A Practical Handbook

ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION OF VOLUNTEERS

A Practical Handbook For Volunteer Coordinators To Attract, Engage & Retain

Gen Z & Gen Alpha Volunteers

HBNC

Creating Connected Communities

About This Resource

This resource has been developed in collaboration with Scott Millar and the Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre to support volunteer coordinators in engaging the next generation of volunteers.

The strategies and ideas shared throughout this handbook are designed as practical starting points and should be adapted to suit the unique needs, communities and contexts of each organisation.

Thank you to Volunteering Queensland for supporting the development of this resource.

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WELCOME TO THE HANDBOOK

Young people are entering volunteer organisations with different expectations, experiences and ways of connecting to the world around them.

From digital communication and flexible involvement to purpose-driven contribution and community connection, Gen Z and Gen Alpha are reshaping what volunteering can look like for the next generation.

This handbook has been designed as a practical handbook for volunteer coordinators looking to better attract, engage and retain young volunteers within their teams and organisations.

Inside, you'll find simple strategies, practical ideas and reflective prompts that can be adapted to suit your organisation, volunteers and community context.

Each strategy in this handbook includes:



A simple insight into engaging young volunteers



Practical strategies you can implement immediately



Real-world examples and prompts for reflection



Actionable ideas designed for everyday volunteer environments

MEET THE NEXT GENERATION

The next generation of volunteers have grown up in a world shaped by rapid technology, instant communication, social media and constant change. As a result, they often connect and communicate differently from previous generations.

Understanding these differences can help volunteer coordinators build stronger relationships and better support the young people on their teams.



Generation Z

Born 1995 - 2010

Nickname:

Digital Natives

As the first generation to not know a world without wifi, touch screen devices and social media.

Population:

4.6 Million

Gen Zs in Australia, making up close to 20% of the Australian population.



Generation Alpha

Born 2011 - 2025

Nickname:

Generation Glass

Referring to the fact that many of this generation learned to use a device before they could speak full sentences.

Population:

3 Million

Gen Alphas in Australia, making up close to 12% of the Australian population.



Section 1:

ATTRACT

The Next Generation Of Volunteers



Purpose

Align With
Their Values



Platform

Meet Them
Where They're At



Prompt

Opportunities To
Get Involved

PROMOTING PURPOSE OVER PROCESS

Gen Z and Gen Alpha are more likely to engage when they understand the impact they are making.



While processes matter, young volunteers are often motivated by purpose, contribution and feeling connected to something meaningful.

What This Looks Like In Practice

INSTEAD OF SAYING:
"We need volunteers to help set up tables for the event."

TRY THIS:
"This event helps raise funds for families in our community, and your support helps create that experience."

Simple Strategies For Success

Start volunteer briefings with impact stories, photos or outcomes.

Celebrate volunteer contributions and achievements publicly.

Connect day-to-day tasks back to the organisation's mission.

Explain why tasks matter, not just what needs to be done.

Ask Yourself

"Would a new volunteer understand the impact they are helping make within the first 15 minutes of doing a task?"

MEET THEM

WHERE THEY'RE AT

Gen Z and Gen Alpha are more likely to engage with organisations that are active online. While flyers and newsletters still matter, young volunteers are often discovering opportunities through social media, websites and digital content that feels authentic, visual and easy to engage with.



What This Looks Like In Practice

INSTEAD OF SAYING:
"Our flyer explains everything you need to know about us."

TRY THIS:
"Let's create content that helps young people see the rewarding work our organisation does in the community."

Simple Strategies For Success

Refresh your website so it feels modern, visual and adapts to mobile devices.

Share stories and behind-the-scenes moments on social media platforms.

Highlight volunteers, impact and experiences through photos and videos.

Create simple and easy-to-read content for people scrolling on the go.

Ask Yourself

"If a young person discovered our organisation online today, would they feel connected to our people and purpose?"

MAKE IT EASY

TO MAKE A START

Gen Z and Gen Alpha are more likely to volunteer when opportunities are easy to explore for the first time. Young volunteers are often more comfortable starting with smaller engagements that allow them to 'try before they buy' and build confidence and connection over time.



What This Looks Like In Practice

INSTEAD OF SAYING:
"We're looking for people who can help every single week."

TRY THIS:
"We've created flexible opportunities so people can explore volunteering before committing long term."

Simple Strategies For Success

Offer one-off volunteering days, events or short-term projects.

Create achievable tasks that help first-time volunteers feel successful.

Invite young people to trial volunteering before officially signing up.

Build pathways that support transition toward longer-term involvement.

Ask Yourself

"Could someone explore volunteering with us without needing to make a major commitment straight away?"



Section 2:

ENGAGE

The Next Generation Of Volunteers



Understand
How They Communicate



Adapt
Your Approach Across Cohorts



Support
Their Wellbeing As They Work

UNDERSTAND HOW VOLUNTEERS PREFER TO BE APPRECIATED

Gen Z and Gen Alpha are more likely to stay engaged when they feel appreciated in ways that feel meaningful to them personally. Understanding how different people prefer to receive appreciation can help volunteer coordinators build stronger relationships and create a more positive team culture.



What This Looks Like In Practice

INSTEAD OF SAYING:
"They should already know we appreciate their work."

TRY THIS:
"Let's offer moments of appreciation that are tailored to each volunteer on our team to reward hard work."

Simple Strategies For Success

Words of affirmation can be as simple as thanking them for their work.

Acts Of Service involves taking a task off someone's plate.

Quality Time can be offering a late start/early finish as a reward.

Gifts could look like buying a snack or coffee to show appreciation

Ask Yourself

"Do we understand how the young people on our team prefer to receive encouragement, appreciation and recognition?"

ADAPT YOUR APPROACH

ACROSS GENERATIONS

Every generation has grown up in a very different world and as a result, communicates in very different ways. Understanding how different generations prefer to engage can help build stronger relationships, reduce misunderstandings and create a more connected team culture.



What This Looks Like In Practice

INSTEAD OF SAYING:
"This is how we've always done things in the past."

TRY THIS:
"Let's adapt our management style to get the best out of the different volunteers on our team."

Simple Strategies For Success

- **Adapt** communication platforms to suit different generations.
- **Create** opportunities for intergenerational collaboration & learning.
- **Recognise** the unique skills that each generation brings to the team.
- **Understand** how different generations prefer to receive information.

Ask Yourself

"How well does our current communication and leadership approaches support volunteers across different generations?"

SUPPORTING THE WHOLE PERSON

Gen Z and Gen Alpha are more likely to stay engaged when they feel seen as people, not just volunteers completing tasks.
While outcomes are important, young volunteers value environments where managers take the time to check in on them both professionally and personally.



What This Looks Like In Practice

INSTEAD OF SAYING:	TRY THIS:
"They're here to help, not to talk about their weekend."	*"Let's create a culture where volunteers feel supported beyond just the work they're doing."*

Simple Strategies For Success

Check In with volunteers regularly and create space for genuine conversations.

Recognise when volunteers may need additional support.

Build relationships with volunteers beyond their rostered tasks.

Support young people in building confidence, skills and connections.

Ask Yourself

"Do the young people in our organisation feel genuinely supported as people, not just volunteers?"



Section 3:

RETAIN

The Next Generation Of Volunteers



Leverage
Generational Superpowers



Create
Skills Based Opportunities



Curate
Reverse Mentoring

LEVERAGE GENERATIONAL SUPERPOWERS

Every generation brings different strengths, experiences and perspectives to a volunteer team. Young volunteers are more likely to stay engaged when organisations actively recognise and leverage the unique 'superpowers' that each generation brings to the team.



What This Looks Like In Practice

INSTEAD OF SAYING:
"Young people have a lot to learn before having their say."

TRY THIS:
"Let's create opportunities for volunteers to leverage their strengths and contribute in meaningful ways."

Simple Strategies For Success

Leverage Baby Boomers for their experience, insight and relationships.

Support Gen Y to facilitate cross-generational collaboration.

Empower Gen X through opportunities to build efficient solutions.

Encourage Gen Z to share ideas around technology and digital.

Ask Yourself

"How are we creating opportunities for different generations to contribute their unique strengths within our team?"

CREATE SKILLS-BASED OPPORTUNITIES

Gen Z and Gen Alpha are often looking for opportunities to develop their skills while also building portfolios of work they can showcase in the future. Organisations are well positioned to create opportunities for them to contribute their strengths and apply their skills in meaningful ways.



What This Looks Like In Practice

INSTEAD OF SAYING:
"We only need help with simple operational tasks."

TRY THIS:
"Let's explore how young people can contribute skills that create value for us while they build their experience."

Simple Strategies For Success

Invite support for social media, content creation and digital platforms.

Encourage skills in areas like design, photography or marketing.

Explore opportunities to refresh websites or online engagement strategies.

Create opportunities for young people to build real-world experience.

Ask Yourself

"How could volunteers contribute their skills while building experience and portfolios of work for the future?"

CURATE REVERSE MENTORING PROGRAMS

In today's fast-moving world, every generation has something they can teach and something they can learn. While younger volunteers can learn from the experience of older generations, senior volunteers can also learn a great deal from the fresh perspectives brought by Gen Z and Gen Alpha.



What This Looks Like In Practice

INSTEAD OF SAYING:	TRY THIS:
"Young people don't know anything when they're starting."	*"Let's create opportunities for volunteers across generations to learn from one another."*

Simple Strategies For Success

Pair volunteers across generations to encourage shared learning.

Use reverse mentoring to break down silos and strengthen team culture.

Encourage younger volunteers to share ideas around all things digital.

Create opportunities for experienced volunteers to share their insights.

Ask Yourself

"How are we creating opportunities for different generations to learn from one another within our team?"

ENGAGING THE NEXT GENERATION OF VOLUNTEERS

Young people are not disconnected from community. In fact, many Gen Z and Gen Alpha volunteers are actively searching for opportunities to contribute, build skills, create impact and be part of something meaningful.

The volunteer organisations that will thrive into the future are those willing to adapt, listen and create volunteering experiences that feel purposeful, flexible and genuinely human.

Small changes can often create the biggest impact. Whether it's improving communication, creating more flexible opportunities, recognising volunteer contributions or building stronger intergenerational collaboration, every step forward helps create more engaging and inclusive volunteer communities.

The future of volunteering is not about replacing what has always worked. It's about evolving it to better support the next generation of volunteers and the communities they will help shape.

Post Handbook Check-In

- What is one thing your organisation could implement immediately?
- What is one barrier preventing young people from engaging with your organisation?
- What is one area your team should continue exploring?
- Who could help champion these ideas within your organisation?

About Your Authors

Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre

The Hervey Bay Neighbourhood Centre supports and connects the local community through programs, services and initiatives that strengthen wellbeing, inclusion and community connection.

To find out more, head to:
www.hbnc.com.au



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Scott Millar is a trusted voice on the future of work, helping organisations understand the trends shaping Gen Z. Scott brings fresh insight into the shifts transforming workplaces, industries and communities.

To find out more, head to:
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The next generation isn't waiting to be invited into volunteering, they're looking for organisations ready to grow with them.

Whether you're recruiting your first young volunteer or reimagining an established volunteer program, this practical handbook provides the tools to build volunteer experiences that resonate with the next generation. Grounded in real-world practice, Engaging the Next Generation of Volunteers introduces nine practical strategies across three essential areas: Attract. Engage. Retain.

Discover how to:

- Connect volunteers to purpose.
- Create flexible opportunities.
- Support wellbeing and belonging.
- Build intergenerational teams.
- Unlock the strengths every generation brings.
- Develop future-ready volunteer programs.

Designed for busy volunteer coordinators, every chapter includes practical strategies, real-life examples, coaching questions and ideas you can implement immediately. Because when young people feel seen, valued and connected, they don't just volunteer, they become the future leaders of our communities.

Creating Connected Communities

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