

Introduction to Volunteering



This article is for those thinking about or exploring volunteering. It will cover what volunteering is, what you can do as a volunteer, what you can expect from the volunteer experience and your rights as a volunteer.

What is volunteering

Volunteering is an altruistic activity where an individual or group for no payment freely gives time “to benefit another person, group or organisation.” Volunteering has positive benefits for the volunteer as well as for the person, organisation or community served. In New Zealand, volunteers make a significant contribution to the social development, economy and environment of New Zealand. More than 1 million people across Aotearoa volunteer for an organisation, contributing \$4 billion to New Zealand’s economy.

Volunteering is part of New Zealand’s culture. It is a positive way to contribute to society by giving time and skills to help others.

Benefits of volunteering

Volunteering brings a wide range of personal benefits including enjoyment, a sense of purpose and belonging within the community, higher levels of life satisfaction, and a feeling of connection. Volunteering improves health and social relationships too.

People volunteer for all sorts of reasons – they may be out of work, retired, or just have skills and some spare time they want to use to help others.

Having volunteering listed on your resume can be a really positive addition. It shows prospective employers that you are willing to get involved in your community. Some volunteer organisations will also give you a reference to help you secure paid work. Results of Deloitte research showed that 82% of employers preferred applicants with volunteering experience.

What can you do as a volunteer?

There are all sorts of activities you can get involved in through volunteering. Some roles may need specialist skills and an ongoing, regular time commitment, but many do not. The types of activities you can do are endless, and range from administration, accounting and research to gardening, retail, teaching and sport.

Volunteering is often categorized in two ways:

- Informal volunteering, can be informal (e.g. helping a neighbour with their grocery shopping), and micro volunteering (short bursts of one-off volunteering).
- Formal volunteering, which takes place through an organisation. This can be one-off experiences such as street collecting for the Guide Dogs or Cancer Society or longer-term roles like teaching English to new migrants, or sports volunteer roles like coaching.

Other options include team or group volunteering (e.g. a public tree planting event), and employee volunteering where you would volunteer through your employer.

When thinking about volunteering it is important to consider what sort of person you are and what sort of experience you want. Some useful questions to ask yourself include:

- Do I prefer working by myself or with others?
- Do I want the chance to practice my English if I'm a migrant or former refugee?
- Do I want to use the skills I already have or to learn new ones?
- What do I really enjoy doing and how can I best contribute?
- Do I prefer to work with certain types of people, e.g. children, elderly, or with certain types of animals, e.g. cats, dogs or birds?
- Do I prefer practical work, like making things or gardening, or thinking work, like writing or accounting?
- How much time can I spare?
- Do I want to volunteer regularly or less often? E.g. once a week, or once a month
- What days of the week suit me to volunteer?
- How will you get to and from the volunteering location? How much will travel cost and how long will it take?

Finding volunteer opportunities

Your local Volunteer Centre can help you find suitable volunteer opportunities. They will help you find a suitable organisation and match you with a role. Check for your local Volunteer Centre on the Volunteering New Zealand website [here](#).

If possible, before you start looking for a role, visit your local Volunteer Centre for a face-to-face talk. This is a great way to make sure that you end up with the volunteering experience that is right for you.

You can also contact organisations directly to ask about volunteering opportunities. Look on community noticeboards like those at your local community centre, library or supermarket, attend expos or search online sites like SEEK Volunteer (see [here](#)).

There are thousands of groups around the country that rely on volunteers and provide volunteering opportunities. Here are a few examples:

- Animal welfare charities, e.g. **SPCA, HUHA**
- Counselling and support services, e.g. **OUTLineNZ, Women's Refuge**
- Public safety services, e.g. **Fire and Emergency New Zealand, Community Safety Patrols, Surf lifesaving**
- Health organisations, e.g. **Cancer society**
- Religious organisations, e.g. **Salvation Army**
- Youth organisations, e.g. **GirlGuiding New Zealand, Scouts**
- Conservation organisations, e.g. **Nature Space, Department of Conservation (DOC)**
- Sports and music clubs, e.g. **Sport Wellington, Arcadia Music**
- Volunteer on a marae, e.g. **Manurewa Marae**

What to expect

It can take time to secure some volunteer roles, so you will need to be patient. You may need to fill out an application form and/or provide some personal information. The organisation may want to interview you to find out what skills you have and what you want from the volunteering experience.

You may be asked to supply the names of people who know you well and can vouch for your good character, reliability and trustworthiness – a reference check. A Police or Ministry of Justice check may also be required, especially if you are going to be working with young children, vulnerable people, or handling money.

You may need training to be a volunteer, which the organisation will provide, and some organisations offer an induction before you begin too. Ask the organisation what you can expect regarding any training and induction.

Find out what the organisation expects from you and tell them what you expect from them. Both you and the organisation need to be comfortable with the arrangement. A clear understanding from day one makes the volunteering experience more enjoyable and beneficial for everyone.

Your rights as a volunteer

If you are successful in getting a volunteer role, remember that you are giving your time, energy and skills to an organisation for free. So, the organisation should treat you well in return. As a volunteer in New Zealand, you have certain rights:

- You should not be used to fill a position that previously belonged to a paid worker
- You should be reimbursed (paid back) for any out-of-pocket expenses you have incurred on behalf of the organisation you are working for in line with any expense policy.
- You must be given enough training to do your job
- Your work environment must be healthy and safe
- Your confidential private information must be protected in line with the organisation's privacy policy
- You must not be subjected to unlawful discrimination or sexual and racial harassment.

You can find out more about your rights on this part of the VNZ website:

<https://www.volunteeringnz.org.nz/rights-as-a-volunteer/> Also, you can find out more on the Employment NZ website here: <https://www.employment.govt.nz/starting-employment/who-is-an-employee/volunteers/>

Good luck on your journey into volunteering!