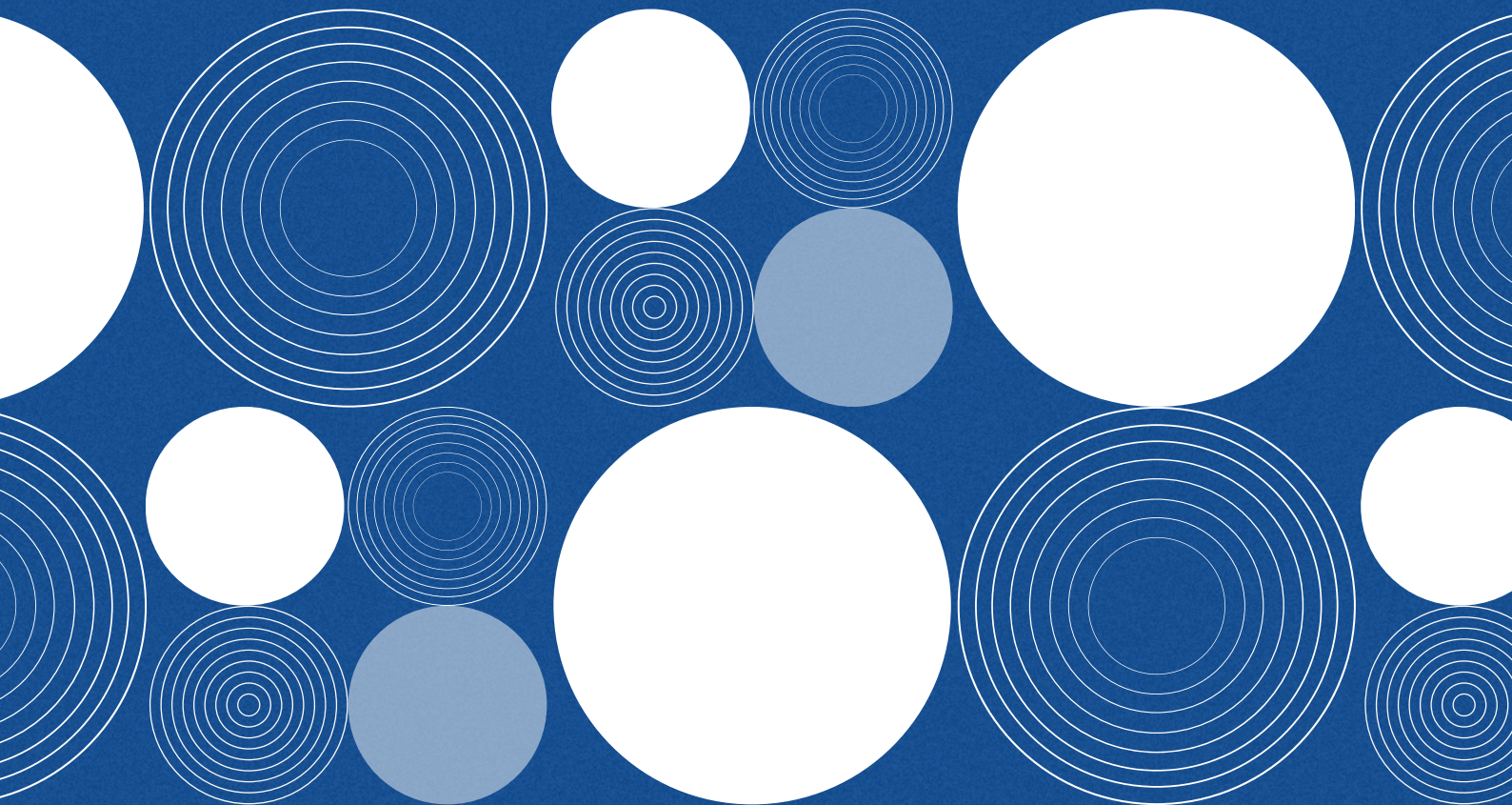




BALLARAT
FOUNDATION

GROWING YOUR VOLUNTEER BASE

HOW LOCAL AND BIG DATA CAN DRIVE
SUCCESS



INTRODUCTION

For organisations that depend on volunteers, growth is more than just recruiting new faces – it's about building a resilient, committed, and diverse volunteer community. In today's data-rich world, local community data and big data are powerful tools that can help organisations not only attract more volunteers but also keep them engaged. This case study outlines how combining local and big data can unlock new opportunities for volunteer recruitment, engagement, and retention.



What is local data?

Local data is information gathered from your own community and through operations, programs and outcomes. This could include information from volunteer feedback surveys, local council data sets, monitoring information from your own organisation.

Examples of useful local data:

- Volunteer demographics
- Reasons people leave or stay
- Event attendance records
- Feedback from surveys
- Local barriers (transport, timing, language)



What is big data?

Big data refers to wider datasets from national and global sources. This data usually shows broad trends and, if analysed correctly, can provide good insights. This includes census data and national survey data from the government, business, or academia

Examples of useful big data:

- National volunteering trends
- Social media engagement patterns
- Census data
- Reports from peak bodies like Volunteering Victoria
- Employment and migration statistics

WHY DATA MATTERS FOR VOLUNTEER GROWTH

Organisations often assume that a good cause and word-of-mouth are enough to maintain a healthy volunteer base. However, without data:

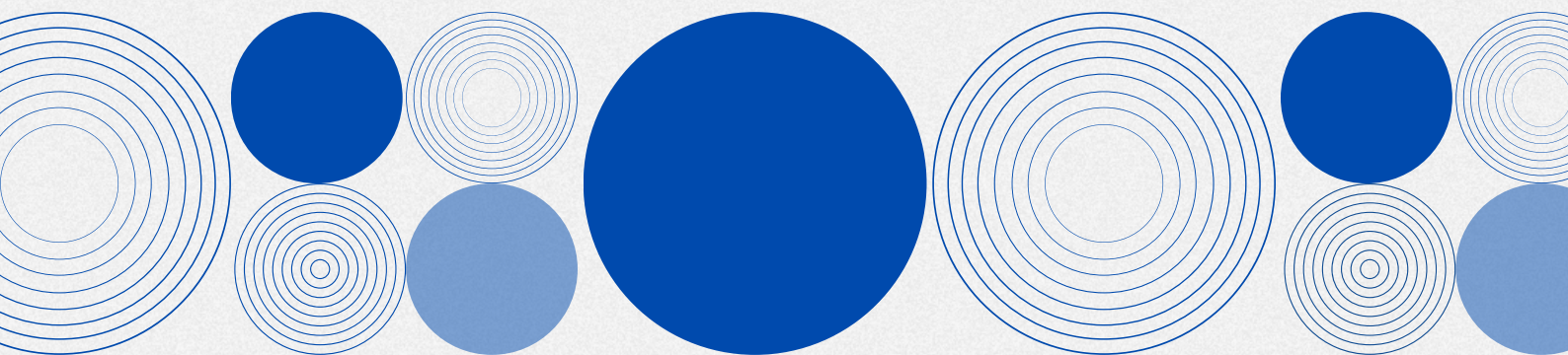
- Organisations may miss emerging community needs.
- Recruitment efforts might not reach the right audiences.
- Organisations may miss new recruitment opportunities.
- Volunteer programs may fail to adapt to changing motivations and barriers to volunteering.
- Retention rates may drop without clear insights into volunteer satisfaction.



using data enables **evidence based decision making** - turning guess work into smart, targeted strategies

HOW DATA DRIVES VOLUNTEER GROWTH: A STEP-BY-STEP APPROACH

The Ballarat Foundation started using data to help direct funding where it was needed most. This analysis was useful in getting a true picture of local development. The insights from data not only helped us generate more powerful funding submissions, it also helped with our volunteer work. By understanding the community demographics and areas of concern, we identified new audiences and new strategies. Here is a step-by-step guide on how to use local and big data to grow your volunteer base.



1

UNDERSTAND YOUR ORGANISATION'S CURRENT VOLUNTEERS

Gather and analyse:

- Age, gender, backgrounds
- How they found out about you
- Their motivations (skill-building, social, purpose-driven)
- Barriers they experience

EXAMPLE:

We discovered through our exit surveys that 15% of our volunteers under 60 years left volunteering for our learner driver program because we changed where the car keys were stored. This increased their travel time, which conflicted with their regular work hours. Changing our key storage location to cut travel time boosted retention.

2

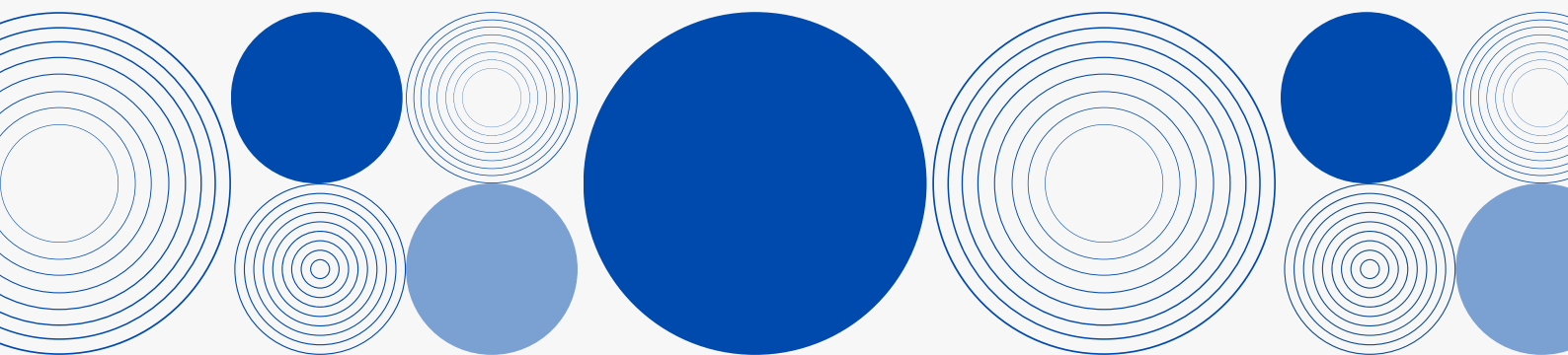
SPOT OPPORTUNITIES IN THE WIDER ENVIRONMENT

Tap into external data to understand bigger trends:

- Which age groups are volunteering more or less?
- What skills are people seeking to develop?
- Where is there an oversupply of volunteers (e.g. in arts and animal welfare) or a shortage (e.g. aged care)?

EXAMPLE:

The Ballarat Foundation, through our Vital Signs report which uses big data found there was a high level of young adult unemployment in Ballarat and so developed a program with employment agencies, in collaboration with volunteer involved organisations, to use volunteering as a pathway to employment.



3

TAILOR RECRUITMENT STRATEGIES

Use insights from data to design sharper campaigns:

- Target communication to specific groups (e.g., retirees vs. students)
- Offer flexible opportunities based on what people are looking for
- Focus outreach in geographic or social communities where the need or interest is greatest

EXAMPLE:

The Ballarat Foundation included a simple question in our on-boarding process asking volunteers, “how did you find out about us”. This data showed us the most effective form of advertising. This helped us not only recruit more volunteers but also save resources by focussing advertising efforts.

4

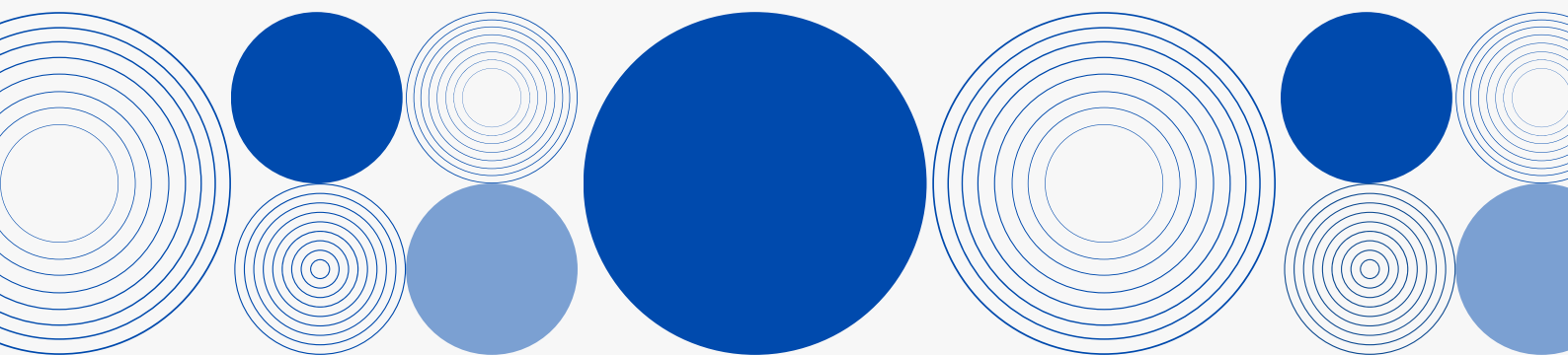
ENHANCE THE VOLUNTEER EXPERIENCE

Data allows you to improve volunteer satisfaction::

- Personalised onboarding
- Recognition programs that match what volunteers value
- Training opportunities aligned to career-building trends

EXAMPLE:

National studies showed young people value skill accreditation. The Ballarat Foundation renamed a short-term internal volunteer position for school leavers as an ‘internship’, helping volunteers boost their LinkedIn profiles and experience on their CVs and improving application numbers.



5

MONITOR, LEARN AND ADAPT

Create a continuous feedback loop:

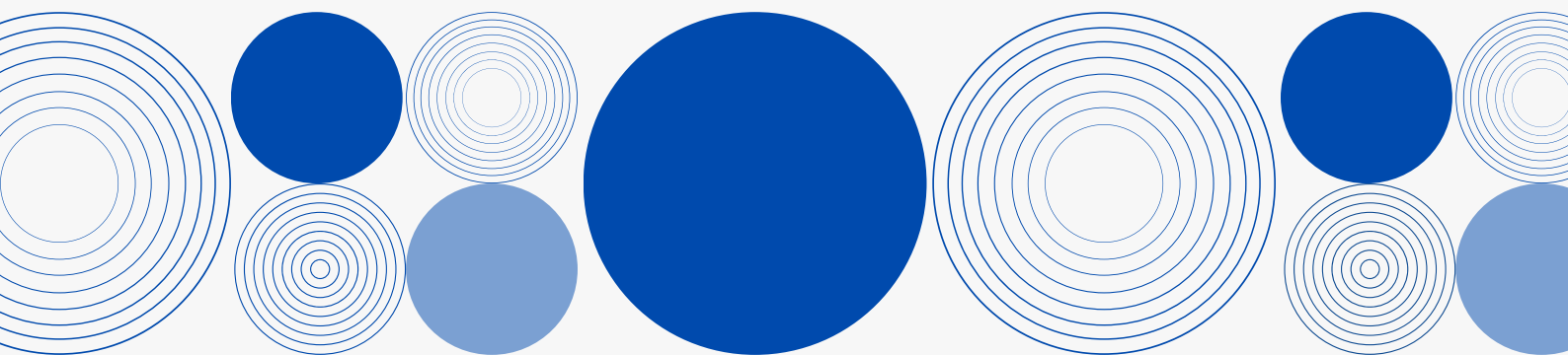
- Collect local data regularly (quick polls, exit surveys, feedback forms)
- Benchmark yourself against big data insights annually
- Pivot your programs based on evidence, not assumptions

EXAMPLE:

On our volunteer program, the Ballarat Foundation tracks volunteer active hours on a monthly basis and found an end-of-year dip over a three year period. We introduced an end-of-year celebration for our volunteers and saw both satisfaction and retention rise.

PRACTICAL TIPS FOR VOLUNTEER ORGANISATIONS

- **Start Small:** Even basic data collection (e.g., exit survey with three questions) is better than none.
- **Invest in Tools:** Simple tools like Google Forms and Excel spreadsheets can manage data effectively.
- **Respect Privacy:** Always get consent and anonymise sensitive information.
- **Collaborate:** Partner with local councils, universities, or peak bodies for access to bigger datasets or use open-source data.
- **Tell Data Stories:** Share key statistics with your volunteers – they love seeing the impact they create. Data stories are also powerful for funding proposals.



CONCLUSION

Organisations that combine local knowledge with the power of big data can grow their volunteer base in smarter, more sustainable ways. **Data doesn't replace relationships — it strengthens them** by helping you understand, engage, and celebrate your volunteers more effectively. The future of volunteering belongs to organisations that can listen, learn, and lead with data driven evidence.

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The Ballarat Foundation acknowledges the Wadawurrung people, the traditional owners of the lands and waterways in our region. We recognise their diversity, resilience, and the ongoing place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold in our communities.

