

Volunteers are the heart and soul of community sports organisations. It is an organisation's volunteers who transform a simple game into a vibrant community event. But attracting volunteers isn't just about asking for help and hoping that people put up their hands. It's about building relationships, fostering trust and tapping into people's intrinsic motivations.

## Why do people volunteer?

Everyone who volunteers does so for one reason: people volunteer because they want to. While there are different motivations that make people want to volunteer, for example they may seek to make a difference in their sport, build skills, help their children or enhance professional opportunities, the reason they volunteer is always because they want to volunteer, to fulfil their feeling of motivation. The key to attracting volunteers is understanding people's personal motivations and creating an environment where they can feel fulfilled.

While it's true that not everyone will volunteer, every volunteer's journey is unique. According to Volunteering Queensland, the number of people who volunteer exclusively in volunteer-involving organisations could be as low as 14.1%. Rather than seeing this as a limitation, view it as an opportunity to focus on those who are genuinely interested in volunteering.

## The power of friendship

Building friendships is the cornerstone of attracting volunteers. As a committee member, your role is not just to do every job that comes up, but to be an ambassador for the organisation. This means prioritising connection over tasks. Attracting more volunteers begins with getting out there, meeting people and building relationships.

Remember, everyone joins and volunteers for your organisation because they are driven by a shared love of the sport, whether it's their own passion or their children's. Use this as a starting point to have conversations with new people to build friendships. Over time, these friendships can translate into a willingness to volunteer, as people naturally want to help their friends and the organisations they care about.

Volunteer recruitment events are designed to attract and recruit individuals to become volunteers. They are also an opportunity to celebrate and recognise current volunteers.

Ideas for running volunteer recruitment events:

1. Strategically time the event when there will already be a large attendance (for example, after an important game/event, awards night or fundraiser)
2. Current volunteers can share their experiences, acting as testimonials for potential recruits
3. Prepare brochures or information packets detailing various roles, time commitments, and benefits of volunteering.
4. After the event, send a thank-you note to all attendees and initiate further engagement with those who expressed interest.

## Asking for help

When you have made friends and built relationships with members in your organisation, you will be more comfortable asking for help. When you do, it's important to do it personally, politely, transparently and with plenty of advance notice. This means asking face-to-face, being polite and positive about the role, and giving a clear and honest appraisal of what the position requires and the time commitment involved.

## The principles of influence

Attracting volunteers is about understanding and applying some well-known principles of influence. These include:

**Liking:** People are more likely to say 'yes' to people they like. By building genuine relationships and friendships, you increase the likelihood of people wanting to volunteer to help you out. This principle underscores the importance of being a friendly, approachable and trustworthy representative of your organisation.

**Reciprocity:** People are more likely to help those who have helped them. By building friendships and helping others through your volunteer efforts, you increase the likelihood of them volunteering in return.

**Commitment and Consistency:** People like to be consistent with their past actions. By getting people involved in small ways initially, they are more likely to commit to larger roles later.

**Social Proof:** People are influenced by what others do. By showcasing your current volunteers and their positive experiences, you can encourage others to get involved.

## Strategies to attract volunteers and build a volunteer-friendly organisation

Attracting volunteers is about creating an environment where people feel valued, understood and excited to contribute. Here are some strategies to try:

- Provide detailed job descriptions to help potential volunteers grasp their responsibilities. Highlight where they can contribute and specify the estimated time commitment, including any events or meetings they would be expected to attend
- Present volunteer opportunities in a manner that appeals to your community. Emphasise the positive impact of the role and its value to the community. Remember to appreciate your current volunteers; framing a need for more help as a crisis might inadvertently diminish their efforts
- Share success stories. Let your current volunteers do the talking. Share their insights and experiences to inspire potential volunteers

# Attracting volunteers

- Show your volunteers that they are valued. This could involve anything from personal thanks and recognition at events, providing training and education opportunities, to giving personal recommendations on their social media profiles
- Create a welcoming and inclusive environment, making sure your organisation is a place where volunteers feel valued and supported. This includes helping volunteers find meaning in their work and providing opportunities for growth

**Empower your volunteers with training and education. As they gain skills, they become more confident and enjoy their roles, leading to improved performance. This enjoyment fuels further commitment, creating a cycle of growth and dedication. Investing in education is about more than just skill acquisition; it's about nurturing motivated, effective and ever-evolving volunteers. Remember, a well-trained volunteer doesn't just excel once; they continue to grow and thrive.**

## Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation

In the realm of volunteering, a genuine, self-driven desire to contribute often yields the most sustained and impactful outcomes. While extrinsic motivation incentives, such as meal vouchers or organisation merchandise, can spark initial interest, they might not always nurture long-term commitment. Similarly, subtle forms of 'guilting' people into volunteering, like implying negative outcomes if they don't volunteer, may produce short-term gains, but they usually don't foster a sustainable volunteering spirit.

Recognise that everyone's situation is unique. Some people are pressed for time, have restrictive work schedules or face financial challenges. Always be understanding and flexible, acknowledging these realities without making individuals feel obliged.

While intrinsic motivation is at the heart of genuine volunteerism, extrinsic incentives can occasionally be effective tools. When using them, it's essential to remember:

- Tailor incentives to individual preferences; one size doesn't fit all
- Incentives can be experiences, recognition or opportunities, not just physical gifts
- Give incentives promptly, close to the act being rewarded
- Ensure incentives complement, not overshadow, the genuine appreciation and relationship-building you prioritise
- Regularly check in with volunteers to gauge how incentives are received

Remember, incentives should support, not replace, the focus on intrinsic motivation and relationship-building.

Some organisations have explored the 'volunteer levy' system - an upfront fee that's reimbursed once a member completes a designated amount of volunteer work. While the idea is to incentivise people to volunteer to get their money back or opt to pay more to not volunteer, it is rarely effective. In reality, it can conflict with the organisation's values and unintentionally suppress the intrinsic motivation to volunteer.

Ultimately, the goal is to inspire volunteers from a place of genuine interest and commitment. Organisations should focus on intrinsic

motivation like building strong relationships, understanding individual motivations and cultivating an environment where the act of volunteering becomes its own reward. Remember, while rewards and recognition are very valuable, they work best when they amplify the intrinsic value of volunteering.

## A note on volunteer retention

Once you've attracted volunteers to your organisation, the next crucial step is ensuring they stay committed and engaged for the long term. It's essential to make volunteers feel valued, emphasising genuine appreciation over material tokens. The strategies discussed in *building a volunteer-friendly organisation* also apply to retaining volunteers. Organisations should consider strategies like conducting regular feedback sessions, allowing growth opportunities and hosting social events to foster connections among volunteers. Additionally, providing avenues for skill development is a great way to retain volunteers, as it acknowledges their contributions and offers them opportunities to grow. Embracing these strategies ensures volunteers remain committed to the organisation's values and mission. Effective retention enhances community spirit within the organisation and saves valuable resources otherwise spent on continuous recruitment.

## Embrace flexible volunteering approaches

Gone are the days of one-size-fits-all volunteering. Embrace flexibility! Consider shared roles, introduce 'assistant' positions or get creative with non-traditional formats and ways to volunteer. As long as the rules are upheld, the possibilities are endless. Adapt and thrive!

Here are some questions to consider as you create innovative volunteering strategies:

- Are there digital tools you could use to allow volunteers to assist from a distance, such as managing your online presence or planning virtual events?
- Can you break down roles into micro-tasks - smaller tasks that allow for short-burst contributions, perfect for those with limited time?
- Are you tapping into the specific skills of your members, such as graphic design or grant writing, even if just for one-off projects?
- Have you thought about rotating roles among various volunteers, including leadership roles, to diversify input, share experiences and inspire future leaders?
- Can you create family-friendly volunteering opportunities, turning organisation activities into bonding experiences?
- Are you making the most of volunteers who might only be able to assist during big events or tournaments?

Attracting volunteers is about more than just asking for help. It's about building relationships, understanding motivations and creating an environment where people want to get involved. By focusing on these principles, you can attract and retain a dedicated team of volunteers who are passionate about your organisation and your sport.

**Remember, every volunteer brings value to your organisation. They contribute their time, skills and energy, enhancing community engagement and expanding your organisation's reach. So celebrate your volunteers, as they are the ones who turn sports organisations into thriving community hubs.**