



# Volunteer Retention in your Homework Club

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Volunteers come from a diversity of backgrounds, in terms of age, skills/profession, cultural background, etc. People volunteer for a variety of reasons and, as such, are best supported in different ways. Without doubt, the best way to retain volunteers is to ensure they feel like supported and valued members of the homework club team. And since the most common method of volunteer recruitment is word of mouth, the better you support your volunteers, the less work required on retention!

There are four important factors involved in determining your chances of retaining a volunteer:

- How **welcome** the volunteer feels
- The **connection** the volunteer feels to the program/organisation
- How **useful** the volunteer feels
- How **valued** the volunteer feels

You need to think about each of these factors at different stages of the 'volunteer program' – remember that the first six months are critical in determining the long-term commitment you will end up getting from a volunteer!

## The initial stages: recruitment, screening and induction

- How welcome and valued volunteers feel starts from the moment they first come into contact with your organisation/program. It is important to respond to volunteer enquiries as soon as possible; try to make your initial contact friendly and welcoming.
- Try to keep these initial stages friendly and as efficient as possible. Make clear to potential

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The Centre for Multicultural Youth is a Victorian not-for-profit organisation supporting young people from migrant and refugee backgrounds to build better lives in Australia.

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volunteers as soon as you hear from them how the screening and induction processes work and approximately how long they should expect to wait until they start volunteering. (Don't forget, a volunteer can commence as soon as you have received their Working With Children Check receipt).

- Throughout these initial stages, try to find the right balance between structure and welcome. While it is important to follow correct procedures and ensure volunteers are appropriately screened / selected, you should avoid being overly formal. For example, you may like to invite volunteers to an 'informal chat' instead of an 'interview'.
- At the same time, it's important not to act 'desperate' and take on anyone who walks through the door. Don't be afraid to say no to people that aren't appropriate for the role – this will save you time and effort later. Remember that finding and keeping the right volunteers will mean more committed volunteers long-term, thus less time/effort spend on recruiting new people later on!
- You should also ensure that you make it very clear from the start what is expected of volunteers. E.g., weekly attendance, student reporting procedures, etc. Providing a volunteer tutor role description is a great way of making this information clear.

## The first few weeks

- Remember that volunteers may be feeling nervous and unsure when they first start tutoring. No matter how clear you've made the role, the reality can be very different from a new volunteer's expectations!
- It is important to support volunteers during their first few weeks. Allow opportunity for volunteers to debrief after their first few sessions. It will be important for them to know that the challenges/difficulties they experience are normal, and that they don't need to have all the answers!

## Ongoing Support

- Remember the four key factors in volunteer retention – welcome, connection, usefulness and value – these factors are crucial when it comes to ongoing support for volunteers.
- Think about how you can make volunteers feel like important and valued members of the organisation, for example:
  - Ensure paid staff treat volunteers as fellow colleagues
  - Seek volunteer feedback on program operations and involve volunteers in program planning
  - Invite volunteers to staff/team meetings
  - Provide opportunities for volunteers to meet and get to know each other. (For example you could organise (or ask a volunteer to organise) social activities, like an end-of-term dinner)
- Think about how you communicate with your volunteers and keep them informed of what is going on, for example:
  - Consider having staff/team meetings (including volunteers) at the start of each term to plan.
  - Ensure that you keep volunteers informed about what is happening, for example via newsletters or regular email updates.

### ***Lessons from the sector: Volunteer Induction at the Werribee Homework Club***

To maximise their chances of retaining committed volunteers through the initial stages, the Werribee Homework Club introduced a multi-staged induction process. There is an information night followed by a two-week 'trial' period, during which prospective volunteers tutor under supervision from an experienced tutor.

After this 'trial', if volunteers are felt to be suitable and still want to commit, they then complete the paperwork and formal induction procedures. The program coordinator reports that this has not only lead to an increase in retention of committed volunteers, but has also reduced his workload on a daily basis, as less supervision is required.

Think about how you can show volunteers that their time/effort/contribution is appreciated.

For example:

- Sending personalised cards (for example during volunteer week or at the end of the year)
- Remembering volunteer's birthdays and sending them a card or email.
- Have students work on thank you cards for volunteers at the end of term.
- Send certificates of service during Volunteer Week.
- Display photos of volunteers around your office
- Include volunteer stories in newsletters and media articles
- Think about what it is that volunteers bring to your homework club that staff cannot – share this with your volunteers!

### ***Lessons from the sector: The 'buddy' system at Collingwood Homework Club***

To support volunteers in their first weeks at homework club, Collingwood Homework Club introduced a 'buddy' system. New volunteers are paired up with existing volunteers and they tutor together for the first few weeks. This not only helps new volunteers build their confidence in a comfortable setting, but also relieves pressure on those running the program.

Remember... many volunteers feel personally invested in your homework club, and are committed to ensuring the program's development and success. This is why it is so important to support your volunteers and treat them like colleagues rather than 'your staff'. You may even consider harnessing the enthusiasm of volunteers by giving them additional roles and responsibilities. USE the additional skills and experience of your volunteers to improve and develop your program!

### ***Lessons from the sector: Additional roles***

Examples of additional volunteer roles, from homework clubs around Melbourne:

- Daily set-up; tutor/student allocation
- Resources/Worksheets/Library
- Tutor recruitment and recordkeeping
- Student reporting and recordkeeping
- Researching funding opportunities
- Tutor social events/meetings/ training
- Volunteer/supporter newsletter
- IT – website, database, etc.
- Inducting new volunteers