

# Youth Volunteering

The purpose of this quick guide is to outline how to engage young people in your volunteer program. It discusses the benefits of engaging with young people as well as the risks you need to consider. Finally, it includes tips for making your volunteer program more attractive to young people and how to keep them engaged.

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## Youth volunteering

Engaging young volunteers can help reinvigorate your volunteer program and reduce the impact of older volunteers moving on. To include younger volunteers into your program you need to consider and address the barriers and motivations for these volunteers and make adjustments to your program to include them.

In this document, a youth volunteer is 25 years of age or younger. A person is considered a child in Australia up to the age of 18. This may be important when considering volunteer checks, insurance and compliance.

## Volunteering age

There is no legislation relating to volunteers and age across Australia. Each state and territory has its own legal obligations that apply to the working conditions of children. Your organisation should be aware of the relevant legislation in your state. Generally, legal obligations that apply to the working conditions for children set out:

- The time of day a child is permitted to work, usually not late at night or early morning;
- The maximum hours permitted to work; and
- The standards of working conditions.

Your organisation may have its own policy about the age of volunteers depending on the type of role and the activity.

## What can young people bring to an organisation?

Young people can bring in talent, enthusiasm, energy, new perspectives, and creativity. Adding a younger voice to your organisation, committees, and programs is a powerful move – their voice can help you reach an even larger target or client base.

They may be open to new ideas, accept change readily, and are able to grow into roles where appropriate responsibility and support is given. Young people can be open to inclusion and to promote intergenerational connections. They add value through their diverse technology and social media skills.

## Does the organisation need consent/permission when recruiting young people?

For volunteers under the age of 18 securing written consent from a parent/guardian before they commence is good practice, however consider if it is essential for young people who may not live at home, or have complex family arrangements. In designing roles for younger volunteers, you should consider:

- supervision needs given age and experience
- time of day or duration of volunteering (e.g., hours in a week)
- adapting around school/education commitments
- working conditions noting health and safety of the young person

## What checks are required?

If staff or young people are working with children or vulnerable people under the age of 18 there may be additional checks or clearances required. Checks or clearances are for a defined period (generally three years). Each state and territory has difference legislation so it's importance to check the requirements for your organisation and activities. They are not transferable between states or territories.

The relevant criterion in the legislation is extensive and very specific. Having clear policies regarding the need to protect children (and other vulnerable groups), undertaking reference checking and interviews and provide adequate induction, training and supervision are also important.

## How do I address risk management?

Your organisation needs the ability to provide suitable duties and supervision to provide a safe space for younger volunteers.

Volunteer policies and procedures should expressly outline risks associated with youth volunteers under 18 years old.

The National Principles for Child Safe Organisations (<https://childdsafe.humanrights.gov.au/national-principles/download-national-principles>), are best practice guidelines for creating child safety.

All Volunteer Involving Organisations should review any conditions of their volunteer insurance policies with their insurance company, to ensure all volunteers are adequately covered.

## How do I attract young volunteers?

Like most volunteer recruitment, word of mouth is your best tool. Talk to any young volunteers within your programs and tap into their networks. Promote success stories of young people already in the organisation through social media. Encourage volunteering with friends, family or in small groups.

Review existing volunteer marketing and social media to ensure the role is being seen by young people, and that it is likely to appeal to them. Social media is constantly changing, so find out what platforms young people are using. Emphasise the element of personal and professional development and mention specifically that you're looking for young people. Tap into local youth organisations including schools or universities.

Share the vision and passion for your organisation and the great work that is being done.

## What can young people get out of volunteering?

Volunteering can contribute to personal and professional development. It can build transferable job skills, communication skills, experience, contacts, and increased self-confidence. All these can help in the search for employment.

Volunteering can provide recognition for service and references for job applications. Young volunteers also enjoy knowing they are making a difference and it can be a chance to meet like-minded people and make friends.

## How to retain young people

Lengthy application processes that are not digitally compatible may discourage young people. They can be put off by the same things that discourage other volunteers – poor organisation, poor supervision, or unsatisfying roles. Young people may be sensitive to being 'talked at' or 'talked down to', aim to promote

respectful relationships with youth. They will expect meaningful duties, not ad-hoc tasks that nobody else wants to do. Listen respectfully to their opinions and give their ideas due consideration, actively involving them in decision making where possible.

## What could my organisation change to include young volunteers?

Your organisation could provide more flexible schedules, looking for tasks that can be done outside of standard work hours or that can be done virtually. Review systems for email and text (SMS) mobile phone communication with volunteers. Find out how younger volunteers want to receive information.

Digital induction and training procedures might need to be reviewed and simplified so as not to be overwhelming. Make it inclusive, fun, friendly and rewarding to get involved. Consider mentoring or coaching schemes that allocate more time at the beginning for supervision, and tasks that start small and build up as confidence and skills develop. Allowing volunteers to make mistakes and see this as a learning experience rather than a failure is important.

Review the volunteer program or projects and ask if there are any changes that could be made if there was a younger team involved. There may also be grants available for community groups that involve young people or projects, where young people can learn and gain employment skills.

## Quick tips for engaging young people?

The key to keeping younger volunteers engaged, as with all volunteers, is to ensure the role meets everyone's needs.

- discuss expectations
- have a trial activity to give you both a chance to make up your minds before progressing
- use incentives such as free food, training opportunities or leadership roles for youth



*The seven State and Territory volunteering peak bodies acknowledge the Traditional Custodians of country throughout Australia and their connections to land, sea, and community. We pay our respect to Elders past and present.*

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