Western Australia Auditor General’s Report

Working Together: Management of Partnerships with Volunteers

Report 1 – February 2012
WORKING TOGETHER: MANAGEMENT OF PARTNERSHIPS WITH VOLUNTEERS

This report has been prepared for submission to Parliament under the provisions of section 25 of the Auditor General Act 2006.

Performance audits are an integral part of the overall audit program. They seek to provide Parliament with assessments of the effectiveness and efficiency of public sector programs and activities, and identify opportunities for improved performance.

The information provided through this approach will, I am sure, assist Parliament in better evaluating agency performance and enhance parliamentary decision-making to the benefit of all Western Australians.

COLIN MURPHY
AUDITOR GENERAL
22 February 2012
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Volunteers play a key role in our society. They willingly give their time, skills and experience back to the community. In 2011, Western Australians were estimated to volunteer around 288 million hours, and their contribution was valued at over $9 billion.

The State Government recognises the importance of volunteering, and has publicly committed to supporting volunteers in the public sector. It advocates a collaborative partnership between agencies, groups and individuals.

This audit focused on whether selected public sector agencies were involving and managing volunteers in line with state government best practice guidelines.

We found that while agencies were meeting some aspects of good practice in managing their volunteer programs, there is general room for improvement. Overall agencies need to plan their volunteer programs better, especially the level of resourcing needed to support and run the program. There also needs to be greater attention paid to ongoing management and monitoring of volunteer programs.

A clear message from this audit is that volunteer programs do not run themselves. It is not enough to set a volunteer program up and then give it minimal attention. If agencies do not develop a good partnership with their volunteers, they risk losing the partnership forever.

I would like to thank the agencies and especially the volunteers for their cooperation, time and contribution to this audit.
Executive Summary

Overview

Volunteering is a strong part of the Australian spirit and culture. A volunteer is a person who works and receives no pay, or only enough to reimburse them for reasonable expenses incurred in doing the volunteer work.

In 2011, Western Australians were estimated to volunteer around 288 million hours, valued at $9.4 billion. Volunteers contribute to the delivery of public services in diverse areas and in a wide variety of ways. For instance, assisting with search and rescues during natural disaster, providing respite to carers and provision of counselling.

The benefits of volunteering include meaningful social participation and inclusion, an increased sense of belonging, fostering of positive relationships, the forming of stronger local communities and cost effective service delivery.

The State Government has publicly committed to supporting volunteering in the public and community sectors. It advocates a collaborative partnership between agencies, groups and individuals. The Government, through the Department of Communities, has published guidelines to help public sector agencies apply best practice when involving and managing volunteers within their own programs.

This audit focused on whether agencies are managing their volunteers in line with State Government guidelines. The guidelines recommend good practice principles for public sector agencies and outline key legislation, policies and programs relevant to the management of their volunteer partnerships. We looked at programs where the agency directly manages volunteers’ day-to-day activities.

We examined six volunteer programs at four agencies – Department for Communities (Communities), Disability Services Commission (the Commission), Drug and Alcohol Office (DAO) and the WA Museum (Museum). We expected agencies to:

- plan the volunteer role and responsibilities for each volunteer program
- have supporting policies, procedures and guidelines
- engage, induct and train the volunteers
- supervise and manage volunteers
- assess and manage the program risks to volunteers, clients and the agency
- listen to volunteers and provide feedback on their activities
- periodically review the volunteer program to ensure it is implemented as planned and the intended outcomes achieved.
Conclusion

While some good practice was found in the programs we audited, overall agencies were not consistently meeting government’s good practice principles. As a result there is a risk that the important relationships between agencies, volunteers and the broader community, as well as the services delivered, could be compromised.

Key Findings

We found some examples of good practice....

- DAO and Communities supervise their volunteers, develop rosters, organise recognition events and ensure they are reimbursed for out-of-pocket expenses.
- Communities thoroughly screens its volunteers, undertakes regular police clearances, and asks them to sign and commit to confidentiality agreements.
- The Commission regularly reviews its policy and procedures to ensure they align with the evolving culture of caring for the disabled.

but we also found areas for improvement....

- No agency had fully planned their volunteer programs before implementation. No agency assessed the costs and benefits of the program including the level of resourcing required to run the program effectively. In some instances, inadequate planning resulted in volunteers feeling underutilised or not valued. Intended outcomes may also not be achieved.
- No agency had systematically assessed the risks from using volunteers and put strategies in place to manage them. Agencies should identify the risks of using volunteers and ensure they are managed.
- The policies and procedures of three agencies relating to the implementation and management of the volunteer programs are not comprehensive and there was a heavy reliance on past practice. Without the knowledge of experienced staff, inadequate policies and procedures has led to fragmented engagement and management of volunteers.
- Two of the four agencies had ad hoc processes to select, screen, orient and train volunteers. For example:
  - the Commission and the Museum did not require police clearances from volunteers. Good selection and screening helps ensure volunteers are suited to their role and is particularly important if it involves working with vulnerable people.
  - the Commission does not train the volunteers who work with people with a disability to care for and manage their special needs. Training helps volunteers understand their role and the challenges they may face.
• Two agencies did not provide consistent oversight and management of volunteers. Poor management has led to difficulty in retaining volunteers and intended outcomes not being achieved.

• Three agencies had not monitored or evaluated their volunteer programs. The fourth agency had evaluated one program but not implemented the recommendations. Regular reviews of volunteer partnerships ensure they remain effective and well run.

What Should Be Done?
Agencies should:
• plan for their volunteer partnerships by establishing:
  o volunteers’ roles, activities and responsibilities
  o the accountabilities volunteers must observe, including codes of conduct and ethics
  o contributions volunteers might make and the costs and benefits of engaging volunteers
  o the risks associated with the use of volunteers and the strategies needed to manage the risks
  o the resources required to supervise, coordinate and manage volunteers
  o regular policy reviews to ensure programs remain current.

• establish an effective volunteer partnership through:
  o policies and procedures to guide core activities
  o induction and orientation
  o consistent screening and selection processes
  o training
  o informing key stakeholders about the partnership.

• manage their volunteer partnership through:
  o effective supervision and coordination
  o fostering a good relationship between staff and volunteers
  o listening to volunteers’ feedback
  o reimbursing expenses in line with agency policy
  o recognition and celebration of volunteers’ contributions.

• routinely monitor, evaluate and report on the volunteer partnership to ensure it is operating well and is sustainable.
Agency Responses

Department for Communities
The Department for Communities welcomes the recommendations of the performance audit which will be examined as a priority and appropriate action undertaken. This will include incorporating policy and procedures for the management of volunteers into a Policy and Procedures Manual for the Women’s Information Service, and ensuring that all departmental volunteers have signed volunteering agreements.

Disability Services Commission
The Disability Services Commission accepts the findings of the audit which pertain to the Commission’s ‘Companions and Friends’ strategy. It is the view of the Commission, however, that this informal friendship building strategy falls outside the scope of volunteering as presented in the Guidelines for Successful Partnerships between Public Sector Agencies and Volunteers (2006). The Commission will be reviewing the strategy with the aim of finding a more appropriate mechanism for building informal friendships for people with an intellectual disability.

Drug and Alcohol Office
The Drug and Alcohol Office (DAO) has appreciated the opportunity to be included in the audit and supports the report’s findings and recommendations. DAO had developed, and is in the process of implementing, a plan to address issues identified during the audit. Immediate actions have included establishing volunteer agreements, confidentiality agreements, and police clearances for current volunteers.

WA Museum
The Western Australian Museum is revising all current policy, procedures, record keeping and documents in relation to volunteers. These will be developed to align with the best practice recommendations.

The Museum will also develop Volunteer Manuals which will include, where necessary, the recommendations from the recent audit. Whilst all endeavours will be made to implement the recommended changes within the organisation’s budget constraints, this will need to be done over a period of time.
Background

Volunteering is an essential aspect of an inclusive society. The individuals and groups engaged in volunteer partnerships with government agencies increase the capacity of many services and spread connectedness in communities.

The State Government has recognised this and for some 20 years has published a commitment and guidelines for public sector agencies to value, promote and support volunteer partnerships. These guidelines outline good practice principles and strategies for volunteer programs.

Volunteers are more likely to stay with a soundly established and well-run program which ensures the time and skills they contribute are used effectively. The guidelines recommend each agency develop a unique relationship with its volunteers, and structure policies, procedures and programs to achieve the best results.

The guidelines focus on planning and establishing the volunteer partnership; managing the partnership; monitoring, evaluating and reporting on the volunteer program; and understanding the legislative framework.

There is a variety of government-volunteer partnership models that have evolved over time. These include direct volunteering where the volunteer works to a staff member within the organisation, independent volunteer associations which contribute to an agency’s work or outcomes, and service agreements with non-government organisations that involve volunteers.

Due to the fluid and informal nature of volunteering it is not known exactly how many volunteers help deliver WA public sector services but one estimate puts the number at 130,0001.

The Department for Communities (Communities) fosters the development of volunteering in Western Australia through policy development and the provision of specialised programs. It fosters volunteering by:

- publishing and regularly updating the government’s commitment and guidelines to support and promote volunteering in the public sector
- funding Volunteering WA and volunteer resource centres
- conducting research
- advising the government and non-government sectors
- liaising with other government agencies on policy and program development
- providing grants and recognition for volunteers, such as Thank-a-Volunteer Day
- promoting volunteering through community events such as National Volunteer Week.

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1 Number of Western Australian public sector volunteers insured by RiskCover. Data supplied by RiskCover 26 July 2011.
Communities, in consultation with the community sector, developed and released *Vital Volunteering 2011-2016* in May 2011. *Vital Volunteering* commits that the Department for Communities will, as one of nine strategic directions, provide leadership to help State Government agencies use best practice processes to involve and manage volunteers within their own agencies.

In 2006, the supporting public sector guidelines were substantially reviewed and rewritten. Communities reviewed the guidelines again in late 2011, but did not make substantial changes. The guidelines are supported by a Public Sector Commissioner's Circular.

Communities does not monitor agency compliance with the commitment and guidelines. Individual agencies are responsible for their own volunteer programs.

Communities funds Volunteering WA and 16 other Volunteer Resource Centres in the not-for-profit sector to assist individuals who are, or who want to be, volunteers. Volunteering WA also assists organisations and agencies working with volunteers, including public sector agencies.

**What Did We Do?**

Our audit objective was to assess whether agencies are managing their volunteers in line with State Government guidelines.

We asked three key questions:

- Do agencies establish and manage their partnerships in line with good practice?
- Do agencies manage the risks associated with their volunteer partnerships?
- Do agencies review the effectiveness of their volunteer partnerships?

We assessed six direct volunteering programs in four agencies against the principles set out in the *Guidelines for Successful Partnerships between Public Sector Agencies and Volunteers* (2006) (the guidelines).

At each agency we:

- interviewed agency staff and volunteers
- examined agency documents
- tested more than 20 per cent of the program volunteer population to assess agency compliance with the guidelines and its own program policies and procedures.

The audit was conducted in accordance with Australian Auditing and Assurance Standards.

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Executive Summary

Table 1: Agencies and programs audited

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agency and Volunteer Program</th>
<th>Program Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Department for Communities (Communities)</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Women's Information Service (WIS)</td>
<td>24 volunteers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Home Visiting Program</td>
<td>61 volunteers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| **Disability Services Commission (the Commission)** | |
| Linking with the Community Program | 19 volunteers | A friend/companion volunteer provides friendship to people with a disability living in residential accommodation. They visit regularly and undertake community activities with residents for two or three hours. This improves a resident's quality of life through emotional support, and links them into the community. |

| **Drug and Alcohol Office (DAO)** | |
| Parent Drug Information Service (PDIS) | 28 volunteers | The *Parent Drug Information Service* is an information and support service for parents. Volunteers telephone parents who have contacted DAO for help with their children's drug problems. Volunteers also support parents at the Adult Drug and Children's Courts, community awareness events, peer support groups and the Drug and Alcohol Youth Service (DAYS). |

| **WA Museum (Museum)** | |
| Front of House Volunteers | 110 dedicated regular volunteers | The WA Museum has two types of volunteers across its regional and metropolitan sites: |
| Back of House Volunteers | 72 volunteers assisted with the AC/DC exhibition | *Front of House* volunteers assist with hosting exhibitions. |
| Back of House Volunteers | 110 dedicated regular volunteers | *Back of House* volunteers work behind the scenes on projects such as cataloguing artifacts. |

Table 1: Agencies and programs audited
What Did We Find

Agencies did not plan their volunteer programs well

No agency planned their volunteer program well before implementation. Three agencies defined volunteer roles and responsibilities but none assessed the costs and benefits of the program, the risk of using volunteers or how the volunteer program would be monitored and reviewed.

If agencies do not plan for volunteers they increase the risk that:

- volunteers and key stakeholders will not know the volunteers’ role
- volunteer contributions will not be fully utilised
- the cost of engaging volunteers is unknown and not managed
- the program may not achieve its intended goals.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planning the Volunteer Partnership</th>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Commission</th>
<th>DAO</th>
<th>Museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Good practice requires agencies establish and document:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>volunteers' roles, activities and responsibilities</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the behavioural accountabilities volunteers must observe, including codes of conduct and ethics</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>contributions volunteers might make and the costs and benefits of engaging volunteers</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the risks associated with using volunteers</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>resources required to supervise, coordinate and manage volunteers</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>regular policy reviews to ensure programs remain current</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

✓ Practice aligns with guidelines   ✗ Does not align with guidelines

Table 2: Summary of agency performance in planning their volunteer program(s)
Roles, responsibilities and accountabilities….  
Three agencies have clear descriptions of their volunteers’ roles and responsibilities. Clear and well communicated role descriptions are key to managing volunteer programs effectively. The guidelines do not suggest agencies set performance expectations for volunteers.

However, only Communities’ Home Visiting program made volunteers clearly aware of their behavioural accountabilities, and required volunteers read and sign an agreement committing to them. The program has confidentiality agreements, codes of conduct, ethical guidelines, duty of care and volunteer agreement forms.

Communities’ Home Visiting program and Women’s Information Service volunteers sign confidentiality agreements, and are informed of confidentially requirements during training.

DAO and the Commission do not ensure volunteers sign documents committing to volunteer-specific codes of behaviour and ethics. The Museum did not have clear role descriptions but advised that this is being addressed. It was also not keeping copies of signed commitments.

Assessing the cost of engaging volunteers…
No agency in implementing its volunteer program (or since) had assessed the contributions the volunteers might make or the cost of engaging and managing them. However, all agencies, except the Commission, budget for the volunteers. The lack of such assessment can make it difficult to judge the ongoing value of a volunteer program.

Agency assessment of risks….  
No agency had systematically assessed the risks of using volunteers, but they had identified a number of risks that volunteers themselves may face. Risks to the agency can include financial liability to clients for actions by volunteers, poor quality of service and damage to reputation while risks to volunteers include to their health and safety.

However, DAO and Communities do advise volunteers in their training and information manuals of some risks volunteers may face and strategies to deal with them. While the Commission identifies risks in its policies and procedures it does not communicate these to volunteers.

There are many and varied risks associated with the programs we reviewed. It is important for agencies to have strategies in place to manage these risks. For example:

• The Commission’s volunteers deal with the risk of taking people with disabilities out of purpose built residential accommodation to involve them in community activities in a dynamic environment.

• Communities’ volunteers visit people in their homes to assist them to develop parenting skills. These people can be vulnerable or living in a dysfunctional environment.

• PDIS and WIS volunteers need to cope with the emotional stress of assisting people who have experienced pain and suffering.
One good risk management strategy we noted was the Commission’s *Linking with the Community* application package. The package informs volunteers of their duty of care to the resident, sets out the commitments required of the volunteer and clarifies any special needs the resident has. A written specification, setting out suitable activities, should also be completed. Volunteers are also required to give their contact details, and state their vehicle is roadworthy. However, of the 19 current program volunteers, only seven have partially completed the forms.

All agencies have insurance protection for their volunteers, covering risks such as liabilities caused by them, personal accident and damage or loss to personal assets whilst undertaking volunteer work. However, none of the agencies had informed their volunteers of this cover.

We found agencies understand the legislation relevant to their volunteer activities, such as the *Occupational Health, Safety and Welfare Act 1984* and the *Equal Opportunity Act 1984*. However, only Communities informs volunteers of their rights and responsibilities under this legislation in their training material.

**There were ad hoc processes for selection, screening, orientation and training of volunteers**

Only one of the four agencies (Communities) satisfactorily met the majority of the criteria considered necessary to effectively select, orient, train and guide volunteers. Ensuring that suitable people are engaged and trained to deliver quality service is critical to the success of volunteer programs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Establishing the volunteer partnership</th>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Commission</th>
<th>DAO</th>
<th>Museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>consistent screening and selection processes</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>routine induction and orientation</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>training</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>up-to-date policies and procedures to guide the activities that the volunteers will undertake</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>a communication strategy to inform key stakeholders about the partnership</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
<td>×</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

✔ Practice aligns with guidelines  ❌ Does not align with guidelines

**Table 3: Summary of agency performance in establishing their volunteer program(s)**
Screening and selection....

Good screening and selection of volunteers is important to ensuring that they are engaged in roles that fit their temperament and skills. Failure to use suitable people can have serious consequences for the agency, clients and the volunteers themselves.

Of the four agencies, only Communities thoroughly screens its volunteers and requires police clearances. It requires an updated police clearance for each volunteer every three years. Good screening matches applicants' skills and attributes to the role. It also helps ensure unsuitable people are not engaged, particularly if working with vulnerable people.

The Commission does not routinely screen their volunteers. Although an application package has been developed for Linking with the Community volunteers to complete, only eight of the 19 friends/companions had completed the application form. Of these, three had not supplied a surname. Without this information the Commission cannot adequately screen its volunteers to ensure they are suited to working with vulnerable people. Although the Commission's policy states a national police clearance is only valid for five years, three volunteer's police checks were over five years old, while nine had not been done.

DAO has reasonable processes but does not require volunteers to sign confidentiality and volunteer agreements. The Museum does not currently document volunteer screening and selection or require police clearances. As no records are kept, Audit could not determine how well volunteers are recruited, screened or trained.

Induction, orientation and training....

Only Communities and DAO had comprehensive induction, orientation, and training material and kept records of attendance for each volunteer. During interviews, these agencies' volunteers considered this had prepared them for their role and they understood what was expected of them.

The Commission has not developed a formal induction program. Volunteers are not routinely and consistently trained to care for, and manage the risks associated with, the special needs of residents they take on community outings.

Up-to-date policies and procedures....

Only the Commission had comprehensive, up-to-date policy and procedure documents to guide service delivery and the engagement and management of Linking with the Community volunteers. These documents are updated regularly. Incomplete or out-dated policy and procedure documents can result in inconsistent service delivery and has led to fragmented engagement and management of volunteers. Consistent service delivery then relies on the knowledge of experienced staff.

Both Communities and DAO rely on experienced staff to consistently engage and manage their volunteers in the delivery of the program. Communities' policy and procedures require updating to bring them in line with their current practice.
DAO’s policy and procedures for the volunteer program we looked at are over 10 years old and not comprehensive. For example, initial screening of applicants is good but there is no policy on the length of time a police clearance is valid. Some volunteers have national police clearances over five years old. The Museum’s Guidelines for use of volunteer work within the Museum were endorsed in 1998 and require updating. However, the Museum advised it is re-establishing its volunteer program to bring it in line with good practice. As part of this, it is developing new guidelines, strategies and formal induction and training programs.

Inconsistent oversight and management of volunteers

Overall, DAO and Communities manage their volunteer programs well while the Commission is poor. The Museum lacks records to evidence how it manages its volunteers. Poor or inconsistent management of volunteers can affect program delivery and cause retention problems as the volunteers will perceive that their contribution is not valued.

Effective management of volunteers involves good supervision, rosters that suit volunteer availability and provide certainty of work, monitoring of volunteers’ activities, regular feedback, accurate and timely reimbursement of expenses they incur and recognition of their efforts.

“Once a volunteer is burned they never come back”

Volunteer Coordinator

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Managing the volunteer partnership</th>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Commission</th>
<th>DAO</th>
<th>Museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>supervises, coordinates and manages its volunteers</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>fosters a good relationship between staff and volunteers</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>considers volunteer’s feedback and motivations with a view to further develop the partnership</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reimburses volunteer’s expenses</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>recognises and celebrates volunteers’ contributions</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

✔ Practice aligns with guidelines ✗ Does not align with guidelines

Table 4: Summary of agency performance in managing their volunteer program(s)
Supervision and coordination …

We found Communities and DAO coordinate and supervise their volunteers well. All agencies, except the Commission, have appointed a coordinator to supervise and coordinate their volunteers – an approach that is recommended by the government’s guidelines. The Commission advised it wants all staff to take responsibility for the volunteer program, not one dedicated officer.

The Commission did not have good oversight of their volunteers. They advised that they removed approximately 50 names from their volunteer database in June 2011 due to inaccurate information being recorded or the volunteer no longer being required. This left 19 names on the database. Audit found the database also lacked essential details about the volunteers. In some cases, the only detail the Commission had was the volunteer’s first name.

Communities and DAO develop rosters to ensure sufficient volunteers are scheduled to deliver the service. In doing this they consult volunteers about their availability and gain their commitment to the roster. WIS volunteers are supervised on-site, while PDIS and Home Visiting volunteers have scheduled meetings with program supervisors.

The Museum advised they develop rosters for exhibitions but again do not keep records of this. Their back of house volunteers have an agreed day when they come in. All volunteers are supervised on-site.

Some of the Commission’s volunteers have regular scheduled days that they meet with their companion, others may only meet once or twice a year. However, there is little interaction or coordination between the volunteers and the staff responsible for the companion.

Fostering a good relationship with volunteers…

The guidelines recommend agencies foster a good relationship between staff and volunteers by encouraging a positive and productive working environment where employees understand the volunteers’ roles and are not concerned volunteers might displace them.

No agency we audited had a formal communication strategy for their volunteer partnership, including informing staff about volunteers’ roles. However, all four agencies have information about the programs on their websites.

Agencies should also ensure volunteer and staff roles are clear and distinct. Volunteering should never be used as a precondition for paid employment. However, we acknowledge volunteering is an avenue to develop work-ready skills.

We found one instance where an agency employed a volunteer in a temporary paid position for approximately 12 months, though with duties that were distinctly different to their volunteer role. Such circumstances need to be carefully managed to ensure the roles of the volunteer and paid staff are not confused and expectations raised of a volunteer position leading to paid employment. We did not find similar examples in other agencies, although the Museum advised they had previously closed a volunteer program as the lack of clarity of the volunteers’ role had caused difficulties.
Reimbursing expenses.....

The guidelines recommend that, where agencies do not provide all equipment and resources volunteers need to do their role effectively, they reimburse volunteers' out-of-pocket expenses. This includes expenses volunteers may incur such as travel and parking costs, telephone calls, motor vehicle mileage, and other incidental costs.

While DAO and Communities consistently apply their reimbursement policies across all volunteers, the Commission does not. The Commission has established a schedule of rates for reimbursing costs incurred by volunteers while ‘taking-out’ their companions. The schedule authorises reimbursement of costs such as fuel, movie tickets and coffee. However, the schedule is not consistently followed with some volunteers underpaid and others overpaid.

The Museum advised it does not have the budget to reimburse volunteers. T-shirts are provided to exhibition volunteers but the Museum is unable to reimburse volunteers for other costs such as travel and parking costs.

Accepting volunteer’s feedback and recognising their contributions....

Only Communities has regular supervisory group meetings with the clear aim of receiving feedback from volunteers about their experiences. DAO has six weekly supervisory meetings with volunteers. However, the feedback to individual volunteers varies and is not documented. The Museum and the Commission advise volunteer feedback occurs as required.

“...they pop in from time to time. I don’t really know who they are, but it’s nice they’ve come to see us.”

volunteer on recognition by senior agency staff

DAO and Communities regularly recognise volunteers’ contribution. DAO issues certificates and awards pins for longer-term service. Communities hold regular events such as morning tea with the Director General, weekend getaways, and training events. The Museum is developing a range of strategies to recognise volunteers. The Museum, DAO and Communities also acknowledge the volunteers’ contribution in their annual report. The Commission did not have any formal strategies.

Three agencies did not review their volunteer programs

It is important that agencies regularly review their volunteer partnership to ensure it remains effective and well run. This requires routine monitoring and collection of operational data as well as more formal evaluation from time to time. Evaluation should consider the volunteers’ contribution to the agency’s delivery of services, outputs and outcomes.
### Reviewing the volunteer partnership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Good practice includes:</th>
<th>Communities</th>
<th>Commission</th>
<th>DAO</th>
<th>Museum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>monitoring the partnership's operations such as rosters, expenses, training, and volunteer activities and time contributed</td>
<td>✔️</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>evaluating the effectiveness of the partnership and whether it was implemented as intended and is sustainable</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

✔️ Practice aligns with guidelines  ✗ Does not align with guidelines

### Table 5: Summary of agency performance in reviewing their volunteer program(s)

**Periodic evaluations …**

Of the four agencies, only Communities had reviewed one of the two volunteer programs we looked at, having done so in 2008. However, it was unable to show that it implemented recommendations from the evaluation of the WIS program. The other three agencies advised that they are planning to evaluate their volunteer programs.

**Routine monitoring and reporting…**

Communities also routinely collects and reports data on its WIS program, such as number of calls and types of inquiry and uses the data to inform policy development. This information, together with data on volunteer activities, enables Communities to monitor the program and the types of services delivered. In contrast to the WIS program, Communities does not use information collected by its regional staff on its Home Visiting program to monitor status and activities. DAO, the Museum and the Commission do not routinely monitor their volunteer programs.

As part of our assessment, we sought information about complaints made about or by volunteers as this can indicate problems that agencies need to manage. No complaint has been made about, or by, volunteers of the four agencies.
We spoke with volunteers of all six programs that we audited. While they came from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences all share a common interest in wanting to help. Some hope to alleviate a particular problem relevant to their own life experience. Others simply want to give back to the community.

Volunteers generally spoke well of the agency they are involved with. Where they did offer suggestions for improvement it was instigated by their passion for the program they are involved with and their concern it could be more helpful, effective, or useful.

“It was a good opportunity to contribute.”

“It’s a healing process. My daughter died. In the years of our daughter’s drug use there was almost no help available for families.”

“Better than I expected it to be. I gained a lot. I learned a lot and made some good friends.”

“I learn so much as a volunteer.”

“I wanted to give back to the community.”

“I had some heart wrenching moments with my son and I understand.”

“I thought I had heard it all. You just can’t believe these things are happening. It’s really sad. These are families.”