



Youth Ready Guide

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Involving more young people in your environmental projects is important. Younger volunteers bring energy and enthusiasm, as well as a high level of concern about the environment – they want to be part of the solution with you.

This Guide is aimed at helping involve independent young volunteers, from teens through twenties. If you are involving children under the age of 18, you'll need to meet the legal obligation of your organisation to comply with Victoria's compulsory Child Safe Standards - the Commission for Children and Young People has an Implementation and Action Plan Tool to help.

The environmental challenges facing us are more important than ever. Involving young people in your work will help your group continue to achieve your environmental goals now and into the future.

The five focus areas below were identified through a consultation process and focus groups with young people and environmental groups to help you boost your youth readiness. Use this Guide after completing the Youth Ready Assessment.

This Guide and the Youth Ready Assessment were developed in partnership between Volunteering Victoria and the Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning, with input from YACVic (Youth Affairs Council Victoria).

Three Steps to Start

1

Make a formal commitment to youth inclusivity and get it endorsed by your board or committee. Share it on your website, newsletter and social media – get the word out there.

2

Take the *Youth Ready Assessment* – use the assessment tool to see how your activities measure up across five focus areas.

3

Choose where to focus your efforts and develop an Action Plan – choose the focus areas where you can start taking some immediate steps, and use this guide to help you get youth ready.

Cover photo credit: Matt Daniels (Waterwatch volunteer), Dr Kavitha Chinathamby (RMIT) and Wendy Noble (EstuaryWatch volunteer) preparing sediment samples for analysis (Corangamite Catchment Management Authority)

Focus areas

Tick the actions you decide to focus on. Use the Action Plan below to develop your next steps.

1. Designing projects with young people

By young people, for young people – ask young people what works for them in terms of structure and design. Involving them in the process means they are more likely to be able to join your projects. If you don't have any young people in your group currently, think about links you can make locally through schools, youth services or recreation clubs to get started. A good place to start is to contact your local university before Orientation Week (o-week), or talk to the staff delivering environmental degrees and discuss opportunities.

Choosing activities is an important part of youth engagement. Ask young people to decide what activities or issues are most important to them. This is also a chance for young volunteers to take ownership of activities and grow their knowledge and experience.

Get the timing right – young people are often busy, with competing study and part time or shift work. Offering a range of project lengths and times will maximise opportunities to join in.

Getting there and back – transport is a major issue when you're relying on public transport or lifts. Providing information about public transport options helps, along with identifying safe locations to meet other volunteers or wait for transport together.

Check the essentials – make sure your organisation has a Child Safe Policy or Code of Conduct in place, and review your insurance policy at the same time. Check the Resources section for some easy steps to get these essentials in place.

2. Inspiring young people to volunteer

Get social – there are lots of different social networks – don't limit yourself to Facebook in this ever- evolving medium. Remember that posts on external sites can work well too – try youth-oriented sites (see resource links).

Put young people in the picture – use photos that show young volunteers. This is also a great opportunity for young volunteers to contribute to your work – find an aspiring photographer or film maker to help build your resources.

Spread the word – young people can help promote your activities to their peers, through presentations at school, university or through other youth networks that they belong to. This is a good opportunity to talk directly about what they gain from volunteering, including transferable skills and other benefits.

Nail your messaging – it's not just about the environmental outcomes - tell young people how volunteering on your projects can help build social connections, increase physical fitness, improve mental health by time spent in nature, and even build transferable skills that are useful in any job.

3. Registration and booking (keeping in touch)

Getting your message out – young people have grown up using phones for everything. Instant messaging, texting, and social network sites are all frequently used and should be part of your communication tools with young volunteers. Think about the way your information will appear when it's being read on a mobile phone screen.

Sharing the information needed – while it's great to have comprehensive information available (on your website, social media or in person), young people might think TL;DR - too long, didn't read. Keep the information you send or post short and to the point.

Booking is easy – a booking process is useful for planning, and helps volunteers to feel comfortable and confident about joining you. Keep it simple – you could use an easy text to book system, or use one of the free online ticketing systems – see the Resources section for ideas.

Keep in touch – without falling into the trap of sending too much information, do stay connected with volunteers. Help them to build their knowledge of your project, and the environmental outcomes being achieved – and use the opportunity for some regular recognition and thanks.

4. Being welcoming and inclusive



<p>You're welcome – for young people, your project might be their very first experience as a volunteer. Make them feel welcome – a good way to do this is to have some introductory or taster sessions to get started, and of course to make sure they meet everyone and enjoy their first volunteer projects.</p>	
<p>Walk the talk – having youth representation on your committee or board, or having a youth advisory role, is a good way to publicly signal your intentions to involve young people in your projects.</p>	
<p>Inclusivity is essential and young people expect to see it – involving Traditional Owners for a Welcome to Country where appropriate, or making an Acknowledgement of Country, shows respect for Traditional Owners.</p>	
<p>Using personal pronouns is another way to show respect and avoid making assumptions about gender. A straightforward way to do it is to invite people: “introduce yourself with your name, and your pronouns if you feel comfortable.” Introduce yourself in the same way – <i>Hi, my name is Sue and my pronouns are she/her/hers.</i>”</p>	
<p>Celebrating community events demonstrates your organisation’s commitment to inclusivity. Look for opportunities beyond environmental events; joining recognition or celebration events with different sectors can open your work to a whole new audience. Stuck for ideas? Try Our Community’s Calendar of Key Events</p>	

2. Outlining benefits to boost youth appeal

Bump up the benefits – volunteering is a useful way to pick up transferrable workplace skills, earn a reference or a LinkedIn recommendation. Prepare for this using the templates and suggestions in the Resources section – then promote as part of your volunteer benefits.

Public recognition is also a wonderful way to thank volunteers with activities such as a certificate presentation (see Resources section) or a social event with the chance for volunteers to reflect on their achievements and enjoy discussing them together.

Make it newsworthy – invite the local newspaper out for a photo opportunity, focusing on young volunteers (with their permission, of course). Not only can this help to encourage more young volunteers to join you, it's a great opportunity for a young volunteer to take on a media role with your organisation – look for someone studying or in early career stages in this sector.

Social sharing – share and hashtag your group and projects. Help people to find you by getting your social media organised: young people are highly skilled in this area, and a volunteer specialising in social media can help spread news of your projects and volunteer opportunities far and wide.

Action Plan

Decide what steps you can take to help boost your youth readiness. Write down your ideas, practical actions and any resources you'll need to make your Action Plan.

Our priority actions will be:

Focus Area 1 – Designing projects with young people

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Focus Area 2 – Inspiring young people to volunteer

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Focus Area 3 – Registration and booking (keeping in touch)

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Focus Area 4 – Being welcoming and inclusive

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Focus Area 5 – Outlining benefits to boost youth appeal

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Microplastics analysis (Port Phillip EcoCentre Inc)

Useful Resources

Child Safe Policy

The Victorian Government's Child Safe Standards are compulsory minimum standards for organisations that provide services for children and young people (or are used by children and young people). Child safe organisations help their community understand how they keep children and young people safe and protect them from harm. Children and young people should have opportunities to inform the development of child safety policies and may need child-friendly versions to appreciate what their organisation is doing. The Commission for Children and Young People (www.ccp.org.au) has useful guides and resources, including the Child Safe Standards – Implementation and Action Plan Tool.

Insurance – know what your cover means

Insurance can be confusing but it's important to make sure your activities, and all the people involved, are covered. Check Volunteering Victoria's website at www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au for a straightforward Guide to Insurance and Liability, and ask your insurance broker to confirm any age restrictions on your cover. If necessary, extend coverage to add younger people to your policy.

Booking systems and how they work

Ticketing websites such as Eventbrite and TryBooking offer a free and simple way to add a booking system to your projects. Bookings can be made online, including via mobile phone, with confirmations and automatic reminders. Look for a system that is free to set up, and does not charge for ticketing free events such as volunteer projects.

Identifying transferable skills

Transferable skills are skills and abilities that are useful across a range of jobs. Volunteering is a good way to develop them, especially for young people who may have limited work experience. Skills such as being able to communicate effectively, showing and using initiative, and having a good work attitude, are valuable across all industries. Recognising and promoting transferable skill development through volunteering is a great way to encourage and support younger volunteers. An easy way to start is to develop a list of transferable skills (use the examples below to get started). Refer to your list to write effective references or recommendations that will support young people with their job or study applications.

Transferable skill	Can be demonstrated by:
Team work	Volunteering alongside people from a range of different ages, backgrounds or abilities
Following directions	Listening and following directions to complete a project effectively; helping to communicate directions to others when needed
Problem solving	Working as an individual or as part of a team to solve a problem and find the best way to complete a project
Planning	Helping to design a project or tasks; planning recruitment to attract enough volunteers to join
Communication skills	Communication with other volunteers during projects; taking on social media or recruitment tasks;
Creativity	Designing projects for young people; helping with social media; designing resources such as certificates or thank you cards
Work ethic	Commitment to volunteering – being a valued, reliable volunteer who always contributes to the project
Confidence	Building personal confidence through volunteering, and showing a progression in confidence and personal skills
Timeliness	Supporting the other volunteers in the group or team by being there on time, every time
Time management	Prioritising tasks to make sure the most important things are done first, and in the right order
Adaptability	Being able to adjust to new projects or situations, learn new skills or deal with changes in the volunteer group
Leadership, mentoring	Volunteers taking on leadership roles as they gain experience, or mentoring new volunteers as they join the group
Training	Volunteers helping to train new volunteers, or explaining the aims and objectives of a project that they know well

Add your own examples

Providing references

Offering to be a personal referee, or write a reference letter, is a great way to reward and recognise volunteers for their efforts, especially when they may not yet have much employment experience to draw on. References give the opportunity to recognise people who are going the extra mile to contribute their time and efforts to your programs. Writing a reference letter is straightforward:

- Start by explaining how you know the person – include your role and explain that you know them as a volunteer
- Confirm how long you've known them by stating how long they've been volunteering. You could include some additional information if it's relevant and helpful: Max has been volunteering for the last six months, joining us monthly for five hours each time
- Add positive personal comments with specific examples: *Josie is always reliable, cheerful and enthusiastic and is a valued member of the volunteer group. She has taken on a leadership role of training new volunteers and has used her own initiative to develop an introduction kit which explains the environmental issues that our group is addressing. This has been very helpful for new volunteers to understand the background and aims of our project.*
- Close with a statement of recommendation: *I recommend Liz to you as an exceptional volunteer who has shown commitment to her local community and environment, giving her time regularly and freely to improve our regional park.*
- Finish with your contact information.

How to write a LinkedIn recommendation

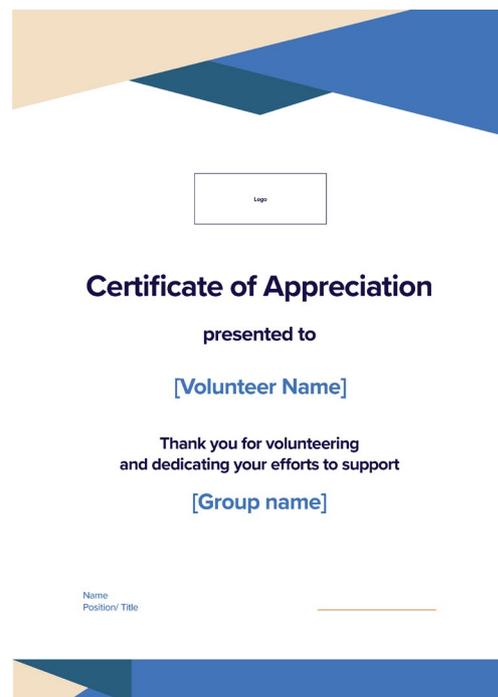
LinkedIn is a platform used for professional networking, widely used by people seeking jobs and employers looking for job applicants. A LinkedIn recommendation is a statement that publicly recognises someone's work or skills. You'll need your own LinkedIn account to write a recommendation – it's free to set up – and you'll need to be connected to the person you are writing the recommendation for. Just like any reference, your recommendation should be specific about the skills, commitment or capability of the person you are recommending. Provide some context to how you know them – being publicly recognised as a volunteer is an additional benefit.

Using social media effectively

Social media is a fast-moving space – the best way to use it effectively is to find a volunteer who loves it. This is an ideal role for a young volunteer, or even a team of social media volunteers, with experience across platforms such as Instagram and TikTok as well as Facebook. Develop some guidelines together around what you want to achieve, how you will measure outcomes, and unleash some creativity that works for your projects. Don't forget to look for opportunities to post on other channels and sites that are used by young people too (e.g. youth networks, youth support services) – form a relationship and share information to increase your reach.

Certificates

Recognition certificates can recognise milestones such as completing a project, or volunteering for a certain number of hours, or just be a way to thank everyone at an annual celebration. Use our template to design your own certificates.



Further Reading

[New Growth - Engaging with Universities, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning \(www.environment.vic.gov.au\)](http://www.environment.vic.gov.au)

[Environmental Volunteering Social Research Report 2020, Department of Environment, Land, Water and Planning \(DELWP\) in partnership with Newgate Research \(www.environment.vic.gov.au\)](http://www.environment.vic.gov.au)

[Deloitte Global Millennial Survey 2020 \(www2.deloitte.com\)](http://www2.deloitte.com)

[Volunteering Australia Research Briefing, Volunteering During the First Year of COVID-19 \(www.volunteeringaustralia.org.au\)](http://www.volunteeringaustralia.org.au)

[General Social Survey 2019, Australian Bureau of Statistics \(www.abs.gov.au\)](http://www.abs.gov.au)

[Empowerment and Participation - A Guide for Organisations Working with Children and Young People \(www.ccyp.vic.gov.au\)](http://www.ccyp.vic.gov.au)

Youth Links

[Girl Guides Victoria \(www.guidesvic.org.au\)](http://www.guidesvic.org.au)

[Scouts Victoria \(www.scoutsvictoria.com.au\)](http://www.scoutsvictoria.com.au)

[Multicultural Youth Network Victoria \(www.vic.gov.au/multicultural-youth-network\)](http://www.vic.gov.au/multicultural-youth-network)

[Youth Affairs Council Victoria \(www.yacvic.org.au\)](http://www.yacvic.org.au)

[Youth Central – the Victorian Government’s website for young people aged 12-25 \(www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au\)](http://www.youthcentral.vic.gov.au)