

Case study: Leading change towards inclusive practice

Streamlining the volunteer onboarding experience

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House in Sunbury has streamlined its volunteer onboarding through an online Volunteer Hub, making it easier for new volunteers and students to access training, information and resources. The Hub reduces administrative workload, supports consistent and thorough induction, and highlights how digital tools can create a positive and inclusive experience.

Background

Goonawarra Neighbourhood House is a community organisation based in Sunbury, northwest of Melbourne. It provides social, educational and support services to local residents, with a focus on strengthening community connection, capacity and wellbeing.

Goonawarra operates with a small staff team, including a House Manager responsible for staff supervision, building management, program delivery and volunteer coordination. Volunteers play a crucial role in supporting service delivery and the Neighbourhood House's broader impact within the local community.

In 2023, Goonawarra had a small number of volunteers and no formal volunteer program. State Government funding made it possible to employ a Volunteer Engagement and Capacity Building Coordinator to establish a program that would be manageable for staff and sustainable beyond the life of the funded role.

Rethinking volunteer onboarding

As the volunteer program was being established, volunteer onboarding emerged as a key area for improvement. The existing process placed a significant administrative burden on the House Manager, requiring multiple follow-up emails and one-on-one training to prepare each volunteer for their role.

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Onboarding was recognised as a critical phase of the volunteer experience. It is the point at which volunteers are supported to feel confident, informed and welcomed, while also ensuring Volunteer Involving Organisation (VIO) responsibilities are met. This includes completing screening checks and collecting required documentation to manage risk and ensure safety.

While certain onboarding requirements – such as compliance and screening checks – could not be changed, opportunities were identified to improve how volunteers were supported to move through the process. The aim was to create an onboarding experience that was clear and thorough, without being overly time-consuming or difficult to navigate.

Developing the Volunteer Hub concept

To address these challenges, Goonawarra Neighbourhood House developed the concept of an online Volunteer Hub. Designed to guide volunteers step-by-step through onboarding, the Hub also acts as a central store of information that volunteers can return to throughout their involvement. It is intended for use by new volunteers, students completing placements, and staff members joining the Neighbourhood House.

After investigating several software options, MoodleCloud was selected as the platform for the Hub. Moodle is a customisable learning management system available as open-source software, with MoodleCloud offering a hosted solution that manages software updates. This allows staff to focus on content development, rather than technical maintenance.

The platform also supports the creation of discrete courses that can be tailored to different roles and learning needs.

Features of the Hub include:

- **Organisational information**, such as contact details and social media links

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- **Key documents**, including policies, procedures and feedback processes
- **Volunteer Induction Course**, guiding volunteers through core onboarding activities, including:
 - Goonawarra's mission and values
 - Screening checks, with clear information about what checks are required, why they are necessary and how to apply (including Police Checks and Working with Children Checks)
 - Required forms, such as the Code of Conduct, available for direct download
 - Core training modules covering topics such as manual handling, diversity and inclusion, respecting and valuing culture, child safety and volunteer safety
- **Student Induction Course**, which mirrors the Volunteer Induction Course but is tailored to students commencing placement
- **Resource Hub**, an optional and ongoing library where volunteers can access learning materials throughout their involvement, including links to free external courses and resources on topics such as personal development, sustainability, disability and community development

Benefits and outcomes

The Volunteer Hub is now fully operational and demonstrates how a centralised system can support both volunteers and staff.

“The volunteer onboarding hub has become a valuable resource. It saves a great amount of time and reduces the frustration of volunteers who don't follow through. I've come to rely on it a great deal as it streamlines the recruitment process and eliminates the concern of how to organise timely volunteer training on a range of topics that they need to be across. It's all there in one place.”

- Isabella Rosinsky, Goonawarra Neighbourhood House Manager

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One of Moodle's strengths is its adaptability. The Hub continues to be refined and updated over time and is now being adapted so other Neighbourhood Houses can use it to support their own volunteer onboarding processes.

In the long term, this approach is expected to:

- **Provide a centralised system** that streamlines onboarding and training, reducing administrative workload
- **Increase volunteer confidence and preparedness** through consistent, high-quality onboarding and ongoing access to learning resources
- **Offer clear and accessible content**, supported by practical resources such as step-by-step factsheets
- **Increase volunteer retention** by creating a positive and inclusive onboarding experience

Key tips for the sector

The experience of developing the Volunteer Hub highlighted several practical considerations for volunteer-involving organisations.

1. Allow volunteers to guide the processes that impact them.

Throughout the development of the Hub, volunteer feedback was actively sought to better understand where friction existed in current systems. Exploring what felt confusing, difficult or unnecessary led to small but meaningful improvements informed directly by volunteer experience.

2. Consider how the process may be experienced by someone different.

During development, the organisation was approached by a recently arrived migrant interested in volunteering. Although motivated to contribute, the process of navigating required screening

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checks proved confusing and time-consuming, and the individual ultimately decided not to proceed.

This experience reinforced the importance of understanding how systems may be perceived by people with different cultural, linguistic or lived experiences. Tasks that feel routine to staff can be intimidating or inaccessible to others. These insights directly informed the creation of clear 'How-to' factsheets to support volunteers through screening requirements.

3. Understand both the strengths and limitations of technology.

While the online Hub offers efficiency and flexibility, not everyone has equal access to or confidence with digital systems. To address this, Goonawarra Neighbourhood House maintains alternative options, including printed materials, emailed resources, and access to on-site computers for completing training.

4. Link in with other VIOs for support.

Early conversations with other Neighbourhood Houses confirmed that many were facing similar challenges, particularly where volunteer management sits alongside other management responsibilities. Although none had previously used software to support volunteer onboarding, these discussions informed the Hub's design and continue to guide its expansion for use across the Neighbourhood House context.

Learn more

For more information about Goonawarra Neighbourhood House and the Volunteer Hub, visit:

<https://www.goonawarranh.com.au/>

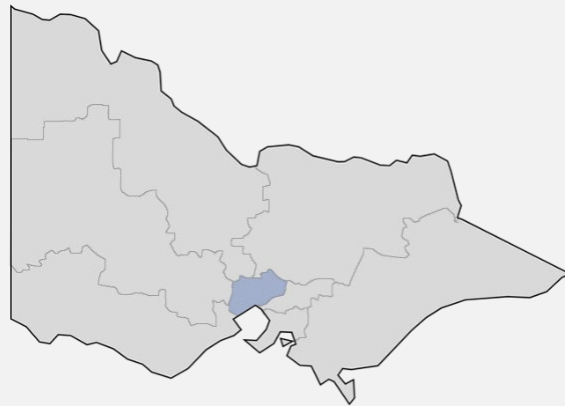
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<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>



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Volunteering Victoria acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.