

DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERING



A definition of formal volunteering is a critical reference for the sector. It protects the integrity of volunteering, and it also protects volunteers by ensuring that the term "volunteering" and what is and is not intended when we use this word is widely understood.

The formal definition and principles of volunteering are the result of a national consultation undertaken in 1996 with a wide range of stakeholders including volunteers, personnel of not for profit organisations, policy makers and unions. They are enshrined in one of Volunteering Australia's foundation documents:

Definition of formal volunteering

Formal volunteering is an activity which takes place through not for profit organisations or projects and is undertaken:

- to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer;
- of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;
- for no financial payment; and
- in designated volunteer positions only.

Principles of Volunteering

- Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer
- Volunteer work is unpaid
- Volunteering is always a matter of choice
- Volunteering is not compulsorily undertaken to receive pensions or government allowances
- Volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community
- Volunteering is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs
- Volunteering is an activity performed in the not for profit sector only
- Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work
- Volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers
- Volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others
- Volunteering promotes human rights and equality

* This information has been adapted from information compiled by Volunteering Australia, 2008.