



Engaging people with disability in volunteering

Funded by the Australian Government Department of Social Services, the Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) aims to increase opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their broader community through volunteering. Volunteering Tasmania used a co-design approach to work together with key stakeholders to help understand the challenges and needs of people with disability and to support organisations to deliver more accessible and inclusive volunteering opportunities.

Stakeholder consultation

During September-November 2022, stakeholder consultation was conducted with 53 individuals and organisations state-wide.

Consultations were held with:

- 15 individuals with disability interested in volunteering
- 38 volunteer-involving organisations or specialist agencies who support people with disability

“We must focus on the ability not the disability.”

Many of those who participated in consultations from an organisational or specialist agency perspective, also identified as having a disability, or lived experience of disability.

In addition, six people included in the above consultation count officially provided two perspectives, both as a person with disability as well as from the organisational perspective.

What we heard...

Disability is a broad term encompassing a range of abilities and experiences. There is significant risk in a one size fits all approach, and people with disability should be included and consulted about what they have to offer as volunteers and what support is needed to do so.

People with disability have the same motivations to volunteer as everyone else. However, they face prejudice and stigma and are often limited by assumptions made. Many are only offered ‘low level’ opportunities due to uninformed perceptions of their ability.

Volunteering experiences can be extremely rewarding and beneficial when done well and extremely challenging and disempowering when not.

Co-Design Working Group

Following on from the consultations, key stakeholders were invited to join a working group to further examine strategies to support volunteering for people with disability.

A co-design framework was used to engage people impacted by or with direct experience of the issue, alongside professionals/experts to design a solution. Co-design is used in communities all over the world to tackle problems and create impactful, systemic change.

The Co-Design Working Group met regularly between November 2022 and June 2023. This involved group members sharing their own experiences as well as connecting with their networks to gain additional input and feedback between sessions.

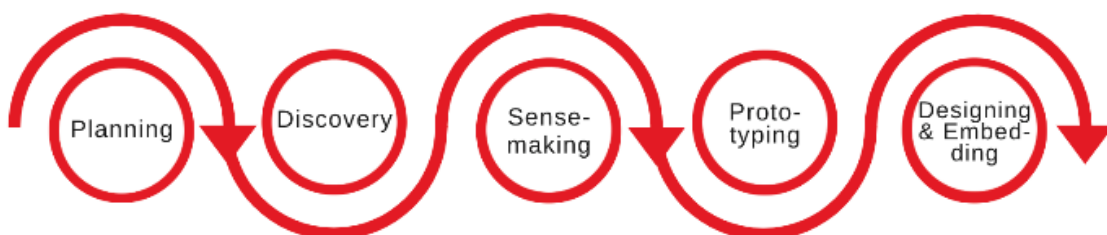
The group comprised of 16 members state-wide and included people with disability, volunteer managers and representatives from specialist agencies.

Organisations represented:

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|-------------------------------------|
| Australian Red Cross |
| Calvary Care |
| Disability Voices Tasmania |
| Inclusive Innovations Tasmania |
| Launceston Volunteers for Community |
| Mental Health Council of Tasmania |
| Mersey Community Care |
| National Disability Services |
| RSPCA |
| TasTAFE |
| Volunteering Tasmania |
| WISE Employment |

Phases of co-design

- 1. Planning:** We define the problem, surface/identify assumptions, identify stakeholders, shape the team and plan the work.
- 2. Discovering:** We test the assumptions surfaced in phase 1 (Planning), involve others in the process, listen to what people have to say, observe and find out more.
- 3. Sense-making:** We review the data that we have collected and accessed, find patterns and meaning, develop insights and shape ideas.
- 4. Prototyping:** We design and run experiments, test our own assumptions and learn as we practice our work.
- 5. Designing & Embedding:** We learn and adapt, design our work, processes and resources, work with people to create lasting change, evaluate what we have done and continue to learn and iterate.



Key principles of co-design

- ❑ **Shared power:** All voices have the same level of influence when we balance power dynamics and shift hierarchical structures.
- ❑ **Prioritising relationships:** We build and maintain strong relationships across the community.
- ❑ **Use participatory means:** We make sure members of the community have the chance to participate in whatever way works for them.
- ❑ **Builds capability:** We support people to increase knowledge and capability.

Common themes

During the co-design process and additional community consultations, the following themes consistently emerged when discussing challenges and opportunities:

1. Organisational barriers – promotion, recruitment, on-boarding
2. Accessibility barriers – physical access, communication & language, time
3. Need for ongoing support and flexibility provided by volunteer-involving organisation
4. Need for information and resources
5. Attitudes and awareness - discrimination, bias, assumptions

Discussions around each theme were reframed and posed as “How might we...?” questions from the perspective of the volunteering sector, to help better understand the challenges and identify possible solutions.

For example, “How might we reshape volunteer opportunities to meet the needs and capacity of the volunteer?” and “How might we showcase positive experiences of volunteering many people with disability have had?”

Vision statement developed by the group: Volunteering opportunities are meaningful, equitable and accessible for people with disability.

Brainstorm of possible solutions

Several possible solutions were identified during the sense making phase.

These included:

- Disability awareness training; general education of disability types (volunteers and paid staff).
- Disability awareness training; supports available to organisations, reasonable adjustments.
- Template for adjustments checklist specific to various disability types.
- Links to resources, supports and trainings which already exist, e.g. common portal or website.
- Community of practice to continue sharing knowledge and resources.
- Awareness raising public campaign.
- 'Diversity tick' program for organisations demonstrating good practice in inclusion.
- Volunteer mentors or buddies.
- Advocacy around Working with Vulnerable People registration.
- Improve representation of people with disability in promotion materials.
- Showcase what an inclusive onboarding experience (and vice versa) looks like.
- Showcase alternative and flexible interview format and process.
- Checklist for reviewing volunteer-involving organisation (VIO) documentation, etc. regarding inclusive language.
- Detailing the importance of creating a good match between person and role/organisation.
- Showcase stories from VIOs on why having volunteers with disability has positive benefits for their organisation (perhaps through video).
- Lead by example, advocate for inclusive approach in all networks and opportunities. E.g. VT membership might only be available to organisations who demonstrate inclusive practices.
- Annual forum or workshop to hear best practice examples and share ideas.

The Co-Design Working Group considered all possible solutions against the following criteria, to select an idea to carry forward into prototyping:

- It is within scope of our project goals, which are to remove barriers to volunteering for people with disability.
- It assists us achieve our group's vision: that volunteering opportunities are meaningful, equitable and accessible for people with disability.
- It is something we can influence and achieve real impact within 6–12 months' timeframe.
- It is possible to clearly define the project activity and the measurable steps needed to achieve it.
- It is ours to address – if it is not ours, we can note it for future advocacy opportunities.

The **Awareness Raising Campaign** was selected by the Working Group.

Prototype: Volunteers with disability awareness raising campaign

Several volunteers with disability have been identified statewide and Volunteering Tasmania will work with these 'champions' to showcase their volunteering experiences. They will be supported to identify the communication method they would like to use. Options might include a short video, radio interview, written article and media release, photo shoot or speaking at a conference.

Key messages for communication

1. 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.

2. Volunteer diversity means diverse skills and experience.

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

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

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

4. People are restricted 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.

5. 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.

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.

Next steps

Ongoing support and connections will be provided to the Co-Design Working Group and broader interested community, through a Community of Practice facilitated by Volunteering Tasmania.

The Diversity and Inclusion Community of Practice will progress VMA outcomes, informing the creation of resources and supporting systems change to improve the capacity of organisations to engage people with disability and other identified priority groups in volunteering opportunities.

The brainstormed ideas from this project will be revisited throughout the VMA funding period.

Volunteering Tasmania appreciates the support of the following organisations involved in the Disability Co-Design Project:

Australian Red Cross; Calvary Care; Disability Voices Tasmania; Inclusive Innovations Tasmania; Launceston Volunteers for Community; Mental Health Council of Tasmania; Mersey Community Care; National Disability Services; RSPCA; TasTAFE; WISE Employment



Volunteering Tasmania acknowledges the palawa people as traditional custodians of the lands, seas, skies, and waterways throughout lutruwita/Tasmania. We pay respect to elders past and present and recognise their deep history and continuing connections with our shared country, culture, and community.

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Visit www.dss.gov.au for more information.