

BREAKING BARRIERS:

Unlocking volunteering opportunities for regional youth



Introduction



According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the youth volunteer rate in Ballarat significantly lags the state average by 76 percent. This shows there is considerable work needed to break down barriers for youth inclusion in volunteering opportunities in the region.

Young people bring energy, innovation, and a unique perspective to volunteering. However, many young adults are unaware of volunteering opportunities or how volunteering can help them. Likewise, volunteering involved organisations are faced with natural attrition of their existing volunteer base and lack of succession planning. This document summarises common barriers faced by young people and outlines practical steps that volunteer involved organisations can take to encourage and support youth volunteering.



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Young adults lack awareness

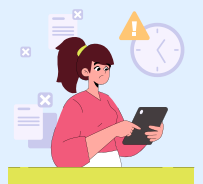
Many young people are unaware of the volunteering opportunities available, or they have limited understanding of the benefits (skills development, social connections, employability). Some equate volunteering only with unpaid labour rather than a chance to grow.

- **Actively promote opportunities:** Most schools are offering volunteering as part of the VET curriculum. Actively promote opportunities through schools and TAFE to leverage these opportunities.
- **Highlight positive stories:** Through story telling highlight how volunteering builds skills and supports a pathway to employment.
- **Use social media:** Advertise opportunities where young people access their information.

Time pressures and competing priorities

Study, part-time work, and family responsibilities often compete with volunteering. Many young people feel they don't have the time for long commitments.

- **Offer flexibility:** Explore potential roles that are short-term, micro-volunteering or project-based roles that can fit around study and work schedules.
- **Change roles:** Look at existing roles and see if there are opportunity for casual or event-based roles that can be done by young adults so they can "dip in and dip out".
- **Explore on-line volunteering:** There may be roles that can be adjusted to be done online, which will be appealing to young people and offers greater flexibility.



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Transport and accessibility

Young people may not have a driver's licence or car, and public transport may not always align with volunteer hours or locations.

- **Provide information:** Provide clear transport instructions (bus routes, cycling options) on your website and volunteer brochures.
- **Align volunteer shifts:** Look at aligning shifts, particularly casual shifts, with transport availability. On-line volunteer options would also address this issue.
- **Reimbursement:** If the volunteer organisation has the means, offering reimbursement for travel costs for youth, or arranging car-pooling, may encourage more youth participation.
- **Flexible start and finish times:** Offer flexible start and finish times to align with public transport schedules.
- **Take out the thinking:** Let people know how to get to the site. Have clear instructions with public transport routes including stops and distances. The organisation may also be able to help young people plan their travel as part of the onboarding process.

Confidence and skills gap

Many young people state they lack the skills, confidence, or life experience needed to volunteer. Young people report feeling they are seen as inexperienced, immature and unknowledgeable by the wider public. Fear of "not being good enough" can hold them back. .

- **Key messaging:** Provide clear, simple role descriptions and highlight if no experience is needed or no specific skills are required. A simple sentence such as "younger volunteers are encouraged to apply - no prior experience required" shows you are open to taking on volunteers with no prior experience.
- **Offer mentoring:** Offering training and mentoring may encourage unskilled volunteers to apply. Pairing a young person with an experienced volunteer may also assist. If there are insufficient volunteers available for mentoring, volunteer organisations may consider marketing a specific volunteer mentoring role. Other alternatives include "text a buddy", where newly recruited or prospective youth volunteers are given a number of a previous youth volunteer who can provide information and support to a new youth recruit prior to, or at the time of on-boarding.
- **Transferrable skills:** Highlight in job descriptions or volunteer information that skills such as digital literacy, teamwork, and creativity are directly transferrable, even if these were not obtained in a work environment.
- **Highlight success stories:** Use examples of other youth volunteers that demonstrate how volunteering is an effective pathway to employment and how volunteering can build transferable skills.
- **Engage directly:** Don't wait for young people to contact you. Engage directly with youth groups, schools, and universities to promote volunteering opportunities as a pathway to employment and a way to gain skills they may not yet have.



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Relevance and engagement

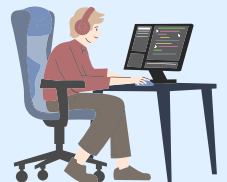
Volunteering that feels boring, irrelevant, or disconnected from young people's passions won't hold their interest.

- **Focus on impact:** Youth are highly empathetic. Emphasise how volunteering helps the local community and what specific impacts are relevant for your organisation (e.g.: mental health, climate change, biodiversity, youth engagement etc). Share impact stories and highlight how volunteering contributed to these impacts.
- **Career relevance:** Young people are concerned about their futures. Highlight how volunteering can build their resume and career prospects.
- **Reward contribution:** Many young people are passionate about causes but will not actively seek out volunteering roles. Be overt in seeking out youth placements and offer rewards that will appeal to young people, such as certificates for volunteer placements or provision of references for inclusion on resumes.
- **Highlight specific roles:** Actively look for roles that will suit younger people within the organisation and then build a job description that highlights the relevance. Don't use a generic post but build an advertisement that will appeal to youth volunteers.
- **Co-create:** If you don't know what will appeal to youth, or how a position could be better targeted towards youth, then get youth involved to help you. Ask a young person to come into the organisation and help you do these things. A young person can help target the right platforms and adjust documents using youth-appropriate language.

Compliance and administration

More than half of the volunteer involved organisations in the Ballarat region that take volunteers under 18 years do not have any active volunteers in that age group. One reason for this is the amount of time and lengthy process young people have to go through to sign-up. In an age where nearly everything is digitised young people are used to instant results.

- **Simplify where you can:** If you offer positions for youth, then make age limits and what experience is required very clear. Make the language concise and to-the-point.
- **Digitise if you can:** Young people prefer applying online. Having an online application option will encourage youth to apply.
- **Clear communication:** Use plain language and avoid jargon in information about volunteering opportunities, including on websites, advertisements, and application materials.
- **Subsidies:** Consider providing subsidies for compliance requirements where a free volunteer option is not available.



06



By recognising the unique challenges young people face and adapting processes to be flexible, supportive, and relevant, volunteer involved organisations can unlock a powerful volunteer base. In a survey undertaken by the City of Ballarat in 2024, 40 percent of youth felt they have a say in the things that matter to them. Removing barriers to youth participation in volunteering can significantly increase the role youth have in creating social change which helps build stronger, more connected communities.

This tip sheet was developed following a workshop convened by the Ballarat Foundation with young people from Ballarat secondary schools undertaking the Certificate II in Active Volunteering, alongside local volunteer-involved organisations. The workshop was facilitated by the Local Learning and Employment Network (LLEN) and supported by the City of Ballarat. Funding was provided by Volunteering Victoria through the Australian Government.

For more information regarding volunteering opportunities in Ballarat contact:

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The Ballarat Foundation acknowledges the Wadawurrung people, the traditional owners of the lands and waterways in our region. We recognise their diversity, resilience, and the ongoing place that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people hold in our communities. We pay our respects to the Elders, both past and present, and commit to working together in the spirit of mutual understanding, respect and reconciliation.

