



Chapter 5

Blurring the Boundaries: Volunteering and Participation Requirements

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This chapter addresses forms of social participation, frequently referred to as volunteering, that are challenging commonly used volunteering definitions. It features a case study of unemployed people who have had their volunteering count towards a government requirement to 'contribute to the community' in return for their welfare payments.

Introduction

Growing forms of social participation are testing commonly used definitions of volunteering. Frequently badged as volunteering, service learning, unpaid work, peace-corps style programs, and 'volunteering for income support' are cases in point. Volunteering for income support – income support recipients having their volunteering count towards a government requirement to 'contribute to the community' in return for welfare payments – has been a feature of successive Australian governments' policies. Service learning, which refers to community service programs widely adopted in schools, characterised by civic service and parallel classroom based learning, is now a global phenomenon. Unpaid work, particularly no pay (or very low pay) internships for people entering the job market for the first time, is becoming increasingly common. In the past 10 years, seemingly informed by notions of national service, a number of political leaders and groups have floated ideas for volunteering programs targeted at youth. For example, in 2006, Labor leader Kim Beazley proposed an Australian Peace and Community Team (A-PACT), under which young Australians would have received incentives, including fee relief and scholarships, for assisting 'the underprivileged and under-served parts of our Australian and global economy' (Beazley, 2006).

Are any of these social participation activities volunteering? To what degree do they satisfy or contravene volunteering definitions and support



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