



PORT STEPHENS
COUNCIL

Volunteer handbook

2026

Welcome to volunteering with PSC. This handbook will help you understand your rights and responsibilities as a Council volunteer.



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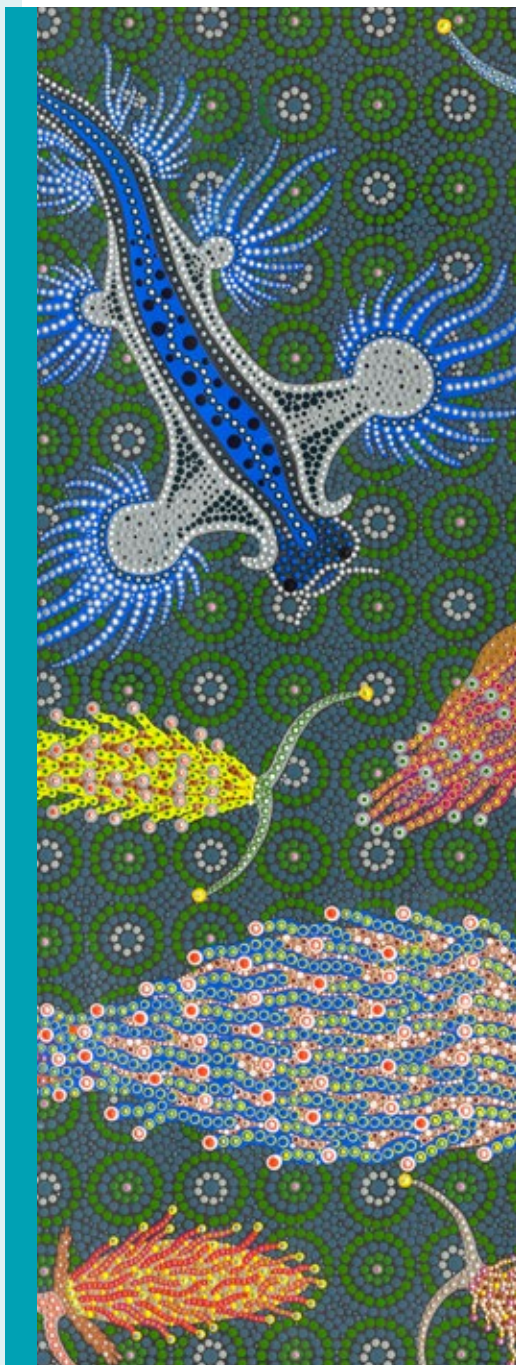
(GOO-JEE IK-KOO)

We welcome you to Port Stephens – part of the Worimi Aboriginal Nation. Port Stephens Council acknowledges the Worimi people as traditional owners and custodians of the lands and waterways on which we all live, learn, work and play.

We value and respect the Worimi people and the legacy 60,000 years of Aboriginal Nation traditions and culture brings with it. As part of Council's culture of acceptance, diversification and harmony we walk alongside the Worimi people on a journey of listening and learning.

Together we will strive to make this a better place for all peoples. As guardians of these lands, we ask that you tread lightly to help preserve the biodiversity and respect those who came before as well as those who will follow.

Artwork by Regan Lilley.



Contents

Introduction	4
Volunteering opportunities	6
Position statement on volunteering	6
Volunteering with Council	7
Rights and responsibilities	8
Performance and behaviour	10
Code of Conduct	11
Personal behaviour	11
Unacceptable behaviour	12
Children and young people guidelines	14
Communications	14
Use of technology and social media	14
Other obligations – gifts and benefits	14
Diversity and safety	15
Work Health and Safety (WHS)	16
Hazards vs risks	16
Bullying, harassment and discrimination	20
Counselling and support	20
Support	21
Insurance	22
Expenses and reimbursements	22
Grievances	23
Resolving issues	23

Mayor's welcome message



Thank you for choosing to become a Port Stephens volunteer.

Volunteers are the essence of the Port Stephens community – the time and energy you give makes our beautiful region a better place to live, work and play. Without our volunteers, many of our programs and services could not be provided to our community.

Whether you make a hands-on contribution, help others, share your knowledge and experiences, or stay active and form new friendships, we appreciate the role you play.

There are over 500+ volunteers making an impact across the Port Stephens area covering 858.5 square kilometres with a population of 75,282 people. We appreciate you choosing to be a Port Stephens Council volunteer and thank you for dedicating your time, skills and service to the Council and greater community areas.

This handbook will help you understand:

- Your rights and responsibilities as a Council volunteer.
- Expected performance, behavior and boundaries.
- Opportunities involved in volunteering.
- How to stay safe while volunteering.
- How to raise concerns and find support.

As a long-term volunteer myself, I understand and appreciate the time you give, and I also share the wonderful sense of pride in giving your time for the benefit of our community.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leah Anderson". The script is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Leah" and last name "Anderson" clearly distinguishable.

Leah Anderson

Mayor of Port Stephens



Volunteering opportunities

We are able to offer volunteering roles in a range of programs, services and activities including some skills training where required for our volunteers.

Position statement on volunteering

Council is committed to creating opportunities for volunteers that are productive, meaningful and deliver mutual benefit and positive outcomes to Council, community and the volunteer. Council will ensure all volunteers are engaged, trained and supported to appropriately fulfill their approved volunteering duties. Council is committed to increasing volunteering opportunities that will lead to learning and skills development.

To provide ongoing support after the transition the following will be in place:

- compulsory training
- induction procedures and processes
- guidelines
- ongoing communications.

Volunteering with Council

Nomination and recruitment

- Volunteer completes nomination form.
- Application is endorsed and reviewed for available roles.

Induction and orientation

- Port Stephens Council Induction (online)
- Policy and Procedures (online)
- Port Stephens Council Volunteer agreement form (online)
- Site specific Work Health and Safety induction (in-person on site)
- Ask questions or contact volunteers@portstephens.nsw.gov.au

Personal checklist

- ☐ Completed expression of interest and nomination form
- ☐ Current contact details provided to your Registered Volunteer Officer
- ☐ Port Stephens Council Induction (online)
- ☐ Signed volunteer agreement
- ☐ Access to policies and procedures
- ☐ Orientation completed with your Registered Volunteer Officer
- ☐ Mandatory training
- ☐ Correct personal protective equipment and knowledge

Rights and responsibilities

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My volunteering has allowed me to get to meet many more local people in my area, sharing knowledge and experiences has been a very positive 2 way street. I devote as much or as little time as I have available for various things and have always for PSC very supportive in my journey.

– **Bronwyn Mitchell**

LTP Old School Centre Volunteer



Rights of volunteers

- Undertake volunteer work in a safe and healthy environment, free from discrimination and harassment.
- Covered by Port Stephens Council insurance (Volunteer Agreement must be signed and returned).
- Be given training and equipment to safely fulfill your role.
- Raise concerns, complaints, grievances and feedback safely.
- Change your mind about volunteering.

Rights of Council

- Select the candidate who best matches the role requirements.
- Require completion of mandatory training and re-training.
- Ensure volunteers and staff adhere to Council's rites and behaviours at all times.

Responsibilities of volunteers

- To act in accordance with all relevant Council policies and procedures including the Code of Conduct.
- Comply with instructions and directives from the Registered Volunteer Officer and only undertake agreed upon works.
- Attend required training or refresher training as necessary.
- Treat others with respect, dignity and understanding and be a positive representative of Port Stephens Council volunteers.
- Notify your Registered Volunteer Officer if you are unable to make the shift or are no longer able to volunteer.

Responsibilities of Council

- Volunteers undertake relevant corporate and site inductions.
- Volunteers have access to relevant guidelines and policies.
- Ensure a safe and healthy work environment for volunteers.
- Involve volunteers in policy or procedure change.

Performance and behaviour

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Volunteering is special! If you are thinking about volunteering, do it! I've volunteered in a few areas over the last 30 years, and now in our local library on a weekly basis! It gives me a special connection with library staff and the general community who visit the library! It gives me a happy feeling each week, and I thoroughly recommend volunteering in an area which holds your interest!

– Sally

Tomaree Library Volunteer





Code of Conduct

The Code of Conduct outlines Port Stephens Council's commitment to conducting itself with honesty, fairness and integrity and expected standards of behaviour and responsibilities for all Port Stephens Council volunteers and staff. Including expectations of all people to be responsible for creating and maintaining an environment that is productive, positive and safe.

Personal behaviour

Council's values – RITES

- **Respect** – creating a unique, open and trusting environment in which each individual is valued and heard.
- **Integrity** – being honest and inspiring trust by being consistent, matching behaviours to words and taking responsibility for our actions.
- **Teamwork** – working together as one Council, supporting each other to achieve better results for everyone.
- **Excellence** – improving the way we work to meet the challenges of the future.
- **Safety** – providing a safety focused workplace culture to ensure the wellbeing of staff, their families and the community.

Dress and appearance

As a volunteer you are responsible for wearing appropriate footwear, clothing and personal protective equipment (PPE) at all times. We support you dressing in a manner that reflects your culture, faith and gender / identity.

Sensitive language

During verbal or written communications with others do not make assumptions or discriminate based on background, age, disability, religion, family status, gender identity / expression, intersex status, sexual orientation, social or economic background.

Attendance and punctuality

We understand from time to time things pop up, for safety and to assist the group, if you are unable to make your shift please notify your Registered Volunteer Officer (RVO).

Unacceptable behaviour

Violence and assault

If you encounter any violence or assault, respond with non-aggressive language and seek the presence of another person or walk away. Violence in a verbal or physical form is unacceptable as a volunteer.

Act and notify

If you require assistance with a concern or would like to raise a complaint where something or someone is breaching our policies or code of conduct, please notify your RVO.

Exploitation

Volunteers are not to seek influence on a situation, person to gain advantage, this includes physical or psychological exploitation.

Images of others

Technology is a part of everyone's day to day life, we respectfully ask any photos or video of yourself and other volunteers be taken with consent of fellow volunteers. Images must be dignified and respectful, and are not to be used to mock, bully or belittle other volunteers.

Language and verbal abuse

Violence in a verbal or physical form is unacceptable as a volunteer. You are responsible for your behaviour and language and are expected to act accordingly. Examples include aggressive gestures, expressions or eye rolls, yelling or swearing. None of these are ok. Experiencing these incidents can cause significant harm to a person and their wellbeing.

Public Interest Disclosure – internal reporting

Good government relies on public officials (including volunteers) speaking up when they witness, or otherwise become aware of, wrongdoing in the public sector. A strong 'speak up' culture that encourages public officials to report wrongdoing is important for ensuring the integrity of the public sector.

An integral part of that 'speak up' culture is having in place a framework that facilitates public interest reporting of wrongdoing by:

- protecting those who speak up from detriment
- taking active steps to maintain the confidentiality of reports
- imposing duties on agencies who receive reports of wrongdoing to take appropriate action to investigate or otherwise deal with them.

In NSW, that framework is the Public Interest Disclosures Act 2022 (PID Act). To make a report or for further information, please contact the Disclosure Coordinator at Council – the Governance Section Manager by telephone 02 4988 0187.

Children and young people guidelines

Volunteers must abide by Port Stephens Council child safe policies and commitment to creating a safe culture by promoting and protecting the wellbeing of children and young people. If the volunteer group is working with volunteers under 18 you will be required to gain a Volunteer Working With Children's Check.

Communications

An essential part of team work is communication, it helps develop and strengthen relationships but also helps with preventing misunderstanding. A few quick tips for great communication include, actively listening to the person speaking, being patient with speakers who are considering their words and sentences. Ensure you are clear and use common language when working with other volunteers.

Use of technology and social media

Technology has become an important part of our day to day. With that Council has implemented a few guidelines for phone, computer etc use during volunteer works. Council requires comments made be expressed as an individuals' opinion not a reflection of Council or the Council volunteer group. Additionally any photos or film captured by a volunteer of the group is done with consent and is done to benefit the group.

Other obligations – gifts and benefits

Under Council code of conduct, gifts and benefits can be considered as inappropriate. If you receive any gift, reward or benefit please notify your manager or RVO. Gifts, benefits are not to be solicited under any circumstances.

Diversity and safety

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Port Stephens Council
embraces volunteering that
creates value through safe
practices for our people and
environment.

– **Nicole Le Grange**
PSC WHS Manager



Work Health and Safety (WHS)

Port Stephens Council is committed to the work health and safety of all our volunteers. It is everyone's responsibility to maintain a safe work place, volunteers also have a duty of care to others and themselves in respect to health and safety.

As a volunteer you are responsible for:

- WHS obligations as per the Work Health Safety Act & Regulations including those processes, requirements and instructions from your volunteer officer.
- Take reasonable care to work safely and identify and manage hazards on site.
- Report all incidents and accidents, injuries and hazards to management.

Environmental Management System (EMS)

Council is committed to protecting our environment and this is the basis of our Environmental Management System (EMS). Environmental legislation in NSW has determined that every individual has a duty of care to the environment. This includes consideration of environmental impacts when undertaking activities. As a volunteer, you are responsible for working under our EMS which can include processes, actions plan and instructions from your volunteer officer.

Hazards vs risks

A component of Work Health and Safety legislation is management and recognition of hazards arising within the workplace. Hazards can be identified using tools such as a risk assessment (SWAT form), team meetings or workplace observations on site. When you identify a hazard it is important you notify your supervisor.

A hazard is defined as anything that can cause harm to a person. Hazards may occur but are not limited to the following examples:

- physical work environment
- equipment, materials and products used
- work tasks and how they are performed
- work design and management.

WHS Risk Management



Identify hazard(s) – what has the potential to cause harm.



Assessment of risk – Assess and prioritise hazards according to risk.



Control risks – implement a control of the risk (hazard) where practicable.



Review control measures – ensure controls are reviewed or when an incident occurs.

Reporting incidents

Incidents (including environment), injuries and near misses may occur during your time as a volunteer. It is important that you report these to your RVO so that we can assist you with first aid or seek further treatment or actions where necessary. It is also important we know so we can record the incident in our incident management system.

Personal Protective Equipment (PPE)

PPE may be required for some volunteers to undertake their roles safely. PPE may include sunscreen, wide brimmed hat, long sleeved shirt or pants, safety footwear, gloves, eye protection and face masks.

No Smoking Policy

All Council buildings, offices and worksites are “Smoke Free Areas”. Volunteers are not permitted to smoke within 4 metres of these areas.

Psychosocial hazards

NSW Work Health and Safety laws require organisations, including Councils, to provide working environments that protect staff's (including volunteers) physical and psychological health.

This means taking a risk management approach to all hazards by either eliminating them or controlling them, to keep staff happy and healthy while at work! While physical hazards can be obvious, psychosocial hazards can be more subtle in how they present, and how they impact people.

As a Council, we pride ourselves on working together to manage work health and safety in our workplace and making sure our staff including volunteers go home safe and well at the end of each working day.

Volunteers often operate in high-pressure or emotionally charged environments, making them susceptible to specific risks:

- **High job demands:** Excessive workloads, unreasonable time pressures, or roles that are too emotionally taxing (e.g., emergency response or trauma support).
- **Lack of role clarity:** Uncertainty about what is expected or receiving contradictory instructions.
- **Traumatic exposure:** Witnessing or hearing accounts of distressing events, which is common in community service or disaster relief roles.
- **Poor support:** Inadequate training, lack of resources, or insufficient emotional support from supervisors.
- **Harmful behaviours:** Exposure to bullying, harassment, or aggression from the public, clients, or other team members.
- **Inadequate recognition:** Feeling that their time and effort are undervalued, which can lead to burnout.

Manual handling and lifting

Manual handling and lifting plays a role in all areas of life including volunteering. It is important to consider the following when assessing a manual task, the load or size of the load, the environment is it well lit, clear path, even surface. Do you need another person to help you carry. If in doubt please do not lift and speak to your RVO as there may be a mechanical or better option.

Alcohol and other drugs

Alcohol and drugs can have adverse impacts and jeopardise the health safety and wellbeing of others. It is important volunteers are not under the effect of alcohol or drugs while volunteering. This does not include volunteers who take prescription medication.

First aid

Each volunteer group will have a trained first aider and first aid kit. For more information on this or participation in first aid training, please reach out to your RVO.

Environmental safeguards

Environmental safeguards reduce the risk of pollution and impact to air, water, soil, noise, heritage and flora & fauna. Environmental safeguards can include but are not limited to erosion and sediment controls, spill kits, dust suppression and limiting hours of work which use power equipment eg leaf blower. Safeguards should comply with Council approvals and industry best practice.

Fire and evacuation procedures

Under instruction from your RVO go to the nearest fire escape, or nominated area. As part of your site induction you will be shown the safest evacuation route prior to commencing activities.

Infectious sharps and safe handling

While volunteering you may come across a syringe/needle (called a sharp) we request you do not touch the sharp and report it to your RVO immediately. Sharps are only to be picked up if you have been trained, are wearing the correct PPE and have access to a disposal sharps bin or container.

Hazardous chemicals

All usage of chemicals must have prior approval. All chemicals currently used by Council have a Safety Data Sheet (SDS). The SDS outlines the risk and hazard of the chemical. Containers that hold chemicals must be clearly labelled. If in doubt regarding chemical use please ask your RVO.

Housekeeping

An important part of volunteering is ensuring the site is left as you found it if not better. To assist with keeping our sites safe and avoid slips, trips or falls please make sure:

- Pathways and work area are free of obstructions.
- Sites are maintained, clean and free of debris or rubbish.
- Work areas are cleaned of waste materials, sharp metal or nails upon completion of the works.

Bullying, harassment and discrimination

It is important to understand what actions are considered discriminatory, harassment or bullying. It is never okay, to embarrass, take advantage of or intimidate another volunteer or staff member whether it is direct or indirect, written or verbal. Some examples of things considered discriminatory include: age, gender or gender identity, sexual identity, political beliefs, impairment or disability, race or ethnic background, religious belief, relationship status, physical features.

Support

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Our Ambassador Team plays a vital role in creating cherished, lasting memories for our Koala Sanctuary guests, leaving a positive and meaningful impact long after their visit with our resident koalas.

– **Melinda Atkinson**
Koala Sanctuary
Assistant Manager





Insurance

Voluntary workers Insurance

Port Stephens Council holds coverage for its volunteers which covers you if you become injured while volunteering. Signing the Volunteer Agreement form will ensure you can access this insurance if necessary. If you are injured while volunteering you are required to notify your RVO.

Personal Property

It is important to note any personal items are not covered for loss or damage whilst undertaking volunteering activities. Council recommends not bringing any items of significant value or ensuring personal items are stored in a secured place for the duration of the volunteering shift.

Expenses and reimbursements

Volunteers are required to have written approval prior to any expense being incurred if they wish to be reimbursed. Volunteers will also be required to provide proof of purchase attached to the reimbursement claim.



Grievances

Council recognises from time to time things may go wrong, and problems may occur. If you have or are experiencing any inappropriate behaviour we encourage you to act so it can be resolved. Grievances can occur during a situation where a decision or omission is made which you believe is discriminatory, harassing or unfair. Council wants your volunteering environment to be a safe and enjoyable space for you, and will endeavor to resolve any issues in a meaningful and timely manner.

Grievances should be reported to your RVO, in instances where your RVO has not satisfactorily resolved your grievance you are encouraged to contact your Volunteer Program Officer.

Resolving issues

As issues arise we aim to resolve them in a sensitive and timely manner. Council's approach includes personal support, mentoring, additional training or reassignment and in some instances warnings. It is important to understand that if unacceptable behaviour occurs, disciplinary action may be taken. If serious misconduct has been identified, your volunteer role may cease or be suspended.

All issues are handled according to relevant Port Stephens Council policies and procedures.

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