



Landcare Notes

Managing volunteers

Whether members of your group or people who are involved in a one-off project, volunteers and voluntary works are a key part of Landcare.

This Landcare Note looks at the role of volunteers and the issues associated with their involvement. Anyone who gets involved in Landcare activities is invaluable to the success of those activities. It's vital that everyone enjoys what they are doing so you achieve your goals and your volunteers stay involved.

What volunteering is

The organisation Volunteering Australia defines volunteering as an activity which takes place through not-for-profit organisations or projects. The volunteer is involved in a designated volunteer position of their own free will, for no payment, to benefit the community.

Very few Landcare activities are carried out by paid staff. Nearly all the organisational and manpower works are done by volunteers, whether they are 'full-time' members of a group such as yours, or become involved on a one-off basis in a specific project.

How to do it

Volunteers such as you and your members (and anyone else who gets involved in the project) are a significant asset to the community. The rewards to volunteers are not financial so the reasons for involvement must be recognised if volunteering is to persist (see Landcare Note 9.4: Celebration and Recognition).

Most volunteers support a cause rather than an organisation. This means you have to be clear about what your group is aiming to do because that's what will keep everyone inspired and committed.

Volunteers don't *have* to do anything, but they get involved because of their commitment and willingness to do. So you should aim to ensure the 'working' environment is a positive one which encourages enthusiasm.

Responsibilities to volunteers

Any group with organised activities has a duty of care to the people involved. Your members and other volunteers should be protected in the same way as an employee would be.

Volunteers are not covered by awards or workplace agreements but your group does have legal and moral entitlements to provide:

- A healthy and safe environment (see Landcare Note 7.5: Personal Safety)
- Assurance there is no discrimination
- Proper insurance cover (see Landcare Note 7.3: Insurance for Landcare Groups)
- Adequate training to do the jobs they need to do
- Payment for out of pocket expenses as agreed
- Privacy for their personal information
- Accurate and truthful information on any matter related to their volunteering.

Keeping volunteers enthused

Your members and other volunteers are usually looking for a social connection, a meaningful purpose and a sense of community when they join a Landcare group. Getting involved means they are willing to spare time, outside their own personal and financial commitments.

If you have an action plan and know the skills of your members and other volunteers, it can be easier to find tasks that can be shared between them. When new people ask to be involved in some way, find out about their areas of interest and skills they might be happy to share.



Landcare Notes

Small tasks delegated widely among everyone who is associated with the project can ensure the burden is shared rather than overwhelming one or a few individuals. It also keeps people engaged with the group and its activities.

Managing volunteers

The secret is to not assume that your group's expectations are known. Volunteering is a partnership that requires all the volunteers to work together. The committee takes responsibility for organising and leading the group but you will need other people involved, so be clear on what needs doing and when.

Tips

- Create a 'buddy' system – pair new and inexperienced volunteers with an experienced member for mentoring, training, and safety.
- Be realistic about how many volunteers can be managed properly at any one time.
- Be relatively flexible – volunteers come and go so you could be disappointed if you are relying on their availability for critical or specific tasks.
- All volunteers, including all members, should be signed in as a registered participant for meetings and activities. Use an exercise book so you have an ongoing record of your events and the people who attended.
- Always provide any volunteers with information about the work site, the tasks to be done and the risk management procedures (see Landcare Note 7.4: Risk Management: Why Worry?).
- Think about ways you can incorporate social opportunities and an exchange of

Related Landcare Notes

This Landcare Note is one of a series. These notes provide an excellent guide for the ongoing operation of your group.

Landcare Note 7.3: Insurance for Landcare Groups

tasks on the 'work' day, so it's more relaxed, enjoyable and satisfying for your team of volunteers.

- Regularly ask new members/volunteers how they are going so you can maximise opportunities and make improvements that will keep them happy and coming back.

Further references

Victorian Landcare gateway:

www.landcarevic.org.au

Volunteering Australia (2007):

<http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/>

Volunteering Australia (2007) – *Volunteer Rights and Volunteer Checklist*:

<http://volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-Volunteer-Rights-and-checklist.pdf>

Volunteering Australia (2007) – *National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not-For-Profit Organisations*:

<http://volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/VA-National-Standards-for-involving-volunteers-in-not-for-profit-organisations.pdf>

Volunteer Coordinators Network (2004) – *The VCN (Natural Areas) Manual*:

<http://www.aabr.org.au/images/stories/resources/manuals/vcn.pdf>

Murray Wilson (November 2007) – *Identifying, Attracting and Managing Volunteers for Landcare Projects: A Practical Guide*:

http://wcma.vic.gov.au/index.php?option=com_docman&task=doc_details&gid=65&Itemid=50

Landcare Note 7.4: Risk Management: Why Worry?

Landcare Note 7.5: Personal Safety

Landcare Note 9.4: Celebration and Recognition



Victorian
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Landcare Notes

Landcare Note 9.2

Acknowledgments

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