VOLUNTEER*ing*
ILLAWARRA

State of Volunteering in the Illawarra

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Message from the Lord Mayor

I am proud to present this research report on the *State of Volunteering in the Illawarra* that has been commissioned by Wollongong City Council's Volunteering Illawarra unit. Volunteers play a critical role in the creation of a cohesive and inclusive community, helping to deliver a diverse range of services in areas such as aged care, education and literacy, through to youth programs, transport and bush care.

Research into the *State of Volunteering in the Illawarra* was funded by the NSW Department of Human Services: Ageing, Disability and Home Care in 2011. The research identifies the issues affecting volunteer management in not-for-profit organisations, the expectations and perceptions of potential, new and experienced volunteers and emerging trends in volunteering. The research report provides a number of recommendations of relevance to organisations that work with volunteers, to agencies that fund volunteer-based services and to policy makers.

 I take this opportunity to thank all of those individuals and organisations that contributed to the development of the *State of Volunteering in the Illawarra* report. I hope that the outcomes of this research project will assist the local voluntary sector to respond appropriately to the challenges they face and plan for a sustainable future.

Lord Mayor of Wollongong

Councillor Gordon Bradbery OAM

Acknowledgement

Volunteering Illawarra would like to thank the organisations and individuals who participated in this research project. The sharing of thoughts, opinions and experience has helped shape this report, which would not have been possible without this valued contribution.

Special thanks to Claudia Perry-Beltrame who was commissioned by Volunteering Illawarra to undertake the research project that led to the development of the *State of Volunteering in the Illawarra* report.

Executive Summary

There is global recognition that the volunteering sector will experience many opportunities and challenges in the coming decade. The United Nation's *State of the World Volunteerism Report 2011* and the Australian Government's *National Volunteering Strategy 2012* address the changes and challenges that the voluntary sector is facing nationally and internationally in the early 21st century. Volunteering Illawarra, the Illawarra's regional Volunteer Referral Centre, commissioned a research project in late 2011, to better understand the 'health' of volunteering in the Illawarra and develop a set of recommendations to support local organisations in developing sustainable volunteer services.

The *State of Volunteering in the Illawarra Report* aims to understand the issues affecting volunteer management in not-for-profit organisations. It provides an analysis of the sectors utilising volunteers, the expectations and perceptions of volunteering of experienced and new volunteers and explores generational differences, and emerging trends in volunteering. The report captures the local issues, commonalities and challenges faced within the region and makes comparison to Volunteering Australia's *National Survey on Volunteering Issues*, the *State of Volunteering in Tasmania* report published in 2010 and recent literature and a range of other government reports and academic literature.

The project was undertaken from June 2011 to July 2012 in three stages. Stage One involved a literature review into generational changes in Australian society, examining popular culture and scientific research to address the question: "What impact now and into the future, do the differing cultures, values and expectations of different generations have on their participation as volunteers?" Stage Two involved a survey and four focus groups with volunteer managers and coordinators during 2011. Stage Three involved a survey and the application of a range of qualitative research methods with volunteers during 2012. The majority of organisations participating in the research were from the community / welfare and the health, aged care and disability sectors across the Local Government Areas of Wollongong, Shellharbour, Kiama and Shoalhaven.

The State of Volunteering in the Illawarra Report is structured in four parts:

- Part 1 is a literature review on similarities and differences in work and lifestyle values and the leadership preferences across generations, based on McCrindle's (2009) generational segmentation of Builders, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y

- Part 2 discusses management and leadership from the volunteer managers' and volunteers' perspectives
- Part 3 considers aspects of volunteering into the future such as the use of technology and emerging models of volunteering
- Part 4 provides recommendations for the government, volunteer referral centres and not-for-profit organisations.

The generational study on Builders, Baby Boomers, Generation X and Generation Y found differences across the generations in core lifestyle and work values and leadership and management styles, resulting from the impact of economic, social and environmental events occurring during each generation's formative years and the current career stage of each generation. These differences will impact on the types of rewards and recognition expected and the interaction and relationships forged by volunteers in the work place.

Research into management styles indicates that a more collaborative management style will be required in future to get the best out of Generation X and Generation Y volunteers (and staff). Interestingly, research into leadership style preferences indicates that the Baby Boomer generation also prefers a supportive management style, does not like to feel patronised and wants to be valued as an equal contributor to the organisation.

The role of volunteer manager / coordinator is vital for effective volunteer management. The findings demonstrate the need for greater recognition of this role, which requires highly developed people skills and leadership qualities which align, motivate, inspire and support volunteers to remain with a program or organisation without employment contract or remuneration. They manage in a highly fluid and uncertain environment, with high volunteer mobility, high competition for skilled volunteers and almost non-existent funding for volunteer recruitment and training. Despite the critical and complex role played by volunteer managers/coordinators, less than 60% of volunteer managers surveyed in the Volunteering Illawarra study are in a paid full-time or part-time position and funding to appoint a coordinator is limited. Often volunteer managers work in dual roles and find it challenging to manage both appropriately, with the client focused role taking precedence over the volunteer related one. The research shows that organisations that do not employ a volunteer coordinator / manager (whether paid or unpaid) tend to have older volunteers, and more difficulty recruiting or matching volunteers to their organisation. The failure to delegate responsibility for management of volunteers to a discrete position impacts negatively on administration and on taking

responsibility for the volunteer work force, reducing the time to engage volunteers fully in the organisation.

The three most significant challenges for volunteer managers / coordinators, identified in the *State of Volunteering in the Illawarra* research, are recruiting (80% of organisations) and retaining (44%) volunteers in a setting where the volunteer work force is ageing (the third challenge). In an ageing population volunteers work fewer hours and want more flexibility in terms of hours and continuity, due to lifestyle and work preferences. Competition for volunteers is high particularly in more rural areas of the Illawarra. Some focus group participants estimated that a third of their volunteers leave the organisation each year due to work, study, travel, poor health or age. This is particularly the case in one-to-one services, where ageing volunteers can eventually become clients of the service. The study indicated that specialised volunteering roles, such as bus driving or administration, are already difficult to fill.

Recruitment was identified as a challenge for those volunteer organisations that are smaller, do not have a strong "brand" or do not clearly articulate their objectives or focus. The study indicated that there also seems to be a relationship between difficulties in retaining volunteers and difficulties in providing them with effective training for their roles. Almost 32% of organisations indicated that providing training is a challenge and, of those, 57% do not have a structured training program in place and just below 44% do not pay for it in full. The findings in this study indicate that new volunteers want significantly more training than experienced volunteers. With volunteer turnover increasing, the cost of training is also increasing for organisations. Often training is duplicated across organisations, as it is not transferable, or when a volunteer changes organisations, their existing training is considered insufficient by the new host organisation.

Another means of retaining volunteers is through full engagement in the organisation. The BlessingWhite Report (2010) found that engagement of paid employees increases through relational management including strengthening trust, creating a sense of belonging, employees' ability to fully utilise their talents, and the knowledge that their efforts make a difference. Parallels can be drawn from this research, to the management of the volunteer work force. Findings in the *State of Volunteering in the Illawarra* report show that being valued as a part of the organisation, having a role of interest, having a sense of purpose and helping the community are important values and motivators for volunteers, across all of the generations surveyed. Further, retention of volunteers did not appear to be linked to reimbursement and recognition factors. However, volunteers on income support indicated that due to their financial situation,

reimbursements are more important. Interpersonal recognition such as a "thank you" or receiving feedback from staff, were more important to the majority of volunteers than tangible benefits that incur costs for organisations. However, interpersonal recognition requires an organisation-wide approach with all employees participating and contributing.

Effective management and leadership are critical to achieving full engagement of volunteers. Providing a mentor and access to meetings or social interactions, adopting macro-management as opposed to micro-management approaches and giving feedback are key contributors to an engaged volunteer workforce. To achieve this, workplaces might benefit from a review of their organisational hierarchy, creating flatter structures for projects and program management and roles with more responsibility. In addition, organisations (not just the volunteer manager/coordinator) can create a more sustainable voluntary workforce by developing participatory, friendly work environments which support group or team work, inter-generational interaction and a good culture for knowledge sharing and celebrating accomplishments. These values can be integrated into the marketing message to reach out to volunteers of all ages.

The *State of Volunteering in the Illawarra* research indicated that an ageing volunteer force is directly related to the uptake of technology by organisations. The older their volunteer cohort, the less likely it was for technology to be present in organisations. Interestingly, face to face communication is still the preferred communication method for all generations. Focus group discussions identified that face to face, phone calls, texting and e-mail each have a place in the way volunteers prefer to be managed and communicated with. Using the newest electronic communication tools (including social media) in reaching volunteers has the potential to attract younger volunteers who use more diverse technologies, but particularly texting and social media, than any other generation. The research also indicated that new volunteers expect significantly more communication through social networks and shareware than volunteers already in the sector.

However, the research found variable understanding and enthusiasm for technology and social media among volunteer managers and older volunteers. While the older generation's preference for traditional communication methods will remain, the generational transition of the volunteer (or potential volunteer) workforce into the future makes it essential for volunteer managers to learn about the different technologies and utilise these to support their services and volunteer engagement into the future. In addition, using the appropriate communication channels for the desired volunteer target group will help in recruiting the type of volunteer wanted for a program or project.

Newer forms of volunteering identified in the *State of Volunteering in the Illawarra* report have currently only had limited uptake by Illawarra volunteers. Participants in the individual volunteer survey said they prefer to volunteer in groups, within the organisation rather than at a distance and with peers or friends. Virtual volunteering, particularly if undertaken alone, does not meet these preferences. Family volunteering was among the least favoured forms of volunteering and was rejected by the Baby Boomer focus group participants, who stated that they do not wish to share their volunteer time with other commitments such as child-care. Corporate volunteering was most favourably viewed by young Generation Y respondents. However, further research into this area is required to determine the actual uptake of corporate volunteering opportunities, particularly from an organisational perspective. Lastly, the Baby Boomer migration every winter is already occurring in this region and organisations that participated in the study indicated that they are already experiencing difficulties in filling certain positions during this time. Considering the migration patterns of the "grey nomads", travel and volunteering (ie: attracting passing "grey nomads" so that they volunteer short-term while they are in town) will not be a trend the Illawarra can tap into, as this region is located too far south to be considered part of the "sun-belt" that attracts this demographic. Local volunteer organisations might be best to consider seeking other means to boost their volunteer workforce during the colder months of the year, such as taking on students for work experience or internship.

For organisations to manage the changes to volunteerism and the expectations of existing and future volunteers, they will be required to review their volunteering strategy, to identify the optimum mix of skilled and unskilled volunteers to meet organisational needs, they will need to consider the communication methods they use to attract the relevant age group, how each generation wants to engage and what message is appropriate for them. The main lesson learned from the *State of Volunteering in the Illawarra* research is that volunteer organisations need to develop the right mix of "brand"; organisational structure, management and leadership; volunteer program flexibility and transferability; and relevant communication technologies, if they are to achieve sustainability.

Statistics in Brief

- 64 volunteer manager surveys, 158 volunteer surveys
- 25 volunteer organisation and 86 volunteers participated in focus groups, interviews and referral calls
- 59.38% of volunteer managers surveyed are paid and employed either full-time or part-time and 21.88% of volunteer coordinators are not paid
- Challenges faced: Recruitment - 80.3% of organisations, the aging work force - 48.5%, retaining volunteers - 44% and matching volunteers to the organisation - 37.9%
- 42% of volunteers surveyed were 55 to 74 years old and 27.3% were 18 to 44 years old
- 34.9% of volunteer managers surveyed stated that they do not feel they have enough time to achieve goals and 22.8% do not feel have enough money
- 31.9% preferred face to face communications on an individual basis, followed by phone - 25.1% and e-mail - 17.9%
- 48.4% of organisations surveyed have websites, 26.6% intranets, 20.3% use social media. Other technologies are under-represented.
- 25% of respondents have smart phones allowing regular access to the web, social media and email.

Analysis of organisational processes versus volunteer expectations is summarised in the following table:

Process	In place by organisation	Expect to be in place by volunteer
Insurance for volunteers	96.88%	90.4%
Recognition and rewards	95.3%	84.9%
Transparent feedback process	92.1%	80.8%
Induction to the role	90.5%	87.7%
Introduction to relevant staff	90.5%	93.2%
Job Descriptions	90.5%	90.4%
Reimbursements	90.5%	80.2%
Policy and procedures	89%	86.3%
Induction to policy and procedures	89%	87.7%
Recruitment process	89%	75.3%
Regular contact with volunteer managers	84.5%	86.3%
Support from board or senior management	82.8%	Not measured
Meetings with volunteer manager	77%	80.8%
Grievance Policy	76.56%	78.1%
Induction to WHS	70.13%	87.7%
Formal training or professional development: • For volunteer coordinators • For volunteers.	68.75%; 62.5%	72.6%
Paid training: • For volunteer coordinators • For volunteers.	56.2%; 43.75%	47.9%
Succession planning for volunteer managers	25%	Not measured

Recommendations

Recommendation 1 - Leadership

a) Volunteer organisations to recognise management committee and board members as volunteers and to resource them to develop the leadership skills necessary for strong governance of the organisation

b) Volunteer managers / coordinators to link younger volunteer(s) with an experienced volunteer or staff member to create a support system and a career development opportunity

c) Volunteer organisations to develop a trusting work environment, to build organisational citizenship and ensure a leadership style which permits engagement of employees and volunteers

d) Volunteer organisations to recognise their touch points with volunteers within the organisation to ensure consistency of service and to create leadership structures and values which can be adopted across multiple groups, units and departments

e) Volunteering Illawarra to undertake more research into issues affecting volunteer management committees and corporate volunteering.

Recommendation 2 - Strategic Planning

a) Volunteer organisations to ensure that their organisational culture is defined via a set of values in the Strategic Plan and marketing message and that the organisational structure, management functions and volunteer positions are aligned with these values

b) Volunteer organisations to incorporate a "volunteer goal" with associated strategies and activities in the Strategic Plan to achieve the required generational transition including:

- Flexibility of work arrangements

- Recruitment, retention and engagement.

c) Volunteer organisations to incorporate technology into organisational strategy to:

- Address the generational transition as well as new forms of volunteering

- Ensure appropriateness of the type and use of technology for programs, projects and the marketing message

- Ensure training of staff and volunteers.

Recommendation 3 – Coordination of General Volunteer Activities

The sector has significant duplication in training and processing of volunteers. Therefore, it is recommended that volunteer organisations develop and implement a centralised approach[i]:

a) Develop a central approach to training for volunteers, particularly in WHS and general work related activities by sector

b) Centralise funding for training of volunteers, so organisations are not burdened by this cost

c) Develop a central and transferable approach for processing and records management of documentation relating to volunteer recruitment such as police checks, working with children checks, confidentiality forms etc, to assist travelling volunteers and reduce cost for organisations

d) Develop a database for volunteers to register their interest in a demand driven system, rather than supply driven system, to help reduce the cost of recruitment, assist in matching volunteers to appropriate organisations by identifying their skills and interests and assessing against the requirements of the organisation

e) Provide shared resources to not-for-profit organisations including:

- Access to a web space managed from a central host and domain

- Develop a 'model' technology or social media policy for organisations that do not have the capacity to undertake this (similar to the Model Constitution available from Fair Trading NSW).

Recommendation 4 – Marketing Volunteering

a) Volunteer organisations and volunteer referral centres to adapt their marketing message to facilitate the changes in technology and volunteer values and preferences and ensure it reaches the desired volunteer group

b) Volunteer organisations and the local volunteer referral centre to ensure the visibility of volunteer roles online and promote the referral centre and its role in the community in general media and on volunteer organisation's websites

c) Volunteer organisations and the local volunteer referral centre to manage the use of volunteer symbols and images in the community to maximise effectiveness of message and minimise confusion.

Recommendation 5 – New Forms of Volunteering

a) Volunteering Australia to develop specific resources to assist organisations with implementing family volunteering, particularly in relation to WHS, insurance and other legislative matters

b) Volunteer organisations to review their programs to determine if they are suitable for family volunteering and to promote these volunteering opportunities to members of Generation X

c) Volunteering organisations requiring volunteers to deliver one-to-one personal services, to review how their services are provided and establish a future-focused approach for these services, based on volunteer preferences regarding working in groups or with peers

d) Volunteer organisations to review their business functions to explore opportunities to adopt virtual volunteering as a means of gaining support for their organisation, particularly utilising skilled professionals currently in the work force.