

Volunteering to Learn Learning to Volunteer



University Student Volunteers

enrich volunteering with mutual benefits for the communities they connect with and for the students as learners.

Volunteer programs that successfully enhance learning (whilst ensuring productive experiences for all involved) encourage students to continue to volunteer during their professional lives.

Preliminary findings from a pilot study highlight good practice in student volunteering as:

Good Planning, Clear Expectations
and Good Communication

What Needs Attention

- Complaints of unreliability (student workloads and other demands during semester).
- Complaints of short-term nature of student volunteering (training only to have them leave).
- Expectations felt by Host organisations that students volunteer primarily to further their career.
- The tension between enhancing learning and contributing to community needs.

Recruitment Tips

Invite student volunteers to liaise with the Volunteer Manager who will provide support in building more volunteers.

Recruit existing volunteers as champions to promote volunteer projects.

“There’s always the challenge - do you try and change the volunteers to benefit the organisation or do you try and change the organisation to be more accommodating for student volunteers?”

What Works and who is responsible?

Students

- Realising ‘it’s not about you’, but becoming community aware (commitment to the cause)
- Structures managed by students
- Students who find their own volunteering activity are usually more successful.

Host organisations and students

- Host organisations providing good orientations to the whole purpose of the organisation not just the volunteer activity (commitment to the cause)

University and host organisations

- Helping Host organisations fit their volunteer activities to student conditions (short term, specify manageable commitments)
- Balancing civic engagement with ‘fun’ activities (give a purpose)

Host organisations

- Ensuring the volunteering activity is meaningful ‘not just picking up rubbish’ (commitment to the task)

Universities and students

- Linking with careers, learning how to use networking, enhancing employability

Universities

- Working with host organisations to define and delineate the volunteer role
- Outlining expectations to students and host organisations at the outset (build in the pressure times such as exams etc), build in leave

Everyone

- Having an overall purpose to provide a transformative experience through the social governance structures – e.g. hubs managing such aspects as Working with Children’ checks

Good practice in university student volunteering

The Federal Government's Office of Learning and Teaching funded a national two-year research project to investigate volunteering by Australian university students and to develop a set of Good Practice Guides for universities, students and host organisations. The project will disseminate good examples of programs that enhance learning.

This collaborative project has been developed by academic members of the research committee at Volunteering Western Australia (VWA) and involves four Western Australian public universities. Volunteering Australia and Macquarie University are invited partners in this project.

The Department of Local Government and Communities in Western Australia funded a pilot study to commence exploration of university student volunteering in this state.



The primary aims of this pilot study were to commence identification of the various forms of volunteering taking place via universities; establish a preliminary framework which sets out the models in use, and identify some elements of good practice in student volunteering. The study incorporated a desk audit of programs at WA universities, and workshops in WA and at a conference in Adelaide to seek more clarity around student volunteering.



Workshops provided more clarity about:

Volunteering in relation to Service Learning and Work Integrated Learning

Is volunteering for a political party or faith-based group— volunteering?

Is volunteering for credit —volunteering?

Is activism— volunteering?

Is volunteering— 'slave labor'?

Student volunteering can refer to a range of activities including service by students to their university by way of clubs and associations, placement in volunteer positions in community organisations and volunteering through university organised programs such as volunteer hub or centre.

For further information please contact:

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The voices of experience

“...organisations benefit from students who spread the word about their positive experiences.”

“...volunteers that probably have the most transformative experience are those that autonomously think – what's something I really want to do? and go out and find something exactly tailored to them”

“ Student volunteering in and from universities has to try to balance the learning and civic engagement purposes.”

“...one of our successes...in terms of best practice I think having the hubs able to provide and manage things [like Working with Children checks] is a big deal.