

Volunteering & Employment



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People who volunteer do so for a variety of reasons such as helping their local community, contributing to a cause that's close to their heart or just as an opportunity to meet and interact with like-minded people..

Volunteering in Australia is defined as "time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain." While volunteering is an end in and of itself, people also volunteer to gain valuable work experiences that can be used to provide a pathway to sustainable employment.

For people with disability, gaining work experience through volunteering is a very important component in developing the necessary skills and experience to create sustainable, and paid, job opportunities into the future.

While not all volunteers will expect that a volunteering role will lead to a paid role, for some people this would be the ideal scenario.

This guide will provide organisations thinking of recruiting volunteers with disability with an understanding of some of the motivations and expectations of these volunteers, and help you to better communicate and manage these expectations.



Why some volunteers are motivated to volunteer for employment reasons

In Australia, people with disability are nearly twice as likely to be unemployed as people without disability. Women with disability have even lower rates of employment. In this context, volunteering roles often provide a valuable opportunity to gain work experience of a foot in the door of an organisation.

Volunteering gives a person time with an employer to learn about a specific job, role or industry. This may include watching others perform the role, performing the role themselves or a combination of both. There are a number of reasons why people take part in unpaid work experience or volunteering as a steppingstone to paid work, including to:

- Improve or demonstrate employable skills
- Gain experience for job applications
- Network and form relationships in a specific sector
- Decide whether a particular sector is a good fit.

For people with disability, volunteering is often one of the best ways to gain initial work experience for future, paid, employment opportunities. Depending on the nature of the disability, volunteering also can sometimes provide an easy entry into the workforce, a soft landing back into the workforce after a break or to gain work experience they might not otherwise get the opportunity to perform



Developing mutual understandings and managing expectations about volunteering roles and pathways to employment

Sometimes there is an expectation that if a person volunteers at an organisation for a certain period of time, it will lead to paid employment. While this may or may not be the case for every volunteering opportunity, it is important for organisations to understand the expectations of the volunteer and the realities of the role before a volunteer with disability comes on board.

Before the volunteering role has been confirmed, and due to the potential barriers that may influence effective communication due to the nature of the disability, the following suggestions should be considered:

- Make sure the person understands the expectations of the role – now and into the future
- Make sure the person understands that it is a non-paying role
- Set time a frame on the work or a point when you can both review your arrangements.

These considerations might seem obvious however, it is very important that the person understands that volunteering roles are non-paid roles. As well as establishing a clear and transparent relationship between you and the volunteer, it will also avoid potential legal situations for your organisation. Visit Not-For-Profit Law for further clarification:

www.nfplaw.org.au/sites/default/files/media/Part_2_Volunteer_employee_or_independent_contractor_Final_0.pdf



Providing opportunities for paid work in your organisation



Organisations often advertise for paid positions internally before opening roles up for external applicants. For cause-based volunteer-involving organisations, this has the benefits of recruiting from a pool of people already committed to your organisation's mission and values, who have a pre-existing understanding of the working context and who have been already inducted into the organisation.

Some volunteer-involving organisations (including local councils) open up internal positions to their formal volunteers as well as paid employees. This fairly small policy change can make a big difference in someone's life if it leads to paid employment. It also sends a signal that your organisation recognises the value, contribution and skills of your volunteers as an integral part of your workforce.

Written role expectations

In general, the more clarification and objectivity you can bring to your volunteer role development and recruitment process, the better. If a role does have the potential to lead to paid employment, it is preferable to mention this before the volunteering role has been confirmed. However, as an employer you have the right to set expectations for paid and unpaid roles and you are not obliged to hire a volunteer.

Volunteering Victoria recommends as best practice, that you develop formal position descriptions and volunteer agreements to help to frame your volunteering relationship and clarify expectations. In a situation where a person with disability, like any person applying for a role, is not suited to a role, documented expectations of a role will help form the basis and justification of your recruitment decisions.

All volunteer roles or programs should have written procedures outlining how the program will run, what it will deliver and expectations of both the organisation and volunteer.

The *National Standards for Volunteer Involvement* provide a useful checklist for best practice in volunteer management and include information on the expectations of volunteers and agreements about respective roles. You can download the Standards from the Volunteering Victoria website: www.volunteeringaustralia.org/wp-content/uploads/National-Standards-Document-FINAL_Web.pdf

Consideration should be given to people with disability who might not be able to read or fully understand position descriptions. Your organisation may be able to work with the person with disability and their support workers or carers to help them understand the agreement and arrangements.



How to ensure volunteers remain engaged and feel continued benefit from volunteering

When someone is volunteering their time to your organisation or cause, it is especially important to make sure they feel comfortable and engaged while they are in the role. If you have plans to make their volunteer position a paid role, then ensuring they are supported and motivated in their role is even more important.

Below are some concepts and guidance on making volunteers engaged and feel continued benefit from volunteering.

Support and supervision - Providing ongoing support to volunteers is crucial and the organisation must devote appropriate time and resources to this. Support could relate to induction, training, on-going assistance with their role and so on. In the case of volunteers with disability, support and supervision should be an integral part of their daily routine. Having a buddy or mentor in this situation is an ideal solution to providing important one-on-one engagement.

Performance management - Organisations should monitor how volunteers are performing in their role and provide them with regular feedback, both positive reinforcement and where improvements can be made. Areas you could look at include:

- Are they working within their designated role or program?
- Are they working well with other staff?
- Are they working well with customers, clients and other stakeholders?

Performance management is also about volunteers having their say. Do they feel adequately supported and supervised? Do they have any feedback on organisational issues? Are they happy? Are they developing their skills? Taking feedback seriously is one way you can recognise a volunteer's efforts.

In the case of volunteers with disability, having clear role expectations in place – including the possibility of performance assessments – is appropriate, but should be communicated effectively before the role begins.

Recognition – Recognising volunteers for the work they do should not be forgotten. There are many ways organisations can do this including:

- Say 'thank you' regularly
- Share positive comments from clients, staff and others
- Give positive feedback based on your own observations
- Celebrate successes in your volunteer programs
- Include items about volunteers in the organisation's newsletter or journal
- Ensure volunteer services are included in the organisation's annual report – their activities, impact and in-kind financial contribution · Provide references if requested or act as a referee
- Issue certificates for length of service, special achievements, completion of training, etc.
- Publicise the work your volunteers do throughout the community
- Put forward your volunteers to receive awards offered in the local community.

Further help

www.accenture.com/t20181029T185446Z__w__us-en/_acnmedia/PDF-89/Accenture-Disability-Inclusion-Research-Report.pdf

https://volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/VolVic_FastFacts_RecruitingVolunteers_March2018.pdf

<https://whatsnext.jobs.gov.au/work-experience-and-volunteering>

https://volunteeringvictoria.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2018/03/VolVic_FastFacts_ThePrincipalsOfInvolvingVolunteers_March2018.pdf

<https://volunteeringvictoria.org.au/repository/managing-volunteers-for-retention/>

<https://dpoa.org.au/factsheet-employment/>