



# Leading and Managing in Tasmania's Volunteer Sector

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in partnership with Volunteering Tasmania.

## Who we are

As the peak body for volunteering in Tasmania, **Volunteering Tasmania** aims to better support the volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations, and the Tasmanian Government as we work together to ensure a vibrant and active volunteer sector for all of us.

Through our 220 members we represent over 50,000 Tasmanians who give their time to volunteering.

## Authorship

UNIVERSITY of  
**TASMANIA** 

This report has been produced by Dr Toby Newstead, Dr Gemma Lewis, and the Volunteer Leadership Research Group at UTAS, in partnership with Volunteering Tasmania.

### *vision*

**The contribution of volunteering is understood, respected and valued as a powerful driver of community prosperity and inclusion in Tasmania.**

### *purpose*

**We connect and build an inclusive community to make a difference through the impact of volunteering.**

# Executive Summary



Tasmania needs volunteers, and volunteers need good leadership **and** management.

Across Tasmania, volunteers provide a range of services that protect, support, and enhance the wellbeing and development of individuals, enterprises, places, and communities. We are beginning to understand the magnitude of the value volunteers contribute to Tasmania. However, we know relatively little about how best to lead and manage volunteers.

The substantive functions of leading and managing paid and volunteer workers are largely the same. But, volunteer coordinators do not have the conventional lever of remuneration to incentivise their workforce. This simple but profound distinction means that leadership and management within the volunteer sector must be especially nuanced to ensure volunteer attraction and retention, even without the incentive of pay. In short, volunteer coordinators need to be really good leaders and managers.

This report on leading and managing in Tasmania's volunteer sector is based on interviews and focus groups conducted with over 30 volunteer coordinators that collectively manage more than 5,000 volunteers (**See Appendix A for study methodology**).

# Background

Thanks to the comprehensive State of Volunteering Reports (2014, 2019), we are beginning to understand the value of volunteering in Tasmania.

To sustain and develop the value of volunteering, we must provide positive volunteering experiences, both for volunteers and those people, communities, and environments they serve. Positive volunteering experiences depend, in large part, on good leadership and management.

A glance at the paid workforce reveals a massive annual investment in developing management and leadership capability. But the same cannot be said for the volunteer workforce.

This report distils the findings of a study that sought to assess the current challenges, strengths, and opportunities to better support volunteer coordinators in their efforts to lead and manage within Tasmania's Volunteer sector.

*"I think most people have trouble comprehending the benefits of volunteers and volunteering."*

(Volunteer Coordinator, community welfare)

Almost 300,000 Tasmanians volunteer<sup>1</sup>. Approximately 200,000 of these are termed formal volunteers, in that they volunteer within an organisation. The remainder are informal volunteers who give their time in more self-organised community activities. This report focuses on formal volunteers.

Tasmanian volunteers provide a wide range of services to peoples and places across the state, from emergency response, to community service, education, sport, animal care, and environmental stewardship.

People start volunteering for myriad reasons, including contributing to community, supporting a cause, values alignment, social connection, personal development, and skills development<sup>2</sup>.

But to keep volunteering, volunteers need to experience good leadership and management<sup>3</sup>.

**Management** is about coordinating and controlling resources. Management entails planning and rationalising, fulfilling contractual obligations, maintaining stability, and achieving objectives.

Leadership is related to, but distinct from management.

**Leadership** brings people together in a collective effort to achieve a common purpose. Leadership is enacted through relationships; it is about inspiring and innovating, creating vision, initiating change, building collaboration, and uniting people around values.

The importance of **both** leadership and management cannot be overstated.

1. The State of Volunteering Report Tasmania, 2019.

2. *ibid*

3. Waikayi L, Fearon C, Morris L, et al. (2012) Volunteer management: an exploratory case study within the British Red Cross. *MANAGEMENT DECISION* 50: 349-367.



*“Ensuring good leadership and management in Tasmania’s Volunteer sector is an important step in bolstering volunteer satisfaction ...”*

Over 70% of the paid workforce report leaving a job because of bad leadership<sup>4</sup>. We do not want the same to occur in the volunteer workforce. Yet, the 2019 State of Volunteering Report highlights a worrying decrease in volunteer satisfaction.

In the paid sector, there is strong evidence that good leadership and management lead to more satisfied employees<sup>5</sup>. And there is emerging evidence that the same is true in the volunteer sector<sup>6</sup>.

Ensuring good leadership and management in Tasmania’s Volunteer sector is an important step in bolstering volunteer satisfaction and increasing the likelihood that volunteers will remain engaged in delivering value to the peoples and communities they serve.

It is essential that volunteer-involving organisations are aware of the importance of leadership and management and that they realise the role of leadership and management in volunteer retention and satisfaction. It is equally important that volunteer-involving organisations train and develop their volunteer coordinators so they have the skills, abilities, knowledge, and confidence to lead, as well as manage, in ways that provide positive volunteer experiences, and increase volunteer retention and satisfaction.

In this report we present the findings of a recent study into leading and managing in the Tasmanian volunteer sector.

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4. 72.28% of the more than 2,000 respondents to the Australian Institute of Management’s 2019 Leadership Survey said they had left an organisation because of “the leadership team, their direct manager or a combination of both” (Australian Institute of Management, The State of Australian Leadership Report, p. 17).

5. Azanza G, Moriano JA and Molero F. (2013) Authentic leadership and organizational culture as drivers of employees’ job satisfaction. *Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* 29: 45-50. Madlock, P. E. (2008). The link between leadership style, communicator competence, and employee satisfaction. *The Journal of Business Communication* (1973), 45(1), 61-78.

6. Benevene P, Dal Corso L, De Carlo A, et al. (2018) Ethical leadership as antecedent of job satisfaction, affective organizational commitment and intention to stay among volunteers of non-profit Organisations. *Frontiers in Psychology* 9.

# The uniqueness of leading and managing in the volunteer sector

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Every respondent agreed that leading and managing volunteers is unique to leading and managing paid employees. However, analysis of interview and focus group data revealed that the primary difference is simply that paid employees are paid, and volunteers are not.

Leading and managing both paid employees and volunteers demands a complex set of leadership and management skills, from inspiring action, encouraging engagement, aligning values, showing individualised consideration, maintaining relationships, and building trust, to delegating effectively, navigating HR systems/volunteer management systems and policy, ensuring quality, and meeting objectives.

The fact that volunteers do not rely on their volunteering for financial security means their efforts are entirely discretionary. The discretionary nature of volunteering means volunteer coordinators must lead and manage with a high level of nuance and expertise in order to make volunteers want to keep volunteering. As one of the interviewees indicated, *“at any point your volunteer can walk out the door.”*

So while all leaders and managers carry out functions such as planning, organising, delegating, mentoring etc., the discretionary nature of volunteering adds an undeniable layer of complexity, and in turn, this complexity gives rise to a strong perception that the situation is unique.

As our respondents explained, volunteers are *“happy to be there and give their time and capacity, but it’s very much on their terms.”* This means leading and managing volunteers requires *“a different way of working with people... you have to negotiate and influence and persuade, rather than direct.”* Providing direction is key in both the paid and volunteer sector, but in the volunteer sector, it must be done in a way that is nuanced and sensitive. The ability of volunteer coordinators to negotiate respectfully, influence positively, and persuade compellingly is essential – and these are core leadership capacities.

*“you have to negotiate and influence and persuade, rather than direct.”*

# The positives of leading and managing in the volunteer sector

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For almost all of the coordinators we spoke to, there was a strong sense of satisfaction attributed to the type of work they did, and this could be traced back to the enjoyment they get from working with volunteers.

Volunteers are there because of, *“a heart-based place, not necessarily a role, rule, obligation-place that a paid employee may come from.”* (Volunteer Coordinator, community welfare).

Intrinsically motivated volunteers often bring a high level of dedication to their volunteer work, as evidenced by this comment from a coordinator involved in community welfare programs: *“A volunteer can give a lot of time and a lot of love to one of those difficult customers.”*

*“If it wasn’t for volunteering, our society would grind to a halt.”*

Volunteer coordinators also spoke of the positive feeling and satisfaction they experience when witnessing the development of volunteers.

*“We can build skills into young people. It’s another step down the road to employability. For me, that’s the most rewarding.”* (Volunteer Coordinator, education).

*“It’s not just those human connections and the interactions...It’s lots and lots of skills that people wouldn’t otherwise be exposed to if it weren’t for the volunteering.”* (Volunteer Coordinator, community services)

*“I feel very privileged to have the role. Because to watch those individuals grow, I think the organisation offers opportunities that they wouldn’t otherwise get. It’s incredibly satisfying to watch them grow as individuals.”* (Volunteer Coordinator, education and training)

Coordinators also expressed how volunteers enabled them to do more for their communities: *“If we have a volunteer workforce, we can do more, we can make more and then we can help more.”* (Volunteer Coordinator, community services), and to grow their organisations. *“Watching the reputation of the organisation grow on the back of what [volunteers] do and how they give back to the community.”* (Volunteer Coordinator, education and training).

The coordinators we heard from were generally very positive about their experiences leading and managing volunteers. However, some clear challenges were also surfaced.

# The challenges of leading and managing in the volunteer sector

While the functions of leading and managing paid and volunteer workers are largely the same, volunteer coordinators must be especially nuanced and sensitive in the execution of their leadership and management, in order to retain their volunteers. In short, they need to be really good leaders and managers.

Our data suggests the key challenges volunteer coordinators face in relation to leading and managing volunteers relate to resourcing, identity, and training. Each of these challenges is discussed in more detail below.

## Resourcing

*“One of my greatest challenges is that the people around me perceive that volunteer management is free.” (Volunteer Coordinator, health services sector)*

A significant challenge faced by volunteer coordinators is the issue of HR resourcing. In a paid context, HR is regarded as an essential business function and the rule of thumb is that at least one HR professional is needed for each 100 employees. But this rule of thumb does not seem to translate to Tasmania's volunteer sector; some volunteer coordinators in Tasmania have upward of 200 volunteers for whom they are the sole HR resource. Compounding this is the fact that many volunteer coordinators fulfil HR duties in a part-time capacity, further stretching HR resources.

It usually takes many volunteers to deliver one full-time equivalent position. But each volunteer is an individual with all the requirements of any individual employee, from recruitment to induction, training, delegation, scheduling, communication, relationship building, development, and transition.

As one respondent explained, *“just because they don't get paid doesn't mean volunteer labour is free.” (Volunteer Coordinator, health services sector).*

And it was noted that relationship building which is imperative to leading and managing volunteers requires a substantial investment; *“Being there, listening, having these conversations, induction, all this takes time...and costs money.” (Volunteer Coordinator, community services).*

It seems that many volunteer coordinators are responsible for up to double the number of volunteers a coordinator of paid employees would be. Under resourcing volunteer coordinators risks depleting them of the time, energy, and resources to provide nuanced, sensitive leadership and management that is required to keep their volunteers engaged and satisfied.

## Leader identity

The second challenge highlighted by this study was that many of the volunteer coordinators we spoke to don't identify themselves as leaders, although in most cases they are actually exhibiting behaviours associated with very good leadership.

At the beginning of each interview or focus group, coordinators were asked to select whether they view themselves as a leader or a manager. Interestingly, every respondent selected manager.

This low level of leader identity within the volunteer sector is of some concern. Research suggests that identifying as a leader is integral to an individual's ongoing leadership development. When someone identifies clearly as a leader, they are more likely to enact leadership and develop their leadership skills and abilities<sup>7</sup>. Hence it is concerning that the volunteer coordinators we spoke to indicated low levels of leader identity.

When individuals don't identify as leaders, they are much less likely to develop their own practice of leadership. In addition, their ability to cultivate and encourage leadership in others is limited. Ensuring a pipeline of leaders within volunteer-involving organisations is important in succession planning and cultivating a culture of leadership, which encourages all members to engage in the work of leadership.

7. Day D and Harrison M. (2007) A multilevel, identity-based approach to leadership development. *Human Resource Management Review* 17: 360-373.

# The challenges of leading and managing in the volunteer sector

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## Training

The volunteer coordinators we spoke to expressed a genuine people-focus and explained their roles in ways that suggest they are engaging in good leadership and management. But they also reported a general lack of management skills within their organisations and a lack of specialised training opportunities for leaders and managers of volunteers.

*“With the exception of a few board members, there’s not a lot of people here with a background in management.”*  
(Volunteer Coordinator, tourism sector).

There is a need for a range of training to support volunteers and volunteer coordinators, however, there is a particular need for training to support the mental health and wellbeing of volunteers.

The challenge of very little specialised training is exacerbated by the fact that volunteer coordinators are often working with vulnerable people and engaging in physically, emotionally, and psychologically demanding work.

The nature of the volunteering sector dictates that coordinators are often leading and managing vulnerable people. As one respondent explained, *“sending vulnerable people out to engage in volunteering, requires skill sets of the people that will be managing them in those volunteer positions.”* (Volunteering Professional).

Among coordinators, there is an acceptance that there will be some volunteers that have personal issues and that some may be on a mental health recovery journey. Managing people through personal issues and on mental health recovery journeys requires advanced managerial and leadership skills and places additional demands on volunteer coordinators.

*“Often you can find yourself, [as a] sort of proxy social worker.”* (Volunteering Coordinator, community sector)

Some volunteer work also has implied physical and psychological risks. Emergency services are an obvious example; volunteer firefighters put themselves at immense risk to protect their communities. But volunteers in other sectors can also be exposed to potentially risky situations with vulnerable people suffering mental health issues or issues such as family violence. Arguably, this creates a situation where volunteers are dealing with significant psychological stress, on top of what they may already experience in their paid jobs or personal lives. Yet, their leaders and managers are not necessarily receiving any specialist training in how to support and guide them through these situations. Without targeted, tailored interventions, it is likely that many volunteers are overcome by the psychological, and sometimes physical, impacts of volunteering and exit the organisation or role early.

*“...you see people at their finest, [and] most vulnerable...you have to be really aware of that, you know, in terms of scheduling, in terms of management, in terms of morale, in terms of formal and informal support.”* (Volunteer Coordinator, arts sector)

Specialised training in leading volunteer mental health and wellbeing and supporting psychological safety would benefit volunteers and volunteer coordinators in all sectors.

# Supporting good leadership in Tasmania's volunteer sector

This study confirms other research that highlights declining satisfaction among volunteers. The study also identifies the relationship between volunteer satisfaction and the leadership and management they experience.

*"How could volunteer coordinators be better supported? The short answer is more resourcing within our organisations." (Volunteer Coordinator, emergency services)*

To retain active, engaged volunteers, it is imperative that volunteer coordinators are supported in their efforts to lead and manage well. Some of the support structures suggested by our respondents include:

- ✓ Training and development that is specific to the volunteer sector
- ✓ Greater recognition of the value of leadership and management in terms of volunteer engagement and retention
- ✓ Greater recognition of the costs of leading and managing volunteers, and increased resources to match

**Specialised training** might involve industry-based or accredited learning, tailored to leading and managing in the volunteer sector. In the volunteer sector, coordinators do not have remuneration as a lever of control with workers (volunteers). This means they must use more nuanced, sensitive ways of leading and managing volunteers. There are some additional peculiarities to leading and managing in the volunteer sector, such as legalities, insurances, and duty of care that warrant specialised training. Volunteering Tasmania provides extensive training opportunities and resources, but there is clearly room for additional training, accreditation, and support, especially among volunteer-involving organisations that are not currently members of Volunteering Tasmania.

**Greater recognition of the value of leadership and management** in terms of volunteer engagement could be achieved through a survey of volunteers' experiences of leadership and management and their levels of satisfaction and engagement in their volunteer work. A survey would ideally reveal how volunteers perceive their current experiences of leadership and management and indicate how they would most like to be led and managed. The results of such a survey could inform the development of specialised training for volunteer coordinators.

**Greater recognition of the cost of leading and managing volunteers** would mean paying attention to the actual hours and cost involved in volunteer coordination. It would mean acknowledging that although volunteers do not get paid, volunteer coordination carries equivalent costs and resources to leading and managing paid workers.

*"The health of an organisation is determined by how it retains its volunteers." (Volunteer Coordinator, arts and culture)*

# Conclusion and recommendations

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The findings of this study suggest that many volunteer coordinators in Tasmania are leading and managing very well. The way respondents spoke about their volunteers and the people and communities they serve, was genuine and heartfelt.

There was a pronounced focus on people and relationships, and clear appreciation for the efforts of volunteers. There was also evidence that volunteer coordinators do not identify as leaders (even though they exhibit many positive leadership attributes), that they are under resourced in their provision of human resourcing, and that additional accreditation and training opportunities in regard to leading and managing volunteers would be of value.

The findings of this study, coupled with leadership and management research, point to two key recommendations.

## RECOMMENDATION 1:

**Invest in providing and developing good leadership and management in the volunteer sector, through initiatives such as:**

- 1.1 Leadership and management training for volunteer coordinators
- 1.2 Appropriately resourcing the human resource functions of volunteer coordinators
- 1.3 Investing in succession planning to ensure a pipeline of leaders and to cultivate a culture of leadership, beyond straight management
- 1.4 Providing specialist training in managing volunteer mental health and wellbeing

## RECOMMENDATION 2:

**Conduct further research to examine the challenges, strengths, and opportunities of volunteer leadership and management from volunteers' perspectives. Such research would:**

- 2.1 Provide evidence of how Tasmanian volunteers currently experience leadership and management
- 2.2 Identify how volunteers would like to be led and managed
- 2.3 Inform efforts to design and deliver specialised training for volunteer coordinators

# Appendix A - Study Details

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This report is based on a study conducted by the University of Tasmania's Volunteer Leadership Research Group (ethics approval reference number: H0018335).

In 2019, the Chief Investigator, Dr Toby Newstead, and co-investigator, Dr Lisa Schimanski, conducted three focus groups and 14 interviews with volunteer coordinators around Tasmania. All participants were provided information sheets about the study, and each signed a consent form regarding their participation.

Study participants represented sectors including emergency services, community and welfare, arts, heritage, education and training, health, and environment. Participant ages ranged from 18 to 67 with most aged in their 50s, and their educational attainment ranged from year 12 equivalent to postgraduate degrees (note: only one respondent had a qualification specific to leading and managing volunteers). Some of the coordinators we spoke to had been in their roles for under two years, while others had been in theirs for over 30 years.

Focus groups and interviews were audio recorded, de-identified, and transcribed verbatim. Transcripts were analysed using NVivo qualitative analysis software to identify common themes.

## Acknowledgments

We wish to acknowledge the individuals who gave their time and shared their insights into the state of volunteer leadership in Tasmania.

We also wish to acknowledge the immense, life-changing efforts of volunteers and volunteer coordinators around Tasmania. Your time, effort, and service are the lifeblood of our state.



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