

# Case study: Leading change towards inclusive practice

## Making Your Volunteer Expo More Inclusive

**Volunteer Expos can be a powerful way to connect people with volunteering, but attracting a broad cross-section of the community takes more than simply opening the doors. Over several years, the Ballarat Foundation has refined its annual Volunteer Expo to reduce barriers, strengthen inclusion and improve volunteer recruitment. Through ongoing evaluation and community feedback, the organisation has identified practical approaches that others can adapt when planning inclusive volunteering events.**

### Background

In an effort to increase volunteer engagement, the Ballarat Foundation has been looking at ways to make their annual Volunteer Expo more inclusive. The Volunteer Expo aims to connect, inspire and encourage people from across the community to get involved in volunteering.

The Expo is designed to:

- **Promote volunteering** as a valued and accessible opportunity by showcasing the wide range of roles available and reinforcing that there is a role for everyone, including people with disability, First Nations peoples, newly arrived migrants, youth and vulnerable women.
- **Support Volunteer Involving Organisations** by providing a platform to share their mission, recruit volunteers, and build relationships with other organisations.
- **Celebrate volunteers** by publicly acknowledging the impact they have on the community, reinforcing a culture of giving back.
- **Educate the community** about social issues, community needs, and how volunteering can help address them, including issues around inclusion.

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### Event snapshot

Ballarat is a regional centre with approximately 80 Volunteer Involving Organisations. Each year during National Volunteer Week, the Ballarat Foundation hosts a free 4-hour Volunteer Expo in a church hall in the centre of town.

The event runs from 10:00am to 2:00pm and is open to all members of the community. It is preceded by a celebratory morning tea, featuring a guest speaker talking about their volunteering experience and public recognition of local volunteers and the contribution they make to the community.

### What we learned

The Ballarat Foundation gathers feedback from stall holders and visitors after each Expo to identify opportunities for improvement. These lessons have helped shape a more inclusive event, while strengthening connections between Volunteer Involving Organisations, community members, and local service agencies

#### ➤ Invest in targeted marketing

Effective marketing is critical to attracting new volunteers. While organisations have always been keen to participate, increasing community attendance requires a more targeted approach.

The Ballarat Foundation found these strategies made the biggest difference:

- **Invest in paid advertising.** Free community radio helped raise awareness, but commercial radio advertising delivered much stronger results. The campaign featured stories from organisations that had successfully engaged volunteers from diverse backgrounds, which saw Expo attendance increase by 193%.

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- **Boost social media posts.** A modest investment in Facebook advertising significantly increased the campaign's reach, generating more than 52,000 views from 587 engagements at a cost of just \$0.43 per engagement.
- **Directly target groups that promote volunteering.** Marketing directly to schools and employment agencies helped attract more young people, particularly where volunteering formed part of education or employment pathways.
- **Use reusable signage.** A large banner positioned near the main street attracted passing foot traffic. Avoid including dates so it can be reused each year.

### ➤ Combine celebration with recruitment

Bringing the Volunteer Expo together with the annual volunteer celebration created a stronger sense of community and encouraged more people to stay and visit the Expo.

Key lessons included:

- **Put volunteers at the centre.** While dignitaries remain important, hearing directly from volunteers about how volunteering has changed their lives creates a much stronger connection with attendees. This is particularly powerful when volunteers from priority groups share their experiences of inclusion.
- **Celebrate volunteers visually.** Invite participating organisations to submit photos of volunteers in action and display them in a slideshow throughout the morning tea. This helps volunteers feel recognised while demonstrating the diversity and impact of volunteering experiences across the community.

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*Sharing photos of volunteers in action celebrates their contribution while inspiring others to get involved.*

### ➤ Remove barriers for exhibitors

**Keep exhibitor stalls free, if possible.** Supported through Volunteer Management Activity funding and business sponsorship, this allowed smaller organisations with limited budgets to participate alongside larger organisations. This created a broader range of volunteering opportunities for visitors while reducing financial barriers for community organisations.

### ➤ Show inclusion in action

Inclusion should be visible throughout the event. The Ballarat Foundation achieved this by:

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1. Ensuring organisations that engage volunteers from priority groups, including newly arrived migrants, people with disability, First Nations peoples, vulnerable women and youth, were represented at the Expo.
2. Inviting a coffee van and food trailer run by trainees with disabilities to serve visitors at the entrance. This demonstrated inclusion in action, while also encouraging those passing by to stop and explore the Expo.



*The food trailer run by work experience students from McCallum House*

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### ➤ Choose an accessible venue

Venue choice has a significant impact on attendance and accessibility. A centrally located venue encourages walk-in visitors, makes networking easier for exhibitors and creates a more cohesive event.

Accessibility should also be considered when selecting a venue. Consider mobility access, hearing support, accessible toilets and proximity to facilities such as public adult changing places.

### ➤ Measure what matters

Collecting data is only valuable if it informs future improvements. The Ballarat Foundation used attendance data, visitor feedback and marketing analytics to continually refine the Volunteer Expo and demonstrate its impact.

Key lessons included:

- **Track meaningful measures.** Attendance numbers, volunteer enquiries, visitor demographics and social media performance all provided valuable insights. Attendance increased by 193% compared with the previous year, alongside greater participation from young people and people with disability.
- **Measure outcomes, not just attendance.** Asking organisations about actions taken after the Expo demonstrated that the event led to meaningful changes. For example, Foodbank created a volunteer role specifically designed for people with disability after participating in the Expo and has since successfully recruited into that role.

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- **Use data to tell the story.** Clear evidence of impact strengthens applications for future funding and sponsorship.
- **Create a feedback loop.** Honest feedback from exhibitors and visitors helps identify opportunities to improve future Expos and continue strengthening inclusive practice.

### Impact

Continually evaluating and refining the Volunteer Expo has helped the Ballarat Foundation build a more inclusive, effective and successful event. Attendance has grown significantly, more people from priority groups are engaging with volunteering, and participating organisations are reporting stronger recruitment outcomes.

Equally important, documenting these lessons has created a practical framework that can be shared with other communities looking to strengthen inclusion through volunteering events.

*“As a result of the Expo we had a record 6 volunteer interviews. Three of these people said they heard the radio interview and came to the Expo looking for our stand.”*

*– Shana Love: Volunteer Engagement Officer, Uniting Agewell*

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*Quick facts on the success of Ballarat Foundation's Volunteer Expo*

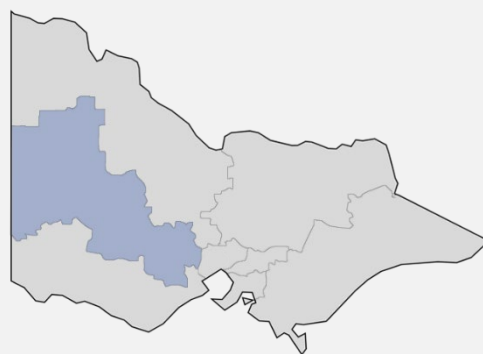
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<https://www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au/leading-volunteers/vma-2022-2026/>



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*Volunteering Victoria acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.*