VOLUNTEERING AUSTRALIA'S NATIONAL REVIEW OF THE DEFINITION OF VOLUNTEERING IN AUSTRALIA

ISSUES PAPER
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Executive Summary

The current Volunteering Australia (VA) definition of volunteering has been in place since 1996 and may be too narrow for the breadth of volunteer practices undertaken in Australia today. A review of the definition is being conducted in two phases.

- Phase 1: The research and development of an Issues Paper which focuses on the issues, reasons, implications and opportunities around changing a definition.

- Phase 2: An Australia-wide consultation process that examines the issues in more depth enabling a recommendation on changing the definition.

The purpose of the Issues Paper is to encourage significant reflection and debate and provide stakeholders with an understanding of the dimensions of volunteering both here in Australia and globally.

Many of us would think that we know and can define what it means to volunteer in Australia in 2014. Complexities around the definition of volunteering soon emerge, however. Across Australia today - in academia, government, the non-profit sector and business sector - a number of different definitions of volunteering are in use.

This Issues Paper discusses the current VA definition of volunteering, global definitions of volunteering, global and cultural concepts of volunteering, language used in discussing volunteering and trends in volunteering. It also discusses the potential impact of changing the definition on volunteers and the sector and then distils this analysis to three alternate definitions for further consideration and debate by stakeholders during Phase 2 of the Review.

Current definition

The current VA definition of volunteering was developed in 1996 alongside a set of principles which 'clearly differentiate between volunteering and other unpaid activities' (Cordingley, 2000, p. 82).

The current definition does not account for areas like informal volunteering, which is known to be a significant way people give their time, or corporate volunteering. It also separates volunteering from other activities such as work experience, community service orders, student placements, unpaid work trials, emergency work during industrial disputes, work for the dole and caring for a family member.

Global definitions and concepts

Globally there are many definitions of volunteering and the concept of volunteering varies between cultures. Informal volunteering is typically more common amongst collectivist cultures, in Asia, Southern Europe, South America and Africa (Gronlund, 2013), whereas formal volunteering is more common among Anglo cultures and Northern European

countries. Given the multicultural nature of Australia today, any definition needs to have meaning to the different communities within which individuals volunteer.

Volunteering terminology

Terminology associated with volunteering reflects different ideas of what volunteering is. Rochester et al (2010) proposed three broad ways of thinking about volunteering globally. These are:

- Unpaid work or service - the dominant idea in Anglo countries
- Civil action - the dominant idea in Scandinavian countries and developing countries in the Global South
- Leisure - volunteering as a discretionary activity chosen to be undertaken in free time.

Trends in volunteering

Some of the trends currently having an impact on the sector include the increasing number of procedures and practices concerning volunteers and volunteering that have provided the sector with a raft of policies such as governance, risk management and workplace controls. Areas of recent growth in volunteering also need to be considered in a contemporary definition of volunteering, these include:

- Skilled volunteering
- Group volunteering
- Corporate volunteering
- Youth volunteering to gain hands-on work experience
- Volunteering through places of learning
- Spontaneous volunteering (e.g. in response to bushfires and floods)
- Virtual volunteering
- Episodic and micro-volunteering
- International and/or cross-national volunteering.

Impact

This Issues Paper also considers the impact of changing the definition. For example it could help:

- A wider variety of forms of volunteering be accepted and supported through better volunteer management practices
- Grow the understanding of the size and breadth of the volunteer community and its outputs and outcomes for society and Australia's economy, contributing to greater government and community recognition of the value of volunteering in society
- Provide greater support and recognition for volunteers currently not covered under the existing definition.

Other considerations include the impact on legislation and policy and the growth of social enterprise in Australia, and the lessening distinction between profit making and non-profit entities.

Potential dimensions for inclusion in a definition

This Issues Paper identifies the following as (potential) dimensions of a definition of volunteering:

- Benefit to the community
- No payment or financial reward
- Only un-paid work?
  - Should we include or exclude certain types of activities?
- Choice
- Structure of volunteering – only for a non-profit entity?
- Can entities volunteer or only individuals?

Recommended definitions for consultation

The National Steering Committee (membership listed in Attachment A) reviewed this paper and recommended the consultation phase focus on discussing three potential definitions:

a. Volunteering is an activity undertaken as an individual or in a group, for the benefit of the community, without expectation of financial reward. Volunteering is a choice freely made by each individual and can include formal or informal community participation.

b. Volunteering is doing something willingly, for no financial gain, that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives or the individual.

c. We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation (from Volunteering England).

Developing a set of principles covering inclusions and exclusions around a definition was also recommended.

Contents

1.   Introduction

Volunteering Australia (VA) has approved a project to revisit their definition of volunteering. The current VA definition of volunteering is now considered too narrow for the breadth of volunteer practices undertaken in Australia today, with some key areas excluded.

This Issues Paper has been developed to provide stakeholders with a good understanding of the dimensions that define volunteering both here in Australia and globally, and support the next step of this project, an Australia-wide consultation on a potential new definition.

A sub-committee of the National Steering Committee for this project were invited to write this paper outlining the relevant issues and dimensions relating to defining volunteering. The National Steering Committee (membership listed in Attachment A) then worked collectively through the dimensions to propose the three potential definitions. These are listed at the end of this paper and will be the focus of the consultation phase.

The concept of a volunteer may, at first glance, appear simple. Intrinsically many of us would think that we know and can define what it means to volunteer in Australia in 2014. The complexities around the definition of volunteering soon emerge, however. Across Australia today - in academia, government, the non-profit sector and business sector - a number of different definitions of volunteering are in use.

VA has its own definition and set of principles to describe volunteering. These were agreed in 1996 and have informed the position of VA as the national peak body for volunteering for the past 18 years.

The definition agreed at that time defines formal volunteering as an activity that takes place through non-profit organisations or projects. Volunteering is:

- • 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 (Cordingley, 2000).

While the definition reflects the best wisdom and practices of the time, since then there have been numerous changes to volunteer practices in Australia. VA recognised that their definition may need reappraisal in *The State of Volunteering in Australia Report 2012* (p. 28) noting that:

> 'It is timely to reconsider how Volunteering Australia defines volunteering for a number of reasons. The definition was developed more than a decade ago in a particular social, economic and historical context. We want to be confident that the way we understand, discuss and support volunteering serves us well in the coming years. The definition of volunteering adopted by Volunteering Australia is challenged by the opportunities and dilemmas in practice, for example, volunteering as a participation requirement of income support, volunteering in the for-profit sector, and the increasing involvement of volunteers in organisations during economic downturns.

The way volunteering is seen and described is being contested in Australia and internationally. Volunteering is an integral part of work in our society, yet the idea that volunteers are workers is relatively new. Secondly, the concept of work is changing. Deregulation, globalisation and the casualisation of labour impacts on how we view and experience work' (Oppenheimer 2002; 2008, p. 7; 2010; 2011; Oppenheimer with Edwards 2011).

The 2012 report commenced an initial review of the national definition of volunteering. Its preliminary consultation with stakeholders showed areas of agreement about the purpose of the definition, but highlighted some of the sources of conflict with current practice. The current VA definition does not account for areas like informal volunteering which is well known to be a substantial component of all volunteering – particularly for youth volunteering, multicultural communities and spontaneous volunteering around crisis management. Other growth areas in volunteering such as corporate or business volunteers and micro volunteers may not be included in the current definition.

This definition, therefore, may no longer reflect how many Australians volunteer their time. It is critical that it is reviewed to ensure Volunteering Australia's definition appropriately reflects the realities of volunteering. A definition of volunteering has a significant bearing on decision making by governments, volunteer resource centres and volunteer involving organisations. A revised definition has the potential to influence how volunteers are managed, how volunteering is measured and how Australia maintains and implements best practice standards. While Volunteering Australia is responsible for the definition, the state peak bodies are perceived locally as the custodians of the spirit of volunteering. How the new definition will be used and by whom (in addition to VA) is still open to debate.

2.   About the National Review - The process for reviewing the national definition

Following the *State of Volunteering in Australia Report* release in 2012, Volunteering Australia commenced an initial review process of the national definition of volunteering, and approved the project, the National Review of the Definition of Volunteering in Australia (http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/about-us/).

This project will make a recommendation on a definition for approval by the Volunteering Australia Board. Volunteering Australia will then have a new or reaffirmed definition of volunteering, for adoption by the relevant State and Territory peak bodies. This process was endorsed by all peak volunteering bodies in Australia, with the respective CEOs agreeing that a consistent and contemporary definition of volunteering across all states and territories is desirable.

Volunteering Australia and the CEO Network of peak volunteering bodies are working together on this project. To guide the project and arrive at a draft definition, a National Steering Committee was formed comprised of representatives from Volunteering Australia,

State –Territory peak bodies, Volunteer Resource Centres, member organisations, academics and government (see Attachment A).

A sub-committee of this Steering Committee was established to write this Issues Paper.

The Review project commenced in 2014 and is expected to be completed by mid-2015. It is being conducted in two phases.

- Phase 1: The sub-committee develop this Issues Paper which focuses on identifying background material on the issues, reasons, implications and opportunities around changing a definition.
- Phase 2: Based on this Issues Paper, there will be an Australia-wide consultation process that examines the issues in more depth enabling a recommendation on changing the definition.

The discussion around the Volunteering Australia National Review of the Definition of Volunteering is expected to deliver the following outcomes:

- Member organisations, volunteer managers, government and broader stakeholders gaining a better understanding of volunteering and its role in society
- Member organisations, volunteer managers and government using the new definition to develop programs and strategies to enhance volunteering
- Volunteering peak bodies using the definition to advocate and promote volunteering in society
- A wider understanding of the continuum that exists between formal volunteering and many areas of active citizenship for core stakeholders and the wider community be fostered.

3.   The current definition and a brief history

In 1996, and after extensive consultation, VA established both a definition and set of principles of volunteering. They were developed to 'clearly differentiate between volunteering and other unpaid activities' (Cordingley, 2000, p. 82), and followed on from the first national survey of volunteering by the Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) in 1995. The 1996 definition states:

> 'Formal volunteering is an activity that takes place in non-profit organisations or projects and is of benefit to the community and undertaken of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion; for no financial payment; and in designated volunteer positions only.'

The 11 principles of volunteering that accompanied the definition were seen by the sector at the time to describe the values characterising formal volunteering, and were to 'provide a sound basis for informing social policy and guiding the actions of organisations involving volunteers' (Cordingley, 2000, p. 74). The principles were that:

- Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer
- Volunteer work is unpaid work
- 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 of groups to address human, environmental and social needs
- Volunteering is an activity performed in the non-profit sector only
- Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work
- Volunteers do not replace paid workers and do not 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 (Cordingley, 2000, p. 74).

The definition is reflective of its time. The ABS' first national report had defined a volunteer as 'someone who willingly gave unpaid help in the form of time, service or skills, through an organisation or group' (ABS, 1996). The reference to an organisation or group denoted a formal structure. VA's definition followed this line and focused on 'formal' volunteering. While it acknowledged 'informal' volunteering (unpaid labour undertaken outside formal organisations, such as helping out a neighbour), VA sought to make the distinction.

VA also believed an important distinguishing characteristic of formal volunteering was that it only occurred in non-profit organisations and must be in designated volunteer positions. The motivation of the volunteer involving organisation was considered to be a key distinguishing factor. Commercial companies were considered to be ultimately motivated around profit making while non-profit organisations were considered to have a motivation to create positive community outcomes. VA wanted to clearly demonstrate that 'formal' volunteering was not exploitative, nor was it taking the positions of paid workers. As the following table suggests, this excluded student placements, work for the dole, community service orders, informal carers and work experience as forms of unpaid work which are not volunteering.

Table 1: Examples of unpaid work

	Benefits to the community	Through non-profit organisations	No remuneration	By choice and without coercion	In volunteer designated positions
Formal	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓

volunteering					
Work experience		✓	✗	✓	✓
Community service orders	✓	✓	✓	✗	✗
Unpaid work in the home	✓	✗	✓	✗/✓	✗
Student placements	✗	✓	✓	✗	✗
Unpaid work trials	✗	✗	✓	✓	✗
Emergency work during industrial disputes	✗	✓	✓	✓	✗
Work for the dole	✓	✓	✓	✗	✓
Caring (carers)	✓	✗	✓	✗/✓	✗

(Source: Cordingley, 2000, Figure 6.1, p. 81)

The requirement that volunteering be in volunteer designated positions only was a critical element of the debate at the time (Cordingley, 2000). It was aimed at clearly legitimising volunteering and deflecting criticism from the trade union movement who were concerned about protecting the rights and positions of paid workers. Both VA and the state peak bodies continue to be strong advocates of formal volunteering and its management and work with government to ensure volunteering is not associated with unpaid work required around unemployment benefits and other forms of mutual obligation.

At the time there were few formal policies on volunteering in Australia. 'Volunteering as an activity' was 'underestimated, under-researched and undervalued' (Oppenheimer & Warburton, 2000, p. 1). VA's definition, too, was created at a time when there was an 'increasingly blurred understanding between what should constitute paid work and volunteer work' (p. 3) with the Howard Government's introduction of mutual obligation arrangements for dole recipients.

4.   Why have a clear definition?

There is no single definitive view of what is and is not volunteering in 1996 or now. The area is complex and diverse, and a spectrum of volunteering may be a logical approach. There

needs to be discussion around how a definition in Australia will be used. A broad, inclusive definition may work well for policy and practice but for the purposes of measurement, tracking changes in the characteristics of volunteers and volunteering over time, comparing trends in different States and to facilitate and sharpen government and agency policy making, a practical, contemporary definition is required. To date the use of a clear definition around formal volunteering by VA and the state peak bodies has enabled them to have clarity on their roles, develop a framework for management that supports their member organisations, and deliver services, appropriate support and recognition across the community, as well as push for social policy change. Any new definition needs to be workable and able to be operationalised by these entities.

Having an inclusive definition can allow effort to be focussed on providing a supportive environment and ensure that volunteering remains an important and sustainable social movement. Yet, too narrow a definition may exclude some of the important forms of volunteering discussed in this paper.

A definition needs to be clear, simple and should resonate with all parts of the community to help create a more common language across Australia. The context it sits within should also be understood, as volunteering represents a significant part of active citizenship, but is not an appropriate descriptor for all activities. Hence the definition should provide clarity about what is, and is not, volunteering.

A further consideration is the longevity of the definition. It needs to be sufficiently flexible to stay relevant as Australia's society continues to change, particularly in areas such as digital technology, while having enough clarity to be practical.

One important reason given for using an agreed definition is that of quantifying the economic value of volunteering. This is an area of significant debate, with some arguing that it is not possible to measure or quantify volunteering and/or this fails to capture the multidimensional value of volunteer activity (Haski-Leventhal et al, 2011). Measurement using an agreed definition, however, allows like to be compared with like. A key benefit of measurement itself is to enable organisations to quantify the value of volunteering to their organisation and to the economy and society.

The current definition of volunteering includes no agreed-upon metrics, such as the lower boundary for age or the recall period as the definition does not specify a timeframe. Under this definition a volunteer could be interpreted by a layperson as someone who has volunteered at some point in their lives, whether this was last week or twenty years ago, or it might be understood as referring only to present volunteers. Consideration needs to be given to the need to be inclusive, and at the same time enable measurement. It is important to note that measurement is just one potential use of a definition.

The consultation undertaken for the *State of Volunteering in Australia 2012* revealed broad-based agreement that:

- The current definition generally captures the essence of volunteering
- There are aspects of the current definition that challenge and constrain volunteering in Australia
- Having a clear and shared understanding about the parameters of what we see as being 'volunteering' is important
- Clarity and a collective view of 'volunteering' are important and useful in considering and making decisions about the opportunities and challenges that present themselves in day-to-day practice, helping to frame the parameters for research and guiding macro and micro-level policy.

5.   Different ways of thinking about volunteering

It is clear that the concept of 'volunteering' has never been stable. There are a variety of ways of thinking about volunteering (See, for example, Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth 1996; Carson 1999; Wilson 2000; Soupourmas and Ironmonger 2002; Petriwskyj and Warburton 2007; Toppe 2006).

The *State of Volunteering in Australia Report* 2012 stated:

> 'UN Volunteers (UNV) articulates the universal nature and values of volunteering. Volunteering is a human activity, a basic expression of human relationships that occurs in every society in the world. People engage in volunteerism for a great variety of reasons. The terms which define it and the form of its expression may vary in different languages and cultures, but the values which drive it are common and universal: a desire to contribute to the common good, out of free will and in a spirit of solidarity, without expectation or material reward (UN 2011, pp. iv, xx). Volunteerism promotes cooperation, encourages participation and contributes to the well-being of individuals and society as a whole. It is a way for people to engage in the life of their communities and societies, acquiring a sense of belonging and influencing the direction of their lives. Volunteerism has the potential for people to be primary actors in communities and affect their destiny.'

One of the most significant variations between definitions of volunteering today is the inclusion or exclusion of informal volunteering. Informal volunteering is conducted outside a non-profit organisation or structured group that may benefit specific individuals or the general community (Finkelstein and Brannick, 2007). The United Nations includes both formal and informal volunteering in its definition:

> 'Volunteering is an action carried out voluntarily, according to an individual's own free will, not undertaken for financial reward nor stipulated by law, contract or academic requirement, and done for the common good. It includes acts that take place outside the context of a formal organisation on a regular basis.' (UN 2011:3-4).

Informal volunteering is typically more common amongst collectivist cultures, that is Asia, Southern Europe, South America and Africa (Gronlund, 2013), whereas formal volunteering is more common among Anglo cultures and Northern European countries. Given the multicultural nature of Australia today, any definition needs to have meaning to the different communities within which individuals volunteer.

Broun, describing indigenous Australian perspectives around volunteering (IAVE Conference, 2014), stated helping each other out is widespread and often not recognised as volunteering as it is not formal or structured, but rather a way of living within a culture of reciprocity and familial obligation. While some of these activities may well fall within volunteering definitions (particularly taking part on committees and structures that assist in supporting the community) most are not formal volunteering. This means they may be undervalued and not recognised officially. Yet the informal volunteering that occurs within a cultural framework of obligation and responsibility goes a long way to maintaining social cohesion and inclusion in these communities. Broun noted that 'The concept of volunteering must be approached in a dynamic way that reflects the diversity of the community you are working in'. For Australia's indigenous communities volunteering is generally not undertaken in a structured way through formal positions. This also raises a question around the terminology currently used around 'free will'. Inherent social obligation for all members of community may not be perceived as a matter of 'free will' or 'personal choice'.

This section examines some alternative definitions of volunteering currently in use today.

The International Labour Organisation (ILO), for example, confines its definition to work and refers to 'Unpaid non-compulsory work; that is, time individuals give without pay to activities performed either through an organization or directly for others outside their own household' (p 13). This definition goes on to refer to 'activities that produce goods and/or services which contribute something of potential value to its recipients'. Key to this definition is that it was developed for the measurement of volunteering, and supports comparative statistics on volunteering in the context of UN recommendations from the IYV celebrations report in 2005 (ILO, 2011).

As discussed earlier, however, there is considerable debate about measurement of volunteering. Some researchers argue that variations in definitions contribute to an inability to 'give credence and respect to the contributions that volunteers make' (Salamon, Sokolowski & Haddock, 2011, p. 245). Other researchers contend that most attempts to measure volunteering to date provide an incomplete picture of its value (Haski-Leventhal et al, 2011).

The International Association for Volunteer Effort (IAVE) (2009) definition of volunteering follows a 'Universal Declaration on Volunteering', rather than a succinct definition. Interestingly, the Declaration refers to individual as well as group action which suggests that it includes both formal and informal volunteering. Volunteer Canada (2011) suggested a further expansion of the definition, arguing that:

> '... the word *volunteering* is associated with a narrower concept of service and benevolence, while notions of leadership, active citizenship, social action, and community engagement are all part of what volunteering means today. Rather than finding a new word, the focus of conversations was on renewing the meaning of the word. ... by 2017, *volunteering* is regarded as part of our everyday lives, and as the way we participate and shape the communities we want for ourselves and for future generations.'

In 2012, in their Code for Volunteer Involvement, Volunteer Canada defined a volunteer as 'any person who gives freely of their time, energy and skills for public benefit, of their own free will, without monetary compensation' (Volunteer Canada, 2012, p. 22). Volunteering is considered to be 'the most fundamental act of citizenship and philanthropy in our society. It is the offering of time, energy and skills of one's own free will' (p. 22). In recognition of the depth and breadth of volunteer activity the code presents a spectrum of volunteer engagement and identifies that volunteering is a:

> 'continuum that includes informing oneself about an issue, supporting a cause, actively participating, and adopting leadership roles. These range from the most passive to the most active levels of engagement' (p. 20).

Volunteering England includes both formal and informal volunteering in its definition:

> 'We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation' (Volunteering England 2014).

Similarly, the UK Compact Code of Good Practice defines volunteering as 'an activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or individuals or groups other than (or in addition to) close relatives' (Zimmeck 2009, p. 3). The tenet that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual is not part of the definition but is part of an additional statement of principles. Both the Centre for Volunteering and Volunteering Queensland include informal volunteering within their view of what constitutes the activity, with the Centre for Volunteering specifying that volunteering can take place 'through non-profit and community organisations and projects or your local community'(http://volunteering.com.au/what-is-volunteering-2/).Volunteering Tasmania utilise the current VA definition. However they have added a statement recognising the continuum that sits along the three core elements of the definition, that is paid - unpaid, coercion - free will, and no benefit to community - benefit to the community. Important to the debate is a notion articulated in the UN State of the World's Volunteerism report which states that the ethos of volunteering 'is infused with values, including

solidarity, reciprocity, mutual trust, belonging and empowerment, all of which contribute significantly to quality of life.'(UN, 2011,p.xx).

Table 2 summarises the definitions presented above alongside other national definitions to show how they compare against the dimensions of free choice, structure (organised through or outside an organisation), beneficiaries and remuneration. The table includes definitions from other Anglo countries with similar ideas about volunteering to Australia as well as those from countries such as Sweden and Portugal where alternative ideas of volunteering are prevalent.

Table 2: A comparison of international and national definitions of volunteering

	Free choice	**Structure**	**Beneficiaries**	**Remuneration**
Volunteering Australia	Free will	Nonprofit organisations	Community and volunteer	None
Volunteering Canada	Free will	Any organisation	Community, individuals, volunteer	None
Volunteering England	Free will	Any organisation	Environment, individuals, family	None
Volunteering Ireland	Free will	Not specified	Community, individuals and causes	Out of pocket expenses
Portugal	Not specified	Within an organisation	Social and communitarian causes	Some compensation
Sweden	Free will	Any organisation	An organisation	None
IAVE	Free will	Not specified	Others or the community	None

ILO	Free will	Both through an organisation and directly with clients	Recipients outside your own household	None

Significant variation in definitions between Australia and other key global entities makes cross-cultural comparison of volunteering rates, size, breadth and other patterns challenging.

6.   Language and ideas about volunteering

Across Australia a range of terms are often used interchangeably with 'volunteering'. These include 'voluntary work', 'voluntary activity', 'unpaid work', 'unpaid volunteering', 'pro bono', 'participant involvement', 'unpaid activism', 'civic participation', 'active citizenship', 'community participation', 'community service', and 'community engagement'. These terms mean different things, and as Zimmeck (2009) argues, sometimes nothing at all. She describes such terminology as inaccurate, inventive and misleading, causing confusion and reducing the scale and visibility of volunteering and thus its value, especially to government. It could also be argued that that these terms each represent one part of a broader understanding of volunteering, that might be stretched even further with activities such as 'time banking' becoming popular. Attempts to distinguish between multiple overlapping terms may simply be confusing and unproductive.

Terminology associated with volunteering reflects different ideas of what volunteering is. Rochester et al (2010) propose that there are three broad ways of thinking about volunteering globally. These are:

- Unpaid work or service
- Civil action and
- Leisure

Unpaid work is the dominant idea in Anglo countries (Lyons et al, 1998), even though the voluntary sectors do vary substantially (Gronlund et al, 2013). This is evident in the current Volunteering Australia definition which defines volunteering as 'unpaid work'. Civil action is the dominant idea in Scandinavian countries and developing countries in the Global South. The idea of volunteering as leisure was first discussed by researchers in the early 1970s (Rochester et al, 2010), as volunteering is a discretionary activity chosen to be undertaken in free time. The non-profit community has only recently begun to adopt the idea of volunteering as leisure, partly because it may be seen by some to trivialise volunteer activity. Stebbins' (1996) idea of volunteering as serious leisure, which involves considerable effort from the participants has been more popular. The focus of leisure volunteering is on the motivation, effort and impact of the activity on the participant, and participants can also develop a career through their leisure volunteering. Researchers have examined

volunteering in leisure settings e.g. steam railway enthusiasts restoring a steam railway and opening it to the public, museum tour guides, activities within the arts, theatre and music sectors and sport (Rochester et al, 2010). Leisure volunteering has also been documented among volunteer firefighters (Arai & Pedlar, 1997) and search and rescue volunteers (Uriely, Schwartz, Cohen & Reichel, 2002).

In 2011, at a special workshop devoted solely to defining volunteering, participants at the 13th IAVE Asia-Pacific Regional Volunteer Conference in Republic of Korea agreed on the universal dimensions or qualities of volunteerism (free will, altruism, undertaken without monetary reward and so on) but also suggested that volunteerism should be seen as a continuum, rather than a dichotomous concept, such as selfish vs. altruistic, freewill vs. force, paid vs. free. This suite of continua allows for a more inclusive description of different forms of volunteering in Australian society today. A broad definition, however, could complicate the already existing challenges in defining volunteering for policy and strategy by governments and for measurement.

The outcomes from the IAVE workshop follow Cnaan, Handy and Wadsworth's (1996) well-cited four dimensions of volunteering:

- Free choice (free will, relatively un-coerced, obligation to volunteer)
- Remuneration (none at all, none expected, expenses reimbursed, stipend/low pay)
- Structure (formal, informal)
- Intended beneficiaries (benefit/ help others/strangers, benefit/help friends or relatives, benefit/ help oneself)

Cnaan et al also presents these on a continuum from 'pure' volunteering to 'broad'. This broader conceptualisation of volunteering is also used by Petriwskyj and Warburton, who have developed a typology or matrix of volunteering along three dimensions - whether the volunteering is formal or informal, done as part of a group or as an individual, and the category (e.g. activism, self-help, community service) in which it belongs. This typology enables researchers to clearly specify the type of volunteering they are investigating (Petriwskyj and Warburton 2007). The idea of pure and broad concepts of volunteering follows on from a cross-cultural study of people's perceptions of volunteering, which found that while there was general consensus as to what volunteering definitely is, there was substantial debate around the broader, more marginal areas (Handy et al, 2000).

To enable a clear basis for future research, Petriwskyj and Warburton (2007) offered a definition aimed at addressing the current dilemmas, which is based on both the UN and IAVE definitions:

> 'Volunteering is …. an activity that is undertaken with a primary purpose other than financial reward, for a common goal or the good of others, of the person's own free will and without coercion and without the intent to cause harm.'

This discussion emphasises how important it is to have a clear and shared understanding of what volunteering is, before it can be defined operationally.

7. Trends in volunteering since 1996

There have been significant changes in the volunteering field since 1996. However some of the change is not directly related to how people volunteer and what should be considered 'volunteering', but is concerned with the increasing number of policies and practices concerning volunteers and volunteering. The sector within which the vast majority of volunteering occurs – the non-profit sector – has seen a raft of policies such as governance, risk management and workplace controls that have had an impact on volunteering. A second major shift has been in the increasing roles and responsibilities given to volunteers and volunteer-based organisations through changing government policies.

A national survey conducted by Volunteering Australia in 2011 identified one in two organisations had introduced new ways of offering volunteering in the past 12 months. The most common change has been the provision of greater flexibility about when people could volunteer. This is not necessarily a change in what constitutes volunteering but is indicative of social changes about how people prefer to donate their time (e.g. Brudney, 2005; Merrill, 2006).

The way people are choosing to 'give time to help out' in Australian society is very diverse and areas of recent growth around volunteering include:

- Skilled volunteering
- Group volunteering
- Corporate volunteering and corporate sector involvement
- Youth volunteering to gain hands-on work experience
- Volunteering through places of learning
- Spontaneous volunteering (e.g. in response to bushfires and floods)
- Major event volunteering
- Virtual volunteering
- Changes in when and for how long people volunteer, including episodic and micro-volunteering
- International and/or cross-national volunteering
- Recognition of the increasing multi-cultural nature of Australian society and different ways communities within Australia help each other out
- Time banking.

Taking into account the earlier discussion on informal volunteering, the current definition does not reflect how significant numbers of Australians give their time, nor is it well aligned to the Australian community's view of how they 'volunteer'.

8.   Issues for discussion

To stimulate debate about how volunteering should be defined, the dimensions in the existing definition and the 11 principles outlined in 1996 are discussed around current volunteering in Australia.

8.1 Benefits

- One of the 11 principles in the existing definition is that 'Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer'. Two additional principles are 'volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community' and 'Volunteering is a vehicle for individuals of groups to address human, environmental and social needs'.

All definitions of volunteering are more specific than just 'giving time' and generally include a phrase that relates to the benefits that accrue to the community outside of the volunteer's own family. Good practice in volunteer management also ensures the volunteer benefits. The motivation of the volunteer often determines the type or location of the volunteering undertaken rather than being a dimension within the definition of volunteering.

Debate exists about whether volunteer support activities may actually increase the dependence, or prevent development of the recipients of the support, or at least not assist the recipients in breaking the cycle of dependence. This debate has been prominent in development activities – mostly in developing world settings – and is important to the discussion about volunteering (Devereux, 2008). Elements of this debate include students volunteering to assist in communities as part of their studies, where there may be concerns of 'exploitation' of the clients, or a downgrading of the importance of their needs for the benefit of the student volunteers (Bamber & Hankin, 2011). This debate has also been found in the area of volunteer tourism (Holmes, 2014). This principle raises questions around how far volunteering should benefit the community in comparison to the volunteer, or in fact the volunteer organising entity.

VA's current definition gives the impression that all volunteer work is of benefit to the community or the volunteer, whereas some volunteers' efforts (even though offered in good faith) may have no impact or even negative impacts in some circumstances (see Guttenberg, 2009). Indeed some volunteer actions can be considered to be detrimental to society. For instance, the UN reviewed the 'participation of young people in armed conflict, in gangs and rebel organisations' (UN, 2011, p. 56) and explicitly state in their report:

> 'When people participate in peaceful activism, for or against animal research or building of a dam, both sides seek what they consider to be beneficial outcomes. They are included in our definition. Activities involving or inciting violence that harm society and actions not corresponding to the values attributed to volunteerism are not included in our definition' (p. 4).

Civil society participation and activism can be seen as detrimental or beneficial depending on the context in which it occurs and the values and perceptions of the observer.

Community benefits are also often considered at the local level where the volunteering occurs, but the growth of virtual volunteering demonstrates that an individual or entity may volunteer to assist in the creation of community outcomes quite remote from their actual location.

- Should 'benefit to the community' be included in the definition and if so how is 'benefit' determined?

8.2 No payment

- The current definition of volunteering refers to 'no financial payment' and the 11 principles refer to 'unpaid work'. Other definitions in use refer to no pecuniary interest, although there has long been a recognised right for volunteers to seek reimbursement of expenses.
- Volunteering South Australia & Northern Territory notably state that for them volunteering should involve 'no payment or material gain'.

Issues for consideration with respect to payment include: reimbursement of expenses, stipend volunteering, obligations associated with receipt of government benefits, corporate and employee volunteering, the migration of some volunteering activities to (under)paid status and the type of in-kind or financial reward and recognition given.

Some forms of international volunteering include a stipend. While a stipend is not considered compensation for the work performed, it enables volunteer activity to occur by covering living expenses, and may be considered an inducement. The notion of undertaking 'volunteering' as part of the obligations associated with receiving social security benefits sits awkwardly with the tenet of 'no payment' in most existing definitions. Similarly, traditional voluntary roles such as sport umpires are increasingly attracting a small payment. Other roles such as foster carers are often excluded from being considered volunteering due to the payments involved.

The growing trend for volunteer tourism involves Australians travelling overseas to volunteer and international tourists coming to Australia to volunteer, although the former is more common (Holmes, 2014). Volunteer tourists sometimes pay substantial fees to the host and/or broker organisations for the opportunity. Here individuals are paying to volunteer.

A further matter requiring consideration here is associated with corporate and/or employee volunteering. Increasingly corporate involvement in community organisations includes allowing individuals to volunteer during paid work time, sometimes characterised as volunteer leave; sending groups of workers to undertake tasks or assist with events in the form of 'corporate volunteering', or loaning individuals with skills or expertise to non-profit organisations for 'skilled volunteering'. These activities could be considered to be

performed at the expense of the employer as the individual is still receiving their wage or salary while volunteering. Both corporate and employee volunteering, and volunteering associated with government benefits are also issues to be considered with respect to choice.

- What role should remuneration have in definitions of volunteering? While we recognise the right to reimbursement of expenses, do we extend this to include other types of payment?
- Can corporations or business entities volunteer, or only individuals?

8.3 Only unpaid work? What activities are volunteering?

- The current 11 principles identify that 'Volunteer work is unpaid work', but also that 'Volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community' and '… is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs'.

Many definitions of volunteering refer to it as work. This includes studies that have been undertaken around the world to capture the magnitude of volunteer activity. The ILO, for example, refers to unpaid non-compulsory work, in its definition designed to be adopted for the 'measurement' of volunteering. Other material has been developed to assist managers distinguish between paid and un-paid positions and roles (Volunteering ACT, 2014). It is increasingly being accepted however that not all volunteering is perceived or constructed as 'work'. The concept of 'work' paid or unpaid implies that the activities contribute to economic production. As noted earlier, unpaid work is only one way of thinking about volunteering, although it is the dominant approach in Australia. Thinking of volunteering as unpaid work can raise issues relating to how paid workers and unpaid workers operate alongside each other in the same organisation. In the world of paid work, level of pay is an indicator of status and economic compliance. Referring to volunteers as unpaid workers gives them the lowest status out of the staff in any organisation and possibility leads to questions of their dependability, given they are not paid in return for their services.

In addition, the dominant model of volunteering as unpaid work may not be appropriate to other cultural perceptions of volunteering as civil activism or informal volunteering within multicultural Australia today. The idea of volunteering as serious leisure has been already presented in this paper and also challenges the dominant model of volunteering as unpaid work. Faith-based volunteering and activities such as mentoring also demonstrate the breadth of activity that may or may not be regarded as volunteering. Different ways of thinking of volunteers as unpaid workers or participants during leisure hours has a substantial impact on the way in which volunteer programs can be organised.

- How far should the definition of volunteering in Australia reflect the important role of all three ways of thinking about volunteering: unpaid work, activism and serious leisure?

- Are there specific activities which should be clearly delineated as either volunteering, or not volunteering?

8.4 Choice

- The existing definition and principles refer to volunteering as a matter of choice 'undertaken of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion'. There is specific reference to volunteering as being 'not compulsorily undertaken to receive pensions or government allowances' and 'is not a substitute for paid work'.

The ABS, for example, indicates that their data collection specifically excluded unpaid community work which 'was not strictly voluntary and would not normally be seen as voluntary work' (2007, p. 87) naming programs such as work for the dole and mutual obligation as not fitting the 'willingly undertaken' component of their definition. The debate in Australia has recently been revived with the discussion about the requirement for unemployment benefit recipients to undertake community work. Organisations, however, do not always make the distinction with respect to their volunteers for example one volunteer involving organisation states on their website:

> 'Many of our volunteers are on mutual obligation agreements with Centrelink. This means that they offer their time for one or two days per week as agreed with their Centrelink contact. We welcome these volunteers and offer them the same processes and the same recognition and events as our other volunteers.'

The issue of choice is also one which comes up with respect to students undertaking volunteering in relation to their studies, and employees volunteering with or on behalf of their employer. The subtleties of choice become more complex when there are implicit pressures to volunteer, such as the inclusion of community service in performance appraisal processes under 'discretionary effort' in a large corporate entity. In addition, limited choice may apply, for example with students having a choice over where to 'volunteer' but the 'volunteering' component may be a compulsory part of their curriculum. A debate is currently taking place at universities in Australia about the role of awarding credit for student volunteering.

Beyond the matter of choice to take up volunteering, there are also other matters for consideration. While volunteers have the right to choose, we need to try to create transparency and appropriate information, policy and volunteer referral systems to maintain duty of care and quality outcomes for both the volunteer and community that benefits. This can include actions on the part of volunteer involving organisations to sign volunteers up to behavioural contracts, and to expect them to honour commitments made in terms of time. The notion of choice at this level is made at the time of making a commitment to volunteer.

- The State of Volunteering Report 2012 suggested considering a term such as 'undertaken by choice and without coercion or obligation stipulated by lay or contract'. Is this a helpful way of differentiating volunteering?

8.5 Structure of volunteering, only for a non-profit entity?

- One of the 11 principles around the existing definition is that 'Volunteering is an activity performed in the non-profit sector only'.

Volunteering Australia's current definition of volunteering does not acknowledge, or in some cases, easily accommodate the involvement of the range of volunteer involving organisations that currently exist in Australia. Amongst the definitions discussed in this paper, the VA definition is the only one specifically limiting volunteering to non-profit contexts. The public sector and the private sector increasingly rely on volunteers to provide important services to the community. Local government authorities, state and federal government departments involve volunteers in a wide range of positions. Each year hundreds of volunteers work in areas including, but not exclusive to, public libraries, community services, visitor centres, transport, and community events. It has long been the case that that governments have enlisted the help of volunteers for many activities, ranging from the volunteers who assist in emergency services such as firefighting, to those who inform and educate on behalf of fisheries, and those who assist in hospitals and other health facilities.

Volunteering also takes place in for-profit settings, with private hospitals and commercially run events being two such examples. In hospitals the requirement to operate in a non-profit setting has led to the formation of auxiliary associations, which operate as separate entities, to allow volunteers to provide services to the patients. In sporting or cultural events volunteers are active in many roles including marshals or organisers to assist the event to run smoothly. The volunteers often receive significant benefits such as the opportunity to be a part of important events or activities (such as The Rugby World Cup or Olympic Games).

The involvement of volunteers outside of non-profit settings leads to concerns about the potential for exploitation. For instance in high profile organisations such as football and cricket where players are well rewarded for their efforts and where sponsorship is generous, some may consider the involvement of volunteers to be inappropriate. Volunteering should not be exploitative or involve inappropriate work or tasks that should be undertaken by a paid employee. The rights and responsibilities of both volunteers and employers need to be very carefully considered and are a critical area in volunteer management to ensure good practice occurs (Volunteering ACT, 2014). Legislative areas in Australia such as the Fair Work Act help clarify the differences between paid work and unpaid work, but this legislation does not apply across all parts of Australia nor across many areas of potential volunteering discussed in this paper.

This area is very complex and some stakeholders consider a practical solution is to exclude volunteering in profit-making entities as it can lead to exploitation. However, others believe this is a volunteer management issue rather than a definitional issue and note the corporate structures behind different social enterprise and non-profit entities can now be complex. It is no longer valid to assume all non-profit entities are concerned with creating community benefits, and all company structures are focussed only on profit-making.

- Should the reference to the non-profit sector be removed from the definition? And if so, what parameters, if any, should be put in place to make it clear that exploitative practices are not volunteering?

9.   Impact of a change

Revising the definition has the potential to influence how Australian communities value and participate in volunteer activities around the country. In reality, people will choose to 'freely give time to help out' in a wide variety of ways, often without knowing or caring whether it is technically considered 'volunteering' according to VA's definition.

Changing the definition may have a substantial impact across Australia over time by altering:

- How our communities talk about the subject;
- The areas and ways that volunteers are managed;
- How Australia maintains and implements best practice standards in government and agency legislation, policy and strategy; and
- How volunteer resource centres and volunteer involving organisations provide support across the sector.

For instance, a more inclusive definition could help:

- A wider variety of forms of volunteering be accepted and supported through better volunteer management practices;
- Grow the understanding of the size and breadth of the volunteer community and its outputs and outcomes for society and Australia's economy, contributing to greater government and community recognition of the value of volunteering in society; and
- Provide greater support and recognition for volunteers currently not covered under the existing definition.

The impact of a definitional change needs further consideration and discussion to ensure the positive and constructive reasons for any change are maximised and unintentional negative potential consequences are mitigated. There needs to be continual focus on clearly distinguishing between volunteering and inappropriate work practices. Any new definition needs to be able to support the ongoing work around good practice in volunteer management.

Other considerations also exist. For instance, the capacity for different entities to access government and agency support may alter. In budget restricted times if a significant

increase in 'non-traditional volunteering' organisations can tap a funding pool, this may significantly decrease the amount of funds available for traditional volunteer involving organisations. This is only a potential outcome, however, as the UK Government, despite including informal volunteering in its definition, has shown no interest and invested no resources in informal volunteering (Zimmeck, 2009). It may also be necessary to continue to maintain a clear understanding of formal volunteering as a vital and important component of volunteering. Even if Volunteering Australia chooses to adopt a wider and more inclusive definition of volunteering, some organisations may choose to recognise and accept the new definition but continue to focus their own work only in the area of formal volunteering.

The impact on legislation and policy will require detailed discussions. It may take a number of years to work through specific areas of focus within various government levels and departments. While this sounds daunting, it is critical to enable Australia's volunteering sector to work effectively and support the contemporary Australian way of life.

10.   Next steps

The purpose of this review is to encourage significant reflection and debate across Australia into the dimensions around volunteering – about the current definition, the wider context that it sits within and to gain a deeper understanding of the different views within our communities and organisations regarding a change to the definition.

This Issues Paper has been designed to support the Australia-wide consultation process. The consultation will be managed by Volunteering Australia and each State peak body and will gather views across each of the dimensions highlighted in this Issues Paper:

- Benefit to the community
- No payment
- Only un-paid work?
- Should we include or exclude certain types of activities?
- Choice
- Structure of volunteering – only for a non-profit entity?
- Can business entities volunteer or only individuals?

The National Steering Committee recommended the consultation phase focus on discussing three potential definitions:

a. Volunteering is an activity undertaken as an individual or in a group, for the benefit of the community, without expectation of financial reward. Volunteering is a choice freely made by each individual and can include formal or informal community participation.

b. Volunteering is doing something willingly, for no financial gain, that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives or the individual.

C. We define volunteering as any activity that involves spending time, unpaid, doing something that aims to benefit the environment or someone (individuals or groups) other than, or in addition to, close relatives. Central to this definition is the fact that volunteering must be a choice freely made by each individual. This can include formal activity undertaken through public, private and voluntary organisations as well as informal community participation.

The consultation over the three potential definitions above will also consider the following principles:

That the term 'volunteering' encompass:

- The provision of benefits to the community, other than, or in addition to, benefiting close relatives
- A relationship where the volunteer also benefits
- Philanthropic service giving
- Mutual aid
- Activism and advocacy
- Environmental stewardship
- Corporate volunteering
- Volunteering done as part of 'volunteering leave' from work.

That the term volunteering exclude:

- Activities undertaken as they are obligated by law
- Public/ community service not including court orders
- Compulsory educational institutional requirements
- Participation in community activities to reduce debt
- Forced/ paid community service.

Additional areas where there are significant levels of mixed views about inclusion as principles include:

- Cultural reciprocity
- Whether a business entity can volunteer not just individuals
- Employees participating on behalf of their company outside normal work hours
- The inclusion of leisure activities
- The principle of no intent to cause harm.

The review of Volunteering Australia's definition of volunteering will consider the issues outlined in this paper. For more information on the consultation process, its timeline and how to take part, please visit Volunteering Australia or your state peak websites.

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Attachment A

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