Guide

A GUIDE FOR TRAINING VOLUNTEERS (PART A)

For trainers, managers of volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations.

national volunteer skills centre | volunteering australia

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A GUIDE FOR TRAINING VOLUNTEERS (PART A)

In recent times formal training for volunteers has begun to assume special importance, both as a volunteering role requirement and as a motivation to volunteer. A trainer of volunteers not only facilitates competency strengthening but also contributes to motivating volunteers by helping them to achieve and maintain satisfaction in their roles.

The volunteering environment is characterised today by legislative, quality assurance and continuous improvement requirements. There are also service delivery obligations attached to funding. The competency and commitment of volunteers are pivotal to meeting these requirements.

A volunteer who is competent in their role – well-trained – will have more reason to continue volunteering than one who is not confident and under stress because they lack competence. Making the most of what volunteers know and can do has obvious benefits for both volunteers and volunteer-involving organisations. Accordingly, a trainer who supports the volunteer in achieving competence and confidence is a key contributor to volunteering in Australia. This guide, together with the Toolkit for Training Volunteers (Part B), is offered as a resource to assist this important process.

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WELCOME TO THE GUIDE FOR TRAINING VOLUNTEERS (PART A)

This guide is one half of a resource which assists trainers of volunteers to achieve best practice in the design and delivery of training. It should be read in conjunction with the *Toolkit for Training Volunteers (Part B).*

This guide (Part A) reviews training environment issues that shape how volunteers are trained and provides an introduction to competency-based training. In particular, it offers information which will assist trainers to:

- analyse the volunteering environment;
- design effective and appropriate training strategies and;
- achieve training/learning outcomes to support volunteer-involving organisations' goals and help volunteers derive satisfaction and personal growth from their volunteering.

The *Toolkit for Training Volunteers (Part B)* builds upon the issues discussed in this guide and offers a range of tools for you to draw on when designing and facilitating competency-based training. In both Parts A and B it is recognised that training is not an activity that can be reduced to a one-size-fits-all model. Accordingly, the information and tools in these resources are offered for you to reflect on, and take up in a manner that bests suits you and the changing environment in which you facilitate training.

Who is a 'trainer' and how can you use this guide?

In this guide, a 'trainer' can range from a person who is sometimes a trainer and may not have trainer qualifications, through to a person in the formal role of trainer and with formal qualifications. Of course, there are many variations in between, embracing both paid staff and volunteer trainers. An experienced volunteer may also be part of a learning partnership in which they act as a training supporter rather than principal trainer. Taking on the role of buddy or coach to assist the learner, is an example of this.

This guide is aimed at four principal audiences:

- designated trainers of volunteers – this means that training is a significant part of your role;
- occasional trainers of volunteers – this means that your major duties are other than training, but you do facilitate training which may have been identified as appropriate and designed by others;
- training supporters – this means that you assist trainees to learn by being a buddy or coach;
- managers and team leaders of volunteers who contribute to the identification of training needs, the design of training programs and support the delivery of training.

We also recognise that people's levels of experience will differ. This guide is written as much for the confident expert as it is for the newcomer to the role of trainer or training supporter. Depending on your experience, you will draw on this guide as a refresher of best practice and/or as a tool to help you to design and deliver training/learning. For you to get the best from this guide, our suggested approach is:

- *If you are an experienced trainer* – read each section as a guide to a critical self-audit of your current practice. Draw on those parts of the guide (*do something*) which seem likely to be helpful in updating your practice as suits your environment. You may find the guide and accompanying Toolkit (Part B) useful when supporting a less experienced person to undertake a trainer role.

- *If you are a newcomer to a trainer role* – read each section as a guide to best practice in training. Draw from the guide *(do something)* in whatever way will best support your design and facilitation of training/learning. Keep in mind that as you grow and develop as a trainer and as your training environment changes, you will find yourself in a continual process of improvement. If you get to the stage where you look back on the last time you facilitated learning and are confident that you have done as well as you ever will, then *pack it in!* You will have reached the end of your own learning journey.

- *If you are supporting a volunteer in furthering their learning* – read each section as a source of ideas for how you might best assist your colleague. Draw from the guide *(do something)* that adds to the support that you are giving and also enhances the personal value that you are getting from the supporting role.

What do you need to qualify formally as a trainer?

Many trainers in the volunteering environment will be facilitating training on an occasional basis and as part of other duties. The need to have formal qualifications as a trainer is unlikely to apply, however you may be increasingly working in partnership with qualified trainers from Registered Training Organisations (RTOs). If you wish to deliver accredited training you will need a formal qualification known as *Certificate IV in Training and Assessment*. Professional trainers will be aware of the increasing requirement for formal qualifications and that in 2005, TAA40104 *Certificate IV in Training and Assessment* superseded BSZ40198 *Certificate IV in Assessment and Workplace Training*. Accordingly, this guide and the accompanying *Toolkit for Training Volunteers (Part B)* takes the opportunity to introduce some of the TAA40104 content to lay some groundwork for those who are considering achieving formal qualification, and for the general interest of those not intending to proceed to formal qualifications. You may find that these two resources help you to start gathering evidence of your competencies as a trainer, which you may be able to use to apply for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL). See Appendix to the Toolkit (Part B) for further details, and another resource produced under the NVSC Project, *Recognition of Prior Learning Toolkit*, available free via Volunteering Australia's website.

Throughout this guide the terms **'training'** and **'learning'** are used interchangeably, as are 'trainee' and 'learner'. This is an attempt to break down the notion that a training pathway to new knowledge and skills is different to a learning pathway. There are many potential pathways to acquiring new competencies and, whether these are called 'training' or 'learning', the outcome is the same. However, the term 'learner' is arguably more empowering than 'trainee' and better reflects the values of volunteering.

You will also find that **active learning** is a repeated theme. Training programs can often be designed and delivered with more of a focus on what the trainer does than what the trainee does. In the past it was not uncommon to come across lesson/training plans expressed in terms of topic content and time allocation by the trainer – clearly not a focus on the learner. This guide advocates and supports a design and delivery strategy which is focused on the learner being consciously aware of the value to them – and others – of the training/learning experience, and on the importance of them being an active participant (doing something). Sitting passively, listening to a trainer is not a learning experience, and it does not make the most of what a learner knows and can do.

Throughout the guide this *brightening the insight* icon announces a suggestion that you may *choose* to take up to explore the issues more deeply. The generic approach of this guide can serve as the basis for you to explore and think about *facilitating learning* in your environment. Encouraging your trainees to be active learners is a best practice strategy, and reaching beyond the information presented in the guide is a way for *you* to model *active learning*.

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UNDERSTANDING THE VOLUNTEERING TRAINING ENVIRONMENT

A1.1 Why training volunteers matters

Today, the competence of volunteers is extremely important. Volunteers are integral to the delivery of important services and there are other factors such as securing funding that are tied to the competence of volunteers. Volunteer-involving organisations also have a formal duty of care to clients, paid staff, volunteers and the general public. This means that having competent paid workers and volunteers is critical to the ongoing viability and success of volunteer-involving organisations.

Nurturing an environment which enables an organisation and its volunteers to identify and act on opportunities to derive best advantage from its volunteers is therefore very important. Developing volunteers' skills and extending volunteer competence not only immediately benefits organisations, but also makes volunteering more attractive, more rewarding and more purposeful for volunteers.

Research confirms the need for volunteer training. One example of this is the 2001 research funded by the Department of Family and Community Services (Thomson Goodall Associates 2001) which led to the creation of the National Volunteer Skills Centre (NVSC) project. Information about the NVSC project can be found on Volunteering Australia's website (www.volunteeringaustralia.org) and the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs' (FaCSIA) website (www.facsia.gov.au).

Another significant outcome of this research was the finding that some of the best aspects of training reported by volunteers include:

- practice techniques
- accessible supervisors to ask questions of and learn new skills
- training built on Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL)
- 'on-the-job' training
- twinning buddy system / peer training and support
- courses followed by ongoing training, supervision and support
- interactive rather than theoretical training

Reflect on whether any of these best aspects of training as perceived by volunteers are present – or could apply – in your training programs. And if so, is there an opportunity to enhance the training experience by drawing upon these strategies more fully than is presently the case?

The 2001 research found that there was richness and variety in the training of volunteers and a strong base upon which to build, but also identified training areas to strengthen. This guide will help you strengthen your planning, training and facilitation skills, and identify training areas where you can make improvements. In turn, you will be better able to support the volunteers you work with to build their knowledge and skills.

A1.2 Who benefits?

As a trainer, you are a significant giver of value. The prime beneficiaries of your facilitation of training are:

- The clients of your volunteer-involving organisation, through the quality of service that the volunteer provides;
- The volunteer, through the strengthening and expansion of their competency, confidence and sense of contribution;
- The volunteer-involving organisation, through its strengthened capacity for service delivery.

Reflect on the possibility that there may be other beneficiaries of your training. For example, depending upon the nature of the volunteering, these might include family of clients, family of the volunteer, other volunteers (and paid staff) within your organisation (and organisations associated with your organisation), the general public, etc. And, in some circumstances, even the employer of the volunteer may be benefiting in ways that might not be recognised.

A1.3 What's special about training volunteers?

There is an extensive range of volunteering activities in Australia, and a significant portion of the population are volunteers. Importantly, there is no 'typical' volunteer. Contrary to traditional stereotypes of the 'typical' volunteer, volunteers are strongly represented across gender, educational, cultural and economic divides.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS)[1] tells us that in 2000, 4,395,600 Australians voluntarily contributed 704.1 million hours of their time to community organisations. Data gathered in 2004 by Volunteering Australia and AMP Foundation anticipated that by 2005 close to 40% of people over 18 years in Australia will have volunteered their time, energy and skills to an organisation. This prediction was realised and confirmed by the *Giving Australia* project which reports that in 2004, an estimated 6.3 million Australians over the age of 18 volunteered, amounting to 41% of adult Australians.[2]

Illustrating the point that volunteering covers a wide variety of activities, the ABS uses eleven broad sectors against which to collect and analyse volunteering data:

- Community/welfare
- Sport/recreation
- Education/training/youth development
- Religious
- Health
- Arts/culture
- Business/professional/unions
- Emergency services
- Environment/animal welfare
- Law/justice/political
- Foreign/international

[1] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2000, *Voluntary Work, Australia, 2000*, 4441.0

[2] Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, October 2005, *Giving Australia: Research on Philanthropy in Australia*

Being an effective volunteer requires a range of competencies beyond what might at first appear to be the case. Given that volunteering occurs across a wide range of communities and activities and that volunteers are an extremely diverse group, it is reasonable to suggest that the training of volunteers needs to be broader in scope and more relevant to context than other fields of training. Volunteer roles can also be many-faceted, and may require more than just technical competence in delivery of the service.

For example

A volunteer who is supporting people in strengthening their maths skills may be a superb mathematics teacher, but not have experience in the cultural issues which may be relevant to the particular client community.

Reflect on your experience of instances where it was important to train volunteers both in a technical role and in 'getting it right' in relation to the environment. Do you recall instances where this was well done and/or where the balance was not good?

Training of volunteers needs to begin by acknowledging that volunteers come from diverse backgrounds and to draw on this.

For example

You may be preparing a newly recruited group of volunteers for a role that involves strengthening the social skills of young people who are at risk of long-term anti-social behaviour, but members of your learner group bring very different life experiences to the program. They may be of different ages and range from learners with little formal education through to professionals with high academic qualifications. While there may be a challenge in dealing with these people as a group, there is also an opportunity to draw upon the diversity of their personal backgrounds in the course of the program.

The diversity of a group of volunteer learners is probably quite different to other training groups. As a trainer of volunteers you will probably not have homogeneous trainee groups as is the norm in industry or even in much of post-secondary education/training.

In a non-intrusive way (conscious of equity and privacy issues) form an impression of the variety of backgrounds that volunteers bring to your volunteer-involving organisation. Reflect on how this rich resource can be best drawn on within training programs. For example, it might be very powerful for a group of learners to deliberately compare differences of view based on age. Compare your views with a colleague.

In recognition of the special circumstances and training needs of volunteers, an initiative of the NVSC project has been the creation of three accredited courses designed especially for volunteers:

- Certificate I in Active Volunteering
- Certificate II in Active Volunteering
- Certificate III in Active Volunteering

An overview of these courses and the course modules can be found on Volunteering Australia's website. You will also find that this website is a good starting point for browsing the extensive (and growing) body of training resources which support the training of volunteers, including learning guides for all of the core units of the Certificates in Active Volunteering.

Take a few moments to look at the overview of each of the Certificates in Active Volunteering and browse the range of support materials which you can access on the Volunteering Australia website. When doing this keep in mind that the Certificates in Active Volunteering are only part of a much larger engagement that volunteers may have with training. Look for materials that are of current interest.

Did you find information and/or resources that are useful to you – or maybe to a colleague – now or in the future? Do you have resources that could be added to this body of material? If so, Volunteering Australia invites you to submit such additional material.

A1.4 Motivation matters – how volunteers' motivations can impact their learning

The reasons people choose to volunteer are yet another illustration of the diversity of volunteering. Personal values and the motivation to volunteer can vary widely. Some people volunteer to learn new skills and meet people, others because they want to share their skills. Some volunteers have an interest in a particular social cause, others have an interest in their local community.

While the knowledge and skill required of a volunteer is the same as would be required of a paid worker performing the same task, volunteers will have different needs, will find different things rewarding, will have varying expectations of their volunteering experience and will value training differently. These factors, together with their different motivations for volunteering, may influence whether a volunteer takes up training and how motivated they are to achieve learning outcomes.

For example

A volunteer may not be seeking career advancement in their role and may not place as much value on achieving a formal qualification as might be the case for a paid worker. Timing, place and effort may have a different impact on the design and delivery of a training program for volunteers than on one for paid trainees. Also, having completed the training, a volunteer may not have the same opportunity as a paid person to fully transfer what they have learned to the workplace and maintain their level of skill.

In your role as a trainer you will be acutely aware of the value of volunteering to the community and, in particular, the contribution your volunteer-involving organisation makes to the community. But your trainees may not be as aware as you, and it may add to their training motivation to more fully recognise what they contribute. Accordingly, drawing upon a volunteer's current knowledge and skill and presenting your training in the context of how it can enhance the unique contribution each volunteer makes to their community, may add to the incentive to undertake training.

For some volunteers, their ongoing motivation arises from being able to do something that they find personally rewarding. Many people volunteer because they wish to make a contribution to the community and create social change. For example, a volunteer visiting older people in their own homes is probably primarily motivated by the human and caring aspect of being company and keeping an eye out for older people, than by a desire to reduce publicly funded aged-care facility costs.

Beyond broad social and economic outcomes, a volunteer may be even more motivated by the chance to make a contribution in their own special way. In other words, the volunteer is primarily motivated by being able to do something that they value, and that will be of value to others. If this is true, it follows that the contribution which you make as a trainer to a volunteer being competent and confident in carrying out their duties – as they value them – is a significant factor in the volunteer's ongoing commitment to volunteering.

In *Volunteering and Social Capital: A Functional Approach*, Stukas, Daly and Cowling (2005) state that:

> Volunteerism is often promoted as particularly likely to contribute to social capital, the bonds of trust and reciprocity created in social networks. However, volunteer work may only lead to such beneficial outcomes when certain conditions are met. A functional approach to volunteerism (Snyder, Clary & Stukas 2000) suggests that individual outcomes, such as volunteer satisfaction and retention, are more likely when volunteers are able to meet their important goals and motives for their service in their actual activities. In a small survey of Australian volunteers, we examined whether social capital outcomes, such as generalized trust in others and psychological sense of community, were similarly related to the matching of motivation and available benefits. Our results support such a contention and we discuss its implications and the need for future empirical research on the creation of social capital.
>
> (Stukas, Daly & Cowling 2005 – abstract of paper)

Although the paper does not discuss the training implications of this view, it is reasonable to infer that the quality of training which a volunteer undertakes is an important factor in them finding personal satisfaction in their volunteering role. This is because with your support as a trainer they are more able to make the contribution they envisage and want to make.

Ask some volunteers if they feel that their training has added to their motivation to remain as a volunteer and, if so, why they believe this. And, based upon their responses – positive or negative – reflect upon how you might strengthen your training delivery.

Discuss your findings with some trainer colleagues. Keep in mind that the e-forums at www.volunteeringaustralia.org may be a place to exchange views.

MEETING THE NEEDS OF THE ORGANISATION AND THE VOLUNTEER

A2.1 How training/learning can meet the needs of the organisation and the volunteer

Even though there will always be some difference in what trainees bring to a training experience and what they seek to take from it, in the case of volunteers this difference is probably much broader than in more conventional circumstances and brings with it the need to balance the organisation's need with the volunteer's motivation to undertake training and to continue volunteering. This does not imply compromise by the organisation, which has service delivery obligations, but it may be appropriate to structure (enrich) the training so that a volunteer's motivation to continue volunteering is reinforced.

The above may appear a bit strange, as the organisation is unlikely to have the resources or the will to offer training which is beyond its service delivery goals, and it also needs to keep the volunteer's activity within bounds. However, the learner is a volunteer and it is necessary to respect and reinforce this status. It therefore makes sense to integrate the process of volunteer learning/training into volunteering activities by learning on and through the job. This process begins with identifying a need or even an opportunity. In a traditional workplace, training is typically initiated when the *need* to upgrade the skills of an employee or a group of employees is identified, generally in the interests of the enterprise. However, it may also be the case that a volunteer identifies training as a way – the *opportunity* – in which they could make a greater contribution to the goals of the volunteer-involving organisation while expanding their own capabilities.

Integrating the process of volunteer training into volunteering activities and supporting the achievement of the volunteer's and the organisation's goals requires certain knowledge and skills. To do this competently you should be able to:

- identify the competencies which volunteers require to perform their role;
- identify the gaps/shortfalls in the volunteer's existing competencies;
- recognise and build on existing knowledge and skill possessed by volunteers;
- design and deliver training/learning suited to meeting the volunteer-involving organisation's needs;
- identify the opportunity and structure a learning component in volunteering activities – i.e. supporting a volunteer to build on their body of outcomes from lifelong learning through the experience of being a volunteer;
- assess the extent of competencies gained by the volunteer through formal training and life experiences;
- assist the volunteer in transferring their outcomes from formal training and broad life experiences to their volunteering role;

- encourage a volunteer to recognise, value, and draw upon the added competencies that they have gained through volunteering in such a way as to be of advantage to them in other aspects of their life; and
- in addition to helping others to acquire new competencies, be able to recognise the need/opportunity to acquire new competencies themselves.

These skills are relevant to: designated trainers, occasional trainers, training supporters and managers of volunteers. What areas do you need to strengthen? What activities might you undertake to start building your own skills and knowledge? Do you have a colleague or a mentor who can support you in your quest to build your own competencies?

Figure 1 illustrates a first step towards satisfaction of both parties' needs.

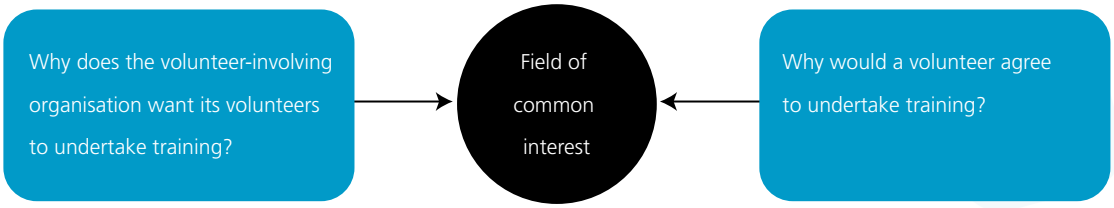


Figure 1 *Confirming the organisational and learner field of common interest*

Because an organisation will have defined service delivery goals to meet, its training initiatives may appear to be inflexible. However, by knowing what motivates the volunteer the trainer can construct and deliver the training so that it draws on what an individual learner brings to the training experience (by way of relevant knowledge, skill and commitment), and does so in a way that the learner feels included and valued. Further, the training process may reveal ways in which the learner's capabilities and enthusiasm can be further drawn on for the benefit of both the organisation and the volunteer.

It is possible that the learner will have reasons for becoming a volunteer, and hence undertaking training, which are not going to be fully satisfied in the volunteering role for which they are being trained. However, this is not an unusual situation in life. Providing that enough of the volunteer's motivation is being satisfied, this will not be a problem. The trainer has an important role in ensuring that this is the case.

On both sides – organisation and volunteer – there is a balanced give and take embedded in the training experience, but never to the extent of compromising the organisation's service delivery objectives. The trainer is very much involved in moderating this giving and taking but does not have sole responsibility in this regard. Others, such as supervisors, team leaders and other volunteers, also influence the retention of volunteers.

Discuss with some volunteers to what extent training was relevant to their reason for becoming a volunteer. To what extent did they feel able to make a contribution to the learning experience as opposed to being relatively passive learners expected to take from the training without giving to the training experience? Did they feel more like relatively passive receivers of information or active participants in acquiring new knowledge and skill?

A2.2 Designing an appropriate training strategy

As we can see, volunteering is very diverse in 'what', 'how' and 'who'. Because of this, it is very difficult to be prescriptive about the particularities of volunteer training. Your training environment will probably have special characteristics which require unique approaches to delivering training.

Nevertheless, volunteer training can be expected to lead to competency outcomes at the same standard as vocational training. This may be why some people tend to see volunteering as a pathway to employment.

These possible differences between paid workers and volunteers reinforce the importance of two things:

- Trainers of volunteers need to be especially adept at supporting learning in an environment where the learners have diverse motivations and different experiences to bring to the training;
- Trainers of volunteers need to be especially adept at supporting learners to transfer their skills beyond the training experience to the actual volunteering workplace.

Create a list of the particular things which you feel could influence how you design and deliver training to volunteers in your environment. In doing this, think about the training from the learner's point of view.

For example

The time and place that best suits trainees who have responsibilities other than volunteering, the language, literacy and numeracy capabilities of the trainees, fear of failure that some trainees might have, etc.

Having created the list, you may find it very interesting to discuss your list with some volunteers who have recently undertaken training and compare their comments to those of volunteers who have undertaken training at earlier times. If there is a difference in their comments, why is this so?

When designing a training program and developing strategies for take-up and skills transfer beyond the training experience to the volunteering workplace, it will be useful to reflect on the special nature of your training environment, and what may make the training of volunteers different from the training of paid staff.

Reflection on these things and inquiry within your environment should inform your training strategy. There are some universal elements or components which are common to all training strategies, as shown in the template, *Designing a training strategy* (Template 1). This template can be used as an aid to systematically plan and deliver training that will work across the diverse range of volunteering activities. Techniques for investigating and acting on these matters are included in Part B of this resource, *A Toolkit for Training Volunteers.*

Template 1 *Designing a training strategy*

Universal components of the training strategy	Details of the training strategy
The volunteer-involving organisation's need and operational objective	*This detail will arise from a training needs analysis (see PART B of this guide for tools to help you conduct this analysis). It should include confirmation that the organisation's objective is best met by a training approach*
Personal reason why the volunteer will participate in the training	*What's in it for the volunteer?*
The what, how, when and where of the training program for both delivery of the program and assessment of trainee competence	*The learning design and the assessment design are intimately connected – each informs the other*
Process of evaluating the quality of the training program	*Training programs should be critically reviewed so that you can continually improve your training. How would you define 'quality'? What are the indicators of quality? How will you go about evaluating this?*
Process for effectively transferring the learning from the training experience to the volunteer workplace	*This should include identification of what aids and what hinders a volunteer in applying what they have learned from the training experience. Aids can be a way to treat barriers.*
Means by which the volunteer will maintain their knowledge and level of skill over time	*There is a possibility that a volunteer will not have sufficient opportunity to regularly apply all of their newly acquired new knowledge and skills. If you don't use it, you lose it. What opportunities are available to the volunteer to practise or exercise their skills and knowledge?*

When you are planning and delivering training systematically, the variety of what individual volunteers bring into a training experience and their different reasons for volunteering are two significant uncertainties. In a one-on-one training situation this may not be a problem, but where you are facilitating training for a group these differences may present a significant challenge for you.

Discuss the variation in what a volunteer brings in and seeks to take out with some of your training colleagues. In some instances they may have found this to be important and may have developed techniques to manage the issue and even to take advantage of the variety. In other instances, the issue may have not been seen as significant – if so, why? Be alert for the possibility that the issue may not have been recognised.

Note: Volunteering Australia, through the National Volunteer Skills Centre project, provides web based e-forums where you could raise this matter and other issues, and share views across the broad spectrum of trainers of volunteers.

An issue that may arise in some volunteering environments is variation in the spoken language skills, literacy and numeracy (LLN) of volunteers. This can occur where there is a transition from relatively informal training to formal training, which some people find threatening. For some volunteers this is a very sensitive matter and requires reciprocal sensitivity by the trainer. Providing sensitive support for volunteers who need to strengthen their LLN skills may be a special contribution that a volunteer-involving organisation can make, and one which can be life-changing for some volunteers. Of course, this comes down to the will to do it – by both the organisation and the volunteer – and availability of resources. What might at first be seen as a recruitment and retention problem may turn into an opportunity.

As many volunteers can have LLN limitations (now acknowledged as more prevalent in our community than was previously apparent [3]), trainer competency in supporting trainees with LLN weakness is very important. This is especially important in the volunteering environment because of the volunteer status of learners – if they feel threatened they won't join or won't stay.

There is a growing range of learning materials to help trainers develop their competency in supporting LLN skills, and the topic is now included as an elective in the (TAA40104) *Certificate IV in Training and Assessment*. These new learning materials go a long way toward demystifying this topic. You will find that just browsing over these materials will be useful to you and will yield tools that you can readily apply in supporting your learners.[4]

If you have not already formally incorporated LLN issues in your training practice, you may find the following questions a useful starting point.

- Are you alert to the possibility that there are people in your trainee group who have LLN limitations? If yes, what is your strategy for identifying where this exists?
- Do you use training materials that exclude people with LLN limitations? If no, how do you know that this is the case?
- Do you facilitate learning in such a way that there are alternative pathways that a trainee may take that is appropriate to their LLN capability? If yes, what is the nature of these alternative pathways? For example, a training program that is heavily reliant upon reading could be offered in an alternative form that is orally based – talking about the issues with competent others.

[3] The Australian Council for Adult Literacy – www.acal.edu.au – and the National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER) – www.ncver.edu.au – are useful sources of information.

[4] On the National Training Information Service (NTIS) home page – www.ntis.gov.au – click on 'Training Packages' in the Browse NTIS panel; from the list displayed select 'TAA04 Training and Assessment Training Package'; in the Resources panel click on 'found here' and scroll down to the materials you want.

A2.3 How accredited training and recognition of prior learning can enhance the motivation to learn

In your training experience you have (or will) come across instances of volunteers resisting training, and other instances where training was not only welcomed by volunteers but was a major factor in the decision to become and remain volunteers. The 2001–02 research (Fahey, Walker & Sleigh 2002) into factors that influence the recruitment and retention of Tasmanian Volunteer Ambulance Officers (VAOs) found that learning new skills ranked equal highest with helping the community as a motivation for becoming a VAO and was reported as the most enjoyable activity (slightly ahead of helping people, patients) as a VAO.

> This paper reports the training findings of a larger study of Tasmania's Volunteer Ambulance Officers, the first-line response to medical emergencies in rural and remote areas. They are a dwindling resource in an isolated state with a great need for such services due to its large rural population and numerous tourists. The project surveyed all Tasmanian Volunteer Ambulance Officers and then conducted 10 focus groups. We found that Training is important to [a] VAO. It is not a disincentive. If done well, training will be a strategic recruitment and retention tool and will help to stabilise Tasmania's emergency rural health workforce. This research has a wider application for emergency services as they undergo similar changes and pressures related to training volunteers.
>
> (Fahey, Walker & Sleigh 2002 – abstract of paper)

Seek out research relevant to the importance of volunteer training within a number of different volunteering fields, including your own. If you find that there are either different features or similarities in the importance of training across the sectors, reflect on why this might be so. Discuss this with colleagues with a view to how your design and delivery of training could be strengthened.

Whether the training is accredited – in the sense that it is formally recognised for qualification purposes – and whether the learner seeks and will value the award of a qualification, can influence how it is valued.

- For some volunteer trainees, the prospect of training involving the award of a qualification causes anxiety due to such things as bad experiences with formal learning, a personal learning difficulty, or fear of failure in a test situation.
- For other volunteer trainees, the prospect of adding to their qualifications is a welcome, and even sought after, opportunity.

Where a degree of training formality exists, as a trainer you may be supporting learners – individually or in groups – across this spectrum, so you need to be skilled in encouraging and supporting learners according to their level of learning comfort.

Notwithstanding the learner's predisposition to formal learning, a volunteer learner will probably value feedback on how they are going. There is an opportunity (arguably a need) for you to provide this feedback throughout a training program in such a way that the accruing value to the learner is recognised and the learning experience motivates even a hesitant learner. In this way, the training experience – facilitated by you – can cause even a hesitant learner to become a confident learner.

When beginning accredited training some volunteers do not realise that they can be awarded credit for knowledge and skills they already possess. Also, their volunteer work may be structured in a way that can earn them credit towards formal qualifications.

Recognition of Prior Learning, also known as RPL, is a form of assessment that acknowledges skills and knowledge (known within the VET system as 'competencies') gained through:

- formal training conducted by industry or education institutions;
- work experience;
- life experience.

RPL can only be granted by qualified assessors working with or on behalf of RTOs. RTOs and their assessors are only able to grant RPL (if proven deserved through the assessment process) for courses and competencies they are authorised by their State Training Authority to deliver.

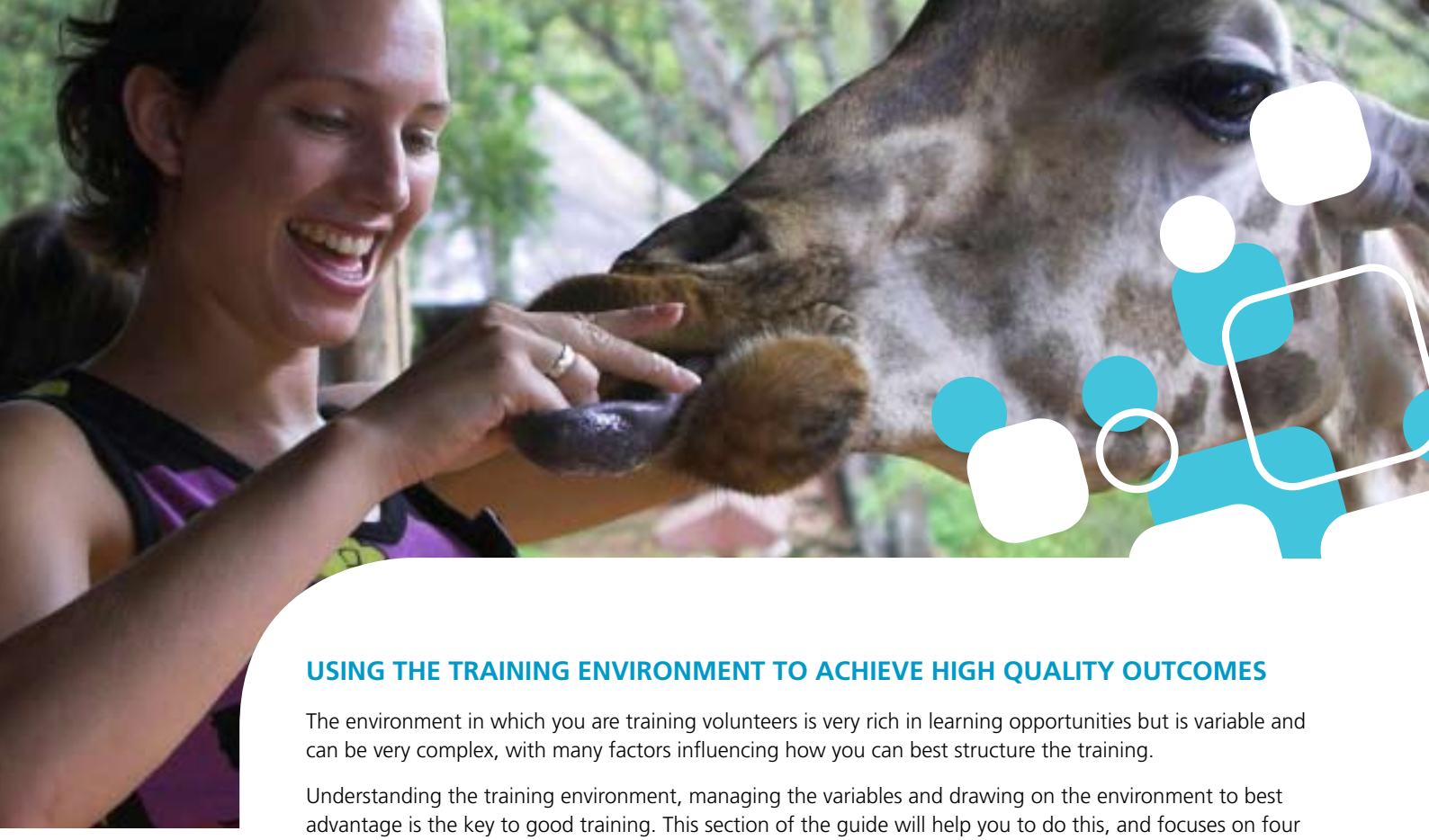
RPL is sometimes also referred to as Recognition of Current Competencies (RCC). The main principle underpinning RPL is that for competency-based training the focus should be on the outcomes of learning, rather than how, when or where the learning occurred. In order to grant RPL, the assessor must be confident that the candidate is currently competent against the endorsed industry or enterprise competency standards or outcomes specified in Australian Qualifications Framework accredited courses.

The potential benefits which can be gained through RPL are so significant and wide-reaching that Volunteering Australia, through the National Volunteer Skills Centre project, has developed an RPL toolkit. This toolkit is available free of charge, and illustrates the benefits for volunteers, volunteer-involving organisations and the community which can be gained through RPL. It also contains tools and advice to help volunteers apply and attain credit for their existing knowledge and skills.

The following key points give an overview of RPL from the perspective of its motivational value **to undertake learning:**

- It can be a significant motivator to begin a course of study if advanced standing is awarded through RPL – i.e. the learner is already some way down the track towards gaining a formal qualification.
- It is very motivating to have what you already know and can do formally recognised and valued, no matter how this competency has been acquired.
- Identifying and gathering evidence of existing competency, although it requires effort, is a motivating process as it allows the learner to realise the value of their current competency and to demonstrate this to others.
- The prospect of acquiring new knowledge and skills aligned with endorsed competencies while carrying out a volunteering role adds satisfaction to being a volunteer. This learn-as-you-go approach, which is structured so that evidence of the learner's competency is progressively assembled, is very motivating. This is of advantage to volunteers seeking to strengthen their employability.

Note that **the awarding of RPL requires high quality evidence of current competency.** Just having done something in the past is not necessarily adequate evidence. For further information, download the RPL toolkit from Volunteering Australia's website.



USING THE TRAINING ENVIRONMENT TO ACHIEVE HIGH QUALITY OUTCOMES

The environment in which you are training volunteers is very rich in learning opportunities but is variable and can be very complex, with many factors influencing how you can best structure the training.

Understanding the training environment, managing the variables and drawing on the environment to best advantage is the key to good training. This section of the guide will help you to do this, and focuses on four main areas:

- identifying training tools;
- supporting learning by sharing the role of training;
- understanding the rules which impact upon training; and
- putting it all together.

It is also important for trainers to understand how the above (and other) environmental factors are dynamic and inter-connected. This section of the guide will also help you to keep sight of these factors, understand how they are connected and manage them effectively.

A3.1 Identifying training tools

Sometimes it might seem easier to think about training as a narrow process where a learner participates in a training program and exits with some increased level of knowledge and skill. Other issues, such as what motivates the learner and their anxieties about learning and the transfer of outcomes to the workplace, are regarded as peripheral and not really the concern of the trainer. Figure 2 illustrates this narrow approach.

Figure 2 *Narrow view of the training of a volunteer*

In the narrow view of training, the training materials and other resources (tools) would most probably be thought of as residing within the 'training program' box. However, if you give these resources their own position – as shown in Figure 3 – their status and potential richness of variety is made more apparent.

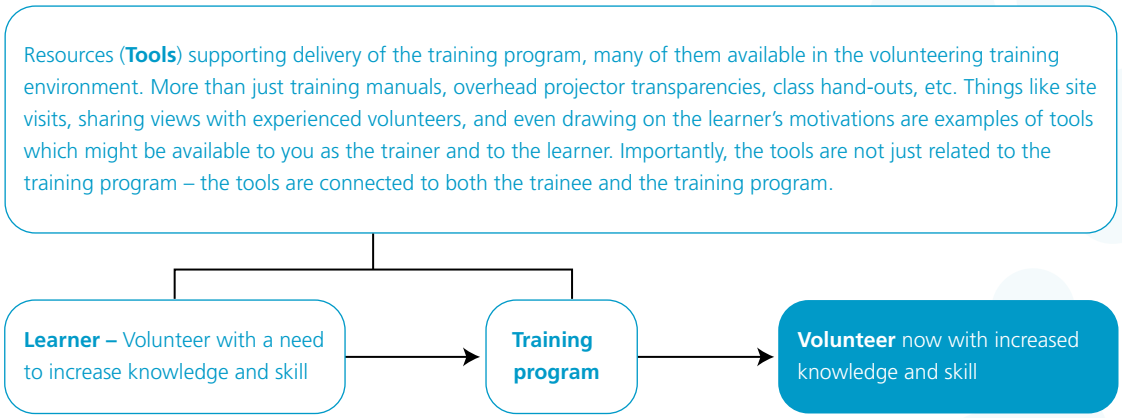


Figure 3 *Expanding the view of what training tools might be*

Figure 3 shows that training tools are connected to both the training program and the learner. Although it is obvious, it can be overlooked that it is the learner who draws on the tools, so they should fit the learner's needs and whatever opportunity the learner has to draw upon them. It is probable that within a trainee group, individual learners will have different preferences for how they learn and will draw differently on the available tools – preferring to select some and avoiding others. Because of this, best practice learning design and training facilitation requires there to be reasonable choice (flexibility) of learning pathways. Creativity in developing and/or identifying tools is a major factor in offering learning flexibility.

By giving tools their own status, it is more likely that in designing and delivering a training program you will identify a wider range of materials and other resources that can be drawn on, including such things as the motivations of the volunteer to learn, and the experience of others, in addition to the more conventional resources that are thought of as supporting delivery of a training program.

Think about instances of where you have noticed that people have different preferred ways of learning.

- Have you personally experienced being forced to learn in a way that wasn't comfortable for you? For example, you had lots of reading and no interaction with other learners? Or, your preference is to be directed to information and then left to quietly get on with it, but instead you were thrown into a veritable maelstrom of group activity? If so, how did you manage this situation?

- With the benefit of hindsight, can you think of ways in which offering a variety of tools – learning pathways – would have enriched a training program? For example, a mentor could have been assigned and perhaps visits to sites relevant to the learning could have been arranged?

Although trainees may be learning as a group, with appropriate support for different options of how best to learn, individuals within the group can be assisted to learn in ways that best suit them. For example, some people learn best by having information provided to them (reading a book, attending a class, etc.) whereas others learn best by discovery (being set a challenge, undertaking a project, etc.). For this reason, the tools in Figure 3 are shown as connected to both the learner and the training program. The potential difference in learning preferences of the trainees should be reflected in the variety of tools. In addressing the required competency objectives (common to all trainees), the training program must be appropriate to the differing learning needs of the trainees (as they will not all have the same knowledge and skill gaps to fill) and draw upon tools that suit this. The learner, the training program and the tools are all interconnected – change one and you have an impact upon the others.

Consider – What might happen to the tools if you have an established training program, but the nature of the learners changes? For example, their ages and life experiences are different, the level of education is different, the cultural backgrounds are different, the learner groups are not as homogeneous as they were in the past, or the motivations to be a volunteer are different.

You may also find it appropriate to discuss with a colleague the possibility that an existing program and its associated tools is not as well suited to the needs of the learners and/or the reason for conducting the program has changed.

A3.2 Supporting learning by sharing the role of training

Beyond the richness of the available learning tools, there is also the possibility of sharing the training facilitation between a number of parties. The most common learning partnership, which has probably always informally existed and is recently being given formal support, comprises a trainer, the learner and an experienced colleague of the learner in the role of training supporter (in some instances 'a coach'). And there are other possibilities such as learners providing mutual support each for the other (face-to-face or electronically connected), family members supporting a learner where there are language, literacy and numeracy issues, and supervisors and team leaders ensuring that the workplace is conducive to learning. All of this can be viewed as what might be referred to in training circles as a 'division of labour'. Essentially, this means sharing the load to help the learning take place (see Figure 4).

Beyond the people with whom the training work might be shared, learning occurs in the context of a community of learners, the volunteer-involving organisations, colleagues of the learner and those who are the clients of the organisation (see Figure 4). And, depending on the nature of the volunteering, there could be an even broader community including people who are not at first obvious stakeholders in terms of the training need and outcomes. For example, a public safety volunteer at an outdoor music festival is obviously concerned with the safety of the general public attending the event, but would also be providing service with the interests of the artists, other volunteers and even the interests of the event sponsors in mind. Or, as another example, a volunteer fire fighter operates as part of an obvious close team (practice community[5]) of fellow brigade members, but also has responsibilities to the families of other members of the brigade with regard to protecting the safety of their loved ones.

It is also important to consider the nature of the community of volunteers in which a volunteer is training and the community of their clients. When the client community changes, such as a shift in age range of the clients, a change in ethnicity profile, or a broadening of education achievement, the training program will probably also need to be adjusted. The way in which other volunteers support the learner might also need to change.

[5] You may find it of interest to explore the topic 'Communities of practice' by entering this into a web search engine.

A3.3 Understanding the rules which impact upon training

The rules that influence a volunteer's obligation to train and their access to training, along with broader standards or policies governing volunteering, are another important component of the learning environment. For example, a volunteer who is working with children is doing so under a set of rules which include not receiving payment, having passed a police check, avoiding inappropriate physical contact and possibly also having been trained in safe food handling. The interconnected relationship of rules to other components of the learning environment is shown in Figure 4.

As a trainer, you are under an obligation (a rule) to ensure that the learning environment is healthy and safe. This is a unit of study (a unit of competency) in the TAA40104 *Certificate IV in Training and Assessment.* Template 2 might be a useful reminder or a starting point for you to review your training approach with respect to this obligation.

Template 2 *Ensuring a healthy and safe learning environment*

Key healthy and safe learning environment (OHS) issues (Elements of competency as defined in the TAAENV403A *Ensure a healthy and safe learning environment* unit of competency)	**Actions you will take to address these key issues** Note: The performance criteria for each of the elements of this unit of competency are an appropriate guide – go to www.ntis.gov.au
Identify OHS responsibilities	
Identify hazards in the learning environment	
Assess risks in the learning environment	
Develop and implement actions to ensure the health, safety, and welfare of learners and/or candidates	
Provide appropriate OHS requirements to trainees	
Monitor OHS arrangements in the learning environment	

There are of course many formal and informal rules, in addition to the examples above, which influence how you plan and deliver training. If you are a trainer operating within an RTO, or work in partnership with an RTO, then the Australian Quality Training Framework (AQTF) sets standards which affect your work as a trainer. There are 12 Standards:

- Systems for quality training and assessment (Standard 1)
- Compliance with Commonwealth, state/territory legislation and regulatory requirements (Standard 2)
- Effective financial management procedures (Standard 3)
- Effective administration and records management procedures (Standard 4)
- Recognition of qualifications issued by other RTOs (Standard 5)
- Access and equity and client service (Standard 6)
- The competence of RTO staff (Standard 7)
- RTO assessments (Standard 8)
- Learning and assessment strategies (Standard 9)
- Issuing AQF qualifications and statements of attainment (Standard 10)
- Use of national and state/territory logos (Standard 11)
- Ethical marketing and advertising (Standard 12)

It is beyond the scope of this guide to go into detail regarding the AQTF, and the framework may have little direct impact on your role as trainer as much of it deals with management and administration matters. However, as it is useful for all trainers to have some understanding of the AQTF – particularly the learning and assessment strategies (Standard 9) – it is recommended that you familiarise yourself with the AQTF. To read more about this, search the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) website www.dest.gov.au for details of the AQTF.

As was the case with *Ensure a healthy and safe learning environment*, having the capacity to design and conduct your training in accordance with the AQTF is a requirement for any delivery of formal vocational educational and training (VET). If you would like to explore the AQTF further, you may find it useful to compare how far your approach to training delivery aligns with the elements of TAAENV401A *Work effectively in vocational education and training*, which is also part of the TAA40104 *Certificate IV in Training and Assessment* (go to www.ntis.gov.au and enter TAAENV401A in the search facility). These TAAENV401A elements of competency are:

- Work within the vocational education and training policy framework
- Work within the training and/or assessment organisation's quality framework
- Manage work and work relationships
- Demonstrate a client-focused approach to work

Don't panic if all of this talk about rules feels overwhelming. The intent is not to make the training environment appear impossibly complex. Rather it is to give you an overview of the issues (see Figure 4) so that you can comfortably manage what might otherwise be too complex a load. It is not so hard when you stand back and look at the big picture – this helps avoid getting lost in the detail.

Reflect on the relationships which exist within your volunteer-involving organisation between division of labour, the learning community and rules that impact upon training and practice as a volunteer.

- Identify a few examples of learning partnerships – division of labour – that presently exist within your volunteer-involving organisation. Keep in mind that these may not be formally structured. Are there ways that these learning partnerships can be strengthened?
- Try to describe the learning community within your volunteer-involving organisation – i.e. the people that a volunteer interacts with in developing their competency and applying what they know and can do. Are there ways in which the bonding within this *community of practice* can be strengthened? (As suggested before, you may find it interesting to do some reading on *communities of practice* if it is a new topic for you.)
- Identify the major rules which impact the design and delivery of training in your volunteer-involving organisation. How do these rules influence the design and delivery of the training?

Discuss your findings with some colleagues within your community of practice.

A3.4 Putting it all together

As mentioned earlier, understanding how environmental factors are interconnected and how they relate to the learner is vital if you are to facilitate learning and support a learner to transfer their skills beyond the training experience.

Figure 4 below brings all these factors together. Note that the outcome of learning is expressed in a different way to Figures 2 and 3. In the earlier figures the outcome from the training program is shown as a volunteer with increased knowledge and skill. While this is the conventional view of the purpose of training, it is really just a step toward a higher goal where strengthened competency is to be applied to a tangible outcome. In the case of volunteers, this higher goal is suggested as being increased community capital through a committed and confident volunteer transferring the outcomes of their training to the volunteering workplace, in whatever form this may be. For this reason Figure 4 shows the outcome as being something beyond just the strengthened competency situation at the end of training.

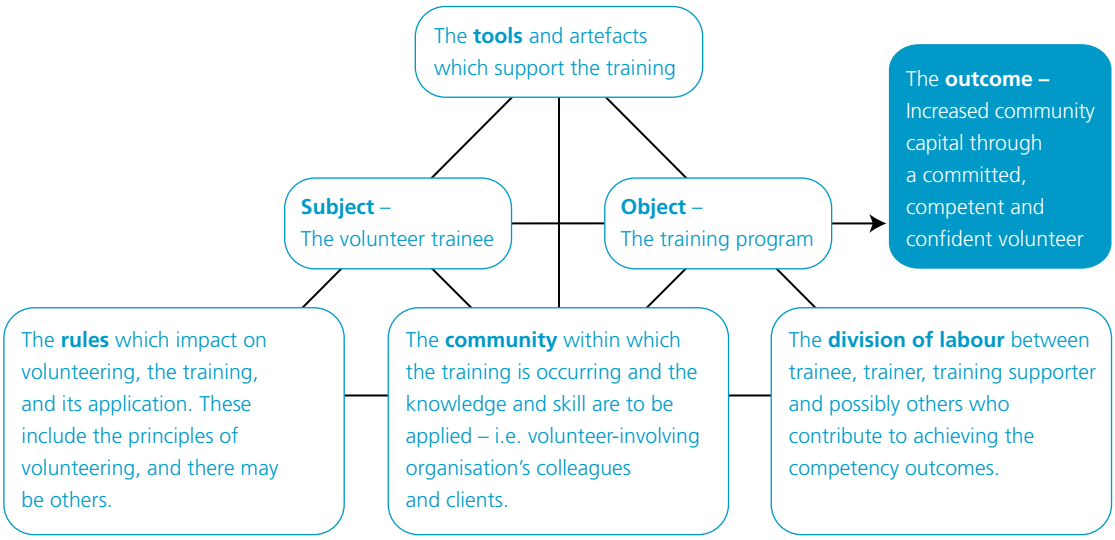


Figure 4 *Overview of the learning environment for the training of volunteers*

In Figure 4, the upper part of the diagram – subject, object, tools and outcome – is derived from the work of Vygotsky, Leont'ev and Luria as the founders (circa 1920s) of the cultural-historical school of Russian psychology (Engestrom, Miettinen & Punamaki 1999, p.1). The lower part of the diagram – rules, community and division of labour – has evolved as more contemporary scholars have built upon the earlier work. This has emerged as *Activity Theory*.

One scenario that illustrates Activity Theory is the case of a primitive tribe where there is a division of labour with some of the tribe (hunters as the subject) chasing the hunted animal into a confined space so that others can kill the animal (object) by throwing rocks (tool) in order to get meat and fur pelt for clothing for survival (outcome) of the tribe (community). There are associated rules regarding who acts as beater, who acts as rock thrower, who gets what part of the animal, etc. All of these elements of the hunt are interconnected. This explanation 'the primeval collective hunt' (cited by Engestrom http://communication.ucsd.edu/MCA/Paper/Engestrom/expanding/intro.htm – accessed 15/04/06) originates with Leont'ev (1981, pp. 210-213). However, consider what might occur if a rifle was made available as a tool. A single hunter might not require co-operation with others, the rules might change (the hunter might not share the meat and pelt with all of the tribe), and the sense of community might alter. Likewise, what might need to change for tribe survival if some of the hunters were struck down by illness? And there is much more that could change as one element impacts on others.

The purpose of introducing you to *Activity Theory* is to provide you with a means of over-viewing the learning environment associated with the training of volunteers. You may also find *Activity Theory* a useful tool which can be used outside the training context.

If *Activity Theory* appears of interest to you, enter this topic into a web search engine and explore where it takes you. In particular, look for prompts that cause you to reflect on how in the training of volunteers there is an interaction between things in the learning environment that must be taken into consideration.

To recap, Table1 summarises how *Activity Theory* can be used to help you analyse the volunteer learning environment.

Table 1 *Activity Theory overview of the volunteer learning environment*

Activity Theory network component	**Explanation** – as applies in the case of training of volunteers
Outcome	Increase in community capital through increased skill and knowledge base of the volunteers undertaking the training.
Subject	The volunteer undertaking training to achieve competency required in their role.
Object	The training program that the volunteer undertakes to achieve the required competency.
Tools	The things – tangible and intangible – which the learner may flexibly draw upon to achieve competency.
Division of Labour	People cooperating in a learning partnership to support the learning of the trainee.
Community	The people – including the trainee – who make up the community of practice in which the trainee learns and applies the outcomes from their learning.
Rules	The rules which impact upon the way in which the volunteer learns and fulfils their role.

In essence, the learning design and delivery of the training process is very straightforward, as illustrated in Figure 5. However, you do have to take into account the way in which one component can influence the other, and how feedback can inform adjustment from time to time. It is the quality of this '*taking into account*' that separates exemplary training from merely acceptable training. Sometimes just a small adjustment makes a huge difference to the outcomes of a training program. The following story is an illustration of this.

In the course of facilitating a training program for volunteer art gallery attendants, who provide both security and information, Mary noted that a number of the trainees were not really actively participating in discussions. The program had been run successfully for a number of years and this was the first time that she had noticed this apparent disconnection. Upon inquiry, Mary discovered that the non-engaged group had not volunteered before, did not have a background or experience in the arts relevant to the gallery, and had come to this volunteering program through a mutual obligation program. Rather than suggest that these people not continue with the program, Mary buddied each with another trainee who was passionate about the arts and who helped the trainees to understand and develop their interest in the arts along with a behind-the-scenes, ongoing, role-play element within the program. The upshot was that most of the trainees new to volunteering and the arts did develop their interest in the arts and a couple of them went on to fulfilling careers in galleries.

Adjustment to training:

Pairing volunteers with less experience in the arts, with volunteers with passion and knowledge about the arts.

Outcomes

For the individual:

- ↗ Enjoyment and learning derived from new field of interest;
- ↗ Continued involvement with volunteering, yielding new social networks and learning opportunities;
- ↗ Improved skills and knowledge, resulting in fulfilling careers.

For the organisation:

- ↗ New volunteer recruits, passionate about the organisation and its mission;
- ↗ Broadened field of potential supporters, patrons and clients;
- ↗ Proven training and development strategies for future use.

For the community:

- ↗ Positive citizen participation in the community;
- ↗ Enhanced community capital;
- ↗ Enhanced service delivery.

Although much training design and delivery can be systematised, managing the variables requires learning to be facilitated in a way that makes it appear more creative than scientific. While this may be a philosophical stance that invites debate, it is the sensitivity to context that makes the difference. Figure 5 illustrates the importance of applying a systematic approach to training in a way that ensures the approach is informed by context variables and able to be adjusted.

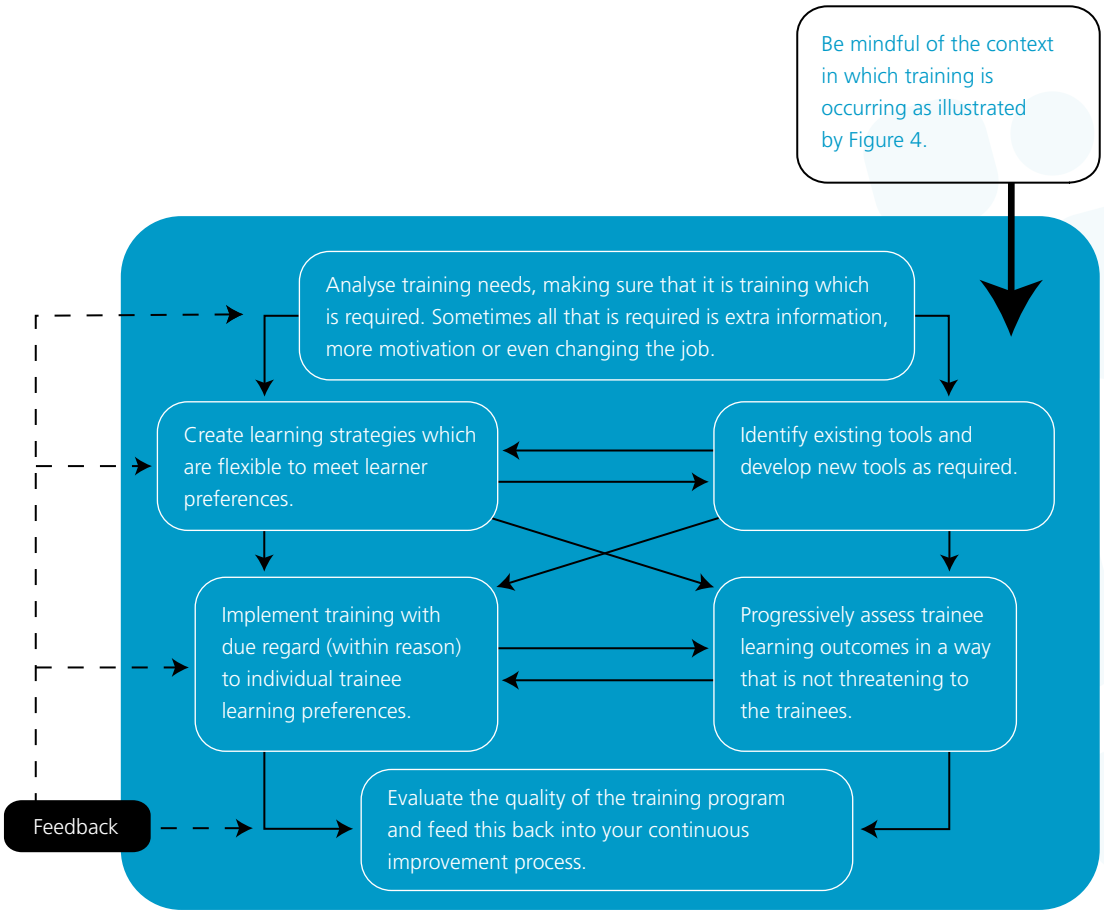


Figure 5 *Locating planning and delivery of training within the context of the learning environment*

The process illustrated in Figure 5 is the core framework of designing and implementing training. Remember that there are possibly quite complex, interrelated factors which will influence the design and delivery of training. Viewing Figure 4 in conjunction with Figure 5 and drawing on *Activity Theory* will help you manage these factors. Importantly, remember that the training design and delivery process is dynamic.

The following tips will help you to keep in mind the impact the environmental context can have on the design and delivery of training, and the dynamic nature of this process:

- 'Training' is not always the appropriate way to address a performance deficiency. Not only will training not always fix the problem, it can be counter-productive. For example, if there has been a decline in client service standards, requiring volunteers to undertake technical training for which they are already competent would be something of a turn-off, when the real problem might be an administrative breakdown in service delivery (beyond control of the volunteers and related to inappropriate division of labour).
- Creating learning strategies and identifying learning tools are joined, but separate, activities influenced by many factors in the environment. Each informs the other.
- Implementing training and progressively assessing the acquisition of trainee knowledge and skill are intimately entwined. The learner requires feedback on how they are going throughout the program and the trainer needs to diligently monitor and adjust their facilitation of learning so as to keep abreast of changes and/or the unexpected in the learning environment, including emerging opportunities to strengthen the learning experience.

Note on progressive assessment (typically called formative assessment)

A particular feature of competency-based training is that at the time of final assessment (typically called summative assessment) a trainee will be confident that they are ready for assessment and will not feel anxious about this. Final assessment is really the point at which the learning effort is acknowledged and applauded. The trainer plays an important role in coaching the trainee to this point of self-confidence, as do others who may be members of the learning partnership.

- Evaluation of the quality of the training program should reach beyond the traditional 'happy sheet' in which the learner gives feedback to the trainer. The results in the field – returns to the community – are the important test of quality.

The above tips are by no means exhaustive, but are offered as a starting point for you to think about the impact the environmental context can have on the design and delivery of training.

Identify and reflect upon the training delivery continuous improvement processes that exist within your volunteer-involving organisation.

Things that you might consider are:

- Are they formally articulated or do they occur as an occasional informal process?
- Who has input to this process and in what way?
- Who has authority to make changes?
- How is the effect of changes evaluated?

FACILITATING COMPETENCY-BASED TRAINING

Increasingly, the volunteering sector is embracing competency-based training. This trend toward accredited training for volunteers is due to a range of factors, including regulation, operational requirements, and sometimes volunteer demand. While not all volunteers seek and require formal certification, this trend is growing and it is prudent to benchmark volunteer training practices against the competency-based training approach.

Even where the training of volunteers is not as formally structured as is the case for fully developed competency-based training (see below), it is clearly important for quality outcomes that a training program has the clear objective that the volunteer will gain the knowledge and skill required by their volunteering role.

The review of competency-based training at the end of section A4.1 (see Figure 6) offers a way of assessing how your design and delivery of training compares to best practice.

Note on competency-based training

Prior to the introduction of competency-based training, the typical (traditional) approach to vocational training was to design a curriculum based on delivering a series of topics in assigned time allocations. All students started at the same point (irrespective of what they already knew and could do) and the final stage was a pass or fail test which accepted some mistakes by the student. In many instances, there was an assumption that the student would learn how to apply what they had learnt once they got on the job. The teacher-centred nature of this approach was often revealed by lesson plans expressed in terms of what the *teacher* would do rather than what the student would do, with the focus on the teacher teaching rather than on the student learning. In the case of volunteer training, there may be instances of training programs where there is an expectation that if the trainee attends the course they will be on their way to being able to do the job – if so, on reflection, does this appear satisfactory?

A4.1 An overview of competency-based training

The current Australian emphasis on competency-based training began in the mid-1980s when there was a perceived need for greater emphasis on competencies in the training of apprentices. This particularly took hold following a 1987 Australian Council of Trade Unions/Trade Development Council mission to Western Europe which studied metal and electrical trade skill acquisition in a number of European countries[6] (Harris, Guthrie, Hobart & Lundberg 1995, p. 50).

[6] The 1987 report *Australia Reconstructed: ACTU/TDC mission to Western Europe* was written following this tripartite mission comprising of delegates from the ACTU, TDC and the Australian Department of Trade.

Compared with the traditional approach to training where much of the focus was on the structure and delivery of training (including duration of the training), competency-based training is focused on achieving the target competency outcomes by whatever means and time are required. This includes assessing and giving credit for what a trainee can *already* do and facilitating further training to bridge the competency gap, if one exists.

It could be said that the essential difference between previous approaches to development of skill and the competency-based approach is:

- in the past the emphasis was on the design of curriculum and how it was delivered (what the teacher did in delivering the course);
- competency-based training emphasises what the trainee achieves (what the trainee does – as suits the circumstances – to achieve competency).

In the past, qualification/certification was awarded as a result of serving time and passing tests. In the case of competency-based training, qualification/certification is awarded when competency can be proven or demonstrated. It should be noted that passing tests is not the same as proving competency.

Reflect on instances where a volunteer has done the course and passed the test (if a test was included), but was not really up to the job in the field. You might even have come across instances of a volunteer repeating training, but still not coming up to scratch in practice. If so, what might have been a better approach to supporting the volunteer in acting on their motivation to make a contribution?

In *Competency-Based Education and Training: Between a Rock and a Whirlpool*, Harris, Guthrie, Hobart and Lunberg (1995, p.21) begin their review of the Australian definitions associated with competency-based training as follows:

In Australia, the National Training Board[7] (1992, p. 29) has given the following definition to competency:

The concept of competency focuses on what is expected of an employee in the workplace rather than the learning process; and embodies the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments. This is a broad concept of competency in that all aspects of work performance, and not only narrow task skills, are included. It encompasses:

- the requirement to perform individual tasks (task skills);
- the requirement to manage a number of different tasks within the job (task management skills);
- the requirement to respond to irregularities and breakdowns in routine (contingency management kills);
- the requirement to deal with the responsibilities and expectations of work environment (job/role environment skills), including working with others.

Industrial competencies are defined by the National Training Board (1992, p. 10) as:

> the specification of the knowledge and skills and the application of that knowledge and skill across industries or within an industry to the standard of performance required in employment.

They (specified competencies) represent a means by which an individual's competence can be described and, ultimately, used as a basis for assessment.

[7] In 1995 the National Training Board (NTB), the Australian Committee for Training Curriculum (ACTRAC), and the National Staff Development Committee (NSDC) became part of the structure of the Australian National Training Authority (ANTA), which had been established by the Federal Government in 1992. Recently, the functions and responsibilities of ANTA were transferred to the Federal Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) – ANTA ceased to exist as at 1st July 2005.

Harris, Guthrie, Hobart and Lundberg (1995, p. 21) also cite the Mayer Committee[8] view that:

> The term competence focuses attention on learning outcomes. It is about what people can do. The Mayer Committee takes the view that competence is underpinned not only by skill but also by knowledge and understanding. It involves both the ability to perform in a given context and the capacity to transfer knowledge and skill to new tasks and situations. This means that the learner must grasp the principles and concepts which underlie particular applications, since this is the basis of transfer to new situations.
>
> (Mayer 1992)

Beginning in the 1990s, the transition to competency-based training caused the introduction of Training Packages which are nationally endorsed standards and qualifications for specific industries that guide the delivery of training and assessment of competency. These Training Packages are developed by industry through National Industry Training Councils or by enterprises to meet the identified needs of specific industries or industry sectors. (Refer DEST website – www.dest.gov.au .)

You will find a competency-based training glossary on the DEST website (www.dest.gov.au – enter glossary in the search facility). Although it may now need revision, it is a good way of becoming familiar with the terminology and the things that make up competency-based training. The following is a summary of the glossary's key terms.

Assessment guidelines

an endorsed component of a Training Package which underpins assessment and which sets out the industry approach to valid, reliable and fair assessment. Assessment guidelines include information concerning: assessment system overview, assessor requirements, designing assessment resources, conducting assessment, sources of information on assessment.

Assessment materials

optional component of Training Packages that complement endorsed industry assessment guidelines and could take the form of assessment exemplars or specific assessment tasks and instructions.

Australian Qualifications Framework (AQF)

a nationally consistent set of qualifications for all post-compulsory education and training in Australia.

Competency-based assessment (or CBA)

the gathering and judging of evidence in order to decide whether a person has achieved a standard of competence.

Competency-based training (or CBT)

training which develops the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to achieve competency standards.

Competency standard

an industry-determined specification of performance which sets out the skills, knowledge and attitudes required to operate effectively in employment. Competency standards are made of units of competency, which are themselves made up of elements of competency, together with performance criteria, a range of variables, and evidence guide. Competency standards are an endorsed component of a Training Package.

[8] The Mayer Committee, chaired by Eric Mayer and building on the earlier Finn Report (1991), developed the notion of seven Key Competencies considered to be required for effective participation in work and social settings. These are reviewed later in this guide.

Element of competency

any of the basic building blocks of a unit of competency which describes the key activities or elements of the work covered by the unit.

Endorsed component

the central part of a Training Package, endorsed by the National Training Framework Committee comprising competency standards, assessment guidelines and qualifications. Compare non-endorsed component.

Key competency

any of several generic skills or competencies considered essential for people to participate effectively in the workforce. Key competencies apply to work generally, rather than being specific to work in a particular occupation or industry. The Finn Report (1991) identified six key areas of competency which were subsequently developed by the Mayer Committee (1992) into seven competencies: collecting, analysing and organising information; communicating ideas and information; planning and organising activities; working with others in teams; using mathematical ideas and techniques; solving problems; and using technology. (Note that from 2006, key competencies will be progressively replaced in Training Packages by the Employability Skills Framework which is derived from the key competencies.)

Learning strategy

a non-endorsed component (now referred to as support material) of a Training Package which provides information on how training programs may be organised in workplaces and training institutions. This may include information on learning pathways, model training programs, and training materials.

Non-endorsed component (now referred to as **support material**)

the parts of a Training Package not required to be endorsed by the National Training Framework Committee, including support materials for learning, training assessment, and professional development.

Qualification certification

awarded to a person on successful completion of a course, in recognition of having achieved particular knowledge, skills, or competencies. See also Australian Qualifications Framework.

Range of variables (also called **range statement**)

the part of a competency standard which specifies the range of contexts and conditions to which the performance criteria apply.

Recognition of current competencies (or **RCC**)

the acknowledgment of competencies held by a person, acquired through training, work or life experience. More commonly known as recognition of prior learning (RPL).

Recognition of prior learning (or **RPL**)

the acknowledgment of a person's skills and knowledge acquired through previous training, work or life experience, which may be used to grant status or credit in a subject or module.

Registered training organisation (or **RTO**)

an organisation registered by a state or territory recognition authority to deliver training and/or conduct assessments and issue nationally recognised qualifications in accordance with the Australian Quality Training Framework.

Training Package

an integrated set of nationally endorsed standards, guidelines and qualifications for training assessing and recognising people's skills, developed by industry to meet the training needs an industry or group of industries. Training Packages consist of core endorsed components of competency standards, assessment guidelines and qualifications, and optional components of support materials such as learning strategies, assessment resources and professional development materials.

As mentioned at the beginning of this section of the guide, the focus which competency-based training brings to the learner and achieving outcomes is clearly desirable. Training which achieves this in an effective and sensitive way might therefore be considered best practice.

Although you may not be formally engaged with competency-based training as it exists in the context of Training Packages and associated aspects of vocational education and training (VET)[9], you will probably find that your approach to training best practice has much in common with competency-based training. Figure 6 is an overview comparison that illustrates this point.

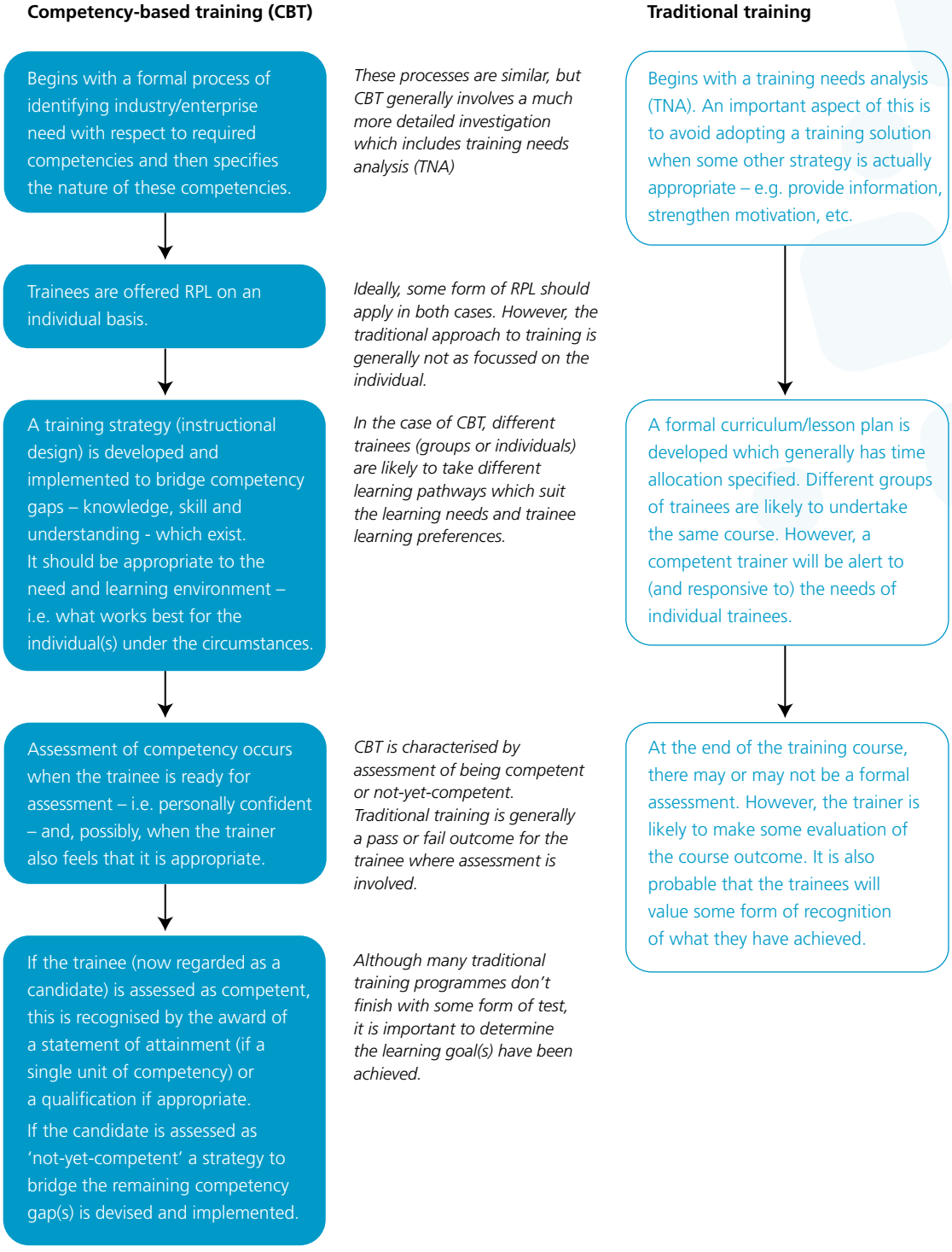


Figure 6 *Comparison between CBT and traditional approach to training*

[9] In November 2005 a decision was made by Federal authorities to, in some instances, refer to VET as Vocational and tertiary education (VTE).

A4.2 Drawing on Training Packages to achieve best practice in volunteer training

In section A4.1, we mentioned Training Packages, how they came into being and what they are.

To further explain the nature of a Training Package, it is helpful to begin by explaining what a Training Package is *not*. To the uninitiated, the term 'Training Package' conjures up an image of a collation of learning material – curriculum outline and a heap of stuff in a box – like classroom resources used many years ago. However, this is not a Training Package as now applies to vocational education and training.

Figure 7 is a representation of the structure and content of a Training Package. However, this is only a starting point and it is highly recommended that you seek out and browse an actual Training Package. Training Packages can be downloaded from the DEST website (free of charge) or purchased in CD form, but be warned they are large documents and, at first sight, appear somewhat daunting.

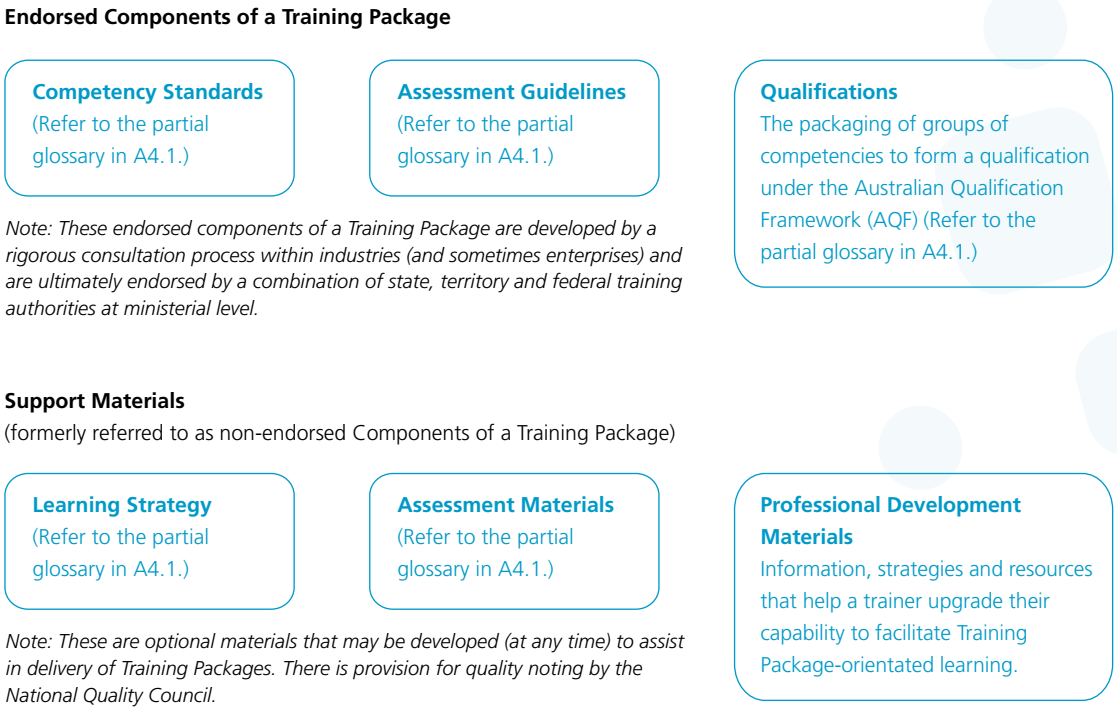


Figure 7 *The structure and content of a Training Package*

Certificate IV-qualified trainers will be familiar with Training Packages, but if they are new to you, you should do the following before reading on:

1. Find a person in your organisation or environment who is familiar with Training Packages (e.g. a Certificate IV-qualified trainer) and ask them to guide you through a Training Package relevant to your training environment.

   and/or

2. Go to the Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST) website – www.dest.gov.au – and explore Training Packages.

   and/or

3. Download the RPL guide developed under the National Volunteer Skills Centre (NVSC) project at www.volunteeringaustralia.org – and read it in conjunction with a Training Package of interest to you.

If you don't have somebody to help you access a Training Package, the steps to take are:

1. go to www.ntis.gov.au;
2. click on Training Packages in 'Browse NTIS' and a list of all Training Packages by code and title will come up;
3. click on a Training Package that seems relevant to your organisation. Explore the screen that comes up (clicking on any one of the listed qualifications generally works) until you get a screen that invites you to 'Download the Training Package';
4. download the Training Package. (Note: This may be in several files. Don't get overwhelmed by the size of these documents – at this stage, you are only seeking to become familiar with the general nature of a Training Package.)

Registered Training Organisations and their role in assessment for RPL

The delivery of training based on Training Packages normally assumes involvement by a Registered Training Organisation (RTO) and a Certificate IV-qualified trainer. However, partnering between an RTO and a non-RTO organisation is an approved practice and is not uncommon.

If you intend or decide later to support your learners in gaining RPL, you will have to involve an RTO as the assessing entity. Even if you don't initially partner with an RTO, it would be good practice to at least create and maintain a relationship with an RTO or number of RTOs. The RPL guide developed by Volunteering Australia as part of the National Volunteer Skills Centre project can help you in this regard. This is an area that is currently being further explored as part of the NVSC project.

If your organisation is not an RTO, and you are not a Certificate IV-qualified trainer and you are not partnering with an RTO, it is still appropriate for you to draw on a Training Package when designing and delivering your training. It would be an appropriate courtesy to seek DEST's approval and to acknowledge this in some way within your training material. You might not need to do this every time – you may be able just to have a general understanding with DEST.

A4.3 How to draw on Training Packages – some examples

As a trainer of volunteers you are likely to find yourself facilitating learning across three broad fields:

- *Imparting information:* recruitment, induction and orientation;
- *Expanding competency:* technical knowledge and skills acquisition;
- *Refreshing competency:* occasional training to address emerging issues or maintain skills.

It is possible to draw from Training Packages in each of the above situations to enhance your training, and create opportunities for your learners to gain formal recognition (in the form of certification/ qualification) of their skills.

1. **Recruitment, induction and orientation –** Briefing prospective volunteers and newly joined volunteers about the volunteering environment.

   While the primary aim of this activity is imparting information, you presumably also want your audience (and the other people they go on to deal with) to be able to benefit from it. Be alert to the possibility of an information session just having 'telling' by the trainer rather than action by the audience as its objective. In your experience, such sessions may not have typically had performance outcome goals defined and evaluated. Maybe the task was considered done upon 'telling them'? If so, consider whether this is really satisfactory – surely some behavioural outcome is the reason for conducting the session.

   There are elements of endorsed competencies in Training Packages that relate to aligning performance with organisational goals and policies, and it is possible to couple 'information/orientation' training with Training Packages.

   For example

   The BSBCMN201A unit of competency *Work effectively in a business environment* is incorporated within the (BSB01) Business Services, (SRC04) Community Recreation Industry, (SRF04) Fitness Industry, (SRO03) Outdoor Recreation Industry, and (SRS03) Sport Industry Training Packages, and there is a broad scope of application within volunteering and in working life for this unit.

   BSBCMN201A has only two elements – *Work within organisational goals* and *Determine future work/career directions.* These align with the presumed reason for conducting the information/ orientation session, the subsequent contribution expected to be made by the volunteer and quite possibly the learner's motivation to volunteer.

   Volunteers may find it both useful and rewarding (in their volunteering and other aspects of their life) to use the *Work effectively in a business environment* outcomes from their volunteering as evidence of competency leading to the formal awarding of a Statement of Attainment, which is a step toward a qualification. For this to happen, it is helpful for the trainer delivering the information/orientation session to structure the session in such a way that the volunteer is aware of this opportunity. The trainer could then move on to supporting the volunteer to apply the information/orientation in their volunteering role.

   In addition to the above example, you may want to consider aligning your training with competencies or elements of these competencies from the accredited courses in **Active Volunteering – Certificates I, II and III in Active Volunteering.**

   AV03VOL1A Be an effective Volunteer is a unit of competency which is common to all three Certificates in Active Volunteering and contains the following elements – *Apply knowledge of volunteering sector to a volunteer work role* and *Apply basic work practices to a volunteer work role.* Similar to the above example, if you and your learners are aware of the details of this competency and can apply the outcomes of this learning in their volunteering roles, your volunteers can begin to collect evidence and head down the path towards formal qualification as a volunteer. If you haven't already done so, go to www.volunteeringaustralia.org and follow the skills and training links to the materials. Details of the unit of competency structure of these courses can be found on Volunteering Australia's website, or by going to the NTIS website – www.ntis.gov.au and go to the 'Search NTIS' facility toward the bottom left of the screen and clicking on 'here' in 'To search Training Package competencies (units) click here'.

There are other units of competency (or at least elements of competency) in other Training Packages which may be relevant to the induction and orientation of your volunteers, and so the opportunity for the volunteer-involving organisation and the volunteer to benefit is far broader than these examples. A volunteer may be surprised that even just participating in and acting on an information/orientation session can get them started on the road to a qualification that is relevant in their working life. It is in your hands as the trainer to be creative in supporting this possibility.

2. **Technical knowledge and skills acquisition –** Supporting volunteers in acquiring the technical knowledge and skills that they use in their volunteering roles.

   Even very brief and narrowly focused training fits well within the principles of competency-based training and there is the potential to align much of this learning, and how it is applied, with competencies endorsed in Training Packages. For example, the CHC02 Community Services Training Package and the RTD02 Conservation and Land Management Training Package are just two instances where there are competencies with a close connection to related volunteering.

   If you do decide to draw at least partially on one or more Training Packages in designing and delivering a training program, the following steps are suggested:

   1. *Explore the relevance of Training Package competencies to your training objectives.* Do this by browsing through the units of competency in Training Packages that appear related to the activities of your volunteer-involving organisation (You will find the list of Training Packages on the National Training Information Service (NTIS) website – www.ntis.gov.au)

   2. *Design the learning to align with these competencies, where appropriate.* Of course, there may be instances where your training only partially aligns with a Training Package or is not covered by one. Keep in mind that there are rules about how units of competency can be packaged into qualifications and these may stop you from just 'cherry picking' across different Training Packages. (For an example of the packaging rules, see Figure 8.) An appropriate strategy might be to identify qualifications that your volunteers might value and choose the units of competency that you could incorporate – fully or partially – into the training.

   3. *Design your delivery and assessment processes to meet the requirements for formal assessment of competency,* provided this is appropriate to your organisation's needs and resources, and remembering that an RTO will need to be involved if formal acknowledgment of competency is to be achieved. If you are not a Certificate IV-qualified trainer it would be wise to seek guidance from a qualified colleague.

   4. *Inform your learners of the way in which their training and application of their learning outcomes could lead to a qualification.* This might include a strategy of setting up a project or series of projects designed to meet organisation delivery obligations/targets and structuring the project(s) so that the volunteers end up with tangible evidence of their competency. These projects would be undertaken by the volunteers (who chose to do so) as a follow-on from the training program. Of course, it might be possible to make minor changes to existing projects so that they yield evidence of competency. For details on what constitutes tangible and powerful evidence of competency, download the free RPL Toolkit from Volunteering Australia's website.

3. **Occasional training to address emerging issues –** Filling newly emerged competency gaps and refreshing competencies.

   Occasional training needs present opportunities to draw on Training Packages to the advantage of the organisation, its clients, and the volunteer.

   The refreshing of competencies in order to maintain competence beyond the initial training activity is such an opportunity. Where a volunteer is willing, refresher training can be specifically orientated to a process of reviewing the level of competency that has been maintained. This can be done in such a way that competency is confirmed as current, and appropriate to the award of RPL Statements of Attainment.

   Using Training Packages in this way could enable volunteers to make at least partial progress toward a qualification in a way that is non-threatening (to those who have learning and assessment anxieties) and allows the value and status of the volunteers to be acknowledged. For some volunteers, this could be highly motivating, and it could also benefit the organisation.

   For example

   Your volunteer-involving organisation may be seeking to strengthen its case for funding by demonstrating the competence of its volunteer force. This could lead to the innovative step of inviting volunteers to participate in a project (or series of projects) in which they gather evidence of current competency, filling gaps when found, which could then be assembled into personal portfolios of evidence supporting their application for RPL against endorsed Training Package competencies. An element of this strategy could be for the experienced volunteers to take on the role of coaches (training supporters) assisting the relatively new volunteers to bridge competency gaps. This might even involve experienced volunteers formally buddying, for a period of time, with new volunteers. This would demonstrate to a funding authority a commitment by the organisation's volunteer force to serving the organisation's clients through quality outcomes from learning.

   Another example: a volunteer organisation providing food services could open up possibilities for itself by encouraging its volunteers (those who wished) to each work towards achieving the *(HLT31502) Certificate III in Health Service Assistance (Nutrition and Dietetic Support)*. Keep in mind that a Statement of Attainment will be awarded for individual competencies, so they would not all have to immediately achieve the qualification. Working towards a qualification, or only intending to go part way would be worthwhile, and a volunteer not completing the full qualification will still earn formal acknowledgment of their achievement.

   The description of this certificate is given in Figure 8. The titles of the units of competency suggest that an experienced volunteer in a related role (claiming RPL) in this field might already be well on their way toward the qualification. Of course, close examination of the elements of competency, performance criteria and other details of the competency are required to confirm this.

(HLT31502) Certificate III in Health Service Assistance (Nutrition and Dietetic Support)

This qualification covers workers who provide a range of varied assistance tasks to Dieticians and Food Service Managers. Common occupational titles include diet aide or nutrition assistant. Common occupational titles include diet aide or nutrition assistant. This qualification is suited to New Apprenticeships pathways.

Packaging Rules

14 units must be selected for this qualification including:

All **compulsory** units

2 **elective** units

Compulsory

BSBCMN203A	Communicate in the workplace
BSBCMN204A	Work effectively with others
BSBCMN302A	Organise personal work priorities and development
HLTFS7A	Follow basic food safety practices
HLTHIR2A	Contribute to organisational effectiveness in the health industry
HLTHSE1A	Follow the organisation's occupational health and safety policies
HLTIN1A	Comply with infection control policies and procedures
HLTNA1A	Provide assistance to nutrition and dietetic services
HLTNA2A	Plan and evaluate meals and menus to meet recommended dietary guidelines
HLTNA3A	Plan and/or modify menus according to nutrition dietary plans
HLTNA4A	Plan meals and menus to meet cultural and religious needs
HLTNA5A	Support food services in menu meal order processing

Elective

2 units may be selected from the following areas to make a total of 14 units:

- Allied Health Assistance
- Client/Patient Service Delivery
- Operating Theatre Support
- Pathology
- Pharmacy
- Nutrition and Dietetic Support

OR

- Health Training Package units available at Certificate III
- Community Services Training Package units available at Certificate III
- Other national Training Package units available at Certificate III

Depending on client profile, selection of the following units as electives may be appropriate:

CHCDISIC	Orientation to disability work
HLTHIR3A	Work effectively with culturally diverse patients, clients, customers and co-workers
HLTHIR4A	Work effectively in a cross cultural context with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander, colleagues, clients and organisations

Figure 8 *Qualification packaging rules for HLT31502 Certificate III in Health Service Assistance (Nutrition and Dietetic Support)*

(An example of a qualification which may be closely aligned to a particular volunteering activity)

Drawing on the unit of competency structure for TAADES401A *Use Training Packages to meet client needs* (a unit forming part of the TAA40104 *Certificate IV in Training and Assessment*) as a benchmark is a good way to begin a process of drawing upon Training Packages.

Go to the National Training Information Service (NTIS) website www.ntis.gov.au and navigate your way through to TAADES401A *Use Training Packages to meet client needs* (a unit of competency within the TAA04 Training and Assessment Training Package). Drawing on the elements of competency, performance criteria and other components of the competency document, consider how you might advantageously use Training Packages.

If you take up these suggestions, bear in mind that this can lead to you establishing a grounding in the TAADES401A competency that will contribute towards *you* achieving the TAA40104 *Certificate IV in Training and Assessment* if you choose to take this path. It is not just your trainees who have the opportunity of benefiting from RPL. Some strategic planning on your part can lead to significant personal benefits as you expand your range of acknowledged competencies.

CONCLUSION TO PART A

This brings us to the conclusion of Part A, *A Guide for Training Volunteers*. We trust you found this guide to be rich in information that enhances your understanding of the volunteering training environment, and tools that will help you to achieve learning outcomes of benefit to your volunteers and your volunteer-involving organisation.

As mentioned at the outset, this guide is one half of a resource which, when used together, will assist trainers of volunteers to achieve best practice in the design and delivery of training. *A Toolkit for Training Volunteers (Part B)* builds upon the content of this guide and offers a range of tools which will assist you to carry out the ideas discussed in Part A, and make the most of what volunteers know and can do. We recommend you review *A Toolkit for Training Volunteers (Part B)* and draw on this as required.

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USEFUL WEBSITES

The Australian Council for Adult Literacy, www.acal.edu.au

The National Centre for Vocational Education Research (NCVER), www.ncver.edu.au

The Department of Education, Science and Training, www.dest.gov.au

The National Training Information Service (NTIS), www.ntis.gov.au

Volunteering Australia, www.volunteeringaustralia.org