

Volunteering in the 21st Century



Volunteer management: recruit, retain and recognise

To maximise the effectiveness of our volunteer engagement and to make our community group more attractive to new volunteers, it pays to have a Volunteer Management Program. This is as simple as giving thought to how we recruit volunteers, how we support them when they are on board, how do we ensure we are meeting our legal obligations and providing a safe, welcoming environment for them so they stay engaged, and how do we recognise and reward their contributions.

In simple parlance this is known as the 3 R's of volunteer management: how we **recruit**, **retain** and **recognise** our volunteers and the great work they do.

Position descriptions

Position descriptions are a crucial part of any volunteer management program. There is no point declaring "We need more volunteers" if you haven't established very clearly what it is you want volunteers to do, when and how you want them to do it, what skills are required, and what your expectations are.

Position descriptions are very relevant and attractive to young people who want to have a clear understanding of what is required of the volunteer role. It is also important to establish if it is new volunteers you are seeking or more new members. Whilst it may seem they are one and the same, there are many potential volunteers who may be interested in helping your group without necessarily joining as a member. Similarly not every member who joins your group may want to contribute as a volunteer.

Position descriptions bring clarity to volunteer recruitment. They can help you match your needs with the skills and interests of potential volunteers. Position descriptions make volunteer recruitment more efficient. They can help to avoid uncertainty and confusion about the suitability of roles and candidates. A position description also outlines how the role fits in with relation to the broader goals of the organisation and this helps volunteers value the contribution they are making.

Position descriptions support volunteers by providing clarity around expectations, responsibilities and support arrangements for their role and how they fit into the organisation. Having a defined position description also provides ease in listing your volunteer roles on promotional services such as that located at Victoria's Volunteer Portal (www.volunteer.vic.gov.au) or Go Volunteer (www.govolunteer.com.au).

Recruitment strategy

A recruitment strategy simply reflects how, where and who you are seeking to target for specific volunteer roles. It will be informed by the position descriptions you have created and the certain skills and requirements you are seeking to have filled. Having identified, for example, that you require a website designer will influence where you promote this role. Your recruitment strategy may also be in response to other goals the group is trying to achieve, such as increasing youth participation or recruiting more skilled volunteers.

Recruiting volunteers also presents a great marketing opportunity for you to promote your community group. Consider using the media to promote your volunteer needs. Write a media release – a basic story about why you need volunteers, what role it is you are seeking to fill and how vital it is to the on-going success of your group. Make sure you have an engaging photo to accompany the story and send both to your local media outlets.

Tap into your wider networks: send a brief description of the available role to other community groups, schools, local council and churches with a request that they send it to their networks or publish it in their newsletter. Don't forget the obvious recruitment strategies like putting up posters and signs in shop windows and places of assembly.

Your existing volunteers and members are great ambassadors for your group so encourage them to promote your volunteer roles throughout their networks. Don't overlook your internal marketing options – make sure you place a notice in your club-rooms and put a call-out in your newsletter and on your website.

Most people volunteer because they are approached by someone they know. Just ask.

Recognition and acknowledgment

The days of volunteering simply because it is the “right” thing to do are long gone. There are now as many motivations for volunteering as there are volunteer roles!

People volunteer to:

- support a cause they feel passionate about or connected to
- enable an activity or event to occur because they want to see it happen
- gain vocational skills and increase their employment opportunities
- make friends and social connections
- increase their community engagement and break down social isolation
- give something back to a group who has assisted them
- role model positive behavior for their children
- gain experience working in a new field

Volunteering is a two way relationship – it’s just as much about the volunteer and what they are getting out of their role, as it is the group and what it is they gain from the volunteer’s participation.

It’s important not to make assumptions about our volunteers and the experience they are having whilst volunteering. Many volunteers are happy to simply go about their jobs and will shrug off suggestions of acknowledgment or rewards. Whilst this should be respected it can also lead to creating a culture where a group fails or forgets to celebrate the work that their volunteers do and the important role they play. Groups should make a point of acknowledging, celebrating and recognizing the contribution volunteers make, rather than run the risk of overlooking or offending someone by not thanking them.

Celebrating volunteers also demonstrates to the broader community that your group values volunteers and it is a subtle reminder that our lives and our communities are enriched by the work that volunteers do.

Ways of acknowledging volunteers:

- Annual celebrations such as National Volunteer Week and International Volunteer Day provide an easy opportunity to broadly thank volunteers. Host a morning or afternoon tea.
- Volunteering Australia have an adaptable Certificate of Appreciation template online which can be presented to volunteers during National Volunteer Week.
- Profiling volunteers in your newsletter showcases the diversity of roles and volunteers who support your group.
- Approach local businesses for vouchers to gift to your volunteers. Even a “two for one” or 30% off voucher will generate revenue for the business whilst also rewarding your volunteers.
- Make sure your Committee of Management and staff know who your volunteers are and what they do. Create opportunities to bring everyone together including end of year functions and regular social activities.
- Make sure your volunteers are mentioned in your annual report – include profiles, photos or testimonials from volunteers describing their volunteer experience.
- Similarly, ensure volunteers are thanked at your AGM and other official functions.
- Write stories for your local media highlighting the work and value of your volunteers in supporting your group and strengthening your local community.
- Maintain a birthday list and recognize each volunteer’s birthday in some way.
- Invite local students to interview and film or photograph your volunteers, asking them about their motivation and what they get out of volunteering. Students can make You Tube clips which you can add to your website. This creates a great partnership between your group and local students and produces a valuable documentation of your volunteers which you can use in a variety of on-going ways.

