

Working with Volunteers in Events

Volunteers transform a good event to a great event and regardless of the number of volunteers an event needs, we recommend you consider the following before embarking on involving volunteers in your organisation. Their experience of recruitment, training and interactions with others will affect what results you get from your volunteers and all event organisers involving volunteers should aim to provide an engaging in a meaningful, satisfying and memorable experience.

Volunteers are often sought to help the paid staff, to support them in their roles and to enable an event to take place. Many organisations recognise the importance and value of volunteers very early on, and others scramble around in the last few weeks looking for extra help!

Planning for Volunteers:

A proactive organisation will reflect on volunteer input during their annual planning process and the management of the volunteer programme should receive same consideration as other major projects.

- The amount of volunteers needed is irrelevant as to how you and involve them
- All volunteers should be well prepared and briefed for their role
- Volunteers should have a clear understanding of their role and know who to contact with any questions or issues
- Volunteers need to feel that it has been worth giving up their time to volunteer – they should feel that they have been involved in a meaningful and rewarding experience.
- Volunteers with ownership of the event are more likely to strive even harder to give their absolute best

What is your vision regarding volunteers?

Before starting to think about advertising for volunteers – stop and consider what your organisation's vision is and how volunteers fit into this picture.

- Does your organisation have a clear vision – what is the outcome they are working towards, the end result – do the volunteers feel a part of this vision?
- Plan to share this vision with volunteers and keep it at the forefront of everything that involves them – from the bag packers and the signage crew through to the people on ticketing or those in catering – everyone needs to know that their contribution is important, valued and part of the bigger picture.

- It is inside everyone to do something great and be part of something great – volunteers need this aspiration to be drawn out – aspire them to be great and make the event they are involved with great.

Why involve volunteers?

Volunteers bring enormous value to the organisation and event.

Volunteers themselves should benefit from their involvement whether it is the buzz from being involved in a world class event, to meeting a great bunch of people they otherwise wouldn't have connected with or gaining experience for a future career. Volunteering creates stronger, more connected communities.



Provide a Great Experience

The whole process a volunteer goes through needs to be great – what does a great event involving volunteers look like?

Two key aspirations – excellence and professionalism:

Excellence in attitude, behaviour, work ethic and commitment – from staff and volunteers – they are the same team and should be working towards the same vision.

Professionalism – an excellent event requires an excellent team – whether it's a team of expert event managers running a high profile sports event– or a team of parents running an annual fundraiser for a local pre-school – both teams need to be professional and committed to their roles to pull off a great event where volunteers will want to return.

Our community is too small to get it wrong – aim to get it right and engage with your volunteers from the outset.

All stages of the volunteer involvement needs to be spot on - selection, training, experience and recognition.

What other key issues should a successful volunteer manager consider before recruiting volunteers?



Is your organisation and attractive place to volunteer?



What is your vision regarding involving volunteers?



Can you offer a meaningful, rewarding and satisfying experience?

- How is your organisation viewed amongst the community? Is it an attractive place to volunteer? What is the diversity like amongst volunteers? What is the vibe like?
- What are your organisation's aims and goals when involving volunteers? What cost is involved? Are paid staff happy with the concept of working with volunteers?
- Are you able to offer a rewarding, enjoyable and meaningful experience? What is going to make someone put their hand up to help you deliver your event? It's tempting to rush into identifying a role simply because there is a gap that needs filling! Be realistic about the role – is it appealing, are their clear benefits to those involved and is it meaningful and rewarding?

Practicalities and Paperwork:

We recommend you complete a role description, even a brief one for all volunteer roles. This helps clarify your needs and also gives the volunteers vital information about what is expected of them, what they can gain, a key contact person, the time required, breaks, training and so on.

Other processes you may consider are:



Recruiting your Volunteers:

There are considered to be three main ways of recruiting volunteers:

The delegated approach

Delegation of recruitment to another organisation i.e. Volunteering Central or SEEK Volunteer. (Links below). Register but don't rely on them alone.

The scattered approach

General advertisement for volunteers – posters on noticeboards, radio advertisements and publications, media releases, word of mouth, information sessions, talks, Facebook, etc. Keep at it, promote it widely and make sure people don't only know about the event, but that volunteers are required.

The targeted approach

The advertisement of individual voluntary positions in newspapers, radio and targeting specific groups or individuals that share the skills you need. Where are the volunteers you seeking – often within the databases of other event organisers!

Hints for Recruitment

- Make sure that volunteering in your organisation is a rewarding and positive experience and word of mouth will work for you
- Ask current volunteers to provide names of potential recruits
- Emphasize in all recruitment materials the many benefits of volunteering in your organization
- Keep a record of people who enquire about volunteering, even if you do not have a place for them at the time
- Respond promptly, professionally and enthusiastically
- Make sure the volunteer is comfortable with the role they have been recruited for.
- Remember your vision when dealing with volunteers and try to install this into their whole experience with you

Welcoming and Retaining Volunteers:

Volunteers return when they are connected, valued and can see that they are making a worthwhile contribution.

Volunteer managers need to keep volunteers enthusiasm high by involving them in the organisation and ensuring they feel part of the team. Even if their role appears small or less glamorous than others – ensure they remain focused on that shared vision and how they are contributing towards it.

- Keep communication channels open –ensure they have a clear route to talk with you. Encourage feedback and act on it, capture their enthusiasm for the role, introduce them to others, making them feel welcome and valued, take time out to ask them how their shift was. Consider how you communicate with the team – Mailchimp, text, face to face, Facebook – find a way that works for you and your event and keep in touch!
- If they express concerns about their role – talk to them and move them to a more appropriate role
- Brief volunteers appropriately in order to carry out their role effectively.

Volunteers are often asked about the organisation they are volunteering for and an alarming amount of volunteers have a very limited understanding of the organisation as a whole. In order to ensure the volunteer feels part of the organization, and that they can promote the organisation, it is essential they are fully aware of the organisations aims and how they contribute towards that one shared vision.

Valuing Volunteers during the Event:

A volunteer who feels they are contributing in a meaningful way will result in volunteers being more likely to enjoy their role and remain committed to you and the organisation in which you work.

- Keep reminding them of the big picture – the excellence, the vision
- Your volunteers are a team – treat them as such

- Ensure every contact you & your team have is genuine, sincere and respectful
- Treat your volunteers with excellence, and you will get it back.
- Consider a Volunteer Hub – make it comfortable and practical – clothes storage, a reason to linger, refreshments etc.
- Refreshments – are they provided to those hard to reach volunteers, are they relieved to have a toilet break!?
- Say ‘thank you’ a lot!

A role can be small and simple or large and involved – as long as the volunteer knows how they are making a difference they are more likely to continue giving their time as a volunteer.

Recognising and Thanking Volunteers:



So how do you recognise your volunteers? A t-shirt, coffee voucher, a thank you party?

They all help towards making the volunteer feel appreciated but **nothing** motivates volunteers more than a simple and sincere thank you. Recognise them for the work they do and tell them it means something to you and the organisation.

Give others involved the chance to thank them: Ask for beneficiaries comments on the volunteer involvement – the athletes, the audience, the members of the public attending a festival. Get others to tell the volunteers how valued and awesome they are.

Ask for their feedback: By giving the opportunity for volunteers to provide feedback not only does it give you essential information but it gives them the opportunity to reflect – and ensure you let them know you have listened and acted upon their feedback!

In Summary:

- Volunteers are vital to many of the regions events – they are in demand and we all need to work collectively to ensure they are valued and respected and they will keep putting their hands up to help!
- Ensure that every contact you and your team have with volunteers is genuine, sincere and respectful
- They are representing you and your event – have a clear vision – share it with them and keep it at the forefront of everything that involves them
- It is inside everyone to do something great and be part of something great– aspire them to be great and make the event they are involved with great.

Managing volunteers can feel like you're juggling. It's a busy, strategic role. But it is also an incredibly exciting, privileged and humbling role.

Treat your volunteers with excellence and you will get it back and finally say thank you - and say it a lot!

Links:

Volunteering Central: <http://www.volunteeringcentral.org.nz/>

Volunteering New Zealand: <http://www.volunteeringnz.org.nz/>

Volunteer Local: <http://www.volunteerlocal.com/>

Better Impact: <http://www.betterimpact.com/>

SEEK Volunteer: <https://seekvolunteer.co.nz/>

Volunteer Net: <https://volunteernet.org.nz/>

Do Good Jobs: <https://dogoodjobs.co.nz/>