

# Engaging Volunteers

The purpose of this quick guide describes the range of activities carried out by a manager of volunteers over the course of a volunteer program. This role could have many different names and may be either a paid or volunteer position.

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## What is volunteer engagement?

Leaders of volunteers engage with volunteers to meet the goals and objectives of your organisation's programs or projects. Volunteer engagement includes a range of activities that support the development and sustainability of a skilled and engaged volunteer workforce. In larger not for profit organisations it is usually handled by a dedicated role often called a Volunteer Coordinator or Volunteer Manager. In smaller organisations the work may be carried out by a volunteer, or group of volunteers who may or may not identify with a specific role of leader of volunteers.

## Core activities in volunteer engagement

### Program planning and evaluation

Volunteer program planning and evaluation includes planning new volunteer programs or evaluating existing ones, collecting volunteer, staff, or customer feedback, and redesigning programs based on organisational and volunteer needs.

### Recruitment

Volunteer recruitment includes designing role descriptions, posting volunteer opportunities, creating flyers, attending recruitment events, screening and interviewing candidates and performing background checks if necessary.

## Core activities in volunteer engagement (continued)

### Training and development

Volunteer training includes running orientation sessions, giving site tours, matching new recruits with existing volunteers to act as mentors, delivering role-specific training sessions, and providing volunteers with policies, procedures and other role-related resources.

### Supervision

Volunteer supervision includes scheduling shifts, managing events, answering questions, being available, arranging team meetings, and handling any problems that may arise, recognising and rewarding volunteers and managing volunteer exits.

### Reporting

Volunteer reporting includes monitoring the volunteer management database (if one exists), writing sections of the annual report, providing inputs to the CEO for Board Reports, compiling grant reports, collecting data from volunteers and/ or staff, distributing information to the public.

### Skills needed to be a leader of volunteer

Effective leaders of volunteers utilise a host of leadership skills to engage effectively with a volunteer team. Leaders of volunteers may also come with or develop skills and knowledge in project management, change management, stakeholder management, workforce planning, and budgeting.

### Leaders of volunteers are leaders

Volunteer engagement and management requires strong leadership abilities. Leading volunteers can require more expertise than managing paid staff. If you have found yourself in such a role, you are someone who possesses the leadership skills and qualities to bring the volunteer team together to work towards the organisation's mission.

As an aspiring, new or existing leader of volunteers it is important to continually develop and sharpen your leadership skills to ensure success.

## The following are traits of effective leaders.

### Effective communicators

Leaders are excellent communicators, able to explain problems and solutions clearly and concisely. Leaders know when to talk and when to listen. In addition, leaders can communicate with people from diverse backgrounds and across different media: one-on-one, via phone, email, etc.

### Accountable and responsible

Leaders hold themselves accountable and take responsibility for any mistakes. Leaders support and encourage individuality while abiding by organisational structure, rules, and policies that need to be followed.

### Long-term thinkers

Leaders are visionaries. This is evidenced by the leadership trait of being able to plan for the future through concrete and quantifiable goals. They understand the need for continuous change and are open to trying new approaches to solve problems or improve processes.

### Self-motivated

Leaders are self-motivated and can keep going and attain goals despite setbacks. In addition, good leaders try their best to exceed, not just meet, expectations.

### Confident

Virtually all good leaders share the leadership trait of confidence. They can make tough decisions and lead with authority. By being confident, leaders can reassure and inspire others, establish open communications, and encourage teamwork.

### People-oriented

Leaders are typically people-oriented and team players. They're able to foster a team culture, involve others in decision-making, and show concern for each team member. By being people-oriented, leaders are able to energise and motivate others. By making each individual feel important and vital to the team's success, they secure the best efforts from each member of the team.

***“Leaders are the ones willing to take care of the people around them. They can exist in any level or department of an organization. We call someone “leader” because they took the risk to express uncertainty, ask for help, or head towards danger before anyone else.”***

- **Simon Sinek**



*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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