Student Work Placement Framework: a guide to successful student work placements



BELLARINE CATCHMENT NETWORK

Landcare and Coastcare

Student Work Placement Framework

A practical resourced designed to help volunteer groups in the region build pathways to employment for studying volunteers.

Contents

Acknowledgements 3

Bellarine Catchment Network 4

Introduction 4

Part One: Benefits of work placement 5

Part Two: Types of work placement 6

Formal – part of a program or course 6

Informal – self-facilitated 7

Part Three: Designing and Facilitating Placements 8

Designing a work placement program 8

Planning tasks 8

Tasks Matrix 9

Paid vs unpaid 10

Position Descriptions 10

Advertising 11

Case Study: Formal Placement 12

Case Study: Informal Placement 13

Part Four: Work Placement Checklist 14

Resources 16

Appendix 1: Example Work Placement Agreement 17

Appendix 2: Position Description Template 18

Appendix 3: Example Participation Certificate 20

References 21

Acknowledgements

Student Work Placement Framework
Bellarine Catchment Network, Victoria, 2023

Published by Bellarine Catchment Network Inc.
865 Swan Bay Road, Mannerim, Victoria, 3222
www.environmentbellarine.org.au
www.bgevc.com

Copyright 2023 Bellarine Catchment Network

All rights reserved. No portion of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission from Bellarine Catchment Network. Supported by the Victorian Government.

Contact info@bcn.org.au for information

Bellarine Catchment Network wishes to Acknowledge the Wadawurrung, the Traditional Owners of the land on which we work, live and volunteer, and pay our respects to their Elders past, present and future, and recognize their continuing connection to land, water and community.

Bellarine Catchment Network Acknowledges LGBTIQA+ Elders, past, present and emerging who lead the way in change and recognition.

To learn more about what the Wadawurrung Traditional Owners Aboriginal Corporation (WTOAC) and what they aim to achieve, read their Palerrt Tjaara Tja 'Let's make Country good together 2020 – 2030: Wadawurrung Country Plan'. Visit: www.wadawurrung.org.au

Artwork: Thank you to proud Wadawurrung artist BJ O'Toole. Follow them at @papul_art (Instagram) and @papulaborginalart (Facebook)

Bellarine Catchment Network

Bellarine Catchment Network (BCN) is an independent, not-for-profit organisation overseen by a volunteer committee of management. We are an integrated and collaborative network consisting of 35 different community organisations, 'Friends of' groups, land managers, Landcare and Coastcare. Our collective goal is to protect and conserve our catchments, coastal areas and inland bushlands with strong connections to our local communities. BCN works through and for the network groups and organisations and the wider community to achieve these outcomes.

Our mission is to be an integrated, inclusive and collaborative network that educates, facilitates, connects and empowers groups and individuals to care for the living things of the land and water of the Bellarine catchment.

Contributors

This document was created in consultation with tertiary education institutions. We acknowledge the intellectual property that they provided us with for the purpose of this document.

Introduction

In 2022, the Victorian Government released the 'Victorian Volunteering Strategy', a document aimed at identifying ways to engage volunteers in the post-covid era. The Victorian Government provided $1 million in grants to support local partnerships and innovation projects to re-engage volunteers, broaden the volunteer base, and strengthen volunteering in local communities. This program was entitled the 'Emerging Stronger' grants program.

Bellarine Catchment Network were grateful to receive funding from this grant program to facilitate 2 student placements and to create this 'Student Work Placement Framework' – a resource for any volunteer-managing group wanting to better engage with work placement students that facilitate pathways to employment.

Purpose of this document

The purpose of this document is to provide volunteer managing organisations (any group, volunteer or staffed who offers volunteering opportunities) with the following:

- An understanding of the benefits of work placement student programs to both the student and the host organisation
- Background information about different types of work placements
- Practical tools to improve the planning and facilitation of work placements
- Tools, resources, links and templates.

Part One: Benefits of work placement

There are many benefits to hosting students as part of a work placement and include benefits to the host organisation as well as the student. Work placement programs provide students with vital on-the-job experience, a chance to gain new skills, an opportunity to make new professional network connections and can facilitate pathways to employment with the host organisation [1]. Work placement programs also offer many benefits to the host organisation by allowing employers to meet potential future employees, bring in people with new and unique skills and helping specific projects succeed [2].

To ensure that work placements are successful, both parties should strive to plan and facilitate high-quality work placement opportunities. However, there is no one size fits all scenario, however this guide aims to provide a framework that can be adapted to any organisation and/or any situation.

Engaging youth

The Victorian Government's 'Volunteering Strategy' identifies a desire to engage young people in volunteering and students studying at tertiary institutions are a key example of young people who can give so much back to their community [3]. Many organisations that are volunteer managed can benefit from engaging young people in volunteering activities as they may offer new ways of thinking.

Pathways to employment

Students right across Australia volunteer in order to develop their skills, from mentoring and networking opportunities and to facilitating pathways to employment [3]. For those trying to enter a specific field of employing, being able to demonstrated the required skills and abilities via volunteering can help students secure paid work. Volunteering can assist students to identify fields of interest, to make connections with potential future employers and builds work-relevant skills that may not be taught as part of their studies. Work placements have shown to improve job prospects and can help with education to work transitions for young workers [2].

Many students are looking for opportunities to practice 'soft skills' such as professional communication, stakeholder and team engagement, time management and critical thinking [4]. Volunteering as part of a work placement program is a safe space for students to practice these skills before entering the workforce and is a great way to increase one's employability capital [4]. Many students believe that when they enter the workforce, their technical skills will be the most valuable, however soft skills are integral to every working environment and so are a valuable skill to develop through work placement.

Work placement is also an opportunity to encourage students to be themselves and embrace their unique skills. For example, some people may thrive when completing repetitive tasks – this is a good opportunity to identify the strengths of each student and empower them to see the positives.

Part Two: Types of work placement

There are 2 main types of work placements; formal and informal. Your organisations capacity may determine which type of work placement you facilitate and so the differences are outlined below.

Formal – part of a program or course

Formal work placements usually occur when a student is required to undertake work placement in order to complete a unit or their course. At some tertiary education institutions, students can gain credits from completing work placements. As the name would suggest, these work placements are formal in nature and are often organized in partnership with a third party and may require additional administration to facilitate. For many students, volunteering while studying may not be possible and so this type of work placement offers an opportunity for students to volunteer that can be completed during their study time. Here are some key features of a formal work placement:

- They are generally co-organized by a third party and may require the completion of multiple forms detailing the conditions, supervision arrangements and learning outcomes
- They may require the host to hold a certain level of insurance. If your organisation does not have insurance, you may need to talk to another organisation about a partnership
- They may need to occur at a specific time of the year to align to student semesters/trimesters
- The third party may specify the minimum and maximum hours and/or duration of the placement
- Students may have an option for additional support and/or a complaints process outside of the host organisation.

Example: Deakin University

Deakin University have multiple ways of facilitating formal volunteering with partner organisations. The first way is through their Work Integrated Learning (WIL) program which is available for students studying at each Deakin University campus (Burwood, Geelong and Warrnambool). The WIL program facilitates placements for students studying courses within the 'Life and Sciences' including topics like environment, sustainability, biomed, wildlife, marine, as well as biomedical students looking to expand their focus. Some key points to know about the WIL program include:

- The WIL coordinators are the best place to contact for advice and support
- WIL coordinators can suggest host organisation opportunities to participating students (faculty sourced), or students are welcome to find these organisations on their own (self-sourced). Opportunities can also be actively advertised to students
- To complete the WIL program, students must complete a minimum of 60 hours of work, but can complete up to 180 hours

- Host organisations are required to provide evidence of insurance and must complete certain forms outlining the conditions and requirements of the placement. They must also complete evaluation forms to assess the performance of the student.

Deakin University also have a 3rd year undergraduate unit that approximately 800 students complete each year that involves a similar placement between 80-160 hours. Some key points to know about this unit include:

- Students can complete this work placement either by working 2 weeks full time or via a more flexible approach – e.g., 1 day per week.
- Host organisations must sign an agreement and complete the same forms as the WIL program outlining tasks, responsibilities, requirements and conditions
- The students are covered by Deakin's insurance but host organisations should have appropriate insurance despite this
- Students have some time restrictions on when they can undertake work placements. Students must complete their work placement by week 10 of their unit, so this is something to consider for the host organisation.

Informal – self-facilitated

Informal work placements are facilitated outside of an educational institution or without a third party and are negotiated between the organisation and the student directly. Informal work placements may arise when students are looking for specific skills, to learn more about an organisation or want to build their professional networks. Here are some key features of an informal work placement:

- They may be arranged without a third party. Contact may occur directly via email, social media or face-to-face
- They are more flexible and the student may be able to volunteer at any time of the year
- They may require the host organisation to have strong governance including policies outlining volunteer engagement, privacy, a code of conduct and/or complaints and grievance procedures
- The host organisation will need to investigate if they have adequate insurance including Public Liability and Volunteer Accident. If you do not have insurance, you may need to talk to another organisation about a partnership
- When facilitated appropriately, they can still provide students with significant learning outcomes. However, as informal placements may not involve approval by a third party, some students may be placed into situations where they may not feel comfortable about advocating for appropriate conditions and tasks during the placement [4].

Part Three: Designing and Facilitating Placements

Designing a work placement program

To ensure that your work placement program or opportunity will be successful and mutually beneficial requires you to spend time designing and planning the placement. There are many things to consider; from the tasks to be undertaken, the conditions of the placement, the learning outcomes and any adjustments that can be made to accommodate the student. The best place to start is to read through the National Volunteering Standards for Volunteer Involvement – a document aimed at providing a framework for organisations to consider the role of volunteers.

Here are some critical things to consider when designing a work placement opportunity:

- Do you have policies, procedures and insurances in place to facilitate a work placement student? If not, are you partnering with an organisation that does have this?
- Identify the purpose of the placement and what your organisation is hoping to achieve
- Identify if the placement will be beneficial to the student – will they be provided with sufficient learning outcomes, new skills gained, engagement with stakeholders?
- Map out details of the placement including the tasks, timelines, skills required, number of students and conditions including if the work can be done remotely
- For informal placements, consider the need for a written agreement. An agreement should cover all arrangements, conditions (hours, duration, protections, insurance) and recognition
- Assess if the work and or tasks are in fact suitable for a volunteer. Are they safe and appropriate? Have you considered if these tasks or roles should in fact be considered paid employment? Read through the Fair Work Ombudsman's 'Unpaid Work Factsheet' for more information on this – **click here**

Planning tasks

The tasks that you set for a work placement student ideally should be related to the field of study or qualifications that the student is undertaking, in order to make the most of the placement [5]. It is important to ensure that the tasks and role is meaningful for both the host organization and the student. Although providing students with real experiences in a professional environment can be beneficial, avoid asking students to solely undertake simple, repetitive tasks like cleaning, buying coffees, photo copying, etc. Instead plan for a mix of tasks that may include the mundane and repetitive, but also tasks that are more educational and allow the student to develop new skills or professional contacts [5]. Students should have the option to select some roles or tasks that are related to their skills or interests. If possible, the opportunity should be flexible enough to fit into a student's availability and/or capacity and should include some 'virtual volunteering' to facilitate volunteering from those are limited by time or mobility [6].

When advertising your work placement opportunities, be sure to list if tasks can be completed virtually as this may increase pool of students and can make volunteering more equitable [6]. To help you understand what activities, tasks or roles that a work placement student may undertake to best assist your organization, complete the **matrix below.**

Tasks Matrix

Use this matrix to identify tasks that are appropriate and beneficial to the work placement students.

Note that the more tasks are placed into the top squares, the better. Tasks or skills that end up in the bottom squares tend to reflect the needs of organization only.

Interesting but not as relevant	**Educational or empowering experiences and tasks**
Not worth the time	**Poor learning or skill outcomes**

Paid vs unpaid

Work placement opportunities should clearly state if they are paid or unpaid. Although many volunteer-run organisations are unable to facilitate a paid work placement, there are many good reasons why compensation should be offered, if appropriate. Expenses such as transportation, meals and/or accommodation can make work placements more equitable, especially with disadvantaged youth [4]. If you do decide to offer payment or reimbursement, be clear about this arrangement in any written agreement and make sure that you consider if in fact this role should in fact be a paid employment opportunity. For advice on this, visit the Fair Work Ombudsman's information page on student placements vs. paid employment – **click here**.

Position Descriptions

A well planned and written position description is a valuable tool to help you recruit suitable volunteers [5]. A position description provides an opportunity to map out the work placement opportunity, encourages volunteers to understand more about the role and allows them to assess if this opportunity is suitable for them before they apply [5]. See **Appendix 2** - **Position Description Template** for an example.

Some things that should be included in a position description include:

- The location of the placement and any transportation information including major train or bus stops nearby
- The host organisation and chosen supervisor/contact
- The timing commitment (months, hours per day, frequency) and if this is flexible
- Role description including main expected duties or tasks (dot points or sentences)
- Expected learning outcomes or benefits to the volunteer
- Benefits to the volunteer
- Requirements or conditions of the placement (e.g., Working With Children Check)
- The conditions (i.e., in-person, virtual, reimbursements or equipment)
- A statement demonstrating your values. For example; a commitment to inclusivity and diversity and that you will support if they have a disability or medical illness.

Advertising

When advertising your work placement role or program, make sure that you are clear about the conditions of the placement including the purpose of the placement, expected tasks and time commitment. Being clear and upfront about the role will allow you to manage expectations from an early stage. Any recruitment should be open, fair and transparent to ensure that applications are treated with equality and inclusiveness [5].

Some things to consider when you are advertising a work placement opportunity are:

- Make sure that it is advertised through both formal and informal channels (social, universities, Seek)
- Ensure that the advert is clear about the role and the conditions
- Ensure that any screening/interviewing is fair, equitable and inclusive
- Consider promoting the culture and values that you expect of all staff and volunteers
- Consider the timing of your advertisements and their alignment to university semesters or trimesters. This is especially relevant for formal placements as the administration can take up to 2 weeks. It is best to expect a delay of 1 month from the selection of the student to their volunteering start date.

Case Study: Formal Placement

James Wong
Volunteer (March 2023)

Why were you looking for work placement volunteering?

Because this is a requirement of my unit at Deakin University (SLE301) and I was looking to volunteer for some organizations which are near to where I live (Geelong). I also wanted to build some new connections in the local community.

How do you think these skills will benefit your chances of employment?

I enjoyed having the chance to try different things including including creating social media content, educating secondary students and working with the CALD community. The real-world experiences and skills I learned will increase my chances of employment.

What contacts did you make?

I was able to meet some teachers and students from local schools including Christian College, groups like Bellarine Landcare and Cultura. I also met many people from the CALD community.



Case Study: Informal Placement

Abbey Jacob
Volunteer (January-February 2023)

Why were you looking for work placement volunteering?

I saw the work placement as a fantastic way to gain insight into the 'behind the scenes' work that goes into environmental conservation. It provided me with plenty of opportunity to engage with the public, learn about the logistics of running community events and ask plenty of questions surrounding grants, funding and collaborating with environmental stakeholders. It was great networking and it definitely enhanced my professional communication skills.

What was the best part?

The best part was definitely seeing the joy, curiosity and wonder in children's faces as they learnt about the marine environment at events. Their enthusiasm and persistent questions were inspiring and really showed how important it is to share knowledge of biodiversity and our natural world, and make that knowledge available and accessible to everyone. My volunteering experience with BCN really helped me think about where I wanted to start taking my career and motivated me to continue working in the environmental field.

What connections did you make?

I was able to meet and work alongside organisations including Bellarine Bayside, the Friends of the Hooded Plover Bellarine, Breamlea Coast Action, Bancoora Surf Life Saving Club, Geelong Rainbow Inc as well as members of the public.



Part Four: Work Placement Checklist

To help you plan, facilitate, advertise, and evaluate your work placement roles or programs, the following checklist has been developed. This checklist brings together learnings from this document.

Action	Tick
Planning	
Do you have a volunteer policy, procedures manual or volunteer plan?	
Do you have a Code of Conduct that includes volunteers?	
Do you have appropriate insurance and/or are partnering with an organisation that has Public liability and Volunteer Accident insurance?	
Do you have an ABN? **this may only be required for some formal placements*	
Does your organisation have the capacity to facilitate the placement?	
Do you have processes in place to provide volunteers with additional support?	
Do you have a Position Description template or appropriate information to create one?	
Have you identified the role and outcomes of the placement?	
Does the opportunity align to organisational purposes, goals or outcomes?	
Have you identified the conditions including timing commitments, in-person vs. virtual and/or experience needed, if required?	
Do volunteers need specific certificates like a Working With Children Check?	
Are volunteers able to work from a centralised location like an office?	
Will volunteers be provided with equipment like laptops and Personal Protective Equipment?	
Have you nominated a member/s to manage and support the volunteer?	
Are you displaying equal opportunity when interviewing and selecting volunteers?	
Have you prepared a written agreement with conditions outlined clearly?	
Will you cover travel expenses or other expenses? E.g., paid vs unpaid	
Is their engagement clearly a volunteer role?	
Do you have a clear end point?	
Have you developed a project plan?	
Have you developed a work placement agreement or signed a similar document in line with expectations by a third party?	
Do volunteers know what skills they are building?	
Are there ways that volunteers can fairly communicate issues or complaints?	
Are the roles appropriate for community members to complete?	
Do you have processes in place to protect the student's health and safety including an incident report form?	

Advertising	
Are you including information about the conditions and requirements of the placement in any advertisements?	
Have you considered outreach via social media, Seek and in-person events?	
Have you considered advertising at appropriate times in line with semesters/trimesters for formal placements?	
Have you contacted WIL programs or unit chairs at universities?	
Have you created a registration or expression of interest form that is inclusive and easy to complete?	
Facilitation	
Do you have a Privacy Policy or procedure in place to ensure the safe storage of personal and confidential information about volunteers?	
Have you planned out an orientation schedule including training?	
Have you provided volunteers with a dedicated work space and/or equipment?	
Have you introduced the volunteer to the appropriate supervisor or support contacts and provided their contact details?	
Is the student being provided with opportunities to meet partners and stakeholders to build further connections?	
Does the student have access to a fair complaints and feedback process?	
Does the student have somebody that they can contact in the event of an emergency?	
Are you communicating any changes or cancellations in a timely manner?	
Have you provided the opportunity for the volunteer to develop specific skills?	
Are you involving the volunteer in meetings with other teams and stakeholders when appropriate?	
Are you offering the volunteer opportunities to undertake training?	
Evaluation	
Have you scheduled an evaluation meeting towards the end of the placement?	
Have you thanked the volunteer effectively?	
Have you provided volunteers with a fair opportunity to provide feedback about the placement or the organisation?	
Have you filled out an evaluation form either created by your organisation or on behalf of a third party like a university?	
Do you have a plan to provide a detailed reference letter for the volunteer, highlighting tasks, accomplishments and strengths?	
Have you provided the volunteer with a certificate of participation? See Appendix 3 for an example	
Have you reviewed the success of the placement with staff and/or committee members to identify ways to improve?	

Resources

The following resources provide more information and/or background information to assist host organisations facilitate successful work placement programs.

Websites and Organisations

Justice Connect

https://www.nfplaw.org.au/

Volunteering Geelong

https://volunteeringgeelong.org.au/

Volunteering Australia

https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/

Volunteering Victoria

https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/

Resources, Guides and Templates

National Volunteering Guide
Volunteering Australia, 2021
https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-volunteer-guide/

Volunteering Resource Hub
Volunteering Australia
https://volunteeringhub.org.au/resourcetype/templates/?all=1

National Standards for Volunteer Involvement
Volunteering Australia, 2015
https://www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/National-Standards-Document-FINAL_Web.pdf

Student Placements
Fair Work Ombudsman,
https://www.fairwork.gov.au/tools-and-resources/fact-sheets/unpaid-work/student-placements

Appendix 1: Example Work Placement Agreement

Example of a written agreement, especially useful for informal work placements

Work Placement Agreement	
Student Name	
Address	
Institution	
Course/Area of study	
Details of placement	
Organisation	
Location	
Contact Name	
Role	
Start and end date	
Days and hours of work	
Purpose	
Tasks	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Learning objectives	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Insurance cover	☐ Public Liability ☐ Volunteer Accident
Requirements/checks	☐ Working With Children Check ☐ First Aid
Financial compensation	☐ None ☐ Travel ☐ Food ☐ Accommodation ☐ Stipend

Appendix 2: Position Description Template

Volunteer Position Description	
Position Title	
Location Address	
Organisation	
Contact/Supervisor	
Details of role	
Time commitment	E.g., dates and hours
Role Description	
Tasks	☐ E.g., Assist with weeding days ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Learning objectives	☐ ☐ ☐ ☐
Experience needed	
Benefits	☐ E.g., Build networking opportunities ☐ ☐ ☐
Requirements/checks	☐ E.g., Working With Children Check
Conditions	E.g., Volunteering is flexible – dates, location and hours can be negotiated. Volunteers will be reimbursed for any project-related expenses.
Application Due Date	**Friday the 17th of May at 5pm**

Appendix 3: Example Participation Certificate



References

[1] Maertz C. P., Stoeberl, P. A., and Marks, J. (2014), Building Successful Internships: Lessons from the Research for Interns, Schools, and Employers.

[2] O'Higgins, N. and Pinedo, L. (2018), Interns and outcomes: Just how effective are internships as a bridge to stable employment?, Employment Policy Department, International Labour Office, Genevea.

[3] Victorian Government (2022), Victorian Volunteer Strategy.

[4] Maria Luisa Giancaspro, M. and Manuti, A. (2021), Learning to Be Employable Through Volunteering: A Qualitative Study on the Development of Employability Capital of Young People, Department of Education, Psychology, Communication, University of Bari, Bari, Italy.

[5] Rosas, G. and Corbanese, V. (2017), Developing quality traineeships for young people, International Labour Organisation.

[6] Volunteering ACT (2014), Designing Volunteering Roles: a Practical Guide.

[7] Volunteering Australia, (2022), Youth Volunteering Key Statistics.