



Volunteering and disability

A guide to volunteering for people living with disability

How to use these guidelines

These guidelines are written in the 'Dual Read' format. They are separated into two sections:

 'Unsupported Reading' and  'Supported Reading'.

The purpose of this format is to allow people who need help reading to read alongside another person through the 'Supported Reading' pages, or every even page.

Those who do not need help reading can follow the 'Unsupported Reading', or every odd page.

This format allows people who do not fully understand the content to ask the other person reading the guidelines to clear any misconceptions.

The content is the same in both styles.

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A guide to volunteering for people living with disability

Volunteering – what is it?

Volunteering is “time willingly given for the common good and without financial gain”. It comes in all shapes, kinds and forms, including:

- Helping out at the local football club.
- Fundraising in the neighbourhood.
- Assisting the elderly get involved in the community.
- Organising emergency services during natural disasters.

Volunteering:

- Benefits the community and the volunteer.
- Addresses human, environmental and/or social needs.
- Respects the rights, dignity and culture of others.
- Promotes human rights and equality.

Many organisations need volunteers and will be looking for people to help reach their goals. Formal volunteering involves an organisation developing a volunteering role and a person entering into a volunteer agreement with the organisation to fill that position. Volunteering should help both the volunteer and the organisation.

Volunteers are a crucial part of the workforce but they have different rights and responsibilities than other workers. Like paid workers, there are expectations for volunteers to be involved in the organisation in a meaningful and practical way. Volunteering should add value to the organisation.

Volunteering – why?

People volunteer for many reasons. The most common reasons are to:

- ✓ Make a difference in their community.
- ✓ Increase self-confidence.
- ✓ Try something new.
- ✓ Develop social links.
- ✓ Build professional skills.
- ✓ Help a cause you support.
- ✓ Gain self-fulfilment.
- ✓ Have fun.

Volunteering for people living with disability can be a fantastic way to be involved in the community.

Some volunteering can be done with a group of people. This can be a great way to get friends, families and work colleagues involved, strengthen relationships and meet new people.

Whatever your motivations there are many great reasons to get involved in the community through volunteering.

Your guide to volunteering

What is Volunteering?

There are many ways you can volunteer.

Volunteering can be:

- Helping others at the football club.
- Assisting the elderly.
- Assisting at the op shop.



Volunteering is not paid. Volunteering helps other people. Volunteers are involved in an organisation. Volunteering should be important to **you**.

Why Volunteer?

There are many reasons to volunteer. People volunteer because they want to:

- Learn new skills.
- Have fun.
- Make new friends.
- Help people in the community.



Volunteering can be more than one person. It can include friends and families. Volunteering can help you be a part of the community.

Before you start

You should ask yourself a few questions before you apply for a role. You should:

Ask yourself why you want to volunteer

Formal volunteering is a commitment. You are more likely to have a meaningful volunteering experience if you are clear about your reasons for volunteering.

If you are getting funding under the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS), volunteering can be an option. Discuss how to start getting involved in volunteering with your Local Area Coordinator or Support Coordinator. If you have a carer or support worker helping you, you should also discuss how they can be involved and what that means for you and your plan.

Remember that volunteering is your choice. Many people might suggest that you volunteer. Volunteering is good for everyone try but it is your right to decide whether or not to seek a volunteering position.

Examine what skills and interests you have

Different organisations will draw in different kinds of volunteers.

You should think about:

- What skills you have.
- What skills you want to build on.
- How you work best with others.

Also think about your hobbies and interests, such as:

- Writing.
- Photography.
- Membership in community clubs and societies.

You and the organisation should focus on what you *can do* and *have accomplished*, rather than what you cannot do. Making a list of your skills and interests can help find the kind of role and organisation you are looking for. You should look for organisations that value your knowledge and experience with disability.

After you have gone to a NDIS planning session with your Local Area Coordinator or Planning Coordinator, you should have a better idea of how you want to contribute.

Before you start

There are important questions you should ask yourself before you volunteer.

Do you want to volunteer?

Volunteering is only meaningful if **you choose** to volunteer.

If you are under the NDIS, you might want to pick volunteering as a goal. You can talk to your Local Area Coordinator or Support Coordinator to start.

If you have a carer or support worker, you should ask how they can be involved and what that means for your plan.

What skills and hobbies do you have?

You should **find** roles that interest you. Making a list of your skills and hobbies can help.

You should look for organisations that value your knowledge and your experiences with disability.

Focus on what you can do and what you have accomplished.



Find volunteer roles

Volunteer roles can be found in a number of different ways. You can:

- Use the internet to find roles posted online. Websites such as www.GoVolunteer.com.au allow you to filter for positions which are suitable for people with a disability and which have wheelchair access.
- Contact your local volunteer support organisation. Volunteer support organisations can help guide and support you in finding the right volunteering role. volunteeringvictoria.org.au/volunteering-support-in-my-area
- Find volunteering roles directly on the website of an organisation you support (not all organisations have volunteer positions posted).

Do some research on organisations which have volunteer positions to ensure their values align with your own values before making contact. If you cannot find a role that you like, check again at a later date. New roles become available all the time.

If you are being supported by the NDIS and one of your goals is to be more involved in the community through volunteering, it is still a good idea to find some roles that interest you. That way you can discuss what is out there and speed up the process. If you have a carer/support worker who can further assist you in volunteering, you should try finding a role that can accommodate both of you.

Contact the organisation

Once you have decided on a role, you should contact the organisation to express your interest. This may either be through an online application, calling them or visiting the organisation.

The way you express interest in a role depends on how you found the organisation and the role description. If you are funded under the NDIS, you may not have to contact the organisation yourself.

It is important to understand how the organisation is able to provide for you and your needs. If you have a carer or support worker, check to see how they will be involved in your time as a volunteer.

For example:

- Will they be considered a volunteer as well?
- Will they be supporting you and working as a volunteer at the same time?



Where will you find volunteer roles?

You can find volunteer roles on websites such as GoVolunteer. You can call or visit Volunteer Support Organisations for help.

Volunteer support organisations can help you find a good place to volunteer. If you do not find a role that you like, wait a bit longer. There are new roles all the time.

If you are under the NDIS, you should still look up volunteering roles. This way you know what you like and what is out there. There might be roles that can include both you and your carer or support worker.

How and when will you contact the organisation?

You can call organisations to show interest. You can visit organisations as well. Most organisations will ask you to apply for the role online.

If you are under the NDIS, you might not have to contact the organisation yourself.

You should check to see if the organisation can support you. You should check to see how your carer or support worker can be involved in your volunteering.



Once you start

Being Honest

From the very beginning of an interview, it is important that you have an honest and open conversation with your manager about your rights, responsibilities and expectations. It is your decision if you want to talk about your disability. This might be intimidating, however doing so can help protect you during your time volunteering. Talk about ways the organisation and your co-workers can support you as some people without experience with a disability might be afraid to ask. Your discussion should include possible risks and what emergency procedures are available to you.

As everyone's disability is unique, you will need to have an honest conversation about what the organisation can do to support you. The questions below may be relevant for you. Use the questions as prompts, you will likely have your own questions.

Once you start

Being honest

Have an honest talk about your role. It is your choice to talk about your disability. You do not have to talk if you do not want to.

Everyone's disability is different. You know more about your disability than anyone else. Talking about your disability can let the organisation know what they can do to support you. Asking questions can help both you and the organisation in helping you.

I am a...	Possible questions to ask
Person who is blind or with a visual impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Am I able to safely navigate and do my work as a volunteer within the workplace? If I have a support dog, will your organisation be able to support and provide for them?
Person who is deaf or with a hearing impairment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If the emergency procedure is an audio alarm, what other measures will be made available to me? How will I communicate with my colleagues?
Person who cannot walk, has trouble walking or uses a wheelchair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is your entire organisation wheelchair-friendly? This includes front entrance, bathrooms, emergency exits, etc. Can the work I do be done while sitting down? Can you provide an adjustable desk?
Person living with an intellectual disability, acquired brain injury and/or neurological disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If I don't understand the information, what changes can you make? How can you support me while I volunteer? Am I able to make complaints anonymously? Will my colleagues be trained in what to do should I have a seizure? If I have a carer/support worker, will I be able to have them with me while I'm volunteering?
Person living with mental health issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will I be given breaks to rest? Can you be flexible in my hours and working days?

I am a...	Possible questions to ask
Person who is blind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Am I able to safely walk around? If I have a support dog, will I be allowed to work with them?
Person who is deaf 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What emergency procedures are available for me? How will I talk to others?
Person who cannot walk, has trouble walking or uses a wheelchair	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Is your place wheelchair-friendly? This includes front entrance, bathrooms, emergency exits, etc. Can I sit down while doing my work? Is my desk adjustable?
Person living with an intellectual disability, acquired brain injury and/or neurological disability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> If I don't understand the information, what changes can you make? How can you support me while I volunteer? Am I able to make complaints anonymously? Will my colleagues be trained in what to do should I have a seizure? If I have a carer/support worker, will I be able to have them with me while I'm volunteering?
Person living with mental health issues	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Will I be given breaks to rest? Can you be flexible in my hours and working days?

Confidentiality

If you decide to tell your manager about your disability and you plan ways you can be better supported throughout volunteering, you may not be comfortable with your colleagues being aware of your disability and how it affects you. You have a right to keep the details of your personal information private. This choice is completely up to you and you are more than welcome to inform others of your personal circumstances, if you are comfortable doing so.

You may also need to use discretion. Your colleagues or manager may discuss sensitive or personal information with you. As a volunteer, you have certain responsibilities. You must:

- Keep written information secure.
- Not repeat sensitive information given to you, unless you've been given approval to do so.
- Report concerns to your volunteer supervisor.

Complaints, suggestions and criticism

If there are times where you have a disagreement with a colleague or have an issue with the organisation, tell your manager in a helpful way. You can do this by discussing with them possible suggestions that can help improve the situation. Your experience and knowledge of disability can be helpful in implementing better inclusive practices across the organisation.

In many cases you are protected from discrimination based on your disability. Organisations and your colleagues should not prevent you from volunteering because of your disability. Organisations should make reasonable adjustments for people with disability. Reasonable adjustments include adapting role requirements or duties, and implementing disability-friendly practices. Examples include:

- Getting larger computer screens.
- Allowing people to sit while they work.
- Installing wheelchair-friendly ramps.

While you should be given a volunteering role that suits your skills and interests, you should also be realistic about the kind of responsibilities you will be given. For example, if you are using a wheelchair, it is unlikely you will be given a role that requires reaching high places or using ladders. However, an open and constructive discussion with your manager may help you find a role in your organisation of choice that is both interesting and meaningful to you and the organisation. You might even develop innovative solutions to problems you thought made the role not an option.



What to do with Private Information

You have a right to privacy. You do not have to tell other volunteers or members about your disability.

When you are trusted with sensitive information, you must:

- Keep written information secure.
- Not repeat information unless you have permission.
- Tell your manager about any problems.

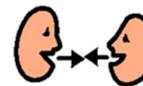


Giving suggestions

There may be times you disagree with a co-worker or do not like something the organisation does. Suggestions to your manager can improve the organisation. Your knowledge and lived experience is important and can improve the organisation.



You cannot be treated unfairly based on your disability. Organisations need to make doable changes for you. This can be adding a ramp if you are in a wheelchair.



You may not be allowed to do some jobs. This can be reaching high places if you are in a wheelchair. You **should talk with your manager** about what they can do for you

Working in a safe environment

Both organisations and volunteers must look after the health and safety of all participants in the workplace. The organisation must ensure their current emergency procedures are well-equipped to accommodate for you and your needs.

As a volunteer, you also have the responsibility of maintaining good practice. You must:

- Follow health and safety instructions.
- Use appropriate personal protective equipment (PPE).
- Report any injuries or hazards noticed at the organisation.

Volunteer Agreements

A Volunteer Agreement is a record of your requirements, rights, and responsibilities while you are volunteering. It outlines the organisation's expectations of volunteers.

Volunteer agreements generally will include:

- A title and expected duties of the volunteer position.
- The purpose of the volunteer position.
- The location and contact details of the organisation.
- Time/s of work.
- Name/s of volunteer supervisor/s to whom the volunteer will respond.

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

Entering into an agreement with an organisation that only fulfils parts of your wishes and cannot accommodate your needs will likely lead to a poor volunteering experience.

Working safely

Both you and the organisation need to make sure the place is safe to work in. The organisation needs to ensure that you can be safe during emergencies.

You have a responsibility to act safely. You must:

- Follow health and safety instructions.
- Use appropriate safety equipment.
- Report injuries or hazards you have seen.

Volunteer Agreements

A Volunteer Agreement is a record of:

- What you will be doing.
- What is expected of you.
- What is expected of the organisation.

Volunteer Agreements include:

- Title and tasks of the volunteer.
- Purpose of the volunteer.
- Address and contact details of the organisation.
- Time of work.
- Name of the manager whom the volunteer reports to.

You should understand the conditions of the agreement before accepting the role.

Accepting a role that does not fulfil all of your wishes will lead to a bad experience as a volunteer.

❏ Checks & Protection

Some community organisations screen potential staff and volunteers. Screening is a normal process that is used to protect volunteers, organisations and service users and ensure that your character and skills match the position. Standard checks include:

- References.
- Driving records.
- A Working with Children Check.
- A National Police Check.

Possible referees you can ask are:

- People in the community who know you and can vouch for you.
- Teachers, mentors or buddies.
- Employers or managers.

❏ Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct guides the organisation's responsible and ethical behaviour. It may also reflect the philosophy of an organisation. Volunteers and staff are expected to follow the Code of Conduct.

❏ Insurance

The organisation you volunteer for should have volunteer insurance to protect itself, its volunteers, paid staff, management committee, clients and customers against risk.

Work health and safety legislation requires organisations to organise personal accident and public liability insurance on behalf of their volunteer. These insurance arrangements are not your duty as a volunteer, however you may wish to confirm with the organisation that they have the appropriate insurance.

❏ Checks and Protection

Some organisations will check your background. This will make sure you can safely work with the organisation.

Some checks include:

- Referees.
- Working with Children Check.
- National Police Check.

Some referees that you can ask are:

- People in the community who know and like you.
- Teachers, mentors or buddies.
- Employers or managers.

❏ Code of Conduct

A Code of Conduct are special rules for the organisation. The Code of Conduct guides responsibility and good behaviour. You should follow the organisation's Code of Conduct.

❏ Insurance

Your organisation should organise insurance for you.

Volunteer – rights & responsibilities

Your rights and responsibilities

Volunteer Rights

Introduction to Organisation

- Orientation at your organisation.
- Clarification of your role and responsibilities.
- Awareness of the organisation’s grievance procedure.

Safety & Protection

- Adequate insurance cover and a healthy, safe work environment.
- Agreement about hours and conditions.
- Access to training to safely perform duties.
- Support and supervision in your role.

Understanding Information

- Access to relevant information about your organisation, such as volunteer policies.
- Information and support on matters directly or indirectly affecting you and your duties.

Supporting Volunteers

- Clarity on reimbursement for out-of-pocket expenses.
- Freedom to refuse tasks (if it can be done by a paid employee).
- Recognition as a valued team member.

Volunteer Responsibilities

Tasks

- Commit to their volunteer position.
- Be punctual and reliable.
- Notify in advance any changes to your availability.

Work Environment

- Accept responsibility for your actions and behaviour.
- Notify your organisation of any potential hazards or dangerous situations.
- Follow your organisation’s volunteer policies.
- Respect the rights and privacy of others.
- Carry out the duties listed in your volunteer position description, including training.

Supporting Others

- Deal with complaints in the appropriate manner.
- Support other team members and ask for support when needed.
- Give advance notice before leaving the organisation.

Your Rights

Introduction

- An introduction at your organisation.
- Understanding your work and what you have to do.
- Knowing how to make complaints.

Being Safe & Protected

- An agreement about hours and conditions.
- Training to perform your tasks.
- Support while you volunteer.
- Suitable insurance while you volunteer.
- A safe and healthy work environment.

Understanding Information

- Access to information important to you about your organisation.
- Being given information that can affect you.

Supporting Volunteers

- Refunds for costs you pay for yourself.
- The choice to say no to tasks that can be done by paid staff.
- Recognising and celebrating your work.
- Holiday breaks.

Your Responsibilities

Tasks

- Committing to your volunteering role.
- Arriving on time at your organisation.
- Letting your organisation know about changes to your availability.

Work Environment

- Accepting responsibility for your actions.
- Letting your organisation know of dangerous situations.
- Following your organisation’s volunteer policies.
- Respecting the rights and privacy of others.
- Completing tasks in your volunteer role.

Supporting Others

- Dealing with complaints appropriately.
- Supporting others and asking for support.
- Giving notice before leaving the organisation.

Further Resources

For volunteers

- ❑ [GoVolunteer](#) and [Seek Volunteer](#) to find volunteer roles online (note that you can filter for roles suitable for people with a disability and wheelchair accessible organisations).
- ❑ [Volunteering Support Organisations in Victoria](#).
- ❑ [Volunteers and the Equal Opportunity Act 2010 - Know your Rights](#).
Developed by the Victorian Equal Opportunity & Human Rights Commission.
- ❑ [Dispute Settlement Centre of Victoria](#) for mediation and disputes.

For organisations

- ❑ [NFP Law for Volunteers](#) (Justice Connect) for legal matters relating to volunteering.
- ❑ [Taking That Extra Step: Start Growing and Maintaining an Inclusive Volunteer Program](#)
Developed by Inclusion Designlab (Inclusion Melbourne). A guide for businesses and organisations looking to include volunteers with intellectual disability in their operations or disability support organisations looking to build a volunteer program.
- ❑ [National Standards for Volunteer Involvement](#). The National Standards for Involving Volunteers in Not for Profit Organisations have been developed by Volunteering Australia through a consultation process with volunteer-involving organisations and volunteers, and aim to promote a model of best practice in the management of volunteers.

Acknowledgements

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Volunteering Victoria would like to acknowledge and give thanks to people from the following organisations who have supported and contributed directly to the development of these guidelines and more broadly towards solutions in the challenging intersection between disabilities and volunteerism.



We acknowledge and appreciate that there are a broad range of disabilities and everybody is unique. Therefore, these guidelines may not be precisely tailored to your circumstances.

We are always interested in your feedback. Feel free to contact us with your ideas and comments on these guidelines at the contact details below.

About Volunteering Victoria

Volunteering Victoria is the state peak body for volunteering.

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.

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