

Recruiting **volunteers**

Introduction

Every volunteer's journey starts somewhere. For most people who volunteer with an organisation, their journey starts with recruitment. Having an effective recruitment process not only ensures that new volunteers can discover your group – it also exposes your team to new skills, experiences and ways of thinking.

Volunteer recruitment is the process of attracting people to join your organisation in an unpaid position, enabling them to give their time for the common good. This process may also include designing the volunteer role and screening volunteers to make sure they're a good fit.

Recruitment is consistently one of the top issues raised by volunteer managers. In the State of Volunteering in Queensland Report 2021, two-thirds (64.5%) of volunteer managers described the issue of recruitment as 'very important'. For your volunteer involving organisation to achieve its mission, it is essential that your recruitment process is effective, adaptable, and centred around mutual benefit.

How to use this guide

This guide provides practical information about recruiting volunteers, including considerations for role design, messaging and screening. It provides suggestions and prompts to serve as a starting point when creating or updating your organisation's volunteer recruitment process. These will need to be evaluated against the needs and scope of the volunteer role and customised as required.



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National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

The National Standards for Volunteer Involvement provide a framework for organisations to consider the role of volunteers and the impact effective volunteer involvement can have on achieving the strategic goals of the organisation. Created by volunteering peak bodies across Australia, they allow organisations to make use of simple, practical criteria across a broad range of volunteering situations.

Volunteer involving organisations are encouraged to consider the National Standards when developing their volunteer management processes. Standard 4 is primarily concerned with recruiting volunteers.

Standard 4: Recruitment and Selection

Volunteer recruitment and selection strategies are planned, consistent and meet the needs of the organisation and volunteers.

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

For more information on the National Standards, visit:

www.volunteeringaustralia.org/resources/national-standards-and-supporting-material

What you will need

What an onboarding process looks like will differ between organisations and roles, but there are some key elements that should be included every time a volunteer joins an organisation. At a minimum, onboarding a new volunteer should involve:

- 1.** Your organisation's leadership **committing to a recruitment process**, including decisions on communication, record keeping, how to select volunteers and your overall recruitment goals
 - › What does success look like? Are you focused on the number of volunteers, or on finding the right people for the right role?
- 2.** Identifying the **need for new volunteers** within your organisation
 - › What will these volunteers be doing and how does this help achieve your mission?
 - › Is there a minimum or maximum number of volunteers to recruit?
 - › Where do these volunteers fit within your organisation's structure?
- 3. Role description**, with:
 - › Your organisation's background, activities and mission
 - › Clearly defined duties for the volunteer
 - › Supervision and reporting lines
 - › Benefits for the volunteer
 - › Any requirements, including necessary credentials, vaccinations or skills

Where to find volunteers

Anywhere you find people, you can find volunteers! Although some people hesitate to describe themselves as a 'volunteer', giving time to help others is part of our way of life. The State of Volunteering in Queensland 2021 Report found that over three-quarters of adult Queenslanders volunteered in 2020 alone.

In that same report, volunteer managers were asked which methods they use to recruit volunteers. The most popular responses were:

- Personally approaching participants, members and their networks (word of mouth)
83.6%
- Social media
54.9%
- Open days and events
41.1%
- Websites
36.7%
- Traditional media (e.g. posters, signs, newsletters)
32.4%

However, this doesn't mean that these methods were the most effective, only that they were the most common. Most volunteer managers using these methods said that volunteer recruitment was a very important issue and many said it's a priority for them to improve in the future.

An effective recruitment process may involve finding volunteers in several ways, including some not listed above. Rather than trying to rely on one method for all your recruitment needs, it's more important to learn to engage with several different methods according to the needs of your organisation. Also, to track your progress, make changes as required, and communicate the value of volunteering with your organisation.

Ideally, your organisation should have one central place to capture new volunteers' details (usually an online form), with multiple ways for volunteers to find it. Here are some methods your organisation may use:

Online recruitment

VIKTOR database (Volunteering Queensland, SEEK Volunteer and others)

- ▶ Volunteering Queensland, other volunteer peak bodies and many local volunteer resource centres share the same online database of volunteer roles and opportunities. This database, called 'VIKTOR', is also used by SEEK Volunteer and GoVolunteer
- ▶ The Australian Government has described VIKTOR as the leading web-based system for volunteer referrals. In 2020, they found that VIKTOR "lists 95 per cent of volunteering opportunities".
- ▶ With role listings on VIKTOR being shared by key groups in the volunteer sector, potential volunteers are not split between dozens of different platforms
- Other volunteer platforms
 - ▶ There are many other websites used to recruit volunteers. If one seems popular in your region or industry, think about listing a role there as well
- Your organisation's website
 - ▶ Wherever your organisation has an online presence, check if it is suitable for recruiting volunteers
 - ▶ If someone knows your organisation and wants to support you, one of the first things they'll do is check your website. Make sure any information about volunteering is easy to find

Accessing VIKTOR

Join Volunteering Queensland as a member

Sign up through SEEK Volunteer

If you have a local volunteer resource centre, ask if they use this database

Using your organisation's existing networks

- Social media and newsletters
 - › Anyone following your social media or newsletter has shown that they're interested in your group – do you use these to recruit volunteers?
- Past and current volunteers
 - › Invite past volunteers to rejoin the team, especially those that were part of a short-term campaign or whose volunteering was impacted by lockdown.
 - › If you don't already know, ask your current volunteers how they found your organisation (and start keeping these records!).
 - › If you're creating a role that needs different skills, invite current volunteers to apply. They may be more suited to the new position.
- Community connections
 - › Is your organisation a member of any local associations, groups or networks?
 - › Team up with local groups: co-host events and promote each other's opportunities.
 - › Neighbourhood and community centres, faith-based groups and PCYCs are often hubs for their local area. Get in touch to discuss volunteering.
- Word of mouth
 - › Word of mouth often happens organically – but it can still be a planned part of your recruitment strategy.
 - › Invite your team to spread the word or bring a friend.
 - › Host an open day and invite the community to see the value of your mission.

Open days and events

Ask some outgoing volunteers to be ambassadors for your group

Is there an entry-level volunteering activity that you could demonstrate on the day? The more visible impact, the better!

Do you have any testimonials from volunteers or people that your organisation has helped?

Check if any other events can be used to promote volunteer opportunities: anniversaries, awareness weeks, campaigns or fundraisers

Have a computer, tablet or clipboard handy to collect contact details



Forming new partnerships

- Existing stakeholders
 - › Your suppliers, funding partners and lessors want to see you do well. Check if there are any opportunities to promote your organisation and its volunteering through their networks; they may want to highlight that they have a community group or charity as a client.
- Government
 - › Ask if your local council has any programs to support volunteering.
 - › Politicians want to be seen engaging with their community. Invite them to visit and briefly pitch in with your volunteer team – and have a camera ready!
 - › Make sure you're registered with government-funded programs that promote volunteering, such as JobSeeker 'mutual obligations'.
- Student volunteers
 - › Students make for enthusiastic volunteers that are passionate and eager to learn. They often want to develop skills, networks and experience that complement their studies.
 - › Contact local universities, colleges, TAFEs, as well as any student guilds or clubs that are relevant to your organisation. Depending on your organisation, you may be contacting a dedicated volunteer manager, a lecturer or a careers counsellor.
 - › If your policies and insurance allow it, consider contacting local high schools to discuss hosting their students as volunteers.
- Employees and corporate volunteering
 - › Identify businesses in your area that offer volunteer leave, have a giving program, or have a focus on social initiatives.
 - › If your organisation has sponsors, see if this arrangement can be extended to include corporate volunteering.
 - › Contact a group that matches corporate volunteers to volunteer involving organisations, such as Volunteering Queensland.
 - › Coordinate with Human Resources staff from large businesses nearby to connect with recent or future retirees.
- Volunteers with diverse experiences or backgrounds
 - › If your volunteer roles are accessible to people with disability, promote this upfront and consider meeting with local disability advocates.
 - › Volunteering is often very strong within ethnic communities and recently-arrived migrants. Contact local leaders or cultural groups to discuss opportunities to partner with your organisation.
 - › Note that views on volunteering differ between cultures. Some groups may volunteer their time in ways that are less compatible with your organisation's existing processes. Check if there are changes you could make to enable these groups to volunteer with your organisation.

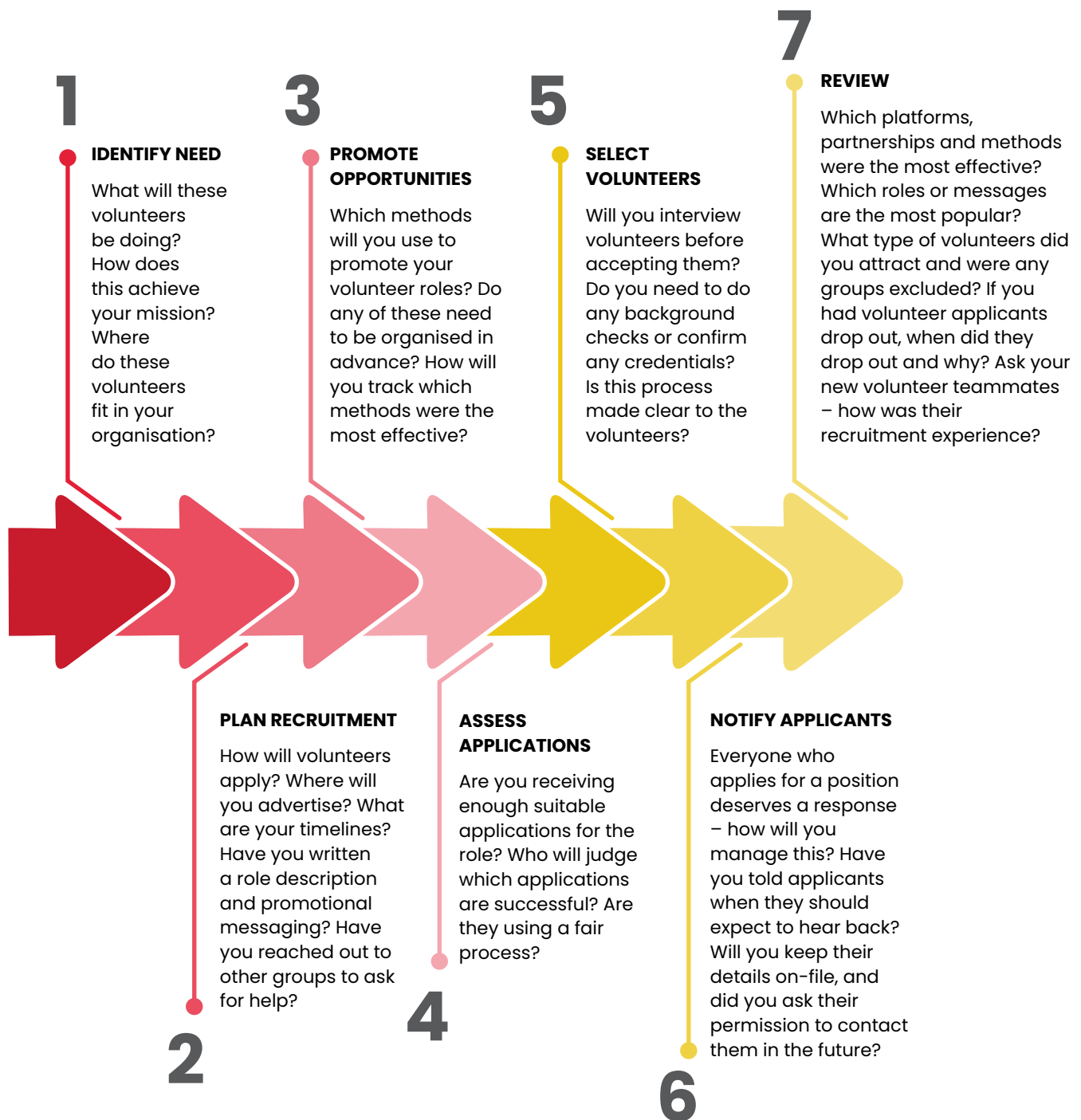
Disaster and emergency

- During times of emergency, Volunteering Queensland's EV CREW program is one way to engage volunteers quickly as part of a community's disaster response.
- Care Army, established to help vulnerable Queenslanders during the COVID-19 pandemic, has found an ongoing role in connecting volunteers to groups in need. To find out more, your organisation can get in touch with Volunteering Queensland or a local Neighbourhood and Care Army Connect Worker.

Stages of volunteer recruitment

Recruiting volunteers usually isn't a one-off job. Most organisations will need to recruit volunteers on an ongoing basis, either in waves or as part of their daily operation.

Volunteer recruitment involves several steps. Each gives your organisation a chance to consider what your priorities are, what success looks like and how you can adapt to be more effective and resilient. Here are some stages your organisation might go through and some thoughts for each:



Finding the right process

Each organisation will have their own volunteer recruitment process. You should make sure your process follows best practice, while also making changes over time to find what works for your needs.

Some options, their benefits and challenges are listed below. Sometimes, it will be obvious which option is right for your organisation. Others may need some trial and error to find the best approach.

Option	Benefits	Challenge
Recruiting volunteers one at a time	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Form a relationship and personal bond with the volunteer earlier Can discuss different roles and find the best fit Easier to identify potential barriers Volunteer more likely to feel personally supported 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More time consuming per volunteer Volunteer may feel that the team is smaller than it is, having not seen other volunteers in action Some volunteers feel more comfortable in a group of peers
Recruiting volunteers in groups	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More time efficient per volunteer Ensures information is consistent across the volunteer team Early opportunity for volunteers to meet and help each other Large teams can demonstrate the scale and value of the organisation Reviewing batches of applications gives a better view of the skills and motivations of the team as a whole 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harder to establish a personal bond with volunteers Volunteers may feel left behind, unsupported or insignificant Finding a time that suits most people may be difficult Introverted volunteers may be overwhelmed A process set up for a large group may not cater to volunteers with specific needs or barriers
Volunteer manager recruits all volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Better consistency in messaging, data collection and procedures Easier to make adjustments to the process over time Duplicate applications can be spotted and removed if needed 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Much more time and work required of one person – this can be a bottleneck Volunteer manager may be recruiting for roles they're unfamiliar with
Department heads recruit volunteers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Work is shared across multiple roles – less reliant on one individual Department heads may better understand and communicate the needs of the role Personal bond with the volunteer can be established earlier 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Harder to keep the recruitment experience consistent Department heads need to be trained in the process (and again if the process changes) Information and processes can go into silos and teams might feel disconnected Volunteers applying for multiple roles may cause confusion between teams
Allowing walk-ins or flexible volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be required for background checks or insurance processes Easier to assign specific tasks to volunteers Better record keeping and tracking of volunteer hours Processes, training and meetings can be bundled into batches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excludes many potential volunteers. Flexible and intermittent volunteering is a large gap in the sector. Organisations that become known for doing flexible volunteering well can have a unique advantage in their area Volunteers can be more likely to commit after trying a shift than from reading a role description
Requiring volunteers to apply in advance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> May be required for background checks or insurance processes Easier to assign specific tasks to volunteers Better record keeping and tracking of volunteer hours Processes, training and meetings can be bundled into batches 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Excludes many potential volunteers. Flexible and intermittent volunteering is a large gap in the sector. Organisations that become known for doing flexible volunteering well can have a unique advantage in their area Volunteers can be more likely to commit after trying a shift than from reading a role description

Recruitment messaging

It's not enough to have a strong recruitment process – you will also need to communicate your organisation's value and why people should join the team as a volunteer. A potential volunteer should be able to read your recruitment messaging and have clear understanding of what you do, how they can help and why they should apply.

If you're not sure where to start, here's a handy way to think about the structure of your message:

BACKGROUND

What does your organisation do?

DUTIES AND REQUIREMENTS

What will the volunteer be doing?
What do they need in order to do this?

BENEFITS

Out of all the ways to volunteer, why should they choose your organisation?
What can the volunteer learn or experience?
What impact will their volunteering have?

PROCESS

What should the volunteer do from here?
Who will contact applicants and when?

You should also think about writing:

- › A brief overview two to four sentences long, suitable for social media or a quick shout-out in a newsletter
- › Emails to community groups, government agencies, schools, business or anyone else who might help share your volunteer role
- › Pre-written responses for applicants, letting them know their application has been received and what happens from here
- › Notes for other people in your organisation, especially any public-facing roles
- › Material for your organisation's website
- › Testimonials from volunteers describing the positive experience they've had and the impact they've made.

Targeted recruitment

A volunteer team with a diverse array of backgrounds, skills and experiences is a major asset to your organisation. Compare your current team of volunteers to your local community – are there any demographics that have been excluded? Would your organisation benefit from reaching out to these groups?

To target a specific type of volunteer, you can appeal to their activities, interests and opinions. Ask yourself, what activities does this group engage in? Where do they get their information? What are they looking for in a role?

This activity can help you discover new ways to contact potential volunteers. Here's an example:

	International student	Parent of young child	Recent retiree
Source of information	On campus, friends, study group, social media	Parenting group, child's school, suburb/town Facebook page	Combination of internet and print media, local association meetings
Seeks to	Make friends, learn the area, align volunteering with studies	Find new family activity, teach values, connect with other parents	Use career experience to help in a new, purpose-driven way
Other considerations	Potential language barrier, may prefer group volunteering, availability varies with assessment	Family-friendly volunteering, availability during school holidays	May want variety from past career, leaving work could mean recent changes to social circles

This may encourage you to:

- Invite a group of international students to join your team in a role that exposes them to the local area, its culture and history. Make sure that your material is accessible to someone who speaks English as a second language, or consider engaging a translator
- Promote your family-friendly volunteer role in the closing weeks of the school term, checking that there are safe and engaging ways for parents to involve their children
- Be a guest speaker at a local association that is popular among seniors. Meet the members and ask if they'd consider joining your organisation to use their experience in a new way.

You can use this technique for any groups that are under-represented within your organisation. If you're unsure of how to proceed, get in touch with leaders or organisations who are active in those communities and ask for advice.

Other tips

- Lower the required commitment whenever you can. While your organisation may want volunteers to stay for six months or more, this is a very long commitment to ask of someone who hasn't had a chance to see the value of your work. At first, it can be better to avoid asking for a long commitment and instead focus on showing the benefits of volunteering.
- If you have an inclusive organisation or volunteer role, mention this upfront. Let any volunteers with barriers in language or accessibility know that they are welcome.
- Your recruitment process might be someone's first impression of your organisation. Even if they don't join you as a volunteer, make sure they have a positive experience so that they are more likely to support you in other ways.
- Consider if your essential requirements are truly essential. Volunteer managers sometimes use the 'essential requirements' field to give a list of preferred (but optional) skills. Calling these 'essential' encourages anyone who falls short to not apply – even if they tick all the other boxes.
- Look at other volunteer recruitment listings in your sector or local area. Make notes on what you find effective and what to avoid.
- Remember, you're not writing to yourself. Imagine you're writing to someone who knows nothing about your organisation and check that your messaging is simple, accessible and clear.
- Volunteers often apply for multiple roles at once while they consider their options. Make sure you reply to their application promptly, or you risk being left behind.
- In your application form, make sure you ask about the volunteer's motivations and what they want to get out of the role. Don't only ask what the volunteer can do for you (for example, by only asking for their skills, experience and availability).
- Include a 'heard about' field on your application form. How did the volunteer find you? If you see any sources you don't recognise, get in touch and partner with them for future recruitment.

Wrapping up

After recruitment and selection is complete, new volunteers in your organisation should progress to your onboarding process. This includes training, meeting the team, and receiving support until the volunteer is working with the same independence and confidence as their new colleagues.

Recruitment is not just a way to get more people in the door. It's also an opportunity to promote your organisation and its mission, connect with other groups in the community, establish consistent processes across your teams, and find the right people for the right roles. In time, an effective recruitment process will help ensure that your organisation is sustainable and resilient. Find what works best for your organisation and let people know why they should become a valued member of the team.

Localised Information

