

There is a misconception in volunteering circles that young people are not interested or involved in volunteering. In fact, young people (aged 16 to 24 years old) are a growing volunteer base. According to the ABS statistics (2000) the biggest growth area in volunteering was young people. There was an increase in participating 18-24 year olds from 16.6% to 26.8% between 1995 and 2000.<sup>1</sup>

[www.govolunteer.com.au](http://www.govolunteer.com.au), Australia's first national not-for-profit volunteer-matching website, attracts approximately 14,000 young people (under the age of 24) every month.

Here are a few hints for organisations looking to attract young volunteers to help their organisation:

### **What Young People Can Offer:**

- Energy
- Enthusiasm
- A fresh perspective and new ideas on how your organisation can do things
- Skills and abilities in particular 'new' skills - especially in IT
- A 'young person's' point of view
- A way of ensuring the future of volunteering within your organisation by bringing a younger generation of volunteers in to help and thus a way to help sustain your organisation into the future.
- The opportunity to involve your existing staff/volunteers in training and mentoring new volunteers.

### **Why Young People Get Involved:**

- Skill acquisition – job skills, communication skills, personal and professional development
- To gain experience – especially to be able to add to their CV or to gain a written/verbal reference
- To have fun
- To meet new people
- To experience new challenges
- To gain satisfaction from doing something to make a difference to the world we live in.

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<sup>1</sup> The ABS Statistics do not collect information about people under 18 years of age.

### Attracting Young People to your Organisation:

- Use [www.govolunteer.com.au](http://www.govolunteer.com.au), a FREE not-for-profit volunteer-matching website – 14,000 people, each month, under the age of 24, visit GoVolunteer keen to contribute to their community.
- Market your position with young people in mind – think of the image that you are portraying about your organisation – would this be the kind of organisation that young people would be interested in helping?
- List ‘what’s in it for them’ – it maybe a reference, something to add to their CV, training, meeting new people, personal satisfaction, helping a cause they believe in or learning new skills – spell it out so they know what they can get out of helping your organisation.
- If you have benefits or particulars to your organisation that provide an added benefit – then tell them in your advertisement. E.g. reimbursements for travel expenses, monthly get-togethers for staff and volunteers, lunchtime walks in the park etc.
- Think creatively about your volunteer roles – divide tasks into ‘projects’ and think about which tasks could be done by a team of young volunteers.
- Be flexible about the timing of involvement – some young people may need to regularly change the day that they help to fit in with their other commitments. Remember, many young people are juggling work and study or work in more than one job, so may need to adjust their volunteering hours as their study or work commitments change.
- Look for shorter commitment – more project-based tasks.
- Make it easy for young people to get involved – Minimise the screening/induction process e.g. from the email that you receive from GoVolunteer expressing interest, reply as soon as possible (Remember it is the age of instant communication!) Invite the volunteer in so that you can meet them and tell them more about the position – if you are happy that they can perform the role and they are still interested in helping you – then set a time for them to start!
- Make your job description sound interesting – don’t start a gardening position description with “Weeding” start it with “Enjoy the Outdoors!”
- Don’t forget to check that your Volunteer Insurance policy covers your younger volunteers.
- Involve young people in evaluating the program to improve and develop it.

### Examples of Youth-friendly Projects & Youth-Friendly Language:

- Dog-walking – they may only need to commit to an hour a week
- Planting trees – they can see instant results
- Novelty fun fundraising activities – eg National Board Shorts Day
- Painting fishes on drains to remind people that what we put down the drain goes into our rivers
- “Office skills, get real life experience!” – instead of asking for ‘Admin Volunteers’
- Computer tutors to teach older people about computers and the Internet
- ‘Retail Experience’ – instead of ‘Op Shop Volunteer’
- Marketing volunteers to assist in brochure distribution
- Lifesaving on the beaches
- Sailing or ten-pin bowling with someone with a disability.

### Retaining Young Volunteers:

- Show appreciation and recognise your volunteers – value their contribution.
- Give feedback and get (and listen to!) feedback
- Give volunteers ownership/responsibility of a particular project – give them leadership/decision-making opportunities
- Provide on-the-job training
- Provide clear job descriptions
- Enable your volunteers to have input into the planning phase
- Allow your volunteers to develop their roles in areas that are of particular interest to them
- Include them as part of your team – ensure they meet everyone and feel welcome
- Introduce volunteers to each other – foster relationships
- People make mistakes, and so can volunteers! Don’t undercut your volunteer’s confidence – look at mistakes as learning exercises.
- Be flexible – ensure your volunteers know that you are prepared to adjust their volunteer work to suit their schedules.

### What Discourages Young People:

- Poor organisation of the task, orientation within the organisation or supervision of the volunteer
- Unsatisfying jobs
- Unclear job tasks
- Being talked down to
- Lack of feedback
- Lack of recognition.