



the **centre** for **volunteering**  
*igniting community spirit*

# 2006 Membership Report

### **Prepared by**

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Congratulations to the following members who entered our draw to receive a year's free subscription to The Centre for Volunteering:

Manly-Warringah Pittwater Community Aid Service

Penrith City Council

Scouts Australia NSW

Lower North Shore Volunteer Referral Agency

Community Wheels Inc



# Executive Summary

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This report presents the findings of a survey of The Centre for Volunteering's members conducted in 2005. While the last survey was conducted in 2002 for internal purposes and described satisfaction levels with the members' service, the scope of this report in 2005 has been broadened to describe the membership base, the main challenges and the members' levels of satisfaction and support

In mid-2005, the administration of The Centre's membership was a main function following an extensive renewal campaign to maintain our representative base and previous changes to the membership offer. To assist this process, the CEO employed a new Research & Policy Manager. One of the first tasks of the Research & Policy Manager was to design and implement an online survey that would enable The Centre to obtain feedback and monitor the status of current members, the services they used, what they most valued about The Centre and what areas they thought could be improved. This provided relevant information about how The Centre was conducting its role as the state's peak body for volunteering organisations in NSW.

## Overview of findings: Members' characteristics

The Centre has been offering membership since its inception in 1974 and currently has about 390 member organisations. 126 members of The Centre responded to the online survey between October and December 2005. This represented a response rate of 15%. Because of the low response rate of past members to the online survey, ten telephone interviews were subsequently conducted in January 2006.

Under two-thirds (61%) of respondents are from the Community/Welfare sector and the majority (65%) of these organisations are from small to medium-sized organisations that have a maximum of 100 employees. Thirty-nine per cent (39%) of respondents were from large organisation that have 100 paid employees or more.

Eighty-three per cent (83%) of the sample were current members and over half (58%) had been members for three years or more.

## Pathways to volunteering

Respondents identified how they learnt about volunteering. The top three items were through:

- Volunteer centres (20%)
- Word-of-mouth (19%)
- Internet (19%).

Religious organisations (2%), workplace volunteer programs (4%) and young people's groups (1%) are the least likely pathways to volunteering identified by respondents.

## Changes in volunteering

Below are the main three ways in which our members consider volunteering has changed over time:

- Volunteers are seeking job skills (21%)
- Volunteering is becoming more complicated now e.g. legal issues (17%)
- More people are interested in short-term opportunities (15%).

These trends are similar to findings from the Points of Light Foundation Members' Survey, the large American non-profit non-partisan organisation dedicated to engaging people and resources more effectively in volunteer services. A key difference is that the American sample ranked 'the Internet as a resource for volunteering opportunities' even more highly than did The Centre's sample.

## The Centre for Volunteering's Services

The services used most by members were the website (20%), the Volunteer Referral Service (16%) and *The Voice of Volunteering* (e-bulletin) (12%). The most valuable services to members were rated as the Volunteer Referral Service and the website (20% each) and the School of Volunteer Management (14%). Areas that require the most improvement are the School of Volunteer Management's training courses (14%), the Volunteer Referral Service (13%) and breakfast forums (8%).

Respondents ranked the top four services that The Centre might provide in the future:

- Assistance with funding opportunities (13%)
- Online kits for volunteer management (13%)
- Volunteer referrals to match suitable volunteers (13%)
- Police records checks (12%).

The top four courses members would like to see offered at the School of Volunteer Management (SVM) are:

- Recruit/train/retain volunteers (19%)
- Legal aspects of volunteering (14%)
- Implementing national standards (12%)
- Funding submissions (11%).

## Difficulties

The top four difficulties faced by our member volunteer organisations are:

- Lack of staff to carry out work (14%)
- The constant turnover in the volunteer field (12%)
- Competition for funding (11%)
- Competition from other organisations engaged in volunteer work (11%).

## Recommendations

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The following recommendations have been developed from the findings and in consultation with the CEO and The Centre's board:

Conduct an annual The Centre for Volunteering membership survey and investigate the feasibility of volunteering peak bodies in other states doing the same.

Research the volunteering needs of organisations in NSW currently under-represented as The Centre's members such as sport and recreation, business, corporations, universities, high schools and environmental groups.

Develop a strategy that meets members' needs in terms of how volunteering has changed over time as indicated in survey results.

Develop and implement effective communication channels with The Centre's members so that they can better state their information needs and have them met.

Establish local and state networks for members to enable access to and participation in current research and policy developments in the volunteering sector.

Train staff and The Centre's volunteers about the membership structure to ensure they are equipped to promote membership. Develop staff understanding of how membership relates to key aspects of the organisation's operations such as advocacy and policy development.



## Background

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The Centre for Volunteering's mission is to promote and support volunteering and community participation. It acts as the state peak body through its service delivery arm of Volunteering NSW, and the School of Volunteer Management which is a registered training organisation specialising in training for the non-profit sector. The organisation began in 1979. The Centre achieves its mission through leadership and experience in delivering services and connecting people and organisations in order to enrich the community. Program activities include volunteer sourcing and referral, training of non-profit managers, resource development, information and consulting services to help organisations engage volunteers and enhance the capacity and skills of not-for-profit organisations (NFPs), corporations and government for community involvement.

For the past five years, there have been some major changes to The Centre's structure and operations in order to remain relevant, effective and sustainable. This has included rebranding, technology and infrastructure investment and the appointment of new staff in key positions such as the CEO, the Director of Volunteering, the Director of the School of Volunteer Management, the Research & Policy Manager and Project Officers. The Centre has witnessed a decline in its membership base from about 500 in the late 1980s to 390 in 2005. For a number of years, no significant campaign to acquire more members was carried out. Although the decline might be due to a number of internal and external factors, it is important to note that two major events in the Australian context have had an effect on volunteering membership.

The first is the rise of the Internet and access by more than 60% of households to vast information through a direct channel never before possible. In particular, by 2000, the online referral service GoVolunteer <<http://www.govolunteer.com.au/>> provided a way for people to go online and sign themselves up to become volunteers. This direct model has displaced, in some ways, the original intermediary role that many volunteer centres were established for. To remain relevant, many statewide and local volunteer organisations have become increasingly self-sufficient by developing and recruiting volunteers via their own websites. These changes have created competition for members and a share of the 'voice'.

The second change is that increasing numbers of volunteer organisations have also increased their own competition for the member base. Many organisations that might have joined The Centre in the past would find it easy to obtain advice and information directly from Internet searches or private companies such as [www.ourcommunity.com.au](http://www.ourcommunity.com.au) and [www.probono.com.au](http://www.probono.com.au) which distribute resources for non-profits on everything from fundraising to volunteering – a role previously confined to peak bodies or community advisory services. Indeed, these changes mean that The Centre is not alone in experiencing membership challenges.

To address the decreasing trends in membership, The Centre is making major changes to the structure and function of its membership. This includes the types of memberships offered, their cost and the services provided. The results of this survey help inform the scope of these changes and will be used to measure the effects of these changes over time.

There has never been a regular mechanism put in place to monitor changes with The Centre's membership, how members actually use The Centre and the effectiveness of The Centre. The current membership database never had provision for automatic generation of regular reports on key criteria such as increases and decreases in numbers of members and their types of organisations.

This survey was implemented for two main purposes. Firstly, this survey provides valuable and representative baseline data on current members and their needs, and offers a mechanism for broad feedback on how The Centre meets these needs now and in the future. Secondly, this project pilots an instrument that could be used annually by The Centre and adapted by other volunteer centres and agencies to effect a state and national comparison of the larger profile of volunteering organisations, their needs and perceptions of the third sector (or NFP).



## Method

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A membership survey instrument was sourced from Points of Light Foundation, a US volunteer centre national network. In 2003, Points of Light undertook an evaluation of their own services and the issues that impact the volunteering sector in America. This survey was an electronically administered survey and was completed online by 4,954 members. Six focus groups at a national conference were also conducted after the survey and results were published in 2004 as part of a revised strategic plan.

Several items from the Points of Light survey were modified and included The Centre's version for New South Wales' members. This would allow some international comparison of trends, issues and needs in the volunteering sector.

Our NSW survey was designed and administered electronically as a significant majority of our current members have email. Online surveying methods are also becoming recognised as an effective way of conducting research and evaluation within this sector.

Many survey tools are currently available online for low-to-no cost. The online research company Question Pro [www.questionpro.com](http://www.questionpro.com) was sourced to design, deliver and analyse the survey. This company offers one year's free use of most aspects of their product to not-for-profit organisations internationally. The online delivery mode gave greater access to the maximum number of members, providing more flexibility with distribution, completion and data analysis.

A draft questionnaire was compiled by the membership team, the CEO, the Director of Volunteering NSW and the Research & Policy Manager. Then, The Centre's board members and a selection of members from a range of small to large organisations piloted the survey.

The survey was launched through an email invitation to all present and past members of The Centre in November 2005. A reminder note was sent electronically a fortnight later. This proved very effective as there was about a 30% increase in the total number of responses immediately following the reminder. Data was analysed using online statistical tools in Questionpro.

# Results

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## PARTICIPATION

The survey was emailed to 650 addresses comprising current and past members in our database between 2000 and 2005. There were 86 addresses returned as undeliverable, which means that about 13% of members' details are out-of-date. Average completion time was automatically calculated at 12 minutes, which is less than the 15 minutes estimated during the pilot. Table 1 details participant statistics that occurred through online delivery of surveys.

**Table 1:** Participant statistics

Participation Number	
Viewed	237
Started	129
Completed	83

**Table 2:** Rates of participation and completion

Rates	%
Participation	35
Completion	64
Overall response Rate	15

In Table 2, the participation rate is the percentage of people who started or submitted at least one page of the survey after viewing it. The completion rate is the percentage of people who completed the survey after starting it.

Our overall response rate of 15% was lower than expected even though there are encouraging completion and participation rates. This response rate excludes surveys that were undeliverable because of non-valid addresses. These participation and completion rates are encouraging when respondents initially clicked on the electronic invitation to participate in our survey. Our challenge is to increase the number of potential participants to respond to our invitation. (A multimedia invitation campaign will be trialed in late 2006 when the survey is repeated.)

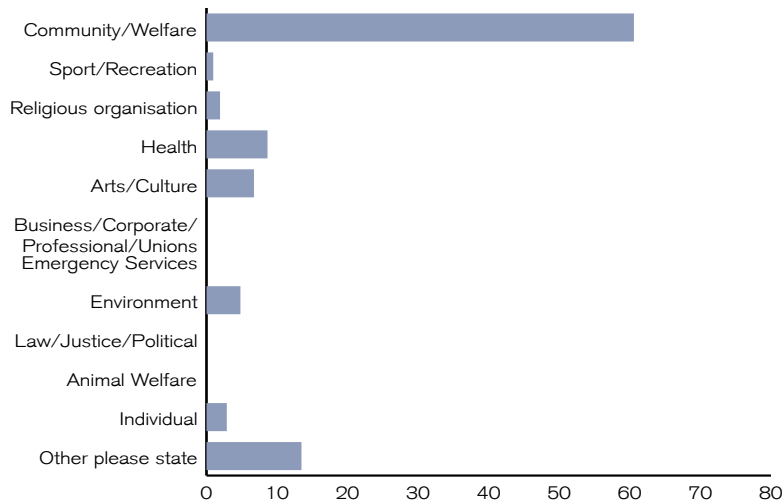
We received 30 validation errors (see Table 1). These errors are recorded when there is a required response to a survey question but none is given. In our initial launch of the survey, respondents could not proceed to the next question until a response was given to the current question they were viewing. If the number of validation errors is particularly high and many respondents start the survey but do not complete it, then this signals that respondents become frustrated with these requirements and drop out.

The survey had required fields for all questions when first released. This proved to be a disincentive for people to complete as there was an unacceptable drop-out rate. One of the benefits of online surveys is the capacity to monitor responses immediately and track the number of errors as they were occurring. All the required fields were removed within 48 hours of the survey being posted online and the number of validation errors disappeared completely.

## FINDINGS

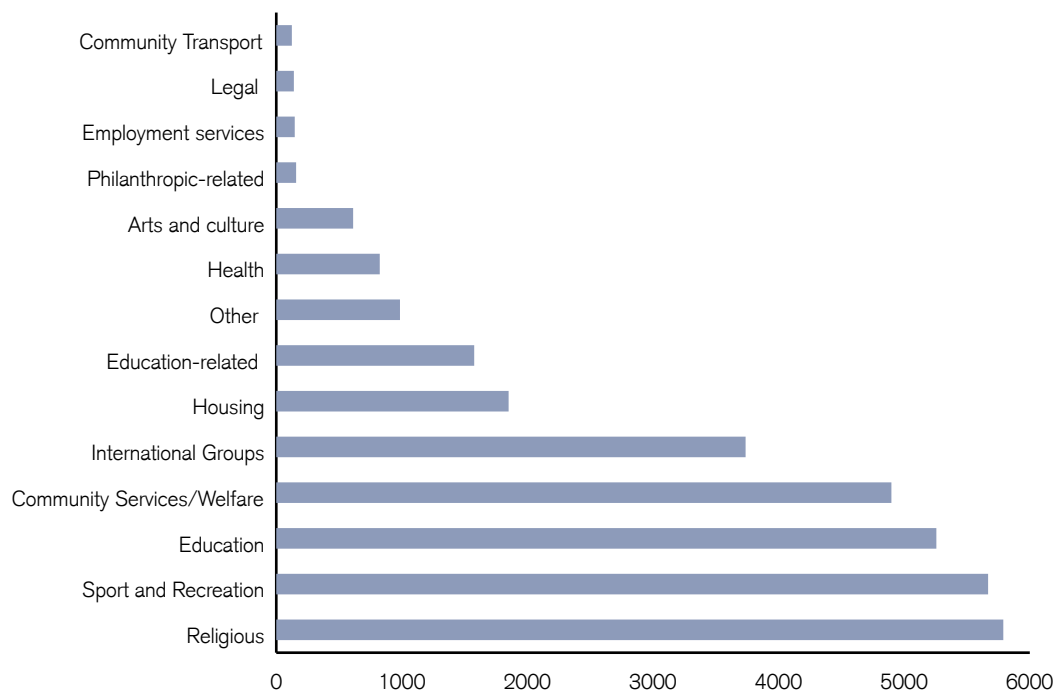
Respondents were asked to identify the category of organisation. The categories complied with those used in the Australian Bureau of Statistics' (ABS) National Survey on Volunteering (2000). Figure 1 shows the types of organisations where our members work.

**Figure 1** Type of organisation



The majority of members (61%) are from the community and welfare sectors while health is the second highest membership with 8%. When our range of organisations is compared with data from from Lyons and Hocking (2000) on volunteering (see Figure 2), there is a marked lack of representation from several areas, most notably sport and recreation, arts and culture and emergency services.

**Figure 2:** National volunteer involvement rate: type of organisation



Source: Lyons, M and Hocking, S 2000, Dimensions of Australia's Third Sector, CACOM, UTS Lindfield.

Because of The Centre concentration of membership in the community and welfare sectors, it was not possible to investigate any differences with volunteering issues in the sample by type of organisation.

### PAID EMPLOYEES AND NUMBERS OF VOLUNTEERS

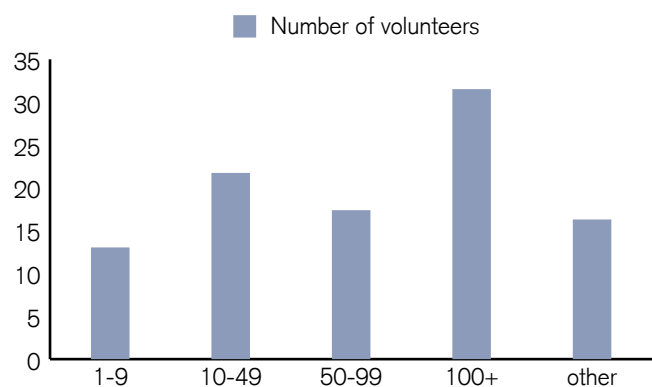
Two measures were used to characterise our membership groups: one was the number of paid employees in an organisation and the second was the approximate number of volunteers connected with that organisation.

**Table 3:** Number of paid employees in organisation

Number of paid employees	%
1-2	18
3-9	20
10-19	14
20-49	12
50-99	1
100+	21
Other	14

In our sample of members, Table 3 shows that there is greater representation from organisations that have between one and 50 paid employees (64%). Larger organisations that have 100 or more paid employees comprise just under a quarter (23%) of our current members. Organisations that have between 50 and 100 paid employees comprise 1% of the sample and are markedly under-represented. (This might be a bias within the sample and would need further investigation.)

**Figure 3** Number of volunteers in organisations



Overall, 37% of members have 100 or more volunteers connected with their organisation. There was a relatively even spread of less than 100 volunteers across organisations with 15% stating they had between one and nine volunteers, 22% stating they had between 10 and 49 and 18% having between 50 and 99. Three organisations who were members said that they had no volunteers. This range of total numbers of volunteers suggests that they are relatively spread among member organisations given that there are just under a quarter of these organisations that employ over 100 paid staff.

## LENGTH OF MEMBERSHIP

The majority of survey respondents (84%) were current members of The Centre while only 4% were former members and 10% were unsure of their current status. Of these respondents, over half (58%) had been members for more than three years and only 31% had joined in the last three years. The long-term members are over-represented in the sample and fewer new members who had joined in the last year responded to the survey than was hoped.

## VOLUNTEERING TRENDS

Responses to Questions 5–12 of the members' survey indicated a fairly even distribution of priorities. In most cases, the 'flattening out' of the responses to these items might be due to the lower than expected total number of responses (n=126), the number choices to respond to and having a choice of the three items.

The volunteering sector is constantly evolving in culturally and historically specific ways. One of the ways The Centre maintains its peak body representation of volunteering issues is by keeping abreast of these trends and the impact they have on the sector. This includes monitoring changes in how organisations attract/recruit volunteers and the time and skills of the potential volunteer pool. To address these important issues, two questions were adapted from the Points of Light survey:

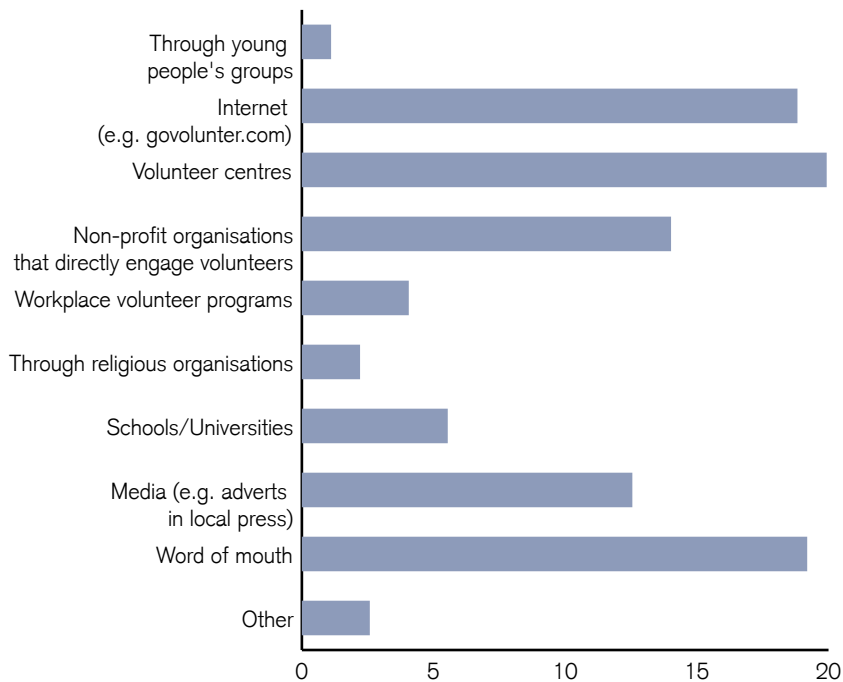
What are the best ways for interested individuals to learn about volunteering opportunities?

How do you see volunteering as changing over time?

Respondents were asked to choose the three most important ways they considered volunteers learnt about volunteering opportunities and developed a pathway to the organisation. Figure 4 shows that the top three pathways were by:

- Volunteer centres (20%)
- Word-of-mouth (19%)
- Internet (19%).

**Figure 4** Pathways to volunteering organisations



These results are similar to the US survey results except that we rank 'word-of-mouth' more highly.

The Centre's member responses were examined to see if size of organisation affected this response to the question using the cross-tabulation function on the Questionpro site. Larger organisations with 100 or more employees stated that word-of-mouth was the best way volunteers learnt about opportunities to volunteer while smaller organisations with less than 100 employees chose the Internet and volunteer referral services. This trend underpins the importance of social networks in recruiting new volunteers especially when the organisation is larger. Moreover for small- to medium-sized volunteer organisations, this data suggest the importance of the referral services provided by The Centre and the website in attracting a new pool of people to their organisations. While these three main pathways are crucial, it is important to maintain many diverse ways of recruitment.

Areas in which our members did not nominate as important pathways are young people's groups, religious organisations, workplace volunteer programs, schools and universities. These areas could be investigated to see why they are under-used and how they could more profitably be engaged as potential pathways to volunteering, especially young people's groups and schools and universities.

These trends are comparable with findings from *Australians on the Edge* (2004) which is another survey of NFPs. One of the questions asked respondents to identify resources and/or methods used to recruit volunteers. The following are ranked as the top six ways:



- Word-of-mouth through other volunteers (66%)
- Word-of-mouth through paid staff (64%)
- Through a paid manager or coordinator (55%)
- Website (53%)
- Services of a not-for-profit volunteer centre/referral service (45%)
- Through an unpaid manager or coordinator (41%).

### CHANGES IN VOLUNTEERING OVER TIME

The volunteering sector is continually evolving and it is important that volunteering peak bodies monitor how their members recognise and are impacted by these changes. Studies conducted internationally have noted the overall increase in numbers of people volunteering, the changing motivations to volunteer, the types of volunteering activities undertaken and the overall growth in prominence of the volunteering sector (Davis Smith 1993; Munton & Zurawan 2004; Snapshot 2004; Giving Australia 2005).

One question was used from the Points of Light survey to broadly measure what volunteers consider to be the main changes to the sector. While the American version of this question allowed respondents two choices, we allowed three to achieve a broader range of trends. Table 4 ranks the responses.

**Table 4:** Ways in which volunteering has changed over time

	%
Volunteers are seeking job skills	<b>21</b>
Volunteering is more complicated now e.g. legal issues	17
More people are interested in short-term opportunities	15

These changes indicate some of the key areas that The Centre can productively engage in and the ways it can support its members. These include research, short courses and workshops. Job skills and short-term opportunities are challenges for organisations as they often require a realignment of priorities to meet the needs of potential volunteers. This is especially relevant for assisting organisations to develop ways in which they can offer more short-term opportunities while balancing the need for a level of continuity with more long-term volunteers.

In terms of complexity, areas such as legal issues, insurance and policy development have been noted in the literature (McGregor-Lowndes & Nguyen 2005; Graycar 2003; Forrester, Maretich & Akpeki 2004). Our results underpin the imperative for The Centre to deliver support through accessible information channels and workshops to address these complexities.

Members identified further changes in volunteering such as increasing professionalism in the sector especially in the management of volunteers, public liability demands and assessing risk management issues. Two of the major changes

the Volunteer Referral Service, the website and the School of Volunteer Management are the most valuable services to our members

to volunteering were that some organisations are experiencing an ageing pool of volunteers that are not being replenished by young people and volunteers wanting to obtain skills in order to seek paid employment.

Overall, our results are similar to those found in the American sample where the top three items selected by respondents overall were:

- More people interested in short-term opportunities
- Internet is a resource for volunteering opportunities
- More organisations seek volunteers.

These similar results suggest that information sharing between Australia and America would be mutually beneficial especially in finding creative solutions to the field of developing and managing effectively short-term volunteering opportunities. However, more volunteer organisations in the American sample nominate the Internet as a vital pathway and resource.

## SERVICES AND MEMBERS

Respondents were asked which The Centre's services they had used as members. Table 5 ranks their responses:

**Table 5:** The Centre for Volunteering's services used by its members

The Centre for Volunteering's Services	%
Website	20
Volunteer Referral Service	16
Internet is a resource for volunteer opportunities	14
Volunteers are harder to find	13
<i>The Voice of Volunteering</i> (e-bulletin)	12
School of Volunteer Management	11
Breakfast forums	10
Fact sheets	8
Information and advice	8
More businesses are engaged in volunteering	7
I haven't used any services	6
Young people are more engaged in volunteering	5
Volunteering research	5
Other	4
Library	3
Increased positive international profile	3
Advocacy services	2
More funds available for not -for-profit organisations	1
Organisations use the skills of fewer volunteers	1

Clearly, the website, the referral service, the e-bulletin, the School and breakfast forums are the major services that primarily engage members. These underpin the importance of the Internet for the services The Centre delivers and the area in which ongoing support can be delivered such as maximising the use of the Internet for volunteer organisations.

It is worth noting that some The Centre's services are under-used such as research, the library and advocacy. The relative under-use of research is understandable given that there was only limited mechanism for the dissemination of findings within NSW and the rest of Australia. This lack was addressed in part by the appointment of the Research & Policy Manager to The Centre in September 2005. The library is currently being evaluated in terms of its mission and how best to upgrade services to volunteers, The Centre's staff and member volunteering organisations. Advocacy had always taken place on an ad hoc basis and research is being done on ways to improve communication channels so that members will be enabled to comment on salient topics.

Tables 6 and 7 comprise two items that help determine the relative value of The Centre's services to members. Members were asked which services provided by The Centre were most valuable to them and Table 6 presents the results.

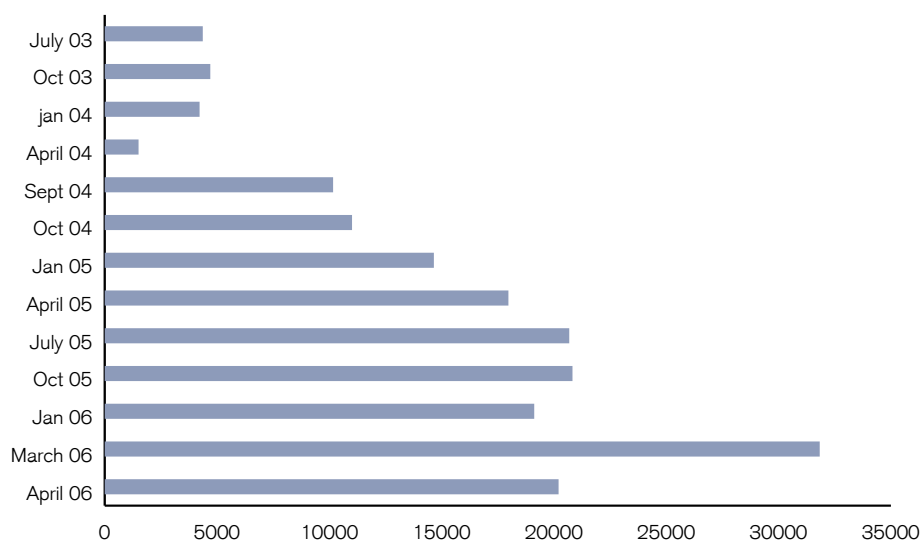
**Table 6:** Most valuable services provided by The Centre for Volunteering

The Centre for Volunteering's Services	%
Volunteer Referral Service	20
Website	19
School of Volunteer Management training	14
Research	9
Fact sheets	8
Information and advice	7
<i>The Voice of Volunteering</i> (e-bulletin)	7
Advocacy	5
Other	4
Breakfast forums	4
Library	2
None of these services	2

These results reiterate the importance of the Volunteer Referral Service, the website and the School of Volunteering as the most valuable services to members. It is also possible that The Centre has until recently been seen to only comprise these three services suggesting that the volunteer sector has no knowledge of other services provided by The Centre. Of interest though is the relatively lower value of certain services such as *The Voice*, breakfast forums, the library and advocacy. These less-valued services are areas that would benefit from further investigation into ways in which they could support volunteer organisations and promote volunteering more strongly in the future.

The importance of The Centre's website is underpinned by the marked increase in the number of visits from approximately 5,000 in July 2003 to approximately 32,000 in March 2006 (see Figure 5.). This increase is probably due to a combination of the increased global presence of the Internet for organisations in general and The Centre's strategy to direct more resources and expertise to developing, monitoring and promoting the website.

**Figure 5:** Total number of visits to www.volunteering.com.au between July 2003 and March 2006



Respondents were asked which services they considered required improvements. Table 7 shows these results.

**Table 7:** Services provided by The Centre for Volunteering that require improvement

The Centre for Volunteering's Services	%
All services meet our requirements	<b>19</b>
School of Volunteer Management training	14
Volunteer Referral Service	13
Other	9
Breakfast forums	8
Information and advice	8
Website	7
Volunteering research	7
Advocacy	7
Library	3
Fact sheets	3
<i>The Voice of Volunteering</i> (e-bulletin)	2



The results of the survey importantly identified areas that require attention in order to tailor The Centre to its current and future members' needs. The School has been identified as a valuable service but it requires improvement. Such a review has been conducted externally and a major restructure in terms of personnel and procedures is taking place.

Some aspects of the Volunteer Referral Service were noted as needing improvement. One area of difficulty identified by a respondent was the mismatching of volunteers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) to volunteer positions that require high level skills in written and spoken English. It is important in the matching process that the volunteers in referral services are aware of volunteer organisations' needs and the skills of potential volunteers. Also,

anecdotal evidence from referral services suggests that there are indeed cultural and linguistic issues to address regarding a volunteer organisation's capacity to effectively use CALD volunteers.

Breakfast forums were identified as needing improvement in terms of their starting time when one respondent said that they are 'too early for some' and the location, the centre of Sydney, is 'too difficult to get to'. 'What about having them sometimes in the suburbs?' is often asked. The location of forums in regions was suggested as a way of addressing the lack of regional services experienced by this member group.

Calls to The Centre, the website and research are all areas that were ranked as requiring some improvement by members and each of these areas is being addressed. For example, calls to The Centre for legal issues are currently part of a recent project initiative of The Centre which is developing a new part of the website as well as establishing a volunteer hotline. The website is also undergoing a review of content since a restructure in 2004 and some information might require culling or refinements. For the first time, the role of research and its inherent value are being developed as part of the responsibilities of the Research & Policy Manager.

To generate a clear idea of what is being done well and where improvement is needed, a ratio method was used by the Points of Light survey. This method will give more precision about which areas to target over what pure responses numbers can offer alone (Cihar 2004, p9). The Points of Light survey constructed a ratio table by dividing the number of valuable responses by the number of needs improvement responses. Table 8 shows the various ratios for the services provided by The Centre's survey.

**Table 8:** Ratios of service improvement

Service	%
<i>The Voice of Volunteering</i> (e-bulletin)	5.3
Website	4.5
Fact sheets	3.2
Research by The Centre	1.8
Training at the SVM	1.45
Calls to Centre for information and advice	1.5
The Centre for Volunteering library	0.8
Advocacy	0.8
Other	0.7
Breakfast forums	0.6

Where the ratio is higher than 1, this means that there are more positive than negative responses overall, whereas ratios lower than 1 indicate more negative than positive responses. For example, a ratio of 2 shows that there are twice as many valuable responses than needs improvement responses while a ratio of 0.5 means there are half as many valuable than needs improvement responses (Cihar 2004, p9).

The median ratio for our survey is 1.5 and the mean ratio is 2.08. Because there is only a 0.58 difference between these two ratios, they offer a relatively rigorous guide to assessing service value and areas for improvement. Those services

Today's main challenges for members are staffing, funding, competition from other organisations and growing complexities of volunteering

between 1.5 and 2.08 can be considered as performing well relative to the total number of services offered and those below 1.5 require improvement. Those services with the highest ratios (the e-bulletin, website and fact sheets) require the least amount of improvement while breakfast forums, library and advocacy are the services with the lowest ratios and therefore need the most improvement according to respondents.

Respondents were asked to nominate three future services from a list of 13 options that would help support them and their organisations. Table 9 indicates the ranked responses.

**Table 9:** Future services provided by The Centre for Volunteering that could add value to volunteer organisations.

Services	%
Assistance to develop funding opportunities	13
Volunteer referral enabling you to match to suitable volunteers	13
Online tool kits for volunteer management	13
Police records checks service	12
Accreditation of volunteer using organisations	9
Accreditation of volunteer managers	9
Doing research on volunteering and have a research network	8
Advanced level management training	5
Recruitment support for paid staff	4
Shared services (e.g. finance and human resources)	3
Peer-to-peer technical assistance	3
Establishing a Trust Fund for volunteering initiatives	3
Leadership training	3
Other	2

Skills building and service development are the main ways to improve what The Centre can deliver to its members, especially in regional and rural areas. Skills in funding applications and support in submission writing are key areas along with the delivery of an e-learning component for the School of Volunteer Management's curriculum. Police records checks were ranked highly as well because of the current high costs and time taken to complete such a check. Finding better ways of matching volunteers is another key area that the referral service could address.

## CHALLENGES

The final two items surveyed the type of challenges faced by volunteer organisations and the types of courses the School of Volunteer Management could provide in the future. Items were used from the Points of Light survey with some additions, such as the designing and implementing of national standards. Table 10 shows the ranking of the major issues faced.

**Table 10:** Issues that make it difficult for organisations to deliver effective volunteering programs

Area of volunteering	%
Lack of staff to carry out work	14
Constant turnover in volunteer field	12
Competition from other organisations engaged in volunteer work	11
Competition for funding	11
Risk management issues	10
Using volunteers from culturally & linguistically diverse backgrounds	8
Effect of economic decline on philanthropic support	7
Effectively using volunteers for short-term projects	6
Other	5
Lack of public interest in your organisation/ program	4
Lack of skilled volunteer managers	4
Lack of internal management support	3
Inability to measure outcomes	3
Designing and implementing national standards	2
Managing large groups of volunteers for specific projects	1

The main challenges identified by member volunteer organisations focus on the areas of staffing, funding, competition and complexities of volunteering. At one level, the turnover of volunteers is challenging for organisations and yet on another, it is recognised that more volunteers are seeking short-term opportunities. Finding a balance between these challenges and opportunities is a key area where The Centre can productively engage its members.

There are similar issues with funding and its impact on staffing levels for organisations. One idea that emerges is that quality volunteering programs are only effective if there are sufficient and sustainable volunteer management structures in place. The cost and economic value of volunteering is a key area of research that is making ground (James & Mack 2006). Two places where accountancy research is taking on this task are the Centre for Philanthropy and Nonprofit Studies, Queensland University of Technology and the Centre for Corporate Citizenship at Boston College in the USA.

The administration of volunteering was noted earlier as becoming increasingly complex for some organisations. This complexity is borne out in regard to addressing and implementing risk management issues. Similarly, dealing adequately with volunteers from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD) also presents a new and increasing challenge for some organisations.

Respondents also noted a number of other issues that make it difficult to deliver effective programs. One of these difficulties is involving young people with mental health issues in volunteering activities. Attention to documentation, research and evaluation was an added workload on top of managing volunteer teams along with implementing effective promotional strategies for their volunteer organisation.



The final item asked members which topic areas the School of Volunteer Management could develop in the future to support their organisations. Table 11 shows the results of this item.

**Table 11:** Courses provided by the School of Volunteer Management in the future that would assist members

Type of Course	%
Recruit/train/retain volunteers	19
Legal aspects of volunteering	14
Implementing National Volunteer Standards	11
Funding submissions	10
Managing conflict and change	10
Leadership skills	7
Strategic planning	7
Team building	6
Governance training and support	6
Gaining support for your organisation	6
Other	2

Supply and demand of volunteers was the highest ranked item by members. This issue highlights the difficulties in maintaining international standards in attracting, training and retaining volunteers. Legal aspects pertaining to volunteering have been noted as complex and members say they need further courses. Even though there are Australian National Volunteer Standards, support is requested in complying with them. Further courses addressing writing and submitting funding applications are required.

Members also noted though that there were several impediments to accessing courses through the School. These were the cost associated with attending courses at The Centre in the Sydney CBD.

### PAST MEMBERS

Only 4% of the total sample comprised past members of The Centre and responses as to why they ceased membership may not be representative. However, all indicated that cost was the main barrier to renewing their membership.

A further survey was undertaken in order to access those organisations who had been members in the past. Seven items from the main questionnaire were used (see Appendix 2). A personal approach was adopted by phoning these organisations to find out more about their perceptions of The Centre and why they chose not to renew their membership.

A list of 174 organisations was generated from our membership database of those who had lapsed between 2004 and 2005. Relatively recent members were chosen to minimise the number of organisations and groups who had ceased operation or were uncontactable.

From the list of 174, a sample of organisations was drawn from the 2004-2005 membership lists to capture as diverse a range of size and service types as possible. Nine representative organisations were contacted for phone interviews which were conducted over a two-week period.

skills building  
and service  
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the main ways  
to improve what  
The Centre  
delivers,  
especially to its  
regional and  
rural members

The sample was biased towards organisations employing large numbers of volunteers of 100 or more, had 50 or more paid employees and had been members for more than three years. Interviews were conducted with only two medium-sized organisations that had between ten to 50 paid employees. It was difficult to establish contact with small organisations as their staff tended to be out of the office and leaving messages on their answering machines was often the only way to contact them during weekday office hours.

### **REASONS FOR MEMBERSHIP LAPSING**

Several organisations stated that lapsing was an 'oversight' and renewal had 'slipped through the cracks'. Several respondents expressed interested in re-joining after the interview. Others said that they did not see The Centre had much relevance to their needs or saw any value for money in services offered. Volunteer recruitment was perceived as the major need of these lapsed members and as the prime service offered by The Centre.

Efforts to promote a wider The Centre for Volunteering service base have been underway since 2003 to address this limited perception of The Centre's role as primarily a referral service. However the message of change might not have reached these lapsed members. Most lapsed organisations had also become self-sufficient in terms of volunteer recruitment since first using The Centre's services and therefore no longer perceived the need to use the Volunteer Referral Service. Nevertheless, the Volunteer Referral Service was still noted by them as an important service.

### **SERVICES OFFERED BY THE CENTRE FOR VOLUNTEERING**

Lapsed members suggested the need for an improved flow of information from The Centre (e.g. e-newsletters) to member organisations to keep up-to-date about volunteering issues. It is noteworthy that this perception directly contradicts the perceptions of current members who rate communications (such as e-newsletters) as highly effective. These suggestions from lapsed members indicate the difficulty in communicating with some organisations who no longer want their names to be on lists or whose permission has not been obtained, under privacy laws, to continue to send material to them. Seeking permission to add these organisations to current contact lists may be a way of overcoming the need to update past members and convert them to current members. Support was also evident from some organisations for the higher level work that The Centre is now prioritising such as research, advocacy and policy as well as service improvement and communications.

### **VOLUNTEERING CHALLENGES/ISSUES**

Finally, past members were asked questions about the difficulties of delivering an effective volunteering program. Two major areas were indicated:

- Low rate of attracting and retaining skilled, trained volunteers.
- Low rate of attracting funding for their volunteer centres.

A major issue faced by this group is managing an over-supply of volunteers especially with limited staff and resources. Sometimes there are waiting lists of new volunteers and organisations face the difficulty of finding suitable tasks and positions for all of them. Attracting suitably-qualified volunteer managers and investing in extensive training for some volunteers are also challenges. For example, in regional areas there is a shortage of skilled volunteers with special experience in respite care.

## Appendix 1: Member Survey

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The Centre for Volunteering would like your help to evaluate and design its member services. We would like to better understand how your organisation feels about volunteering issues that impact you and what we can do to meet your future needs. This survey is for all past and present members. It will take between five and ten minutes to complete. All responses will be kept confidential and your name or any other information will never be disclosed to other parties.

A report of these results will be posted on our website and in our member newsletter. If you want to discuss any matters connected to this survey, please phone Dr Anton Mischewski on 9261 3600 or email [amischewski@volunteering.com.au](mailto:amischewski@volunteering.com.au). All surveys will go in a draw and five respondents will win one year's free membership.

### QUESTION 1 Which category BEST describes your organisation or service?

Please tick one category only.

- Community/Welfare
- Sport/Recreation
- Religious organisation
- Health
- Arts/Culture
- Business/Corporate/Professional/Unions
- Emergency Services
- Environment
- Law/Justice/Political
- Animal Welfare
- Individual
- Other (please state) \_\_\_\_\_

### QUESTION 1A How many PAID employees are there in your organisation?

- 1-2
- 3-9
- 10-19
- 20-49
- 50-99
- 100+
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 1B** Approximately how many volunteers does your organisation currently have?

- 1-9
- 10-49
- 50-99
- 100+
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 2** What is your current membership status with The Centre for Volunteering?

- Current Member
- Former Member
- Never a Member
- Unsure

**QUESTION 3** How many years have you been a member?

- Less than 1 year
- 1-3 years
- More than 3 years
- Unsure

**QUESTION 4A** Why did you stop being a member? Check all boxes that apply

- Too expensive
- The Centre for Volunteering did not meet our organisations needs
- There was a mismatch of volunteers with our needs
- Prefer to use Go Volunteer instead
- Do not require your referral service anymore
- Have found services elsewhere
- Other - please detail

**QUESTION 4B** Why have you never been a member? Check all boxes that apply

- Too expensive
- The Centre for Volunteering does not meet our organisations needs
- Prefer to use Go Volunteer instead
- Do not require your referral service
- Have found services elsewhere
- Could not see any benefits of being a member
- Other - please detail

**QUESTION 5** What are the BEST ways for interested individuals to learn about volunteering opportunities? Please indicate what you consider to be the THREE (3) most important ways.

- Through young people's groups
- Internet (e.g. govolynter.com)
- Volunteer centres
- Non-profit organisations that directly engage volunteers
- Workplace volunteer programs
- Through religious organisations
- Schools/Universities
- Media (e.g. advertisements in local press)
- Word of mouth
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 6** How do you see volunteering as having changed over time? Please check what you consider to be the THREE (3) most important items.

- Volunteers are seeking job skills
- Internet is a resource for volunteer opportunities
- More people are interested in short-term opportunities
- Volunteers are harder to find
- Young people are more engaged in volunteering
- More businesses are engaged in volunteering
- Organisations use fewer volunteers
- Volunteering is more complicated now e.g. legal issues
- More funds available for not-for-profit organisations
- Increased positive international profile
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 7** What services provided by The Centre for Volunteering have you used? Please check all that apply.

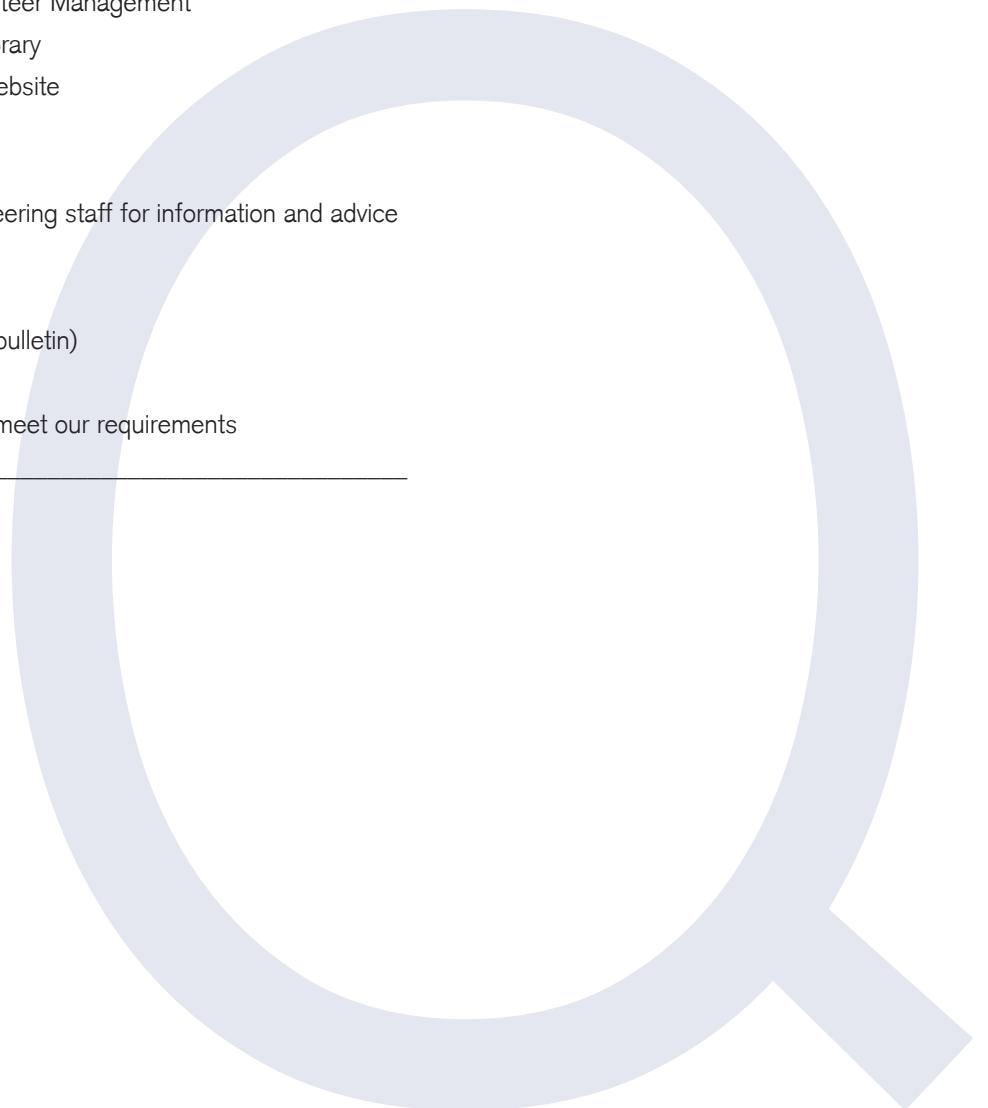
- Training through the School of Volunteer Management
- The Centre for Volunteering library
- The Centre for Volunteering Website
- Volunteering research
- Breakfast forums
- Relationship with staff for information and advice
- Advocacy services
- Volunteer Referral Service
- The Voice of Volunteering (our e-bulletin)
- Fact sheets
- I haven't used any services

**QUESTION 8 What services provided by The Centre for Volunteering are MOST valuable to you? Please select THREE (3) items.**

- Training at the School of Volunteer Management
- The Centre for Volunteering library
- The Centre for Volunteering website
- Research done by The Centre for Volunteering
- Breakfast forums
- Calls to The Centre for Volunteering staff for information and advice
- Advocacy
- Volunteer Referral Centre
- The Voice of Volunteering (our e-bulletin)
- Fact sheets
- None of the services are valuable to my organisation
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 9 What services currently provided by The Centre for Volunteering could use the most improvement? Please select a maximum of THREE (3) items.**

- Training at the School of Volunteer Management
- The Centre for Volunteering library
- The Centre for Volunteering website
- Volunteering research
- Breakfast forums
- Calls to The Centre for Volunteering staff for information and advice
- Advocacy
- Volunteer Referral Service
- The Voice for Volunteering (e-bulletin)
- Fact sheets
- None of the services, they all meet our requirements
- Other \_\_\_\_\_



**QUESTION 10 Which of the following services that The Centre for Volunteering might provide in the future would add value to your work? Please select a maximum of THREE (3) items.**

- Accreditation of volunteer using organisations
- Accreditation of volunteer managers
- Doing research on volunteering and have a research network
- Assistance in developing funding opportunities
- Shared services (e.g. finance and human resources)
- Recruitment support for paid staff
- Advanced level management training
- Leadership training
- Peer-to-peer technical assistance
- Police records checks service
- Volunteer referral enabling you to match to suitable volunteers
- On-line tool kits for volunteer management
- Establishing a Trust Fund for volunteering initiatives
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 11 What issues make it difficult for your organisation to deliver an effective volunteering program? Please select THREE (3) items.**

- Effect of economic decline on philanthropic support
- Competition from other organisations engaged in volunteer work
- Not enough staff to carry out work
- Lack of skilled volunteer managers
- Competition for funding
- Constant turnover in volunteer field
- Lack of public interest in your organisation/program
- Effectively using volunteers for short-term projects
- Lack of internal management support
- Inability to measure outcomes
- Managing large groups of volunteers for specific projects
- Risk management issues e.g. public liability, OH&S
- Using volunteers from culturally & linguistically diverse backgrounds
- Designing and implementing national standards
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 12** Thinking about the types of courses the School of Volunteer Management could offer, which of the following would you find most valuable and helpful. Please choose FOUR (4) topics.

- Leadership skills
- Team building
- Recruit/train/retain volunteers
- Legal aspects of volunteering
- Governance training and support
- Strategic planning
- Implementing National Volunteer Standards
- Gaining support for your organisation
- Funding submissions
- Managing conflict and change
- Other \_\_\_\_\_

Please feel free to add any further comments about issues that are important to you.

As a token of thanks for helping us, please include your name and contact details below to go in the draw for a FREE MEMBERSHIP. Your contact details will be kept separate from your responses in this survey.

Contact Person \_\_\_\_\_

Organisation \_\_\_\_\_

Phone and Email \_\_\_\_\_



## Appendix 2: Lapsed Member Survey

**QUESTION 1a. Which category BEST describes your organisation or service? Please tick one category only.**

- Community/Welfare
- Sport/Recreation
- Religious organisation
- Health
- Arts/Culture
- Business/Corporate/Professional/Unions
- Emergency Services
- Environment
- Law/Justice/Political
- Animal Welfare
- Individual
- Other (please indicate) \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 1b. How many PAID employees are there in your organisation?**

- 1–2
- 3–9
- 10–19
- 20–49
- 50–99
- 100+
- Other (please indicate) \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 1c. Approximately how many volunteers does your organisation currently have?**

- 1–9
- 10–49
- 50–99
- 100+
- Other (please indicate) \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 2. How many years have you been a member of The Centre?**

- Less than 1 year
- 1–3 years
- More than 3 years
- Unsure

**QUESTION 3. Why did you stop being a member? Please tick all answers that apply to you.**

- Too expensive
- The Centre for Volunteering did not meet my organisation's needs
- There was a mismatch of volunteers to our needs
- Prefer to use Go Volunteer instead
- Do not require your Volunteer Referral Service any more
- Have found suitable services elsewhere
- Other (please indicate) \_\_\_\_\_

**QUESTION 4. Which of the following services that The Centre for Volunteering might provide in the future would add value to your work? Please tick three answers only.**

- Accreditation of volunteer-using organisations
- Accreditation of volunteer managers
- Doing research on volunteering and have a research network
- Assistance in developing funding opportunities
- Shared services (e.g. finance and human resources)
- Recruitment support for paid staff
- Advanced level management training
- Leadership training
- Peer-to-peer technical assistance
- Police records checks service
- Volunteer referral enabling you to match to suitable volunteers
- Online tool kits for volunteer management
- Establishment of a Trust Fund for volunteering initiatives
- Other (please indicate)

**QUESTION 5. What issues make it difficult for your organisation to deliver an effective volunteering program? Please tick three answers only.**

- Effect of economic decline on philanthropic support
- Competition from other organisations engaged in volunteer work
- Lack of staff to carry out work
- Lack of skilled volunteer managers
- Competition for funding
- Constant turnover in volunteer field
- Lack of public interest in your organisation/program
- Effectively using skills of volunteers for short-term projects
- Lack of internal management support
- Inability to measure outcomes
- Managing large groups of volunteers for specific projects
- Risk management issues e.g. public liability, OH&S
- Using volunteers from culturally & linguistically diverse backgrounds (CALD)
- Designing and implementing national standards
- Other (please indicate) \_\_\_\_\_

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