

Recruiting Volunteers

Recruitment is not just about attracting enough volunteers to your program; you need the right people and you need them to stay. This starts with careful planning and administration – well before you print up any flyers and advertise online.

Start from the start

First, write down why you want to include volunteers in your organisation and what you want them to do. A carefully constructed job description helps ensure that the aims and objectives of the volunteer program are being met. It also protects the rights of the volunteer and can help them negotiate the demands of a busy agency.

A job description doesn't need to be long or complex, but should include:

- a description of the position (position objectives)
- skills and/or qualifications required (both mandatory and desirable)
- key areas of responsibility or a list of duties
- key relationships, such as supervision
- conditions of the role, such as attendance times, required training.

Advertise online

Did you know that you can advertise for volunteers much like you do paid staff? Go Volunteer is just one platform of many which allows you to find volunteers, and for volunteers to find you. It's easy to use, just visit: govolunteer.com.au or visit the portal on the front page of the Volunteering Victoria website: www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au

Targeted recruitment

When it comes to attracting volunteers, it helps to understand something of why and how people come to offer their time.

The value of voluntary work in Australia was estimated at \$43 billion in 2006. In 2014, 5.8 million people (31% of Australian adults) participated in voluntary work, contributing 743 million hours to the community over the previous year.

A recruitment campaign that highlights the impact a volunteer's contribution will have on your community or cause will appeal to this motivation—and stand a better chance of attracting attention.

The Australian Bureau of Statistics, Voluntary Work, Australia, 2006 also found that 64% of volunteers first got involved through someone they know or because they were asked to. The lesson? Think local connections first. For example:

- Tap into word-of-mouth: ask your current volunteers to spread the word among friends and relatives
- Target your recruitment to interest groups that may relate to your cause
- Ask your volunteers for suggestions and make contact with local branches
- Ask the volunteers themselves to hand out flyers at their club or network or post on social media.

As well as saving you time, targeting recruitment in this way will give your message a better chance of getting through to people with increasingly busy lives.

Not sure where to start?

See Volunteering Australia's toolkit on Designing Volunteer Roles and Position Descriptions. Visit www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/Volunteering_Australia_Volunteer_Roles_Toolkit+1-1.pdf

Make a good impression

You must ensure that the first point of contact for potential volunteers gives the best possible impression of your organisation.

- Inform all relevant people of the recruitment campaign and selection processes, from those who will take calls to those who will supervise volunteers.
- Make sure your documentation (position description, information packs and policy and procedures) is up to date – see Fast Facts – Essential Policies and Procedures for a start.
- Think ahead to how you might deal with the possibility of too many volunteer applicants, or unsuitable volunteer applicants – prepare your response so you are not caught out if applicants phone to check their status.

Selection

Selecting the right volunteer is an important part of managing risk in your program: the risk that the volunteer will not stay, the risk that they lack the interest or skills for the role, or the serious risk that they may cause harm or be harmed through the role.

A well thought-through selection process is the best way you can manage these risks.

Interviews

It is good practice to interview applicants for volunteer roles. Recruitment interviews for volunteers are like standard interviews. Though they tend to be much less formal, they work best with some structure; put some time into planning the interview venue, timing, format, questions and points for discussion.

Checks

Most organisations today also conduct checks on volunteers in recognition of their duty of care to the organisation's clients or service recipients. Most organisations should plan to conduct:

- proof of identity checks
- reference checks and qualification checks (where applicable)
- police checks (where applicable)
- Working with Children Checks (where applicable).

National Standards for Volunteer Involvement:

Volunteering Victoria recommends that standard four of the National Standards for Volunteer Involvement be used as a best practice guide for your volunteer recruitment and selection strategies. This shall ensure that your recruitment and selection process is planned, consistent and meet the needs of the organisation and volunteers.

- Standard 4.1: If the organisation recruits volunteers, it uses planned approaches to attract volunteers with relevant interests, knowledge, skills or attributes.
- Standard 4.2: Potential volunteers are provided with relevant information about the organisation, the volunteer role and the recruitment and selection process.
- Standard 4.3: Volunteers are selected based on interest, knowledge, and skills or attributes relevant to the role, and consistent with anti-discrimination legislation.
- Standard 4.4: Screening processes are applied to volunteer roles that help maintain the safety and security of service users, employees, volunteers and the organisation.

Mass campaigns

Common mass publicity methods include arranging an article in the local paper, distributing flyers and posters, radio announcements and paid and unpaid advertising in print and on websites. Although the ABS reports that only 5% of the people they surveyed commenced volunteering in response to a media campaign, such campaigns can serve to increase awareness of your 'brand' and make people more receptive to other recruitment approaches.

And while they are by nature general, media campaigns can also be targeted: think about the social groups who may be attracted to your activity and the places and media they frequent and spend your resources accordingly.

Walk-in volunteers

Plan for how your organisation manages people who come to you unannounced. The most important thing is for your front of house staff/volunteers/temporary workers to know how to manage this situation: who to contact and/or what the process is. Depending on the type of work you may be able to accommodate them straight away. Sometimes a quick 5 minute conversation is all that is needed in the first instance. It is reasonable to ask the volunteer to come back at an arranged time, to give them materials or to direct them to a website for them to go through a recruitment process.

Of course, like customers or clients, you should consider the experience of walk-in volunteers and how their experience could reflect positively or negatively on your organisation's reputation.

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering. We provide support to volunteers and not for profit organisations, and represent the interests of volunteering in Victoria.

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More information

National Standards for Volunteer Involvement: www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/National-Standards-Documents-FINAL_Web.pdf