Webinar transcript – Smaller charities: Managing staff and volunteers

17 April 2018

**Chris Riches:**

Hi and welcome to today’s webinar. Today we’ll be looking at what charities – particularly smaller charities – can do to manage their staff and volunteers.

My name is Chris Riches, and I’m from the ACNC’s Education Team. Joining me today is Heath Eldridge from our Advice Services team. Hi Heath.

**Heath Eldridge:**

Hi everyone.

**Chris**

Before we start, some housekeeping.

If you have any troubles with the audio for the webinar you can try listening through your phone. Call the number listed in the email you would have received upon sign up and put in an access code and listen to the webinar that way.

You can also ask a question at any time throughout the webinar by using the tools in the GoToWebinar panel on your screen.

Feel free to ask questions during the webinar by typing them in the GoToWebinar interface. We have our colleague Matt Crichton on hand to respond.

We’ll try and answer all the questions that come through. But if your question isn’t answered, please feel free to send us an email and we will get back to you.

A recording of this webinar, as well as the presentation slides, will be published on the ACNC website in the coming days – we’ll also send out an email with website links featured in this webinar, so you don’t have to write down all the website references right now.

Finally, we really value feedback. If you have any suggestions for ways we can improve our webinars, please let us know in the short survey at the end of the webinar.  
OK, let’s get into it.

Today we’ll cover four or five main themes linked with the topic.

We’ll start with some general good practice tips, as well as a bit of a reminder of the other authorities, regulators and peak bodies that have an interest in this space.

We’ll look at the groundwork your charity should lay to properly manage staff and volunteers it might take on board. That might be some processes or policies, as well as some critical thinking about how you’ll effectively recruit and engage staff and volunteers.

We’ll devote some time to the induction process, which is vital. Very very important. Then we’ll also look at ongoing staff and volunteer management - what your charity can do to keep things rolling.

Finally, we’ll look at what your charity should do when volunteers or staff exit – aiming for smooth handover processes and ensuring all your I’s are dotted and t’s are crossed.

**Heath:**

So, let’s get some context.

The most recent Australian Charities Report found nearly half of all Australian Charities operate with no paid staff. 49.6% in fact.

In all, nearly 3 million volunteers support the sector through their efforts. More than 20% of those who volunteer for charities do so with religious groups, with emergency relief charities also attracting a large number of volunteers.

Meanwhile 1.3 million people are employed by charities. This represents 10.6% of the country’s workforce, which is an extraordinary number.

So it is clear that for many of Australia’s charities, volunteers are at the centre of a lot of what they do, and are vital to their work. Similarly, paid staff make a huge contribution to the sector as well.

**Chris**

When we talk about staff and volunteer management, we need to be clear that the ACNC is not the key regulator in many of these spaces.

We’re certainly interested in ensuring charities adhere to good practice in this area, and if volunteer or staff related issues are causing a charity to breach our Governance Standards we’ll most likely become involved.

But it is often the case that other regulators set the tone - and the law – in this area.

Some might be from around the states and territories – WorkSafe, SafeWork, those types of things. Fair Work and the Fair Work Ombudsman are Federal regulators in this space.

And there are certain sector peak bodies which are relevant too. Volunteering Australia is one pretty significant peak body, with various state and territory-based organisations as well.

Their websites and materials are well worth seeking out and reading for further specific guidance on these topics. There’s some links to the sites on the screen here.

**Heath:**

One thing to note though is that, generally speaking, volunteers are entitled to the same precautions as paid workers under works health and safety laws, and under equal opportunity laws.

So just because someone is a volunteer, you don’t get to treat them any differently than pad staff. And, to be honest, you shouldn’t anyway – treating volunteers with respect and valuing their contributions is absolutely vital.

And that point leads to the first of our good practice tips here …

**Chris**

The first – and arguably most important – tip we have is that your charity must have a positive organisational attitude to its people – volunteers or staff.

Treat them well and value their contributions. Respect them, make them feel welcome and include them in what you do.

**Heath:**

The groups I’ve been a part of in the past … you know, the easiest thing you can do as a charity is to simply say thanks. Say thanks publicly, thank volunteers and staff privately, even say thanks in your annual report, on your website, with a small function or get-together at the end of the year.

It means so much to people and helps foster a positive relationship.

**Chris:**

Of course you have to follow the laws of the land. They might be Federal laws, or state and territory regulations … or even local council regulations. Some of the sites and authorities we mentioned on the previous slide are worth referring to here.

As part of due diligence before you get staff or volunteers on board, your charity should ensure it can use them and that it actually needs them.

It is no use bring people on board if you haven’t got anything for them to do. Volunteer or staff recruitment is a waste of time if there’s no role for them.

**Heath:**

In addition, think carefully about whether you need to hire staff to fulfil a role, or whether it would be better, more convenient or more appropriate to get volunteers aboard. Look critically at the role or roles you are trying to fill, the responsibilities that come with them, and then think about what would be more apt – recruiting volunteers or actually employing staff. And if you are looking to employ staff, ensure you can afford to pay them properly!

**Chris:**

Have your induction processes established before you recruit new people. We’ll go into more detail about induction in a few minutes, but don’t jump into recruitment without solid planning and a process which deals with inducting people into your charity.

Ultimately – and this should be the overriding thought for your charity on matter like these – your people are a precious asset.

They should be valued, their efforts should be recognised and they should be looked after properly. It is a mark of a good, well-run charity (no matter its size) to do this, and ensures that your charity has a positive reputation.

So, before you start you need to have in place a strategy or plan to properly manage any staff or volunteer recruitment or engagement.

Again we repeat those three short questions from the previous slide – can we use them, do we need them, can we pay them.

Once you’ve thought critically about these three quick questions and worked out your requirements, other questions need to be addressed.

**Heath:**

Your recruitment strategy will be shaped by whether you need staff or volunteers, the number of people required and the task at hand.

Sometimes it might be a matter of roping in some existing charity supporters for a day or two of help. Other times it might involve a proper formal recruitment process to have a new staff member come aboard.

Again, choose the approach most appropriate with your needs and your abilities or capabilities as a charity.

Before you get people on board, ensure you have a clear policy or procedure which sets out their proper management. For volunteers this could be in the form of a volunteer management policy – NFP Law has some great detailed information on developing such a policy as well as some templates to help your charity do so – nfplaw.org.au/volunteers.

Part of that policy would be clarity on role or position descriptions, including duties and tasks. This is best practice and just good common sense – both charity and volunteer or staff member are then clear on what is expected and required, and can clarify any points of uncertainty.

Your charity will also need to have its insurance requirements sorted too. Appropriate insurance might include public liability insurance, for example, as well as coverage that other workplaces or public events would need.

There are some specialist charity insurers out there, and if you need further assistance it might be worth contacting Volunteering Australia, for example, to chat about what you might need.

There’s a couple of link to some handy pages on the ACNC site too – one which covers engaging volunteers, the other employing staff. They’ve got some good sharp tips on the topics.

**Chris**  
Some further good practice tips here to have in place your pre-engagement screening process and checks before you start.

This covers police checks, Working With Children checks (in Victoria, for example, or equivalent), Visas or passports depending on what the role might be, drivers licences too.

Reference checks and referee checks come under this process, and of course you might well need to check someone’s qualifications and education before you have them jump aboard.

**Heath:**

Again, the NFP Law page linked on this slide can help with many of these elements from a volunteer perspective. A number of the points on this slide are, of course, applicable if you are recruiting staff or volunteers.

Your charity should have a volunteer agreement or staff terms of employment document prepared and available for those you wish to recruit to receive and sign off on.

**Chris:**

Also, again, recruitment has to comply with the law. While there can be weight given to pre-screening findings, discrimination is clearly a no-no. There are certain legal protections against discrimination on the basis of things like age, gender, marital status, irrelevant criminal record, etc.

Don’t fall on the wrong side of this issue. Do the right thing.

All that groundwork is there for a reason, and that’s to ensure that your charity is in the best possible position to work through a successful recruitment process, and then, once your new staff or volunteers are on board, to get them slotted into their role seamlessly and so they can hit the ground running.

Induction forms a crucial part of this.

**Heath:**

As we state here, your charity’s induction process allows volunteers and staff to hit the ground running but, more importantly, helps them reach their full potential. This includes them not being aware of the various roles and responsibilities they and others have at your organisation.

This also relates back to ACNC Governance Standard #5, something many of you who have joined us for webinars in the past would be familiar with. The Standard states that a charity’s Responsible Persons – those responsible for the organisation’s day to day operations – must act with reasonable care and diligence.

This extends to their responsibility to ensure their charity’s staff and volunteers are properly recruited and inducted, are managed appropriately and are made aware of the requirements of their role.

A good rundown on the Standard can be found at the link up on the screen.

**Chris**

So, what should be involved in your charity’s induction process? Here’s a bit of a rundown.

You should have an induction pack ready to go. The exact contents of that pack will vary from charity to charity depending on any individual requirements you might have.

But some of the general material you are likely to need is listed here.

You’ll need a position or role description with a bit of background material on what is required to fulfil the role.\

A rundown of charity policies is invaluable. Include your charity’s complaints or internal disputes policy (which we’ll look at in more detail in a few moments), as well as your policies on things like:

* conflict of interest,
* remuneration,
* reimbursement of expenses,
* behavioural standards etc.

Your induction pack should include a rundown on who’s who in the organisation, key charity stakeholders. You could include a copy of your annual report, links to the website, all that sort of stuff.

If there’s any legal elements that need to be covered, induction is the place to do it. It might be about providing information on these issues, or even looking at training for the newcomer.

**Heath**

ACNC Governance Standards could also be a part of induction. Obviously if you are a Responsible Person then this is especially relevant and important, but really this sort of information should be made available (or people should be pointed to the ACNC website) to anyone jumping on board.

Some staff or charity volunteers might need access to passwords or logins – to bank accounts, computer systems, the ACNC site and charity portal – to do their jobs. This is part of a charity’s induction process.

**Chris**

What else do we have here – the staff or volunteer agreement and terms of employment – that should be signed as part of the induction process. A clear probation period should be spelled out in that agreement, while it is also suggested that behaviours that might bring about dismissal as a staff member or volunteer are also clarified.

And while an induction pack and documents can be a rather static thing, the idea of including things like a formal welcome, office tour, etc are just as important.

As is the idea of each newcomer having a mentor or “buddy” when they jump aboard to help them out. In fact, a buddy or mentor system, combined with a good induction pack and the opportunity for any training or learning, goes a long way towards really rounding out a solid, useful induction process.

Again, there’s some links to the ACNC site and to NFP Law for more.

**Chris:**

Once you’ve built a solid base with induction processes and all the proper checks, maintaining good staff and volunteer management is the key.

There’s plenty your charity and its people can do to achieve this, with one key attitude worth noting being encouraging and recognising the positive while recognising and addressing the negative.

Of course, it is a very rare organisation indeed which goes through its days with no hassles, debates or disagreements. And one of the more common issues that the ACNC hears about from charities are internal disputes involving staff, volunteers or a mix of both.

Internal disputes - we do get quite a few calls from charities on this topic. Sometimes we’re even asked to try and intervene or mediate in these disputes – something the ACNC can’t do unless the dispute poses a serious risk to public trust and confidence … for example, if the dispute is likely to result in a breach of the ACNC Act.

**Heath:**

Internal disputes can arise through all manner of circumstances as well. We’ve been told of disputes centring around social media and internet site use (and abuse), around staff and volunteers not seeing eye-to-eye, and issues when it comes to “reporting lines” and responsibilities across charity staff, boards and leaders.

What we do suggest is that, as a first step, charities check their rules, the applicable laws or regulations and their dispute resolution policies or procedures.

Doing so is highly likely to determine how your charity will approach any internal dispute and what it will do to try and find a resolution.

**Chris**

We can’t emphasise enough how important it is to have a solid dispute resolution procedure to use as a starting point for any efforts to resolve such conflicts.

There are some useful dispute resolution policy templates available at the NFP Law site we’ve previously mentioned, as well as through Our Community’s Institute for Community Directors and its Policy Bank – there’s a link to that on the slide you can see right now.

The ACNC has some worthwhile guidance on the issue in its Internal Disputes Factsheet – we’ve included some of it here.

**Heath**

In short, open and respectful communication is vital, as is the need not to ignore an issue and risk having it fester and get worse.

Talking issues through to resolution in a way and an environment which really promotes positive steps forward is also important. That might mean a meeting overseen by a neutral “mediator”.

Once a resolution has been reached, note it down, get buy-in from everyone involved and then commit to reviewing the progress of the resolution.

Finally, there are dispute resolution services out there. If an agreement or compromise cannot be reached, you might need to use an independent mediator.

Discuss who will pay for the cost (if any) of mediation before engaging the mediator, though in some states and territories there are free mediation services. You can also consider speaking with your peak body to find out more.

Finally, just to note, we’ve got a webinar planned for July which will look in more detail at managing charity disputes. If it is something your charity reckons would be useful, sign up via [www.acnc.gov.au/webinars](http://www.acnc.gov.au/webinars).

**Chris:**

Before we leave the topic of ongoing staff and volunteer management, a few other points to note.

Charities can achieve significant steps forward in this area by being aware of its importance and working to get the small things right.

Develop a welcoming culture at your charity and respect and value people for their contributions and efforts. Saying thanks is a huge part of this type of culture – it is such a simple thing to do, but so often overlooked.

Channels through which to access help and support, to supply or provide feedback, to just check in and gain some feedback on what you are doing … all these things are valuable too.

Your charity might decide to offer more structured opportunities to provide feedback, and of course if you have in place an ongoing buddy or mentor arrangement, that can help too.

Finally, volunteers and staff should be given the chance to provide feedback, and that feedback should be noted and, if needed, acted on.

**Heath:**

Of course, volunteers and staff will eventually leave your organisation in one way or another. Again, there’s some considerations for your charity when it occurs.

First up, say thanks. Again. There’s a bit of a theme running through a few sections of this presentation, and that’s to say thanks to your staff and volunteers.

It means so much to them and, to be honest, it’s just basic good manners. So do it, say thanks, write a quick note, have a morning tea, write a thank you in your annual report, on your website, all that jazz.

Importantly, staff or volunteer exit is also a chance for your charity to learn. An attitude of continuous improvement should see you aim to sit down and have a chat with anyone exiting your charity to learn and gain some feedback.

An exit survey is another way of gathering information as your charity strives for continuous improvement.

Your charity will also need to tie up loose ends – ensuring pay and documentation are up to date, as well as gathering up things like any uniform or equipment they might have, as well as nametags, that sort of thing.

If the person leaving your charity has access to passwords, bank account details, logins … your charity will need to manage this as well as the person exiting clearly shouldn’t be able to access your bank account, or log into your social media or the ACNC Charity Portal!

**Chris:**

So take care of all these details. Any records that need to be retained – employee records for example – ensure you do so.

Under the Fair Work Act, organisations must keep employee records for 7 years. This doesn’t specifically extend to volunteer records but as a matter of best practice organisations should keep records for 7 years.

There’s some good information on this (again) at the NFP law site … it has a great “Ending the Volunteer Relationship” checklist and guide which we will link to in our follow up email in the days after this webinar.

As you go through these processes, think about the ways you can keep these people involved in your charity. Ask them if they wish you to stay in touch with them through annual reports, updates, invitations to events, regular emails.

There might also be an opportunity to approach them to become a member or donor as well. Your charity should be aware of these opportunities and follow up on them if and when appropriate.

Also on this slide we’ve got a few further details covering a volunteer or staff member exit in acrimonious circumstances. Hopefully your charity doesn’t ever have to look at these processes but if you do it is handy to know what you should be doing.

Take note.

As we hit the home stretch for this webinar, we’re going to take a look at handovers and handover processes.

If a volunteer or staff member is moving on, and a replacement is preparing to take over the role, a handover process is a must.

Of course, there might be circumstances where a handover is a challenge to organise – an unexpected exit of a staff member or volunteer, for example – but where you can, handovers are vital.

The thing about them is this – you don’t want any handover process to result in the new arrival drowning in paper like our friend on the screen here.

Don’t just throw the passwords, important documents, files and that sort of thing in a big pile and expect your new arrival to take everything in and on board.

Any handover process needs to be orderly, organised and considered. Document the process and ensure you have a checklist or something similar to work from through the handover – that way your charity will not miss anything.

Establish “buddy” or mentoring arrangements so that there’s someone ready to help out when the newcomer arrives.

Of course, hand those important documents over in an orderly, ordered, way. And if there’s feedback about the handover process, take it on board and make changes and improvements if needed.

Handovers aren’t just an exchange of documents and information. They are a knowledge and wisdom exchange too. Important knowledge, institutional memory and other things can be passed on effectively through a good handover process.

And this is the sort of stuff you don’t want to lose.

**Chris and Heath:**

OK, five quick key points to remember.

Lay the groundwork to good staff and volunteer management through policy, planning and preparation.

Spend time preparing an informative, practical induction process.

Ongoing staff and volunteer management occurs through planning, processes/procedure and the right attitude.

Aim to get things right, but plan in case something goes awry.

Finally – an orderly handover process and strive for continuous improvement.

**Chris:**

Here’s a list of links relevant to what we’ve been talking about today. As we stated at the start of proceedings, there’s a number of regulators with oversight in this area, as well as some good solid information on a number of sites like NFP Law, Our Community and the like.

Just a reminder that a recording of this webinar, as well as the slides and other weblinks, will be up on the website in coming days, and contained in an email we’ll send out to those who registered for this webinar. So don’t bother about scribbling down all these web addresses right now!