Curtin University

Volunteering Trends Study

Executive Summary January 2019

chorus

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Chorus as a volunteering organisation relies on staff and volunteers to provide in-home and community support to more than 10,000 people across metropolitan and regional WA.

This project was undertaken to offer strategies to support Chorus in the recruitment and retention of current and future volunteers to ensure sustainable service provision.

Chorus successfully engage a range of volunteers to support their programs and this research has shown that their volunteer centred approach has been a key factor in not only providing optimal community services, but supporting volunteer's own goals.

Globally, volunteering continues to grow which is positive for service organisations, however the nature of this volunteering is shifting in terms of the personal characteristics of volunteers, their drivers for volunteering, expectations of the experience, and their availability to volunteer. These changes require organisations to be strategic in understanding their own volunteering needs, being agile with their workforce and having targeted approaches to their recruitment and retention of volunteers.

Chorus has a strong and deep experience of volunteering and is positioned well to implement sustainable practices to support future services.
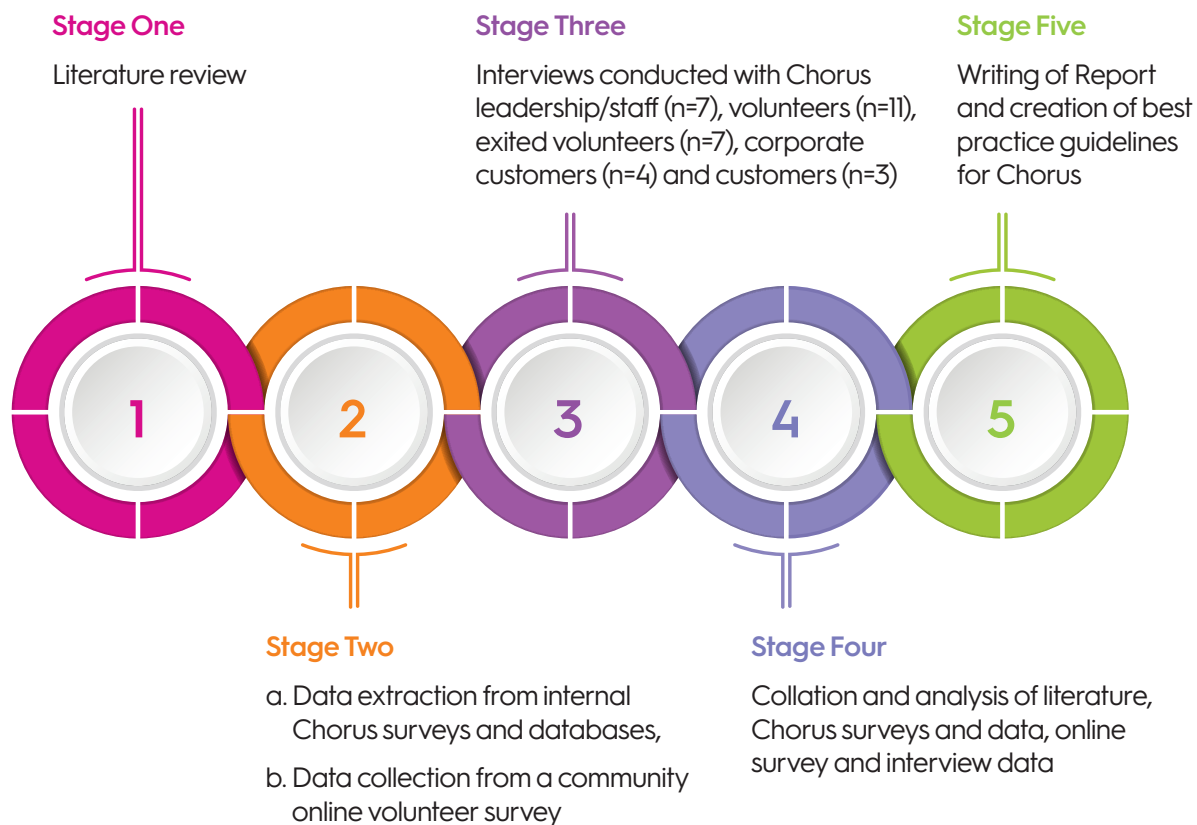
Aim of this study

The aim of this study was to explore and understand:

- The current nature and trends in volunteering, locally, nationally and internationally in regards to recruitment, retention, processes and training;
- The current nature and trends of volunteering at Chorus in regards to recruitment, retention, processes and training; and
- How Chorus can be prepared for sustaining volunteering in the future.

Methods

The study was conducted in five stages over a period of one year (2017-2018).

Stage One

Literature review

Stage Three

Interviews conducted with Chorus leadership/staff (n=7), volunteers (n=11), exited volunteers (n=7), corporate customers (n=4) and customers (n=3)

Stage Five

Writing of Report and creation of best practice guidelines for Chorus

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Stage Two

a. Data extraction from internal Chorus surveys and databases,

b. Data collection from a community online volunteer survey

Stage Four

Collation and analysis of literature, Chorus surveys and data, online survey and interview data

Key Findings

(i) International literature review:

Current trends in volunteering

- Volunteering trends are changing with more people volunteering but for less hours and shorter lengths of time.

- People are motivated to work with older adults for both personal benefit (e.g. improvement of resume, gaining new skills) and to help others (altruistic).

- Volunteers who feel valued, acknowledged and appreciated by being told they are making a difference and by having their efforts recognised in the organisation are more likely to continue to volunteer. Everyone perceives rewards and recognition differently so these need to be tailored to the individual to aid retention.

- People are more likely to continue to volunteer if they have a sense of purpose and feel they belong to an organisation that shares common values, goals and respect.

- Volunteers who receive training opportunities are more likely to continue volunteering.

- Micro-volunteering is a new and increasingly sought after type of volunteering which involves small groups working together to form part of a bigger project. Those involved in micro-volunteering generally tend to not want to be committed to an organisation and/or spend longer than 60 minutes doing the activity.

- Virtual volunteering with an internet connected device eg home or work computer or mobile phone, is an emerging type of volunteering which is becoming more popular.

Recruitment trends in volunteering younger adults:

- Their primary motivation to volunteer tends to be career benefits, including work experience, improvement of resumes and the acquisition of skills to enhance overall employability.
- Those motivated to volunteer for social reasons are more likely to invest more time in volunteering.
- They value the social interaction aspect more highly than other age groups.
- They favour online recruitment, particularly those young adults under 24 years old.
- Virtual volunteering-involving organisations are becoming more attractive to younger volunteers.
- Digital engagement and digital inclusion are becoming increasingly important to youth and younger adults.
- They report 'time constraints' as one of the main reasons they do not engage in volunteering.
- Many do not volunteer due to lack of awareness of volunteering opportunities.

Recruitment trends in volunteering older adults:

- Motives for volunteering include altruism, utilisation of skills and social engagement.
- They prefer to be asked to contribute their education and skills to a task, rather than simply being asked to volunteer.
- They are more likely to volunteer when there are incentives, such as mileage reimbursement or discounts at local stores.
- They volunteer to feel more connected and create meaningful social relationships, whether that be with other volunteers or with the care recipients who are often people of the same generation.
- Older adults are currently healthier and more active than previous generations and have greater commitments and responsibilities. 'Time constraints' is reported as being one of the main barriers to engaging in volunteering.

Australian trends in volunteering:

- The most recent data from the 2016 Australian Census indicated that 3.6 million people (19.0% of the population) aged 15 years or older engaged in formal volunteering.
- Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) 2012, report volunteering rates were high for people aged 15-17 years (42%), 35-44 years (39%) and 65-74 years (35%).
- ABS 2014 report the most common reason identified for being a volunteer was to help others or the community (64%), while more than half identified personal satisfaction (57%) or to do something worthwhile (54%). Personal or family involvement (45%), social contact (37%) and to be active (35%) were also reported as reasons for volunteering
- Volunteering rates have increased by 1.2% since the 2011 Census.
- Volunteering rates are higher among females than males.

(ii) Key findings on the current trends in volunteering from the (a) community volunteering general survey and (b) the Chorus interviews:

1. Many volunteers felt that further targeted marketing could attract larger numbers of volunteers.

2. Many study participants praised Chorus for their acceptance of people with disability, mental health concerns, and those who are deemed minorities in society.

3. The processes in place for volunteering school students allowed them to learn how to work in a team and what is required in a workplace, including professionalism. The personal protective equipment gave a professional look and feel for the students. The new on-job induction in the classroom allowed volunteers to ask questions and receive feedback. The feedback from the Chorus team to the volunteers and the school allowed a learning opportunity and further training for the volunteers. The safe environment provided by Chorus, included lowered anxiety and allowed the volunteers to perform their tasks. Chorus offered students with disability, who required supported volunteering, the training and practical skills that were needed for them to be able to find full-time work in the industry. Many students kept volunteering at Chorus once their course had been completed and some until they found full-time work. The 'value' of the volunteering program for school students should be further advertised.

4. The safe inclusive environment at Chorus provided for intergenerational and cultural social enrichment for young school volunteers and their customers which was attractive to ongoing volunteering.

5. Feedback on the volunteering program at schools was that Chorus processes worked well. Chorus was well equipped, well-organized, were very aware of all the safety requirements and there were no further requirements from the schools' perspective.

6. Clear and prompt communication, helpfulness and a good relationship with the corporate customers and schools were some of the reasons they have stayed with Chorus. A school appreciated Chorus staff attending school open days to gain greater understanding of the students.

7. Not all potential volunteers enjoyed gardening so some corporate organisations would like a choice of volunteering activities. Camaraderie, team work and the experience being meaningful for staff were important to the corporations. The goals of the corporate organisation need to be established for a successful volunteering program.

8. Positive comments from Chorus customers to volunteers had a positive impact on the volunteers.

9. Corporate and school volunteers were not affected by the transition to Chorus but it has resulted in some older volunteers, including long-standing volunteers, leaving Chorus. It was expressed that the change of name to 'Chorus' may initially present difficulties in volunteer recruitment as it is not as widely known as the three individual organisation names, and also does not include the word 'volunteer'.

10. Multiple individuals from all sectors of Chorus and one corporation identified large amounts of paperwork and a lengthy process of enrolment as likely barriers to recruitment for general volunteering.

11. Micro-volunteering has been found to be successful at Chorus.

12. Person- centred reward and recognition; meeting individual volunteering goals; and processes and support for volunteers to transition to different roles, including paid roles, within the organisation were valued by volunteers.

13. Chorus was praised for their understanding of the needs of individual and corporate volunteers with disability. Volunteers with disability require person-centred support with appropriate processes in place.

14. Matching volunteer skills with organisational needs was working for both the volunteer and Chorus.

15. There was 'survey fatigue' for both volunteers and staff at the time of the study, resulting in low recruitment numbers for this study.

Best practice guidelines: What can Chorus do to remain sustainable in the future?

(i) Recruitment of volunteers for Chorus

Below are the recommended guidelines on how to improve recruitment of volunteers for Chorus. We suggest utilising different recruitment strategies to target both younger and older adults. The recommendations are listed in no specific order and are all deemed equally important.

General recruitment strategies:

Guideline 1: Offer person-centred volunteering opportunities that can be flexible and provide for personal circumstances eg changes in health, employment, family commitments etc.

Guideline 2: Advertise the benefits of volunteering such as training, support, mentoring, rewards/recognition, flexible roles, socialisation, improvement of resumes, attainment of skills, health benefits etc. Include these benefits when marketing to schools.

Guideline 3: Provide volunteering opportunities outside of the typical Monday to Friday working hours. This would allow for a greater range of volunteers to be part of Chorus, such as parents, full time workers and students.

Guideline 4: We recommend Chorus creates more opportunities for micro-volunteering and digital volunteering.

Guideline 5: Improve the efficiency of the volunteer application process.

Guideline 6: Continue to gain a comprehensive understanding of the different volunteering goals and objectives of potential volunteering organisations ie corporate organisations, schools, colleges, return to work programs etc.

Guideline 7: Track existing and future recruitment methods to measure their success.

Guideline 8: Continue to improve marketing and increase brand awareness. Many volunteers suggested that Chorus improve marketing as then they would have found Chorus much easier and quicker. Advertise in a variety of locations and ways for greater coverage and exposure e.g. online, on social media, in the community newspaper, in promotional emails to the administration of schools and corporate companies, on websites and social media for people with disability, at libraries and at doctors' rooms, and encouragement of word of mouth marketing. Specifically advertise on the GoVolunteer App, which is a mobile app for volunteering opportunities Australia wide, as it is gaining recognition as the place to go when seeking volunteering opportunities.

Strategies for recruiting younger adults

Guideline 1: Tailor marketing to younger adults to promote the social and career benefits. Also include Chorus younger volunteers' anecdotes and stories and depict current younger volunteers at Chorus in advertising.

Guideline 2: Advertise for new volunteers in locations where young adults frequent, such as universities, sporting clubs, TAFE institutions and schools to combat lack of awareness.

Guideline 3: Market volunteering opportunities online e.g. GoVolunteer and Seek. Include digital volunteering for projects or ongoing volunteering to connect with a broader range of volunteers.

Guideline 4: Young adult volunteers tend to be university students or have part time jobs and are more likely to become involved in volunteering roles that are advertised as flexible and considerate of time restraints.

Strategies for recruiting older adults

Guideline 1: Marketing material should highlight how older adults can utilise their current knowledge and skill set for the benefit of others, and the volunteering activities that Chorus offers.

Guideline 2: There is strong evidence to suggest some older adults are more likely to volunteer when there are incentives, such as mileage reimbursement or social outings, which Chorus currently offers volunteers. Some individuals at Chorus have voiced a desire for changes in the mileage reimbursement policy.

Guideline 3: They are more likely to volunteer if roles are advertised as flexible and considerate of time constraints.

(ii) Retention of volunteers at Chorus

Below are several recommendations to assist in the retention of volunteers at Chorus. These are not specific to an age group, but useful for overall retention.

Guideline 1: Aim to continue to provide a person-centred flexible volunteering experience.

Guideline 2: Provide comprehensive and appropriate training and inductions to volunteers. Focus on the quality of the training sessions by having a smaller group of volunteers at each session, more volunteers will receive one on one training and support.

Guideline 3: Continue to value volunteers and recognise their efforts and contributions, ensure it is person-centred. Continue to provide certificates upon completion of training or reaching volunteer milestones to enhance resumes and provide recognition of service.

Guideline 4: Improve communication channels between Chorus and their volunteers by:

- allowing volunteers to provide feedback and suggestions in their preferred format ie verbal, digital, hard copy format or an anonymous 'suggestions' box;

- allowing them to feel comfortable in voicing concerns or issues they may be experiencing at Chorus and for these to be addressed in a supportive and understanding manner; and

- organising a half yearly volunteer meeting to discuss feedback and other updates within Chorus to allow for communication and opportunities to improve the organisation.

Guideline 5: Provide greater flexibility with volunteering roles and times. Current volunteers expressed that there were often limited opportunities to change or try new volunteering activities. To improve retention, a suggestion is to create volunteering opportunities outside of regular working hours.

Guideline 6: Continue to create a sense of social interconnectedness amongst volunteers who will benefit from developing a shared sense of purpose.

Guideline 7: So they can continue to volunteer, support volunteers through periods of change as needed, whether it be organisational change or personal change eg the death of a client they support.