

Unit/Centre		Policy Title	
Institute wide		Volunteer Policy	
Responsible Officer	Authorised by	Revision date	Page
PR & Development Office	Board of Directors	Nov 2005	1 of 6

## 1. Introduction

Volunteers are defined as those people who give their time, skills and experience without payment, on a regular and continuing basis – they are unpaid staff. Burnet, as the only medical research and public health organisation to be accredited by the Australian Agency for International Development (AusAID) as an overseas development Non Government Organisation (NGO), and as a key resource in Australia in the development and delivery of education programs in international health, offers a unique environment for volunteers. In the past, a small number of volunteers have been placed in the Centre for International Health and Centre for Harm Reduction (CHR), usually for short term placements and to undertake specific tasks that are both of interest to them personally and of value to the Centres themselves. The number of volunteers that can be placed in these Centres is likely to remain limited, due to staff numbers and the recognised need to provide the necessary support to volunteers in order that the experience is mutually fulfilling. Volunteers have also contributed to the marketing and special events activities organised by the Public Relations and Development Office. Tertiary level students undertaking placements as part of their course requirements and work experience students have also been involved in a volunteer capacity at the Institute.

Volunteering and in-kind contributions are valued by Burnet, not just because of the expertise and capacity they bring to the organisation, but because they are a way of measuring Burnet's community support. Burnet records details of unpaid work contributions each year for inclusion in Burnet's organisational audit. Volunteers increase our capacity and indicate community support. The interest in volunteering is high and there are usually more people interested than positions available.

## 2. Definition of Volunteering

In accordance with Volunteering Australia, Burnet adopts as its definition of volunteering:

*Formal volunteering is an activity which takes place through a not-for-profit organisation or projects and is undertaken:*

- *to be of benefit to the community and the volunteer;*
- *of the volunteer's own free will and without coercion;*
- *for no financial payment; and*
- *in designated volunteer positions only.*

Unit/Centre		Policy Title	
Institute wide		Volunteer Policy	
Responsible Officer	Authorised by	Revision date	Page
PR & Development Office	Board of Directors	Nov 2005	2 of 6

### 3. General Principles

Burnet adheres to the principles of volunteering as defined by Volunteering Australia:

- Volunteering benefits the community and the volunteer.
- Volunteer work is unpaid.
- Volunteering is always a matter of choice.
- Volunteering is not compulsorily undertaken to receive pensions or government allowances.
- Volunteering is a legitimate way in which citizens can participate in the activities of their community.
- Volunteering is a vehicle for individuals or groups to address human, environmental and social needs.
- Volunteering is an activity performed in the not-for-profit sector only.
- Volunteering is not a substitute for paid work.
- Volunteers do not replace paid workers nor constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers.
- Volunteering respects the rights, dignity and culture of others.
- Volunteering promotes human rights and equality.

### 4. Roles of Volunteers

While volunteers provide a rich resource and can make a significant contribution to Burnet, the unique role of the Institute and the particular skills needed to undertake many of the tasks, limits the positions available for volunteer input. Involvement may be in the form of:

- Regular on-going tasks such as reception, mail, filing and other administrative tasks
- Special short-term projects within various areas, such as advocacy, research, documentation of project learnings, programs, laboratory research, etc.
- Occasional activities such as mail-outs, fundraising, making phone contact with donors or development education activities.

Unit/Centre		Policy Title	
Institute wide		Volunteer Policy	
Responsible Officer	Authorised by	Revision date	Page
PR & Development Office	Board of Directors	Nov 2005	3 of 6

## 5. Recruitment

Our recruitment policy is underpinned by the commitment of the Institute to the values of social justice and equity and to a belief in maximising human potential.

All prospective volunteers are provided with an information pack about the Institute and possible ways to get involved by the Public Relations and Development Office. Potential volunteers are requested to complete a 'Skills and Interests' form and to provide a copy of a CV. This information is registered in the Burnet Volunteer database which is maintained by the Public Relations and Development Office.

Job matching is done by the Public Relations and Development Office, who may first discuss possible placements with the nominated person in each Centre or Laboratory responsible for volunteer supervision. If in these discussions it is deemed appropriate, the volunteer may be asked for work or character references before placement is considered. Volunteers are matched with positions according to positions available and interests, skills, experience and availability. Volunteer placement is also influenced by the priorities and work plan of the Institute and the capacity of staff to resource and supervise volunteer assignments.

Once the volunteer has chosen their preferred available voluntary position a meeting is arranged for the volunteer to talk directly with the staff supervisor for that position. The purpose of this meeting is to determine whether the volunteer will be suitable for the position and for the volunteer to determine if they would like to take on the position offered. Days and times of voluntary work can be determined at this meeting.

In line with Burnet's Child Protection Policy volunteers working in activities with children and/or young people will be required to undertake a police check. The cost of the police check will be covered by Burnet.

All voluntary appointments are to be appraised after one month and then again after three months. If either the volunteer or the supervisor feel that the appointment is not working, either a new position may be found or the volunteer may be asked to wait until a suitable new position comes available.

## 6. Rights and Responsibilities of Volunteer Staff

Unlike paid staff, volunteer staff are not covered by award conditions or work place agreements. Volunteers, however, do have rights, some of which are enshrined in legislation (duty of care) and some of which are the moral obligations of an organisation

Unit/Centre		Policy Title	
Institute wide		Volunteer Policy	
Responsible Officer	Authorised by	Revision date	Page
PR & Development Office	Board of Directors	Nov 2005	4 of 6

involving volunteers. Volunteers with Burnet can expect certain rights to be fulfilled so that the time spent with the Institute is both valuable and satisfying.

## 6.1 Rights of Volunteers at Burnet

To carry out their work effectively, Burnet volunteers have a right to:

- receive adequate information and clear explanation of the duties and responsibilities expected and to understand why they are doing a task and how it fits into the broader program;
- be provided with orientation to the Institute;
- information about the particular Centre/Laboratory to which they have been assigned;
- be provided with sufficient training to enable them to do their job;
- have on-the-job supervision provided by a designated staff member;
- work in a safe and healthy environment;
- be informed of all relevant laws, regulations and codes of practice that relate to specific areas of research;
- supervision and support to enable them to carry out their duties;
- an appraisal of their work performance at the end of the volunteering period or on completion of set tasks;
- have their personal details kept in a confidential manner;
- the facilities, equipment and back-up services to carry out the work, as appropriate and decided by the supervisor;
- out-of-pocket-expenses. Volunteers working in excess of 4 hours work in a day are entitled to: a travel subsidy (actual public transport expenses within Melbourne for volunteers for travel to and from Burnet); and a \$6.00 lunch allowance.
- be adequately insured;
- to have access to a grievance procedure, as spelt out in clause 17 of The Macfarlane Burnet Institute for Medical Research and Public Health Ltd, Terms & Conditions of Employment;
- to receive a reference that includes activities and responsibilities undertaken during work with Burnet;
- Participation. Burnet values volunteers' points of view and will canvas ideas and experience to help make good decisions. Volunteers will be consulted by paid staff on matters affecting them and the work they do.
- Personal development. Volunteers, like paid staff, should be encouraged to develop their skills, abilities and experience within Burnet.

Unit/Centre		Policy Title	
Institute wide		Volunteer Policy	
Responsible Officer	Authorised by	Revision date	Page
PR & Development Office	Board of Directors	Nov 2005	5 of 6

## 6.2 Responsibilities of Volunteers

- To learn about Burnet's work and how their job fits within the organisation. This will involve undertaking the formal orientation from the Laboratory Manager.
- To work according to procedures and carry out the duties agreed with the responsible member of paid staff;
- To adhere to all relevant laws, regulations and codes of practice that relate to specific areas of research;
- To give regular and reliable commitment of time where these duties involve special responsibilities or regular hours;
- To be aware of other workers' workloads and spaces;
- To keep relevant staff member(s) apprised of progress on tasks assigned;
- To ask for help when needed;
- To appreciate and respect the confidential nature of some aspects of Burnet's work and, if required, be prepared to sign the Burnet Confidentiality Statement;
- To represent the Institute in a positive manner.

## 6.3 Burnet's Commitment to Volunteers

Burnet recognises that volunteers can contribute valuable skills, knowledge and support towards assisting Burnet in achieving its mission. All Burnet staff in return are to treat volunteers with respect and support. Staff are accountable for volunteers under their supervision and must be present (or delegate responsibility for this to a colleague) while their volunteers are in the building. No volunteer should be in the Burnet building unsupervised.

**Recognition:** volunteers are to be included, where possible and appropriate, in all relevant staff meetings, discussions and celebrations. Volunteers should be given every opportunity to develop their skills to enhance their own skill base. Long term volunteers (those who have provided regular voluntary assistance for more than six months) are to be included in staff training sessions whenever possible.

**Awards and Acknowledgement:** volunteers who have provided long term support to Burnet will have their annual anniversaries acknowledged and where possible, celebrated.

**Confidentiality:** all volunteer's information will be treated with confidentiality. The volunteer database will be password protected and resumes and registration forms will

be kept in a locked filing cabinet. Resumes and registration forms can be shown to relevant staff in order to decide a volunteer's suitability for a position.

Unit/Centre		Policy Title	
Institute wide		Volunteer Policy	
Responsible Officer	Authorised by	Revision date	Page
PR & Development Office	Board of Directors	Nov 2005	6 of 6

### Process for Applying

Write to the Burnet Public Relations and Development Office indicating your special skills, what you would be willing to do and when you are available. Your application will be acknowledged.

Should there be work available which would suit you, you will be invited to an interview to discuss how you can contribute.

If there is no suitable work available, your application will be filed and we will contact you if/when a suitable job does become available. This may take time.

### References

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