



Managing and upskilling volunteers

In this final chapter of our 3 Part series on Future proofing your volunteer program, we look at strategies to help you manage and upskill your volunteer workforce.

Ongoing management

Volunteer Managers hold the key to future opportunities for existing volunteers.

The Volunteer Manager role is the linchpin to the ongoing professional development, engagement and retention of existing Volunteers.

So try to:

- Link the goals of your volunteer to the strategic operations of your organisation. In your conversations, identify what it is the volunteer hopes to achieve and what they can contribute. Actively involving the volunteer in the operations of the workplace creates trust and shows you value their input.
- Schedule quarterly performance reviews so feedback can be shared by both parties. Most people when they start in a new role want to know how they are going and value the time you make to provide them with feedback. This provides you with an opportunity to nip any issues in the bud whilst allowing the volunteer the chance to modify their behaviour.
- Match a volunteer to the needs of your learners. Most organisations assess their learners' needs in some way and you can do the same with your volunteers. For example, you could match volunteers and learners who speak the same language or who have similar interests. This can also support your organisation to implement the values of diversity and inclusion.
- Make it a priority to communicate regularly through formal and informal channels. This will support the re-engagement of volunteers within your organisation. Schedule a "pulse check" with your volunteers to ask how they are going and how things can be improved.

**Top tip**

Getting to know your volunteers helps you to identify how you can best show your appreciation. Adjusting your recognition to each volunteer shows just how much you truly value them. Why not make it a celebration?

Listen to your volunteers

Listening to your volunteers will help you to make the program as successful as possible, and show that you value their time and input.

- Timetable both virtual and face to face volunteer meetings so you can meet with everyone. Plus, it's a great opportunity for the volunteers to connect with one another.
- Actively seek and listen to volunteer feedback. Apply their ideas where appropriate and always provide follow up feedback if an idea is not adopted.
- Involve the volunteers in co-design opportunities to improve the programs you offer.
- Create a feedback box for volunteers who may not feel comfortable in sharing their thoughts in an open forum.
- Using the volunteer feedback, create a new vision or way of engaging with the volunteers. Tap into their thoughts, feelings, knowledge and skills to help you create a sustainable volunteer program.

Digital tools to help you manage your program

Volunteer management software can help increase your flexibility.

This allows you to work remotely when needed, whilst providing you with the time to listen and respond to the changing needs of your volunteer workforce.

If your budget doesn't allow for special software, think about how free or your existing digital tools can be used for this purpose. Just check the security credentials of the platform you choose before storing any personal, confidential or identifiable volunteer details.

Online collaboration tools can also help you to manage your volunteers and inform them about what is happening in the organisation, especially if they are working remotely or are part time. This could include your organisation's intranet, giving volunteers video call links to join staff meetings remotely, or even online project management tools or to do lists to help them to know what to work on next.

Upskilling

Information gained from the performance review will help you to identify, plan and seek out opportunities to upskill your volunteer workforce.

- Consider both formal and informal learning opportunities to develop their potential. On the job informal learning should never be underestimated. Volunteers can learn a lot from each other through discussions, observations, watching videos and reading literature. New volunteers may be able to shadow an existing volunteer for the first couple of weeks to learn more about the role.
- Some volunteers may need support to keep up with the technology being used in your organisation. You don't want to lose great volunteers because they can't access your new systems! Include volunteers in your digital skills programs to gain confidence and online safety tips. Plus, include your volunteers in any digital upskilling plans you have for your paid workforce.
- Explore other courses beyond the Be Connected resources your digital mentors and volunteers can complete, to then share their knowledge and support with other learners.
- Volunteers are often the ideal role models for other volunteers who are at the beginning of their volunteering journey. Talk to your volunteers to find out who would be interested in acting as a role model and cross check this with the performance reviews and feedback from staff and learners. Then find ways they can assist you to mentor others. It will help to free up some of your time and provide a boost to the volunteer who is the role model. Essentially it is an excellent engagement strategy!
- Consider asking your role model volunteers to develop an ongoing buddy system to assist with the onboarding, induction and upskilling process of new volunteers.

Future proofing your volunteer program

This resource is Part 3 of a three part series on Future proofing your volunteer program for organisations in Good Things Foundation's national digital inclusion network.

Also in the series:

- [Planning volunteer recruitment](#)
- [Promoting and recruiting volunteers](#)

Further resources:

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- [Volunteering Australia](#) has a hub of helpful resources for people who manage volunteers.
 - [Digital mentor library | Good Things Foundation](#) to upskill and support digital mentors and program coordinators.