

Volunteer Recognition & Retention

Guide

Once volunteers have been recruited, your next objective is to keep them coming back. Valuing the time and effort of volunteers is crucial to retaining them. You can do this through effective management of your volunteer program.

National Standards for Volunteer Involvement

The [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#) provide guidance for supporting the volunteering sector in Australia. They are intended to be flexible enough to apply to organisations and groups of different sizes, with varying levels of resources.

The eight National Standards for Volunteer Involvement are the best practice framework to support safe, effective and inclusive volunteering. They help to improve the volunteer experience. Volunteers should be engaged in meaningful roles which contribute to the organisation or group's purpose, as well as meet volunteer interests and preferred style of participation. Volunteer satisfaction and retention flourish if their role is meaningful and tailored.



Support and supervision

Providing ongoing support to volunteers is crucial; your organisation must devote appropriate time and resources to do so.

The kind of support volunteers need will depend on:

- » the nature of the role
- » the conditions of the role
- » their motivation for volunteering
- » their personality and circumstances.

Training

Responsible organisations ensure that their staff are properly trained. Volunteer programs are no different. As well as orientation and training before they commence, you should plan for a volunteer's ongoing training and development needs. Changes to the program or organisation, or new systems or equipment, may require volunteers to update their knowledge – either through formal training or via newsletters, posters or briefings.

Training and development provide an opportunity for volunteers to gain personal growth and progression within the organisation – which may make or break their commitment to your program.

Who's the boss?

Consider these needs when determining who will allocate work and supervise a volunteer – the manager of volunteers, another staff member or another volunteer.

If the supervisor is to be someone other than the volunteer program manager, you will need to ensure they understand their responsibilities and any issues specific to working with volunteers. You should also create lines of reporting that will help you identify whether the needs of both the organisation and the volunteer are being met.

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. This means determining whether they are:

- » working within the program guidelines
- » demonstrating any problems such as overconfidence or requiring an unrealistic level of supervision
- » working well with other paid staff and volunteers
- » 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?

Taking feedback seriously is one way you can recognise a volunteer's efforts.

A carefully planned approach to conflict management is essential in case performance issues do arise: see the Volunteering Victoria guide on '[Dealing With Conflict](#)' for further guidance.

Recognition

Valuing the time and efforts of volunteers is crucial to maintaining a happy volunteer team. There are many ways to show that their contributions are appreciated, and you value their input.

Here are some options to consider:

- » Say 'thank you' often and mean it
- » Share positive comments from clients, staff and others with your volunteers
- » Give positive feedback based on your own observations
- » Celebrate successes in your volunteer programs
- » Write thank you notes to your volunteers
- » 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 training, support and guidance in their role
- » Ask volunteers for their thoughts or opinions when developing new policies
- » Involve volunteers in events and team catch-ups
- » Provide references if requested or act as a referee
- » Issue certificates for length of service, special achievements, completion of training, etc.
- » Organise a picnic, barbeque or other outing for your volunteers
- » Publicise the work your volunteers do throughout the community
- » Put forward your volunteers to receive awards

Being considered

Engaging volunteers in decisions that impact them can help reduce dissatisfaction, avoid potential conflicts, and contribute valuable insights.

Decision-making processes will vary from place to place, so the involvement of volunteers needs to be considered in the context of your organisation. Think about how you can ensure that volunteer involvement is effective. The part-time nature of volunteering must also be considered, so that volunteers are not excluded from decision-making simply because, for example, they do not volunteer on the day meetings are held.

Gather feedback

Volunteering Victoria's [State of Volunteering 2025 report](#) highlighted changing volunteer preferences, such as shorter hours and task-based roles with more flexibility. The needs of volunteers may change over time, so take the opportunity to gather their feedback along the way.

A volunteer's departure is a good opportunity to continue the ongoing evaluation of your program. Exit interviews allow you to capture a volunteer's experiences at the organisation – perhaps with greater honesty than while they are still engaged. They may provide negative insights into their experience or have commitments elsewhere. This information can provide fresh ideas for consideration and lead to improving the volunteer experience.

Dismissal

Occasionally volunteers are asked to leave an organisation, perhaps due to a dispute or problems with performance. A dismissal policy is essential to ensure that the process is fair and clear to all. See the Volunteering Victoria guide on '[Dealing With Conflict](#)' for details of what to include in the policy. Remember, while such an experience can be painful

for all parties, it is also an opportunity to critically assess what works and what doesn't in your program.

Further information

As Victoria's peak body for volunteering, you can always come to us for reliable resources and advice. Below are some helpful links and resources to continue your understanding of *Managing Volunteers for Retention - Guide*.

- » The [Volunteering Victoria website](https://volunteeringvictoria.org.au) is your go-to resource for all things volunteering, with timely and reliable support, training, resources, and expert advice.

Can't find what you're looking for?

Contact the Volunteering Victoria team at info@volunteeringvictoria.org.au anytime with your questions.

