

# **State of Volunteering In New Zealand**

2015

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“Volunteering occurs in every society in the world. The terms which define it and the forms of its expression may vary in different languages and cultures, but the values which drive it are common and universal: a desire to contribute to the common good, out of free will and a spirit of solidarity, without expectation of material reward”

Helen Clark

(2011 State of the World's Volunteerism Report, p. iv)

## Preface

Over one million New Zealanders participate in volunteering each year and their contribution to the non-profit sector is essential. One of Volunteering New Zealand (VNZ)'s objectives is to undertake research and disseminate material relevant to its role in promoting, supporting, encouraging and representing volunteering in this country.

*Jan Harrison,  
Chair of Volunteering New Zealand*

With this in mind, VNZ conducted a survey of the nation's registered charities in order to gain an insight into the present state of volunteering in New Zealand. The information gathered will be used by Volunteering New Zealand to strategically support the community and voluntary sector by identifying current trends, issues and challenges.



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## Contents

Acknowledgements	2
Preface	4
Contents	5
Introduction	6
Findings	7
Discussion	14
Conclusion	18
Recommendations	19
References	20
Appendices	21

## Introduction

New Zealand has one of the largest non-profit sectors in the world in proportional terms, and especially notable is the sizable volunteer workforce engaged by New Zealand non-profit sector organisations. A 2008 study of the sector estimated volunteers comprise two-thirds of the non-profit sector workforce in this country, and their contribution is valued at over \$3.3 billion to non-profit organisations (Sanders, O'Brien, Tennant, Sokolowski, & Salamon, p.10).

In order to maximise the contributions that volunteers can make and to affect an organisation's ability to attract and retain volunteers, it is important to understand how the nature of volunteering is changing. Non-profit organisations need to make adjustments in the way they operate in order to reflect this (Wilson as cited in Sanders et al. 2008, p.30). By undertaking this research VNZ aims to provide information and recommendations for the sector, thereby enhancing the value and status of volunteering in New Zealand.

## What we wanted to find out

There were a number of areas which we wished to explore in our survey. We set out to answer the following questions:

- For what reasons do organisations utilise volunteers?
- Do organisations utilise online tools to recruit volunteers, and in which form?
- To what extent is technology being embraced to enable volunteers and volunteering?
- Which challenges have volunteer involving organisations experienced in both recruiting and retaining volunteers in the last 12 months?
- How common is it for organisations to offer reimbursements or monetary incentives to volunteers, and if they do, in what form?
- What trends have been noticed with regard to volunteers and volunteering in New Zealand in the last 12 months?
- How do volunteer involving organisations rate the state of the New Zealand volunteering sector?

## The Research

Our goal in undertaking this research was to take a snapshot of the state of volunteering in New Zealand. The most practical way of achieving this was a survey of registered charities, 90% of these organisations utilise volunteers in some capacity (Sanders et al., 2008, p.13). The survey was sent to just over 15,000 recipients and members of 1,482 organisations responded, a 10% response rate.

The data collected from this survey suggests that the majority of volunteer-involving organisations (VIOs) in New Zealand face considerable challenges with volunteer recruitment, and retaining volunteers is also problematic for many. There is much to celebrate about volunteering in New Zealand considering the near seven-billion-dollar impact on our nation's gross domestic profit (Volunteering New Zealand, 2015), however the average figure given by respondents when asked to rate the state of the volunteering sector shows that there is room for improvement.

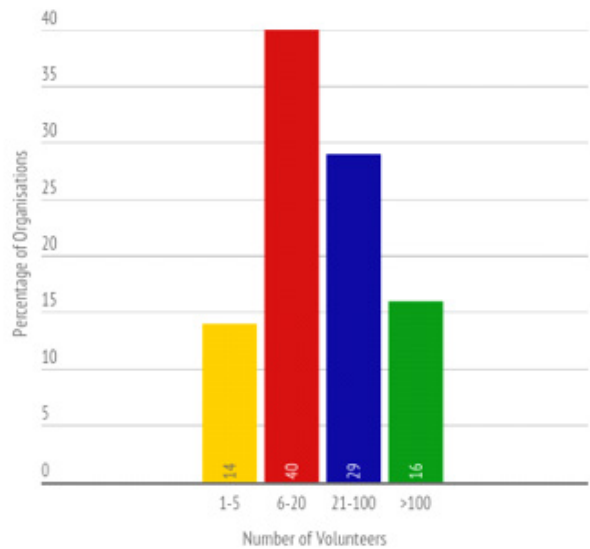
## What is Volunteering?

Volunteering is work done of one's own free will, unpaid for the common good (Volunteering New Zealand, 2014). It can be formal or informal. This research focuses on formal volunteering carried out through the structure of an organisation.

## Survey Questions & Responses

### How many volunteers does your organisation utilise?

40% of respondents indicated that their organisation engaged from 6-20 volunteers. The next largest group of 29% was organisations with 21 -100 volunteers, 16% used more than 100 volunteers, and the smallest group was those who utilised 1-5 volunteers. This data confirms that many non-profit organisations engage large numbers of volunteers.



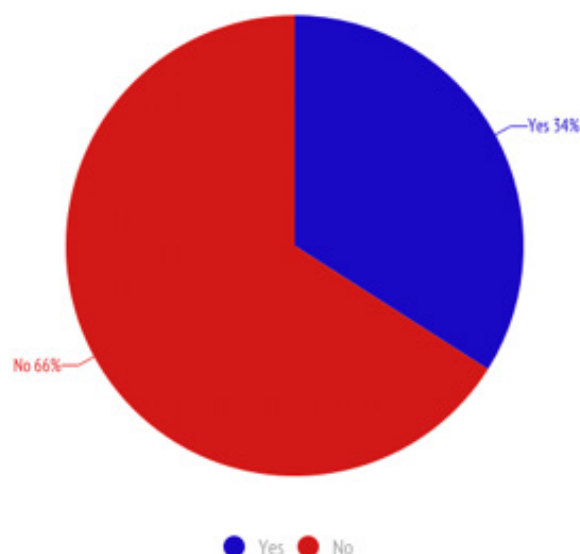
### For what reasons does your organisation utilise volunteers?

Respondents were asked to choose as many options as they liked when answering this question. 81% of VIO's indicated that volunteers were essential to achieving their goals, illustrating how vital their role within these organisations is. Only 31% indicated that volunteers were utilised as a cost saving measure.



## Does your organisation utilise online tools to recruit volunteers?

Only 34% of respondents used online tools to recruit volunteers. Of the organisations who utilised the smallest number of volunteers (1-5), 85% indicated they do not use online tools for volunteer recruitment, whereas 67% of organisations who used more than 100 volunteers said yes to advertising volunteer opportunities online. We can conclude from these results that the majority of VIOs utilizing smaller numbers of volunteers are not taking advantage of the opportunities provided by online technology with regard to volunteer recruitment.

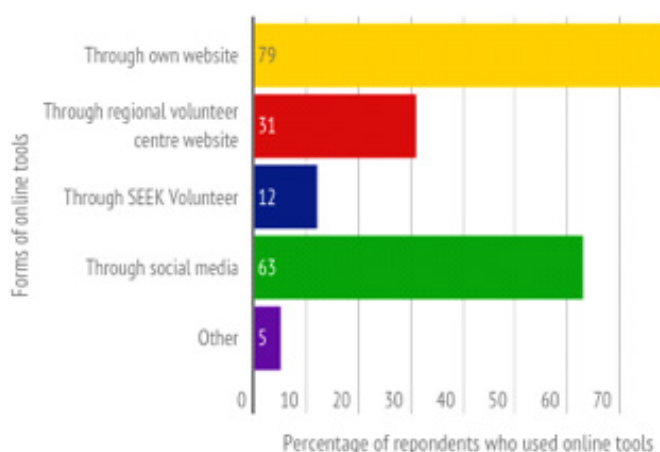


## Utilising online tools to recruit volunteers

No of volunteers utilised	No	Yes
1-5	85%	15%
6-20	76%	24%
21-100	61%	39%
>100	33%	67%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>66%</b>	<b>34%</b>

## Forms of Online Tools Utilised

The majority of organisations which used online technology to recruit volunteers did so through their own website. Social media was also a popular tool.

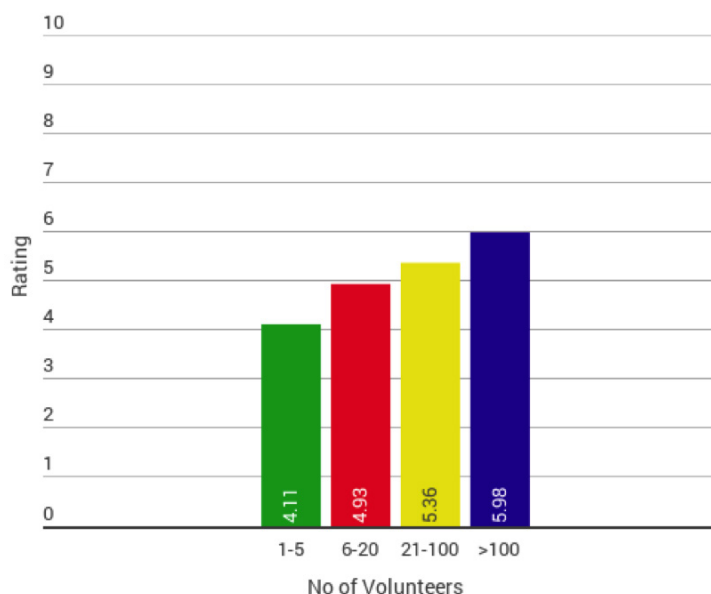


**On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is 'not at all' and 10 is 'fully embracing'), to what extent is your organisation embracing technology to enable volunteers and volunteering?**

The average response to this question was a 5 (on a scale of 0 to 10) indicating that this is an area which could be improved upon for many organisations.

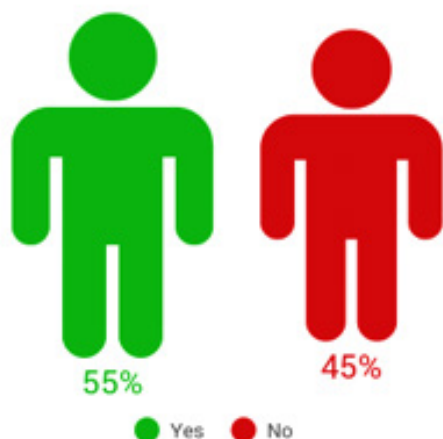
An interesting finding when comparing results by VIO utilisation size, was that the average rating increased as the number of volunteers utilised grew larger, giving the impression that VIOs who engage large numbers of volunteers are utilising technology in this capacity to a greater extent than VIOs who engage smaller numbers.

### Embracing Technology to Enable Volunteering



**Has your organisation experienced challenges in recruiting volunteers in the last 12 months?**

55% of the total number of respondents indicated that they had experienced challenges in recruiting volunteers in the previous 12 months.



Generally, VIOs with a smaller utilisation size had encountered less difficulty in this area than VIOs with a larger utilisation size. The most common challenge for organisations was that potential volunteers have too many commitments and not enough time. More women are working fulltime, leaving them with less free time as families increasingly require two incomes in order to make ends meet. Young people are also "time poor".

Another frequently recurring response was that there is a lack of suitable volunteers. Often potential volunteers are not available at the times when they are needed, such as during the week, and there is a shortage of volunteers with appropriate skills. Many respondents had problems recruiting the younger generation, attributing this to young people having more work pressures, being more mobile, too busy and having less commitment.

One respondent commented, "the current generation of volunteers is retiring and the next generation of potential volunteers is either too busy or feel their time is too precious". Lack of commitment, passion and interest was another common theme among responses regarding challenges in recruitment. People are often reluctant to commit for long periods of time and prefer to help with short term projects.

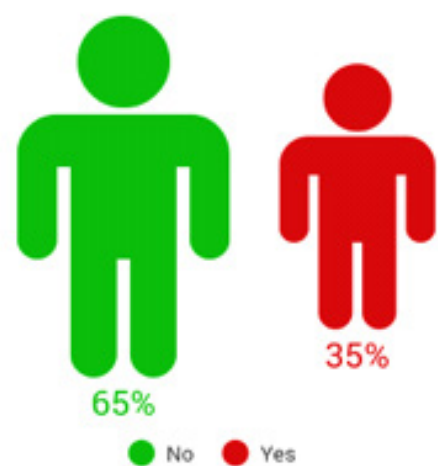
### Challenges in Recruiting Volunteers

No of volunteers utilised	No	Yes
1-5	62%	38%
6-20	44%	56%
21-100	41%	59%
>100	42%	58%
<b>Grand Total</b>	<b>45%</b>	<b>55%</b>

**Has your organisation experienced challenges in retaining volunteers in the last 12 months?**

Overall, 65% of respondents indicated they had not encountered difficulties in retaining volunteers. Of VIOs with a utilisation size of 1-5, only 25% said they had experienced challenges in this area compared with 48% of VIOs with a utilisation size of >100.

The most common reason given for people leaving volunteering roles was due to time constraints. With both parents often working full-time there is little time to spare among families, and young people are also very busy. In older people, a major barrier is poor health and aging, followed by lack of motivation and commitment. Other factors were people moving location, poor volunteer management, lack of recognition, and inability to achieve goals. Training requirements and government regulations were also described as having a negative effect on retaining volunteers.

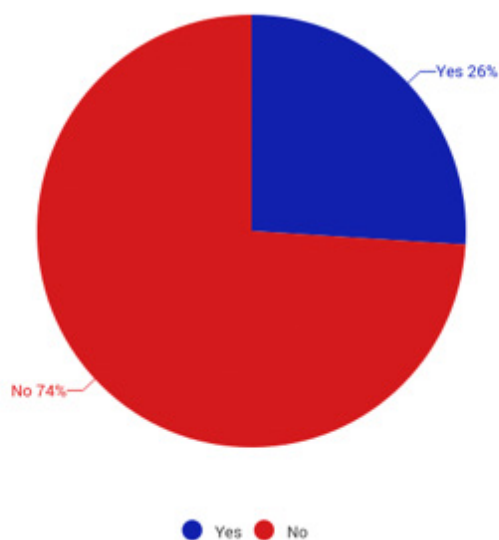


Challenges in retaining volunteers

No of volunteers utilised	No	Yes
1-5	75%	25%
6-20	66%	34%
21-100	65%	35%
>100	52%	48%
Grand Total	65%	35%

**Does your organisation offer reimbursements or monetary incentives to volunteers?**

The majority of respondents indicated they did not offer volunteers reimbursements or monetary incentives of any kind. Those who did most often paid for travel expenses or offered petrol vouchers. Some organisations offered reimbursements for other expenses incurred such as phone calls, stationery or printing costs. A small number of VIOs offered a monetary reward such as an honorarium. Occasionally meals, free training, or discounts, for example on membership fees, were offered.



### What trends have you noticed with regard to volunteers and volunteering in your organisation in the last 12 months?

The most common trend noted in this section was that in today's society people are very busy and lack of time is the largest barrier to volunteering. There were also clear indications that volunteers in New Zealand are getting older, are mostly retired, and health problems are having an impact on their productivity and ability to perform in a number of roles.

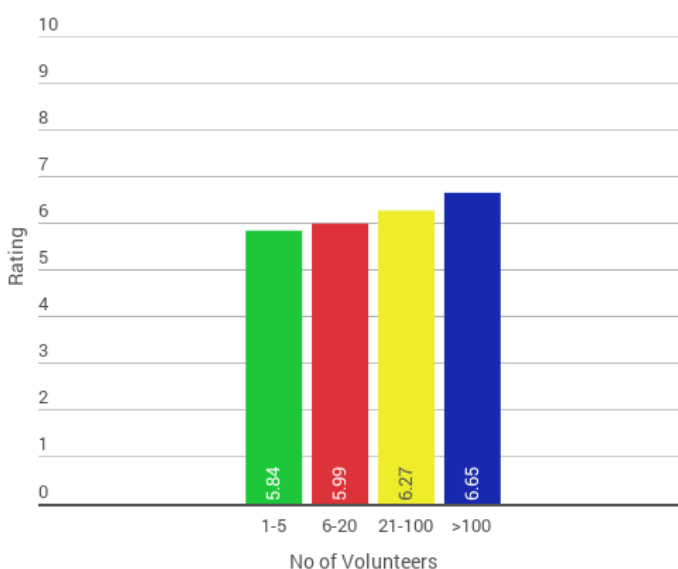
A large number of VIOs expressed a concern that their volunteer base was ageing and there were very few younger replacements ready to step up. Although many organisations reported a shortage of young volunteers, encouragingly, a large group indicated they had seen a rise in young people volunteering as a means to gaining work experience. Many of these were tertiary students or recent graduates looking to improve their C.V. and enhance their skillset. A number of respondents noted a lack of volunteers in the 25-40 age group, observing that this demographic is often busy with work and family commitments, particularly with more women joining the workforce. Frequently respondents reported experiencing ongoing difficulties with finding volunteers.

A large portion however noted an increase in volunteers over the past year, while many indicated they having an ample supply in recent times. Some of those VIOs who had seen an increase in volunteers had achieved this through online promotion, via websites and/or social media, and by enhancing the organisation's profile through the media. Many VIOs expressed frustration that volunteers tended to move on quite quickly, often due to moving location or gaining paid employment. There was a clear trend towards short-term roles which were particularly popular with young people. One respondent noted that "short-term volunteering is becoming the new normal".

Another frequently recurring theme with regard to trends was that bureaucracy and red tape are driving many volunteers away. Health and safety legislation, compliancy rules, training requirements and administrative hurdles can all be a barrier to volunteering. Respondents also noted that volunteers increasingly expect or require some form of incentive as a reward for their services.

### Please rate the state of the New Zealand volunteering sector on a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is 'weak' and 10 is 'extremely positive')

The average rating given by respondents was a six on a scale of one to ten. The rating given by VIOs with a larger utilisation size was higher than that of those who engage small numbers of volunteers.



### **Further comments on the state of volunteering in New Zealand**

When asked to add any further comments, the most common themes from respondents were that lack of time is a major barrier to volunteering and that the majority of current volunteers are older with young people being difficult to recruit and preferring short-term projects. Many VIOs reported experiencing challenges in recruitment, but a number of others wrote about having a healthy supply of high quality volunteers.

A frequently recurring theme was that New Zealanders are very giving people, and that there is a culture of helping each other in this country. Other respondents commented that the culture in New Zealand is changing, and that many people are not interested in volunteering because they are self-centered and don't care about the common good.

A number of VIOs stated there is a lack of funding from the government, and a reliance on volunteers to pick up the slack. One person wrote: "Governments have increasingly shifted the burden of many activities, social services in particular, onto the shoulders of volunteers and this can't continue." Other themes were that bureaucratic hurdles and political correctness are driving people away, volunteers don't stay long, and more information about volunteering would help with recruitment.

## More comments from respondents

I'd love to see volunteering be something that attracts young and 'unqualified' people as well who have much to offer and often little confidence or realisation of what they can contribute (and where that could lead for them) - not only for their potential value to the community but for the opportunity it would present for them to rub shoulders with other generations who have much to share.

Bureaucracy is driving people away from volunteering, i.e. new over the top Rural Fire standards...Being too politically correct and too much paperwork, theory etc. has affected the volunteer sector hugely.

Most volunteers are elderly and lack the computer skills to assist where we really need it. Technology is a massive tool for the future, and the next generation is not coming through with those skills yet. We find it hard even getting a secretary these days as it now requires a computer.

The face of volunteering as we known it in the past is changing. The new generation of potential volunteers is very mobile and their life circumstances change a lot more rapidly than people did a generation ago and they are thus unwilling to make long term commitments. We have to accept that change and work with it, not against it.

More compliance means expectation for (not for profits) to run as a business without adequate resourcing. Volunteers fill a need, or a gap in resourcing, but we feel it is an ever decreasing pool of people who are available; thus making it harder for those who do, and potentially leading to 'burn out' for volunteers

The taxpayer on the whole seems to pick up or contribute less and less funding of key volunteering organisations, organisations that provide crucial safety and social services. The Government in my view takes advantage and leaves the provision of these services up to unpaid volunteers who have to fundraise, respond to calls for help and operate what can be complex organisations given increasing regulatory expectations.

## Discussion

Issues around recruiting and retaining volunteers are daily concerns for most non-profit organisations (Sanders et al. 2008, p.30), and results from the survey show that a majority of VIOs experience challenges in volunteer recruitment. Only a third of respondents indicated they had difficulties in retaining volunteers, although this is still an area of concern for many. The challenges in relation to both these areas were very similar.

### **Improving access to volunteering**

In his article Making Sense of Volunteering: a literature review, Colin Rochester (as cited in Smith & Cordery, 2010, p.13) identified four key strategies for improving access to volunteering:

- addressing the image of volunteering
- more and better sources of information about the range of possible activities
- more specific activities aimed at boosting people's confidence
- applying the principles of good volunteer management.

Employing these strategies will assist VIOs in New Zealand in attracting and retaining volunteers. Good management practices include providing support and communication, written policies and procedures, orientation and training for volunteers, recognition activities, and risk management (Smith & Cordery, 2010). VNZ has produced the Best Practice Guidelines for Volunteer-Involving Organisations (Volunteering New Zealand, 2015), which provides helpful information in this area.

Scouts New Zealand recently released a report on recruitment and retention (2014) which emphasises the importance of providing recognition and support to volunteers, and also suggests investigating the provision of “perks” for volunteers, such as offering free training and uniform and the introduction of a membership card to attain regular discounts at various retailers.

A large majority of the organisations surveyed do not offer reimbursements or monetary incentives to volunteers. This is certainly an area worth exploring for VIOs, as providing assistance with expenses and/or some form of monetary reward is likely to have a positive influence on volunteer recruitment and retention.





## Volunteerism and the Internet

The potential contributions of technology to volunteerism are far-reaching, as explained in the State of the World's Volunteerism Report (United Nations Volunteers, 2011). Online volunteering has eliminated the need for volunteerism to be tied to specific times and locations, thus increasing the freedom and flexibility of volunteer engagement (United Nations Volunteers, 2011, p. 27). VIOs should work at taking advantage of the opportunities provided by technology to assist with volunteer recruitment and also to enable volunteers in their work. In their literature review on encouragement and support of volunteering, Smith and Cordery (2010, p.11) stated that lack of time is the most common reason given for not volunteering, which was confirmed in the survey results.

Organisations should therefore attempt to offer flexibility in the roles they advertise for volunteers, especially with regard to the "when and where". An increasing number of international organisations are using technology to engage with a range of audiences, and also to advertise volunteering opportunities (Volunteering Tasmania, 2012, p.18). Although the survey respondents who said no to utilising online tools to recruit volunteers were not necessarily those who were experiencing challenges with recruitment, using the internet to assist with engaging volunteers makes good sense in an age where computers have become a part of both the work and social lives of many New Zealanders.

### Attracting younger volunteers

There is evidence from the data collected that much of the current volunteer population in New Zealand is aging and there are fewer younger people willing to take their place. Young people are increasingly time poor as they are balancing study, work and many other commitments (Volunteering Tasmania, 2012, p. 11) and even those who are passionate about volunteering may not be able to offer regular volunteer support. Financial limitations are also often a factor for this age group (Smith & Cordery, 2010), and offering reimbursements or some form of monetary reward should help overcome this barrier.

The younger generation are looking for flexible roles and involvement, often preferring to put their time and energy into 'one-off' projects. It is becoming increasingly difficult for young people to secure employment without some work experience and volunteering provides an opportunity to improve employability and develop skills.

VIOs could promote the idea of volunteering to gain work experience, targeting roles to fit the needs and interests of individuals.

Utilising social media can be an effective method of connecting with the younger population. Young people have grown up with digital technology, therefore it is logical to engage with and match them with suitable roles using online tools. Being technology savvy, members of this age group come equipped with certain skills which are lacking among much of the aging population.



## Conclusion

Volunteers make a significant contribution to the non-profit sector in New Zealand every year. This was confirmed in the results of VNZ's survey on the state of volunteering 2015, where 81% of respondents indicated that volunteers are essential to achieving the organisation's goals. It is important however that volunteer engagement evolve with the times to meet both the needs of volunteers and organisations which involve volunteers.

There is a strong culture of volunteering in New Zealand but its form and development is influenced by a range of factors which need to be understood by the organisations to whom this unpaid workforce is vital. The 21st century volunteer seeks flexible involvement and fulfilling experiences (Smith & Cordery, 2010, p.11). VIOs must acknowledge this and adjust their approach to volunteer engagement accordingly.

Non-profit organisations would benefit from improving their public profile, thereby increasing the likelihood of people wanting to join in, and creating a stronger culture within the organisation that people are proud to be part of. There needs to be an open dialogue between volunteers and staff to ensure a mutually beneficial arrangement is reached between them. Finally, it is important to acknowledge volunteers as a precious resource which must be recognised and celebrated if volunteering is to continue to thrive in New Zealand.



## Recommendations for VIOs

- Increase public awareness and enhance profile through the media
- Provide more and improved sources of information about the range of possible opportunities
- Maximise the benefits of technology and social media as a vehicle of volunteer engagement
- Offer flexible roles matched to fit the skill, abilities and motivations of individual volunteers. Long-term roles could be broken up into several smaller roles for people with different skill sets
- Offer internships to attract younger volunteers looking for work experience
- Follow the principles of good volunteer management, which includes providing support and communication, written policies and procedures, orientation and training for volunteers, and recognition activities
- Investigate offering volunteer perks such as petrol vouchers, reimbursements of expenses incurred or discounts on memberships
- Attempt to build meaningful relationships with volunteers

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## Appendices

### Appendix A – Themes from Data Analysis

#### Challenges in Recruiting Volunteers

Key Challenges	Notes	Frequency
Lack of time	Busy with work, attraction of other activities, pressure of supporting a family	138
Hard to find proper volunteers	No skilled volunteers, not available at suitable time, less commitment	99
Can't retain volunteers	No rewards, declining membership/small pool, transitional volunteers (e.g., students, part-time workers), short term interest without long term commitment	87
Lack of passion/interest/commitment	No willingness, lack of passion	84
Difficult to engage young people	More old volunteers, small population, no attraction for young people	81
Others	No government support (e.g. funds, policy check, healthy requirement), lack of parental support	

#### Challenges in Retaining Volunteers

Key Challenges	Notes	Number
Time pressure	Full-time work, young people have less time, family issues	112
Age/health problems	Old people, health condition	70
Lack of motivation/enthusiasm/commitment	No interest, short term commitment, burn out	64
Change of location	Move out the region for work/travel	50
Inadequately managed/recognised	Inadequately managed, the contribution of volunteers is not recognised, volunteers' motivation is not achieved	22
External pressures	Training requirements, government regulation	18
Others	No rewards, small population, higher demand	

### Types of Reimbursements

Types of Reimbursement	Number
Cost reimbursement	102
Petrol vouchers	85
Food/drinks	52
Gifts/functions	27
Honorarium/money	22
Discount fees	10
Free training/conferences/seminars	9

### Trends in Volunteering

Key Challenges	Notes	Number
Lack of time is a barrier	less parents due to working full-time	134
Volunteers are getting older	have health problems, are less capable, are not being replaced	122
Less people volunteering	means same people have to do more	82
Adequate supply or increase of volunteers		82
Difficulties recruiting volunteers	same people volunteering and difficult to find new ones	64
Increase in young volunteers	as a means to gaining work experience, way of enhancing their skillset	55
Less young people volunteering		42
People are more self-centred, lack commitment and are unreliable	Volunteering ethos is not there any more	32
Regulations/red tape drive away volunteers	Health and Safety legislation, training requirements, compliancy rules are all deterrents	25

### Further comments on the state of the Volunteering Sector

Key Themes	Notes	Number
Most volunteers are older/ not enough young volunteers	Young people are looking for short term projects	50
Don't volunteer due to lack of time		49
Nzers are givers	There is a culture of helping each other in NZ	43
Recruiting volunteers is a challenge	demand often exceeds supply	36
People are not interested in volunteering because they are selfish	Don't care about the common good	21
No problems with recruitment	good supply of high quality volunteers	20
Not enough funding from Govt	Volunteers are left to pick up the slack	15
Other	More information is required, bureaucracy is driving people away, people don't stay long	25

