WORKING WITH PEOPLE

1. HOW CAN WE RECRUIT NEW MEMBERS OR VOLUNTEERS FOR OUR GROUP?

Many small community groups struggle with recruiting enough members to achieve the goals they have set. If you are trying to recruit new members or volunteers, you need to take into account the changing nature of volunteering. **While traditionally people volunteered because of strong social bonds and a sense of community, there is now a greater tendency towards individualised volunteering that is based on the personal needs and goals of the volunteer.** This can present both challenges and opportunities for community groups.

It is important to determine exactly what you can offer new volunteers, as well as what you want from them. **Consider why people would want to be involved with your group and the rewards of volunteering with you, for example: a sense of achievement, making new friends, work experience or networking.** Make things easy for potential volunteers by choosing an accessible location, specifying volunteer role requirements, being flexible and covering incidental costs such as transport, food and equipment.

New members and volunteers for your group can come from a variety of sources. Residents of the area you work in may be keen to join your group and could be recruited through letterbox drops, posters at local shops and holding regular local events. Students at schools, universities and TAFE colleges are often looking for work experience opportunities and they have a lot of energy for one-off or short term volunteer roles.

Consider the networks you belong to and how you can promote volunteer roles through them: these could include the local Council, state or federal MPs, tourism centres, other community groups, funding bodies, schools, local businesses and the media. There are also many websites where you can list specific volunteer roles (*see Handbook 6*).

Many potential problems and conflicts can be avoided by a good recruitment process, so try to avoid taking on people who you feel may be dominating or cause problems later on, and make sure any potential volunteers fit with the culture of your group. Ideally you should have a code of conduct and criteria for specific roles so that new volunteers know what is expected of them. If possible, try to recruit people specifically for each volunteer role, such as administration, finances or on-ground activities, so that volunteers are well-suited to their roles and don't feel out of their depth.


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2. HOW CAN I ENCOURAGE & RETAIN NEW GROUP MEMBERS?

Community groups provide an opportunity for people to translate their passions into action. **Consider the strengths and capacities of the people in your group and link these skills to projects and to other people with similar skills or interests.** Find ways to engage people in roles which fit their skills and are personally fulfilling, while still contributing meaningfully to the activities of the group. It is important to be flexible in role descriptions so that individuals can use their skills to their full potential. Then opportunities can mushroom: you may find new ways in which your group can achieve its goal; people will work together to solve problems and create positive feelings of success; which will in turn encourage other people to become involved with your group.

Encourage and engage volunteers in an increasing level of involvement, providing support to enable them to become confident and comfortable in their roles without becoming overloaded. Their motivations for getting involved may be different to those for staying involved. There are some key stages to consider:
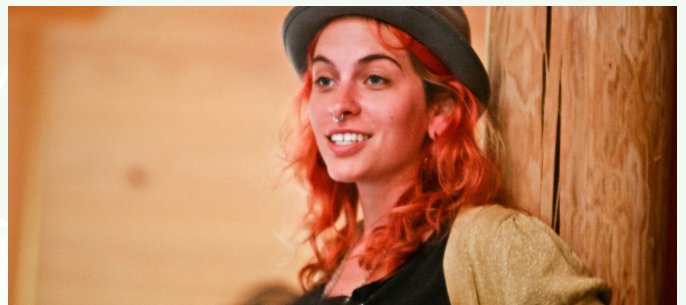
Linking:
Ensure you welcome new individuals and engage with them in their first month, determine their interests, motivations and skills, as well as any barriers to their involvement with your group. Consider the strategies you can use to give them appropriate tasks and strengthen their connection to your group.

Belonging:
Determine if their interests are being met, overcome any barriers to their connection with your group and try to deepen their level of engagement with the group so that they feel a part of it and take responsibility for the group's purpose. Ensure their experiences match with their expectations as far as possible.

Development & Leadership:
Provide training to upskill volunteers or let them know about external training and networking opportunities. Gradually encourage key volunteers to take on leadership roles by delegating specific tasks and responsibilities.

Finally, recognition and rewards are critical to keeping your volunteers happy. You can show recognition through means such as:

- Informal recognition for good work, such as a thank you note or email that is cc'ed to others in the group, and sent out soon after the event.

- Greeting volunteers by name and knowing the names of their partners and children.

- Reimbursing out of pocket expenses and providing refreshments.

- Using quotes from volunteers in newsletter and website articles.

- Holding an annual thank you event or award ceremony for your members / volunteers.

- Providing references for work experience and job applications.

3. WHAT RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES DO VOLUNTEERS HAVE?

Volunteering Queensland has developed a charter of volunteer rights, and Volunteering Australia publishes the National Standards for working with volunteers. See *Handbook 6* for links to these documents. **However, these rights are not all legally enforceable as volunteers are not paid employees of the group.** Some rights, such as privacy and a safe workplace, are covered under legislation. If there are disputes, you can approach Legal Aid or the Fairwork Australia Ombudsman for more information (*see Handbook 6*). It is advisable to have some sort of Code of Conduct for your group, such as a working agreement that can be referred to in the event of disagreement or conflict.

4. DO WE NEED TO FOLLOW ANY RULES OR REGULATIONS FOR MANAGING VOLUNTEERS?

There are no strict regulations for working with volunteers in your community group; however it is useful to have some policies in place so that all members know what is expected of them. These could include a code of conduct and policies for recruiting volunteering, settling disputes, and managing risks and safety. They need not be long and complicated, but should set out any expectations or procedures to be followed. You might also have specific role descriptions and requirements for committee members such as the treasurer and secretary. See *Handbook 6* for some examples of these policies. Specifically, you may need to look into background checks on your volunteers if they will be working with children or other vulnerable groups. You can apply for Blue Cards on behalf of volunteers who will work directly with children, and you can also request a general police check on an individual, for example before assigning the treasurer's position (*see Handbook 6*).

5. HOW CAN WE MANAGE & REDUCE CONFLICT WITHIN OUR GROUP?

Community groups provide people with the opportunity to work towards common goals: however, you may meet, work and talk with people with very different values and life experiences. Conflict is a normal part of life and can arise from misunderstandings, poor communication, lack of planning, poor selection of volunteers, frustration, stress or burnout. Conflict is not inherently bad, however if it is not resolved it can be highly destructive to the group.

Effective communication is the key to avoiding and resolving conflicts within community groups. Recognise that people may have different communication styles; they may be task or people-orientated and that they may communicate most effectively through auditory, visual or hands on means. Active listening and using appropriate body language and vocal tone are also critical to respectful communication. Focus on reasonable dialogue, openness with your volunteers, and keep a good flow of information to everyone involved in the group so no one feels left out. **Try to create a harmonious environment where there are opportunities for people to get to know each other, socialise and build relationships by holding regular meetings and openly talking through any grievances to reach mutually beneficial outcomes**. The best communication is face-to-face, so try to avoid any email communication of grievances, and use tactful wording in reports and emails.

Many people try to avoid conflict at all costs, smoothing things over without addressing the causes or blaming someone or something else for causing it. These responses do not resolve conflict and can lead to the situation building up and exploding, which makes a resolution much more difficult. **It is much more beneficial to your group to either minimise potential situations of conflict before they arise, or to address conflict constructively when it does occur**. Brainstorm ideas for resolving the conflict in a group situation by defining the problem and the causes of that problem, and generating some possible and mutually acceptable outcomes. Be open, honest and positive and focus on the issues not individual personalities.

Treat others courteously, respect privacy and don't get side-tracked into irrelevant arguments. The solution needs to be a resolution that is acceptable for all, which will require you to uncover the real issues and discuss them openly. However, the goal should be problem solving and allowing people to work together civilly, not making everyone happy and best of friends.

Finally, it is advisable to have some sort of grievance policy for your group, however simple, that outlines how you will address conflict and how members or volunteers can make their grievances known, so that they feel confident to report them where necessary. The policy should be known and available to all group members. Ideally there should also be an unfair dismissal policy in case of any disagreements that lead to volunteers leaving the group.

6. HOW CAN WE ENCOURAGE YOUNG PEOPLE TO VOLUNTEER WITH OUR GROUP?

Young people are an important resource to volunteer groups, as they are often enthusiastic volunteers with a large amount of free time. Youth volunteering also encourages a lifelong service ethic, with adults who begin volunteering as youth then twice as likely to volunteer or donate to charities later in their adult life.

However there are some generational differences that should be considered when recruiting generation X and Y volunteers, such as:

- **Generation X (born 1964-80)** are self-reliant, they expect choices and a work-life balance. They are interested in global causes and groups that support social justice or show innovation. To recruit them, groups should encourage flexibility and freedom and identify what they will learn from the volunteer experience. **Give them meaningful assignments where they can multi-task, respect their skills, build in socialising and fun, run brief efficient meetings and recognise individual contributions.**

- **Generation Y (born 1980-90)** question things frequently, demand choice and accountability and value innovation and change. They are open to smaller, lesser known organisations, and will want to work with creative, expressive and efficient processes. They will look for variety, stimulation and strong causes, so groups should focus on their mission or issue and promote the value of the community, collaboration and team spirit. **Give them a variety of exciting and challenging opportunities, engage them quickly, keep them busy, give immediate feedback, use technology, clearly define tasks and responsibilities, treat them with respect and allow questions.**

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7. HOW CAN WE WORK WITH DIFFERENT GROUPS OF PEOPLE?

Many community groups are made up of individuals from increasingly diverse backgrounds. This could include members of varying ages, with different skill sets or education levels, from a range of cultural and religious backgrounds, and those with disabilities. See *Handbook 6* for some specific information on working with each of these groups. Working with unique and diverse individuals can have many benefits to your group. It widens your potential pool of volunteers, provides the group with multiple and different perspectives, and encourages creative solutions that integrate these diverse perspectives.

However, there are challenges to overcome in order for diverse groups to achieve their potential, and attention needs to be paid to trust building and the integration of diversity. **Building trust takes time and concrete experience, so it is important to hold a range of joint activities, informal and formal, where group members can share information and experiences**. The process of overcoming prejudice and stereotyping needs to take place before effective dialogue can begin.

In order to recruit individuals from different backgrounds, first research your local demographics. Know your local community and the groups within it: for example, are there particular migrant communities, ethnic groups or university students living in the area? Make contact with any community leaders or other charity groups working with these communities. Advertise any volunteer positions through face-to-face interactions or in tailored publications. You may for example wish to translate some of your materials into the local language of the major ethnic groups living in the area.

Finally, you should ensure that your group is generally inclusive of all types of people and that you don't discriminate against volunteers from different backgrounds. Although the anti-discrimination act does not specifically relate to volunteers, it can be applicable in some aspects of volunteer work, such as training and development, club membership and sporting activities. Ideally your group should have a policy to ensure there is no discrimination in recruiting, training or dismissing group members or volunteers. It may be illegal to treat people unfairly because of their race, sex, age, relationship or parental status, impairment, religious or political beliefs, union activities, gender identity, sexuality, lawful sex work, pregnancy, and breastfeeding or family responsibilities. If a group member has a complaint that cannot be resolved internally, it can be made to the Anti-Discrimination Commission of Queensland (*see Handbook 6 for details*).