



volunteering
queensland



Successfully Engaging Volunteers with Disability

QDN

QUEENSLANDERS WITH DISABILITY NETWORK
NOTHING ABOUT US WITHOUT US



Who made this guide?

This guide was developed by Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN).



Acknowledging our support partners

This project was made possible by [Volunteering Queensland](#) with the support of the Australian Government Department of Social Services.



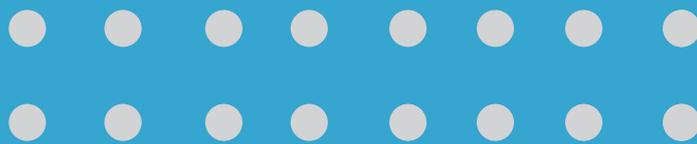
Australian Government
Department of Social Services

Queenslanders with Disability Network (QDN) is a strong state-wide network of people with disability and has a long history of delivering programs and progressing system reforms from the perspective of people with disability. QDN believes it is essential people with disability are engaged in the design, delivery, and evaluation of policy, programs, and services.

Through their work, QDN has built a network of people with disability and staff who have demonstrated abilities and skills in the delivery of training, education and cultural change programs that result in improved outcomes for people with disability across a variety of areas of their life.

QDN has developed this resource with the support of people with lived experience of disability. The content and style were defined with the aim of sharing knowledge, experiences, and understandings to strengthen diversity and inclusion across the volunteering ecosystem.

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Introduction

This guide is a practical resource that will help you unlock the potential of a diverse, motivated and resourceful group of people. By providing insights, strategies and key ideas, this guide will help you to create long-lasting and mutually beneficial volunteer roles for all potential volunteers, not only those with disability.



There are four key themes this guide focuses on:

- 1 We are more alike than different.** The majority of things a volunteer with disability needs to succeed is the same as every other volunteer. Their disability is only a small part of who they are.
- 2 Focus your efforts on one person at a time.** This will help bring out gifts and talents while deepening relationships, and will make for a far more rewarding and positive volunteer experience for all.
- 3 Stop, collaborate and listen.** This is a great opportunity to grow and learn new ways of doing things. By necessity, people with disability are great problem solvers and are invested in finding solutions that work for both you and them.
- 4 Inclusion benefits everyone.** If done well, the opportunities provided will not just benefit the volunteer with disability, but your organisation and the broader community.

These themes are intentionally challenging as this guide has been written to inspire change, not just provide information. We want to deepen your understanding of what it means to be included and to challenge some misconceptions that get in the way of this happening for people with disability. We share frameworks and strategies we hope will reshape your thinking about how people can contribute, and inspire you to think about how things can be done differently.

We are also conscious volunteer organisations are mostly run by volunteers who are time poor. This is why we have included achievable and practical strategies that benefit everyone. These are intended to complement existing recruitment resources and processes rather than replace them. It is highly likely that you are already doing many of the things we suggest.

Thank you for showing such an interest in including volunteers. This is an important first step and we hope this guide will help you on your journey.

Learning from volunteers with disability

A common learning from QDN was that people with disability look to volunteer roles as a stepping stone to paid work. Employment has always been a barrier for people with disability, as reflected by an unemployment rate that is two to three times higher than the general population.

It can mean that volunteers with disability are looking for opportunities that increase their employability by developing skills, gaining experience and building their networks. This motivation may differ from other volunteers who are looking for a role that compliments their other paid work, or for an opportunity to contribute in retirement.



[Click here or scan QRcode to watch the video](#)

Let's hear from some of the people with disability who have been instrumental in developing this guide about what makes a good volunteering experience.



The value of engaging volunteers with disability

Australia has a long history of people with disability going above and beyond to invest their time and efforts to making this country a more inclusive space for all. They are a motivated, committed and eager group within our community and have so much to contribute.

You may already be working with colleagues or customers with disability. One in five people have a disability, however, not all disabilities are visible and nor is everyone comfortable sharing that they have a disability.

As with all volunteers, finding the right person with disability for a role provides a wealth of opportunity for personal growth, meaning and purpose. It also provides other members of the community an opportunity to learn from their peers with disability. Funded supports through the NDIS have provided people with disability new opportunities to get out in the world and pursue their interests. This is a huge opportunity for organisations seeking volunteers.

What it means to live with a disability

As people with disability have not historically been included in the same places as people without disability, there can be a gap in understanding what it means to live with a disability.

This is not about knowing how to use a wheelchair or imagining what it is like to be blind. This is about understanding that having a disability can lead to complexities and barriers in life that have nothing to do

with the disability itself. These barriers can then further negatively impact a person's independence and access to the same opportunities and human rights as people who do not have disability. They can range from needing to avoid peak hour traffic due to the noise and lack of accessible seating, being reliant on support workers who might call in sick or the battery in a wheelchair failing. These barriers can have real implications for what a volunteer with disability can and cannot commit to in a volunteer role.

Understanding what it means to live with disability is about gaining knowledge so you can better understand some of the common issues that people are more likely to experience because they have a disability. Knowledge increases our ability to be empathic and support people, while recognising obstacles that prevent them from being included. This will greatly improve both the experience of people with disability in your organisation and that of all volunteers and employees.

Much has been written on the lived experiences of people with disability. Some of this has been from formal sources such as the Disability Royal Commission while others come from the lived experience of people with disability and their friends and allies. We encourage you to educate yourself and seek out the voice of people with disability across the many forms of media that exist.

Some great places to start are:

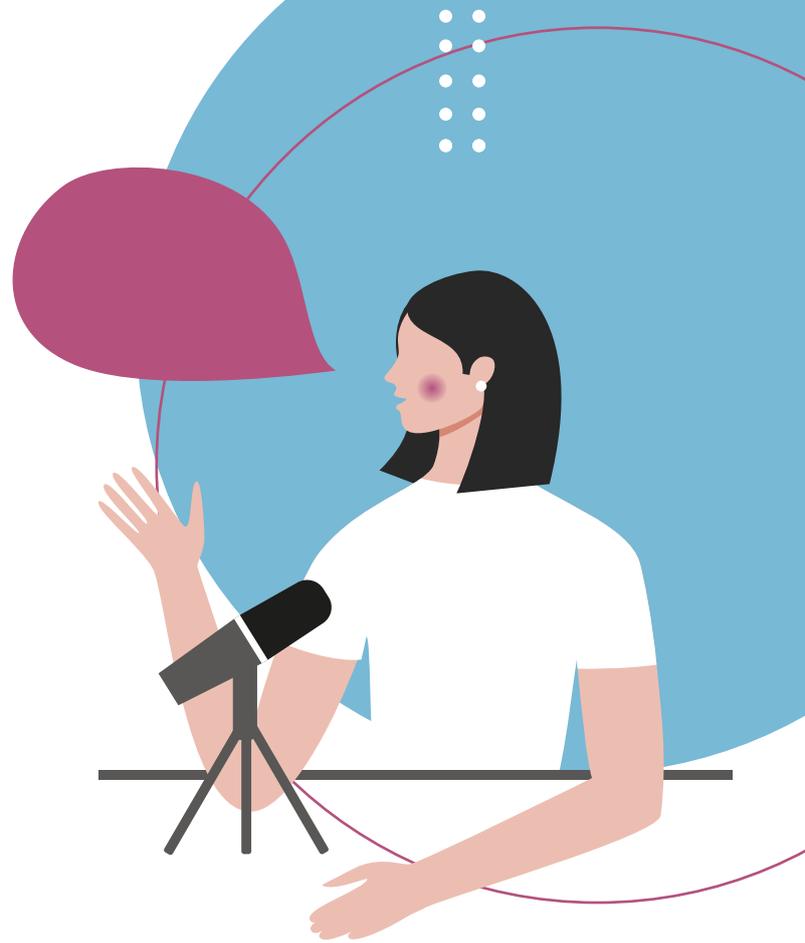
- **Blog:** *QBloggers*, by QDN, is a platform for QDN members to share blogs about topics that matter to them.
- **Blog:** [Carly Findlay](#) is an Australian

writer, speaker and disability activist who has written many blog posts.

- **Podcast:** [Let us in](#), is a podcast by Kurt Fearnley, with ABC journalist Sarah Shands, who discuss what it is like to live in Australia as a person with disability.
- **Podcast:** [The DSC Podcast](#), by Disability Services Consulting, explores issues that impact people with disability in Australia from the perspective of leaders in the disability community.
- **Podcast:** [Yarnin' Disability](#) is the podcast by the First People Disability Network and gives voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people with disability, their families and those in their community.
- **Articles:** [Disability Royal Commission – Issues papers](#). These issues papers explore key issues facing people with disability and their place in Australia.
- **Journal:** [CRUcial Times](#) is a publication by the Community Resource Unit. Each edition explores a theme important to creating change for inclusion and is written by people with disability, their family members, workers, academics and allies.

Important ideas about disability

How we approach a situation influences how we define problems, solutions, benefits and risks. These mindsets are often key to the success and failure of people with disability being included in their communities.



As a community we are prone to unhelpful mindsets about different groups of people, especially if we have never had a chance to get to know someone from that group. It is part of human nature, but like many areas of our thinking we have a responsibility to recognise and address these unhelpful mindsets.

There's an old adage that for inclusion to occur we need "the will, the skill and what's in the till". No amount of training or funding will be enough if your organisation lacks the will to include people with disability. Being clear on your values, and the mindset that influences them, is an important part of setting people up for success. Mindsets are key to understanding this and here are three common examples:

Medical Model of Disability

This model is the traditional mindset for disability. It focusses on what a person cannot do, and it aims to fix the person, to make them less disabled.



There are many unhelpful mindsets that impact how people with disability are perceived. This can lead to low expectations and people with disability being seen as ‘other’ rather than fully human.

Social Model of Disability

This response to the medical model looks at how the world we have created prevents people with disability from living with independence in their communities. It focusses on removing barriers to inclusion because it is these barriers that create the disability.

Strengths based approach

This is also a response to the medical model, which uses a person’s strengths as a foundation for not only overcoming barriers, but in creating opportunities. Success breeds success, and this also builds skills and self-esteem.

Addressing unhelpful mindsets

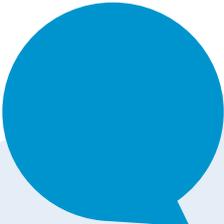
There are many unhelpful mindsets that impact how people with disability are perceived. This can lead to low expectations and people with disability being seen as ‘other’ rather than fully human. It can also be a major barrier in people considering the least dangerous assumption, an idea we explore later in this guide.

Here are some of these mindsets to consider, as well as the more life-affirming responses to them.

- **Disability is a personal tragedy.**
 - **No!** *Disability is an ordinary and common part of life – It also provides many strengths and opportunities.*
- **Special people need special places.**
 - **No!** *We all need to feel included and to belong. Do not define a person by their disability – we are all human and we all belong. Contributing in a meaningful way is key to inclusion and belonging – so let’s make that happen.*
- **A person with a disability is a risk that needs to be managed.**
 - **No!** *If issues arise, then don’t make it personal. The problem is the problem – let’s collaborate to overcome it. See Evaluation.*
- **People with disability are a burden.**
 - **No!** *We all have the capacity to contribute in all sorts of way. Everyone wants to do a good job – so let’s learn together and have high expectations.*

It is also important to understand that many issues people with disability experience go beyond mindsets and perceptions. There's an old joke in the disability sector that goes along the lines

of 'it doesn't matter how I think about the stairs in front of me, but my wheelchair will still not go up them'. The key point here is that having the right mindset is vital, but so is basic accessibility.



Key takeaways about disability

- Approach each volunteer as an individual with their own strengths, experience, potential and interests.
- Volunteering increases social inclusion and helps address stigma and marginalisation.
- The most common barriers experienced by people with disability have nothing to do with the individual.
- Our perceptions of disability impact and influence our imaginations of what is possible.
- People with disability bring unique skillsets to volunteer roles and have so much to offer.
- Leaders must support all volunteers within their organisations.



Attracting and recruiting volunteers with disability

It is generally accepted that the broader you advertise, the more people you will reach! This is particularly true for people with disability.

While some people with disability need information in certain ways, no single strategy can meet everyone's access

needs. The most effective strategies will engage a range of approaches, such as social media, web pages and printed materials ([See Accessible Communication](#)). It is important to recognise that this is not necessarily more work - you are probably doing this anyway.



[Click here or scan QRcode to watch the video](#)

Before we explore the ideas in detail, let's hear from some of the people with disability who have been instrumental in developing this guide about what would attract them to a volunteering role:



Attracting volunteers with disability

People with disability will be looking for opportunities that reflect their strengths, values and interests. While this is common for all volunteers, people with disability will be especially concerned about whether the organisation will be accessible and inclusive of their circumstances.

In addition to the common motivations of all volunteers, people with disability will also be looking for:

- **How are people with disability represented by your organisation?** This is not just about imagery or wording on a website. Are there people with disability in leadership roles, including on the board?
- **What are the roles, and can they be done a flexible way?** People may be looking for signs that a role can be tailored to their personal circumstances.
[See: Customising Roles.](#)
- **What are the benefits for volunteering with your organisation?** What is your broader mission and what opportunities exist for volunteers? This could be in terms of outcomes for society but also, the social benefits for volunteers.
- **What supports are available to all volunteers?** How do you resource your volunteers in their role? Do you provide mentoring, skills development and training? Are there costs involved and will your organisation reimburse these?

Describing the volunteer role

All people who are volunteering will look for roles where they think they will be a good fit. In addition to this, a person with disability will need to consider what additional barriers might exist because of their disability.

Providing a detailed description of the role and its responsibilities will help people to make an informed decision about whether a role might be for them. Key information includes:

- The tasks involved in the role.
- The knowledge, skills, and personal qualities you seek.
- The hours of work and whether there is flexibility (for example some roles may involve supporting the community on specific times and days, others may have broader scope).
- Where the work is to be undertaken (in store, online, or location is flexible).
- Do safety regulations state specific clothing requirements (such as closed in shoes, long sleeved shirts?)
- Email, phone, and in-person contact information available to allow people to ask questions.
- How people apply for the volunteering opportunity.

It is important to remember that the impacts of an individual's disability can vary. Some people may fatigue after a short time, others may find the impact fluctuates from day-to-day. Often people with disability are required to attend specialist appointments to manage their disability, which they may have little to no control over when or where they are.

Finding the right volunteer for the right role

Once you are clear on the role you are looking for then you can start looking for the right person. The strategies that work for all volunteers will be relevant for volunteers with disability.

If you are specifically looking for a volunteer with disability, then try approaching a disability organisation (such as Queenslanders with Disability Network). They can share your volunteer opportunities within their membership networks and can also answer any questions you may have about including people with disability in your organisation.

Word of mouth is always invaluable. Given that one in five people have a disability, try asking your networks to see if they know any suitable candidates.

Finally, it is important to keep an open mind about the potential contributions a volunteer with disability could make in your organisation. People with disability often find they are overlooked for opportunities, so make sure that your intake process is not a barrier to volunteers with disability.

What will discourage volunteers with disability?

An important starting point is to learn more about what it means to live with a disability. This will give you a lens through which to identify what might discourage volunteers from joining your organisation or applying for a particular volunteer role.

A significant and predictable barrier to people volunteering will be access issues. For people with physical disability this relates to physical access, for example ramps and accessible bathrooms.



It is important to keep an open mind about the potential contributions a volunteer with disability could make in your organisation.

For people with other disability, accessibility means:

- Is the language accessible?
- Is the information provided in a format that is accessible?
- Is the environment accessible for people with sensory sensitivities?
- Are the tasks too complex – or too easy?

As with all people, volunteers with disability will be attracted to opportunities where they will feel welcomed and valued. The opposite is also true. They will be looking for examples of unhelpful mindsets held by an organisation and will avoid those that do.

Cost is also a significant barrier. Many people with disability are reliant on pensions and have limited financial means. They might not have the money to be able to cover expenses, even if they are reimbursed. Think of ways you can work around this without putting your volunteer in an awkward position. This will likely be a situation other volunteers are also in.

Key takeaways on attracting and recruiting volunteers with disability

- People with disability are looking for opportunities to learn, develop new skills and develop pathways to employment.
- Give people enough information about the role and setting so they can decide if the role is the right fit for them.
- Be clear and accessible in your communication – on the ad, but also on your website.
- Consider how your organisation reflects diversity in your website and other communications. Does it seem welcoming to people with disability?
- Advertise through ordinary channels and be clear that you welcome applications from people with disability.
- Ask around your networks – word of mouth is invaluable.
- Ensure the people reviewing applications know not to exclude people with disability.
- Contact disability-run organisations (such as QDN) and share what you are looking for.



Checklist 1 | Finding the right volunteers

Have:	✓
Promoted opportunities broadly, across a range of mediums and ensured that resources are accessible and inclusive to a broad audience. See: Accessible Communication.	
Targeted specific locations or organisations that can link you with suitable candidates.	
Provided enough information to help people decide if the opportunity aligns with their skills, interests, strengths, circumstances and values.	
Provided practical information that people with disability will need to consider regarding the volunteering role, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Location and transport options. • Flexibility regarding how the work is done. • Openness to reasonable adjustments. • Demonstrated genuine accessibility and inclusion within your organisation. 	
Provided a range of methods in which people can respond to your ad, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Verbal. • Written. • Phone (including text message). • In person. 	
Considered arrangements for meeting potential volunteers. How flexible can you be?	
Planned to discuss access and inclusion requirements in the initial conversation. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a clear list of organisational needs and desired goals and outcomes. • Reflect on what the most important elements are that you are looking for. • Reflect on potential barriers to access and inclusion in your workplace. 	
Review and evaluate your strategy and include the input of the people you are seeking to target. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider co-design with a person with disability. • Seek feedback on your promotion content and strategy. 	

Induction and onboarding for volunteers with disability

This section of the Volunteering Resource Guide explores some considerations for effective induction and onboarding of volunteers with disability.

It is useful to provide some information before the new volunteer commences as this can help build excitement, interest, and momentum. As with all volunteers,

finding the balance between not enough or too much information is important. Providing too much information or overloading new starters can cause stress and anxiety, fatigue, or frustration. However, not providing enough information may have similar affects.



Click here or scan QRcode to watch the video

Before we explore the ideas in detail, let's hear from some of the people with disability who have been instrumental in developing this guide about what would support them during the onboarding process:





Part of getting to know a new volunteer is understanding them and what they need to succeed in their role

Providing information about the first shift

To minimise delays, anxiety or uncertainty, it is essential to get in touch with your new volunteer well in advance of their first shift. This will give them time to plan and prepare for the shift and to think about things they need to discuss with you before they start.

In addition to the basic information you provide any new volunteer, it is helpful to share:

- Start date and the start and end time of their first shift.
- Information about the work location (for example, address, location of accessible entrance, best drop off and pick up area, closest public transport stops, and most accessible navigation path).

- A map would greatly assist people with disability to plan their journey to and from their shift.
- Recommended parking options (free and paid) within proximity to the work location.
- Where possible, their roster for week one (outlining dates, start and end times).
- A window of time that lunch breaks can occur (allowing the person with disability some flexibility and choice about specific times).
- Who to ask for on arrival, or who to call if assistance is required.
- What they will be doing on the first shift. Will there be an induction process and what does it involve? Who will be taking them through the process?

It is also helpful to outline what people need to bring, including:

- Do volunteers need to bring identification or paperwork on day one (such as Driver's Licence, declarations, blue/yellow card)?
- Is stationery provided or will people need to bring a note pad and pen?
- Does your organisation provide tea and coffee, or do people need to bring their own? If it is provided, does that include milk (including dietary options like lactose free)?
- Can volunteers store personal cups in the kitchen cupboard, or should they take it home each day?
- Are lunch and/or snacks provided? If so, do they meet various dietary requirements?

Getting to know the new volunteer with disability

Once the induction process has been completed you can start to talk about what will help you and the volunteer with disability to get the most out of this role. This is not a once-off conversation and this guide has a whole section on evaluation and continuous improvement. Remember that their answers might have nothing to do with their disability.

It is also important to get a sense of any concerns they have about starting in the role. For many people with disability, they have had to put a large amount of effort just to prepare themselves for starting their day.

This effort could be physical, emotional, sensory and is often a mixture of all three – not to mention the logistical challenges of organising support and navigating a world that might not accommodate their access needs.

Can you ask that?

Part of getting to know a new volunteer is understanding them and what they need to succeed in their role. People can be justifiably nervous when it comes to having this conversation with a person with disability. People with disability may be cautious about sharing this information for privacy reasons and stigma they have experienced in the past. That said, it is important to have this conversation, so here are some suggestions about how to have them well:

- Only ask what you need to know for the person to do their work well. For example:
 - Is there anything you would like us to know about how we can best support you in this role?

- How would you like us to share this information with you?
- If you do ever require help with anything, please let me know.
- Are you comfortable to have this conversation with me, or is there someone else you would prefer to have this conversation with?
- Have the conversation in private and let the person know the purpose of the meeting.
- Be clear about why you are asking these questions and how it will be used.
- Check in during and after the meeting to make sure there are no concerns.
- Remind the volunteer that this can be an ongoing discussion. As outlined in the reasonable adjustments section it is important to be flexible.
- Do not approach the conversation as a series of problems to be solved and do not make assumptions about what a person can and cannot do. Think of this as an opportunity to seek creative solutions that benefit both parties.
- Remember any suggestions the volunteer makes will likely benefit other people in your organisation.
- Do not ask personal questions that you do not need to know about. For example:
 - o How did you acquire your disability?
 - o What sort of disability do you have?
 - o How do you go to the toilet/have sex/do other ordinary personal things?

As with any disclosure of personal information, you need to respect boundaries. It is up to them to decide what they do and don't feel comfortable sharing. They have the right to privacy like any volunteer and that needs to be respected.

Useful resources on disability

- The [PWDA Language Guide](#) outlines and explains the appropriate use of language when describing people and their disability.
- [Here's the difference between identity-first and person-first language](#) (ABC news) offers insights about how and why there is difference in language use within the disability community.



Preparing your organisation and current staff/volunteers.

A successful day one relies on more than just ensuring people with disability have the information they need. The organisation, including relevant staff and volunteers also need to be prepared with appropriate information. Any information that is shared about a person, even if de-identified, should be discussed with them first and carefully framed.

Consider the following actions to prepare your organisation:

- Let current staff and volunteers know that a new volunteer is coming on board. Where possible use existing processes to minimise the risk of making them stand out. Focus on their knowledge, skills and experience as well as what they will bring to the organisation and the role.
- If the person wishes you to disclose that they have a disability then be mindful of what you are sharing and why. Some people with disability may like their accessibility needs to be shared, or how a person would like to be supported in their role, others do not – it should be their choice.
- It might be helpful to undertake research to gain a broad



understanding of the disability and gain some general insights on accessibility considerations. That said, remember this does not make you an expert and not all people's experience with a disability type is identical.

[See: what it means to live with a disability.](#)

- Consider pairing the new volunteer up with a colleague (sometimes referred to as a buddy). Choose a person who is welcoming, competent and helpful. They can help them learn the job, introduce them to the team and answer any questions.
- Let staff and volunteers know that if they are unsure how best to support a person with disability – the best option is to ask rather than assume.
- Remind staff of workplace health

and safety procedures, particularly in relation to trip hazards, and undertake a workplace health and safety check before the new volunteer commences.

- Be aware that any new starter might feel nervous or anxious, some people with disability may experience higher levels of anxiety. Be prepared for this and develop strategies to help minimise anxiety and stress.
[See: Can you ask that?](#)
- Ensure that resources and information that will be provided to the new volunteer are available in accessible formats. See below.
- Set up the new volunteer's workspace to ensure it is welcoming and accessible.

Accessibility

It is commonly thought that accessibility only refers to ramps, parking and toilets. As outlined by the Social Model, a person's disability relates to barriers to accessing things. Therefore, accessibility means different things to different people depending on their needs and circumstances. For example, accessibility is different for a deaf person than it is to someone who is blind.



Accessibility means different things to different people depending on their needs and circumstances

Useful resources on accessibility

The Wikipedia page on [Accessibility](#) offers a broad outline of what accessibility means for different members of our community.



Accessible Communication

Depending on a person's disability, you may require some alternative means of communication. If people do not have access to the same information as their colleagues, then they will not be equipped to do the job properly and this will negatively impact them, as well as your organisation.

This is an example of a 'barrier' as outlined in the Social Model of Disability section.

Here is a brief overview of some key concepts around communication.

- **Simple English:** This is writing in a way that shares key information using language that is not unnecessarily complex. Also known as Plain English.
- **Easy English:** This is a way of sharing information in a specific format that uses images and small pieces of text. This is specifically intended for people with intellectual disability.
- **Auslan:** This is Australian Sign Language. See below for more information.
- **Captioning:** This is spoken language written in text, also known as

subtitles. It is commonly used at the bottom of videos, though it is sometimes used at live events.

- **Screen Reader:** This is software that a person uses to read text on a document or website. It is primarily used by people who are blind or visually impaired. Screen readers can only read text that is formatted correctly.
- **Document/web Accessibility:** This involves creating a document or a website so they are set up for screen readers. The main requirements are the use of headings, lists (numbers or bullets), using hyperlinks properly and including alt-text on images. This is a simple process and it is mostly the same for websites, emails and Microsoft Word documents.
- **Alt Text:** This is a brief description of an image that is added to the image itself. A screen reader will read the alt-text so the person reading can understand the 'why' of an image: what it is and sometimes, what it is communicating.

Useful resources on accessible communication

- The [Commons Social Change Library](#) has a comprehensive list of tools, checklists and websites to improve your website accessibility.
- Microsoft has created [this guide](#) to help you make your word documents accessible to people with disabilities. Please note that most of these suggestions also work for websites.
- How you use web links in your emails and website can have a big impact on accessibility. Vision Australia has developed [this helpful guide How to make "Read more" links accessible](#). Option one is the simplest while the others are useful for web developers.
- The [Web Content Accessibility Guidelines](#) (WCAG) outline the standards for creating accessible documents and websites.



Communicating with deaf people

The deaf community in Australia has its own culture and cultural norms and it is important to be aware of these. This culture is a strong source of pride and identity for people who are deaf and appreciating and understanding the differences can help to build a good relationship.

An example of this cultural difference is language. Auslan is not the same language as English and for many deaf Australians they see English as their second language. These 'Native Auslan Speakers' (who can include the hearing children of deaf parents) have a different relationship to English when compared to hearing people who learn Auslan as a second language (in the same way people learn French or Japanese as a second language). The means that when communicating with deaf people in writing (via text message, email or in writing) bear in mind that you may be writing to someone for whom English is not their primary language.

Organising an Auslan interpreter

There two ways Auslan users can access Auslan interpreting:

1. Through their NDIS funding:
 - The NDIS funds Auslan interpreting

for the deaf individual and they would generally organise this themselves.

- There may be times when they may ask you to assist in the organising of an interpreter (for example, for team meetings), but this can be negotiated between you.
2. If they are ineligible for NDIS funding, then they can access SWITC (Support with Interpreting, Translating and Communication):
 - There are some rules around which organisation can access this funding.
 - SWITC exists to work with organisations, not the individuals themselves so you need to organise. It is funded by the Queensland Government and they define the list of organisations that SWITC can work with.
 - Call SWITC on 07 3982 8559, or email them at switc@deafsq.org.au to find out more.

The National Relay Service is a free 24 hour service that facilitates telephone conversations between people who are deaf and those who are hearing. You call them on 133 677.

Useful information on communicating with deaf people

[Deaf Culture](#) is a resource developed by Aussie Deaf Kids that explains deaf culture in Australia.



Co-design

QDN defines co-design as:

A key process when done well means that people with disability are meaningfully, equally, and authentically collaborating to co-design solutions that deliver quality outcomes, and lead and influence inclusive positive change.

This collaborative approach can ensure that problems are fixed before they are set in stone, and it can create systems and processes that are more efficient and useful. It is also important to note that co-design is not something just done with people with disability but is an inclusive process that can be used across an organisation. As a general overview, the process is to:

- Identify and understand the problem together.
- Pause and reflect then explore and co-design possible solutions.
- Test and review the new solution(s).
- Implement and evaluate.

This process includes people with disability at every stage. Co-design can be used for everything from creating work request templates through to developing training, writing policies or purchasing equipment.

Co-design is not about creating a separate system or resource for people with disability. It is about incorporating a broad range of people in a design process so that the finished product is useful to everyone.

Working with support workers

Some people with disability will need support workers to assist them to successfully engage with your organisation. For some people with disability, they are a vital facilitator of independence and can support them with personal aspects of their life that they would not want colleagues or strangers to be involved in.

A support worker is a (usually) paid person who is there to assist a person with disability to live and work independently. In the past this role was called a 'carer', but this is no longer used as it is seen as infantilising and demeaning. People with disability will say they need support – not to be 'cared for'.

It is important (and appropriate) to be clear on your expectations regarding the conduct of anyone, including support workers, in your workplace. The support worker's conduct will reflect on the volunteer with disability so if you have concerns then be sure to discuss them when appropriate.

Sometimes support workers can inadvertently get in the way of a volunteer with disability taking ownership of their role and building relationships with their colleagues. If you are concerned this might be happening then consider raising your concerns with the volunteer with disability or any of their family or allies you are in contact with.

For many people with disability, good support is vital for their success in a volunteer role. Just as it is important to have high expectations of your volunteers with disability, it is also important to have high expectations of their support workers.

Useful resources on working with support workers

- [Personal assistance: what it is and what it is not](#) is a helpful article by Judith Snow, a disability advocate, who reflects on the role of support workers in her life.
- The NDIS Quality and Safeguards Commission has [this guide on Worker Obligations](#), including code of conduct, reportable incidents and how to raise complaints and concerns.



Key takeaways about induction and onboarding volunteers with disability

- Make sure all volunteers have the information they need to successfully start in their new role. Make sure you are presenting the information in a way that is accessible to a wide audience.
- Not all people who have a disability will identify as having a disability. It is their right not to disclose this.
- People with disability are experienced, motivated and creative problem solvers. They are a great resource for you to collaborate with in a co-design process.
- Get to know all volunteers to understand their needs, expectations and hopes for this new role.
- You may need to consider how a support worker will fit in to your workplace. Have a conversation with your volunteer so you can both discuss your needs and expectations.

Checklist 2 | Preparation, induction and onboarding

Have I:	✓
<p>Shared important information to the potential new volunteer about the interview or induction process in a way that is accessible to them.</p> <p>This information might include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Date and time they need to arrive and an agenda for the day (if appropriate). • The expected length of the interview/induction process. • The location of the interview/induction. Share a map link and even a photo of the front of the building, especially if it is hard to find. • The names and roles of people they will meet –especially the person at the front desk. • Details of any activities or processes they will be expected to do and if they need to prepare anything. • The sort of clothing and attire to wear. • Who they can contact if they have further questions. • Whether they need to bring food. • Details of the surrounding area, such as location of public transport and food. 	
<p>Advised the outcome of the interview at the earliest opportunity in a format accessible for the potential volunteer. Delays in communication may result in significant anxiety.</p>	
<p>Developed a generic induction checklist that includes accessibility and inclusion considerations. This would be used for all new inductees as not all people will disclose their disability during the interview process.</p>	
<p>Set the new volunteer up for success once they have accepted the role:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discussed what would help them to feel welcomed and included. • Discussed any concerns they have – including the practical, cultural and social aspects of starting the new role. • Followed up on suggestions by the volunteer about things you and your colleagues should know to improve their experience. • Identified training strategies to meet specific disability types – for the person and their colleagues. • Explored what support they will need to do the work, including the role of support workers if required. • Explained what is required for a support worker to be on site, including induction and clothing. 	

Have I:



Developed an accessible and inclusive onboarding program:

- Important information is shared in a way that is accessible, understood and meaningful.
- Opportunities to discuss support needs and how they can be met (including support workers).

Been proactive in engaging with the new volunteer and made sure they:

- Feel comfortable about starting the new role and have an opportunity to ask questions.
- Understand the behaviour and cultural norms of the workplace.
- Are aware of who to ask questions to and how to contact them.
- Are aware of what a good job looks like and how to achieve it.



Delivery and engagement

This section of the Volunteering Resource Guide explores the important topic of how to set a volunteer with disability up well so they can be a valued and valuable contributor to your organisation.

To get the most out of any volunteers it is important to find tasks and roles that match their skills and interests. This will help set them up for success and will lead to a better experience for all. The same is true for volunteers with disability and the process will be mostly the same. It starts with

getting to know them and building a strong and mutually respectful relationship.

Most of the processes and strategies you use to get the most out of your volunteers will be relevant to those volunteers with disability. There might need to be some additional flexibility or creativity required and we will address this in this section. Remember that these solutions and lessons learnt will likely help a broad range of people within your organisation.



Click here or scan QRcode to watch the video

Before we explore the ideas in detail, let's hear from some of the people with disability who have been instrumental in developing this guide about their experiences during their volunteer experiences:



Customising roles and finding the right fit

As with all elements of engaging volunteers with disability, it is best to start with the person and engage in a conversation with them and anyone else they ask to be involved. For advice on this, [See: Can you ask that?](#)

For individuals with limited work experience, you may want to focus on building confidence and comfort in the workplace before working towards more complex tasks. For other people, they might want to dive right in and embrace the challenges that comes come with the role.

When looking for opportunities in your workplace, a helpful framework to consider is:

- **Tasks and activities.** What are the functions that need to be fulfilled? These could be doing the work of the organisation or supporting the organisation to function. Make a list of what needs to be done and what is involved in getting that work done.

- **Roles.** Once you are clear on the needs of your organisation, they can then be delegated to individuals in roles. Some traditional roles are predictable and formal, such as an admin officer or board member. Other roles can be crafted to match the needs of the organisation with the strengths and interests of the individual. This is especially helpful for engaging people with more complex disability for whom traditional roles might not be a good fit.



Useful resources on customising roles

- [Thought Sauce! Hot Ideas for Cool Employment](#) by Griffin Hammis Associates is a unique and invaluable practical resource useful for crafting customised roles.
- [Valued Roles for All](#) outlines the idea of Valued Social Roles, which is a useful strategy for helping people with support needs to not only fit in, but to become valued members of your organisation.
- This article by Brisbane mother Glenys Mann, [More than an onlooker!](#) explores how she used Valued Social Roles for her son and how they built a foundation for inclusion and relationships.



Identifying reasonable adjustments

Another consideration for customising roles is that of 'reasonable adjustments'. This ensures the work is done in a way that meets the needs of both the organisation and the volunteer with disability. Reasonable adjustments need to be:

- **Individual** – even if people have similar disabilities, we are all unique and have individual needs.
- **Flexible** – a person's needs and their context change over time.
- **Agreed** – they need to balance the interests of all parties.

This approach is especially helpful for people in specialist roles or roles that have a high degree of responsibility. It can ensure that key outcomes and deliverables are reached while still respecting the needs and circumstances of the volunteer's disability-related needs.

Defining the work and expectations of the role

You will get the best out of all your volunteers, including those with disability, if they are assigned work that is relevant, engaging and purposeful. It is a common experience that people with disability are assigned low expectation roles that are of little consequence. This can be demoralising, stigmatising and boring.

Instead, have high expectations and be sure to define and maintain the quality of their work. There are few things more satisfying than growth and knowing your contributions are meaningful and valued.

It is important to be mindful that people with disability may have different communication needs and ways of

learning. There might be some useful 'scaffolding' that might assist here, such as to-do lists, calendars, photos or videos outlining processes.

The following points are important when considering the volunteer roles and maximising accessibility and inclusion for people with disability:

- Ensure that the purpose, goals, and objectives of a role are communicated clearly.
- Ensure that tasks, responsibilities, and expectations of the role are clearly outlined and explained.
- In collaboration with people with disability, identify reasonable adjustments that can be made to maximise engagement of volunteers with disability in meaningful volunteering opportunities.
- Identify opportunities for capability development within the organisation to enable volunteers to undertake a variety of roles to develop their own knowledge and skills.
- In the case of a volunteer role becoming a funded position, people with disability (and indeed all volunteers) should be given an opportunity to take on the paid role.
- Remove unnecessary barriers and be flexible. For example, if the role is part of a team that needs to drive around, could a person with disability who doesn't drive be paired with someone who does?

Effective communication

Access to information is a key barrier for many people with disability, which can have a serious impact on their perceived

competence and attitude to work (see Accessible Communication). A person's disability may impact how they process, recall, remember and apply information. This is an important topic to discuss when during induction and onboarding when you are getting to know them.

Communication goes both ways. The easiest way to find out if someone has understood you is to ask them. It is also helpful to confirm they understand the implications of what you have said. This is especially important if this information impacts what is required of them.

Some practical guidance for effective communication include:

- 1. Give clear, precise and specific instructions.** For example: I will be at the front counter if you have any questions, rather than "come and find me if you need me".
- 2. Include important details when giving an instruction,** even if you might have shared them in the past. For example, tell your volunteer that they can take a ten-minute morning tea break between 10am and 10.30am, rather than just assuming they know how long they are allowed to take).
- 3. Use a person's preferred communication method.** For example, a person who is deaf may



You will get the best out of all your volunteers, including those with disability, if they are assigned work that is relevant, engaging and purposeful

prefer images or visuals, rather than reading text. Engage an Auslan interpreter for team meetings or training events (see below).

- 4. To create a feeling of welcome, consider learning some basic Auslan,** such as how to say hello, thank you and other commonly used words at work (tea, coffee, cake etc.). Remember that this does not replace the need for an interpreter.
- 5. When providing specific details (such as times, dates, locations, or steps for a task), provide information in a range of formats** as well as just talking with the person.

Useful resources on effective communication

For more information see this guide on [Better Communication with people with disability](#).



Managing organisational process

Policies and procedures are a vital part of any well-functioning organisation. However, for many people they can be daunting and abstract. This may be a barrier for people with disability to access the information they need. Consider other ways to communicate these expectations and processes, such as visually with photos or videos, verbally or through showing people the rules when they are doing the work.

All this said, guides and manuals are a necessary aspect of many workplaces. They can minimise confusion about how to complete tasks and who to seek advice or approval from. Some key tips for writing effective and informative process manuals include:

- Avoid jargon and include definitions of acronyms.
- Don't over-complicate the language you use.
- Consider shorter resources that focus on the information the volunteers need to know.

- Use shorter paragraphs and include white space.
- Sequence the document clearly and logically. For example, document the process from start to finish so that it can be followed step-by-step.
- Ensure documents are compatible with screen readers and include alt text on all images. See: [Accessible Communication](#).
- In addition to specific task instructions, include broader processes such as handling incidents and complaints, accessing support from HR and/or management.
- Ensure the use of inclusive language. See: [Accessible Communication](#).

Remember that the end goal for organisational processes is to ensure jobs are done consistently, safely and well. There are many ways this can be achieved. Consider using the buddy system during the onboarding process provides opportunities and provide many opportunities for people to ask questions.



Building relationships

An important part of any workplace is for colleagues to get to know each other and build strong relationships. This has a broad range of benefits not just to the people who are working together, but also to the organisation more broadly. Think of all the people you know and cherish who you have met through work. It's one of the main ways new relationships develop.

Having a welcoming and inviting workplace will result in a culture that encourages less turnover, great satisfaction and a deepening of commitment to the organisation. This culture will also benefit your customers and other people who you work with.

When asked about the benefits of including people with disability in a workplace, one of the leading reflections was about closer and more supportive relationships between all colleagues. This is the because of strategies, adjustments and

conversations that are required to include people with disability benefit everyone.

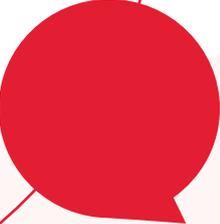
A common experience is also that over time, some of the support provided to the person with disability is their support worker is taken on by their colleagues. This is not about taking on intimate tasks or personal care that someone might require (see [working with support workers](#)), as those are personal and private domains of anyone's life. Instead, it is about colleagues choosing to help each other within the workplace in a natural way. This could be things like catching the bus together, collaborating to get work done on time, preparing for meetings and teaching new processes.

This sort of natural relationship cannot be forced or imposed and nor should it be. The key point here is to be open to ways in which aspects of paid support might be naturally and voluntarily replaced by other people in the workplace.

Useful resources for building relationships

- The article, [Personal relationships between people with and without disabilities](#), outlines the importance of friendship for people with disability what that can help these relationships develop.
- This video on [Strategies to help build relationships](#) by Janet Klees outlines how we can build a context for relationships to develop.





Key takeaways on delivery and engagement

- Get to know your volunteers and what they are seeking out of the volunteer role. This will help in all aspects of working with, and supporting them.
- It is important to be creative in the roles and tasks you assign volunteers with disability. Build on strengths and provide new opportunities for learning and growth.
- Be clear in defining and explaining what the volunteer's role is and what is expected of them.
- Some adjustments to work will need to be personalised, while others might suit a broader group of volunteers.
- Communication is a two way street. Don't assume that people have understood something you have said to them – have a conversation to clarify their understanding.
- Listen for barriers people might be encountering. These could be physical and/or to do with processes or attitudes.
- Consider the culture of your organisation and think of ways you can celebrate the diversity and contributions of everyone associated with your work.
- Invest in the relationships between your volunteers. This will make for a lovely place to work and it will result in many benefits to everyone associated with your organisation.

Checklist 3 | Working with your volunteers

Have I:	✓
<p>Considered what unmet needs and outcomes there are in your workplace. The new volunteer might be a good fit for some of this work.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make a list of important jobs that don't get done, or you wish were done better (e.g. folding clothes, filling photocopiers, proof reading documents, preparing for audits, delivering stock) • Talk with your employees and other volunteers to identify areas of need in the organisation. • Creatively consider how these tasks can be crafted into a meaningful and valued role that includes other people. 	
<p>Provided clear information about the role in formats that are accessible to the individual.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What tasks need to be completed in each shift. • Instructions for key processes or activities. • Expected outputs and what a 'good job' looks like. 	
<p>Created and maintained an accessible and inclusive physical and digital environment.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you explored and addressed access issues? • Have you sought feedback from all volunteers, including those with disability 	
<p>Considered a range of opportunities and methods of communication with volunteers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Share information in different formats – e.g. face to face, email etc. • Check in to make sure people understand key messages. 	
<p>Planned for inclusive volunteer recognition and appreciation opportunities.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Set goals and acknowledge when they have been achieved. This works for individuals and teams. • Is what is being celebrated meaningful and reflects the genuine and valued achievements of volunteers (including the volunteer with disability)? • Make sure these are not tokenistic and only available to people with disability. 	
<p>Created inclusive opportunities for staff and volunteers to learn about and celebrate disability, culture and diversity.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stop for lunch or morning tea. • Acknowledge different cultural or religious events or celebrations. • Have fundraising events that provide different ways of contributing. 	

Evaluation and continuous improvement

Volunteers play an important role in achieving outcomes for your organisation – that is what they are there for. Evaluation and continuous improvement help to ensure that the needs of the organisation and the needs of the volunteers are being met to achieve this outcome.

Evaluation is about assessing a situation and making judgements about what is and what is not working. Continuous improvement is about a commitment to making things better. A useful idea here is to aim for “improvement not perfection”. This is not about a single conversation and

there is no ‘perfect’ outcome that will work forever.

Just like communication, the process of evaluation and continuous improvement is a two-way street. It is a chance to reflect on what is and is not working and to collaborate on solutions that will work for them.

A common message from the volunteers with disability who contributed to this guide was that they want to be equipped to do the best work possible. By receiving meaningful, honest and useful feedback, it provides everyone with an opportunity improve and learn.



ADY

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Before we explore the ideas in detail, let's hear from some of the people with disability who have been instrumental in developing this guide about the importance of evaluation and improvement.



Evaluation

It is important to recognise that evaluation and continuous improvement are ordinary parts of a work environment. Be sure you are clear on your expected standard and maintain high expectations.

Be sure to include your volunteers with disability in the improvement processes of your organisation. By doing this well, you will be providing your volunteer with disability opportunities to learn skills and understand processes that will set them up well for paid work. Formal evaluations, such as annual appraisals are a common rite of passage for all volunteers, if these fit with your usual organisational processes.

Set aside regular times to discuss the specifics of the role and how your volunteer with disability is going overall. This will give you an opportunity to clarify daily tasks and expectations, reasonable timeframes, non-negotiables, and options for flexibility. This would also be an opportunity to explore the skills, experiences, and interests of your volunteers and to identify reasonable adjustments for people with disability.

Having a clear and predictable process for this will help alleviate anxiety and provide certainty that people will have an opportunity to raise their concerns in a safe and respectful setting.

Regular self-reflection and continuous improvement

As well as responding to the actions and conduct of people in your organisation, it is also important to reflect on your own conduct and what areas you need to work on. We are often our own worst critic so it is useful to get feedback from other people you work with, including your

volunteers with disability.

Self-reflection is also an important skill to encourage in your organisation. One way of doing this is to have a daily 'check in' and 'check out'. This structure and routine can be helpful for people with disability who need assistance to process and move through their thoughts and emotions. It involves:

- **Check in.** See how the person with disability is feeling (are they feeling anxious, positive, frustrated), can you work together to overcome any barriers? Is there flexibility to allocate the person to a different task today if needed?
- **Check out.** Have a debrief at the end of the shift – what worked well, what challenges were experienced, how were these challenges overcome? Could you have done better to be more supportive? What can be learned from today's shift for future shifts?

It can be useful to schedule slightly more formal one-to-one time between supervisors and volunteers. To do this well, it is important to reach a mutual agreement about the frequency and location of these catch ups. One-on-one time is a longer, more private conversation to discuss professional development opportunities, upcoming appointments or time off requirements, and taking a deeper dive into the overall volunteering experience.

The least dangerous assumption

At times you might encounter a challenging situation where you are unsure why a person is acting in the way they are. A useful thing to consider here is the idea of 'the least dangerous assumption'.



Co-Design is a useful strategy for working with all of your volunteers, including those with disability

In short, this idea is that if you don't know why someone is doing something, start with an assumption that will have the least dangerous effect on them.

For example, if a person is not completing a task properly, you could assume that they are belligerent or are doing it to deliberately annoy you. The least dangerous assumption however, would be that they are unsure of what is expected of them, and this is a much more productive starting point.

Having empathy and understanding will help with this process and it will help you to recognise and address some of the unhelpful mindsets that are held by you or other people in the workplace.

Adjusting practice and process

Adjusting the practices and processes of your organisation are a necessary part of any quality improvement process. No system is perfect and there is always room for improvement. Harnessing the problem-solving skills and motivation of your volunteers with disability will help you in this process. Co-Design is a useful strategy for working with all of your volunteers, including those with disability.

It can take time to implement co-design processes, especially for large and complex system. Given this, it is important to consider how existing systems can be adjusted to be more accommodating.

[See: Identifying Reasonable Adjustments.](#)

Seeking and recording feedback yields no results if ideas and suggestions are not implemented. It is not expected that

every piece of feedback is implemented, however all ideas and suggestions should be given due consideration. It is also not acceptable to dismiss feedback on the basis of it being too difficult to implement. This can be a common response to people with disability in relation to accessibility and it can reinforce experiences of rejection and devaluation.

The following factors should be considered in relation to implementing continuous improvements:

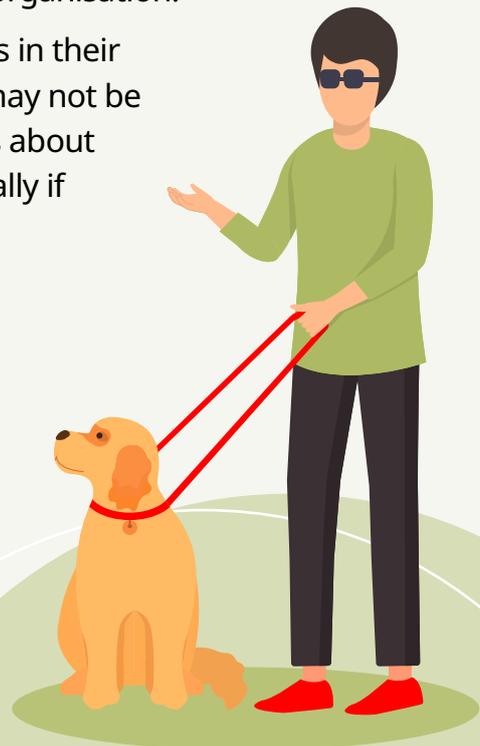
- Communicate the changes that will be implemented as a result of feedback collected (if changes will not be in place immediately, provide an indication of timeframe).
- If you are unsure of the best way to implement a change – ask. People with disability are resourceful and have lived experience – it is likely that they have learnt the hard way and have solutions ready to share.
- Engage people with disability in genuine co-design. For example, if feedback results in a requirement to change a policy, rather than re-writing the policy and asking people with disability to review it, involve people with disability in the re-development of that policy from the outset.

If, after giving suggestions due consideration, it is decided not to implement the change – it is a courteous and respectful to acknowledge the feedback and advise that all feedback has been given thoughtful consideration.



Key takeaways on evaluation and improvement

- Maintain regular and proactive communication. This will help you to build relationships and address little problems before they become big problems.
- Volunteers with disability want to succeed in their work. Feedback and problem solving is a great way to help build skills and improve processes to help make this happen.
- It is likely that you may need to change elements of how you operate. This is a great opportunity to improve things in ways that will benefit many people – not just your volunteers with disability.
- Use the same feedback and evaluation processes for all volunteers, including those with disability. This is an important element of being inclusive.
- Having high expectations of volunteers with disability will provide them with opportunities for growth and to prove their potential.
- Be curious to learn more about your volunteer’s strengths and interests. Use these to find engaging roles for them in your organisation.
- People with disability may have added complexities in their lives that might be impacting their work and you may not be aware of them. Don’t jump to negative conclusions about what might be motivating their behaviour - especially if they have complex ways of communicating.
- Remember that all volunteers’ capacities grow with time and experience.



Checklist 4 | Evaluation and Continuous Improvement

Have:

Established the right relationship for evaluation and continuous improvement:

- Prioritise a good relationship with your volunteers.
- Be clear in your expectations and communicate them.
- Maintain boundaries relevant to your role that won't make it harder to address problems that arise.
- Check in regularly to see how things are going – with yourself as well as your volunteers with disability.
- Acknowledge and (appropriately) celebrate success

Evaluated the work of the volunteer with disability

- Is the work being done to the standard that is required? If not, explore why. If it is, acknowledge it.
- Consider your expectations of the volunteer. Are they too high? Are they too low? How do they compare with our other volunteers?
- Is the process working for the person? Is it too complicated or too boring? Has it been explained clearly?
- Where possible, make small adjustments and reflect on their impact..

Identified larger issues that need to be addressed?

- Be clear on naming the problem and how it impacts the desired outcomes. Then you can explore together how to get there.
- Do not jump to conclusions or make assumptions – just because there is a problem it doesn't mean the volunteer isn't trying to do the right thing.
- Be inquisitive and try to understand what each party's perspective is.
- Follow the same processes that you would for other volunteers to ensure volunteers with disability.
- Remember, the problem is the problem, the person is the person, the problem is not the person. Even if this relates to their conduct.

Reflected on any feedback that has been provided.

- What is the nature of your feedback? Has it been too positive or too negative? Has it been honest, yet kind? Has it been understood? Has it been given objectively?
- Have you sought feedback as well as providing it?
- Has this feedback been provided in a meaningful way and has it been understood?
- Can you see evidence this feedback has been taken on board?

Have!



Celebrated and acknowledged what has been achieved.

- Take the time to acknowledge the contributions and growth of your volunteers.
- Reflect on outcomes achieved – monthly, annually or when goals have been achieved.
- Have your volunteers reflect on their own achievements.



Conclusion

As you already know, volunteering is one of the most powerful ways we, as citizens, can make a positive impact in the world. It is something we all have the potential to do well and to benefit from.

Through this guide we have shown how people with disability are well placed to contribute to this positive impact in a multitude of ways. For organisations it is the chance to learn and grow through connecting with skilled, enthusiastic, diverse and motivated individuals. For people with disability it is the opportunity to contribute to their community and the world in meaningful and tangible ways while growing and gaining new skills,

pursuing opportunities and developing meaningful relationships.

This can happen at all levels of an organisation. Whether it be a person with disability sharing their skills on a board or committee, through to a team leader creating a supportive culture in a group of people that are achieving great outcomes for the organisation.

This will, at times, require change to the way things are done in your organisation. We hope that this resource can give you the confidence, information, mindset and tools to embrace the change and set up a successful volunteering relationship for all involved.



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