellectual property in their employment agreement.

Confidential information

The relationship between an employer and an employee has been recognised by the courts as a special relationship for the purpose of confidential information.

The law requires an employee to maintain the confidentiality of information disclosed in the course of, or acquired as a result of, employment, irrespective of whether there is a confidentiality provision in an employment contract. It's best practice to address confidentiality in an employment agreement.

Moral rights

Employees will have moral rights in respect of any literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work which they produce for their employer, and so consent must be sought for any actions which might otherwise infringe moral rights.





Contractor – when the creator or author of the material is a contractor:

Copyright

Copyright created by an independent contractor will automatically be owned by the independent contractor unless there is a written agreement otherwise (in a contractor agreement or agreement for services).

The agreement should state that any copyright in material created by the contractor during the provision of services to the organisation becomes the copyright of the organisation when it's created. In the absence of this agreement, the contractor can assign their copyright to the organisation after its creation.

Trade marks, patents and designs

A trade mark, patent or design created by an independent contractor will be owned by an independent contractor unless there is an agreement otherwise.

While these types of intellectual property generally rely on registration with IP Australia, registration by your organisation will not prevent a contractor from making a claim for ownership of intellectual property.

So, to prevent a future dispute about ownership, contractor agreements should provide that any intellectual property created by the contractor as part of their services is owned by the organisation. A contractor can also assign their ownership of intellectual property to an organisation after its creation.

Confidential information

As with a volunteer, a contractor will only be obliged to keep certain information confidential where the information has been communicated in confidence to the contractor or the contractor has agreed to keep the information confidential in their contractor agreement. It's best practice to ensure that agreements with contractors address confidentiality.

Moral rights

As with a volunteer, the individuals working for the contractor will have moral rights in respect of any literary, dramatic, musical or artistic work which they produce for a party to which they are providing services, and so consent must be sought for any actions which might otherwise infringe moral rights.





Privacy



Note

Your organisation is likely to collect, use, store and disclose information about individuals (for example, in the delivery of services or in gathering information about new memberships or volunteers of your organisation).

Under privacy laws, this information will often be classified as 'personal information'. Personal information may include 'sensitive information' and 'health information' – these subcategories of personal information require special treatment.

It's important to consider your legal obligations under privacy laws in all your dealings with personal information, including the sub-categories of sensitive information and health information.

Australia has strict privacy laws regulating how an organisation can collect, use and disclose personal information.

Under these laws, certain organisations must deal with personal information in particular ways to make sure someone's personal information is protected and not misused.



Note

While the privacy laws don't apply to some organisations, these organisations:

- may still have to comply with these laws due to contractual arrangements the organisations have with third parties, or
- may want to follow the privacy laws as a matter of best practice, or by choosing to 'opt-in'.

Your organisation's workers, including volunteers, must understand the organisation's obligations under privacy laws and your organisation must implement policies and practices which reflect those obligations. Workers must be adequately trained to ensure your organisation's ongoing compliance under the privacy laws.

If your organisation is bound by privacy laws (or follows them as a matter of best practice), your organisation should only:

- collect and store personal information (including information about volunteers) with consent from the person involved (unless you have ensured that consent is not required for that collection of information under the privacy laws)
- use or disclose the personal information for the purpose for which it was collected (unless the person has consented to some other use of the information, or you have ensured that the use or disclosure is otherwise permissible under the privacy laws), and
- store personal information securely to ensure there is no unauthorised access

Where an organisation holds information about a person (including a volunteer) the person may have the right to request access to their personal information, and to seek that it be modified or amended to ensure it is correct.

Allowing volunteers to access personal information held by an organisation about other people (for example, information about members of the public assisted by the organisation) may constitute a 'disclosure' of personal information for the purposes of the privacy laws. Organisations should consider whether this is permissible before providing volunteers with access to personal information, and limit such access to the minimum information required by the volunteers to perform their tasks.



Tip

If your organisation uses the sample volunteer agreement (in part 3 of this guide), the agreement makes it clear that your organisation will respect your volunteer's privacy, including keeping the volunteer's private information confidential.



Caution

The information included in this part of the guide is of a generic nature and provides an overview of the Commonwealth and state laws on privacy. It's not intended to replace legal advice. More detailed information is available in our [privacy guide](#).

Privacy laws are complex and are not always easy to apply in practice. If you have any doubts, seek legal advice.

What are the privacy laws?

In this guide, the following legislation is collectively referred to as Privacy Laws:

Commonwealth	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy Act 1988 (Cth) (Privacy Act) which includes the 13 Australian Privacy Principles (APPs)
Australian Capital Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Privacy Act 2014 (ACT) • Workplace Privacy Act 2011 (ACT) • Health Records (Privacy and Access) Act 1997 (ACT)
New South Wales	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW) • Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW)
Northern Territory	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Act 2002 (NT)
Queensland	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information Privacy Act 2009 (QLD)
South Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has no legislative scheme for privacy law, but has an administrative direction on handling personal information that binds the public service: PC012 – Information Privacy Principles (IPPs) Instruction
Tasmania	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personal Information Protection Act 2004 (Tas)
Victoria	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) • Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)
Western Australia	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • has no legislative scheme for privacy law, but some privacy principles (dealing with access to information and correction of information) are provided for in the Freedom of Information Act 1992 (WA)



The state and territory privacy legislation applies to agencies of the state and territory governments, but doesn't generally apply to community organisations unless:

- they are required or otherwise agree to be bound by the legislation under a contract (for example, under a funding agreement with a government department), or
- (in some states) they are health service providers

The Privacy Act



Is your organisation bound by the Privacy Act?

The Privacy Act applies to many categories of organisations.

The most relevant categories of organisations are:

- organisations with annual turnover of more than \$3 million in any financial year since 2002
- Commonwealth government agencies
- government contracted services providers, and
- organisations that provide a health service to another individual and hold any health information

There are some exemptions.



Read more about whether your organisation is captured by the Privacy Act in our [privacy guide](#).

Information covered by the Privacy Act

The Privacy Act doesn't regulate or apply to all information that an organisation gathers or deals with – it only applies to information about individuals.

To understand if your organisation has obligations under the Privacy Act, consider whether the information you hold (or want to collect) falls into one of the categories of information described below. The Privacy Act applies to these categories of information in different ways.



Personal information

'Personal information' is information or an opinion about an identified person, or about a person who is '**reasonably identifiable**'.

Personal information can be true or false, verbal, written, photographic, recorded or unrecorded.

Examples of personal information include (but are not limited to) a person's name, address, contact details (such as telephone number or email), date of birth, gender, sexuality and race.



When will someone be 'reasonably identifiable'?

Whether someone is 'reasonably identifiable' from the information you hold depends on factors including:

- the nature and extent of the information
- how the information was received
- how the information will be used and who has access to it, and
- whether it's possible for you to identify the person from the resources you hold (including other information available to you)

Under the Privacy Act, personal information does **not** include:

- anonymous information
- aggregated information (for example, data that reflects trends without identifying the sample)
- de-identified information and information about companies or other entities which does not identify individuals
- information about a deceased person

Information can become personal information if, when combined with other information, it becomes possible, to identify an individual.



Example

Consider a car licence plate. Most people wouldn't be able to identify the owner of a car simply from the registration number. So, to most people, knowing a car's licence plate number would not make the owner of the car 'reasonably identifiable'.

But if you work for an agency responsible for car registration, you may be able to identify the owner of the car because you have access to other information. Holding information about the car registration would make the person 'reasonably identifiable' to you from the information you hold, so the registration number would be considered personal information.



Sensitive information

'Sensitive information' is a special category of personal information under the Privacy Act that is subject to stricter legal requirements for collection, storage, use and disclosure.

Information will be considered 'sensitive information' where it's information or an opinion about a person's:

- health, genetics, biometrics
- racial or ethnic origin
- political opinion, membership of a political association
- religious beliefs or affiliations
- philosophical beliefs
- membership of a professional or trade association, membership of a trade union
- sexual preferences or practices
- criminal record

Identifying sensitive information is important as different requirements and thresholds apply to this kind of information under the Privacy Act.



Health information

'Health information' is a type of sensitive personal information under the Privacy Act that includes information or opinion about a person's:

- physical and mental health
- disability (at any time)
- health preferences (including the provision of future health services)
- use of health services
- bodily donations (for example, blood or organs), and
- genetics



Note

When you are collecting, using, storing, or disclosing information that is considered 'health information', be aware that this type of information is generally afforded a higher level of protection under the Privacy Act and some state privacy legislation.



Examples

Health information may include:

- notes of a person's symptoms, diagnosis, or treatment plan
- specialist reports or test results
- appointment and billing details
- dental records
- a person's healthcare identifier when it's collected to provide a health service
- prescriptions and other pharmaceutical purchases, and
- any other personal information (such as information about a person's sexuality, religion, date of birth, gender) collected to provide a health service

Privacy Act obligations

Many of the key obligations of the Privacy Act are set out in the APPs. These APPs set out rules which must be followed by organisations when they collect, hold, use and disclose personal information.

In addition to the APPs, the Privacy Act sets out specific rules governing the handling of information about consumer creditworthiness, as well as procedures that must be followed in the event of any serious data breach event impacting on personal information.



Note

The Privacy Act has stronger protections for the use, collection and disclosure of:

- sensitive information and health information
- personal information (including sensitive and health information) for marketing activities, and
- consumer credit information (such as credit reports)



Summary of the APPs

In summary, the APPs require an organisation to:

- be open and transparent about its management of personal information, which includes having a culture of privacy compliance, effective privacy processes and a clearly expressed and up to date privacy policy
- take reasonable steps to ensure that people are aware it is collecting 'personal', 'sensitive' or 'health' information about them (and in the case of sensitive or health information, obtain consent to that collection)
- notify people about the purposes for which it is collecting the information and who it might share that information with (among other things)
- comply with restrictions on how personal information can be used and who it can be disclosed to, including at any offshore location where the information may be disclosed
- give people the right to access the information held about them and to have that information corrected or modified
- in the event of a data breach involving personal information, follow the steps set out under the Notifiable Data Breaches Scheme



For more information on privacy go to our [webpage on privacy](#).

This page includes our guide to privacy laws and a fact sheet on the Notifiable Data Breaches Scheme.

State and territory-based privacy laws

Australian state and territory IPPs apply to their respective government agencies (including public sector agencies, local councils, courts, state police).

The state and territory IPPs regulate how government agencies may deal with the personal information of individuals in a similar way that the APPs regulate how private entities deal with personal information.

The laws and directions containing the various state and territory IPPs are:

Australian Capital Territory	• Information Privacy Act 2014 (ACT) sets out 13 Territory IPPs in Schedule 1
New South Wales	• Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998 (NSW) sets out 12 IPPs in Part 2, Division 1
Northern Territory	• Information Act 2002 (NT) sets out 10 IPPs in Schedule 2
Queensland	• Information Privacy Act 2009 (QLD) sets out 11 IPPs in Schedule 3 and 9 National Privacy Principles which apply to health agencies and their contracted service providers in Schedule 4
South Australia	• has no legislative scheme for privacy law, but has an administrative direction on handling personal information that binds the public service: PC012 – Information Privacy Principles (IPPs) Instruction
Tasmania	• Personal Information Protection Act 2004 (Tas) sets out 10 IPPs in Schedule 1
Victoria	• Privacy and Data Protection Act 2014 (Vic) sets out 10 IPPs in Schedule 1
Western Australia	• has no legislative scheme for privacy law, but some privacy principles (dealing with access to information and correction of information) are provided for in the Freedom of Information Act 1992 (WA)



Is your organisation bound by the state and territory based privacy laws?

Each set of IPPs is very similar to the APPs under the Privacy Act.

While the IPPs generally only apply to government agencies, it's not uncommon for a funding contract with a state or territory public agency (for example, Department of Health) to require the funding recipient to comply with the relevant IPPs for the purpose of the funded project.

Always check if your organisation is subject to any state or territory based privacy laws.



If your organisation is contractually bound to comply with any of the state or territory IPPs, make sure:

- volunteers are appropriately trained regarding the organisation's obligations under the relevant IPPs and the funding contract, and
- your organisation complies with the requirements of the relevant IPPs when dealing with the personal information of volunteers

Health specific privacy legislation

Private health service providers are also subject to additional privacy legislation in New South Wales, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory.

The following legislation sets out Health Privacy Principles (HPPs):

Australian Capital Territory	• <u>Health Records (Privacy and Access) Act 1997 (ACT)</u> sets out 12 HPPs in Schedule 1
New South Wales	• <u>Health Records and Information Privacy Act 2002 (NSW)</u> sets out 15 HPPs in Schedule 1
Victoria	• <u>Health Records Act 2001 (Vic)</u> sets out 11 HPPs in Schedule 1

This legislation generally applies to the collection, use, storage and disclosure of health information of people receiving health services from health service providers.

If your organisation is bound by any of the HPPs, it should ensure its volunteers are appropriately trained regarding the organisation's obligations under the relevant health specific privacy legislation.



Tip

Always check contracts with state or territory government bodies to confirm if the organisation is required to comply with the IPPs or HPPs.



Note

This is a short summary of the types of the above information which are relevant to the application and obligations of the privacy laws. However, you should refer to our [privacy guide](#) for more detailed information.

Obligations under Privacy Laws for organisations and their volunteers

Your organisation, its volunteers and the Privacy Laws

If your organisation is required to comply with Privacy Laws (or chooses to comply as a matter of best practice) and engages volunteers, it will need to take steps to make sure people in the organisation are constantly mindful of their obligations when dealing with personal information.

To embed a culture of privacy, train your organisation's volunteers in privacy compliance and make sure they understand the importance of protecting personal information from the outset.

**Specifically, ensure your organisation's volunteers are appropriately trained regarding:**

The organisation's obligations under the Privacy Act and state and territory-based laws in relation to the collection, use, disclosure and storage of personal information and health information (as applicable or as a matter of the organisation's practice)	<input type="checkbox"/>
How the organisation (and its volunteers) collects, uses, discloses and stores personal information as part of its activities	<input type="checkbox"/>
The types of information, particularly sensitive and health information, which the volunteer may be required to deal with and the organisation's obligations in respect of that information	<input type="checkbox"/>
The organisation's policies in relation to privacy, such as a privacy policy, a data breach policy and response plan and the how a person can make a complaint to the organisation in relation to their personal information	<input type="checkbox"/>
What to do if the volunteer thinks that a data breach may have occurred	<input type="checkbox"/>
How to direct people to the organisation's privacy policy (which may be required by privacy law to be as available as practically possible, such as on the organisation's website), or how to provide people with a copy of the policy. The Privacy Act requires certain information be contained within the policy including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – the kinds of personal information that the organisation collects and holds – how personal information is collected and held – the reasons why the organisation collects, holds, uses and discloses personal information – how an individual can access their information – the procedures for collecting, holding, using and disclosing the information, and – an explanation of whether personal information will be disclosed overseas 	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Example**

HelpingHands is a large charity that provides outreach services to the elderly. HelpingHands relies on volunteers to conduct welfare checks on their clients. As part of their role, volunteers receive the personal information (such as the name and address) of clients that they then visit.

Before volunteers begin any activities, HelpingHands makes sure:

- it is able to disclose the relevant personal information to the volunteers under the APPs, and
- the volunteers are trained about HelpingHands' obligations under the Privacy Act, including their practices and procedures

Information about your volunteers and the Privacy Laws

Organisations that engage volunteers must treat volunteers' personal information in the same way they are required to treat personal information of any other individuals under the Privacy Act (and the relevant state and territory privacy laws if the organisation is required to comply with these).



Note

Personal information about employees may be exempt from the requirements of the Privacy Act.



Example

Sam volunteers at a shelter for homeless people. He tells his supervisor, Laureen, that he has tested positive to COVID-19. Both Sam and Laureen must follow the latest government-issued guidance, including any exclusion or self-isolation requirements, to limit the spread.

To the extent that any laws require the homeless shelter to take particular steps, the APPs will not prevent those steps from being taken.

In the absence of any other legal requirements, strict privacy obligations apply when handling this personal health information.

Laureen may only collect, use, store or disclose the minimum amount of Sam's personal information that is required to mitigate risks associated with COVID-19.

When Laureen notifies employees, volunteers and other people who may have had contact with Sam at the shelter of the COVID-19 risk, she should:

- only disclose information that is reasonably necessary to prevent or manage the spread of COVID-19 at the shelter, and
- only reveal Sam's name if this is necessary (for example, by restricting naming Sam to a limited number of people on a need-to-know basis)

Both Laureen and Sam must follow government-issued guidance on whether it is safe for Sam to return to work.



Tip

The [Office of the Privacy Commissioner](#) has [published guides and templates](#) on its website that provide practical information about complying with the Privacy Act.

These include:

- Australian Privacy Principles and Information Privacy Principles — Comparison Guide
- APP quick reference tool
- Guide to developing an APP Privacy Policy
- What to look for in developing a Privacy Policy
- Guide to securing personal information
- Handling privacy complaints
- Privacy Management Plan Template (for organisations)
- Privacy for not-for-profits, including charities



Record keeping

While organisations have limited legal obligations to keep records relating to volunteers, in some circumstances, you may be required to keep records of your volunteers.

It may be necessary for your organisation to keep records relating to your volunteers for a number of reasons including for:

- internal organisational reporting (for example, human resources)
- current or anticipated disputes, or legal action (for example a bullying or sexual harassment claim)
- requirements imposed by a government regulator
- requirements under insurance policies, or
- requirements under funding agreements



Tip

Check your organisation's insurance policies and funding agreements to determine whether your organisation is under a contractual obligation to retain volunteer files or certain records for a specific period.

Keeping records and for how long

We recommend an organisation keep records relating to its volunteers for at least seven years. This is consistent with some regulator requirements (for example, the Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission for registered charities), and is important if any legal action is started against the organisation.

Legal action (civil claims) can generally be brought up to six years after an event to which the claim relates occurred (for example, if a former volunteer alleges your organisation's negligence was the cause of an injury to the volunteer).



Note

Some legal claims have even longer limitation periods – such as claims brought in relation to harm suffered by a person when they were a child.

If your organisation works with children or more vulnerable persons, volunteer records should be kept for as long as possible (ideally indefinitely). This is especially the case considering recent child safety reforms and the removal of limitation periods for bringing actions based on child abuse (meaning they can be brought at any time – there is no six year limit).

Your organisation should treat information that it holds about current and former volunteers with care and in accordance with obligations under Australian privacy laws, as discussed above.



Note

The obligations for keeping records under the *Fair Work Act 2009 (Cth)*, for seven years, don't apply to volunteers.

As outlined in part 2 of this guide, it's important that your organisation understand the differences between paid workers (employees and independent contractors) and unpaid workers because the law treats them differently in some instances.

Volunteer safety and record keeping

Workplace health and safety (**WHS**) laws (sometimes referred to as occupational health and safety (**OHS**) laws) require community organisations to keep certain records in relation to workers, including volunteers. See part 4 of this guide which deals with volunteer safety, including what WHS or OHS laws apply to your organisation.

Model WHS laws

Most states and territories – Queensland, New South Wales, Tasmania, the ACT, South Australia, the Northern Territory and Western Australia – have adopted the model WHS laws.

In these states and territories, organisations to which the model WHS laws apply must notify the relevant regulator immediately after the organisation becomes aware of the occurrence of an incident that is considered a 'notifiable incident'.



Notifiable incident

A notifiable incident is:

- the death of a person
- a serious injury or illness of a person, or
- a dangerous incident

arising out of the conduct of a business or an undertaking at a workplace.

The organisation must keep a record of each notifiable incident that has occurred for at least five years from the day they had notice of the incident. A failure to keep these records may lead to individuals incurring fines of up to \$5,000 and organisations incurring fines up to \$25,000.

The model WHS laws also require keeping:

- a 'Register of Injuries' where any workplace incidents or injuries should be recorded no matter how serious they appear to be at the time (there is a penalty for failing to keep a Register of Injuries); and
- records about hazardous substances such as asbestos, lead and carcinogenic materials which may be relevant if volunteers have had any contact with them

Under the model WHS laws, volunteers are included in the definition of 'workers'.

Victorian OHS laws

The Victorian OHS law is in many respects reasonably consistent with the model WHS law.

An organisation that is bound by the Victorian OHS laws must, so far as is reasonably practicable, keep information and records relating to the health and safety of its workers. There are penalties for failing to keep these records.



The organisation is required to notify WorkSafe, the Victorian regulator, of certain incidents and must keep a copy of the record for at least five years. There are also requirements to keep records under the Victorian OHS laws regarding asbestos, lead, carcinogenic substances and other hazardous substances.



Note

Even if the model WHS laws or the Victorian OHS laws do not apply, your organisation has similar obligations arising under the common law (for example, in relation to negligence).

Keeping records will help you show you are meeting these obligations.

Commonwealth and state regulator record keeping

The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission

The Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission (**ACNC**) requests information relating to a charity's volunteers in its Annual Information Statement, which most charities must submit annually.

The requested information is currently limited to the number of volunteers a charity engages in its activities. For this reason, a volunteer involving organisation that is a registered charity should retain records about its volunteers so that it can report accurately.

Under the *Australian Charities and Not-for-profits Commission Act 2012 (Cth)* your organisation is required to keep its financial and operational records for seven years.



The ACNC has detailed information on its website in relation to [record keeping for charities](#). Our [guide to running a charitable CLG](#) also has information about keeping charities' records.

The Australian Taxation Office

The Australian Taxation Office (**ATO**) requires that records be kept for five years. Many of the documents relevant to tax affairs will also be covered by the ACNC's record-keeping requirements, including an organisation's governing documents, financial reports, cash books, tax invoices, employee records, bank records, grant documentation and contracts.

Clear records should be kept if payments are made to volunteers, such as reimbursements. Records of payments will also be important if a volunteer changes their status with an organisation and becomes an employee or independent contractor of the organisation. For more information, refer to part 2 of this guide.

State and territory incorporation regulators

All community organisations incorporated under state or territory law will need to keep documents and records.

Requirements to keep certain documents and records may be set out in your organisation's rules, as well as in the relevant state or territory incorporation legislation.

While incorporated association laws do not explicitly require you to keep specific records about volunteers, in some circumstances the organisation may be legally required to (or otherwise choose to) because of the position held by the volunteer (for example, if every person on the management committee is a volunteer).



For more information, see our [fact sheets on keeping and accessing documents, records and registers for each state and territory](#).



Other incorporation regulators (ASIC and ORIC)

If your organisation is incorporated under a Commonwealth law, such as a company limited by guarantee under the *Corporations Act 2001* (Cth) or an Indigenous organisation incorporated under the *Corporations (Australian and Torres Strait Islander) Act 2006* (Cth), it will need to keep financial documents and records for seven years.

Neither of these laws explicitly require the organisation to keep specific records of its volunteers, although in some cases records about volunteers will be kept by virtue of the position held by the volunteer (for example, where every person on the board of directors is a volunteer).

Fundraising regulators

Fundraisers conducting regulated fundraising activities must meet certain obligations under state and territory fundraising laws. These are usually the same regulators as the state and territory incorporation regulators (see above).

These laws differ in each state and territory (except the Northern Territory which does not have any specific fundraising law).

If your organisation is fundraising in several states or territories, you will need to consider the laws in each of those places and whether they apply. Fundraising laws are complex. You may need to seek legal advice in determining which laws apply to your organisation.

In some circumstances the fundraising laws require you to make and keep records of individuals involved in a fundraising activity, including as a 'collector'.

These include:

- **Queensland** – Where a community organisation engages in door-to-door or street collections, each collector must be issued with a distinctive armlet or badge. A record of each collector issued with an armlet or badge must be kept.
- **Victoria** – Fundraising laws require that the name and address of each person who participates in the appeal as a supervisor or manager be recorded – in your organisation this person may be a volunteer. Records must also be kept of any expenditure on commissions or other remuneration in relation to an appeal. Collectors in public places must wear a visible identification badge which shows whether they are a paid collector or a volunteer, which may impose additional record keeping obligations on organisations who must issue these badges.
- **New South Wales** – Where the authority holder engages people to participate in a fundraising appeal (regardless of whether they are paid or volunteers), a register of participants must be maintained.
- **Western Australia** – an organisation involved in street collections (that has the relevant permit) is obliged to consecutively number all the collection boxes and keep a record of which boxes are issued to each collector – in your organisation this person may be a volunteer.

In the other states (South Australia, the ACT and Tasmania) the fundraising laws do not explicitly require keeping a record of people involved in a fundraising activity (for example, a collector). However, in the ACT it is within the power of the regulator (AccessCanberra) to require information it considers necessary to decide whether the licensee has complied with the relevant legislation. In South Australia, the Minister and an inspector have the power to request certain records connected to a fundraising license.

Also note in Victoria and New South Wales – there are additional reasons why you should keep records of your volunteers. In these states there are exemptions from the requirement to get permission (to register as a fundraiser in Victoria and to obtain a licence in New South Wales) where only volunteers are used to collect funds and only a certain amount of money is collected within the financial year.

While your organisation may not be legally obliged to make and keep records of each person involved in a fundraising activity (for example, a collector), such as their name and address and their identifying number (if any), as outlined above, there are many reasons why it's a good idea to keep records (for example, it will help you to demonstrate how you've managed risk, and met your governance obligations).

Records of volunteers involved in fundraising should be kept and maintained with the other records of the organisation and with the requirements (if any) set out in the relevant fundraising legislation and, where applicable, other relevant laws (including privacy laws, as discussed above).



Caution

Just because your organisation may be exempt from a requirement to seek permission from the state regulator to fundraise in that state, it doesn't mean your organisation will be exempt in the other states and the ACT. If you are conducting fundraising activities in other states or the ACT you should check with the local regulator, and if required seek legal advice.



For more information on fundraising Laws in Australia see our [fundraising webpage](#) and for more information on running fundraising events, see our [webpage on holding events](#).



National Standards for volunteer involvement

Volunteering Australia's National Standards for Volunteer Involvement include standards relevant to the matters discussed in this part of the guide. If your organisation complies with its legal obligations as set out in this part (or if not obliged, but does so as a matter of best practice), it will help make sure your organisation meets these standards (and can provide evidence that it does so).

Standard 8: Policies and practices are continuously improved– Effective volunteer involvement results from a system of good practice, review and continuous improvement

8.1 Policies and procedures are designed and implemented to effectively guide all aspects of volunteer involvement.

Evidence of meeting this standard includes: all employees and volunteers are made aware of and understand an organisation's policies and procedures relating to volunteer involvement

Standard 1: Volunteering is embedded in leadership, governance and culture – The governing body and organisation leaders promote volunteering and implement effective systems to support volunteer participation.

1.3 Policies and procedures applying to volunteers are communicated, understood, and implemented across the organisation or group.

Evidence of meeting this standard includes regular monitoring and improvement of compliance with volunteer policies and procedures

1.4 Volunteer records are maintained, and volunteers and employees understand their obligations on information sharing, record keeping and privacy.

Evidence of meeting this standard includes:

- information required to engage volunteers is identified
- information from screening checks for volunteers is documented and secured
- the organisation has documented and implemented processes that comply with privacy legislation for securely managing volunteers personal and confidential information
- records of volunteer contribution, achievements and acknowledgement are maintained
- volunteers understand their obligations relating to information and privacy legislation

Standard 2: Volunteer participation is championed and modelled – Commitment to volunteer participation is set out through vision, planning and resourcing, and supports the organisation's or group's strategic vision.

2.1 The organisation publicly declares its commitment to volunteer participation.

Evidence of meeting this standard includes:

- the governing body and leaders publicly communicate the organisation's philosophy, direction and broad objectives for involving volunteers
- key documents are publicly available

Summary of intellectual property, privacy and record keeping issues

Intellectual property

- The forms of IP are all different in what they protect, how they are protected and enforced and exploited, and the duration of the protection.
- Copyright material created by your volunteer is likely to be owned by the volunteer unless you have a specific agreement otherwise.
- The creator of a work will also have moral rights, including a right to be attributed as the work's author. These rights are personal to the creator, and can't be assigned. If an organisation needs more flexibility to deal with works created by volunteers, it should seek appropriate moral rights consents.
- Your organisation can protect its trade marks, designs and patents by registering them with IP Australia.
- The law will protect confidential information where agreements limit disclosure or other circumstances of confidentiality exist. Ensure appropriate confidentiality agreements are in place with volunteers.



Privacy

- Your organisation may be subject to some or all of the Privacy Laws.
- Even if it's not, it's a good idea to follow them as a matter of best practice
- Privacy laws will govern the manner in which an organisation can collect, hold, use and disclose personal information about people, including about volunteers.
- Any collection, use and disclosure of personal information about volunteers should be considered against the requirements of applicable privacy laws. Be extra careful with 'sensitive' and 'health' information of volunteers.
- Volunteers should also be aware of acceptable procedures for handling personal information as part of their roles.
- The Privacy Act also sets out procedures to follow when a data breach occurs in respect of personal information.

Record keeping

- It's a good idea to keep records of your volunteers, even if your organisation doesn't have obligations at law that require you to keep these records.
- Registered charities are required to provide annual information on the number of their volunteers, and some fundraising laws require you to keep details of those involved in fundraising activity.
- Other reasons to keep records include your organisation's own reporting, requirements under insurance policies (check them) or potential future legal action, for example, by a volunteer alleging your organisation failed to keep them safe while volunteering for your organisation.
- We recommend you keep records of your volunteers for at least seven years and that they be kept and maintained with the organisation's other records.

