



# Good Practice Guide for Students

Enhancing the learning in Australian  
University Student Volunteering





## 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 students based on data gathered for this project. Details about the project are on the back of this guide.

## Some reasons university students say they 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

\* See the *Concept Guide for Terminology*.

## How do I find out about volunteering?

The university you attend may have a 'Volunteer Hub', or other central location where volunteer activities are advertised or sponsored. You can also find out about volunteering opportunities through:

- Orientation week advertising
- Friends, peers, classmates
- Information promoted in class
- University careers centre
- The Guild or Student Union
- Joining a sports or other interest club
- Your local Volunteer Resource Centre
- Online via [govolunteer.com](http://govolunteer.com)

Some courses in universities include a Service Learning component, providing valuable learning opportunities.

**REMEMBER:** It takes time to set up a volunteering activity or opportunity. Many organisations will want to interview you, you may need to undergo background checking (e.g. a police clearance or working with children check), and you may need to attend induction or orientation before you commence volunteering. It is important to honour their commitment to you when you volunteer.

## Thinking about volunteering?

Student volunteering could involve academic learning, or learning new skills and knowledge; it could be taking the opportunity to make new friends or discovering an interest or purpose in contributing to society; or it could be to enhance employability. Some considerations for you might be:

- **Your life goals** and what you would like to achieve when graduating – consider the way that volunteering could help you achieve these goals.
- How important it is to **challenge** yourself – get out of your comfort zone, become more independent, be confronted by something new.
- Your **time and other resources**: what can you reasonably fit into your schedule? Just because volunteering is unpaid does not mean you can leave whenever you like, because the organisation (and clients) are relying on you.
- Your **social goals**: how important is it to you to develop networks, make new friendships, help others to develop a sense of connectedness and community?
- Your **employment goals**: what additional skills and knowledge do you want to acquire, or new directions you want to pursue?
- Your **personal goals**: how important is it for you to gain satisfaction and happiness from helping others, as well as having fun and enjoying yourself in the process?
- Your **own characteristics**. Are you a person who prefers clear boundaries and structures, to be organised and given tasks to do? Or would you prefer to work on your own and be left in charge of how to do it? You might find this quiz useful: [www.myworldofwork.co.uk/content/what-type-of-volunteering-is-for-me](http://www.myworldofwork.co.uk/content/what-type-of-volunteering-is-for-me).





## Thinking about learning

It is useful to reflect on your learning while volunteering, particularly if there is no framework provided for this. Keep a reflective log of your activities, the skills you have acquired, problems you have solved and experiences which have changed your thinking. Evidence suggests this will help you to get the most out of your volunteer activity. See the *Concept Guide on Learning*.

## Thinking about graduating

The experiences and learning you have gained from volunteering are important additions to your job seeking. Including information about your practical experience and learning from volunteering in your CV, and using examples from your experience in interviews can give you an edge when competing for employment. Your reflective log can help jog your memory for job applications. See over and see also the *Guide for Potential Employers*.

## What sort of host organisation might I work with?

**Host organisations tend to fall into four groups:**

- Student organisations
- University programs, projects or centres
- Organisations which have specific or particular arrangements or assignments for student volunteers, and
- Those organisations which involve or include students just the same as any other volunteer.

**Some examples from our research include:**

- Helping at events organised by the student guild/union or activity clubs
- Internal university activities, such as orientation week or open day
- Fundraising for charities
- Working in second hand book or opportunity shops
- Serving on committees
- Running student academic events
- Mentoring either in university or in the community (school students for example)
- Working with specific organisations in the community
- A self-organised student group formed in the student village collaborated to help other student organisations with events

## Breaking down stereotypes – rewarding volunteering

The Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME) project works with Aboriginal school children to help them to achieve their goals through mentoring and workshops. Around the country AIME operates within many different communities and universities.

*“ The big part of it is breaking down stereotypes for those students about what they can expect for themselves and what others expect for them, like showing and highlighting that to be an Aboriginal person is really a great thing, and that it’s a successful thing. ”*



## How might volunteering help me get a job?

Volunteering can develop work-related skills, knowledge and other attributes such as:

- learning the professional skills of managing, coordinating projects, time management and goal setting;
- developing new knowledge from a change in focus or direction;
- enhancing discipline-specific skills, knowledge and networks;
- preparing for an interview and workplace behaviours; and
- developing personal skills of self-efficacy and self-confidence, learning how to deal with pressure.

Volunteer managers want people who are reliable, conscientious and empathetic to the cause of the organisation, as do potential employers. See also *Guide for Potential Employers*.

## What makes a good volunteering experience?

Finding an activity that suits your schedule, satisfies your interest and helps you achieve some of your more specific goals will contribute positively to your student volunteering experience. Our evidence is that good communication at the start of the volunteering relationship will lead to better outcomes. Clarification of expectations on both sides about credit, supervision, time availability, length of commitment, skills needs and reasons for volunteering will enhance your experience.

## 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.

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.

## Eye-Opening experiences

*“ People who are most involved in volunteering do it because they get satisfaction, they like seeing other people be happy and satisfied. It is a benefit. You do it because you want to do it and you get satisfaction out of helping other people. ”*

### Student volunteer in student formed organisation

*“ When somebody comes in and says I can't afford five or ten dollars you go, oh no... that was an experience that I kind of stepped back and went I never really have to think I don't have clean clothes to wear today... I can bring that kind of experience back into what I do with other students. ”*

### Student volunteer in second hand clothing store





What are some common challenges?	And how do I deal with them?
<b>Not having clear guidelines or structures to support your volunteering</b>	Ask for a schedule, timetable or other specifics about the activity, your role, and expectations.
<b>Time commitment</b>	Assess realistically how much time you have and match your volunteering to that – it is better to increase your volunteering if you find you have more time than pull out altogether because you are over committed.
<b>Culture shock or not feeling part of the culture of the organisation</b>	This is common for all people on joining an organisation. Find out as much as you can about the organisation before you start and allow yourself time to 'settle in' and make connections there.
<b>Reality check - we are not going to change the world</b>	Maybe not, but the little that you do will make a big difference.
<b>'Ungrateful' / 'angry' clients/recipients when things go wrong</b>	Some people who are experiencing hardship or disadvantage in some way may react negatively to you as a volunteer. Understanding their situation can help, as can training and supervision in the organisation.
<b>The 'bad' volunteer experience</b>	Sometimes things don't turn out the way we hope or expect. Take the lessons from it and engage in a new experience. The vast majority of volunteering experiences are positive.
<b>The cost</b>	There will be some cost, even if only in time. Some organisations can help with bus fares for example. But again, choose a volunteering activity that is within your resources: close to transport, easy to access from work or study, to minimise any out of pocket expenses
<b>Different motivations for volunteering (e.g. volunteering for the hours on a transcript)</b>	Not everyone volunteers for the same reasons. Accepting that there are different roles people can and do play and therefore contribute can make the experience less tense.
<b>Transport (Living off campus)</b>	Choose a volunteering activity that fits within your schedule and availability. If you live off campus you may choose to volunteer for one-off events rather than sign up to a semester long activity.
<b>Lack of interest from volunteering or university structures or services</b>	If you find the service unresponsive, there are plenty of places that will welcome you – try your Guild or Hub.
<b>Getting 'stuck' in the same role</b>	Many students volunteer for one activity over a period and then move to another in the next semester, but there may be benefits in staying in the same activity – getting to know a stable network, demonstrating stability, developing skills to a greater depth.
<b>There are few young people in some organisations</b>	The demographics of a volunteer organisation differ. But extending your networks can be of immense benefit and be pleasurable too!



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[www.murdoch.edu.au/projects/volunteeringtolearn/](http://www.murdoch.edu.au/projects/volunteeringtolearn/)

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.

## 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:

- Senior University Staff
- University Program Managers
- Host Organisations
- 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.*







# Good Practice Guide for University Program Managers

Enhancing the learning in Australian  
University Student Volunteering





## 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. The learning which takes place includes a range of life skills, including 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*.

## 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 managers and coordinators based on data gathered for this project. Details of the project are on the back of this guide.

## Types of Host Organisations

There are four main types of host organisation identified in 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. See also *Guide for Senior University Staff*.

## Different University Student Volunteers

Our evidence is that there are three broad types of university student volunteers.

- **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 of their time

**Equity of Access** – University program managers need to be aware of the issues associated with volunteering for students on limited budgets who may not be able to afford to spend time on unpaid work, or who may need to be able to access reimbursement for expenses incurred while volunteering.

## Where do I start?

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



## Macro/University wide volunteering considerations:

- Having **champions** and getting buy-in from all stakeholders across the hierarchy.
- Proper **planning** before implementation. That is, identify the strategic reasons for the university wanting to facilitate the arrangements, to what end, for whose benefit, and how to ensure the program runs well. Forward planning also includes proactively dealing with demarcation issues, if any.
- The **Structure** needs to be appropriate to reflect the intent of the program and the support needed. Appropriate arrangements also need to be in place, with a clear and well understood interface between Faculties and Centres.
- **Policies** are needed for the arrangements/programs to provide clarity for all in terms of expectations, roles, and responsibilities. This is especially important since the arrangements will reflect on not only the students, but also the image of the university through the conduct, behaviour, and actions of their students.
- **Job security and funding** – if the positions of the managers and coordinators of the program are not secure this reduces the sense of stability for the arrangements, and may possibly reflect on the program's value proposition. There is a need for stability, a sense of continuity, and proper succession planning to position the program well for best results.
- **Strategic partnerships** – who should the university partner with? Should this only be with non profits so as not to take away paid working positions from others? These can be vexed questions, with the answers varying from university to university and being related to the strategic intent of the initiative, and individual volunteering programs.

## Keeping it legal

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- the nature of the host, student and university relationship;
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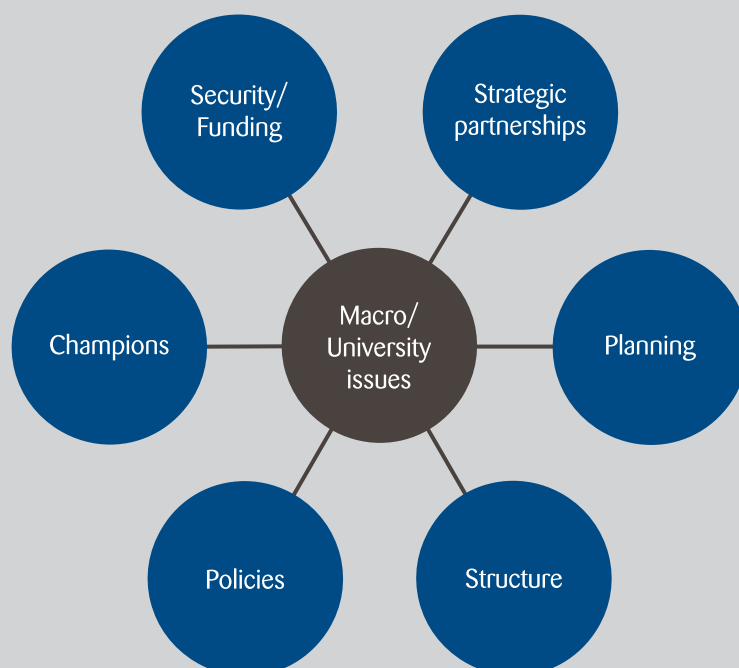
These are in addition to the more broadly applicable legal provisions which apply to any workplace, such as confidentiality, harassment.

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 host organisations, students and their universities to enhance university student volunteering.

## Student volunteering issues for program managers and coordinators





## Micro/Managing the program volunteering considerations:

- Realistic and appropriate **advertising and promotion**.
- Consider a proper **induction** regarding expectations and requirements of students.
- **Risk management** procedures need to be documented and monitored, including: health and safety issues; duty of care; students with medical conditions; and personnel checks such as police and those for working with children. Group volunteering programs are easier to organise compared to individual arrangements due to reduced effort as a result of economies of scale.
- **Timing** – indications are that programs run earlier in the semester are more successful than later (due to lower student workload).
- **Equity** – external students may feel excluded due to their inability to be directly involved.
- **Communication** – constant and open communication is necessary especially in outreach activities nationally and internationally.
- **Training** is needed, expectation management, and information on clear boundaries for operations. Cross-cultural issues also need attention especially for overseas placements.
- There is a requirement for **social support** for students as well as coordinators, especially in dealing with delicate matters such as refugee issues.
- **Provision of feedback/evaluation** and building quality loops to review and tighten arrangements.
- **Assessment** – for credit bearing units, consistent criteria are needed. There is also a requirement to ensure the placements are equivalent in terms of scope and range of activities.
- **Record keeping** – there is a need for proper documentation and continuity, for example relating to appropriate handover provisions.
- **Health issues** – burn out by students and associated staff is common in volunteering. There is a need to balance various competing priorities. Information should be provided on risk factors, and there should be careful monitoring of both staff and students, and the way they respond to the activities.
- **Management of performance** including behavioural issues and dependability. Managing volunteers is more difficult than managing paid staff. For example, sometimes attendance issues are a function of competing priorities and casual work which does not allow students to know their (paid) work schedules in advance.
- It may be useful to **have generic units** for service learning. These units can create a structure and framework for student activities, and allow consistent evaluation and assessment of activities.





## 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 experience gained in paid employment.

## What are some strategies to enhance university student volunteering?

- Ensure appropriate policies are in place and the structure and funding are appropriate for outcomes sought.
- Seek out strategic partnerships and ensure all stakeholders are aware of expectations, their rights, and specific requirements.
- Seek out one or more senior champions for the program.
- Ensure appropriate planning has taken place to avoid demarcation issues and conflict.
- Communication will need to be constant and open between all stakeholders, including feedback on the performance of the volunteers.
- Ensure appropriate feedback loops are put in place to evaluate activities of the program.
- Risk management procedures will need to be fully documented and duly followed.
- All stakeholders should receive an induction and training as necessary for the tasks they are to undertake.
- Allowance should be made for the provision of formal and informal social support as required, especially in difficult and emotive volunteering activities and settings.
- The scheduling of volunteering activities will need to take into consideration the competing priorities of students (including their paid work), and semester and study requirements (in terms of periods where assessments are due).
- Advertising and promotional material need to present a realistic view of the placements and associated requirements.
- Volunteers need to be very clear as to what is expected from them during their volunteer activity.
- For credit bearing units, there will need to be provisions put in place to ensure comparable and equitable assessment of activities for consistency, to meet academic requirements, and possibly accreditations.
- Provision should be made for possible alternate activities for students who may be solely studying on-line and possibly remotely and/or overseas who may not be able to partake in volunteering or service learning activities



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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA







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## Why do universities support student volunteering?

- To attract students
- To boost student retention
- To help students apply academic learning
- To give students leadership skills and experience
- To enable international students to immerse themselves in the local culture
- To help students develop soft skills, (e.g. communication and problem-solving skills)
- To increase students' employability
- To enrich the student experience
- To build relationships with the local community
- To build a good reputation for the university in the community

*“Some of the best universities in the world are very active in volunteering and service learning and we aspire to that.”*

**Institutional Representative**

## 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.

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## Organising student volunteer programs

Student volunteering programs can be organised in many ways which depend on several factors including historical roots, university strategies, the learning outcomes of individual study programs and the efforts of individual staff and students.

Programs can be:

- **University-driven** – established as part of a university strategy often linked to developing employability or leadership skills and found in career services or leadership centres
- **Student-university partnerships** – student-driven programs, which have been brought within the university's control and are run in partnership
- **Faculty-based** – volunteering within specific academic programs, often for students to gain relevant discipline-specific experience
- **Guild/ student union clubs and societies** – students volunteering for a club
- **External organisations operating on campus** – examples include the Australian Indigenous Mentoring Experience (AIME)
- **Integrated student volunteer programs** – where the university has strategically linked all programs across campus together with shared outcomes for students
- **Student-driven** – typically set up by the guild or student union and operated by students for students but may be supported with paid staff

See also *University Program Manager* and *Host Organisation Guides*.

*“ I would love to find more ways that we can make students feel more rewarded from that experience and make the most of those unique opportunities that the university offer. ”*

**Institutional Representative**



## Different University Student Volunteers

Our evidence is that there are three broad types of university student volunteers:

- **Academic** – This university student has assessable coursework requirements associated with their volunteer activity.
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**Other types of student volunteering are:**

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 developing a communication plan for nonprofit
Micro volunteering	Monitoring and counting wildlife, citizen science
Online volunteering	Online tutoring, creating updating webpages, blogging for a cause
International volunteering	Group activities or individual placement with nonprofit 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*.

## Effective university volunteer programs:

- have **champions** and achieve buy in from all stakeholders across the university.
- have been properly **planned** before implementation. The university is clear about the strategic goals for the student volunteer program and adopts the most appropriate model for program delivery.
- have an appropriate **structure** which reflects the intent of the program and provides the support needed, as well as providing an the interface between the faculties and central areas.
- establish **policies** to provide clarity for all in terms of expectations, roles and responsibilities – particularly important as the arrangement will reflect on the image of the university through the behaviour and actions of their students.
- provide **job security and ongoing funding** for staff delivering the program to provide stability, allow for long-term relationships with external organisations and enable proper succession planning.
- develop **strategic partnerships** both on and off-campus and have clear guidelines on which organisations can deliver programs or host student volunteers.
- provide **access** to student volunteering to all students: internal, external and off-shore.
- offer a **variety** of volunteering opportunities to cater for different needs and abilities.

## Keeping it legal

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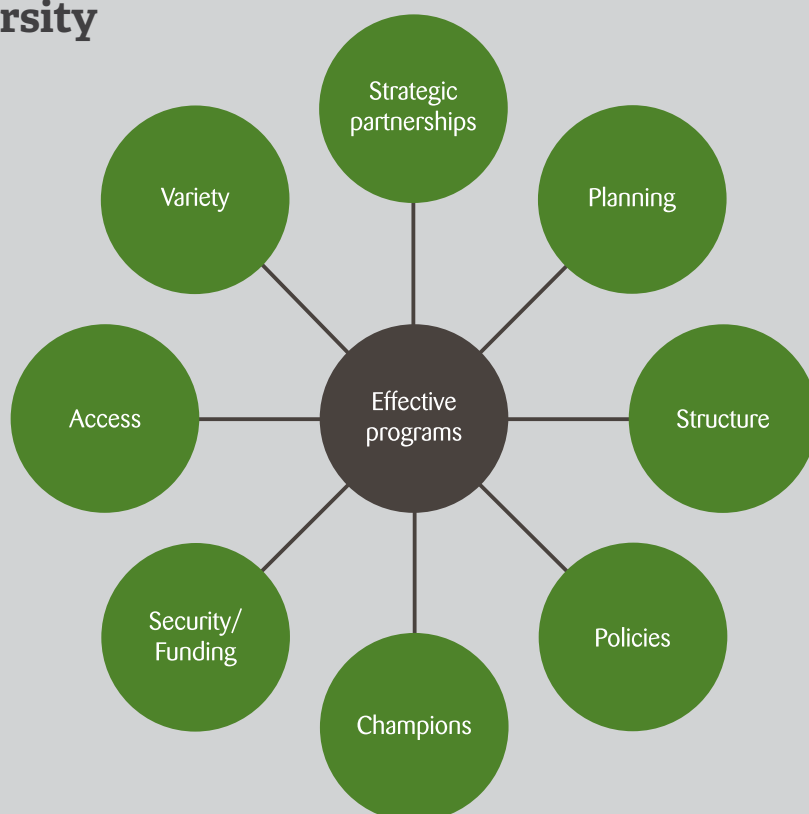
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While it is not possible to provide individual information to cover all circumstances, nor is it appropriate to provide legal advice, all student volunteers, managers and host organisations should be aware of the specific provisions which apply, including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

## What makes an effective university volunteer program?

*“ It’s good to have a really sound foundation in some values that the volunteers and those running the programs are aligned with. ”*

**Institutional Representative**







## Trends in student volunteering

Our project identified that student volunteering is extremely dynamic and programs are constantly evolving. Influencing factors include a change in university leadership; changes in student demand and study patterns; concerns about student employability and the university's social responsibility; and efforts to differentiate the student experience at each university.

The key trends that we identified in our project at the university level were:



## Challenges for universities

The specific challenges identified in our data include:

- **Starting up a volunteer program from the very beginning** – the advice is to start small and gradually increase the number of volunteer placements each semester.
- **Building relationships with host organisations** – it takes time to create meaningful partnerships and it's better to have a few good friends than many casual acquaintances.
- **Coordinating activities across the university** – this is important in developing a university-wide volunteer strategy and if student volunteering is to be recognised through a formal transcript.
- **Finding ways to engage off-campus students** – challenging but not impossible! Students can volunteer online and many universities have volunteer programs at their off-shore campuses.
- **Staff and student turnover** – like any program, losing good leaders means that there is a constant cycle of recruitment both to run the program and participate in it.
- **Recognising the volunteer activity** – what is the best way for students and the university? Transcripts, references, award ceremonies, t-shirts, parties are some of the formal and not-so-formal ways of rewarding students' contributions.



## About the Project

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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.

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- Students
- University Program Managers
- Employers
- Host Organisations

### Plus Concept Guides on:

- Terminology
- Enhancing Learning

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THE UNIVERSITY OF  
WESTERN AUSTRALIA







# 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/](http://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





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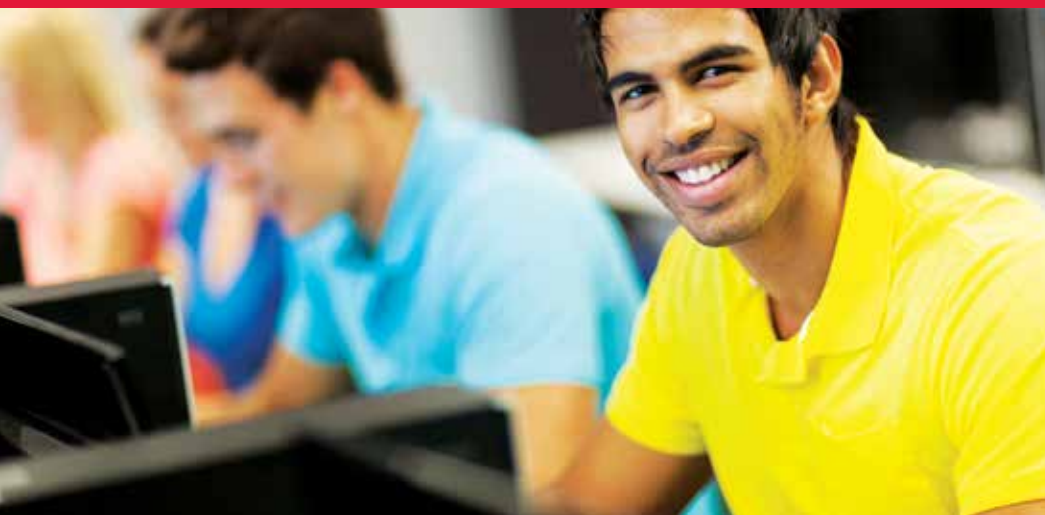






# Good Practice Guide for Potential Employers

Attracting students with volunteering  
experience for an engaged workforce



## The importance of employing graduates with volunteering experience

Employers want employees who will do their best work to help a company achieve its objectives. Employees want jobs that are challenging and meaningful. A term that is increasingly used to describe this win-win situation is 'engaged workforce'. In a world that is changing both in terms of the global nature of work and the aging of the workforce, having engaged employees may be a key to competitive advantage.

Research shows that there is a new way to engage employees – through corporate social responsibility (CSR) and the positive reputation that companies have in the community. A study led by Stanford University in the US showed that students are willing to sacrifice a substantial amount from their annual salary to work for an employer that is responsible and sustainable. If you are a responsible and sustainable employer with a strong CSR, graduates who volunteered in the past could be what you are looking for. These students come out of university with social awareness; a strong set of values and skills; and a desire to work for an employer with social responsibility. Recruiting people who care and who are good global citizens could lead to a more engaged workforce. The value congruence between your company and such students could lead to organisational commitment, job satisfaction and long term retention, and eventually to better financial and overall performance.

## What is University Student Volunteering?

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This guide is a resource for potential employers interested in attracting graduates with volunteering experience for an engaged workforce based on data gathered for this project. Details of the project are on the back of this guide.







## 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.

## People who volunteered in the past are more likely to volunteer again

- Recruiting graduates with volunteering experience means they would be more likely to not just participate in your corporate volunteering programs, but also engage in extra-role behaviour, such as mentoring others.
- Participation in corporate volunteering was found to be related to other positive workplace outcomes such as positive CSR attitudes, job satisfaction and emotional attachment to the organisation.

Our study on student volunteers in several Australian universities shows that student volunteering also develops the students' employability. Through their volunteering experience (domestic or international), students develop new skills, confidence and social awareness. These graduates demonstrated high levels of self-efficacy, independence and ability to deal with pressure. Many students mentioned that volunteering led them out of their 'comfort zone', which allowed them to mature more quickly than their counterparts who did not volunteer. In addition, by hiring graduates who have already volunteered, you may be able to leverage on the human and social capital they developed during their volunteering experience, (i.e. stronger social networks).

This would assist in increasing corporate volunteering rates in your organisation; create stronger social impact; and enhance the company's positive reputation.

## What to look for in potential employees' CV

Past volunteering experience could be a point of differentiation for the student and make them a more desirable candidate for your organisation. But what should you look for when examining an applicant's curriculum vitae (CV)?

Graduates often detail their volunteering experience to enrich their CV. Volunteering experience can be as important as paid work experience, since it can assist the applicant in developing important skills, self-efficacy, independence and social awareness. It is important to therefore clarify (either through the CV or during the interview) what they did as volunteers; what skills they gained; and what challenges they faced. In particular, it is good to know if the student undertook voluntary leadership roles as this could indicate another set of skills which could be important for the student's future promotion in your organisation. See also the *Guide for Students*.

### When examining the applicant's CV, you may see different types of volunteering:

- **Episodic volunteering vs. ongoing volunteering:** Episodic volunteering is usually done as a one-off contribution of time compared to ongoing volunteering in which the student volunteers frequently over a long period of time.
- **International vs. domestic volunteering:** international volunteering is done outside Australia, usually in a developing country. It can help the student develop their independence, maturity, a new language, and professional and cultural knowledge. If the job the student applies for requires some travelling and/or cross-cultural work, international volunteering experience could be vital. In addition, international volunteering may mean the student managed to obtain a travel grant, which can signal additional skills and capabilities. However, domestic volunteering experience is also extremely important and students are still often exposed to new cultures and social groups, develop new skills and a strong social capital.
- **Online volunteering vs. physical volunteering:** Online volunteering is usually done through a computer from a distance. For example, online volunteers can help non profits design their website or brochures, provide support via chats or volunteer to raise awareness through the social media, without physically visiting the non profit's site. This is a growing trend, highly promoted by the United Nations Volunteers, and provides students with additional technical and other skills.
- **Management and leadership experience:** some students begin managing and leading other volunteers, even as young students. These experiences can contribute to their leadership ability in the future.







## Referring to the voluntary experience during the selection process

Volunteering experience can help assess if the graduate is the right candidate for the job. Volunteering is strongly related to the student's employability, skill development and confidence, and therefore should be asked about during the interview just as you would ask about paid work experience.

It would be useful to fully understand what volunteering roles the applicant undertook during their university years, and what type of volunteering it was (e.g. international or domestic, episodic or ongoing). Ask applicants to elaborate on their volunteering experience and the challenges they faced.

### Specific questions can be asked during such interviews:

1. Tell us about your volunteering experience in the university. Where did you volunteer? For how long? How often?
2. What kind of roles did you undertake in your volunteering? What tasks and responsibilities did they include?
3. Why did you want to volunteer? Why did you stop volunteering?
4. What level of responsibility did you have? Did you have any leadership roles as part of your volunteering?
5. Were you working as part of a team? How did you find it?
6. Tell us about your work with the clients.
7. Did you have any experience of working in an office environment?
8. What new skills and capabilities did you develop through volunteering?
9. What did you learn from your volunteering experience?
10. What challenges did you face as a volunteer? How did you overcome them?
11. Why do you think volunteering is important?
12. Would you like to participate in our corporate volunteering programs? Why?
13. How do you think your volunteering experience can contribute to your success in this role?

## Success Story

Students who volunteered explained how the experience increased their employability and their ability to be selected for a job:

*“ Any time I’ve ever given my resume out to anyone they look at the top box and they say, “Wow, you’ve got scholarships for Peru and Austria and England and Cambodia, this is a huge differential from anyone else, and especially that vocational aspect. There’s such a focus on students now, they don’t spend a lot of time at university, they spend a lot of time working trying to get ahead by getting this experience so that when they apply for a job the employer will say, “You’ve already had two years’ experience, I’m going to take you over the person that has none.” And, the program has facilitated that within a university context, they’ve given you really interesting work experiences that stand out on a resume but that’s in the holiday period and it allows you to still go to all your lectures and get the most out of your education. ”*

**Student volunteer**



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