

The international Conservation Volunteer Alliance Accreditation Program
Setting Standards for Conservation Volunteer Management



www.conservationvolunteers.org

For further information about how to join the international Conservation Volunteer Alliance, and to find out more about the accreditation program go to: www.conservationvolunteers.org. The website features a downloadable version of the application documents.

Email: alliance@conservationvolunteers.com.au



You make a difference



**RIO
TINTO**



About the international Conservation Volunteer Alliance

The international Conservation Volunteer Alliance was established by conservation volunteer organisations in 1999 as a not-for-profit organisation, registered in the United Kingdom. The Alliance was formed to enable members to work together to:

- Gain recognition for the achievements of conservation volunteers, who are working to create a better environment around the world
- Ensure the voice of conservation volunteers is heard by global decision makers
- Set benchmarks and standards for practical conservation projects and volunteer experience
- Research and promote the social and environmental significance of conservation volunteering
- Improve communications between the member groups of the Alliance and to encourage the exchange of people and information
- Stimulate the growth of new conservation groups in new locations around the world
- Facilitate access to new funds and influence for members

The international Conservation Volunteer Alliance has been formed to promote the importance of environmental conservation volunteer efforts and demonstrate the benefits of international cooperation and support in conservation volunteer management.

About the accreditation program

The international Conservation Volunteer Alliance Accreditation Program for conservation volunteer organisations is the first major project undertaken by the Alliance. It signals a beginning for the international Conservation Volunteer Alliance as a leading member driven organisation that delivers tangible and significant benefits to member organisations and the environment.

The international Conservation Volunteer Alliance is committed to implementing the accreditation program with the same passion and determination as is applied to volunteer based conservation projects around the world.

The international Conservation Volunteer Alliance Accreditation Program will provide many benefits to conservation volunteer organisations including:

- Assistance to improve practices
- A sound basis for exchange of volunteers between organisations
- Credibility leading to enhanced potential for funding
- More appeal to the conservation volunteer market

The program aims to help conservation volunteer organisations set benchmarks and raise standards. The environment, and member organisations will benefit from the resulting increase in volunteering.

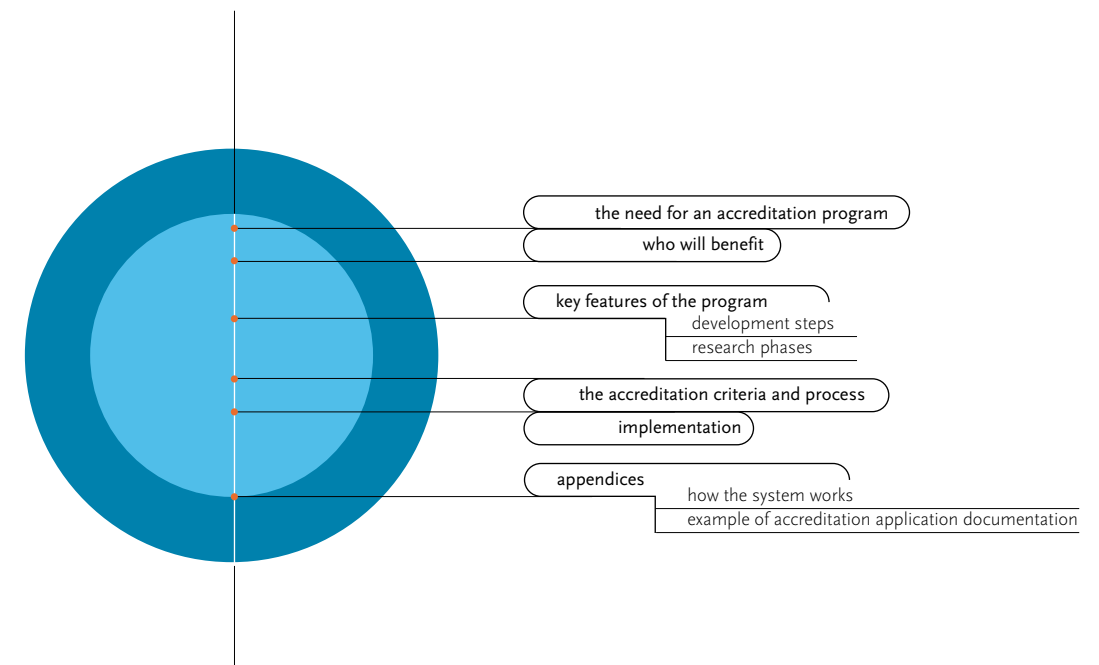
Member organisations of the Alliance have participated in the development, trial and implementation of the accreditation program. The result of this collaboration is a flexible and practical program that enables conservation volunteer organisations to improve their internal management practices in areas such as risk management and volunteer satisfaction.

The accreditation approach was adopted because of its emphasis on continual improvement and because it provided a centrepiece for the international Conservation Volunteer Alliance's growth. An accreditation approach is inclusive, enabling new or developing organisations to participate and work towards improved standards.

By participating in the accreditation program, organisations are able to demonstrate their commitment to a set of international standards, and thereby provide assurance to funders of projects and to volunteers themselves.

The international Conservation Volunteer Alliance strives to inform conservation volunteer organisations around the world of the program benefits, and invites their participation.

This booklet includes an overview of:



The need for an accreditation program

Why have an accreditation program?

Conservation volunteer organisations are renowned for their passion, commitment and practical achievements – they get things done. But there is always room for improvement.

At the heart of conservation volunteer organisations are the people who volunteer their time to do the conservation work. This goodwill cannot be assumed – it must be continually nurtured and professionally managed.

This accreditation program has been developed for conservation volunteer organisations around the world to assist them to deliver a high quality volunteer experience professionally. A good accreditation system sets standards, assists organisations achieve the standards, and rewards those who maintain the standards.

The accreditation program meets these objectives. It has been designed to:

- Set internationally agreed standards for sound practice
- Provide assistance for organisations to meet the agreed standards
- Use the standards to exchange volunteers between organisations

The accreditation program focuses on the practices needed to provide a safe and satisfying conservation volunteer experience.

Who will benefit and how?

Conservation volunteer organisations

Most conservation volunteer organisations have developed their own standards that reflect their 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. The objective of adopting these standards is to improve the viability and reputation of the organisation and the satisfaction of its team. As well, accreditation will make it easier for organisations to share programs and volunteers.

Volunteers

The number of people willing to participate in conservation volunteer activities is increasing. In developing countries many conservation volunteer organisations are seeking volunteers from developed countries. In developed countries like Australia, many retirees are choosing to become involved in community activities such as conservation volunteering. These people are well educated, financially comfortable, well travelled and have high expectations. An international accreditation program provides a mark of quality assurance and helps people choose conservation volunteer activities across different countries and different organisations with confidence.

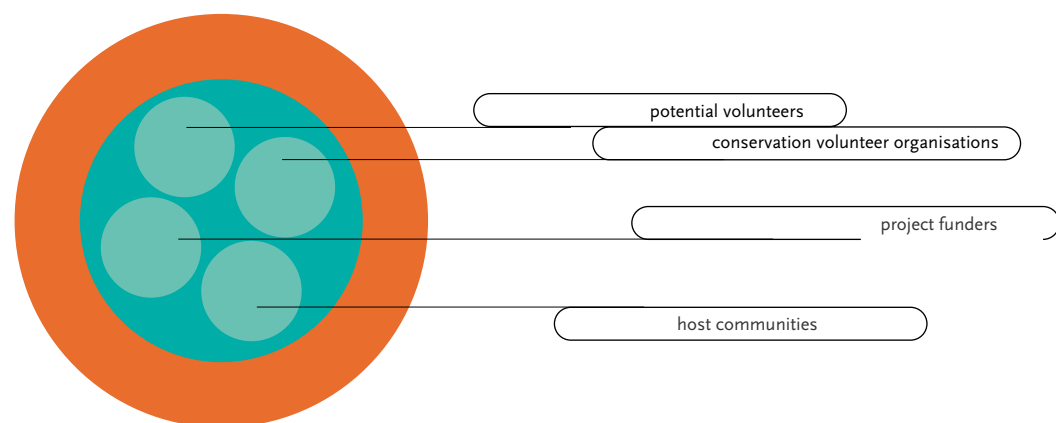
Organisations that fund conservation volunteer projects

Governments and companies want to know that their resources are used efficiently and effectively. Accreditation provides some assurance that the conservation organisation will adhere to good practice in risk management and other important areas of business management, thereby increasing the likelihood of a successful outcome.

Host communities

Host communities want conservation activities to be delivered and managed in responsible ways that limit adverse impacts. By working with accredited volunteer organisations, communities can be more confident that projects will be conducted and completed in ways that are socially, culturally and environmentally responsible.

alliance accreditation program – who benefits?



Key features of the program

Catering for different needs

The accreditation program caters for the differing needs of established and developing conservation volunteer organisations by offering two different levels of accreditation, *benchmark* or *developing*. Organisations that meet the *benchmark* level can assist *developing* category organisations to raise their standards. This provides incentives for organisations to participate, as all conservation volunteer organisations involved achieve direct benefits, through staff development and staff exchange opportunities and assistance to improve practices.

The ultimate aim of an accreditation program is to make it easier for volunteers and the managing organisation to do business. Accreditation assists conservation volunteer organisations to work together, bonded by an agreed set of standards

The accreditation program is a landmark benchmark and accreditation program.

- It is based on market tested criteria and includes incentives for organisations to participate on an on-going basis
- It is flexible. It offers alternative ways to achieve the same professional goal, acknowledging the cultural diversity that exists among conservation volunteer organisations across the world
- It features standards that reflect the practical dimension of a conservation volunteer experience - which, despite being the centrepiece of conservation volunteer organisations, is sometimes under-recognised
- The application process offers a self assessment process for *developing* category applicants and on-site confirmation for *benchmark* applicants
- The assessment process uses a simple point scoring system. Applicants combine compulsory standards with a range of optional standards. Applicants will become accredited provided they reach a certain overall score
- Conservation volunteers have the opportunity to provide feedback on their experience directly into the Alliance website.

Key development steps

- A survey of Alliance members to determine accreditation incentives and standards
- An opportunity for Alliance members to provide comment on draft accreditation standards
- Direct consultation with Alliance members in Bulgaria, Italy, UK, USA and Mexico
- Endorsement of Accreditation Program by Alliance Executive
- Completion of Accreditation Program and Start-up Plan for implementation

Researching standards and consulting with Alliance members

The Alliance conducted a desktop research study to analyse the operations of established not-for-profit conservation volunteer organisations around the world. The findings from the research resulted in a draft set of standards. The draft was converted into a questionnaire for members to rank the draft standards in order of importance and to set the program focus. The questionnaire also asked members to:

- Rank their most compelling reasons for their organisations to participate
- Identify their preference for either self assessment, professional assessment, and/or on-site confirmation
- Make other suggestions

Member feedback highlighted the importance of:

- Simple and flexible processes to accommodate differences between countries and organisations
- A simple application document backed up by documentary evidence for some criteria and contact details for a referee
- A confirmation visit to verify the applications for accreditation
- Including an implementation plan in the program development process

Alliance Executive endorsement and start-up

The Executive Board of the Alliance endorsed the Accreditation Program and a Start-Up Plan was prepared to direct the operation of the program.

The accreditation criteria and process

Who can participate in the accreditation program?

The accreditation program is open to financial members of the international Conservation Volunteer Alliance.

Any organisation involved in developing, delivering, coordinating or representing conservation volunteer activities can join the international Conservation Volunteer Alliance. For more details go to the Conservation Volunteer Alliance website: www.conservationvolunteers.org

The accreditation program has been designed for two types of organisation that are involved in conservation volunteer activity:

- Organisations that provide direct management of conservation volunteers on practical projects (*conservation volunteer project management organisations*)
- Representative organisations that coordinate activities of conservation volunteer organisations (*umbrella organisations*)

Levels of accreditation

Applicants can decide what category of accreditation they wish to apply for – *benchmark* or *developing*.

Developing category

Typically, organisations that apply at this level have some systems in place and recognise the need for further improvement across their activities. These organisations will have a commitment to improve their standards further.

Benchmark category

These organisations have documented systems in place across their activities, backed up by comprehensive skills and experience. These organisations will help *developing* organisations to improve their standards.

What standards are accredited?

The program accredits organisations in areas of:

- Human resource management
- Financial management
- Project management
- Promotion and recruitment
- Risk management
- Volunteer experience
- Membership services

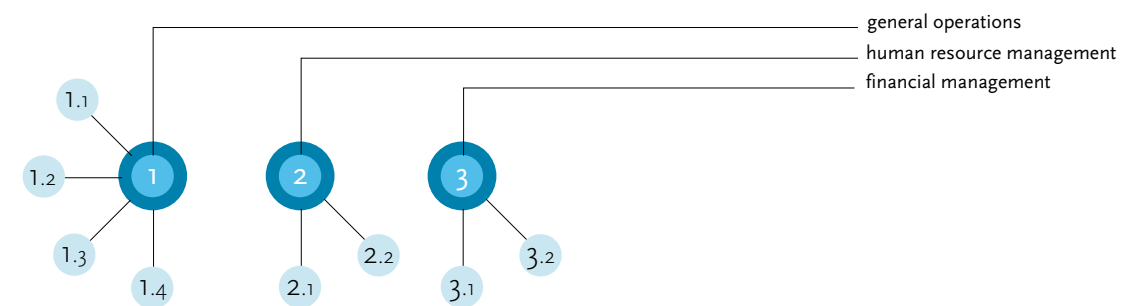
The accreditation program distinguishes between organisational management criteria, which are applicable to all organisations that apply, and project management criteria that are not applicable in all cases. Organisations must meet a number of standards, as well as some relevant supplementary criteria.

Different sets of criteria have been developed for volunteer organisations, project managers and umbrella organisations, based on whether they are applying for either *developing* or *benchmark* status.

The diagram opposite shows an overview of the assessment criteria for a project manager organisation (not an *umbrella organisation*) that is applying for *benchmark* status. Applicants need to respond to criteria about their organisational management, and project management.

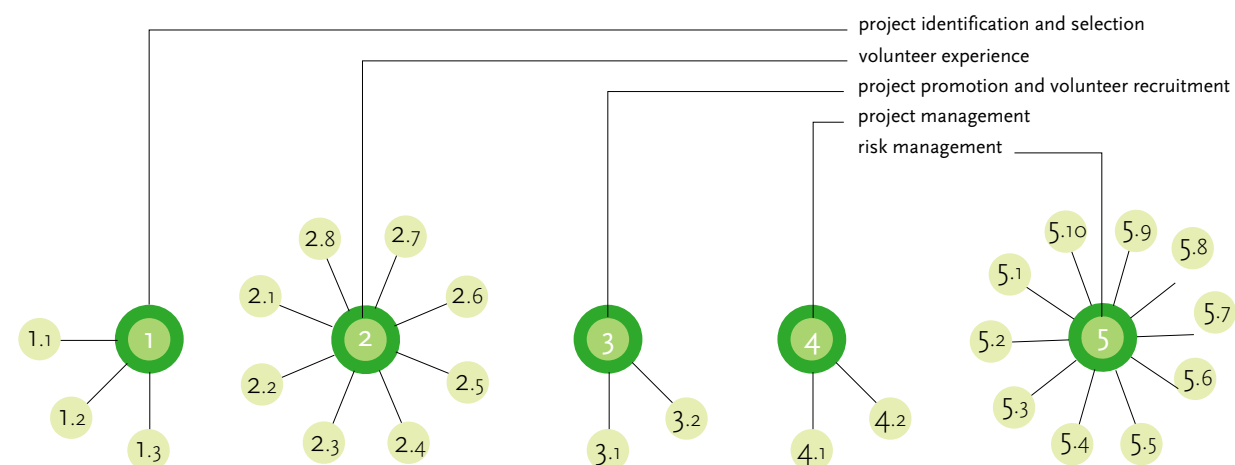
The organisational management criteria are based on the need to maintain a healthy and viable organisation. The project management criteria are based on the need to generate ongoing volunteer confidence and support.

Overview of assessment criteria for a conservation volunteer project manager organisation



organisational management criteria

- | | | |
|---------------------------|----------------------------------|---|
| 1 general operations | 2 human resource management | 3 financial management |
| 1.1 public profile | 2.1 policies on staff management | 3.1 accounting and financial management systems |
| 1.2 current insurance | 2.2 staff induction | 3.2 checking accounting practices |
| 1.3 performance recording | | |
| 1.4 annual review | | |

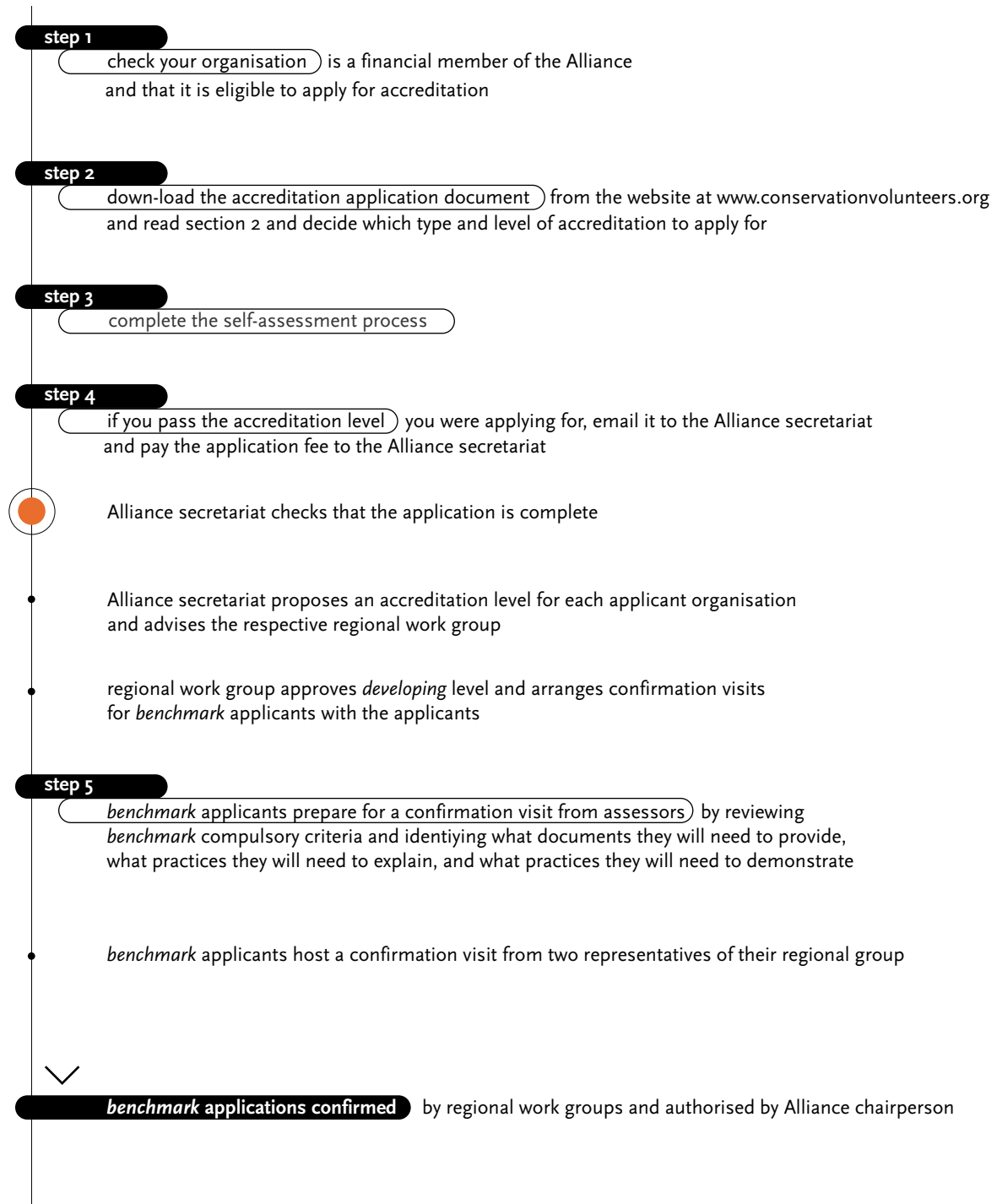


project management criteria

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| 1 project identification and selection | 2 volunteer experience | 3 project promotion and volunteer recruitment |
| 1.1 project proposal | 2.1 statement of rules, rights and responsibilities | 3.1 promotional material |
| 1.2 assessment of project proposals | 2.2 introduction to the project | 3.2 application or registration form |
| 1.3 consultation | 2.3 learning about life, work and service | |
| | 2.4 cultural exchange | |
| | 2.5 learning about the environment and its conservation | |
| | 2.6 socialising and enjoyment | |
| | 2.7 collecting volunteer feedback | |
| | 2.8 managing volunteer complaints | |
| 4 project management | 5 risk management | |
| 4.1 project leader training | 5.1 safety policy | |
| 4.2 overall project review | 5.2 driving skills | |
| | 5.3 vehicle safety checks | |
| | 5.4 protective footwear | |
| | 5.5 special clothing and footwear | |
| | 5.6 safe use of equipment | |
| | 5.7 accessible first aid kit | |
| | 5.8 first aid experience | |
| | 5.9 calling for help – emergency contacts | |
| | 5.10 accident and injury reporting | |

Accreditation process

How your organisation can participate



Implementation of the international Conservation Volunteer Alliance Accreditation Program

Implementation of the international Conservation Volunteer Alliance Accreditation Program is in progress. The international Conservation Volunteer Alliance needs additional resources to continue this important work.

The Alliance is committed to promoting the accreditation program around the world to achieve positive outcomes for conservation volunteering and the environment. The accreditation program is more than a set of standards to measure professional performance - it contains the nucleus for conservation volunteer organisations, wherever they are, to work together and help each other. The program development has motivated Alliance members to do just this.

- 11 How the international Conservation Volunteer Alliance Accreditation Program works
- 12 Sample accreditation document
 - Organisation management compulsory criteria
 - general operations
 - human resource management
 - financial management
- 13 – 15 Project management criteria
 - project identification and selection
 - volunteer experience
 - project promotion and volunteer recruitment
 - project management
 - risk management

How the international Conservation Volunteer Alliance Accreditation Program works

This table shows the number of compulsory and supplementary criteria organisations must achieve, depending on the type of organisation, and whether they are seeking *developing* or *benchmark* accreditation.

Conservation Volunteer Alliance accreditation is achieved through a formal application (*developing* and *benchmark*) and a confirmation visit (*benchmark* only). Organisations demonstrate competency through addressing compulsory and supplementary criteria.

type of organisation	accreditation criteria					
	organisation management section		project management section		umbrella organisation section	
	compulsory criteria	supplementary criteria	compulsory criteria	supplementary criteria	compulsory criteria	supplementary criteria
developing project manager	5/5	0	19/19	0	0	0
developing umbrella organisation	5/5	0	0	0	4/4	0
developing project manager and umbrella organisation	5/5	0	19/19	0	4/4	0
benchmark project manager	8/8	4/8	25/25	6/12	0	0
benchmark umbrella organisation	8/8	4/8	19/19	0	4/4	9/18
benchmark project manager and umbrella organisation	8/8	4/8	25/25	6/12	4/4	9/18

Sample accreditation document

The following table is an excerpt from the accreditation application document. This example shows the criteria that a conservation project manager organisation must meet when applying for *benchmark* accreditation. Organisations are able to self assess by working through the criteria. Members of the Alliance who are trained as assessors confirm the information provided by seeking documented evidence, visiting the organisation's office and viewing a conservation project in action.

The full accreditation document is available through the website: www.conservationvolunteers.org or email: alliance@conservationvolunteers.com.au.

Organisation management compulsory criteria

General operations

<p>a) Public profile</p> <p>The name and contact details of the organisation is listed in at least one of the following publicly accessible places, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – telephone directory – website – information and hyperlinks on other organisation's websites – brochure – listings in other organisation's brochures 	<p>b) Current insurance</p> <p>Conservation volunteers are covered by personal accident insurance and / or national healthcare.</p>
<p>c) Measuring performance</p> <p>The outcomes of conservation volunteer activity is annually recorded, to collect information on at least three of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – number of volunteers – number of programs, projects or camps – number of volunteer hours / days / weeks – conservation outcomes (eg. trees planted, length of trails constructed, hectares of weeds removed) – number of members that participated in training sessions – cost per program/project or camp – cost of each program/project/camp for each volunteer 	<p>d) Annual review</p> <p>An annual review is done and is available to organisations interested in volunteer exchange. The review should include at least four of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – vision and mission statement of the organisation – major initiatives undertaken during the year – results of performance recording – review of performance, particularly what was not achieved and the reasons why – suggested priorities for the following year – financial statements, such as a Profit and Loss Statement and Balance Sheet

Human resource management

<p>a) Policies on staff management</p> <p>There are policies on how staff should be employed and looked after. Ideally, these policies should be kept together in the same place, such as in a folder, in a human resource manual or in an operations manual. Policies should cover all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – how to employ people – how to review performance – how to award holiday and sick leave – how to terminate employment – Other (please specify) 	<p>b) Staff introduction</p> <p>There is a way for new staff to be introduced to the organisation (covering a background to the organisation, the main activities of the organisation, relevant staff and their responsibilities). Techniques should include at least one of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – a brochure or booklet – an induction program; or – an informal process, such as a guided tour and personal introductions to staff – Other (please specify)
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Financial management

<p>a) Accounting and financial management systems</p> <p>Accounting and financial management systems for conservation volunteer activity are in place and can be demonstrated.</p>	<p>b) Checking accounting practices</p> <p>The organisation has its annual financial performance checked by an independent qualified accountant, to check that the reporting is sound.</p>
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A view documents **B** staff explanation **C** view systems **D** confirmation assessors

Project management criteria

Project identification and selection

<p>a) Project proposal</p> <p>Each project is described in a written proposal. The proposal should include at least six of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – type of conservation activity – location – dates – skills and equipment required – type of volunteers required – benefits for volunteers – funding source – type of accommodation, shelter, food preparation and eating areas 	<p>b) Assessment of project proposals</p> <p>Each project proposal should be assessed to decide whether it is worth doing or not. An assessment should cover at least three of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – cost effectiveness – contribution to the conservation of the environment – benefits for volunteers – risk to the safety of the volunteers and project leaders
<p>c) Consultation</p> <p>People with an interest in the site and its conservation are consulted before the decision is made to proceed with the project. Consultation should include all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – informing people of what is proposed – seeking comment on what is proposed – being prepared to take on suggestions 	

Volunteer experience

<p>a) Statement of rules, rights and responsibilities</p> <p>There is a statement of rules, rights and responsibilities applicable to volunteers and an explanation of the disciplinary procedures that would be applied in the event of a breach. The statement should cover at least four of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – commitment to working on the project – following the project leader's instructions – returning to the project site within an agreed time – discrimination and offensive behaviour – responsible use of alcohol and drugs – an explanation of the complaint process – disciplinary and termination procedures 	<p>b) Introduction to project</p> <p>Volunteers are given a comprehensive introduction before starting each project, and are asked to confirm that they understand the introduction (this should include signing an agreement form). The introduction should be delivered in the first language of the volunteers, and include at least four of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – statement of rules, rights and responsibilities – the project's conservation activity – safety and emergency procedures – complaint process – disciplinary and termination procedure
<p>c) Learning about life, work and service</p> <p>Volunteers are provided with opportunities to learn how to live with others such as at least two of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – how to work with different people's work styles – how to manage unusual or uncomfortable situations – how to eat local food in the local way – Other (please specify) 	<p>d) Cultural exchange</p> <p>Volunteers are provided opportunities for cultural exchange such as at least two of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – selecting the group of volunteers from different countries or regions – group discussions that contrast conservation approaches between the host and alternative countries – specific activities that help volunteers discuss their cultural backgrounds – Other (please specify)
<p>e) Learning about the environment and its conservation</p> <p>Volunteers are provided opportunities to learn about the environment and its conservation, such as at least three of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – distribution of information sheets and booklets – talks and group discussions – slide presentations – guided walks – role plays – Other (please specify) 	<p>f) Socialising and enjoyment</p> <p>Volunteers are provided opportunities to socialise and enjoy themselves. These opportunities are provided through arranged recreation and social activities such as at least three of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – sporting activity – guided walks to attractions – music and dance – games – shopping – visits to local restaurants – Other (please specify)

A view documents **B** staff explanation **C** view practice **D** confirmation assessors

Project management criteria (cont.)

Volunteer experience

<p>g) Collecting volunteer feedback</p> <p>There is a process to collect feedback from volunteers at the end of each project. This process identifies what volunteers were satisfied with and how they think the experience could be improved. Techniques to collect feedback should include at least four of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – informal discussions with volunteers – meetings with volunteers after the project – meetings with volunteers during the project – questionnaire handed out to volunteers – questionnaire generated from the organisation's website 	<p>h) Managing volunteer complaints</p> <p>There is a process available to all volunteers and staff for dealing with complaints, if there are complaints, an improvement from at least one complaint can be demonstrated</p>
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Project promotion and volunteer recruitment

<p>a) Promotional material</p> <p>Promotional material created that includes all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – project location – type of work – conditions of participation – proposed dates 	<p>b) Application or registration form</p> <p>Volunteers are supplied with an application / registration form. The form should ask volunteers about at least four of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – health and fitness – skills – conservation volunteer experience – conservation volunteer interests – conservation volunteer expectations of the program or project – travel experience – dietary requirements – languages spoken
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Project management

<p>a) Project leader training</p> <p>All project leaders have been trained as a leader. Ideally, this training is documented in an operations manual or human resource manual, and should include at least 10 of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – main conservation activities – managing a project – managing a camp – group leadership – risk management – solving volunteer complaints and conflicts – menu preparation and shopping – cooking 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – basic interpretation of the natural and cultural environment – creating opportunities for fun and enjoyment – helping volunteers learn about life, work and service – creating opportunities for cultural exchange between volunteers – customer service – discussing family planning with volunteers, where appropriate
<p>b) Overall project review</p> <p>The overall performance of all conservation projects is reviewed. The review should consider at least four of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – conservation outcome – number of volunteers – volunteer feedback – cost per volunteer – accounting report – cost effectiveness – how projects could be improved 	

A view documents **B** staff explanation **C** view practice **D** confirmation assessors

Risk management

<p>a) Safety policy</p> <p>There is a basic policy on how conservation volunteer activity is made as safe as possible, and this policy is made available to project leaders. The safety policy must cover all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – risk assessment – risk control – use of tools and equipment and protective clothing 	<p>b) Driving skills</p> <p>All project leaders required to drive volunteers have a current drivers license and evidence of training in safe driving. The safe driving experience could be a part of the drivers license or a training course, but should cover at least three of the following skills:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – removing a vehicle that is stuck in sand or mud – overtaking safely when the vehicle carries passengers – controlling a vehicle during a slide on a wet road – controlling a vehicle when its tyre explodes – controlling a vehicle when a hard turn is required
<p>c) Vehicle safety checks</p> <p>Vehicles are inspected before each project to make sure that they are basically safe to drive. The check should include all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – headlights, brake and indicator lights – foot brake and handbrake – tyre pressure. 	<p>d) Protective footwear</p> <p>Volunteers wear shoes whenever doing physical conservation work.</p>
<p>e) Special clothing and safety wear</p> <p>Volunteers are supplied with special clothing and safety gear suited to each project, such as gloves, steel capped boots, protective glasses or breathing masks.</p>	<p>f) Safe use of equipment</p> <p>Volunteers receive instructions on the safe use of conservation-related equipment, before they begin operating it.</p>
<p>g) Accessible first aid kit</p> <p>A fully equipped first aid kit is checked for completeness prior to every project and is in easy reach of the project leader at all times. The kit should be to international (Red Cross) standards for treating people in remote locations.</p>	<p>h) First aid experience</p> <p>All project leaders have been trained in use of their first aid kit and the location of the closest doctor or hospital to the project site.</p>
<p>i) Calling for help</p> <p>Project leaders are able to access communications equipment within one hour's travel from the project location. Project leaders must have phone contact details for all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – responsible person within the organisation running the project – doctor – hospital – police 	<p>j) Accident and injury reporting</p> <p>There is an accident and injury reporting system that addresses all of the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – how the accident or injury happened – who was involved – how it could have been avoided

A view documents **B** staff explanation **C** view practice **C** view practice (vehicle) **D** confirmation assessors

The partnership between Rio Tinto and Conservation Volunteers Australia

Rio Tinto and Conservation Volunteers Australia (CVA) have formed a partnership under the Rio Tinto *Business with Communities* program, in recognition of the potential value and importance of the rapidly growing conservation volunteer movement and the need to establish and monitor best practice in volunteer-based practical conservation work.

The aims of the partnership are to:

- Raise the professional standard of volunteer-based practical conservation work in Australia
- Demonstrate a joint commitment to environmental responsibility through raising the standard of management of volunteer-based practical conservation work around the world

The Rio Tinto *Business with Communities* program is a multi-faceted collective of active relationships with organisations and communities integral to Rio Tinto's business. At the heart of the program is an understanding of the importance of mutual benefit - the emphasis being on the benefits to be gained for all parties from the partnership itself, as well as specific programs involved in the partnership.

About Rio Tinto

Rio Tinto is a world leader in finding, mining and processing the earth's mineral resources. The Group's interests are strongly represented in Australia and North America with significant businesses in South America, Asia, Europe and southern Africa.

Wherever Rio Tinto operates, health and safety is its first priority. The Group seeks to contribute to sustainable development and work as closely as possible with its host countries and communities, respecting laws and customs. Rio Tinto aims to minimise adverse effects and strives to improve every aspect of its performance.