



# Engaging the Time Poor Volunteer

Over the last 4-5 years there has been a bunch of studies into the state of volunteering around the world and they all tell us the same thing - the way people want to volunteer is changing. While more people are volunteering, and volunteers continue to contribute a huge number of hours to organisations, on average the number of volunteer hours each person contributes is declining.

When you dig a little deeper, most studies cite that lack of time (or a version of this) is the number one reason people give for not volunteering. In some cases, this accounted for nearly 50% of respondents. So, what can you do to combat the increasing level of time-poor volunteers?

## Reframe Notions of Traditional Volunteering

In one Australian study they used focus groups to explore perceptions of volunteering. A number of participants, especially younger participants, felt volunteering was not 'cool' and described volunteers in a stereotypical manner eg. an older woman who volunteers every week delivering Meals on Wheels. When they were shown photos of one-off, online and corporate volunteer opportunities, they were surprised and agreed that this was something they could actually do.

As a sector, we need to get better at educating people about the wide variety of volunteer roles available and dispel the sense that time and role restrictions will interfere with work, family and other life activities.

## Review the Roles You Offer

To attract the time poor volunteer, you might need to re-think the roles you offer. Create a list of every possible role that a volunteer could undertake for your organisation. Think from the very top level, up and down your organisation and across every team and department. Challenge each task and consider why it is done in that way. Could tasks be split according to the different skills or

availability of volunteers? Where are the opportunities for involving volunteers in a way that offers flexibility?

## Get to Know Your volunteers

Next time a volunteer says they only have a couple of hours to spare each month, talk to them about the types of things they like doing and find out what they are passionate about. If you can deliver a role that fits with their passion, they may find the time to give it a go. Do they want to do something using the skills they use in their job, or do they want to do something completely different? What is your potential volunteer looking for from their volunteer activities and how can you deliver that?

## Flexibility and Accessibility

Challenge the traditional view of volunteering roles eg. roles done at the same place at the same time every week. Flexibility is key if you want to attract the time poor volunteer. Does the role have to be done onsite or could it be done from home in pyjamas? Can it be done whenever your volunteer can fit it in?

Find out where your volunteer lives so you can suggest roles close to home or make it easy for them to get to. Look for volunteers in the neighbourhoods around your organisation, or where the volunteer placement will be. If travel is involved, make it as easy as possible.

## Be Well Prepared

Efficiency is key for the volunteer who has a small amount of time to offer, so make sure you are well prepared. How can you do an induction in a way that respects your volunteer's time? How can you do role specific formalities quickly? Do you have all the equipment required ready to go? Make sure your volunteer can hit the ground running.

## Bite-sized Volunteering

You know how sometimes you would like a little bit of something sweet, but you don't want the whole piece? Demand has been created for the bite-sized morsel.

Often the time poor volunteer doesn't want to commit to regular volunteering, but they might be willing to take responsibility for a single task. When you do your role review, consider what roles can be broken down into smaller bite-sized chunks? (see side bar for examples). The bite-size role will require a smaller time commitment, but as the tasks are completed you can start ticking a larger task off your to-do list.

## Project-Based Volunteering

What are the projects on your to-do list? What are the things that you have on your wish list, but don't have the capability or resource to do in-house? It could be a perfect one-off project for a time poor volunteer.

Bellyful New Zealand wanted some help plotting demand for new branches. A Z Energy employee took on the project after it was posted on the Z Help Tank volunteer platform. They completed the project, using their specific skills, in a volunteer capacity.

## Share the Load

Split one volunteer role between two or more volunteers and share the load. A great example is a husband and wife team, who are both Police Officers and have four school-age children. They share a volunteer role reading to kindergarten children as part of an early literacy programme in their city. They take turnabout each week to share the role and fit it into their schedules.

## Two Birds with One Stone

Where can you offer time poor volunteers the opportunity to multi-task their volunteering with other life commitments? Can they volunteer with a friend, so the experience becomes a social one? Do you have a role that will enable their family to be involved as well? Can they incorporate exercise while carrying out their volunteer task eg. a walk with a leaflet drop? Coaching or managing children's sports teams is a great example of this.

## Corporate Volunteering

Corporate volunteering occurs when a business enables a group of employees to volunteer during work hours. There are a number of benefits for the business and it enables you to engage with volunteers who might not usually be available because of work commitments. You can access organisations who are open to corporate volunteering through your local volunteer centre or advertise the opportunity yourself.

## Make the Most of Technology

There are some great examples of organisations offering online volunteering around the world. UN Volunteers have a very user-friendly volunteer platform ([www.onlinevolunteering.org](http://www.onlinevolunteering.org)) that enables anyone, anywhere in the world to choose the sector they would like to work in, and then choose from the various opportunities under that sector. Sectors include writing and editing, translation, research, outreach and advocacy. Under each opportunity is listed the estimated time required, as well as what skills and tools are required to complete the task.

In addition to reaching volunteers who may only have a few spare hours, virtual volunteering offers the opportunity to connect with time poor volunteers who may have restricted mobility. It can also enable people outside of New Zealand to volunteer for your organisation.



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## Bite-Sized Volunteer Opportunities

If you've been involved in the non-profit sector for a long time, changing the way you think about volunteering might not come easily. So, to help you out, we've put together some ways that volunteers could get involved with bite-sized tasks.



'Mystery-Shop' your organisation to see how easy it is for a potential donor to make a gift.



Research existing articles that could be used in your blog or newsletter.



Research like-minded websites where you could post relevant articles or information.



List your programmes or services on relevant websites.



Gather one-line testimonials from clients, service users and volunteers.



Proof-read your newsletter.



Regularly proof-read your website, fix links and remove anything that is out-of-date.



Take photographs of your programmes in action.



Design a cover photo for your Facebook page.



Create displays in shop windows to promote your cause.



Distribute brochures to libraries, health centres and other public places.



Design an info-graphic explaining key metrics and statistics for your organisation.



Write or update your policies manual.



Provide baking for Board meetings.



Create an Emergency Plan should your organisation be affected by a natural disaster.



Check and re-stock your first aid kit on a regular basis.



Create PowerPoint slides for your public presentations.



Make handmade cards to thank donors, volunteers and supporters.



Design a T-Shirt your organisation could sell as a fundraiser.



Research relevant merchandise your organisation could sell as a fundraiser.

