

Tips for Retaining Young Volunteers

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So you have recruited some young volunteers - now what?

This Tip Sheet gives examples on best practice in the volunteering sector for ideas about how you can retain younger volunteers in your organisation.



Supporting young volunteers

Having a positive environment will make a difference in retaining young volunteers and encouraging young people to join your program.

- Try to match young people with roles that draw on their interests, talents and skills.
- Have a coordinator or support person they can go to for advice and support.
- Have clear policies and procedures that they can access in case of a complaint or concern.
- Give leadership opportunities or professional development opportunities.
- Encourage open communication and welcome any feedback.
- Have recognition opportunities in place - show your commitment to your volunteers.
- Give feedback and show how their work makes a difference to your cause, program or in your organisation.
- Many young people are trying to find their place in the world and their confidence can easily take a knock from seemingly harmless comments. Try to phrase your comments or feedback in an encouraging way. Instead of "young people are always looking for the easy way out", try "it's great that you're looking for a way to save time".
- Get your young volunteers to help evaluate the program to improve and develop it – a fresh perspective can be an excellent resource.
- Create a sense of belonging. Make sure their role and responsibilities are clear, and demonstrate that you value their contributions.
- Assign an older/more experienced volunteer to be a "mentor" to the younger volunteers. This will allow them to rapidly gain experience and confidence.

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What can young volunteers do?

This is dependent on what you do in your organisation. In many cases, young volunteers can do all or most of what the older volunteers do, but some suggestions are:

- Creating, increasing or managing your organisation's online presence through social media and your website (this can be done at your organisation, or from the volunteer's home).
- Assisting at events (setting up/packing up, distributing flyers, answering questions from the public).
- Writing pieces for your newsletter/website/social media.
- Change it up a bit. Variety is a key factor in retaining volunteers, especially younger people who are yet to find their place in the world. Let them try new things, perhaps allow them to "shadow" a different staff member for a day.
- Most importantly, ask them about their interests, future aspirations, or what they would like to achieve in their volunteering role. Try to cater to their interests – if they are gaining beneficial experience for the future, or doing something they enjoy, they are more likely to engage further with your organisation and demonstrate their loyalty!

Be prepared to let them leave

It is important to remember that young people will be going through many life changes - school, travel, new employment or family life. They may not make a long term commitment at this stage, but remember, this is the beginning of a lifelong relationship with your organisation. Accept that their volunteering may be short-term. If they do leave, help them finish on a positive note, so that they may return in the future or continue to support your organisation in other ways.

Case Study:

Volunteering Tasmania has hosted a number of young interns from the University of Tasmania over recent years. The students are made to feel part of the team; their feedback and suggestions are requested and valued; and they are regularly offered the chance to participate in activities additional to their internship project. When these internships are completed many of the students ask if they can remain with us as a volunteer, because they feel welcome and engaged within the team, and enjoy the development opportunities provided to them.