

Involving over 50s as volunteers

Whether it's through the arts, social welfare, education, or health, Queensland benefits enormously from the generous input of volunteers aged 50 and over. This information sheet aims to provide organisations with ideas and tips for how to tap into this growing group of skilled and experienced volunteers.

Who are they?

People over 50 years of age make up approximately 30 per cent of the Queensland population¹. Although the rates of volunteering for this age group may be lower than other age groups, generally over 50s contribute significantly more hours per week to volunteering than other ages.

Why involve the over 50s in your organisation?

The ageing of the population means that not only are more people living longer, they are also maintaining higher levels of health and wellbeing. People over 50 years of age are more likely to give their time regularly and consistently and remain committed to an organisation.

People who have retired from paid work or finished child rearing are looking for ways to participate in their communities. Older people are particularly interested in using their existing skills to contribute to society. Involving people over 50 in your organisation will give your organisation increased access to a wide range of experience and skills.

There is a predicted decrease in the numbers of volunteers for organisations that have traditionally relied on younger volunteers, such as sporting and educational organisations. Recruiting volunteers who are 50 and above is a way for your organisation to maintain their volunteer base into the future.

Why do people aged over 50 get involved?

People aged 50 and over volunteer for different reasons including²:

- to help others or the community
- personal satisfaction and enjoyment
- a transition from work into retirement
- new skills and new experiences
- to meet people and remain active in the community.

This age group is looking for flexible volunteering opportunities that can combine with lifestyle factors such as work, looking after grandchildren, retirement and travelling.

What changes can your organisation make?

Organisations can no longer rely on traditional methods of attracting older volunteers. The following changes will make your organisation more appealing to people aged 50 and above:

- Ensure that policies and practices are not discriminatory. Can you abolish age limits by changing the kind of activities available?
- Be more adaptable. Look at your programs and see if they are flexible in terms of the length of the activity or where it can be done. Could your organisation tailor volunteer activities to suit individual capabilities?



- Think about trends such as family volunteering, corporate volunteering or volunteering online to take advantage of people making the transition from work to retirement.
- Don't make assumptions about the interests or abilities of older people. Though they may not always be looking for something to put on their resumé (though of course, they could be) they are still open to learning new skills, not to mention putting old ones into practice. Don't forget that most senior executives now fall into the 50-plus age bracket.

Tips for attracting older volunteers

Following these tips will help your organisation to attract older volunteers:

- Make the benefits of the volunteering activity clear in any recruitment or marketing material.
- Emphasise the opportunity to meet new people as well as make a difference to the community. Volunteering is a good way to develop new social networks, which is particularly important to people who may be making the transition to retirement.
- Don't forget to clarify any reimbursement of costs particularly for travel since this can be a key factor for many people making the transition from work to retirement, as well as those who are already retired.
- People in this age group value social contact — make yourself available to talk face to face and avoid the assumption that everyone has computers and Internet access.
- Consider new avenues for finding older volunteers such as professional groups and social clubs. Don't forget to consider local newspapers and radio for advertising your opportunities.
- Offer time-limited projects. Consider tasks that could be undertaken in shorter periods of time.
- Get your older volunteers to help evaluate the program to improve and develop it — they are your most valuable resource.
- Don't forget to check that your insurance policy covers volunteers aged 50 and above.
- Acknowledge your volunteers — people don't know they are doing a good job until someone tells them.

Quick links

www.getinvolved.qld.gov.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 older Queenslanders, as well as a range of publications from Volunteering Queensland, Volunteering Australia and Our Community.

1. *ABS Census 2006*.

2. *Older People and Volunteering*, Zoe Gill, 2005.