

# **EFFECTIVE MANAGEMENT OF INDIGENOUS AND LOCAL VOLUNTEERS**

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Throughout the world there is a growing realisation that more needs to be done in order to protect our natural environment and to ensure the ongoing habitability of the planet for future generations. Whilst governments world wide recognise the need for more work to be done within the environment increasing demands from a range of sources means scarcity of funds available for carrying out necessary environmental work. People within the general community are beginning to realise that they are able to make a positive impact on the environment through a hands on approach through various volunteering projects which can be carried out in the environment.

The Conservation Volunteers Alliance is the first world organisation to be formed which recognises this rapidly growing and important area for environmental conservation work to be done.

On 5 December 1997, representatives of organisations from nine countries around the world gathered at Henley Management College in Oxfordshire to examine the possibility of forming a Global Alliance of Conservation Volunteers.

A decision was made to establish an International Alliance of Conservation Volunteer Organisations. At an inaugural meeting attended by 18 organisations from 14 different countries, eighteen months later in May 1999 at Clondeboy Estate in Northern Ireland, it was decided amongst the delegates to form the Conservation Volunteer Alliance with the following draft **mission statement**:

“The World Conservation Alliance will represent and promote organisations involved in volunteer based practical conservation work by establishing and monitoring best practice for projects that protect and enhance the environment.”

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To fulfil its mission the Alliance intends to do the following:

**Advocacy** – Gain recognition for the achievement of conservation volunteers around the world who are working to create a better environment.

**Influence** – Ensure the voice of conservation volunteers is heard by global decision makers, and that the role they play in sustainable development and other issues is communicated.

**Standards** – Set benchmarks and standards for practical conservation projects and volunteer experience.

**Research** – Research and promote the social and environmental significance of conservation volunteering.

**Promotion and PR** – Improve communications between its member groups and encourage the exchange of people and information. Creating opportunities and an approach to enable and encourage a wider section of the community to become involved, through an openness of language and relevance of the activities.

**Developing the Movement** – Stimulate and support the growth of new groups of conservation volunteers around the world.

**Resources** – Facilitate access to new funds and influence for members.

## **THE ORGANISATION**

Organisations which mainly involve volunteers to conserve the environment across a whole country or a large part of a country are eligible for membership of the Alliance. In this context, “volunteers” means individuals who have made a free choice to volunteer and do not receive commercial remuneration. This will include voluntary not for profit organisations and governmental agencies but not commercial organisations.

The initial organisation was put in place and the following organisations became members.

Appalachian Mountain Club (AMC), Association of Volunteers for the Service of Protected Areas (ASVO) Costa Rica, Australian Trust for Conservation Volunteers (ATCV), British Trust for Conservation Volunteers (BTCV), Environmental Alliance for Senior Involvement (EASI) USA, Federation of Ontario Naturalists (FON) Canada, Green Balkans - Bulgaria, Landscapsbeheer- Nederland, LATS, Legambiente, Les Blongios – France, National Association of Services and Conservation Corps (NASCC) – USA, New Zealand Trust for Conservation Volunteers, Polish League for Conservation of Nature (LOP) – Poland, Working for Water Program – South Africa.

## **THE ACCREDITATION PROGRAM**

In April 2001 Conservation Volunteers Australia, on behalf of the Conservation Volunteer Alliance, secured funding from Rio Tinto for developing benchmarks and an accreditation program for conservation volunteer organisations. This was the first major project undertaken by the Conservation Volunteer Alliance, and signaled a great opportunity for the group to grow and begin delivering significant benefits to each member organisation. The accreditation program was to prescribe the “Best Practices” needed to provide a safe, satisfying and effective conservation experience for volunteers. But, development and sustainable delivery of high quality conservation projects requires that volunteering be underpinned by a strong organisational function. Hence, it was decided that the scope of the accreditation program should be expanded to include criteria for areas such as financial management. In effect, CVA undertook to develop a comprehensive set of world benchmarking practices for delivering environmental programs on the ground through effective internal management systems.

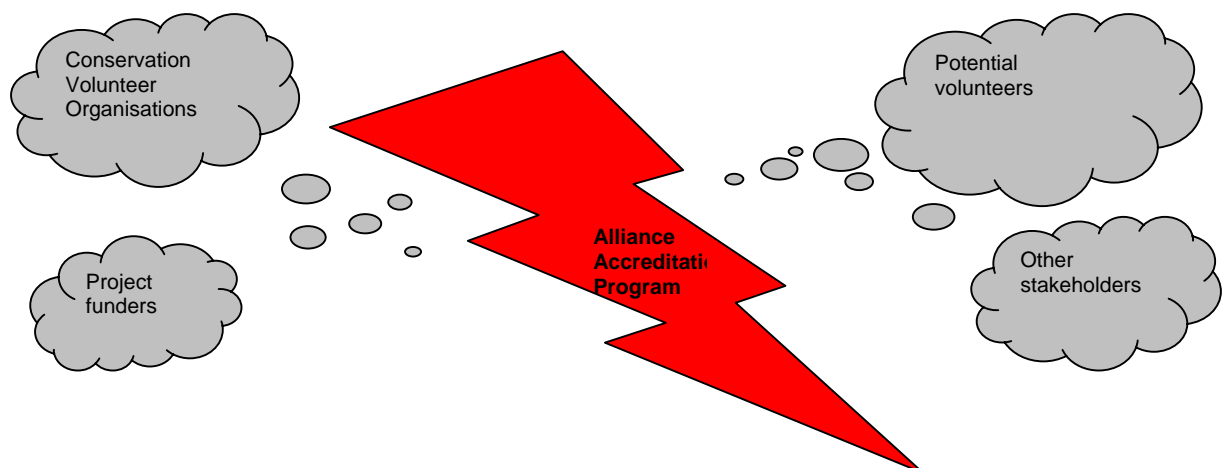
It was envisaged that accreditation could result in substantial benefits for volunteer organisations that would increase their capacity to achieve positive outcomes for the environment.

In developing the accreditation criteria, CVA has taken a confident step towards establishing world benchmarking practice for effective internal management systems for delivering conservation volunteer projects on the ground, with the emphasis at the project level on reliable delivery of safe, effective and satisfying volunteer experiences, and at the organisational level on effective management of people and financial resources.

### ***Why an accreditation program***

The accreditation program has been created to assist to continually improve standards in conservation volunteer organisations. The overall aim of the accreditation program is to assist organisations, to deliver professionally a high quality volunteer experience and positive outcome for the environment.

Every sector involved in conservation volunteering needs professionally run operations.



### ***Why the conservation volunteer organisations need accreditation***

Most conservation volunteer organisations have developed their own standards in response to their own skills and resources – they are not necessarily aware of alternative ways to do things. Accreditation provides a basic set of standards for self-improvement, and incentives to adopt these standards. Once adopted, many of these standards will improve the viability and reputation of the organisation, and the satisfaction of its team. Accreditation also provides each organisation with the self-assurance to share programs and volunteers with other accredited organisations.

Why the volunteers need accreditation

The number of people willing to participate in conservation volunteer activities has been and will continue to increase for the foreseeable future. In developed countries like Australia, people finishing their career stage of life are looking for meaningful experiences such as conservation volunteering. Accreditation provides a form of quality assurance that assists people choose what they want. An international accreditation program helps people to confidently choose conservation volunteer activities across different countries and different organisations.

### ***Why project funders need accreditation***

Governments and private companies that fund conservation volunteer organisations want to know that their resources are used efficiently and effectively. Accreditation provides some self assurance that the organisation is likely to provide a successful outcome (e.g. number of trees planted).

### ***Why stakeholders need accreditation***

Stakeholders, such as host communities and indigenous groups, want the conservation activity to be delivered in a responsible and environmentally sensitive way. Accreditation provides some self-assurance that the organisation will behave in a socially responsible way, and produce sound environmental outcomes.

### ***Why the environment benefits from accreditation***

Accreditation should generate very substantial benefits for the environment, through sustainable increases in:

- Volunteering
- Sponsorship
- Standards underpinning the quality of practical inputs on the ground.
- Monitoring of long-term outcomes against ecological and cultural indicators.
- Indigenous and local community involvement.

Given the deep community concern over whether enough is being done to conserve the environment in the long-term, accreditation of volunteer organisations has a key role to play in ensuring conservation of the biosphere on which all life depends.

## **CATEGORIES OF MEMBERSHIP**

***There are two categories, or levels, of accreditation:***

- Developing

Developing organisations have some systems in place, and recognise the need for further improvement across most parts of their activity. Developing organisations are committed to further improving their standards.

- Benchmark

Benchmark organisations have demonstrated systems in place across all parts of their activity, backed up by comprehensive skills and experience. They are committed to helping developing organisations improve their standards. The benchmark category is more difficult to achieve, than the developing category, but it offers greater benefits.

A Project Manager Organisation seeking accreditation at the Benchmark level for its organisational and project management functions would be required to address a comprehensive set of criteria, including those in the following main areas:

## **WHAT STANDARDS PROGRAM ACCREDITS**

### **Organisational management**

- Telephones are staffed during business hours and are backed up with other systems
- There is a plan directing the organisation
- There are communication links to network the organisation with others

### **Human resource management**

- Policies on how staff are employed and looked after
- Introduction program for all staff
- Documented staff structure
- All staff understand their responsibilities and who they report to
- Staff performance is regularly reviewed

### **Promotion and recruitment**

- There is a plan to attract volunteers to activities
- Promotional material accurately describes the project and experience
- Volunteers must complete a thorough application form
- All applications are processed within a guaranteed time
- There is a record of volunteer profiles for use in shaping promotion

### **Volunteer experience**

- Volunteers are managed by rules and can explain them
- Volunteers are given a comprehensive introduction to their project
- Volunteers get opportunities to learn social and life skills
- Volunteers mix with local people and receive cultural exchange
- Volunteers learn about the environment and its conservation
- Volunteers are given social opportunities
- Volunteers are recognised for their contribution
- There is a process to collect and analyse feedback from volunteers at the end of each project

### **Project management**

- Each project is described in a written proposal
- Each potential project is assessed to decide whether to proceed
- Stakeholders are consulted before a project proceeds
- All project leaders are trained across a vast range of hard and soft skills
- Each project is evaluated against performance criteria

### **Risk management**

- Policies on how activities meet recognised safety standards
- All leaders have driving license and training
- All vehicles receive regular safety checks
- Volunteers wear shoes during conservation work
- Volunteers use specialised equipment for specific tasks
- Volunteers receive instructions on safe use of equipment
- There is always a full first aid kit on each project
- All project leaders have been trained in first aid
- Projects have access to communications equipment
- There is an accident and injury reporting system

### **Financial management**

- Income is generated from several sources
- Demonstrated accounting and financial management systems
- Financial performance checks by an independent accountant

## **PROPOSED BENEFITS OF ACCREDITATION AND BEING A MEMBER**

There are seven main benefits for accredited members of the Alliance:

- Assistance to improve their standards
- Outcomes for the environment
- Increased opportunity to exchange volunteers, staff and ideas with other organisations
- Access to funding for conservation volunteer programs and projects
- Cooperative marketing to increase the potential to attract more volunteers
- Increased volunteer numbers

### **Assistance to improve practices**

This benefit would involve accredited members helping other accredited members to improve their practices to the standards identified in the accreditation program. This benefit would primarily be directed to Developing-accredited members. Benchmark-accredited members would provide other accredited members with:

- Examples of policies, plans and promotional techniques (that are not confidential)
- Training programs
- Staff exchanges.
- Increased volunteer numbers

### **Basis for exchange of volunteers, staff and ideas between organisations**

Many Alliance members would like to expand their programs by exchanging volunteers, particularly volunteers from other countries. Volunteers would have the assurance that they would receive a similar standard of basic care from all accredited members throughout the world. It would be a relatively simple process for two benchmark-accredited members to exchange their volunteers. A developing-accredited member would require additional demonstration of capability, before exchanging volunteers with a benchmark-accredited member.

### **Outcomes for the environment**

“Best practice” will assist organizations in their management practices which will ensure better environmental works can be carried out on the ground. Proper evaluation of projects and outcomes will ensure best use of available resources

## **Access to funding for conservation volunteer programs and projects**

This benefit would involve three types of funding opportunities:

- Developing-accredited members accessing funding for improvement of practices to meet the accreditation program standards.
- Benchmark-accredited members accessing funding to assist Developing-accredited members improve their practices.
- Benchmark-accredited members also accessing special international funding for world conservation volunteer projects funded by organisations.

Funding bodies would have an assurance that environmental projects would deliver the outcome that they seek across a range of countries and cultures.

## **Cooperative marketing**

This benefit would involve benchmark-accredited members developing international promotions to increase the reach of volunteer recruitment. Examples of this could include:

- Worldwide promotion to volunteers to increase exchanges
- Material and concepts to increase local volunteering awareness and opportunities
- A special section of the Alliance website for e-commerce
- Joint exhibitions and representation at tourism trade shows
- Hyperlinks to each others' websites
- Special programs targeted at particular types of volunteers, such as students
- International conservation projects promoted via members and their international links

## **Collective international lobbying**

This benefit would involve collective international lobbying by the Alliance to maintain resources for accredited members. Possible examples of this are:

- Lobbying for international projects
- Lobbying governments to promote the benefits of conservation volunteering
- Financial international lobbying with assured environmental outcomes
- Lobbying government support for an accredited member
- Research to demonstrate strengths of conservation volunteering



## **Increased volunteer numbers**

By careful evaluation feedback and implementation of change the volunteer experience will be enhanced. This will lead to repeat volunteering and word of mouth growth in numbers. Volunteer exchanges, access to funding for projects, and co-operative marketing of projects would all add to volunteer numbers.

## **Other benefits**

### ***Insurance***

Benchmark-accredited members could develop international insurance cover that is tailored to conservation volunteer organisations and competitive with most alternatives currently available.

## **THE WAY AHEAD**

The Conservation Volunteer Alliance has developed an accreditation program suitable for conservation volunteer organisations across the world. The program sets minimum standards for its members to meet, as well as benefits, including increased volunteering, for those organisations that are prepared to consistently meet the standards. Clearly, it has the potential to add, very significantly, to the enormously valuable contribution that volunteering is already making to conservation of the global environment. However, much more needs to be done to achieve that potential, and some matters that require urgent and effective action are suggested below.

## **Indigenous and Local Communities**

The CVA accreditation program is designed to ensure effective management of resources (volunteers and sponsor funding) channelled through volunteer organisations for practical inputs on the ground in the ecosystem. Volunteer organisations need to ensure that strong links are established with conservation bodies, especially with indigenous and local communities, to ensure that volunteer inputs are well aligned with the conservation priorities of protected areas (PAs) and produce the specified outcomes. Increasingly, indigenous and local communities are taking a lead role in specifying ecological and cultural indicators for sustainable management of PAs. There would be merit in inviting local people to conduct an information session, in the ecosystem, for volunteers at the start of a project, to explain how traditional knowledge has contributed to the development of these indicators.

## **Monitoring**

Higher priority needs to be given in project planning, implementation and review to provisions for assuring that the specified outcomes have, in fact, been achieved on the ground. Ecological outcomes (e.g. survival and healthy growth of trees planted to maintain/restore biodiversity) may not be evident for a year, or so, after completion of the volunteer inputs. Hence, there is a need for some ongoing monitoring and feedback to the stakeholders, including volunteer organisations. There is potential for indigenous and local communities, especially, to make a practical input to monitoring outcomes in their own PAs. This area needs to be reviewed in the current accreditation program – and will be recommended at the next meeting.

## **Membership**

Accreditation should generate very substantial benefits for volunteer organisations that would increase their capacity to achieve positive outcomes for the environment, such as:

- Environmental outcomes
- Increased volunteering
- Increased sponsorship
- Improved standards
- More benefits to volunteers

The capacity of the Alliance to enhance the enormously valuable contribution that volunteering is already making to conservation of the global environment will be directly related the size of its membership. Therefore, the existing members of the Alliance are very keen to help others to become accredited and join the alliance, and for all members to work together to help each other in expanding the contribution of volunteering to conservation of the global environment.

## **Acknowledgements**

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