



Involving volunteers with disability

FOR VOLUNTEER INVOLVING ORGANISATIONS

This Tip Sheet provides information to support Volunteer Involving Organisations (VIOs) be more accessible and inclusive when engaging volunteers with disability.

Volunteering allows anyone to participate in the social and economic life of their broader community. This has many benefits to the individual, as well as to the community. However, some people with disability face challenges and barriers which prevent them from volunteering. Increasing diversity by engaging volunteers with disability will have a positive impact on the culture and empathy within your organisation and enables you to better represent the community.

Key barriers faced by volunteers with disability include:

- ✧ Non inclusive, or inaccessible recruitment and on-boarding processes.
- ✧ Bias or discrimination.
- ✧ Physical accessibility barriers.
- ✧ Communication and language barriers.
- ✧ Overly complicated administrative processes and regulatory requirements.
- ✧ Transport challenges.
- ✧ Assumptions, attitudes, and lack of awareness.

Barriers for a VIO engaging with volunteers with disability include:

- ✧ Additional time and resources required for onboarding and ongoing support.
- ✧ Language and communication challenges.
- ✧ Unaware of the supporting resources unavailable e.g. through NDIS supports.
- ✧ Unconscious bias, discrimination, or assumptions.

Volunteering opportunities should be meaningful, equitable and accessible for people with disability.



Volunteering Tasmania facilitated a co-design project focussed on inclusion in volunteering and led to the development of a **Disability Inclusion Explained** video. The video features Vaughn and Jan who have both been blind from birth, and who have spent many decades as volunteers and as volunteer managers. View the video [here](#) or via our website volunteeringtas.org.au/for-organisations

The video includes suggestions for ways you might better include volunteers with disability in your organisation, including:

- ❖ Avoid making assumptions about the capacity of someone with a disability – don't be afraid to ask them and have an open and respectful conversation.
- ❖ Read and gather information about a particular disability, refer to specialist organisations websites.
- ❖ Ask the person concerned "what can we do to make your life (as a volunteer with our organisation) easier, and what sort of tasks would you be interested in undertaking?"
- ❖ Allow a potential volunteer to visit your organisation before they start volunteering with you, to see if it will be suitable.
- ❖ Prioritise good communication.
- ❖ Undertake regular disability awareness training, at all levels of the organisation – staff, board members and volunteers.
- ❖ Think outside the box, how can your volunteer roles be delivered differently to better suit someone with a disability?
- ❖ Be aware of the capabilities of someone with a disability, for example, don't assume that someone who is blind can't do a task just because you wouldn't be able to do the task if you were blind.
- ❖ Provide a buddy, perhaps an existing volunteer with a disability or with some experience working with people with disability, to enable more one-on-one support.

Think about roles which are challenging and useful, not just for the person, but for the community. Engage with people's need and desire to give back to the community, because that's how people develop dignity, a sense of worth and a sense of purpose.

Where can VIOs get more information?

Volunteering Tasmania

t: (03) 6231 5550

e: team@volunteeringtas.org.au

w: www.volunteeringtas.org.au

Disability Voices Tasmania

t: (03) 6215 6800

e: office@disabilityvoicestas.org.au

w: www.disabilityvoicestas.org.au



Discussion points

1. Volunteer diversity means diverse skills, experience and backgrounds.

There are many benefits for organisations when including people from diverse abilities, such as new ideas, new perspectives, and new ways of doing things.

2. People with disability volunteer their time and skills in our community every day.

27% of the Tasmanian population have a disability, therefore in every organisation, workplace and community, people with disability make significant contributions.

3. Volunteers with disability can be creative and innovative contributors.

Many innovations such as Braille and screen readers, were developed by people with disability out of necessity and now assist people all over the world, every day.

4. Organisations are more dynamic and effective when they have greater diversity representation.

People with disability are often underrepresented at all levels, even in organisations who support people with disability.

5. People are excluded by barriers in their environment and society, not by their impairment.

The social model of disability promotes an inclusive and equitable society which accommodates people with disability, rather than expecting a person to change to suit the environment.

6. Volunteers with disability have a lot to offer an organisation.

Focus on the possibilities and the abilities rather than the disability. Don't make assumptions about someone's skills or capacity.

7. There are many supports and resources available to support an organisation to engage a volunteer with disability.

Ask the person what they have found useful in the past. If they have a NDIS plan, consider what this may mean for their volunteering e.g. they may wish to have a support person with them.