

# ACES

**Appreciate**



**Captain**



**Empower**



**Support**



# ACES

## Your Model for Effectively Leading Volunteers and Volunteer Teams

Whether you call yourself a volunteer manager or not, if you're responsible for any volunteers in your organisation this guide will help you be a strong leader and make the most of your volunteer program.

In this guide, we're going to walk you through the ACES model of becoming a great leader to your team of volunteers. We encourage you to share this with others in your team you lead people or volunteers.

# ACES

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## Captain

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# A is Appreciation

Before you can be an effective and trusted leader to your volunteers, you need to understand and appreciate your team. We want to understand what motivates them, appreciate their value and bring them together as a unified group.

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## UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS

Retaining volunteers is a crucial part of your volunteer program. You can have the most robust recruitment and onboarding processes in place but if you can not appreciate your volunteers you will struggle to retain your volunteers and you will lose momentum in your program, spend continuous amounts of time bringing volunteers up to speed and could impact the program and the organisation's reputation.

Volunteers want to feel valued and recognised for their efforts. Much like paid staff, volunteers that feel valued and an integral part of an organisation will be more likely to stay.

Understanding why someone volunteers and what their motivations are will help you to devise ways to recognise and show value towards your volunteers.

### Why do volunteers volunteer?

People who volunteer do so for a variety of reasons such as helping their local community, contributing to a cause that's close to their heart or just as an opportunity to meet and interact with like-minded people. Everyone is unique and each person has their own motivations for donating their time and skills without financial reward.

Motivations are as individual as each volunteer, but here are some of the common ones you're likely to see in your team:

- Working towards a goal they believe in achieving
- Helping others
- Achieving personal or career-related goals
- Learning development opportunity
- Escape from their own problems
- Contributing to the community
- Religion
- Networking and creating human connection
- Sense of belonging
- Making new friends
- Self improvement.

As a leader, it is a great idea to understand what motivates your volunteers. This will help you understand how to support them, where you can provide them with rewarding opportunities and keep them engaged and motivated with the organisation.

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*"What motivates us moves us!  
[But] don't assume that what motivates  
one volunteer, or one group of volunteers,  
holds true 'across the board.'"*

– Judy Esmond, Ph.D.



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# UNDERSTANDING VOLUNTEER MOTIVATIONS

There are a number of national and international recognition days throughout the calendar year for celebrating the contributions of volunteers. These days are recognised and supported by the national peak volunteering bodies and Volunteering Australia and all volunteer-involving organisations are encouraged to take time to participate in the various events and ceremonies on these days.

- **National Volunteer Week**
- **International Volunteer Manager Day**
- **International Volunteer Day**
- **National Student Volunteer Week**

Volunteers want to feel valued and recognised for their efforts. Much like paid staff, volunteers who feel valued and an integral part of an organisation will be more likely to stay.

Understanding why someone volunteers and what motivates them will help you to devise ways to recognise and show appreciation towards your volunteers.

Valuing the time and efforts of volunteers is crucial to retain them. Recognising and rewarding volunteers is an essential part of best practice for volunteer management.

There are many ways to implement these practices into your volunteer program including:

- Providing training, coaching and support
- Offer professional development opportunities inline with their roles and/or interests.
- Reimburse out of pocket expenses
- Cover the costs or part of the costs for continued education
- Provide free refreshments during coffee and tea break
- Thank volunteers in a newsletter, website or social media
- Pass on and share client compliments and letters of thanks
- Include volunteers in coffee catch ups and team social activities
- Let volunteers see and appreciate the end result of their work
- Recognise years of service, birthdays and other milestones
- Simply saying thanks goes a long way.





# C is Captain

Whether or not you consider yourself a traditional volunteer manager, if part of your paid or volunteer role includes supporting and directing others you will benefit from some guidance on how to lead an effective volunteer team.

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## SETTING GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Great leaders are clear in communicating their tasks and objectives. Not only does this help you know exactly what needs to be done and by when, it makes it easier for you to track projects and tasks, identify potential issues and to manage the performance of your team.

A very common and successful way to communicate tasks and objectives is through the use of SMART goal setting.

SMART is an acronym for setting goals that are detailed and effective.

**S****Specific**

Make your goals specific and narrow. Know what you are trying to accomplish. This will help you know how and where to get started.

**M****Measurable**

Measurable goals can be tracked, allowing you to see progress and tell you when a goal is completed.

**A****Attainable**

Ensure the goals can be completed within a reasonable time frame.

**R****Relevant**

Goals should align with values and long-term objectives.

**T****Time**

Set reasonable deadlines for completion of tasks.

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## LEADING A TEAM

For many Volunteer-Involving Organisations a volunteer manager or coordinator role will be implemented to provide management and support for the organisation's volunteer team.

If it is not feasible for such a position to be implemented an assigned member of staff or a senior volunteer may be appointed as a primary person for volunteers to liaise with, take instruction from and raise any concerns or issues.

If you have found yourself in such a role, you have been identified as someone who possesses the leadership skills and qualities to bring the volunteer team together to work towards the organisation's mission. Always keep in mind that volunteers come from all walks of life, each bringing with them their own unique perspective and reasons for becoming a volunteer. Understanding what inspires and motivates each of your volunteers is a highly effective way for managing and maintaining volunteer engagement.

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# SIX LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOURS

Management of volunteers requires strong leadership abilities. Some would argue that leading volunteers require more expertise than paid staff as volunteers can leave at any time, if they are managed poorly.

In order to successfully lead volunteers and volunteer teams, volunteer managers/coordinators should use these six practices on a daily basis.

## 1. Communicate the mission/ aims of your service/program

If volunteers feel connected to purpose and see their role in the organisation's impact they are more likely to feel values-aligned and motivated to do their best and continue supporting the organisation.

- Communicate it/them enthusiastically and often.
- Reinforce frequently – the big picture, purpose.
- Enlist others – ask for help, show how they are making a difference.
- Promote and represent volunteering – internally and externally.

## 2. Build on your team's strengths

Like employees, your volunteers are going to have different strengths, experience, qualifications and suitability for different tasks. If you encourage people to lean into their strengths they are likely to achieve more for the organisation and get a greater sense of satisfaction and self confidence.

- Match volunteers to roles which use their talents, skills & interests (For example, do not accept applicants for a role as an ethics teacher if they do not have the required disposition).
- Tailor roles to achieve team goals/objectives, where possible.
- Train to individual needs.

## 3. Question groupthink (those who follow others)

A groupthink is an unfortunate side effect when you have a group of people who are seeking harmony or to avoid conflict. It is when all decisions are made as a group, which actually can result in unchallenged, poor quality decision making and poor outcomes. It's important a group collaborates, but has clear leadership.

- Be curious – ask questions, listen, investigate, verify, reflect.
- Take initiative. Discuss ideas around calculated risks and experimentation with your supervisor.
- Be open to diverse opinions.
- Encourage creativity, innovation, within the confines of the role.

## 4. Guide co-operative action

The temptation to do everything yourself can at times be strong, but it's important to empower and encourage volunteers to set their own goals, take initiative and operate independently – where it is appropriate.

- Plan and set team goals – collaboratively.
- Determine where guidance is needed.
- Encourage autonomy where possible.
- Encourage initiative, where appropriate.
- Empower volunteer team members.
- Delegate authority, where appropriate.
- Develop your volunteers – identify training needs.
- Provide constructive feedback.

## 5. Encourage the team

As a leader, one of your greatest roles is to encourage the team by finding what motivates them, acknowledging their contributions and giving them a sense of satisfaction and teamwork.

- Build on intrinsic motivation.
- Recognise effort – both individual and team.
- Celebrate milestones and accomplishments.
- Build camaraderie – reinforce teamwork.

## 6. Model the behaviours you expect of your team members

We've all seen people who have one set of rules for those they manage and another for themselves. This is detrimental to unity and is likely to encourage your team to operate outside of guidelines.

- Personal commitment and involvement – set an example.
  - Commitment to quality.
  - Help to solve problems – mistakes are learning opportunities.
  - Be persistent.
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# E is Empower

For a volunteer to be satisfied and retained in your organisation, it is important to identify opportunities for empowerment whether through training, personal development or supporting greater diversity and inclusion.

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## VOLUNTEER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

Training is a necessary requirement for all staff and volunteers. Implementing a training plan for your volunteers will not only help you identify what training is required and when it should be completed, but will also allow you to discuss development opportunities with your volunteers.

While some training will be required by all staff and volunteers it is important that the training provided is relevant to the role the volunteer will be undertaking.

When creating a training plan consider the amount of information the volunteer will be taking onboard and the necessity for each training piece. Some training will be immediately necessary for commencing in the role or moving to a new role, for example, using the phone system, and as such may be delivered during the induction or as a part of transitioning the volunteer into the new role.

Other training may be delivered over a set period of time after commencement when the information being provided holds greater relevance and the knowledge gained can be applied immediately.

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## ESSENTIAL AND ONGOING TRAINING

When developing a training plan for your new volunteer, you should consider what training is essential for getting started in the role and what training may be ongoing.

Training requirements will vary based on the volunteer's role, your organisation's requirements and legislation.

Below are some considerations for essential and ongoing training:

- OH&S/WHS
- Emergency Procedures
- Privacy and Confidentiality
- Manual Handling
- Safe work practices
- Fire and Safety
- Customer service processes.

What other skills, relevant to the role, will be required for the volunteer to feel valued and confident?

For example, Information Technology Skills, Communication Skills, Cultural Awareness.

Are formal training options available that will upskill the volunteer and extend their knowledge?

For example, Certificates I, II, III in Active Volunteering.

Do you have mechanisms in place to encourage the volunteer to take up additional training opportunities?

For example, training opportunities are published to a calendar, volunteers are invited to sessions and courses, training is varied and accessible through a range of mediums.

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# PEER SUPPORT AND BUDDIES

Peer Support occurs when staff/volunteers provide support, knowledge or practical help to one another with the primary aim of providing opportunities for staff/volunteers to share their experiences and learn from one another as well as supporting wellbeing. This sharing and learning takes place in a safe environment where there is a foundation of mutual trust and respect.

Whilst peer support often happens organically and in an informal way, structuring a peer support program can lead to enhanced outcomes for staff/volunteers.

In addition to discussing work matters, peer support provides a platform for staff/volunteers to discuss personal issues that may be affecting their performance in the workplace thereby contributing to satisfaction and wellbeing in the workplace.

Buddying can be used to help new volunteers during their first few weeks of volunteering.

Buddying is partnering a new volunteer with an existing team member. The existing team member should be reliable with some degree of experience within the organisation.

A successful 'Buddying' experience can help with the following:

- Becoming familiar with the organisation
- Helping new volunteers access the staff and information they need
- Offering advice
- Increased volunteer confidence and therefore improved retention

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# DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

Workplace diversity means creating an inclusive environment that accepts each individual's differences, embraces their strengths and provides opportunities for all staff to achieve their full potential.

Let's explore diversity in the workplace further and the benefits it can bring to your organisation. Fostering an inclusive organisational culture is an opportunity to refresh and reinvigorate a community organisation. When we are inclusive, we notice more, connect more and grow more.

By supporting and providing opportunities for people who experience exclusion, volunteering can assist them to participate more in their community and develop skills towards employability.

## 1. Make diversity a topic of conversation

Include the topic of diversity in staff meetings, ask different members of the team to share what diversity means to them or even share and discuss articles and papers on diversity and inclusion.

## 2. Encourage individual skills and gifts

Notice and encourage people's individual skills and gifts. Promote the strengths of your team and allow team members to work with each others' strengths and learn from each other.

## 3. Celebrate different cultures and backgrounds

Celebrate the different cultures and backgrounds represented in your team, from food choices, to music, special holidays – find any reason to celebrate diversity.

## 4. Be mindful of unconscious bias

We all know people who we easily build relationships with and gravitate towards. Being aware of our own unconscious bias and taking steps to ensure our bias does not influence our decisions and the way we work will foster a more diverse culture.

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*"Strength lies in differences;  
not in similarities."*

– Stephen Covey, *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*





# S is Support

As a leader in your organisation, you will be needed to support your volunteers – not only when the times are good but when conflict, poor performance or other challenges and issues may arise.

This section deals with some of the areas where you as a leader may need to support your team through difficult situations.

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## ADDRESSING ISSUES WITH VOLUNTEERS

As a volunteer manager responsible for managing individuals and teams, it is inevitable that you will need to address issues that may arise and are impacting performance and morale.

Taking the time to understand the issue, prepare yourself and be objective and unbiased will help you to address these issues before they get out of hand.

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## HOW TO HAVE A DIFFICULT CONVERSATION

Having a difficult or uncomfortable conversation is challenging. But that doesn't mean you should avoid them. In fact, that's exactly what you **SHOULDN'T** do.

Mel Robbins offers these four techniques in her video "How to have a difficult conversation."

Use them to stay focused instead of getting hijacked by my emotions.

### TRY THIS:

1. **Start the conversation by acknowledging my responsibility.**
2. **Define the outcome or goal you have for this conversation.**
3. **Do A LOT of listening and validating the other person's feelings.**
4. **Restate the outcome.**

### BONUS TIP:

**Try rehearsing the conversation with a friend to work out the kinks and get comfortable with what you're going to say.**

These techniques will help you build your confidence and improve the chances that you reach your desired outcome.

### BONUS VIDEO:

Want to learn more?

**WATCH NOW**

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# ADDRESSING ISSUES OF EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION

If creating an inclusive and diverse workplace has so many benefits, why is inclusion and diversity not the norm?

Everyone is unique and everyone can bring valuable skills, ideas and contributions to your organisation. But when it comes to building a diverse workforce often the needs of those living with disability are seen as a barrier to bringing them into a workplace.

Keep in mind, not all disabilities are visible.

Let's explore identifying potential barriers to becoming an Inclusive Volunteer Organisation and ways to overcome these barriers.

## *Ask the Question*

"Do you need any support to volunteer?"

Every person we engage is unique. Just because we

know a person's diagnosis or disability, that doesn't mean that we automatically know what kind of support they need. In fact, they may not need our support at all.

The empowering thing to do is to ask the question... instead of assuming. This is also a good way to dispel our own fears.

Often the largest barrier to overcome, by individuals and organisations, is the fear of saying or doing the wrong thing and causing or contributing to offence and discrimination. Or the fear of finding out that we cannot provide the support needed.

However, this is all based on assumption. When we are honest about our own limitations, including our limited understanding of disability and mental illness, we ask instead of assuming we create an open safe space for discussion and for any misconceptions and misunderstandings to be cleared up.

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# DEALING WITH CONFLICT

Conflict is often described in terms of incompatible needs or values between people. It can also be caused by broken promises, unmet expectations and destructive behaviour. It is common for people to interpret conflict as a problem – who is right and who is wrong.

With this mindset, it is easy to see how some people mistake a healthy debate or robust discussion for unhealthy conflict. Some people seem to shy away from conflict, others love a verbal fight. This is not how it has to be.

Conflict can be a great opportunity. Some people associate energy, excitement and creativity with conflict. Managed effectively, it can bring issues out into the open for discussion, be a driver for productive change, build an appreciation of individual strengths and differences, provide a more holistic perspective of an issue and uncover common goals.

As a volunteer manager you will often be looked upon to manage conflict between individuals and teams. Taking the time to understand the cause of the conflict and to step back and look at the issue holistically will set you up for managing and circumventing conflict successfully.

## Levels of Conflict

Conflict can range from a minor discomfort to a major crisis. The following categories show the potential escalation of conflict and identify the types of interaction and the feelings accompanying each level.

Being able to identify the severity of the conflict and how you feel in a conflict situation is crucial to both analysing and resolving conflict.

**1. Discomfort.** It may be difficult to identify what the problem is. You feel uncomfortable but are not sure why. Things don't feel right.

**2. Incident.** A short exchange occurs without any internal reaction. The exchange might leave you upset, irritated or with a result you didn't want.

**3. Misunderstanding.** Motives or facts are often confused or misperceived. Your thoughts might return frequently to the problem.

**4. Tension.** Relationships are weighed down by negative attitudes and fixed opinions. How you feel about and regard the other person might be a source of constant worry and concern.

**5. Crisis.** Behaviour is affected, normal functioning becomes difficult, extreme gestures are contemplated or carried out.

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# RESIGNATION AND DISMISSAL OF VOLUNTEERS

Like paid employees, volunteers leave for many reasons. For many volunteers, this will be for personal or professional reasons like entering paid employment, taking up study or changes in family circumstances or commitments. For some it may be due to disciplinary action and dismissal. It is important that the volunteer's leaving, for whatever reason, is handled as professionally as when they joined the organisation.

## Resignation

Whilst it might be sad to see a volunteer move on, it is important to ensure that their departure leaves them feeling as valued as when they came on board. Take the time to recognise their contributions and providing them with a small gift, morning tea or even a thank you card can go a long way to ensuring their time, efforts and hard work are appreciated by fellow volunteers, staff and the organisation.

Remember, word of mouth is the best advertising for a volunteer program and your organisation. Volunteers that leave on a positive note are often the best ambassadors in the community.

## Recognition of Service

Whilst recognising your volunteers throughout their tenure with your organisation is critical, recognition of the volunteers service when they leave is often overlooked. Remember, a volunteer who leaves on a positive note can be a huge advocate for your organisation or program.

A simple way to recognise a volunteer's service, outside of a sincere thank you or farewell gift, is to provide a letter of reference that provides not only details on the volunteer's tenure but also details how the volunteer contributed to your organisation or program. A letter of reference can be extremely valuable to a volunteer, especially if they are seeking new employment or volunteer opportunities.

## Dismissal

Sometimes it may be necessary to work through a dismissal process or instantly dismiss a volunteer. Whilst we don't like to think about this happening it is a far easier process if guidelines and procedures have been put in place in advance. Your dismissal process should be clear and include details around performance management, trial periods and future reviews. You should also have what constitutes an instant dismissal clearly defined and all volunteers should be made aware of, and have access to, these guidelines and procedures from the outset.

When working through a dismissal process, or in the case of an instant dismissal, conduct a thorough investigation, get all the facts, and speak to all parties involved. Preparation is crucial. It is also very important to keep clear, accurate and confidential records of the situation, the process followed and the discussion held. When devising or reviewing your Dismissal Process, the following considerations should be made. These considerations will provide you with possible courses of actions and will ensure the volunteer is treated fairly and provided with the opportunity to improve.

- Do you have a trial period?
- Were expectations and guidelines outlined to the volunteer including during onboarding?
- Can the volunteer be assisted with further information or coaching?
- Is there another role the volunteer could do?
- Is a mediator required?

## Exit Interviews

When a volunteer leaves the organisation, conducting an exit interview is a fantastic way to gather invaluable feedback. Exit interviews not only provide your volunteers with an opportunity to give feedback, but also to offer ideas and suggestions and, in some cases, bring to light any potential concerns or challenges they have encountered. Exit interviews can also provide an opportune time to collect any organisational resources from the volunteer, e.g. ID Badges, keys, uniforms, and equipment.

### The Centre for Volunteering

Level 3, 40 Gloucester St

Sydney NSW 2000

T: 02 9261 3600

E: [info@volunteering.com.au](mailto:info@volunteering.com.au)

W: [volunteering.com.au](http://volunteering.com.au)

