

Disclosure

What is Disclosure?

Disclosure is the act of telling someone something about yourself that might ordinarily be considered confidential and personal information.

Most people are familiar with the process of disclosure from organisations and business. For example, insurance companies are required by law to disclose their fees, margins and how they invest money in order to fund insurance policies. This prevents fraud and helps build trust between the public and the insurer. Another example is when someone is in a court of law, where disclosure is very important in certain legal proceedings. In this situation you would be required, by law, to reveal facts and personal details or history about yourself and/or others.

In most everyday situations, however, disclosure is generally a matter of personal choice. Disclosure will help protect you as the volunteer and the group or organisation you volunteer with. It is not about handing over your whole life story; it is about making sure you give the right information for the right circumstances so you are protected or suitably supported. How much you choose to disclose about yourself is your decision.

What do volunteers need to know about disclosure?

As a volunteer, you may be asked for information about yourself by the group or organisation. That information can include requests for full name, address, contact details and so on. Most people understand that this information is useful so disclose it in good faith. There is a general understanding that the organisation will keep this information confidential (see tip sheet) so people feel confident about handing over these details under most circumstances.

Some groups and organisations may have volunteer position descriptions that require them to know slightly more information about the volunteer. In such situations, the volunteer may need to disclose another level of personal information about themselves such if they have an illness or disability that might affect their ability to volunteer effectively, or complete all the requirements of the position.

What happens if I don't want to disclose any information about myself?

If you feel that the group or organisation is asking for information that isn't relevant to the volunteer position you are volunteering in, you may refuse to disclose that information. Organisations should only ask for information about you that is necessary for you to undertake your volunteer duties.

You are under no obligation to provide personal information about yourself, however, if do you refuse to disclose certain information that is seen as critical to the volunteering role, the organisation may deem you unsuitable for that role. For example, an organisation may require volunteers to undergo a National Police Check (see tip sheet). If you were to refuse to disclose information necessary to conduct the Police Check, then the organisation is within its rights to refuse you for that position.

Be mindful of the fact, that many groups or organisations – particularly welfare organisations – have made blanket policies for all paid staff and volunteers to undergo criminal record checks. They see this not only as streamlining their process but also as a part of their Duty of Care (see tip sheet), to the community, so, the decision to not disclose may impact on your ability to be a volunteer in these circumstances.

Your choice to disclose or not depends on the following factors:

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- That the group or organisation has a clear confidentiality policy and procedure so you are confident that your disclosed personal details will be kept private.
 - That there is a volunteer Code of Conduct that is reasonable and positive so that you know what is expected of you.
 - That there is an appropriate volunteer position description that tells you exactly what kinds of duties you will need to do, so you can make an informed decision about whether you can safely do the work required.

Remember, you aren't under any obligation to disclose information to anyone, unless it is pertinent to the required processes of the group or organisation and the volunteer role you wish to engage in, or you are required to do so by law.

In conclusion

Disclosure is telling others information about yourself that might be considered confidential; it doesn't mean you have to hand over all of your personal details or tell your life story. What it does mean, is that while you have the right to privacy, the group or organisation you volunteer in also has a Duty of Care to ensure that they minimize the risks to you; to the group or organisation; and in the community. A part of this Duty of Care may be to obtain personal information necessary for certain volunteering roles. Choosing therefore, what to disclose, is a matter of knowing what is important information to the function of the volunteering role and what isn't.

The information contained in this information sheet is generic. Please contact your volunteer resource centre if you require further assistance.