

GUIDE TO MANAGING HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Involving People

Is the organisation ready for additional volunteers?

Historical societies in Victoria are normally volunteer run organisations and most of the programs involve volunteers who are usually members of the organisation.

As was shown in the earlier section on Volunteers in the Guide, organisations need to have volunteer programs in place to ensure that programs run smoothly, that the volunteers know what they are doing and that the volunteers feel valued and that they are making a contribution to the organisation.

From time to time opportunities arise for organisations to have the services of volunteers who are not members of the organisation. During the past few years, organisations in Victoria have had participants from Work-for-the-Dole projects, Conservation Volunteers, Heritagecare and other projects helping them with on short term projects. Reports on some of these projects have appeared in issues of *History Victoria e-news*:

(No 6, July 2007) *Work for the dole program*

<http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/rhsvstate/web/issue6d.html>

Dandenong Historical Society

(No 7, January 2008) *Heritagecare – Preservation of a newspaper collection*

<http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/rhsvstate/web/issue7c.html>

Castlemaine Historical Society

(No 8, May 2008) *School Photos Project – Knox Historical Society*

<http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/rhsvstate/web/issue8b.html>

Knox Historical Society

(No 11, July 2009) *Heritagecare for cataloguing*

<http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/rhsvstate/web/issue11a.html>

Murchison & District HS

(No 13 July 2010) *Hamer Awards 2009*

<http://mc2.vicnet.net.au/home/rhsvstate/web/issue13a.html>

Brighton Historical Society

For projects involving groups of volunteers assisting on short term projects to be successful:

- Volunteers should not be accepted unless there is a project organised for their involvement
- The volunteers have to want to be involved in the project
- The volunteers have to have some skills appropriate for the project and/or be prepared to learn new or additional skills
- Supervision of the project is essential usually requiring additional time on the part of the supervisor to be set aside during the duration of the project to ensure the success of the project

- It is probably best that the project involving the short-term volunteers be a succinct project that can be seen to have a beginning and an end, not open ended - this could include cataloguing a particular part of a collection or digitising a particular set of photographs - something that the volunteers can say, I did this or helped to do this
- Equipment required by the volunteers for the project needs to be available for use on the days when the volunteers are at the organisation
- The volunteers need to be able to relate to other volunteers at the society
- Conditions for having volunteers need to be determined before the organisation agrees to accepting volunteers
- The placing of volunteers needs to be advantageous to the organisation accepting them
- The placing of volunteers needs to be advantageous to the volunteer allowing them to learn new skills or develop existing ones

Projects using groups of volunteers from other organisations for short term projects can be beneficial to the organisation as can be seen from the examples provided in the articles mentioned earlier.

Taking on volunteers for short term projects will only work, however, if the right volunteers for the job are selected to undertake a particular well planned / managed project that does not interfere with the running of other projects or work that other volunteers are already doing. For example having additional volunteers coming in to scan or catalogue at the same time that regular volunteers are normally using the equipment to do the same thing is not a good use of resources and is likely to annoy / deter regular volunteers.

Supervision is a key to a successful project. The volunteers will normally work at the organisation for one or two days a week. A supervisor must be there at all times.

Organisations also need to ensure that the new volunteers are provided with adequate and clear guidelines for the tasks.

The *Is your organisation ready for volunteers?* – checklist in the *Procedures* section of the Guide under *Volunteer Forms* provides a series of questions that should be answered before organisations embark on programs involving adding additional volunteers to the organisation for a short term project.

Working with volunteers from other organisations can provide successful outcomes for the organisations and the volunteers. In some cases project volunteers stay on as regular volunteers in the organisation.