



NSW Volunteer Charter

Supporting volunteers, making a difference

Companion document

Acknowledgement of Country

We recognise that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are the First Peoples and Traditional Custodians of Australia, and the oldest continuing culture in the world.

We pay respect to Elders past, present, and emerging. We commit to respecting the lands we walk on and the communities we walk with.

We celebrate the deep and enduring connection of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people to Country and acknowledge their continuing custodianship of the lands, seas, and sky.

We acknowledge the ongoing stewardship of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and the important contribution they make to our communities and economies.

We reflect on the continuing impact of government policies and practices and recognise our responsibility to work together with, and support, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, families and communities, towards improved economic, social and cultural outcomes. We support local decision-making and self-determination for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people.

Thank you

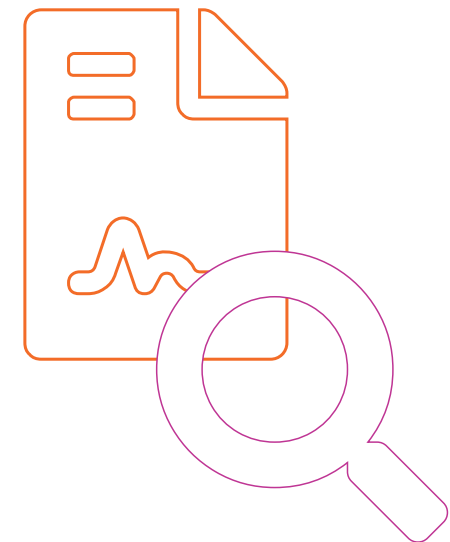
The NSW Government would like to thank all those who have contributed to the development of the *NSW Volunteer Charter*.

In particular, we thank the volunteers and volunteer involving organisations who made submissions to the *NSW Volunteering Taskforce* regarding this initiative, as well as other topics during its consultation process in 2022.

We also thank the NSW peak body for volunteering, The Centre for Volunteering for their support to bring the NSW Volunteer Charter to life.

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Setting the scene

The NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020-2030¹ sets out a ten-year plan for the NSW Volunteering Sector. Volunteers make a difference, and through the Strategy together we are growing volunteering and making a difference.

The Strategy's Vision is:

'Volunteering in NSW grows and is vibrant. Everyone can volunteer, more often, throughout life, and their contributions are celebrated.'

The Strategy has three Focus Areas:

- 1. Growth and Support** – which aims to increase participation in volunteering; and make volunteer recruitment, retention and management easier by building the capacity of the sector.
- 2. Knowledge** – which aims to improve understanding of volunteering in NSW.
- 3. Value** – which aims to enhance recognition of the value of volunteering and the contributions made by volunteers in NSW.

In 2022, the *NSW Volunteering Taskforce*² following consultations with sector stakeholders recommended the development of a NSW Volunteer Charter. This recommendation has been acted upon by the NSW Government through the development of the Charter and this companion document.

The NSW Volunteer Charter has been developed based on NSW Volunteer Taskforce members' experience, consultations with volunteers and the sector, and international practice. It is an important initiative under the NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020–2030. It directly aligns to Focus Areas 1 (Growth and Support) and 3 (Value) of the Strategy.

The NSW Government recognises that the health and wellbeing of NSW, and its residents, relies on the efforts of volunteer involving organisations and their volunteers.

The NSW Volunteer Charter is a set of 10 guiding principles that encourage best practice, good communication and positive relationships.

What do we mean by volunteering?

This document utilises the definition of 'volunteering' established by Volunteering Australia,³ which is:

Time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain.

This definition draws attention to three areas which must be fulfilled for an activity to be considered volunteering:

- Firstly, that the time is willingly given, volunteering must not be exploitative or be used in place of paid employment.
- Secondly, that volunteering must be for the common good, directly, or indirectly benefiting people outside the family or household, or benefit a cause.
- Lastly, there is no financial gain, excluding reimbursement or the good practice of a volunteer being recognised or rewarded.

Volunteering includes formal volunteering for an organisation, and informal volunteering where people help in their community outside of formal arrangements with an organisation. Informal volunteering can include helping others in the community, outside of an organisation or family unit. Informal volunteering can include spontaneous volunteering, for example where members of the public help in time of need during or after disasters.

Why do we need the Charter?

A charter sets out a standard code of conduct to ensure everyone is working to a common benchmark of good behaviour and quality practice.

This type of initiative was first identified as a solution to some of the challenges experienced by the NSW Volunteering Sector, during the consultation and development process for the NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020-2030. It has been considered further through the actions of the NSW Volunteering Taskforce in 2022.

NSW has an opportunity to lead the way, as no other Australian jurisdiction is known to have a 'volunteer charter' that spans and assists an entire jurisdiction's volunteering sector.

We recognise that individual organisations may have charters, codes of conduct or volunteer rights statements, and the NSW Volunteer Charter is not intended to replace them. Rather, the NSW Volunteer Charter can complement what a volunteer involving organisation may already have in place.

Where a volunteer involving organisation does not have a set of principles in place, we encourage volunteers, volunteer managers and organisations to consider adopting the NSW Volunteer Charter as a good starting point to deliver best practice, support good communication and positive relationships.

The NSW Volunteer Charter is not designed to replace the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement.⁴ The NSW Volunteer Charter has been developed as a 'first step' tool for organisations. We recognise that many small to medium organisations may not have the resources to implement the National Standards, and so we encourage organisations to consider utilising the NSW Volunteer Charter as a way to support and implement best practice.

Even if a volunteer involving organisation is working towards implementation of the National Standards, utilising the NSW Volunteer Charter will help.

The NSW Volunteer Charter provides a foundation for a positive volunteer experience and gives individuals, groups, and organisations the opportunity to express their support for the spirit of volunteering, while upholding the principles of best volunteer practice.

By implementing best practice, communities and organisations as a result are supported by motivated, well trained, well managed and equipped volunteers.

Who is the NSW Volunteer Charter for?

This Charter is for **any organisation** that utilises volunteers in their day-to-day operations in NSW. It helps to ensure and maintain good working relations between volunteers and paid staff.

Where will the NSW Volunteer Charter be applied?

The Charter has been developed with the NSW Volunteering Sector in mind.

It is free to use.

However, it can also serve as a helpful tool for organisations that have a multi-jurisdictional footprint.

The Charter is relevant in formal or informal volunteering settings, including where volunteers are engaged alongside paid staff. It will help volunteer involving organisations when making decisions about volunteer recruitment, management, induction and agreed responsibilities.

1
CHOICE

Volunteer involvement is a freely made choice

2
INVOLVED

Volunteers are involved in the life of an organisation and decisions that impact them

3
RESPECT

Volunteers are treated with respect and dignity

4
SAFETY

Volunteers are able to carry out their duties in a safe environment

10
RECOGNITION

Volunteers are recognised and celebrated for their contributions

NSW
Volunteer Charter
10 principles

5
TIMELY

Volunteers are supported and provided with timely and practical resources

9
LEADERSHIP

Volunteer managers and leaders are supported to deliver best practice

8
REASONABLE

Volunteers should be reasonably reimbursed for 'out-of-pocket' expenses

7
CLARITY

Volunteers are provided with clear role descriptions and responsibilities

6
TRAINING

Volunteers are provided with training and professional development opportunities

What are the principles of the NSW Volunteer Charter?

There are ten (10) guiding principles that make up the NSW Volunteer Charter. They are detailed below. The infographic on page 6 provides a summary of the NSW Volunteer Charter principles.

1st Principle – Choice

We recognise that volunteer involvement and activity is a freely made choice of the individual. If there is any compulsion, threat of sanctions or force, then any such activity is not volunteering.

2nd Principle - Involved

Our volunteers are involved in the life of the organisation and are included in decisions that impact them. We do this through meetings, discussions, consultations, surveys or other forms of involvement. We recognise the involvement of our volunteers through our organisation's strategic plan, business planning processes and resourcing.

3rd Principle – Respect

We recognise that volunteers and volunteer managers have their own individual needs within and beyond their role, everyone is treated with dignity and respect. We recognise that an individual's needs may be influenced by culture and language, age, disability, religion, socio-economic status, caring responsibilities, gender identity, sexual orientation, and place of residence.

4th Principle - Safety

Our volunteers are able to carry out their duties in safe, secure and healthy environments that are free from harassment, intimidation, bullying, violence and discrimination. We care about everyone's safety.

5th Principle - Timely

We recognise that support for volunteers should be timely, responsive, appropriate and accessible. We provide practical support and resources so that our volunteers feel prepared, and do not feel overwhelmed or isolated.

6th Principle - Training

Our volunteers are provided with training and professional development opportunities that meet their needs. Volunteers understand their roles and gain the knowledge, skills and feedback needed to safely, and effectively, carry out their duties.

7th Principle - Clarity

Our volunteers have clear role descriptions and responsibilities. We understand that volunteers have expectations about being part of our organisation, and their role. We acknowledge that volunteering is not a one-way transaction, and that the act of volunteering needs to respond to a volunteer's motivations. Where possible, volunteer roles are designed and negotiated around the needs and interests of volunteers. In our organisation, both volunteers and paid staff are given the opportunity to contribute to the development and monitoring of volunteering policies and procedures, including the need for policies that resolve any issues or conflicts that may arise.

8th Principle - Reasonable

We recognise that volunteers should not be paid for their time, however, reasonable out-of-pocket expenses should be reimbursed; no one should be prevented from volunteering due to their income or the cost of volunteering.

9th Principle - Leadership

We recognise the important leadership roles that our volunteer managers and coordinators have, and we are committed to best practice in volunteer management, providing the resources and tools required.

10th Principle - Recognition

Our volunteers are recognised, celebrated, and valued for the contributions they make in our organisation and in the community.

How to use the NSW Volunteer Charter

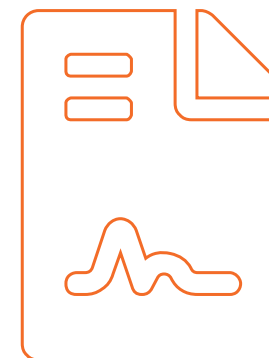
The NSW Volunteer Charter is underpinned by a set of values. It recognises that:

- volunteers are assets, not a commodity
- it is important to build on a volunteer's skills and experiences
- reciprocity, mutual respect, and trust are keys to success
- volunteers build and support strong social capital and community resilience.

The Charter has been developed so that it is flexible and can adapt to reflect the circumstances of different volunteer involving organisations. It can be implemented across different sized organisations with varying levels of resources; and it is relevant for use in both rural, regional, and metro settings.

The NSW Volunteer Charter can be used as a checklist, a support tool, when:

- reflecting on how your organisation operates and what you may wish to improve
- co-designing volunteer roles, programs or services, including online volunteering opportunities
- making decisions about how volunteer-run services, programs and activities will be delivered
- making decisions about how resources are allocated to volunteering activities
- conducting negotiations or establishing volunteer agreements
- considering how the act of volunteering is meeting the motivations and needs of volunteers, and giving back to them
- considering how you can recognise the contributions of your volunteers
- considering how to ensure your volunteers have a voice in the day-to-day life of your organisation.



What do the Charter's principles look like in practice?

Promoting positive relationships

(applicable to Principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 6, 7 and 9)

Good communication, and positive relationships are keys to success.

Volunteers often volunteer alongside paid staff. Most of the time this works well, and staff value the extra support volunteers bring. Ensuring staff support volunteers and make them feel welcome is important to ensuring volunteers have a positive experience.

Also consider:

- Planning for new roles – involving volunteers, and staff, in the development of new volunteer roles, so that they understand why the role was created and what it aims to achieve.
- Reflecting on current or past activities – how are you ensuring everyone has clear expectations, is supported, and engaged.
- Developing relationships between volunteers and paid staff - volunteers should feel confident that staff value their involvement, and they are welcome and recognised for their role in achieving the organisation's aims. Paid staff need to feel confident that all volunteers can do their role well and that they are not a threat to employment or conditions of service. Volunteers, and staff, might also want to know how you'll deal with any problems if they come up. Providing regular opportunities for volunteers, and staff, to meet to discuss and reflect on activities, celebrate successes, and integrate lessons learnt will help develop confidence.
- Developing a simple Code of Conduct between volunteers and staff - it is important to think about dignity and respect for everyone involved in your organisation. Sometimes this can be as basic as acknowledging and thanking volunteers and staff for their contributions. Some organisations have a Respect Policy that outlines the behaviour expected of both staff and volunteers when working together.

Provide practical support

(applicable to Principles 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)

It is important to link volunteers to the right information at the right time. It's also important that volunteers don't feel isolated or overwhelmed. Consider some or all of the following:

- Include information about internal and external support services in your induction materials. Highlight useful information on your website / intranet, newsletters or via posters on notice boards.
- Provide practical advice and support around health and wellbeing, mental health and youth support services.
- Ensure that volunteers are aware that they are included in the organisation's health and safety procedures, and that the organisation recognises its duty of care towards volunteers.
- Ensure your support sessions for volunteers are accessible and timely. Think about formal and informal volunteer meetings. This could be topic based, idea sharing or general reflection and supervision discussions around how people are coping.
- Speak to your volunteers, get to know them, don't forget to ask 'Are you ok?'; 'How are you managing?' or 'Did you know...?'
- Provide a space to chat and unwind, this can help build important social connections and support positive mental health.
- Ensure volunteer involvement is regularly reviewed in line with the organisation's evaluation and quality management frameworks. Ensure that policies and procedures are implemented to effectively guide all aspects of volunteer involvement.
- Developing your connections to trusted organisations offering guidance and support (at State and local levels). This will allow you to incorporate their information more quickly into your materials, and be updated as advice or guidance changes.

Review your volunteer recruitment and retention approach

(applicable to Principles 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 9)

Volunteering is not a one-way transaction. Volunteering should benefit the volunteer, the organisation, and the community.

Volunteer recruitment and retention activities should be planned, consistent and meet the needs of both the organisation and volunteers.

Consider the following:

- How are you ensuring your volunteer recruitment processes are free from discrimination or bias?
 - How are you ensuring that a diverse range of volunteers are involved in your organisation? Do your volunteers reflect the diversity of your community?
 - How are you promoting your available volunteering roles? Can you do things differently to reach the audience you would like to attract?
 - Why are you involving volunteers and how does the volunteer role fit within your group or organisation?
 - Have you identified what volunteer roles can be modified to ensure they are flexible, affordable, accessible and inclusive?
 - Have you considered how your volunteer roles are distinct from paid roles in your organisation?
 - Do your volunteers know who their supervisor is? Are they provided with appropriate levels of supervision?
 - Are your volunteers aware how to raise a concern or grievance and how it will be handled? Do you have a clear grievance policy or procedure in place?
 - What can you do to improve your recruitment and retention practice, as part of this how are you reducing barriers to participation?
 - Are you self-reflecting to ensure you understand and are aware of any stereotypes and assumptions? How can you respond to them?
 - How can you ensure and create safe spaces for diverse community members who wish to volunteer?
- How are you utilising the skills and experience that volunteers bring to your organisation? Are their skills and experiences understood? Are the skills and experiences of volunteers being effectively utilised, and do they feel valued?
 - How are you empowering your volunteer managers, coordinators, and leaders to deliver best practice recruitment and retention activities? Are they empowered to make volunteering more inclusive?
 - Have you identified the resources you will need to support all your volunteers, including finance, materials, equipment, management and staff time?
 - Are you providing volunteers with briefing packs, orientation / induction, and training? Have you indicated what you'll provide, for example, all necessary training, uniform, personal protective equipment, disclosure checks etc?
 - Are you explaining how volunteers can claim expenses? Have you explained what will and won't be reimbursed as an 'out-of-pocket' expense, and what is reasonable?
 - Have you considered options for flexibility, such as time commitment (hours and days), taking breaks, volunteering from home?
 - Do you describe the benefits and impact of the volunteering role? Volunteers have a desire to make a difference, are you communicating the difference the role makes?
 - Are you ensuring volunteers are provided with defined roles and clear role descriptions, and are clear about the policies and procedures that relate to their roles and activities?
 - Does your organisation respect volunteers who may wish to stop, or take time out for any reason? How are you supporting them? Are you keeping in touch with them?
 - When did you last update your volunteer role descriptions? Do they need to be updated to reflect the needs of volunteers or our organisation? How are you involving both volunteers, and staff, to ensure the best fit to meet everyone's needs?
 - What learning and development opportunities are you providing your volunteers? Do they have opportunities to grow and develop in your organisation? Are they able to try new things that align with their passions and interest, their motivations?

- Do you provide your volunteers with opportunities to have fun, and connect socially? Volunteers are part of the team, and opportunities to have fun, socially connect and build relationships makes for a happier volunteering experience.
- Remember to self-reflect, are you ensuring that you differentiate between paid and unpaid roles? How are you ensuring you are not placing volunteers in roles that were previously held by paid staff, are also held by paid staff, or have been or should be identified as a paid role? This can be done by ensuring that volunteer roles are defined, documented, and clearly communicated.
- How are you ensuring your volunteers are not getting 'burnt out' or are fatigued? Can you change what you are doing, how often you are doing it, when it is being done? Do you need more volunteers to share the load? Can volunteers 'role share'?

Remember –every volunteer will have different motivations and may have more than one. Their motivations may change over time. Consider how you can increase your understanding of why people want to volunteer with your organisation in the first place, and how you can retain them. As part of this, understand the barriers to participation as well, these can also change over time for individuals and the community. You may need to think outside of your normal 'business as usual' practices, it is ok to try new things and be creative, you may find fantastic volunteers in your community because of it.



Reimbursements and expenses

(applicable to Principles 1, 2 and 8)

While volunteers are not paid, volunteering is not free. Volunteering has a cost.

Volunteers should be reimbursed for reasonable 'out-of-pocket' expenses because no one should be prevented from participating as a volunteer due to cost or their socio-economic status.

We recognise that some organisations, may have legitimate reasons for only reimbursing certain expenses or none. For example, small volunteer-run organisations may operate with very limited financial resources, and likely recruit volunteers primarily from their members or local community. There are also certain roles where expenses are inappropriate due to the more informal nature of the role. We also recognise the challenges many organisations face in accessing financial resources for their volunteering programs.

That said, we do encourage volunteer involving organisations to reimburse volunteers for reasonable 'out-of-pocket' expenses in consultation with your volunteers. We encourage fair, equitable and transparent processes. You should never assume that everyone's personal circumstances are the same. No one should be embarrassed by their personal circumstances, feel pressured to carry a cost that places them in financial stress, feel left out or stop volunteering because of the cost. You may wish to consider different ways your volunteers can claim volunteering related expenses.

You may wish to consider:

- Paying expenses in advance.
- Paying a 'fair' rate for those volunteers using their vehicles.
- Including volunteer expenses within future funding applications.

If you do not reimburse expenses for a legitimate reason, this does not necessarily mean you are undermining the principles of the Charter. However, we would invite you to consider if reimbursing expenses might make your volunteering opportunities more inclusive and help you attract or retain volunteers.

Invest in your volunteering program

(applicable to Principles 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9 and 10)

It is always good to invest in your volunteers and your volunteer program. You can do this in different ways. Investing in your volunteers helps them to feel valued, happier and healthier, and more productive. Research shows that for every dollar invested in volunteering, much more is returned.

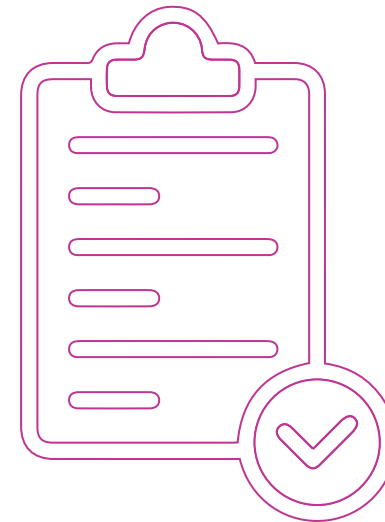
It's especially important to create opportunities to learn, reflect and celebrate. You can invest in your volunteers and programs by investing time, materials, equipment, software, training, technology and funds.

When investing in your volunteers and volunteering programs, this is the right time to ensure you have good policies and procedures in place and that your volunteering program is resourced effectively.

Consider how you can do some or all of the following:

- Volunteer involvement is planned and designed to contribute directly to the organisation purpose, goals, and objectives. Does their involvement have the resources needed?
- Are you giving yourself and your volunteers opportunities to reflect, identify and act on lessons learnt? Reflect on where your activities or volunteering program is strong, how can you make it stronger? How can you take a 'strength-based' approach to your volunteering program?
- Consider conducting periodic evaluations of your volunteer program to ensure current practices are meeting the needs of the volunteer and the organisation. Is your program meeting the expectations of industry good practice? Does your program have performance indicators? Do you share the results? Ensure your evaluations allow for the development of new ways of working and provides insight into the organisational support structure for both volunteers and paid staff.
- Build capacity by including the volunteers into key decision-making structures. Build the voice of your volunteers by developing their communication skills. You may like to consider providing training or guides for individuals and the organisation.

- How are you marketing your volunteer experience? Do you have a communications or marketing plan? If so, are you implementing it and is it achieving the results you need? Consider if your volunteer experience is attractive to potential volunteers? You only have one chance to make a good first impression – how are you making it count?
- Create a positive view of your volunteering program across your organisation, sector, and in the eyes of funders. Consider how you are sharing your stories, and the impact being generated as a result of your volunteers.
- Enhance volunteering effectiveness and efficiency through developing training pathways. You may wish to connect with registered training organisations, such as The Centre for Volunteering to invest in your volunteer managers, coordinators or leaders. Consider free training options, or 'on-the-job' learning opportunities.
- Establish a common understanding and practice of inclusive volunteering through awareness campaigns.



Recognition

(applicable to Principle 10)

Volunteer recognition is critical to the success of volunteer programs. Recognising the contributions of volunteers is a good way to say thank you, it also supports ongoing participation, and inspires the participation of others. No one likes to feel unappreciated for their efforts or taken advantage of, or unrecognised for a 'job well done'.

Organisations are encouraged to regularly acknowledge the contributions of volunteers. This recognition needs to be genuine. Sharing stories of impact and success are a great way to celebrate the efforts of your volunteers.

Consider how you can communicate the positive impact generated within your organisation, in your industry, in your community, with your stakeholders.

You may also like to consider some or all of the following. When doing this, make sure you consult with your volunteers on how they would like to be recognised for their volunteering efforts, and provide a variety of options that are appropriate to the volunteer, and their role.

Consider the following:

- Nominating your volunteers for recognition certificates or an award. For example, The Centre for Volunteering implements the NSW Volunteer of the Year Awards each year, and they are a great way to recognise the contributions of volunteers.
- Holding celebration events or social gatherings at special times of the year, such as during National Volunteer Week each May.
- Providing small tokens of appreciation and recognition to your volunteers. This might be vouchers or discounts or other tokens of appreciation that are relevant and meaningful to your volunteers.
- Shout outs in internal communication channels such as internal newsletters or on notice boards.
- Feedback on a volunteer's performance that recognises the positive, not just the miss-steps or negatives.
- Sharing the findings of program evaluations, or data relating to performance measures for programs. Communicate how volunteers have made a difference.
- And don't forget, sometimes a simple and heart felt 'thank you' is a great recognition of someone's effort.

Volunteer rights and responsibilities

The NSW Volunteer Charter does not replace the moral and legal obligations organisations have towards volunteers.

Remember:

- Volunteering should be accessible and inclusive, and every effort should be made by organisations to understand volunteers' needs and try to offer an appropriate opportunity.
- Recruitment procedures should be fair, efficient, consistent, and free from discrimination.
- Volunteers should not be put under any pressure to do work that is unsafe, is unethical, is against their principles, or for which they are not adequately trained.
- Volunteers should be covered by appropriate insurance.
- Volunteering should not be exploitative, and volunteers should not be used to replace paid staff.

The NSW Volunteer Charter maintains that volunteers also have responsibilities. Volunteers need to remember to:

- Speak up if they have an idea, or a concern.
- Treat information obtained whilst volunteering in a respectful, confidential manner.
- Be reliable, carrying out their agreed role to the best of their ability.
- Be on time and to give proper notice of change of circumstances.
- Be respectful and treat everyone with dignity.
- Inform their supervisor of any incidents or potential dangers.
- Ask questions if they are unsure.
- Attend regular relevant training and support sessions.
- Support other volunteers and staff in their organisation.
- Keep activities safe and in-line with policies, procedures or legislation.
- Recognise that they may at times represent the organisation in a public setting in the community, or with customers or clients, and therefore they need to act in an appropriate manner at all times.

Endnotes

- 1 NSW Government, 2020, NSW Volunteering Strategy 2020-2030.
Available at www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/volunteering/resources-for-volunteering-nsw/nsw-volunteering-strategy-2020-2030
- 2 NSW Government, 2022, NSW Volunteering Taskforce Report.
Available at www.nsw.gov.au/community-services/volunteering/resources-for-volunteering-nsw/nsw-volunteering-taskforce-report
- 3 Volunteering Australia, Definition of Volunteering.
Available at www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/definition-of-volunteering/
- 4 Volunteering Australia, National Standards for Volunteer Involvement.
Available at www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material/

For more information about the NSW Volunteer Charter, please contact the Department of Communities and Justice via email at:

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