



Good Practice Guide for Host Organisations

Enhancing the learning in Australian
University Student Volunteering





Why do university students volunteer?

- To help others
- To act upon their values
- To support a cause
- To develop skills
- To learn/practice English
- To gain experience
- To increase employability
- To add to their CV
- To make friends
- For fun
- Because their friends volunteer
- To be active
- "Because it's what you do"
- "It's expected of me"
- For academic credit
- *Because it's required

* Where a student is required to undertake community work or participation, or a project for their course of study, this may not be volunteering but rather service learning or community participation.

Host organisations, however, often include such activities as part of their volunteering program without a separate distinction for this activity, even though participation for the student is not voluntary.

See the *Concept Guide for Terminology* for more.

What is University Student Volunteering?

University Student Volunteering refers to students acting in a volunteer capacity in a range of organisations, both inside and outside universities. This is the term adopted by this project.

When we do similar tasks not through an organisation, we are 'helping others out'. There is debate about whether students required to volunteer are genuinely volunteering. The relationship between volunteering and Work Integrated Learning (WIL) (e.g. service learning, internships, practica and work experience) are part of this debate. For a discussion of the complexities of definitions refer to the *Concept Guide for Volunteering Terminology*.

This guide is a resource for host organisations based on data gathered for this project. Details of the project are on the back of this guide.

Where do I start?

Your local or state volunteer centre, other experienced host organisation managers, careers and volunteer hubs on campus will be a good source of advice on where to start and who to talk to.

* You might like to refer to the *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement 2015* on the Volunteering Australia website www.volunteeringaustralia.org/policy-and-best-practise/national-standards-and-supporting-material/

Volunteering to learn or learning to volunteer?

Not all university student volunteering is undertaken to enhance the learning associated with the degree or qualification being studied. Where the activity is undertaken for credit, there will be specific learning objectives or statements of skills to be developed. Students take up volunteering of their own volition, for a range of reasons. Even those students who volunteer for reasons other than learning benefit and learn from the activity. This learning could include a range of life skills, such as leadership, time management and organisational skills, and an appreciation of what it is like to be an active volunteer and give back to the community. This type of learning is as valuable as the learning associated with courses of study and contributes to university goals of developing engaged citizens. For more on the learning aspect of university student volunteering see the *Guide on Learning from Volunteering*.

REMEMBER: Engaging student volunteers by providing encouragement and feedback can, at times, lead to their staying on with your organisation. Our evidence is that even when they don't stay on they can be good ambassadors for your organisation and your work.

Forms of university student volunteering

Form of volunteering	Examples include
Traditional volunteering	Befriending, mentoring, tree planting, hospital volunteering,
Long term volunteering	Committed long term member of a group who volunteers
Short term volunteering	Semester long programs, Summer holiday programs.
Episodic volunteering	Short term, sporadic or intermittent volunteering includes events and festivals
Project volunteering	Student or student group completes project such as communication plan for nonprofit
Micro volunteering	Monitoring and counting wildlife, citizen science
Online volunteering	Online tutoring, creating or updating webpages, blogging for a cause
International volunteering	Group activities or individual placement with not-for-profits in foreign country
University service	Orientation, open days, peer mentoring
Student service	Student government, student club leadership
Activism	Campaigning for a cause

See also *Concept Guide for Terminology*.

Dispelling myths

- **Myth: Students are unreliable**

Our evidence is that they can be dedicated, enthusiastic, skilled and loyal. Matching expectations helps with this.

- **Myth: Students are hard work**

There might be some additional work to co-ordinate, supervise or train but if these are set up for one they can apply to others.

- **Myth: I don't have the skills/time to supervise**

It is possible to set up teams of student volunteers to self supervise, or assign a more experienced volunteer to help.

- **Myth: Volunteers are not as good as paid employees**

Volunteers are as committed, as hard working and can be as professional as paid employees. They do, however, require training and supervision like paid employees.

- **Myth: Volunteer work on a CV is not as good an indicator of potential as paid work**

Skills and experience gained from volunteer activity can be as good, or even better, than experienced gained in paid employment.

Types of Host Organisations

There are four main types of host organisation identified by this project:

- Those that involve student volunteers in the same way as any other volunteer
- Those that have particular arrangements/assignments for student volunteers
- Universities that involve volunteers
- Student organisations

Not all organisations fit neatly into these types, and some organisations are a hybrid.

Different University Student Volunteers

Our evidence is that there are three broad types of university student volunteers which organisations might host.

- **Academic** – This university student volunteer has assessable coursework associated with their volunteer activity.
- **Facilitated** – This university student volunteer is not undertaking assessable work but their relationship with the host organisation is facilitated by the university or a university associated program or organisation such as a volunteer hub.
- **Independent** – This university student volunteer undertakes their volunteer activity independently of the university, but will still have study commitments which make demands on their time.



Keeping it legal

All volunteering activities associated with the university have some form of legal framework. Formally arranged volunteering within a university is incorporated within university legal structures. In many cases legal agreements are drawn up between universities and host organisations. All parties should be familiar with what they cover:

- the nature of the host, student and university relationship;
- the obligations of all involved;
- what restrictions there are, if any;
- what liabilities there may be;
- how insurances are arranged and what they cover; and
- the period of the agreement.

These are in addition to the more broadly applicable legal provisions which apply to any workplace, such as confidentiality or harassment.

While it is not possible to provide individual information to cover all circumstances, nor is it appropriate to provide legal advice, all student volunteers, managers and host organisations should be aware of the specific provisions which apply, including those relating to employment law.

What do we mean by Good Practice?

Good practice refers to those activities, structures, situations and practices which provide benefit to students, universities, and host organisations in university student volunteering, primarily in relation to enhancing learning. We are using the term “Good Practice” in this project in preference to best practice because our aim is not to encourage the same practices in all settings. Rather we aim to capture what works, and highlight what may not, in an effort to assist students, universities and host organisations to enhance university student volunteering.



Enhancing university student volunteering

Matching Expectations

- Meet with the student or students about their volunteering can lead to clarification of the expectations on both sides of the relationship. Our evidence is that good communication at the start of the relationship will lead to better outcomes.
- Ask questions about academic credit, supervision, time availability, length of commitment, skills, needs and the reasons for the student wanting to volunteer with your organisation.

Credit

- If the volunteering is for academic credit, what is the student expected to do/complete/submit?
- And what is expected of you as a host organisation?
- If the volunteering is to gain experience what type of experiences are sought?

Supervision

- What level of supervision of the project/activity will come from the university?
- What level of supervision of the project/activity is expected from you?

Time Availability

- What will happen when major university assignments are due?
- When are exams? Will the student need a reduced commitment at that time?

Length of commitment

- Is the student committed indefinitely? until they graduate? until the end of the year? Semester?

Reasons for volunteering

- Has the student been 'required/recommended' to volunteer by their university? Why – for academic credit? To gain experience? To learn English?
- Why did they come to your organisation? Does it fit with their studies? Is it to enhance their resume? Is it because their friends are volunteering here or they are passionate about your activities?

Encouraging learning

All types of volunteering can lead to learning. From this OLT project it is evident that there are a number of factors that may contribute to learning and level of learning.

- Having organised volunteering activities
- Allowing student choice of volunteering experiences, type of volunteering and level of commitment
- Clarifying expectations, with clear understanding about the roles for university and host organisation in assisting students, whether for credit or not
- Encouraging self-reflection, either formal or informal, so that students can articulate the learning gained through volunteering, and its impact
- Host organisations providing feedback to students on their volunteering





About the Project

Volunteering to Learn is an Office for Learning and Teaching (OLT) funded project led by Murdoch University and involving Curtin University, Edith Cowan University, Macquarie University and the University of Western Australia.

Methodology

The project relied on a qualitative approach to develop an understanding of the different perspectives on university student volunteering from a range of stakeholders.

The project team sought to collect data in a way that allowed for inclusion of the voices of stakeholders. The multi-stage data collection involved familiarisation with the extant literature, a mapping exercise to capture the publicly available information on university student volunteering from all of the Australian university websites at one point in time, and an extensive suite of interviews conducted with: students, host organisations, participating universities, and peak volunteering bodies.

Semi-structured interviews were conducted by members of the project team, who developed and used a set of interview frameworks to ensure some level of consistency across the various interviews with different stakeholder groups. The interview frameworks were informed by the literature, the mapping exercise, and the pooling of knowledge and experience of the team. An interpretivist approach was used in the analysis of data.

Drafts of the Guides were sent to our reference group, and a group of critical friends for feedback, and a series of workshops were held to further refine the guides before they were finalised.

Other Good Practice Guides:

- Students
- Senior University Staff
- University Program Managers
- Employers

Plus Concept Guides on:

- Terminology
- Enhancing Learning

The Research team would like to thank Volunteering Western Australia for the provision of many of the images in these brochures.



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Support for this project has been provided by the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching. The views in this project do not necessarily reflect the views of the Australian Government Office for Learning and Teaching.



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