



Volunteer Management

Volunteers are the lifeblood of rugby clubs. They make themselves available to serve in every capacity from Club President, to coaching, running the canteen, organising juniors, running the water and tending the injured, to ground set up and fund raising. Most clubs wish that they had more volunteers and could hold for longer those that they do have.

Here is some guidance that might help your club to achieve both of these wishes.

First, who are volunteers? If you understand a little more about them it may widen your appreciation of how to attract and keep them.

Volunteers:

- Usually develop a sense of loyalty to the organization with their involvement;
- >60 % stay for less than 5 years;
- >45 % work full time or part time;
- 60 % have managerial or administrative backgrounds;
- 75 % will return **if asked**; and,
- the majority join because they have personal contact with someone already involved, they rarely come on board as the result of a recruitment campaign; 58 % have been asked to join, 79 % know someone else involved;

Volunteers leave because:

- They feel they lack support;
 - Of the impact of legal issues;
 - Of time constraints;
- and yet most
- Don't give a reason.

Volunteer management is a systematic process. Experience suggests that the elements of the process are:

- firstly, retention;
- then recruitment; and,
- then management



Volunteer Retention

Retaining the people you have is the first and foremost task for the Club. This is why it is vital that the responsibility for volunteers be given to someone to organise – we suggest the appointment of a Volunteer Co-ordinator is the appropriate way to ensure the task is given the priority it needs and is undertaken.

There are a couple of things **the Volunteer Co-ordinator needs to address** to achieve good retention rates:

- The volunteer is clear on the tasks allocated (a written job description is valuable), has been trained how to go about their tasks and knows who to go to for help.
- During the year an on-going link with each volunteer must be established and nourished. It is important to confirm that the task allocated was what the volunteer expected, that the tasks match his/her interests and abilities and have not absorbed too much personal time.
- The Volunteer Co-ordinator needs to be aware if changes to the volunteer's personal situation have occurred. For example, work commitments, personal changes to availability and keenness. Will this require any adjustments to the tasks the volunteer has been given?
- While informal links are important a more formal evaluation of task, skill match and personal satisfaction is necessary and needs to be done each year;
- The formal evaluation will provide an opportunity to make any adjustments to the tasks allocated and demonstrate that the work undertaken has been appreciated.

During the year the **Volunteer Co-ordinator can be building an environment** that continually re-inforces the value the Club places on its volunteers.

This may include:

- Ensuring links between the volunteer and his/her "supervisor" are strong;
- Continually taking the opportunity to enhance their awareness of the organisation's philosophy, goals and practices;
- Supplying each volunteer with club links (eg clothing, business card) to underline the fact that they have become part of the club;
- Ensuring that any out of pocket expenses have been met;
- Making sure that any concerns that they have expressed have been taken seriously and dealt with
- On-going recognition, which may be as simple as "thanks", is provided. Recognition should be immediate, specific, sincere and enthusiastic; and,
- At the end of the year some performance feedback is given in addition to some formal recognition and an invitation to come back next year.

Good retention rates of volunteers will **improve the efficiency and effectiveness** of the club in addition to increasing its stability. If the volunteer feels part of the organisation it will increase their commitment to it.



Volunteer Recruitment

The key to good recruitment is picking the right job for the volunteer. This is not a matter of just filling a position but achieving “the perfect match” – matching the person’s skills, experience, interests and motivation to make themselves available with what they want to do to help the club. One question that could be asked is “What kind of work would you like to do?”

Experience has repeatedly shown that the initial contact between the club and the volunteer must create a positive impression. These are some aspects that need to be addressed when bringing a volunteer into the club:

- The first meeting must stress appreciation and welcome;
- After initial contact, follow up must be prompt to avoid any concept of lack of interest by the club;
- A sense of inclusion must be made – for example the person should be introduced to significant people within the organization,
- The process that will be followed to bring them into the organization needs to be clearly explained including the time-frames involved.

The importance of a sound introduction of the volunteer to the club cannot be overstressed. There are some aspects that must be achieved.

Any orientation should include:

- An outline of the club’s philosophy and objectives;
- Familiarisation with the club’s working environment and the policies that apply to its operations;
- An explanation of the need for any personal screening that must be done;
- Providing a written job description of the role and responsibilities to be undertaken;
- Letting them know who to go to if they need help and guidance;
- Arranging training in the use and storage of any equipment they will be using;

There is evidence that there has been a shift from long term to short term volunteers. This means that clubs must have sound volunteer management practices in place so that there are always sufficient members on hand to do what has to be done.



The Volunteer Co-ordinator

Volunteers make an enormous contribution to the running of a club. Therefore the appointment of a specific Volunteer Co-ordinator recognises the importance of volunteers to the organisation.

We sometimes overlook the fact that the club's committee is also generally made up of volunteers. Nevertheless, the Volunteer Co-ordinator becomes the direct link between the club's committee and the volunteers themselves who undertake a range of other vital tasks to keep the club going.

Volunteers come from wide backgrounds and therefore have a variety of skills to offer. They come to clubs with different expectations but a common wish to become part of the organisation. They derive a sense of personal satisfaction from being involved but need to be appreciated for the contribution they make. This is where the Volunteer Co-ordinator plays such an important role.

The Volunteer Co-ordinator needs to know why people volunteer their services. S/he should know the objectives and structure of the club and the range of activities that the club needs to have completed.

To be successful it helps that they have good interpersonal skills together with experience in the organization and conduct of meetings. They need to be skilled in negotiation and conflict resolution. S/he will be the point of contact for the analysis for what needs to be done, planning to ensure that it is done, providing documentation on the tasks and reporting to the committee as well as the being the person responsible for each volunteer's placement and, ultimately, their management.

A draft **job description for a Volunteer Co-ordinator** is at Attachment 1. The important features underpinning this position are:

- recognising that volunteers can be at managerial level as well as operating and delivery levels;
- assessing each year what needs to be done and who is available; this includes an appreciation of the skills & experience of those available;
- matching the volunteers' interests and skills to the job allocated;
- organising orientation for each volunteer that covers the demands of the job allocated, who to seek for help and any benefits that may accrue;
- familiarising volunteers with policies that are relevant to the running of the club;
- ensuring a club volunteer recognition program is in place;
- providing volunteers with regular feedback and making sure that out of pocket expenses have been re-imbursed; and
- conducting an end of year appraisal of the volunteer program for the club committee.

There can be little doubt that the Volunteer Co-ordinator is a vital position in any club's organization. It is increasingly so as a more professional approach to club management and administration is being adopted by clubs. The task is not an easy one and requires special attributes. Nevertheless it is a very rewarding role that when successfully undertaken will make a distinct difference to the running of any club.

VOLUNTEER MANAGEMENT



NOTE:

This document draws extensively from material prepared by G Cuskelly & C Auld from Griffith University, Brisbane, for the Australian Sports Commission.

Their material is on the ASC website www.ausport.gov.au and individual publications are available from the ASC covering:

- Recruiting Volunteers
- Retaining Volunteers
- Managing Event Volunteers
- Volunteer Management Policy
- The volunteer Co-ordinator
- Volunteer Management – a guide to good practice; and.
- Set of Volunteer Management Program resources (six booklets).

References have also been made to material produced by SteveMcCurley, shm12@aol.com

Further advice and guidance can be sought from Volunteering ACT, Canberra Labor Club, Community Chambers, Chandler St., Belconnen – phone 6251 4060