

Volunteers



He waka
eke noa

We're
all in this
together

The creative sector, particularly here in the Waikato, relies heavily on volunteers. Whether it's parking wardens at events, kai-makers, kaiako/teachers, front of house staff at venues/museums/galleries/theatres, event and gig dreamers/producers/planners/managers, visual artists, content creators, filmmakers, actors, dancers, musicians, directors, lighting, sound – you name it.

Wonderful stuff happens because of our volunteers as these are the passionate lovers and supporters of our mahi, they are the engine of our local creative sector.

Particularly now. In 2020, an estimated 28k people in the Waikato had volunteered for an arts, culture or heritage organisation in the previous 12 months – reversing a trend which had dropped to 19k in 2017.

Volunteers bring a range of skills and networking opportunities that we may not have, or be able to fund, in our organisations.

The positives are endless – volunteers bring in a variety of skills and expertise, give hours of labour and intellect, strengthen ties in the community, build community identity and social cohesion, extend our networks, add integrity, are advocates and provide excellent opportunities for story-telling and promotion through social media and other channels.

Volunteer motivations



In order to know how best to attract and keep our volunteers, it's good to take a moment to understand why they might volunteer in the first place.

What do they hope to get out of donating their time, skills and energy?

By understanding their desires, motivations and needs, we can ensure we appeal to these through our recruit drives, our conversations, narratives and promotions.

Research on the motivations of volunteers reveals key drivers such as:

Personal satisfaction and sense of achievement

New knowledge and skills

Building relationship networks

Self-expression

Social needs

Finding a purpose

Values – desire to help other people
and concern about the community

Free time

Personal interest (in the event / collection /
venue / project or production itself)

Career goals – work experience
and potential job opportunities

Escape from negative feelings and daily life¹

¹ https://www.academia.edu/26906776/Its_Mostly_About_Me_Reasons_Why_Volunteers_Contribute_Their_Time_to_Museums_and_Art_Museums

Do you know what needs are driving your volunteers?

Have you asked them?

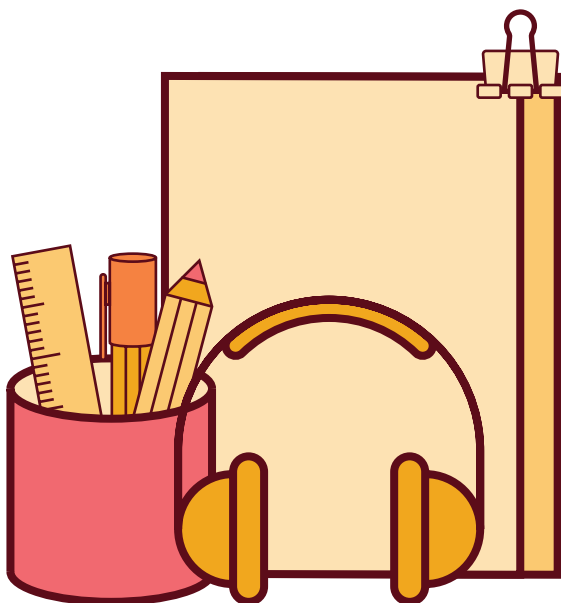
Are you prepared to develop strong valuable relationships with your volunteers by learning about their needs and finding ways to meet them?

Whakawhanaungatanga — Principles of good practice

We know that very little would happen in the Waikato creative scene without our volunteers.

They are often critical to the sustainability and success of our events, projects and organisation – and yet how many of us are guided by a clear volunteer policy?

Below are some suggested best practice principles to guide such a policy, attract these wonderful people, reward them and ensure a safe, mutually beneficial and meaningful relationship thrives.



1. Get clear about your purposes for requiring volunteers.

Is it for specific roles and purposes? Is it to strengthen your links to the community? Is it to increase the skill set as well as the intellectual and cultural knowledge of your organisation? Is it so you can build capability and opportunities in your community? Is it so you can grow your networks? Is it because your kaupapa values community and whaanau participation? Is it because you want the community to feel invested and ownership with what you do? There are different objectives and approaches depending on whether you require and rely on volunteers regularly for the operation of your space (i.e front of house staff or board trustee), or if you are after support with a festival, fundraising event or working bee.

2. Will you take anyone who volunteers?

Or will you screen to make sure you are taking volunteers on if they share your values, culture and vision? Will you be selective about who you approach to volunteer, for example, the local school community, or those with an aligning kaupapa, or those who are geographically close?

3. What opportunities and experiences can you offer?

Free tickets? Upskilling opportunities and work experience? Social, community and professional networks? The opportunity for a creative outlet? What's special about volunteering with you? It can help to get clear on what you need and what you can offer for your volunteer policy and recruitment.

4. What is your recruitment and induction policy?

What information do you need to collect from them (contact information, availability, skill sets, what they want to get from volunteering etc)? Where and how will you store this information? Can you create a list of points for induction and training – what are key things your volunteers should know? Perhaps things like health and safety, the story or historical information about your project/organisation, your vision and values, your expectations on how to treat people, your expectations within the space, and other policies (your collaboration and inclusion policies, awareness and adherence to the Vulnerable Children Act (2014) etc).

5. Get a good understanding of the needs of the different groups within your volunteer pool so you can plan to ensure purposeful return for their needs.

Retirees for example, will have different availability and needs as opposed to a young volunteer. This latter group may be more motivated by ‘career investment’ or upskilling opportunities, experience and networks for their creative career, while your retiree group may be driven by socialising and community-building needs. For the volunteers keen to upskill and learn, what structures and opportunities can you help focus them towards? What social opportunities can you include on your calendar?

6. How will you ensure you have a healthy reciprocal relationship with your various volunteers?

Can you create a clear channel for volunteers to provide feedback, ideas or concerns? Will you have a policy on how to deal with issues or complaints?

7. In what ways will you ensure the volunteers feel valued and celebrated?

Can you create regular Volunteer Profiles on your social media, notice board, newsletter or the like, telling a little about who they are, why they volunteer with you, what they love about it? Can you create celebratory events like coffee mornings, invite them to meetings and ask for their ideas and opinions, or remember to thank them in your newsletters, speeches, promotional material?



**What else would
you add to this list?
Whatever you do in
this space will help
your volunteers to
feel seen and valued**

Tips

If you are struggling with your time, can you assign a volunteer manager and together work out a plan of how you regularly meet with/check in with your volunteers?

Can you establish a 'Friends of' programme in order to generate a pool of people who are willing to support you through monetary means AND volunteering support?

It can be time consuming to recruit volunteers, and sometimes costly, a risk perhaps when you consider they have no obligation to you and can leave at any point

All the more reason to ensure you have a policy and planning in place to encourage thriving and healthy long-term reciprocal relationships

It is worth considering the importance of having clear and specific training for volunteers who are front-facing, as they can have a significant effect on the experiences and behaviours of your audience, clients, customers and visitors

Questions



Can you shift your mindset from seeing volunteers as 'unpaid labour' to recognising them as your most devoted visitors/audience and a strong connection to community building?

What changes would you make if you viewed them in this way?

What valuable information might you receive by asking them directly about their experiences as a user / audience member?

Do you know what sort of needs you have as an organisation and how best to align those by recruiting purposefully?

How often do you reach out to your volunteers to see how they are going, ask if they need anything, see if they are satisfied, arrange social get togethers or celebrate their value to you?

Are you capturing testimonials from your volunteers? These could be invaluable for future volunteer recruitment, or for sharing the value of your mahi with others in funding reports, social media posts, your direct newsletters etc.

Useful links

Volunteering Waikato

 volunteeringwaikato.org.nz

Volunteering New Zealand

 volunteeringnz.org.nz

The Big Idea Volunteering Opportunities

 thebigidea.nz/work/volunteer/region/online
