

Designing Volunteer Roles

Successful volunteer roles are designed with both the organisation and the volunteer in mind. While it's important to think about the tasks you need completed, it's equally important to consider what volunteers are looking for too.

Start with the outcome, not the task

Traditional volunteer roles are often designed around what the organisation has always needed. Rather than asking, "What have volunteers always done here?" ask yourself:

- What are we trying to achieve?
- What skills do we need?
- Could this be done differently?
- Does it need to be one role, or could it be broken into smaller opportunities?
- Could someone complete this remotely or on a flexible schedule?

Sometimes redesigning a role can make it more appealing, accessible and achievable.

Think beyond traditional volunteering

People volunteer in many different ways, and not everyone can commit to volunteering every week.

Consider offering opportunities that are:

- Flexible or choose-your-own-hours
- Short-term or seasonal
- Project-based
- One-off event roles
- Remote or online
- Skills-based
- Micro-volunteering (small tasks that can be completed in an hour or two)

Offering a variety of opportunities allows more people to get involved.

Design for different volunteer journeys

Not every volunteer is looking for a long-term commitment, and that's okay.

Many people volunteer while studying, looking for work, changing careers, or settling into a new community. Others may only be available for a few weeks or months before moving on to employment, further study or other commitments.

Consider creating opportunities that:

- Have a defined start and finish.
- Focus on a specific project or outcome.
- Help volunteers build skills and confidence.
- Can easily be handed over to someone else.

By designing roles for different stages of people's lives, you'll open your organisation to a much wider pool of volunteers.

Design around skills, not just time

Instead of asking "Who can volunteer every Tuesday morning?", think about the skills your organisation needs. Volunteers bring a wealth of professional knowledge and lived experience that can add real value to your organisation.

Examples include:

- Report or funding application writing
- Research and data collection
- Social media and content creation
- Photography, Graphic design, Website
- IT support, Administration, Event planning
- Governance and committee roles
- Mentoring or coaching
- Gardening and maintenance
- Translation or proofreading
- Creating resources or training materials

Don't underestimate the skills people are willing to share when given a meaningful opportunity.

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Think about what volunteers want

People volunteer for different reasons. Some want to give back to their community, while others are looking to meet people, develop new skills, gain work experience or support a cause they care about.

The best volunteer roles offer one or more of the following:

- A meaningful contribution
- Flexibility
- Opportunities to learn or use skills
- Social connection
- Clear expectations
- Appropriate training and support
- Recognition and appreciation

Design your roles with the volunteer experience in mind—not just the tasks that need doing.

Keep roles clear and achievable

Avoid creating "super volunteer" roles with long lists of responsibilities. Instead:

- Clearly define the purpose of the role.
- Focus on the key tasks.
- Be realistic about the time commitment.
- Explain the impact the volunteer will make.
- Review roles regularly to ensure they continue to meet your organisation's needs.

Well-designed roles are easier to recruit for, easier to manage, and more rewarding for volunteers.



What the research tells us A changing volunteer landscape

The Volunteering New Zealand State of Volunteering Report 2024 highlights that the way people volunteer is changing.

Organisations that adapt their volunteer roles are more likely to attract and retain volunteers.

Key findings include:

- **People have less time to volunteer.**
Many volunteers now prefer shorter, more flexible opportunities rather than ongoing weekly commitments.
- **Volunteers are motivated by purpose.**
People want to contribute to causes that align with their values and make a meaningful difference.
- **Learning matters.**
Many volunteers are looking to develop skills, gain experience or build confidence, particularly students and people seeking employment.
- **Time is the biggest barrier.**
Flexible, project-based and micro-volunteering opportunities can make volunteering more accessible for busy people.
- **Recognition and support are important.**
Volunteers are more likely to stay engaged when they feel welcomed, valued and supported by the organisation.

What this means for your organisation

Think beyond traditional volunteer roles. By offering a variety of flexible, meaningful opportunities that match people's skills, interests and availability, you'll attract a broader range of volunteers and create a stronger volunteer programme.