

Involving people with a disability as volunteers

People with a disability have abilities, skills and experiences that can be valuable to your organisation. Many are looking for flexible and accessible volunteering opportunities in organisations that recognise their capabilities, not their disabilities.

This information sheet provides organisations with ideas and tips for how to tap into this group of potential volunteers. Involving people with a disability in your organisation will benefit you and your community.

Who are they?

One in five people, or 20 per cent of the Australian population experience a disability¹. While the number of people with a disability who volunteer and how and where they volunteer is unknown, an increasing number of people with a disability are looking for ways to engage with their communities and become more socially active.

A disability could include:

- a visual or hearing problem
- a physical disability
- mental health issues
- an intellectual disability
- an acquired brain injury
- an illness or disease
- a learning difficulty.

Why involve people with a disability in your organisation?

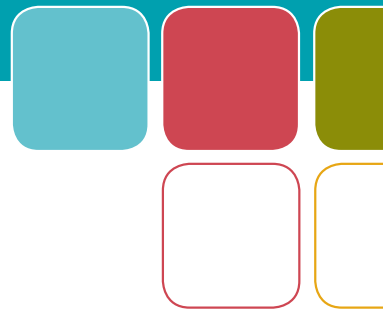
People with a disability are active and prominent in many fields including the arts, media, sport and education. They bring to their work personal and professional qualities and skills, shaped by their own unique life experience.

The benefits your organisation may experience from including people with a disability as volunteers include:

- access to a larger pool of volunteers
- a more diverse group of volunteers that will offer a wider range of skills, experience and motivation
- a volunteer team that reflects the diversity of the larger community
- increased opportunities to develop community partnerships
- improved understanding of diversity and inclusive practice among your staff.

As the population ages, the rate of disability will increase. Organisations need to be prepared to consider how to involve more volunteers with a disability in the future.





Why do people with a disability get involved?

People with a disability volunteer for many reasons including²:

- helping others or making a contribution
- meeting people and making friends
- learning new skills and developing new interests
- enjoyment.

What changes can your organisation make?

The following changes will help your organisation become more volunteer-friendly and accessible to people with a disability³:

- Create an inclusive environment — think about running disability awareness training and improving physical access.
- Concentrate on ability rather than disability. Don't assume what people can or can't do. Think of what people could achieve if they had adequate support and mentoring.
- Listen to the volunteers — they understand best how to manage their impairment.
- Reassess your volunteering programs. How might they change if people with a disability were involved? How could they be done differently?
- Make sure volunteers feel part of the team. Address any negative attitudes towards disability.
- Ensure policies and practices are not discriminatory.

Tips for attracting people with a disability.

Following these tips will help your organisation attract people with a disability:

- Build relationships and partnerships with community groups that involve people with a disability.
- Promote volunteering in ways that include people with a disability. Consider advertising in publications that target people with a disability. Mention in your advertising that people with a disability are welcomed as volunteers.
- Ensure recruitment processes are user-friendly — have someone willing and able to help people fill out the application form.
- Be clear and consistent about the volunteer's role and responsibility to the organisation. However, be prepared to have some flexibility around role descriptions.
- Match the 'role to the volunteer' instead of 'volunteer to the role'.

Quick links

www.getinvolved.qld.gov.au
www.volqld.org.au

www.disability.qld.gov.au
www.volunteeringaustralia.org

Further information

Contact the Office for Volunteering on **13 13 04** or volunteering@communities.qld.gov.au

¹ABS Survey of Disability, Ageing and Carers 2003

²CSV Reports on Mental health, volunteering and social inclusion, Community Service Volunteers, 2008

³Can Do! Volunteering: a guide to involving young disabled people as volunteers, Leonard Cheshire Foundation, 2006

