

Volunteer Management Activity

Tasmanian Stakeholder Consultation Summary – People with Disability

November 2022

Background

Volunteering Tasmania has received funding from the Department of Social Services (DSS) to deliver the Australian Government's Volunteer Management Activity (VMA) from 1 July 2021 to 30 June 2026.

The Volunteer Management Activity aims to increase opportunities for people to participate in the social and economic life of their broader community through volunteering, by:

- building effective volunteering practices and opportunities within organisations and communities
- increasing the diversity of volunteers
- providing access to training, resources and support for volunteers and volunteering organisations

To do this, we will:

- build the capacity of VIOs to provide inclusive and accessible volunteering opportunities
- identify and break down barriers to volunteering for people with disability

We will use a co-design approach to understand the needs across each of three identified priority groups and work together with key stakeholders to implement strategies to support volunteering for these groups. The focus of this current financial year, and for the stakeholder consultation in this report is people with disability.

Stakeholder consultations

During September-November 2022, a total of 53 stakeholder consultations were undertaken with individuals and organisations State-wide.

Consultations were held with:

- 15 individuals with disability
- 38 volunteer-involving organisations and specialist agencies (who support people with disability)
- Six people included in the above consultations provided perspectives from a person with disability as well as from an organisation involving volunteers.

Many of those who gave consultations from an organisational or specialist agency perspective, also identify as having lived experience of disability, which is sometimes invisible.

"some barriers are barriers for all, not just people with disability"

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 rewarding when done well and extremely challenging when not.



“disability is created
by the environment
we put people in”

Key themes

Reasons to volunteer

- A potential pathway or soft entry to employment or for career development - unemployment is disproportionately high for people with disability.
- To gain experience and skills in the workplace - a chance to be mentored, gain experience with workplace culture, networking.
- To connect with things of personal or professional interest e.g. animals, music, politics
- Community participation - social connections, feeling part of society, meeting like-minded people, desire to help others, to make friends, a sense of wellbeing and connection, to connect with people with shared interests and commonality.
- To make a difference - make a meaningful contribution, to be seen as helpful rather than a burden.
- Self-worth - feeling valued and worthwhile, to feel part of something, to feel engaged and included, for a purpose in life, a reason to get up in the morning or to get out of the house, to do something 'normal', to seek recognition that they are not broken, have a rewarding experience, to have shared conversations with family about their day.
- Independence - develop confidence and build self-esteem, gain life skills, to role model for their own children, self-improvement e.g. to overcome shyness or anxiety.
- To have a voice at the table – to advocate and provide perspective of person with disability, share lived experience with others, inform general population, to improve situation for others, to support the world to change and become more inclusive.
- Mutual obligation pressure, NDIS tick box community involvement.

Challenges faced

- Organisations with no experience of volunteers with disability may have misconceptions or misunderstandings about what a person living with disability can do or make assumptions about their capacity and reliability. This limits opportunities for people with disability to demonstrate what they are capable of in both volunteering and employment.
- Assumptions made about the extent of someone's disability or capabilities, and that it will be too hard to accommodate.
- Anxiety or fear of the unknown, creating a perceived higher risk of workplace accident and concerns about insurance liability.
- Social issues including negative judgements, ignorance, stigmas, entrenched prejudices, hate crimes, attitudinal barriers and ableism, meaning some workplaces can be intolerant of people with disability.
- Inclusion and diversity not front of mind when positions are advertised, or through recruitment and induction processes.
- Not being treated equally or with respect, only being offered minimal or stereotypical tasks with no support, creating to feeling overwhelmed and undervalued.
- A real or perceived lack of resources and support where organisations don't believe they can allocate additional support, if the person with disability doesn't have a good support person or has limited hours of support through NDIS.



- Some support people can appear disengaged or are just not as interested in the role as the volunteer, which can impact on how instructions are relayed, or how support is offered.
- Some people with disability don't have NDIS packages but still require extra support
- Some organisations have a cap on the number of volunteers with a disability they'll have at any one time, even if they're accompanied by NDIS funded support person.
- A sense that it can be difficult to match people with suitable roles specific to their ability and needs, e.g. anxiety when dealing with strangers, low literacy.
- Induction processes not inclusive and can be too paper driven without allowing for audience needs, such as screen readers, digital or written literacy, plain English.
- Volunteer ability to attend regularly may be limited due to transport, support, capacity, other commitments, or cost, especially in rural and regional locations with limited services.
- Administrative barriers including processes such as applying for WWVP or Police checks or participating in lengthy online training sessions.
- Communication barriers include level of language and outdated or offensive language.
- Physical access barriers to and within buildings, volunteering often occurs in older buildings with little or no accessibility e.g. ramps, hallway width, stairs, toilets.
- Intersectionality - compounded barriers for person with disability who is also LGBTQI, CALD, First Nations, meaning they may face additional prejudice, exclusion, or disadvantage.
- Having a different capacity than expected, rather than less eg. some people with ADHD may present with a longer than expected attention span, creating greater capacity than presumed.

Improvement suggestions

- Use inclusive language and plain English.
- Simplify forms and processes as much as possible, remove anything not essential
- Learn the social model of disability.
- Provide disability awareness training and improve awareness of resources and supports available to employers.
- Challenge assumptions, reduce labels, foster empowering narratives within the workplace.
- Remind everyone that we are all different, promote diversity as a positive thing for society.
- Speak to people with lived experience of disability, be open to a different perspective.
- Promote cultural safety, acceptance and openness for all workers, educate how to show that through behaviour and attitudes.
- Don't just have tick the disability box or make assumptions about someone's ability.
- Begin with an informal, one on one chat, get to know each other, ask what they need, and focus on the "can do" rather than the "cannot do."
- Ask for any accessibility requirements as standard best practice.
- Provide visuals or picture cards to illustrate steps involved in a task and provide documents in word for screen readers.
- Be flexible - break things down into small, achievable tasks and allow breaks as needed.
- Develop a relationship with a disability provider who can assist with placement and support, perhaps group activities may be an initial option and allow for creative use of limited support.
- Personalise the volunteering opportunity to suit, ensure good match of person to role.
- Offer meaningful, supported and skill-based volunteer experiences.



- Adapt induction to provide an inclusive and accessible experience. Provide information that volunteers can take and read at home if desired.
- Review what ability, capacity and checks are currently required and remove any requirements which are not really needed.
- Offer assistance to volunteers to apply for Police check or WWVP card, or registration forms.
- Ask whether your processes and environment “disables” people and be open to making adjustments.
- Consider inclusion first when designing programs, not as an afterthought.
- Offer mentoring, peer support, buddy program to support, shadow, or advocate as needed.
- Review physical workspace to check for accessibility, adjust workplan and environment to suit the person.
- Ensure check-ins and reviews are regularly undertaken to ensure all is okay and make adjustments as needed.
- Be proactive when recruiting and advertising for volunteers - feature people with disability in marketing, be clear in recruitment so that people with disability can make an informed choice if the role is something they feel able to do, state if people with disabilities are encouraged to apply, are valued and if support will be offered.
- Provide open days for volunteer opportunities.
- Understand when the disability is relevant and when it’s not okay to ask.
- Offer multiple ways to learn, to receive information or to provide feedback, tailor as needed.
- Be curious if a task must be done the same way, in the same place, every time. Perhaps there is more than one way to do something?
- Have an inclusive, accepting, and welcoming attitude to all volunteers, share positive stories, celebrate the wins.

“different people have different motivations, and every disability is different”

Next steps: Shaping the future of volunteering for people with disability

- Through the stakeholder consultation process, we identified suitable participants to join a Co-Design Working Group which includes representatives from volunteer organisations, specialist agencies and people with disabilities from across the State.
- Using a co-design process facilitated and supported by Volunteering Tasmania, the group will meet several times between November 2022 – June 2023 to explore systemic barriers to volunteering for people with lived experience of disability.
- Volunteer organisations will be supported to develop cultures and systems that welcome and promote volunteering for people with disability.
- Ongoing support and connections will be provided to the Co-Design Working Group and broader interested community, through a Community of Practice which will be facilitated by Volunteering Tasmania.
- This process will progress VMA outcomes, informing the creation of resources and supporting systems change to improve the capacity of organisations to engage people with disability in volunteering opportunities.