

VOLUNTEERING:

Frequently Asked Questions



What kind of organisation involves volunteers?

Volunteering typically takes place in not-for-profit agencies. Not for profit agencies' objectives are social rather than economic and they do not distribute profits to owners or shareholders.

Where and when can I volunteer?

There are many areas in which you can volunteer. You can work indoors, outdoors, one-on-one or with groups, day-time, evenings or weekends, weekly, monthly or just occasionally.

How much time do I have to commit? Is there any flexibility?

The time and commitment required to be a volunteer varies from different organisations and will depend on the volunteer position you choose. The commitment may be as little as an hour a week or as much as two days a week depending on the needs of the organisation and on the availability of the volunteer. A general guideline is that a volunteer position should not exceed 16 hours per week.

What are the common jobs volunteers are asked to do?

Volunteers are involved in all aspects of society and can do almost anything from planting a tree to designing a web page. To get an idea of the type of opportunities available in volunteering, visit the LIVE Unit's Volunteers Online <http://www.volunteersonline.unimelb.edu.au/StudentLogin.aspx> . For more volunteer opportunities visit: Student Volunteer Resource Service: <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/live/svrs/index.html>

Do I need previous experience in order to volunteer?

It depends on the volunteer position and what is required to carry out the necessary tasks. There are some volunteer positions where previous experience and formal training is required as well as positions which train volunteers on the job. There are also many volunteer positions that do not require experience or specific skills, just a positive attitude and a willingness to participate and contribute.

Are there short-term or one-off volunteer opportunities available?

Yes there are. If you are not interested in an ongoing volunteer role, there are plenty of other short-term and one-off opportunities available in the community. Short-term and one-off volunteering roles usually take place in organisations involved in celebrating a special event, exhibitions, fundraising and festivals.

Are there any special requirements?

If you choose to volunteer in one of the following areas; with older people or children, disability and animal welfare, you will be required to consent to undergo a Police Check for a criminal record. You would be informed of any legal or training requirements during or prior to an interview.

Will I need to be interviewed for a volunteer position?

Once you have selected and contacted the organisation of your choice, you will probably be invited to attend an interview. Organisations conduct interviews so people can find out more about the volunteer job and the organisation can find the right volunteer for the job. In the interview you should be ready to answer questions about your previous work experience, both paid and voluntary, discuss your skills and qualifications and provide the names of referees.

Is training required in order to become a volunteer?

Training and skill requirements vary amongst organisations. Some positions require little formal training and specialist skills, whilst others have greater requirements. Training is generally provided for by the agency, volunteers should not be required to incur any expense for the training they undertake.

Am I covered by insurance?

It is important to ask an organisation if they have insurance to cover you in the case of accident or injury as Volunteers are not paid employees and are therefore not covered by Work Cover. You should ask the organisation if they have both Public Liability (the policy must mention Volunteers) and Personal Accident Insurance for volunteers. Personal Accident and Injury insurance cover should provide protection in the event of an accident whilst performing volunteer work.

Will there be someone there to help me?

This depends to some degree on the volunteer position and the tasks required. However, irrespective of the position volunteers should be offered an orientation to the organisation and their new position. This may include a tour of the organisation, introductions to paid and volunteer staff, written material such as volunteer policies and procedures, and training in the common work practices of that organisation. Some organisations also have a buddy system to support new volunteers by pairing them with more experienced volunteers that are familiar with the organisation's policies and procedures.

Can I volunteer overseas?

Most Australian agencies which send people overseas to work require applicants to have a good level of experience in their field both for short and long-term placements. You may be required to supply copies of your qualifications when you apply. Some organisations require a financial contribution to help with costs such as airfares and accommodation. As a rule, if you wish to volunteer, overseas organisations require that you are an Australian citizen or hold permanent residency status in Australia.

How do I find out about different organisations which offer volunteer opportunities?

There are a number of options for finding organisations that involve volunteers. Volunteers Online is a good place to start <http://www.volunteersonline.unimelb.edu.au/StudentLogin.aspx>. The LIVE Unit's Student Volunteer Resource Service: <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/live/svrs/index.html> also provides links to community organisations that provide volunteer opportunities. The SVRS also provides a range of resources and links to Volunteer Resource Centres and Online Volunteer Search sites.

How do I apply for a volunteer position?

The application process is not daunting and usually involves a phone call to the organisation which you choose, and possibly followed by a cover letter/Resume explaining why you wish to be selected for the position, and an interview with the volunteer coordinator as a final step in the selection process.

How will I find out if I've got the volunteer job?

Sometimes you will be informed at the end of the interview. At other times there may be other people who apply for the same volunteer position and you may be asked to wait until everyone has been interviewed for the outcome of their application. If you are interested in a particular organisation, it is a good idea to contact the organisation, search Online for information about the organisation, read its brochures/ promotional material, or make an appointment to talk to the volunteer coordinator/manager.

For more Information:

Visit: <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/live/svrs/index.html>

Contact: **Ali Kassem** (Coordinator, Student Volunteer Resource Service)

Email: akassem@unimelb.edu.au

Links: <http://www.services.unimelb.edu.au/live>

* This information has been adapted from information compiled by Volunteering Australia and Volunteering Victoria.