

Engaging young volunteers

Across Queensland, thousands of young people volunteer their time, skills and enthusiasm in activities as diverse as chatting online to people who need help, planting trees for regeneration projects or fundraising for charities. This information sheet aims to provide organisations with ideas and tips on how to tap into young people as future volunteers.

Who are they?

Young people are generally defined as being between 12 and 25 years of age. In Queensland, this equates to approximately 19 per cent of the population or 761 000 young people. Young people represent the fastest growing group of volunteers in Australia.

Why involve young people in your organisation?

Young people can bring enthusiasm, energy, creativity and flexibility to an organisation. If your organisation works with young people, in any way, young volunteers can value add to your services by bringing a youth perspective through new ideas, theories and knowledge. They will also help bridge the gap between generations.

Engaging with young people also allows your organisation to plan for the future and help to prevent your volunteer base from shrinking over time, as the ageing of the population begins to affect the ways in which people volunteer.

Having young people in your organisation contributes to the future of volunteering and the community — people who start volunteering early tend to continue to volunteer for the rest of their lives.

Why do young people get involved?

Young people want to volunteer. Research shows the main reasons include:

- to reach out and really make a difference to others
- to obtain new skills, particularly ones that can be included on a CV or demonstrate experience in a particular field
- to have fun and meet new people.

What changes can your organisation make?

It is important for your organisation to accept young volunteers on an equal basis. The following changes will make your organisation more appealing to young people:

- Be more flexible. Can work practices be updated to accommodate young people? Can you do things outside of normal working hours? Could you use the Internet more effectively?
- Ensure that policies and practices are not discriminatory. Can you abolish age limits by changing the kind of activities available?
- Reassess your volunteering programs with young people in mind. How would they change if young people were involved? How could they be done differently? Do you have any projects that specifically target young people?



- Don't assume what young people can or can't do — think of what they could achieve if they had adequate support and mentoring. Do you have young people in decision-making roles? How could you include them effectively? Think about how you can use their knowledge and life experience.
- Listen to what young people have to say and help them build upon their ideas.

Tips for finding and keeping young volunteers

Following these tips will help your organisation to find and keep young volunteers:

- Be strategic with your advertising:
 - Identify the benefits associated with your volunteering opportunity — it may be a reference, something to add to their CV, training, meeting new people or learning new skills.
 - Try to offer reimbursement for travel expenses, social occasions or other incentives.
 - Use youth-friendly language, such as 'retail experience' instead of 'shop duties' or 'marketing experience' instead of 'fundraising'.
 - Think about where you look for young volunteers. Are you tapping into youth markets?
 - Could you find new places to advertise your opportunities, like university campuses or music magazines?
 - Talk to local schools and education and training institutes — they often look for volunteering opportunities for students.
- Make it easy for young people to get involved and be flexible about the timing of their involvement. Remember, many young people are juggling work and study or work in more than one job, so they may need to adjust their volunteering hours as their study or work commitments change.
- Look for a shorter commitment from young people, such as project-based tasks.
- Get your young volunteers to help evaluate the program to improve and develop it — they are your most relevant resource.
- Don't forget to check that your insurance policy covers younger volunteers.
- Acknowledge your volunteers — people don't know they are doing a good job unless you tell them.

Quick links

www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au

www.actnow.com.au

www.ampersand.org.au

www.ourcommunity.com.au

www.volqld.org.au

www.volunteeringaustralia.org

Further information

Contact the Office for Volunteering on 13 13 04 or volunteering@communities.qld.gov.au

Acknowledgment

The information contained in this fact sheet is based on consultation undertaken with young Queenslanders, as well as a range of publications from Volunteering Queensland, Volunteering Australia and Our Community.