



Royal Agricultural Society

Tip Sheet: Effective Recruitment and Retention of Volunteers

Recruitment

Recruiting volunteers should follow the same process as securing full-time employees: application, screening, interview and offer. You could consider approaching your local Volunteer Centre who can post volunteer adverts for you. Find your local centre [here](#).

Another opportunity to explore, is advertising your volunteer roles (which is free of charge for not for profits) on Seek Volunteer. [Here](#) is their website.

Another website that you can use to advertise and recruit volunteers is Do Good Jobs. You'll find their website [here](#).

Research insights

- Insight from the State of Volunteering Report 2022 (which you can read from mid-December 2022 [here](#)) reveals that 52% of people found out about their volunteer role via 'word of mouth'. Could you ask your existing volunteers to each shoulder tap someone they know to encourage them to volunteer?
- For those aged under 35, 58% found out about their volunteering through a social media post/advertisement. Consider filming your volunteers talking to the camera about why they volunteer and what impact it's having. Short, positive video's 30-60 seconds long. Try different platforms – Facebook, Tik Tok etc.
- Based on the 'word of mouth' insight, consider creating an 'asking strategy' for your members, where your existing volunteers are encouraged to recruit a friend to join them volunteering. You could run an annual volunteer recruitment campaign (for example calling it 'Refer a friend') based on this approach. You could run it during [National Volunteer Week](#) to increase visibility.
- Invest some time in reading the 'GIVERS Framework'. This is a resource aimed at helping you recruit and retain the volunteers you need. It's over 100 pages but there is also a useful 2-page summary. You can view and download both resources for free [here](#).

Recruitment insights

- If you're looking to recruit from a particular demographic in your volunteer pool (e.g., more women, young people) find volunteers that reflect that demographic(s) and create footage of them talking to the camera about why they volunteer and what impacts it's having. When people see themselves reflected in your volunteers, you're more likely to appeal to them and recruit them.

- When writing your volunteer advert, items to consider are:
 - Be short, snappy, and personalised where possible.
 - Be friendly and positive.
 - Include role descriptions that outline time commitments.
 - Emphasise any areas of personal development that you can offer (e.g., writing grant applications, public speaking, leadership skills).
 - Promote your causes – community, social cohesion, supporting the industry (go back to your mission statement if you have one).
 - Explain clearly how the volunteer work will assist with the cause.

 - Don't underestimate the power of storytelling. For your volunteer recruitment video's, remember that *the people you introduce should reflect the people you want more of*.
 - Form partnerships – forming partnerships could double the results with half a much work. As you often only need volunteers for a few shifts a year – that takes a lot of effort to recruit year-over-year. So why not partner up with another volunteer organisation in a similar industry and combine your efforts for a targeted recruitment strategy. Alternatively, you may be able to partner with a sports team, school or community group, offering them incentives to encourage a reciprocal partnership.
 - Connect with corporate volunteers. There's been a huge increase in corporate volunteering as part of corporate social responsibility initiatives. More often than not, corporate volunteers are given one day (or sometimes up to a week) of charitable leave to volunteer with an organisation of their choice. Make sure your organisation is front of mind by connecting with the HR Manager at businesses in your area for volunteer opportunities and sharing more about the sorts of opportunities or tasks volunteers could get to help with. While these may only be one day initially, if the volunteer connects with your mission (and has a great time volunteering!), it may turn into a long-term engagement where they may choose to continue volunteering outside of working hours.
 - Have you considered recruiting virtual volunteers? A virtual volunteer can work from home to complete tasks in administration, IT, marketing, graphic design, and fundraising. And being virtual they could be based anywhere in New Zealand or the world. Note that [Seek Volunteer](#) allows you to advertise for online or remote volunteers as well as in person volunteers.
 - Advertise at schools and universities. Students know volunteering is a great way to create networks, gain job skills and build up a CV, so make sure they know you would love to welcome them onto you volunteer team. Hang posters around campus, speak to the administration team about advertising in the newsletter or on their website, or participate in recruitment fairs/expos to reach students. If you already have a few student supporters, even better. Ask them to become your ambassadors and recruit their fellow students! Make sure student volunteers know the benefits they'll receive, such as a character reference for future employment, a LinkedIn recommendation, discounts, class credits or free merchandise.
 - Sports teams and clubs are a fantastic place to find new volunteers. Athletes are fit and healthy, committed and already work well as a team. Speak to local teams about specific opportunities or tasks you need volunteers for. You may even offer something in return, such as a donation to help buy new training gear or a BBQ at their next home game.
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Retention

Onboarding insights

- Make a good first impression - Onboarding or training sessions for volunteers is vital. The bare minimum you should be doing for new volunteers is to make them feel welcome, give them some background information about your event, give them a task description and explain how their time helps your cause.
- Give new volunteers a tour of the facilities/area they'll be working in. Introduce them to another volunteer (or key person) they can go to for help. A handout that summarises everything you've told them in case they forget is always helpful.
- Always positively represent yourself to volunteers. When a volunteer arrives, you and your colleagues should go into customer service mode. Even if you are run off your feet, take the time to welcome and acknowledge the arrival of volunteers, thank them for their time and efforts. Think about the impression that you're giving volunteers – are you exuding positivity and passion? Are you proud of the event you represent?
- Make their effort worth their time. Remember...there are few things that people can give that are more valuable than their time. Make sure they know what they're doing and have enough to do. There's nothing worse than a volunteer standing around doing nothing, wasting their time. Work to ensure that volunteers are able to contribute in ways that they enjoy that utilise their skills. They are much more likely to come back if you do!
- Be as flexible as possible. Could you allow volunteers to create their own shifts that fit their lifestyle? Could you offer shorter-term opportunities? What about remote/virtual work for volunteers?

Recognition insights

- Fuel their passion. Could you spend more time inspiring volunteers about what your event does, why it's so important and how their volunteering helps fulfil the mission? Volunteers want to know that the time they spend directly impacts the lives of others in some way – and it does! Help them to see that.
- Give volunteers a boost. Ask your team to come up with some ways your organization can help volunteers learn new skills, boost their character, or broaden their experiences. Did you know that there are several things that you can do to impact a volunteer's career and future? That you can improve their reputation in their social circles and in your community at large?
- Show appreciation. You may be surprised at how many volunteers feel unappreciated or like their time didn't make a difference.
- Recognising and appreciating your volunteers will help you retain them. Ask your volunteers how they'd like to be recognised and appreciated. This will enable you to customise 'thank you's' that are welcomed and appropriate for your volunteers.

Volunteer Motivation Insights

- Take the time to get to know your volunteers. You never know what other opportunities this might open up for you and them. Relationships are so important. When you let your

volunteers know that you care about them, they'll begin to care about what you care about – your event!

- If you understand your volunteer's motivation for volunteering, you can ensure their motivations are met and improve retention. Do you have systems in place to ask volunteers questions to establish their motivations?

Insights for you to Consider Doing

- Get advice from others. Don't be afraid of reaching out to other organisations that work with volunteers at events - to share ideas, learn from each other, and build new relationships. This could be an organisation based in New Zealand (e.g., [Young Farmers](#)) or overseas (e.g. [Royal Agricultural Society New South Wales](#) or [Royal Agricultural Society of England](#)).
- Volunteer more yourself in or outside of the RAS. Engaging in volunteer opportunities on your own will help you to better empathize with your own volunteers and will give you a better idea of how to make them feel great and encourage them to return.