

Recruitment: Volunteer Information Sessions

When you recruit a volunteer, your organisation is gaining their time and skills. Information sessions provide an opportunity for prospective volunteers to learn more about your organisation, what roles you have available, and how they can participate.

What are Volunteer Information Sessions?

Volunteer information sessions involve bringing together potential volunteers who have expressed interest in volunteering with your organisation to allow your organisation to share who you are and what role(s) you have available.

Volunteer information sessions allow volunteers to get a feel for your organisation and how the role benefits a cause and/or community. Sessions tend to be held in group settings and provide a platform for you to talk about your organisation, the role(s) available and for participants to discuss and raise questions regarding available volunteer roles.

The Importance of Volunteer Information Sessions

Volunteer information sessions are one of the initial steps in volunteer recruitment. The session may be the first direct contact an attendee has with your organisation and sets the tone for what volunteering with your organisation will look like.

Planning the Volunteer Information Session

When conducting a volunteer information session, the following key considerations should be taken into account:

Set your objective

Design, promote and conduct your session with a clear objective in mind. Consider why you are hosting the information session and what your organisation hopes to get out of it. It should meet the needs of both your organisation and the participants and show participants that there is real value in volunteering with your organisation.

It is important to remember that volunteering involves a process of exchange: there is value to the organisation in drawing upon the skills and services of the volunteer, but in order to achieve this, the volunteer must also derive value from the organisation. Figure 1 highlights the relationship of needs between the volunteer involving organisation and the volunteer. Understanding this relationship assists you to address the key motivations of a prospective volunteer that will persuade them to take the next step. There are many reasons why people volunteer and understanding volunteers' motivations is central to the successful involvement of volunteers in your organisation or program

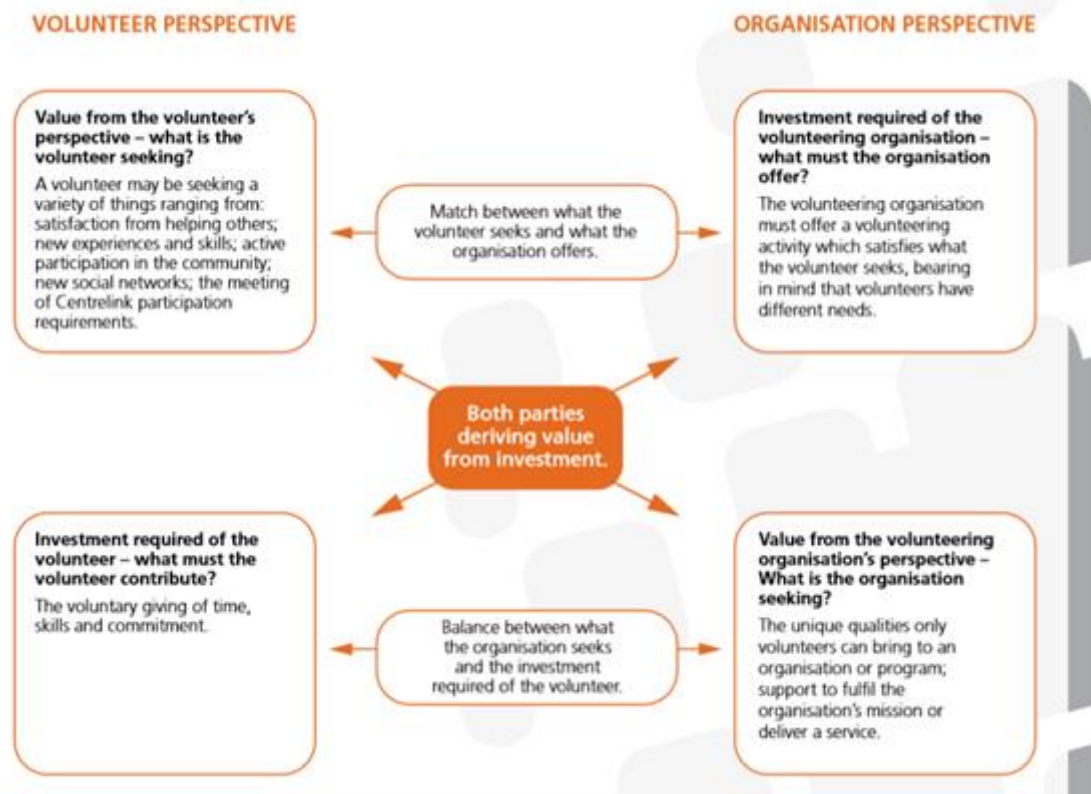


Figure 1: Exchange of needs between the volunteer involving organisation and volunteer

Pitch your message

During an information session you will have a room of people who already have an interest in volunteering with your organisation. Without a well-considered message, you may not always effectively engage with your participants. Your audience will have diverse interests and needs, and it is important to consider different motivators when presenting your information.

Prepare your session

Plan your information session to meet your objective. Decide on which method of delivery will best support your objective and prepare a schedule. Include activities that encourage active participation if appropriate. If your method of delivery involves a digital presentation with handouts, consider how your presentation will deliver key messaging. Further, will you incorporate groupwork, activities or a site visit? For example, a session for volunteer firefighters may include a visit to the brigade's station.

Key considerations when developing your presentation include:

- Make sure each point or slide has a purpose and keep content short and to the point. You want to be direct in your messaging and cover all the information required in the time available. Remember, while you bring substantial knowledge and experience, you don't want to overwhelm your audience with too much detail.
- Make sure content is accessible and inclusive. Don't use jargon or assume knowledge in your audience. If the method of delivery is a presentation, use simple phrasing and accessible fonts, such as Arial, Tahoma or Calibri, ensuring the font size is large enough so all participants can read it.

- Mix up your content. If you have a video covering what your organisation or a specific program does, share that. If you have volunteer or service users' stories and experiences, share these. This will provide impact and demonstrate how your volunteering programs benefit the community.
- Involve everyone. Try and include interactions in the session. This can range from participants introducing themselves and why they are present, to a small activity such as a brainstorming exercise, to a tour of the facilities where participants can meet other employees or volunteers.
- Consider involving one of your existing volunteers in the information session. This allows participants to understand the organisation from the perspective of a volunteer.

Structure and content

When developing the structure for your volunteer information session, consider how you will present your key messaging, and what content is appropriate. The below provides an example of how a volunteer information session may be approached:

1. Welcome and Introduction

- Housekeeping, including location of bathrooms and emergency exits
- Acknowledgement of Country
- Introduce presenters and their role in the organisation
- Have participants introduce themselves
- Set the context for the session, including if questions are encouraged

2. Main Content

- What is volunteering?
- Ask what participants' motivations are for volunteering.
- Why volunteer for your organisation?
- What is your organisational culture?
- What is the organisation's vision, mission and values?
- What is it like to volunteer for your organisation?
- What roles are available? Include details of the role, what it involves, and the time commitment required
- What is the application process?
- What should volunteers expect on their first shift?
- Is there training and ongoing support available?
- What is expected of volunteers?
- What can a volunteer expect in return from the organisation? This can include information on reimbursement of out of pocket expenses, volunteer insurance and recognition.

3. Next Steps

- What happens once the attendee leaves the information session?
- Will the attendee have to submit paperwork that is available during the information session, or will you follow up with them via phone or email to discuss their interest?

4. Open the space for further questions

- Encourage an open dialogue with those present

After the Volunteer Information Session

Make yourself available for questions after the conclusion of the session. Some people will be uncomfortable asking questions in front of others and may wish to approach you after the session concludes.

Evaluate the session

Evaluation is part of the process of continuous improvement. If possible, seek feedback from the participants about what they found useful and what they did not. Use this information to refine and improve the session.

Follow up communications

Make sure you follow up with attendees as appropriate to give them information about next steps if they are still interested in volunteering with your organisation.

Conclusion

Volunteer information sessions are a great way to provide prospective volunteers with an introduction to your organisation. From a recruitment perspective, it enables you to be more efficient by meeting volunteers for the first time in a group. Information sessions are a simple and accessible way for people to discover more about your organisation and the volunteering roles you have available before making the decision to formally apply.