

# Volunteering in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century



## Attracting young people to volunteering

Many community groups and organisations want to engage with young volunteers but don't know how. Young people want to volunteer somewhere that is youth-friendly. The first thing your group needs to ask itself is: Is your organisation ready to have young volunteers? Here are some things to consider:

### A youth friendly culture:

Is your group able to be flexible about when volunteer tasks can be completed? Is your group open, welcoming and receptive to young people?

### The opportunities available:

What volunteer roles are available to young people within your organisation? How will young people find out about these?

### Processes to support volunteers:

Young people will have varied levels of volunteering experience and may require support regarding the tasks of their role and balancing their volunteering with other commitments. Is there a staff member or volunteer who is able to support a young volunteer?

### How is your organisation perceived by young people in the community?

- Is it somewhere they would naturally think to volunteer?
- Are they aware of the work of your organisation?
- Do you already have young people volunteering at your organisation?

**No?** Then you may want to develop a strategy to inform young people about the work of your organisation and the ways they can be involved. If you already have young people volunteering, find out why they volunteer and continue to develop the volunteering opportunities within your organisation.

### Are you ready?

To successfully engage young volunteers, it is important that your organisation is youth-friendly. This requires giving consideration to:

### Attitudes and culture:

Does your organisation recognise and value the contribution of volunteers and young people in volunteer roles?

### The physical environment:

Is your organisation somewhere young people want to volunteer? Is it somewhere they will feel comfortable and accepted?

### Policy and procedures:

Does your organisation have policy and procedures that extend to young people in volunteer roles? Does your organisations insurance extend to young people in volunteer roles? No? Your organisation may not be quite ready to involve young people as volunteers. Developing an organisational culture, which includes policies and procedures that support young volunteers is a good place to start.

### Volunteer Roles

Young people are interested in a range of different volunteer roles across diverse sectors. They are looking for something meaningful, achievable and fun that will also develop their skills.

There are a number of ways to start identifying roles for young volunteers. You can:

- Think about what would interest young people in your organisation.
- Provide an opportunity for young people to contact you and have a conversation about how and when they would like to volunteer.
- Identify roles that will add value to the work of your organisation and maximise the strengths of young people.

### Inspire and Encourage

Young people, who are involved in a community where volunteering is common place, are more likely to volunteer.

### Get people talking:

Young people say they start to volunteer because it is suggested to them and they are encouraged to get involved.

### Inform and inspire:

Young people need to know about the work of your organisation and the volunteering opportunities that are available. They want to volunteer doing something they believe in.

## Network:

Young people find information through their networks, including family, sporting clubs, school and social media, so promote opportunities through these networks.

## Develop a strategy:

Inform and inspire young people and those in their networks (including parents, friends, and partners) about the work of your organisation and the opportunities to volunteer.

## Keep In Mind

Young people bring skills, enthusiasm and diversity to the organisations they volunteer with! Here are a couple of things to keep in mind:

- Young people want to volunteer and are looking for a real challenge.
- Create meaningful experiences.
- Trust and give young volunteers independence.
- Engage them in your organisation - staff meetings and social events.
- Be forgiving of mistakes and focus on the value of learning.
- Ask for their opinion.

## Clear Expectations

It is important to be clear about what is expected of young volunteers, so:

- Be clear about how much time the role requires and realistic about how much time the volunteer has available.
- Be clear about the limitations of the role and the areas in which volunteers can work autonomously and creatively.
- Establish working timelines together.
- Organise regular check-ins with each other i.e. weekly, monthly.
- Understand the young person's motivation to volunteer and their personal and professional goals.



## Support Young Volunteers

Supporting and managing volunteers is important in retaining them and ensuring tasks are completed. Be realistic and clear about expectations, check in with

volunteers regularly and support young people to balance volunteering with their other commitments.

To ensure that young volunteers are supported in leadership roles and to mitigate any potential risks, it is important that there are clear processes and structures in place. This includes:

- A written role description which details tasks, skills and role requirements.
- An application process which gives volunteers a sense of responsibility when taking on the role.
- Structured goal setting so that you and the young person understand the direction of the role and project.
- Regular supervision and check-ins as well as three or six month reviews.

## Remember: Volunteers Move On

It is increasingly common that volunteers are now engaging with community groups for shorter periods of commitment. Young volunteers may be forced to leave a community group or volunteer role for a raft of reasons including competing demands on their time. By encouraging open communication you can get a sense of when the volunteering experience is at an end. This will give you time to make sure that you have another volunteer ready to take over the role. Encourage the volunteer to

suggest another young person who would be interested in the role and try to ensure that there is time for a hand-over between the two volunteers.

It's important to get feedback about the young person's experience as a volunteer and opportunities for improvement. This may take the form of a casual chat, a formal exit interview or a survey. Make sure young people

leave your organisation on a positive note, knowing that they are valued.

Invite them to stay connected via social media and one day they may return or give their support in other ways.

*This information is taken from a series of fact sheets produced by the Youth Affairs Council of Victoria as part of their "Developing Youth Volunteering" project. For more information or to download all of their fact sheets, visit their website at [www.yacvic.org.au](http://www.yacvic.org.au).*