Hello everyone and thank you so much for coming. My talk is about the steps in creating a successful volunteer program. It’s a big topic and I certainly can’t cover everything, but what I would like you to have is an starting point for creating, or building your volunteer program. And it is about connecting, in various ways.

I refer to Volunteering WA during this, and I’m on their Volunteer Leadership Network.
The impact of volunteers in WA is enormous, as you can see here. It’s worth $39 billion to the WA economy annually.

We know that there are over 600,000 volunteers in thousands of community organisations across the State.

E.g. SES, Red Cross, Vinnies, Salvos, Good Sammy, Conservation Foundation, school sports coaches, Meals on Wheels – the list goes on and on.

If you add informal volunteering, the number reaches 4 out of 5 people. They give 315 million hours.
Volunteers are the backbone of many communities.
Sometimes organisations have had experiences with volunteers that haven’t worked. It can help to look at a scenario so you can see where things may go wrong.

The process can go like this

1. An organisation recognises the need for assistance
2. It assesses its resources, doesn’t have enough money to pay someone so look to volunteers to fill the gap.
3. The organisation's leadership assumes that free volunteer labour requires little financial or strategic investment
4. The organisation engages volunteers who
may or may not be qualified

5. Staff may or may not oversee the volunteers, and expectations, accountability and communication remain unclear.

6. When the effort achieves very little, volunteers are identified as the problem and are approached with skepticism, if at all, the next time a need is identified.
The steps for building a good volunteer program can be summed up in these key principles suggested by VWA.

Volunteers aren’t free and you definitely get what you pay for in terms of your support for volunteers.

To create a successful program:
• You need to be organised and prepared
• You need to support the people who oversee volunteers.
• You need to create an environment that is conducive to volunteers staying,
• You need to review your systems and program and learn from it.
1. Pre-recruitment

Pre-recruitment is your planning stage.
What does the organisation want to achieve and why?
Think strategically – start with the end in mind.
What needs to be done?
What is your problem, what are you aiming to deliver, provide, accomplish?
Then you can create some volunteer roles that will help you achieve what you want and the scope of roles is only limited only by your imagination.

Are you looking at engaging volunteers for fundraising, are you trying to raise the profile of your organisation, do you need a skilled volunteer to help you create your new strategic plan or a tax accountant with NFP experience? Identify roles.

Is the role suitable for a volunteer or should it be for paid staff? The criteria for this varies with different types of organisations.
Recognised as the most important tool in volunteer management – Volunteer Position Descriptions

Marketing/recruitment tool
Screening tool when interviewing your volunteer
Provide clarity to volunteer
Evaluation tool
Knowledge succession

What do you need to do to prepare? Do you have resources for volunteers to use? Supervisors? Procedures? Training? Ongoing support? Be prepared to be flexible. You may find someone that has part of the skill set you are looking for, so you
need to divide the role, or travels overseas for two months each year and you’ll need to find cover for them. Understand that this is often part of volunteering.
Now you are ready to recruit.

Ask the question: why would people want to volunteer for your organisation, and you need to ask this because …
We know that most organisations can’t get enough volunteers. *From the 2016 State of Volunteering in Australia report.*

Now some roles are easier to fill than others, and some organisations have a greater drawing power than others. But you are competing for volunteers – e.g. St John Ambulance has a goal of having 20,000 volunteers on board throughout the State by 2020.
Connect – be the right organisation for the person.

We know that the main reason people give for volunteering is for a sense of purpose – to feel like they are making a difference.

UN Online Volunteers does a great job with this ad saying “change the world. everyone can make a difference”, and they make it sound easy as it can be done “from a computer anywhere in the world”.
Sample of a good recruitment notice

“Wherever you are in Blenheim, it’d be great to have you with us.

Being a St John’s volunteer is really rewarding in lots of ways. Working with a great team of people, learning lots of new skills and helping many people in our community. We need people like you. It’d be great to have you with us.”

Is there a target audience for this recruitment?

You may want to target a particular group for your recruitment, e.g. recent migrants, who can have an exceptional skill set, or people with a disability, or any other particular group – you can say that in
your recruitment e.g. people from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds are encouraged to apply.
Here is a less good recruitment.

Who, what, where, when, why? Are you delivering leftover food from a hotel at 5 in the morning to Foodbank, a group of teenagers to a sporting event or some seniors to medical appointments.

There’s no sense of welcome, little thought has gone into the recruitment and if it’s urgent then they are short of volunteers and you may end up being very busy.

Sell the role and the organisation – you are competing for volunteers with other like minded organisations. VWA provides a training session on
writing up recruitment notices.

How do you find your volunteers?
Think about your ideal volunteer, what skills and qualities do they need? Are they retired history teachers or French students? Then go where they are, whether that’s online, or physically. Use your networks. Advertise online – Volunteering WA, SEEK volunteer, LinkedIn.

Some organisations are highly sought after places to volunteers, like libraries, and can’t place all their volunteers. I can’t place all the people who volunteer with me and I would love to be able to refer them on. You might like to network with me, or volunteer managers at similar organisations – your local public library perhaps.

Then recruitment isn’t just finding volunteers, it’s also bringing them onboard.
What will you do when you they say yes?
Will you have a screening process? Application form?
Meet with them? Check references?
This all depends on the position and the need for risk management.
E.g. the 30 volunteers you use to do ticketing at your next event probably don’t need screening, but the history student doing an oral history interview in the home of someone old and vulnerable does need to be checked.
Now you have your volunteers. What will make them stay?
What is your organisation's culture towards volunteers?

Welcoming environment?
Organised?
What do they want from the volunteering experience?
Is their work meaningful? Is it a mutually beneficial experience where both the volunteer and the organisation gain? Do you know what your volunteers are hoping to gain from volunteering? Do they want social contact or work experience?
Are you involving them in your planning that relates to them, or do you just tell them what to do at the end of the process?
How will you recognise the work they do? Do you let them know the impact they are making?
Are you flexible to their needs?

These are all things that build relationships with volunteers and let them know that you value them and the work that they do.
4. Review
The need for continuous improvement is understood

Review

When you are ready to review your volunteer program, you’ll ask things like:

Is your volunteers’ involvement mutually beneficial and support your organisation’s strategic direction and provide benefits to the volunteers?

Are you working towards best practice?

With this framework, there’s nothing that says you have to start at step 1. If you already have volunteers you may want to start with a review.
The National Standards are an excellent tool for measuring your progress and seeing what still needs to be done that is applicable to your organisation.

They contain benchmarks specifically designed to help organisations attract, manage and recognise volunteers, and to manage risk and safety for your volunteers.

VWA offers training on the standards.
Collecting data on your volunteer program is a really important step to help you source funding to help your program grow, and to improve the experience for volunteers and clients.

The first data collected is usually the number of volunteer, the hours they donate and a dollar value assigned to it.

10 volunteers donated 500 hours this year, valued at $17000 and this is a 10% increase on last year. That’s good, right?

Well sometimes, but sometimes you need to keep asking questions and collecting more data. Maybe
this year your processes were more cumbersome, or you had five new volunteers who are slower.

Measure your outcomes also. E.g. volunteers processed 3km of archival material, they shelved 40,000 books, they completed 20 oral histories and have moved the project 30% closer to completion. Did someone reconnect with family because a volunteer helped them research their family history. Tell stories. Stories are very powerful.

How about surveying your stakeholders. Are your volunteers benefitting personally and professionally? Are your clients happier with what is being produced? Do you conduct anonymous exit surveys where your volunteers can honestly tell you why they have left your organisation?
There is help

www.volunteeringwa.org.au

https://volunteeringwa.org.au/contact/volunteer-resource-centres

National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/

https://youtu.be/ReRcHdeUG9Y

While there is a lot to do, there is a lot of help available.

VWA
Your local volunteer resource centre, that you can find on the VWA website
National Standards can be found at Volunteering Australia
Simon Sinek – TED talk and book
“If I could bundle all my experience – success and mistakes – into one lesson, it would be this: respect and honour your volunteers, everything else in volunteer management is commentary.”

Holly Ross, Executive Director, Drupal Association
Mary Doyle
State Library or Western Australia
Volunteers Team Leader
T  +618 9427 3327
E  Mary.Doyle@slwa.wa.gov.au

Any questions?