

Media Release: Thursday 30 July, 2015

New Definition of Volunteering in Australia

The definition of volunteering has been expanded for the first time in 20 years to recognise the new ways Australians give their time.

Definition of Volunteering 2015:

Volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain

Volunteering Australia Chief Executive Officer Brett Williamson said the new definition followed an extensive two year, nationwide consultation to understand what activities we considered as volunteering today.

“A lot has changed in 20 years, including how people volunteer,” Mr Williamson said.

“The new definition captures newer forms of volunteering such as online volunteering, spontaneous volunteering, corporate volunteering and social entrepreneurship.”

Mr Williamson said the previous definition developed in 1996 was out-dated because it only recognised formal volunteering undertaken for not-for-profit organisations.

The old definition did not capture virtual volunteering, volunteering for private organisations nor did it include informal volunteering in the community.

“The new definition is broader, more inclusive and – for the first time – it recognises informal volunteering,” he said.

Mr Williamson said changes in public policy such as the Work for the Dole program had also created grey areas around volunteering which needed to be clear.

The new definition clarifies what civic participation activities are not considered volunteering. Direct family responsibilities, compulsory internships or work experience, participation in Work for the Dole programs, court orders such as community service and compulsory volunteering as part of study are all excluded from the new Australian definition of volunteering.

“The new definition of volunteering in Australia makes clear that volunteering is time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain,” Mr Williamson said.

“Volunteers make a huge contribution so we need to make sure it’s measured accurately and valued. The new definition will ensure a common understanding of what volunteering is, ultimately supporting the integrity of the work they do.”

“New ABS data shows volunteering in Australia is declining so we need to pause and ask ourselves, what does our nation call volunteering today and are we measuring the right things?”

The supporting explanatory notes for the definition will be re-assessed in six months and annually thereafter. Feedback can be directed to Volunteering Australia at admin@volunteeringaustralia.org

Information on the new definition of volunteering including explanatory notes and frequently asked questions is available at www.volunteeringaustralia.org

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