



Volunteer guide

Your guide to why and how you can volunteer,
and your rights and responsibilities



Welcome

Whether this is your first go at volunteering or you're seeking a new role, this handbook will help you get the most from your experience.

Most of us volunteer in some way either formally or informally. Communities with this widespread active participation remain inviting places in which to live and work.

In this guide, you'll find ideas about how to look for a volunteer role that suits you. It will help you work out how to start and sort through the myriad of options available.

Your host organisation and group is responsible for making sure you are safe and happy in your role. As well, you must play your part through committing and contributing to them. It pays to look around for the right fit.

Volunteering Victoria wishes you all the best in whatever role you choose. Along with the network of volunteering support available around the state, we too are here to help ensure that volunteering is an enjoyable, satisfying part of your life.

Sue Noble

CEO, Volunteering Victoria

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About Volunteering Victoria

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering. This means we assist volunteers and organisations who rely on volunteer support.

We help volunteers to find suitable positions and provide information and advice on volunteering issues.

We support volunteers, volunteer managers and coordinators, and volunteer-involving not-for-profit and community organisations within Victoria.

We are a member-based, not-for-profit, non-government organisation funded by the state and federal governments. We also receive private funding and donations for specific programs.

Volunteer information service

Volunteering Victoria offers an information service for volunteers as part of what we do.

In this respect, we are one of many Volunteer Resource Centres (VRCs) around the state. At VRCs, information officers can:

- inform you on roles available within not-for-profit and community organisations around Victoria
- discuss your background, experience, areas of interest and the commitment you're willing to make
- provide advice on where to start.

To check on vacancies in or near your local area, go to one of the following websites:

www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au

www.govolunteer.com.au

www.volunteer.vic.gov.au

Volunteering – what is it?

Volunteering is an activity or project which takes place in volunteer-involving not-for-profit community organisations.

Volunteering:

- benefits the community and the volunteer
- means no financial payment – in a position not designated as paid
- occurs in the not-for-profit sector
- addresses human, environmental and/or social needs
- respects the rights, dignity and culture of others
- promotes human rights and equality.

Volunteering does not replace paid workers or constitute a threat to the job security of paid workers.

Volunteering is always a matter of choice.

Where to start?

Sometimes people ‘fall into’ volunteering, but sometimes people make a conscious decision to volunteer and then face the challenge of how to start.

1. **Decide** that you want to contribute to your community by helping in the not-for-profit sector.
2. **Think** about your skills and interests— which of these would you most like to use, improve or obtain in your volunteering activities?
3. **Contact** your local Volunteer Resource Centre or visit the Volunteering Victoria website: www.volunteeringvictoria.org.au
4. **Read** about the various roles. **Choose** those you like.
5. **Contact** the organisation/s to indicate your interest. Find out how to apply for available volunteer positions.

Choosing a position

Look around for what you enjoy rather than putting on a pair of shoes that doesn’t fit (Tony, volunteer for Habitat for Humanity)

Seeking answers to these questions will help you decide on the best ‘fit’ or match.

Openness

Is the organisation a not-for-profit organisation?

Is there a written position description for the position?

Is the organisation willing to provide you with a volunteer policy explaining your rights?

Is the organisation willing to provide you with written information about itself?

Skills

Will the work maintain or develop your skills, if this is part of what you want from volunteering?

Will the organisation provide you with a reference, if you need one?

Support

Does the organisation have a Manager of Volunteers or other contact person to support and supervise volunteers?

Does it offer adequate training and orientation for you to perform your job?

Does it offer reimbursement for travel or money spent on behalf of the organisation?

Does the organisation have volunteer insurance to cover your out-of-pocket expenses following an injury during your work on behalf of the organisation?

Does the purpose of the organisation match your own values, beliefs and interests?

Volunteer rights and responsibilities

Volunteer rights

All volunteers have a right to:

- Orientation at your host organisation
- Recognition as a valued team member
- Clarification of your role (through your position description)
- Agreement about hours and conditions (through your volunteer agreement)
- Access to training to perform duties to the standard required
- Information and consultation on matters directly or indirectly affecting you and your duties
- Support and supervision in your role
- Adequate insurance cover and a healthy, safe work environment
- Awareness of the organisation's grievance procedure
- Reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses
- Freedom of choice (including refusing positions that may be filled by paid staff rather than volunteers)
- Holiday breaks
- Access relevant information about your host organisation, e.g. volunteer policies.

Volunteer responsibilities

All volunteers are expected to:

- Commit to their volunteer position
- Be punctual and reliable
- Notify in advance any changes to your availability
- Accept responsibility for your actions and behaviour
- Notify your host organisation of any potential hazards or dangerous situations
- Abide by your host organisation's volunteer policies
- Deal with complaints in the appropriate manner
- Respect the rights and privacy of others
- Carry out the duties listed in your volunteer position description, including training
- Support other team members and ask for support when needed
- Give advance notice before leaving their host organisation.

Unlike paid staff, volunteers are not covered by industrial awards.

Volunteering – things you should know

Checks and protection

Some community organisations screen potential staff and volunteers. Screening is a standard procedure that is used to protect volunteers, organisations and service users as well as check that your character and skills match the position.

The level of screening conducted reflects the level of risk and responsibility attached to each position. Standard checks include references, driving records, working with children and background/police checks.

Organisations have a duty of care to protect staff, volunteers and service users from harm. Organisations must honour this duty when choosing volunteers.

For some services, such as childcare, thorough screening of staff and volunteers is mandatory.

Confidentiality

Protecting privacy is essential for all organisations. To keep personal details private, staff and volunteers must comply with policies and procedures. Private information cannot be shared unless consent has been given by those involved.

You must:

- keep written information secure
- consider discussions as information given in confidence and not to be repeated
- report concerns to your volunteer supervisor.

Code of conduct

A code of conduct guides the organisation's responsible and ethical behaviour. Such a code must be consistent with legislative requirements.

A code of conduct may also reflect the philosophy of an organisation. Volunteers and staff will be expected to conduct themselves in a manner consistent with an organisation's philosophy.

Complaints and suggestions

Complaints

If you become unhappy in your role, alert the organisation. In such cases, you are encouraged to follow your host organisation's formal complaint or grievance procedure. Your concerns should be heard and action taken to remedy the issue.

Suggestions & criticism

If you become critical of an organisation, express this in a constructive way. Discuss this with your volunteer supervisor, perhaps suggesting an improvement to the situation.

Occupational Health and Safety (OH&S)

Both organisations and volunteers must look after the health and safety of all the participants in the workplace.

Accordingly, you must:

- follow health and safety instructions
- use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE)
- report any injuries or hazards noticed at the host organisation.

Volunteer agreements

A Volunteer agreement is a record of the requirements and expectations related to a volunteer position. It clearly states the organisation's expectations of volunteers.

Volunteer agreements include:

- title and expected duties of the volunteer position
- purpose of the volunteer position
- location and contact details of the host organisation
- time/s of work
- name/s of volunteer supervisor/s to whom the volunteer will be responsible.

Before accepting a volunteer position, make sure you understand the conditions outlined in the agreement.

Volunteering ... the benefits

Make a difference in your community

Marg from Bright uses her qualifications in fitness training to guide a woman with severe epilepsy through her weekly personal gym session. Says Marg, *'It's rewarding to work with people who thought gym was beyond them. She's stronger and happier.'*

Increase confidence

Try something new

John's first volunteer role at Fernlea House hospice was driving the bus but he's since found recording people's memories is a most satisfying way to pass the time. He sees it as a privilege to be involved in such an important part of life. *'We're all here for a limited amount of time and you make the most of it.'*

Maintain active involvement in your community

Learn more about your community

Have fun

Viva volunteers on the Ucan2 Program, which helps young refugees make the transition into Australian society. She says, *'We do a lot of activities and go on excursions as well. I'm getting to know my local area a bit more. There's something new and exciting every week.'*

Share your knowledge with others

Around the state, Habitat for Humanity builds houses for people on low incomes who commit to contributing to the build. **One of the volunteers is semi-professional builder Tony**, who says, *'Doing a nice job building a house is something I enjoy but best of all this house is the start of great things happening in the family's life.'*

Develop social links

Contribute to a cause you support

As a legal studies teacher and Bail Justice, Irene's got her head around the law. But a legal background isn't necessary to volunteer as an Independent Person at young people's police interviews. *'Our role is quite simple – to support and provide help.'*

Gain personal fulfilment

A group of women based around Alexandra have been volunteering together as part of the **Shire of Murrindindi's Early Intervention Program for preschool children with special needs**. Says one of the volunteers **Marg**, *'You've got to come because they're your children.'*

Maintain and develop skills

